

Verifier's Report to the Evaluation Committee

Name of protected area: Parc naturel régional Loire Anjou Touraine (PNRLAT)

Name of verifier: Jacques DECUIGNIERES

Date of submission of application by protected area: ?

Date of verification visit: 15 to 17 June 2014

Date of completion of this report: 4 July 2014

NOTES FOR THE VERIFIER

Where is shown, verifiers are asked to indicate a score, using the following system:

- X Not relevant
- 0 Not happening
- 1 Weak – little action
- 2 Moderate – action happening in this area, sufficient at present
- 3 Good – significant action, totally satisfactory

A star * may be added to a “3” score to indicate an excellent example of best practice (3*).

Verifiers are asked to comment on individual questions to provide further information or explanation, keeping their answers concise. In particular, the reasons for any score under 2 should be briefly explained, highlighting any particular causes for concern.

The reasons for any score of * awarded should also be explained: what makes this an example of best practice? The star should be used sparingly, and only for outstanding initiatives or actions which can serve as models at the European level.

The format for this verifier's report is linked closely to that of the Application Report completed by the protected area. You should have received the Application Report in electronic format. You may copy information from the Application Report into this report to support particular answers where this is helpful.

If you do this, we would ask you to indicate very clearly (e.g. by use of a different typeface, highlighting, etc.) the text which has been copied from the Application Report.

Your own observations relating to the information provided by the protected area and gained on site are, of course, particularly important – the Committee will have the full Application Report available to refer to as necessary.

Please attach a list of any documents received from the protected area or presented during the visit which were not included in the original application.

Programme of visit, key sites and partners visited:

Please attach a full list of people interviewed and job titles as an appendix

Overall Impressions

PNRLAT appears as strong and experienced park in a populated area with urban cities in its surroundings, from which it is easy to come to the Park: from those cities and also from Paris region and from Northern Europe.

The Park, its partners

If compared with many experienced PNRs, PNRLAT counts less staff capacities but more commitments of Park partners who are not viewed as 'subcontractors' but much more positively as genuine Ambassadors with visibility, capacities and responsibilities deeper than usually seen in parks. Together with their partners the Park has built a strong partnership with long term mutual commitments of them as well as of the park, with clear demanding level. However all Ambassadors met during the visit were very proud of their role and of their commitment. The President of PNRLAT -elected some weeks ago- was previously also an Ambassador and took of his time to participate to my meeting with them.

Park partners met during the verification visit are very significant of what a Charter park can aggregate in its tourism offer:

Clément de CARVALHO manager of camping Isle Verte welcomes people from European countries with very innovative equipment, like eco-lodges and also Vel'Abri, altogether a shelter for bikes, a place to repair them, a cooking space and eventually also a shelter for bikers who cannot mount their tent. Another innovation, the Mariner Hut built with wood from the camping site, close to Loire river to easy birdwatching and equipped with solar panel and USB plug to enable subdued lighting and to refuel the mobile phone or the tablet.

Same 'spirit of Park' with Isabelle ARCHAMBAULT met in her gîte "Pic Epeiche". She welcomes groups all year round with special attention to all kinds of disabilities. Her husband shares his experience of eco-building, she is also a Park Ambassador, elected in her village, delegate to the Park, etc

Many of those people are used to welcome people coming from many countries and at least from European countries and this is why they expect more cooperation between businesses thanks to the Charter process.

Park Ambassadors

This Park can bring significant support to municipalities and to its tourist partners. The museum of Loire mariners visited during the verification gave a good example of its long term support in terms of engineering. Same with the Resource Centre managed by the Park to the benefit of schools and all partners.

But it is reversely rather strict about sincere involvement required in long term from its partners like Ambassadors. Park Ambassadors have to participate to a 3-day initial training session and then to 3 meetings every year. They are invited to work in pairs with other ambassadors. The 5-year mutual commitment implies special links with the Park and they behave as true ambassadors. They are in a position to explain what the nature park does and why, to modify wrong images and commonplaces, to listen to local people and municipalities in name of the park, they easy access to Park staff and their expertise, etc.

ECST to accompany new opportunities from experiential tourism

Their challenge for the Park and its partners is to be visible as a protected area with a distinctive tourist offer in Loire valley, a world-known area awarded with UNESCO label, already offering many hotspots and tourist activities.

Fortunately PNRLAT -and other applicants verified this year- are delighted with new trends with younger generations, an increasing demand of nature tourism, of reconnection with nature and they feel that more visitors are in phase with park tourism offer.

The nature tourism offer is seen as an alternative to famous “châteaux de la Loire” as an opportunity to keep visitors for longer stays.

“Loire à vélo” is a part of the Western branch of a European cycle network from the Atlantic coast to Hungary and soon to the Black Sea (Eurovelo 6 route) and the Park is located just along the most famous riversides, also a part of UNESCO world heritage area.

“La Loire à vélo” is in a way significant of new kinds of tourism. However unlike in other protected areas it would not be sufficient because thousands of people cycle across the area without paying attention to the protected area excepting in some spots. However such tourists could be potential visitors if they realize how all discovery opportunities are available as they are for local people and visitors coming for short stays.

Accessibility and pragmatism

Beyond certification issues, the park prefers to create opportunities of meetings, to help understand daily difficulties for physically-impaired people and others but also to help find concrete solutions and build accessible destinations and not just access to some certified locations.

Some businesses have likewise developed outstanding sustainable tourism offer, not just considering marketing objectives but because they add daily practice to sustainability positioning.

This is why they find good feedback with the Park, the motto of which could be: “starting from concepts and get hands dirty” (*partir des concepts et mettre les mains dans le cambouis*).

