



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

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**Verifiers Training Workshop
Reviewing the Evaluation Process**

**FINAL REPORT
SUMMARY**

12th – 15th February 2009

Workshop

at the International Academy for Nature Conservation
Isle of Vilm, Germany

organised by
EUROPARC Federation and the
German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN)



European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas Verifiers Training Workshop - Reviewing the Evaluation Process

Summary

Central to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is its evaluation process. The Charter has been implemented over the past eight years in several European countries and a wide range of expertise and experience has been built up. By the end of 2008 more than 50 protected areas had been certified as Charter Parks and this number is likely to approach 70 in 2009. With the use of the Charter becoming more widespread it is very important that the evaluation process maintains its high standards and credibility. At the heart of the evaluation process are the verifiers – a European network of experts in tourism and protected areas, many of whom were involved in the development of the Charter in the 1990s. To monitor standards and update the process we brought together current Charter verifiers and members of the Evaluation Committee, as well as the EUROPARC Charter Secretariat and experts in sustainable tourism and protected areas.



Participants of the verifier's workshop on the Isles of Vilm
Photo: BfN

25 representatives from the EUROPARC Federation, EUROPARC Consulting, the Charter Evaluation Committee, Charter verifiers and the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation came together on the Isle of Vilm in the German Baltic Sea from 12th to 15th February 2009. The participants ranged from colleagues from the very early days when the Charter work was begun 16 years ago, up to the latest newcomers to the Charter Network.

The aims of the workshop, which was financially supported, organised and coordinated by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) in cooperation with the EUROPARC Federation, were as follows:

- to review all aspects of the European Charter's evaluation process;
- to define where improvements to the European Charter's evaluation process are necessary;
- to monitor standards for the verification and define best practice at European level;
- to review the European Charter's re-evaluation process;
- to train new verifiers from priority areas in Europe;
- to share expertise on the latest developments and best practice in sustainable tourism in protected areas.

The workshop was divided into five sessions, most of them held in working groups following a pre-defined methodology in order to receive comparable and structured results that enable a future follow-up.

1. Introduction to the evaluation process

The first session aimed to give all participants an introduction to the Charter process in order for everybody to start with the same level of information. Representatives from the EUROPARC Federation and EUROPARC Consulting explained the history and up-to-date situation of the European Charter Network, its application and evaluation process. A Charter verifier presented the verifier's role from desk evaluation to writing the report. A former director of a Charter protected area presented the evaluation through the eyes of the parks and the president of the Evaluation Committee explained what is looked for in a verifier's report. Questions, comments and suggestions on the process were noted and arranged according to key issues, e.g. "difficulties", "things to be discussed", "Evaluation Committee", etc.

2. The verification process and the verifier's report

In the first part, the challenges a verifier faces before, during and after the visit were collected and discussed. Then the participants split up into three working groups answering each of the three questions related to the verifier's report given to them by the organisers. This interactive session aimed at giving the new verifiers familiarity with the verifier's report and analysing what makes a good report, where there are potential difficulties and what would be good, acceptable and unacceptable practice. Further on, the groups were asked to discuss what the Evaluation Committee needs in order to make a well-founded decision. As outcome, the groups produced not only an inventory of acceptable and unacceptable practice but also possible solutions for difficulties verifiers might face before, during and after the verification visit.

3. Ensuring similar standards in the evaluation process

The question was how to identify good and best practice from the Charter protected areas on a European level and harmonise the verifiers' standards. This relates to the scores the verifiers are giving to the different activities of the Charter Candidates application report. The scores are X, 1, 2, 3 and 3*, the last score being an indicator of good/best practice examples. The difficulty often is to define what good practice is. After a short introduction on good/best practice, participants split up into eight small working groups to define minimum standards and criteria for good/best practice for each of the Charter principles. The results will be revised and integrated into the application material. It was also decided to create an online database for good practice examples from the Charter protected areas.

In cooperation with the participants of the workshop, a guidance manual for Charter verifiers will be prepared.

4. Improving the Charter documents

On Saturday afternoon, participants split up again into three working groups to look further at comments, recommendations and amendments to the Charter documents, i.e. the Charter Manual, the Charter application report and the verifier's report. All results from the three working groups will be used to revise these documents. The revision of the documents will start in March 2009 and will be concluded in time to have the new application documents ready for Charter Candidates applying for evaluation in 2011. The revision and enhancement of the Charter Manual (including the application report) and the verifier's report will be carried out in cooperation with all the participants of the workshop and coordinated by the EUROPARC Federation and EUROPARC Consulting.

5. Conclusions

The concluding session brought together all results, comments, questions and suggestions that came up during the previous sessions and transformed them in a set of activities to be followed up in the future.

The workshop was an excellent way of bringing together old and new verifiers with members of the Evaluation Committee and representatives from the EUROPARC Federation and EUROPARC Consulting, so that everybody could be brought up-to-date on the progress of the European Charter and exchange expertise. In addition six new verifiers were trained in the European Charter process thereby widening the expertise across Europe.

All presentations are available from Petra Dippold at p.dippold@europarc.org

The Charter is...

...great people to work with
...valuable, interesting, serious yet fun
...showing sustainable tourism can be fun
...a network of excellent people

...a great opportunity to build a career in protected areas
...GO
...to make possible, YES WE CAN!
...proving itself by becoming sustainable over the time
...an interesting challenge

...an ideal, an idea, an approach, a commitment, a process
...about encouraging PA partners to proceed with a stronger philosophy
...a good recognition for an important process
...ongoing process to excellence and sustainability of tourism in PAs
...ideal tool for planning tourism development in partnership with all relevant stakeholders
...a management tool and a process itself that joins public and private entities, a challenge
...a good tool to network, actors in and around the same territory and values
...a great tool for a territory if it's well understood
...something to discover over the next 3 years
...an action programme towards tourism that sustains protected areas

...an achievement of Europeans
...a great platform to get together inbetween Europe

...not well known to public. This can be changed!
...a good chance for every park to get in touch with the people
...to be responsible for your own territory's destiny
...partnership, working together for the same purpose, well-being and quality of life