

# The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) integrated with other voluntary tools can facilitate a more effective tourism management in Natural Parks

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**Abstract** —The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST), promoted by Europarc in EU protected areas, considers the natural resources conservation as the reason for tourist attractiveness and tourism economy. The main goal is to create a network between public and private subjects in order to individuate and to promote new sustainable tourism offers and to define common, shared, strategies and action plans able to improve local economy preserving natural resources. The ECST implementation can be improved by using procedures and approaches typical of other voluntary tools like ISO 14001/EMAS and Local Agenda 21 (LA21). In particular, the environmental analysis should be more addressed to the existing relationships between pressures produced by tourism and other human activities and the state of the environment (the DPSIR scheme proposed by EEA could be useful for that). A evaluation of criticisms and a rank of priorities should be introduced in the process (as in ISO 14001) and local stakeholders involvement can be referred to LA21. ISO 14001/EMAS should provide references also for monitoring plans and for the management of procedures aimed at using the “park logo” (<http://qualitypark.casaccia.enea.it>) as award for best practices.

**Index Terms** — sustainable tourism, protected areas, voluntary tools, public/private shared strategies

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism fluxes in Natural Parks and, generally, in areas with high ecological values, can strongly affect the environmental quality and biodiversity. Tools able to promote tourism and to control its pressures at the same time could be useful for an effective territorial management.

Voluntary tools for sustainability are those standards, methods and approaches which

can be followed by private or public subjects in order to improve the environmental performances and, as a consequence, the environmental quality. They help to go beyond the requirements of the international and national laws and to spread sustainable behaviours.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECTS), promoted by Europarc, the Federation of European protected areas, is a specific voluntary tool created for managing tourism fluxes in natural parks. Other tools useful for tourism management are 1) the international standard ISO 14001 which introduces the Environmental Management System (EMS), 2) the European regulation EMAS (761/2001/CEE – Environmental Management and Audit Scheme

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- which uses the ISO 14001 as system), and 3) Local Agenda 21 (LA21).

All of them have common items: a general statement (strategy, policy) as starting point, to stress the importance of communication, to ask for training (in order to improve quality in management, service and products), to require a final plan for actions (named "Environmental Programme" in ISO 14001 and EMAS, "Plan for sustainable tourism" in ECTS and "Plan for local actions" in LA21) and to promote awareness and involvement of local stakeholders, in order to share strategies and plan for actions between public and private subjects.

Some are more "strategic" tools, like LA21 or ECST, because they ask public or private organisations to achieve a stated objective, like sustainable tourism (ECST) or the improvement of the environment condition and human life quality (LA21), without giving specific procedures. ISO 14001 and EMAS are more "operational" explaining how to reach the stated goals and listing the requirements to be followed according a "process" approach

## 2 VOLUNTARY TOOLS SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) is the application of the World Charter for Sustainable Tourism, established in Lanzarote in 1995, to protected areas in order to produce an effective and sustainable tourism management. The core of the Charter is a *Strategy* for sustainable tourism shared with local stakeholders (mainly tourism operators) and a common *Plan for Action* based on the results of an analysis of the environmental and tourism constraints and opportunities. The ECST requires a stakeholder participation but do not clearly ask the establishment of a Forum organised according stated procedures. Moreover, the ECST does not give a clear method for the analysis of the relationships between the state of the environment and tourism, the assessment of

priorities and on how effectively manage actions and processes.

The EMS, being an operational tool, strengths very much the "process approach". An evaluation of the environmental analysis results is required in order to check the "significance" of the environmental impacts and of the "environmental aspects": pressures on the environment originated by the human activities. The EMS allows an organisation to have a list of priorities useful for individuating the short- and long-term targets and objectives to include in the *Environmental Programme*. It facilitates also the individuation of the steps the organisation must undertake in order to improve its environmental performances. Unfortunately no specific, common methods for the environmental analysis and for the evaluation procedure are proposed by ISO 14001 and EMAS regulation.