Comments on the application from the protected area and evaluation visit:

Verifier’s assessment

Overall comment on the sustainable tourism strategy and action of the protected area and how it relates to the European Charter:

Main strengths:

- Strong network of Park partners, numerous, well-trained, fully involved in Park activities and also in other institutions like local associations, municipalities, etc.
- Pragmatic approach associated with sense of harmony and balance.
- The all-in-one application document (AP) represents an exceptional synthesis of contributions from Park partners, altogether reference document for the vision of tourism in PNRLAT, fully detailed in the process of each analysis and action to implement, something to read to feed reflections and also quite operational.
- The Park art of management based on development of projects: inside with team building around projects, outside with permanent cooperation and evaluation thanks through active committees and an effective forum.
- Rich and genuine built and intangible heritage that was preserved and can now be enhanced by the Park, its partners with involvement of the inhabitants, either born or arrived here to live with a preserved quality of life.
- Of course an outstanding biodiversity relatively accessible (not like in remote mountains).
- A rather populated area opening possibilities of nature and heritage tourism for local people, ‘dwellers’ of urban areas and tourists. And therefore potential for a tourism economy.

Main weaknesses:

- The Loire valley and its UNESCO label still making difficult to promote a distinctive tourism but things are changing, especially with people eager to reconnect with nature and to come to lire valley for short breaks

- Because the Park stretches on different areas, on two different administrative regions, (Pays de la Loire, Centre) and on two “départements”, public tourism authorities participate to Park meetings and committees but they do not particularly promote the Park as a distinctive tourism destination in their documents.
The Park could have to face additional difficulties if Region areas are modified in the coming years (same for all regional nature parks).
- However this difficulty can turn to create opportunities: the Park house is significantly located just at their borders and the Management is used to take the best from the different public authorities and from partners located in all parts of the area. Pragmatism and median positioning...

Conclusions and recommendations for the protected area: Recommendation on award of the Charter:

PNRLAT in the European Charter network

If compared with other French PNRs, it seems PNRLAT management has decided to come late -later- to the European Charter application but with strong assets and when it became clear that this process could really contribute to put forward an alternative and distinctive tourism in its area. The question had probably been: was this application useful and necessary and the answer was yes.

It is all the more interesting that the Park does not always view national or international branding, certification or label as essential and -as far as I could understand- prefers some sense of local solidarity and pragmatism, mutual commitment between local actors in the long term. However they have considered that ECST certification and also Marque Parc of the French Federation of PNRs as effective solutions of sustainable tourism to be proposed by the Park, which means a global approach and interest for steps 1 and 2 of the Charter and later of the step 3.

Some ideas and points of view that could be considered as inspiring for all Europarc parks: this park felt committed with local partners and stakeholders more than with a European network like Europarc but is now willing to take advantage of the European Charter process and to mutual benefits through cooperation. This Park and particularly its partners are expecting effective return from their commitment into the Charter process.

This is why they would be now ready to share their experience, not just to exchange ideas but to build effective cooperation at a European level. What they do with their local partners they would be ready now to do it with European Charter partners.

In a way such Charter applicants and mainly their local partners and their local level of demand and requirements represent some challenge to new steps into the Charter process.

So, yes I recommend them for Charter awarding.

Please check one box

I recommend that the protected area receive the award of the Charter.

I do not recommend that the protected area receive the award of the Charter.

In order to put a cross in the relevant box, please double click on the box you want to mark. A dialogue box “Check Box Form Field Option” should open. Click under “Default Value” where it says “Checked”, then OK, and the proper box should have a cross in it.

General information about the protected area – Section A of Application Report

I. Has full and clear factual information been supplied by the protected area in answer to sections A1 – A14 of the Application Report framework? 3

Yes, once received additional documents after the verification visit

II. Additional/amended information not contained in protected area's application:

Information exist and are included in the application dossier "candidature du PNR LAT à la Charte européenne du tourisme durable" (abbreviated 'AP'), mentioned in §2.1 (below) as the unique application document.

Some answers cannot be found in the application questionnaire but in this document. This is why the Park sent later an amended application questionnaire (attached to this report) with additional information, also because some questions of this questionnaire in French were not clear for them and induced inappropriate answers.

Other additional information were given during the verification visit.

III. Any information not available, and reasons for this:

Few information described in the application form about tourism activities, tourist flows, etc. This is why collecting data and observatory of tourism tailored for the park area are parts of the action plan.

The Park -like many other nature parks and their French Federation- is confronted by lack of tourism data just relevant for their areas. It can of course dispose of those from regional or département tourism bodies or from tourist offices or from networks like those of accommodation providers, it can get results from different tourism surveys applicable to its area and giving a good analysis of the demand.

The Park has decided to include a monitoring system in its action plan (Action N°5).

However such data could be approximated thanks to statistics and marketing surveys from regional/local tourism bodies as they are mentioned and used in AP.

As an example outputs of marketing surveys are listed in this document and used to get a profile of visitors: either touring/cycling or eager to stay in the area for short breaks or longer.

This helps clarify possible targets.

More information are expected from annual surveys and metering campaigns.

IV. Are you satisfied that the information supplied is accurate? 3

Yes

V. Are there any factual issues that might affect the eligibility of the protected area for award of the Charter?

Indeed, none.

Meeting the Charter principles - Section B of Application Report

*Note: Areas in **grey shading** indicate particularly important points which are critical for successful evaluation. They correspond to the shaded areas in the Application Report. NEVER type within the shaded area, except the score, please.*

Principle 1 – Partnership with local tourism stakeholders

1.1 Has a forum or other partnership structure been established to enable the protected-area authority to work with others on the development and management of tourism, including implementation and review of the strategy?

2

PNRLAT puts the stress onto governance in its action plan, before and of course after the Charter application: Steering Committee (*Comité de Pilotage*) during the months preceding the formal application and now a Monitoring Committee (*Comité de Suivi et d'Évaluation*) who will follow the implementation of all actions during the five years.

I had the opportunity to take part to their last meeting at the Park House during the verification visit (their consultant MaHoC was also present thanks to videoconferencing). Conversations and side discussions gave evidence of long term relationships and a high level of commitment and concrete propositions.

The Forum will of course go on and it is listed in head of ECST Action Plan (action N°1).

Briefly describe this structure, including size and membership, frequency of meetings, etc.:

All decision makers are progressively involved in the Charter process as and when relevant actions are implemented: public bodies like regional and département tourist bodies, tourist offices, local development bodies, chambers of commerce and municipalities.

This is called “Forum permanent des acteurs” established under its denomination for the Charter application but previously existing through different networks and partnerships:

- Members of above mentioned Steering Committee and Monitoring Committee, focused on the Charter application and process,
- Park Board members working in the “Tourism and Leisure activities” permanent Committee,
- Staff members or directors from tourism public authorities, tourist offices from the Park area and from city park gates (“villes portes”)
- Park Ambassadors,
- Tourism businesses, accommodation providers selling products and services under Park Brand.

The whole Forum is invited once a year only (last time in past November) but each group or committee has more frequent meetings:

- three times a year for Ambassadors: training sessions, exchange of experience, contribution to events, reports from onsite visits, etc.
- four to six times a year for the Steering and the Monitoring Committees.

1.2 Are local tourism enterprises involved?

3

Yes

- Park Ambassadors, some of them are also accommodation providers
- Nature guides in charge of Park “Carnets de Découverte” (guided visits), etc.
- Network of ‘Hébergements Nature et Patrimoine’ accommodation providers
- Managers of different tourist sites cooperating under the same label ‘Tourisme durable’.

And of course other businesses according to the actions in progress.

1.3 Is the local community involved?

2

Yes

First as representatives of their community in the Park Board (a PNR is mainly managed by municipalities) and then in different committees like the Steering Committee and the Monitoring Committee. And of course in other Park committees. Local communities are also involved in projects. See for example “*Musée des Mariniers*” (museum of Loire mariners) giving evidence of effective cooperation between a commune and the Park: meeting with the Mayor of Chouzé-sur-Loire together with the president of the local association in charge of this site.

1.4 Are local conservation interests involved?

2

Yes

Leaders of associations involved in environment education and heritage enhancement, like Park partners dealing with ‘*Carnet de Découvertes*’. This ‘Carnet’ is an annual selection of daytrips managed by Park partners under a quality charter and other commitments. Examples of partners involved in conservation interests: CPIE Touraine Val de Loire, Birdlife Anjou and Touraine, Nature-Sciences-Patrimoine (heritage), villages and botanic walks, etc.

1.5 Are the wider (regional) bodies responsible for tourism, conservation and regional development involved?

3

Yes,

as permanent members of the Forum: Steering Committee, Monitoring Committee and also as members of the Park Board for some of them.

I had the opportunity to take part to one of their meetings during the verification visit.

1.6 Are other partners involved, such as volunteers?

3

Yes

Ambassadeurs du Parc particularly: an outstanding network of 150 volunteers. Other volunteers can be involved like those met in different local heritage or conservation associations and in actions managed or supported by the Park: like the above mentioned Loire mariners museum.

Principle 2 – Sustainable tourism strategy and action plans

Preparation

2.1 Have a tourism strategy and action plan been prepared for the protected area?

Yes

The application dossier “candidature du PNR LAT à la Charte européenne du tourisme durable” (abbreviated ‘AP’) is shaped as a comprehensive document in ten Chapters.

After introduction of the PNR and its territory, the document describes in its part 3 the tourism strategy, its basic facts, its objectives and existing links with the Park management plan, in force from 2008 to 2020. The same document gives a summary of current actions.

Its part 4 gives a wide picture of tourism, tourist activities and policies operating in the Park area. This include a description of the regional tourism economy, profiles of visitors and a SWOT analysis in the prospect of an alternative tourism, sustainable tourism corresponding to ECST -other than the prominent tourism focused on Loire valley, built heritage and vineyards.

Parts 6 and 7 clearly describe goals and guidelines as logical results of the above mentioned studies and analysis. Something very interesting, most of them are confirmed by interviews of Park partners: accommodation providers, president of regional grouping of wine growers, head of mission in a chamber of handicraft, camping site owner, etc all obviously active members of the Park Forum.

The action plan is then thoroughly described in part 8 through 16 actions, each of them including:

reference to the European Charter principles, reference to the Park management plan in force (“*Charte du Parc*”), reference to the relevant strategic main line, and then context, objectives, description, expected results, partners, evaluation items, budget, etc

2.2 Briefly describe the process(es) and timetable(s) for preparing both the strategy and action plan.

Formal decision by the Board to apply for Charter awarding.

Creation of a dedicated Steering Committee, selection of a consultant to accompany their work (6 meetings during 2013)

November 2012: call for tenders from consultants

March 2013: first steps of the application with an updated survey and first outputs from the Steering Committee

July 2013: presentation of results and discussion around a shared diagnostic

October 2013: presentation of the strategy and action plan related to the Charter process

November 2013: formal presentation to the whole Forum with all participants of working groups and the Steering Committee.

2014-2019: implementation of the action plan.

2.3 How does the tourism strategy relate to the protected-area management plan?

The tourism strategy clearly refers to the Park management plan ("*Charte du Parc*"). See any action proposed, like for example Action 8 "*communiquer and promouvoir le capital nature du PNRLAT*" (let know and promote the Park nature assets):

- Reference to ECST principles 1 3 5 7 and 8

- Reference to Park management plan main lines, Axe 1: heritage for future generations, strategic and then operational objective ("let know the biodiversity and involve local people into relevant goals"). Same process with Axe 2 sustainable economic development with 3 objectives.

2.4 Are there any apparent contradictions between tourism and protected-area management objectives and actions?

No contradiction indeed as the Charter application is self-contained but clearly and steadily refers to the Park management plan.

Consultation process

2.5 Comment on the involvement of local stakeholders in drawing up the strategy and action plan, making reference to the forum/partnership structures described under Question 1.1 as appropriate.

First steps of the document were built by staff members working in different departments of the Park (Biodiversity and Landscapes, Local Planning and Sustainable Development, then Communication and GIS).