LA 21 stresses the importance of sharing common principles (the Aalborg Charter) and a plan for action with local stakeholders. The Forum is the place where public and private organisations discuss and share policies and objectives. LA21 is based on the results of an environmental analysis too. The major problem affecting LA21 effectiveness is that no criticisms assessment is required and often the list of priorities is established by the Forum participants independently from the environment analysis results. Another problem is that A21 does not require procedures for monitoring the activities effectiveness and the Plan for Action results. Therefore, many organisations which approached sustainability tools, implemented an EMS after LA21 in order to better manage the process. The Forum and stakeholder involvement is a very interesting step of LA21. It can be useful in the EMS implementation too, for obtaining more effective results, mainly if applied to a public administration like a Park organisation.

Figure 1 shows as the implementation of all those tools follows similar steps: after a statement of the general objective (strategy, policy), each tool requires an analysis of the state of the environment and human pressures (specially focussed to tourism in

ECST), then specific objectives have to be individuated and a Plan for Action useful to achieve results has to be stated.

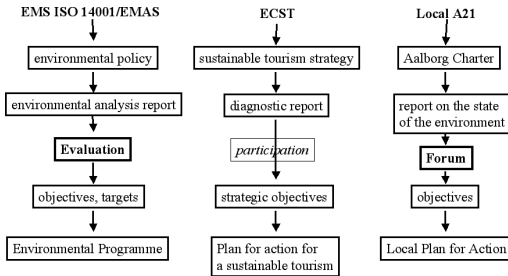


Fig. 1 Comparison of the different steps needed for the implementation of some voluntary tools

Many other volunteer tools were developed in order to promote sustainability.

All of them can be integrated and if a good environmental/economic analysis is undertaken from the beginning it is easier, for an organisation, to get benefit from their implementation.

### 3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECST INTEGRATION WITH ELEMENTS OF OTHER TOOLS

As introduced, ECST is a specific tool for improving relationships between tourism and environment conservation in protected areas. Its implementation can take advantage by the integration with elements of the other cited tools because each one has its own specificity.

ENEA carried out experiences on voluntary tools implementation undertaking specific researches on methods useful to improve the effectiveness of the environmental analysis, the evaluation of criticisms and listing of priorities, the stakeholder involvement through a Forum and how to find a way to “award” those people carrying on best practices useful to the environmental quality improvement [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9], [10].

The project “qualitypark” was specific on that: <http://qualitypark.casaccia.enea.it>.

The project Archicharter introduced a first attempt to integrate the ECST with other tools: <http://infosig3.frascati.enea.it/archicharter>.

### 3.1 The DPSIR scheme and the environmental analysis

The environmental and socio-economic criticisms assessment must start from the analysis of the relationships between the state of the environment and human pressures. The negative impact exists only if pressures overcome the environment carrying capacity. The DPSIR scheme (Driving forces, Pressures, State, Impact, Responses) is a logic scheme proposed by the European Environmental Agency for the environmental analysis and reporting and can help to improve the environmental analysis quality.

The ENEA’s experiences demonstrated the utility of using the DPSIR scheme (Figure 2) for an effective analysis of the ecological and socio-economic conditions and for individuating indicators useful to be related among them, in order to monitor the results of the Plan for Actions implementation.

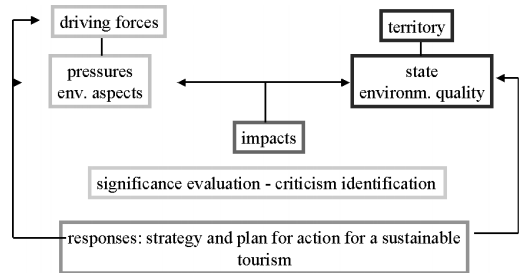


Fig. 2 The DPSIR scheme and the relation among the different steps

A matrix relating the “environmental aspects” of the human activities with the environmental condition (natural and socio-economic resources) allows to better individuate the real impacts and their origins.