Each Park department also corresponds to working groups involving other participants like Board members from municipalities, public bodies, and other partners like Ambassadors and members of networks like coordinators of nature activities, businesses involved in "Hébergements Nature et Patrimoine" network. The Steering Committee was involved during the whole application process. It seems that worked like concentric circles until the wide meeting of the Forum in November 2013.

2.6 Was there consultation with local tourism enterprises in preparing the strategy?

Yes, mainly the Park Ambassadors and businesses in charge of leisure activities and nature day trips "*Carnets de Découverte*".

Beside them other tourism businesses (i.e. other than Park partners) were selected to represent a sample of tourism activities in the park area and they were invited to participate to an additional survey with use of questionnaires.

2.7 Was there consultation with the local community and other interests/ stakeholders in preparing the strategy?



Yes. As a grouping of municipalities, public bodies and representatives of private interest and associations, a PNR could not work differently, from the initial decision to apply to a European certification until the formal application to the Charter, and then to follow implementation results.

Assessment of resource needs, constraints and opportunities

2.8 Was there an assessment of the natural and cultural resources, their sensitivities (capacity) and opportunities for tourism? 3

Yes. In addition to all work done by its staff the Park could take advantage of surveys implemented by regions (PNRLAT stretches on two regions) and assessments made by the two Départements involved and responsible for welcoming capacities in nature areas. Same assessment for all Natura 2000 sites was done in 2011 and also about intangible heritage.

This was completed by a general survey launched in 2012 to give a clear representation of an initial state of biodiversity conservation. A summary is explained in the first pages of the 'AP' document, followed by a description of Park proposition of daytrips PNRLAT can dispose of 73,500 different data on fauna and flora with a focus on 11 sensitive sites and 9 sections of river to monitor. First results collected in 2012 outline a biodiversity rich of 329 species of butterflies, 17 of bats, 186 of birds, 52 of dragonflies (more than 50% of those identified in France), 38 species of fishes, 2,233 species of plants, 611 of them being vulnerable and protected.

This gave a base for protection issues and also for some tourism opportunities although in the same team sustainable solutions must be found and agreed...

2.9 Was there an assessment of needs of the local community and economy? 3

Yes. Such assessment has been done before 2008 for the re-validation of the Park management plan and later confirmed because contribution of tourism to the local economy is one the first goals of the Park in its Charter application dossier.

See page 75 of the comprehensive document: "*enjeu 2: accentuer l'action du PNR LAT en faveur de l'économie touristique et des trois piliers du tourisme durable*".

In addition marketing surveys are summarized in the same document: visitor needs and expectations, quick benchmarking of offers proposed by the Park and its partners, Park image, etc.

2.10 Was there an assessment of strengths/weaknesses of tourism infrastructure/ services? 3*

Yes, clearly. But the Park did it differently: such an assessment was not listed in a distinctive chapter but split into each chapter of the diagnostic, mentioning strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, etc (Part 4 of the 'AP' document, assessment of tourism dynamics in PNRLAT, identification and enhancement of different kinds of heritage, tourism economy):

Assessment of tourism organisation, tourism economy,

Assessment of natural, cultural heritage and their enhancement,

Assessment of tourist offer, accommodation, existing products, etc and every time with regard to the ECST application: e.g. tourist flows, visitor needs, existing Park tourism offer and their effective marketing

Assessment of existing visitors and their needs (B6)

2.11 Was there an assessment of existing visitor patterns and needs? 3

Yes, this was done by Region Centre and also by Département tourism authorities, which means it was not specific for the park but covered a wider area. However it was of course valid for the park area.

In addition a survey made by a polling agency (TNS SOFRES- in 2011 could give a good idea of visitors coming to the area, their profiles, their needs and practices. This was important to outline threats (visitors getting older, shorter stays in the area but a fantastic success of “Loire valley by bike”, less interest for cultural sites but more for nature stays and activities, etc).

Identification of future visitor markets

2.12 Was there an assessment to identify future visitor markets offering potential? 3*

Yes, this was considered of great importance, particularly in order to attract urban people for short breaks and to renew visitor profiles. The Park can take advantage of four surrounding cities (Angers, Tours, Nantes, Poitiers) and could improve the rate of visitors from Northern Europe.

It is clearly mentioned in the ‘AP’ document (Axe 3, page 83 and following: new nature tourism offer, promotion of new relevant products, etc).

The clever idea is to consider Loire valley as a ‘teasing product’ to help promote nature stays in the park area.

Implementation

2.13 Does the action plan include an indication of phasing/staging of action over time? 3

Yes. Each action is described with details including its specific phasing; some begin this year, other ones are planned in the coming years, all referring to the 5-year action plan. Actions in progress are detailed with costs updated if necessary according to quotations.

In addition the AP document (chapter 9) gives a global phasing of all 16 actions until end 2019, thus giving a clear vision of the Park commitment into the ECST process.

2.14 Does the action plan indicate which stakeholders or partners are responsible for the delivery of each action? 3

Yes. Each action is given with indications of the lead partner/coordinator (“*maître d’ouvrage*”), eventual engineering support during the implementation (“*assistance à*

maîtrise d'ouvrage”), other partners (technical support, sharing of experience, etc).

2.15 What is the size of the budget that the protected-area authority is devoting to the implementation of the action plan per year, excluding staffing costs?

The budget devoted to ECST is given under 2 presentations and staffing costs are distinctively mentioned but not separate:
- detailed for each action with labour costs and small expenses (*“fonctionnement”*) and investment costs (*“investissements”*),
- summarized in chapter 10 of the AP document for the five years of implementation.

What is this as a percentage of its total budget?

The total budget for the 5-year action plan amounts to 326,650 euros, to be compared with the Park total budget in 2013: something like 3.3 million euros. The answer is therefore 10 per cent.

2.16 Have funds been provided (or are they being sought) from other sources?

Yes. Some projects will be implemented under other lead partners’ responsibility. And some funding of Park projects must be confirmed in the coming years.

2.17 Does the level of funding seem reasonable to deliver the proposed action plan?

3

Yes, realistic and some project costs are already confirmed by quotations attached to the application dossier.

2.18 Describe the staffing that the protected-area authority is devoting to the implementation of the action plan?

No staff member is exclusively dedicated to ECST:
Head of mission ‘Tourism and Entertainment’ 40 per cent of her full time
Assistant 20 per cent of her time
Head of mission ‘Communication’ 20 per cent of full time
Head of mission GIS approx. 5 per cent of his full time.
Other Heads of mission from other departments also contribute to the ECST action plan: from Natural Heritage (including management of Natura 2000 areas), Climate Change and Energy, Environment Education and Administration.

2.19 Is staffing being provided from other sources?

Yes some additional staffing or engineering is expected for some definite actions. e.g. training sessions. See for example Action N°3: training days dedicated to team building around a project, collaborative management.
In addition actions with lead partner other than the Park imply that they provide their own staff capacities.

2.20 Do you believe the action proposed can be implemented with this level of staffing?

3

Yes, owing to the pragmatic approach of the Park.

Commitment of partners

2.21 Have any formal arrangements been made with partners (such as a legal agreement, a memorandum of understanding or a letter of commitment) for implementation of the strategy and action plan? **3**

Yes. As an example all the ECST applications costs are covered by the two Regions. Some actions of the action plan are already implemented and therefore financed. Future ones indicate a budget with costs and funding from financial/public partners. Some funding will depend on several-year planning and funding from public bodies (Regions, Départements, communities of communes, communes, regional State agencies) and/or structural EU funds, something usual for a French nature park. In addition the Park takes advantage of former arrangements and financial support for example to accompany its main network of accommodation providers, to manage leisure activities in protected areas managed under Département responsibility, to cooperate with heritage guides.

2.22 Does the protected area have any other formal arrangements with partners for implementation of the strategy and action plan or other methods for ensuring their commitment? **2**

Yes, as already mentioned. In addition, agreements must be signed with each partner, particularly because many of them work in the private sector. Such agreements imply mutual commitments like for example in the action “Marque Parc” (Park branding).

Some partners are also expecting long-term relationships thanks to ECST step 2. Anytime the Park is experienced in such mutual commitments and evaluation.

Monitoring results

2.23 Have sufficient indicators been identified for the monitoring of the success of the strategy/action plan and can these be practically measured? **1**

Yes. Indicators are given in two parts for each action: expected results and evaluation criteria. There will be a steering Committee for each action planned, the Park has also set up a Monitoring Committee dedicated to the whole ECST. They will therefore use indicators.

Many of these indicators require indication of a quantitative value, at least as an objective to be shared and agreed with Park partners. Such data are expected and should be sent by the Park in a separate document.

Addressing key issues

Specific action that the Charter looks for in the action plan, Principles 3 to 10

Principle 3 – Protecting natural and cultural heritage

3.1 Monitoring impact on flora and fauna and controlling tourism in sensitive locations A **3** B **3**

As the Park has been active since 1996 some actions are new, some are in continuation of actions already implemented: the Park has been using a data base since 2007 but new partners involved in Park guided trips give the opportunity to implicate them into this collection of data. A large survey was initiated in 2012 but biodiversity and its evolution in the Park area remains difficult to monitor. Some actions are focused on sensitive sites like regional nature reserves, some wetlands and marshes and the specific areas mentioned above in §2.8.

The Park has disposed eco-meters (“*écocompteurs*”) in sensitive sites, particularly where rambling, mountain biking or horse riding are frequent. This makes possible to divert tourist flows and to prevent damage.

In addition daytrips “*Carnets de Découverte*” are always under responsibility of guides selected by the Park and committed to sustainability. Same with Park Ambassadors.

In addition the action plan includes new nature discovery tourism products (Action N°9) and will bring some restrictions to river sports on Loire and Vienne rivers (boarding locations, landing on some islands, fire, bivouac, pet straying limitations etc), especially during nesting periods (Action N°11, now in progress).

3.2 Encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions A **2** B **2**

Intangible heritage is considered of particular importance and the Park can boast of many projects: specific paths to discover Loire landscapes, heritage signposted loops around villages, Park-branded guided visits, conferences, permanent and annual exhibits, shows to enhance local intangible heritage.

However the Park has decided to implement other projects to make it more attractive to younger generations: new digital tools, mobile apps, etc (action N°12)

And also other actions targeting kids like description of landscapes and local stories (action N°13).

It also includes collection of data on culture and traditions with help of volunteers and inhabitants (action N°14).

3.3 Action to control development (including tourism) which would adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise A **2** B **3**

The Park is already active on these fields, either directly or in cooperation with different partners:

As mentioned in §3.1 it brings restrictions of access to sensitive sites.

Accommodation providers of Park network “*Hébergements nature et patrimoine*” have to comply with some recommendations in terms of energy saving, water consumption, waste, food, transport use, eco-building techniques and also about electromagnetic pollution from home networks. They can access to training sessions

and get a “*guide de l’habitat sain*” (guide of sound housing) with many information and practical tips. A very useful and outstanding guide.

Park Ambassadors are also invited to participate to similar sessions (three times each year).

The Park also participates to actions in order to reduce effects of the climate change, especially to reduce CO emissions in its area.

The Park is progressively developing the “*Marque Parc*”, the national branding of products and services in PNRs, implying more precise specifications about protection of nature, landscapes, use of renewables, etc. (Action N°6 of the action plan).

Action N°11 in progress in 2014: new recommendations and guidelines are being prepared for municipalities, public authorities, tourism businesses in order to increase awareness of environment goals along rivers and help people understand restrictions.

The Park cooperates with many partners, private and public -like tourism public authorities- including State civil servants, to explain risks and to obtain a common agreement and then convergent communication, in medias, in tourist offices, in sport associations and also on the sensitive sites. The “*fiche rivière*” (river booklet) delivers a lot of information with maps, landscape description, appropriate behaviour, tips for sustainable canoeing, etc. This document can be downloaded freely or purchased (1 euro only).