The initiatives, projects, plan for actions included in the management plans (Envi-

ronmental programmes, Plans for Actions) of the protected area's organisations are the "responses" forwarded to overcome the environmental criticisms.

In order to obtain real results they have to be strictly related to the existing impacts and to their importance (list of priorities). The existing impacts can be measured on the basis of the "state of the environment" analysis, both from the naturalistic and socio-economic point of view. Any driving force (ex. tourism, agriculture, forestry, urbanisation etc.) has its "environmental aspect". They are the processes of an activity which influence the state of the environment with its pressures.

After making a theoretical matrix with the relationships between driving forces and their environmental aspects (measured with performance indicators), it is possible to individuate "who" is responsible for the major ecological (or social) problems. The use of this scheme allows: to avoid useless descriptions and analyses not being strictly related with the existing problems, to avoid a lot of data not related among them and to find useful indicators to be included in the monitoring plans.

### **3.2 The priorities assessment and monitoring**

The Responses of the DPSIR scheme can be addressed to the improvement of the environmental quality (restoration, habitat management etc.), to changes of driving force (ex. changing agriculture from intensive to extensive) or to a decrease of pressures thanks to better environmental performances.

The effectiveness of the responses depends on the "significance" evaluation and criticism identification according an importance rank (priorities).

Many experiences exist of evaluation of the environmental aspects of a private company; the evaluation becomes much more complicated when it is necessary to take into account not only the "direct aspects", that means the activities undertaken by an organisation directly affecting the environmental quality, but also the "indirect aspects", that

are the whole pressures coming from all the other human activities affecting the territory quality.

This is the core problem when a voluntary tool is applied to an organisation responsible of the landscape and ecosystems quality.

In fact, a public organisation like a Park administration can not be responsible of all pressures exerted on the environment and can not directly modify pressures produced by other organisations and companies, ex. tourism companies.

Therefore, a method able to evaluate the entity and priorities of pressures produced by all human activities (tourism, agriculture etc.) must be included in the evaluation processes in order to identify those subjects which are responsible of the major problems and must be involved in common strategies and programs of environmental quality improvement.

The application of the DPSIR scheme and the priorities assessment allows also to identify the more important indicators to introduce in the monitoring programs in order to check the success of the Plan for Actions.

### **3.3 Stakeholders involvement and the "Park logo" as award to best practices**

The stakeholder involvement for sharing strategies and policies or plan for actions is not an easy process and must be linked to a mechanism of "award".

In fact, the involvement of already aware and sensitive people is not enough for obtaining good results and more and more subjects must be interested, trained and made aware.

To give value to those people co-operating and contributing to the environmental improvement with best practices is important for attracting more and more subjects and have the opportunity to involve them. This process can be obtained using the protected area's label as "award" to people "making something in the same direction of the protected area's policy". They can be considered "environmental quality providers" and the requirements needed for obtaining the award must

be decided and shared together, in a Forum.

For the success of this process it is essential that the award management follows the "quality rules" and is managed according transparent and clear procedures, like in an environmental management system. In a short time many people can be awarded with the Park label and a competition mechanism can afford very good results.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The integration of ECST with procedures and principles of the EMS and LA21 can improve its implementation and obtain a more effective management of tourism and environment (natural and socio-economic).

Experiences of integration of ECST, EMS and LA21 and the use of the DPSIR scheme in environmental analyses were successfully undertaken by ENEA.

The complexity and the variability of situations require more applications in order to spread the method and give value to environmental analyses and to criticisms and priorities assessment.

The explained approach should allow public administrations to save money avoiding environmental analyses duplication.

More experiences in different environmental and socio-economic conditions should be useful in order to obtain more appropriate indicators and to further validate the method integrating the Charter with other voluntary tools.

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