3.4 Action to reduce tourism activities which adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise A 2 B 3

Same answers as above.

3.5 Encouraging visitors and the tourism industry to contribute to conservation (e.g. “visitor payback” schemes) A 1 B 2

No visitor payback scheme but local people, tourism businesses and visitors are encouraged to volunteering and to support actions initiated by the Park:

Park Ambassadors, branded Park partners are committed to contribute to Park missions including conservation and to inform their clients and visitors.

“*Concours éco-trophées*” (eco-competition): no money to expect by winners from this friendly competition, the aim of which is just to encourage people, local businesses, public bodies to innovate in their sustainable practices. Three awards are proposed: about natural heritage and preservation of resources from nature; energy saving and use of renewables; social inclusion and local involvement.

The Park also intends to develop new tourism products as elements of short breaks and focused on environment awareness and implication of businesses (Action N°9 of the action plan).

Other planned actions will also contribute to meet this objective: “*Marque Parc*” (Park branding), involvement of new Greeters to encourage visitors to behave sustainably during their holidays (Action N°4).

Principle 4 – Meeting visitor needs/quality of experience

4.1 Surveys to measure visitor satisfaction A 1 B 2

Surveys and data collection are under the responsibility of public tourism bodies, particularly Département and Region compiling data from their partners: tourism offices, businesses, cultural sites, etc. The Park shares its Park House with a Tourist office with joint reception -and staff- and therefore it contributes to such surveys and invites visitors to fill in questionnaires.

Similar questionnaires are proposed to visitors at the end of guided daytrips. In addition all “*Marque Parc*” partners have to contribute to such surveys.

4.2 Identification of future visitor markets and their needs A 2 B 3

Same answer as above. But the ECST action will help go further:

The Park will build a “*Tableau de Bord*” (management chart) to get tourism data more accurate and more relevant for its area, to dispose of key figures on the tourism activity, to have a clear vision of visitor needs and their evolution, to anticipate and also to manage tourism flows for example in strategic and sensitive areas.

The Park considers it is important to give accurate information to their local partners like municipalities in order to ensure their commitments -and funding- in the actions proposed by the Park.

This is also a question of positioning for local tourism: cultural sites are of particular importance but even in such areas more and more visitors wish to be in touch with nature and have specific experience (see Action N°5).

4.3 Specific provision of facilities and information for disabled people

A 1 B 3

Initially the Park has participated to the development of the national network “*Tourisme et Handicap*” (Tourism for disabled).

But accessibility for different disabilities is no more considered as specific but should be something normal and common. In addition all public and private buildings liable to welcome any kind of visitors will be compelled to become accessible, particularly to wheelchairs, something extremely difficult for accommodation in old houses.

This is why the Park no more considers *Tourisme et Handicap* as sufficient and satisfying and it is now working in offering ‘accessible destinations’; meaning a comprehensive offer of accessible tourist services, access to other daily services, transport facilities, accommodation, restaurants, etc in a definite area. (See Action N°16).

Some nature sites, some museums, some sections of Loire valley cycle road are already accessible to different kinds of disabilities but progress are still necessary. The idea is then to share experience with surrounding villages and destinations (also with other protected areas), to find local solutions in order to include more and more sites and services into an accessible destinations.

4.4 Provision of facilities for economically disadvantaged people

A 2 B 2

All exhibits at the Park House and “*P’tits ateliers*” (workshops for kids) are free. Other services like conferences, guided daytrips, access to some specific sites are free for kids and proposed with discounted rates for families. Other special fares for students, jobless people, etc.

In addition many sites and accommodation providers like camping areas welcome “*Chèques Vacances*”, the French version of holiday cheques granted by social services to economically disadvantaged people. This is quite common and it is difficult to list all tourism sites and businesses who accept holiday cheques.

4.5 Action to monitor the quality of facilities and services A 2 B 2

Commitments of tourism businesses under the label “*Hébergement Nature et Patrimoine*” result from a 5-year agreement with evaluation every 2 years. Park Ambassadors are also in charge of monitoring products and services benefiting from Marque Parc brand or Park label: Park discovery paths, heritage discovery local loops, restaurants, etc. The development of Marque Parc (Action N°6) implies verification in accordance with the different specifications.

4.6 Action to improve the quality of facilities and services A 2 B 2

Same answer as above.

The Park also promotes the national label “*Qualité Tourisme*” (same) related to quality of facilities and services but this is managed by partners, not by the Park. PNR LAT is also associated with “*Mission Val de Loire UNESCO*” a grouping of sites eager to maintain a high quality of services in their area encompassing the Park.

PNR LAT also intends to develop its offer for families (Action N°10): more dedicated products and services, more professionals able to work for this target, a wider period including weekends to propose such services during short breaks, cooperation with other partners like Region Centre tourism authorities, dedicated web pages, etc.

Principle 5 – Communication about the area

5.1 Sensitive promotion of the protected area as a destination using authentic images and reflecting capacity/needs of the area, including times and locations A 3 B 3

The Park has revamped its web site in 2012 and many documents, geographic data, etc are now available and/or downloadable. ICT tools like Google maps are available in mobile version to display branded accommodation and daytrips and to enable geolocation. PNR LAT is now also present in social networks.

However printed documents are still very important: map dedicated to the Park and its major activities, information leaflets (also to download), brochures related to heritage sites, “*Carnets de cocheurs*” to help draw up wildlife inventories. The application dossier includes a list of all printed matter available at the Park House and in tourist offices.

In addition the Park intends to promote Marque Parc in order to foster its own branded tourism offer, thus making it more distinctive (Action N°7).

As previously indicated it is important to make its offer of genuine nature tourism more visible when compared with Loire valley major cultural sites.

The Park is positioned in social networks to keep in touch with (younger) ‘friends’, ‘followers’ also and to involve them in that promotion (Action N°8: communicate and promote the Park’s nature assets).

5.2 Influence on the promotional activities of others (region, enterprises, etc.)

A **2** B **2**

Similar action with Park partners: the Park logo cannot be used without agreement, however various adapted versions are available and can be used to identify the Park area.

It is significant that every village in the park area indicates at their gates their inclusion in the PNRLAT with similar signposting, together with other tourist information.

However the Park area does not seem to be very visible on public body documents, probably because of its location on two regions and two Départements.

5.3 Provision of clear information material on where to go and what to do when in the area (guides, maps, websites – relevant languages) A **3** B **3**

Same answer as in §5.1

The Park House (associated with the local tourist office) welcomes visitors in French, English and German. The permanent exhibit is described in four languages.

Many documents are available on site and also on the website.

Some discovery brochures (like those for birdwatchers) are available in French and English.

The Park will also develop more specific information, for example in accordance with disabilities (Action N°16). Other documents will be updated.

5.4 Provision of accessible information centres/points for visitors and local people

A **2** B **3***

The Park House associated with a tourist office is an example of cooperation to easy access to information. Other tourist offices like those of gate cities -e.g. Saumur- can deliver information about the Park. Same with partner accommodation providers.

The Park also intends to use new technologies to widen access to Park information, like mobile apps, flash codes (from 2015).

The action N°13 “*paysages partagés*” (shared landscapes) tested in Bouchardais area will be a prototype of information using both digital and classic techniques. It intends to create new and sensitive links between visitors/local people and their environment, delivering more experience, accessible on site as well as from home. It is expected that professionals, schools, coordinators of leisure and sociocultural activities will take advantage on this access to information on Park nature sites. This project could be then extended to other sites.

5.5 Process for ensuring that others (especially tourism enterprises) provide good information A **2** B **2**

Park education programmes are managed by 21 associations, in which 12 have also tourist activities. All of those partners are involved in quality scheme implying an evaluation.

Park Ambassadors, “*Hébergements Nature et Patrimoine*” (Nature and Heritage accommodations) accommodation providers have to participate to training sessions (nature sites like Natura 2000, heritage sites, sustainable management, etc) and

evaluation. This will be progressively extended to Marque Parc partners (Action N°6).

5.6 Provision of guiding services and an events programme for visitors and local people, including groups and schools A 2 B 2

As already mentioned the Park cooperates with local primary and secondary schools thanks to annual programmes like “À l'école d'Anjou”. A brochure also explains all activities available with recommendations, suggested good practices so that children are welcomed on nature sites in appropriate conditions.

Guiding services are proposed to all publics thanks to guided daytrips “*Carnets de découverte*” (see above §3.1).

Principle 6 – Tourism products relating to the protected area

6.1 Provision/development of tourism offers (special events, holiday programmes, etc.) involving the discovery and interpretation of natural and cultural heritage A 3 B 3

Similar answer as above: “*Carnets de découverte*”, Heritage discovery loops around villages, etc open to visitors and local people almost all year round.

The Park organises some temporary exhibits at the Park House and later in villages. People are also invited every two years to take part to “*Fête du Parc*” (park fair), to collaborate to different workshops, which gives a good opportunity to meet Park staff and partners.

People also get the Park bulletin “*Écho du Parc*”. They are also invited to share their experience with participants on a definite topic (in 2014: food in all aspects).

Some staff members, some Park Ambassadors also participate to approx. 10 local events in villages to make the Park and its activities more visible.

The Park is also present at some ‘bird fairs’.

6.2 Effective promotion of these offers A 2 B 3

A lot of information is available at the Park House, in different tourist offices.

Information is also available on the Park website.

in addition each action of the ECST action plan includes some communication tools: local medias, social networks, tourist offices, brochures, etc (See § “*communication de l'action*” for each of them in the AP application document.

Principle 7 – Training

7.1 Providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the protected area, in sustainable tourism A 3* B 3*

ECST project is mainly managed by the Tourism and Heritage Education Department, representing 6 people. All of them are committed in a common

department project during 3 years. On that purpose they participate together and every year to a one-week training session, with one 'main stream' (in 2014: how to create attractive events to better links with a global public). It seems other Park departments have similar management.

7.2 Providing or supporting training of other organisations and tourism enterprises in sustainable tourism A 3 B 3

Technical sessions are proposed every year to elected people, staff of municipalities and Park partners. For example to understand environment issues, to transfer and share good practices, etc. concerning sustainable urban planning, mobility, local produce, grass cuts, management of advertising along roads, etc.

"*Passe à ton voisin*" (pass to your neighbour): similar days are organised, this time in villages to encourage exchange of good practices, some of them about local tourism. Marque Parc and meetings of Park Ambassadors also include training sessions.

Principle 8 – Community involvement and maintaining local quality of life

8.1 Involving local communities in the planning of tourism in the area A 3 B 3

Working as "*syndicat mixte*" -something like a community of communes-, local communities are involved in each project and therefore in tourism activities. Some of them take part to the Tourism and Leisure activities committee, to the Steering and Monitoring Committees and therefore to the Permanent Forum. The application to the European Charter was decided by the Park Council (all members). Each action of the action plan is/will be supervised by a steering committee. (mentioned as Actions N°1 and 2 of the action plan).

8.2 Communication between the protected area, local people and visitors A 2 B 3

Several tools are available: the Park website, its social networks and their 'community manager'; temporary exhibits at the Park House and in villages; exchanges between Park partners like Ambassadors and visitors or local people; news from the Park either printed (quarterly) or electronic (monthly).

In addition organises every two years a Forum day to exchange with a more selected public (in 2013: housing and well-being).

The action N°13 "*paysages partagés*" (shared landscapes) will open other opportunities to communicate with local people and visitors. Local people are also invited to be witnesses of those landscapes, with their stories.

8.3 Mechanisms for identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise A 2 B 2

It is one of PNR missions. In order to protect sensitive sites and avoid conflicts, local State authorities cooperate with the Park to bring some access restrictions,

particularly to Loire islands. Parallel to this, communication is sent to local people and to municipalities. The Park can also medias like TV regional networks.

The Park also cooperates with Département tourism bodies to discuss with local associations of sport and leisure activities. Each measure is supervised by a steering committee involving all stakeholders where possible.

Principle 9 – Benefits to the local economy and local community

9.1 Promoting the purchase of local products (food, crafts, local services) by visitors and local tourism businesses A B

Such promotion and purchase of local products is firmly advised to Park partners, particularly accommodations providers and restaurants as it is a part of the mutual commitment between them and the Park.

Four restaurants also propose “*fouée*”, a local and ancient sort of bread, typical of former rural traditions. Same revival of traditions thanks to a cooperative (grouping) of 50 basket-makers using local and genuine raw materials.

Same in another village with local farmers whose products are purchased by local people, by tourism businesses and by a municipal restaurant. Other similar projects are being developed with contribution of social entrepreneurs.

And of course the Marque Parc with selling of branded products bring its contribution to the local economy.

9.2 Encouraging the employment of local people in tourism A B

Although it is easier to employ local people having a better knowledge of the area it is not permitted to propose jobs and declare that local people will be preferred. Not in France -and probably nor in EU.

See Work Code (Code du Travail 1,1, 3: discriminations).

9.3 Development of tourism in association with traditional economic activity (e.g. agriculture) A B

Same answer as in §9.1

Principle 10 – Managing visitor flows

10.1 Keeping a record of visitor numbers over time and space, including feedback from local tourism enterprises A B

A data collection already exists at regional and Département levels and it is also fed by statistics from tourist offices and other tourism partners. See also §4.2 and the project of management chart tailored for the Park area (Action N°5).

10.2 Creating and implementing a visitor management plan A 2 B 2

In addition to the Park management plan, the ECST action plan includes in Action N°9 to monitor and control tourist flows in some sensitive sites. Similar action will help protect fauna -birds particularly- nesting in Loire islands (Action N°11). However the whole park area is too large to envision a comprehensive visitor management plan; particularly because some famous sites are true 'honeypots' but with limited effects on the environment.

10.3 Promoting use of public transport, cycling and walking as an alternative to private cars A 2 B 3

Since 2011 the Park works in favour of sustainable mobility and supports mobility solutions involving between communities of communes, public transport authorities and other local players.

However it is necessary to go forward and this is why the park intends to test mobility solutions more dedicated to visitors. The idea is to refrain use of cars, to build alternative mobility thanks to different transport means and then to propose short breaks without cars in a test area around the hotspot of Azay-le-Rideau castle. This will involve 12 villages during four years (see Action N°15).

In addition cycling itineraries like Loire valley and its Eurovelo route are now used by thousands of visitors, however we cannot be considered that they came here just for the PNR.

10.4 Controlling the siting and style of any new tourism development A 2 B 2

This is a part of PNR missions and the Park can recommend to State authorities not to allow projects of new tourism activities in case of risk for nature and for the environment. And more directly if the Park Charter clearly indicates that they are permitted in its area.

Any further comments or observations:

List of any documents

received from the protected area or presented during the visit which were not included in the original application.

- Updated version of the application questionnaire (attached)
- Brochure "*petites histoires des Pays Sages du Bouchardais*" related to the Action N°13 now in progress
- Ring binder "guide of sound housing" as an example of information and delivered by the Park to its partners during training sessions
- Introduction to PNR LAT
- Various flyers given by Partners during the visit
- Digital photos

Programme of visit, key sites and partners visited:

Please attach a full list of people interviewed and job titles as an appendix

Contacts during the visit

Loïc BIDAULT, Director of PNR LAT

Virginie BELHANAFI, Head of Mission Tourism and Heritage

Camille CHAIX, in charge of Tourism and Communication

All staff members working at the Montsoreau Park House and Tourism Office.

Lundi 16 juin 2014

1) Example of projects followed by PNRLAT at Montsoreau

Meeting with Clément CARVALHO, Park Ambassador, manager of camping site Isle Verte.

Branded "hébergement nature & patrimoine", "Loire à vélo".

Topics: accessibility, management of sport activities along Loire and Vienne rivers, example of heritage paths, cycling and sustainable mobility, innovative accommodation in phase with new trends.

2) Museum of Loire mariners at Chouzé-sur-Loire

Meeting with Paola JULIENNE, president of the association managing the museum, and Gilles THIBAULT, Mayor of Chouzé.

Topics: enhancement of local heritage, support of engineering by the Park, contribution of local stakeholders.

3) Meetings with Park partners and members of Park Committees

Philippe BEAUVILLAIN, Regional Councillor, president of Park « Tourisme et Loisirs » Committee, also responsible of the ECST Monitoring Committee, Park Board member.

Élisabeth NOUVELLET, rapporteur of the Committee, member of the Park Executive Board, member of ECST Monitoring Committee and also Park Ambassador.

Topics: the Forum and the ECST application.

4) Meeting with all members of ECST Steering Committee

Representatives of Region and Département tourism authorities, Chambers of commerce, Consultant, Park staff members.

Topics : Reference values of the Park, how to make them distinctive, shared values and involvement of Park Partners into the "marque Parc" and links with ECST particularly its second step, future steps in the application. Cooperation with the Consultant.

5) Visit of gîte with certified several Park branding, welcoming groups and people with various disabilities

Isabelle ARCHAMBAULT, rapporteur of « Eco-développement » Committee, member of Park Executive Board, deputy-mayor of Lerné, also park Ambassador du Bureau du Parc.

Topics: visit of a site branded by the Park, viability and contribution to local economy, profiles of visitors, eco-building, practical solutions of accessibility,

Mardi 17 juin 2014

6) Meeting with approx. 20 members of the network Park Ambassadors

Topics: detailed presentation of each member, their commitment, their own activities for the park, training sessions, contribution to Park and village events, etc.

Discussion with the new President of PNR LAT (and former Park Ambassador).