

EUROPARC FEDERATION

Verification report for the

České Švýcarsko National Park (CZ), Sächsische Schweiz National Park and Protected Landscape Area (DE) and the Labské Pískovce Protected Landscape Area (CZ)



Application for the EUROPARC certificate:

“Transboundary Parks – Following Nature’s Design”

Date of verification visit: 3rd – 6th September 2012

Names of Verifiers: Rolands Auziņš, Leo Reyrink

Signed 
Lead Verifier Leo Reyrink

Date: 17th September 2012



Main actors for the transboundary cooperation: from left to right:

Mr. Ing. Pavel Benda (Director České Švýcarsko NP)
Mr. Tomáš Salov (Spokesman České Švýcarsko NP)
Mr. Dr. Dietrich Butter (Director Sächsische Schweiz NP)
Miss. Lenka Jandova (Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic, Headquarters)
Mr. Ing. Petr Kříž (Head Labské Pískovce PLA, Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic)
Mr. Jürgen Phoenix (Head division regional planning, Sächsische Schweiz NP)
Mr. Rolands Auziņš (second verifier EUROPARC Federation)
Mr. Dr. Handrij Härtel (Deputy-director České Švýcarsko NP)

1 Introduction

1.1 Cross border region Saxon-Bohemian Switzerland

In 1954 Czech and German conservation experts met for the first considerations for future cross border cooperation in the Elbe Sandstone region. In 1964 the first official meeting was organised for a transboundary cooperation. In 1990 the Sächsische Schweiz National Park was founded (by the Free State Saxony). This was followed by an Agreement from the 28th November 1991 signed by the Minister of Environment of the Czech Republic and the Minister of Environment and

Spatial Planning of the Free State of Saxony on the cross border cooperation for nature along the mutual border. One of the main goals of the cooperation agreement was the cooperation for realisation of a national park on the Czech side of the border (Annex 6.3). In 2000 the České Švýcarsko (Bohemian Switzerland) National Park was installed by the Czech Republic.

The Saxon and Bohemian Switzerland National Parks together form more than 170 km² nature conservation protected area and is an important chain in the European NATURA 2000 network.

In 2010 the cooperating partners organised joint celebrations on occasion of the 20 years anniversary of the Sächsische Schweiz (Saxon Switzerland) National Park and the 10 year anniversary of the České Švýcarsko (Bohemian Switzerland) National Park.

The Labské Pískovce Protected Landscape Area (CZ) and the Sächsische Schweiz Protected Landscape Area (D) south and east of the national parks (more than 530 km²) form a big and good buffer zone around the national parks as core zones in the cross border region.

The administration of the Sächsische Schweiz National Park in Bad Schandau is responsible for both the National Park and Landscape Protected Area. On the Czech side the České Švýcarsko NP is administrated by the NP administration in Krásná Lípa and the Labské Pískovce PLA by the PLA administration in Děčín which is a unit of the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic in Prague. For this reason there are three different applicants.

After more than 20 years of cross border cooperation, the application to EUROPARC to ask for an assessment of the work done is a good step. The evaluation based on the best standards for transboundary cooperation in protected area management is not only a good opportunity to make a critical self reflection of the common work, but can also set a milestone for the Czech and German partners.

For the verifiers it was a pleasure and an interesting task to be confronted with such a long-term cooperation and the assessments of the achievements from more than 20 years of intensive and successful cross border cooperation.

1.2 Results of the Desk Evaluation

The official application from Saxon-Bohemian Switzerland for the EUROPARC transboundary certification process was approved by the EUROPARC Transboundary Steering and Evaluation Committee (STEC) in December 2011. In early 2012 the detailed application forms and questionnaire from the three cooperating partners were received by the EUROPARC Federation. The first assessment of the application in July 2012 by the STEC showed the long-term transboundary work at the Czech-German border in the Saxon-Bohemian region. The self-assessment was critical and the materials proved the high standard of cooperation. The STEC decided that the area was worth to be assessed on location. On behalf of the STEC and the EUROPARC Federation Rolands Auziņš (second

verifier) and Leo Reyrink (lead verifier) were appointed as verifiers for the verification visit and the reporting.

Before the mission and after a second critical review of the materials, a number of questions and probably weak points, which needed clarification during the verification visit were summarised and distributed to the České Švýcarsko NP, Sächsische Schweiz NP and Labské Pískovce PLA. The handout for the mission with questions and further wanted information is attached (Annex 6.2: Handout for the Verification Visit, Desk Evaluation).

1.3 Results of the Mission

From 3rd-6th September České Švýcarsko NP, Sächsische Schweiz NP and PLA and Labské Pískovce PLA were visited to be certified on location according to the programme "Transboundary Parks – Following Nature's Design".

The EUROPARC expert team Rolands Auziņš (Director of the Vidzeme Regional Administration, Nature Conservation Agency, Latvia and member of the council of the EUROPARC Federation) and Leo Reyrink (Director of the Dutch-German cross border park Maas-Swalm-Nette, lead verifier and author of the verification report) visited the site.

The directors and the responsible members of staff of the cooperating organisations organised the programme for the verification visit (Annex 6.1: Programme of the Verification Visit).

The verifiers were accompanied by Handrij Härtel, Jürgen Phoenix and Petr Kříž, the directors and other relevant members of staff and by regional stakeholders.

The programme was very well organised with excellent guides and the time schedule was perfect. The atmosphere was open and a lot of further information was given during the indoor evaluation and during the field visits.



Cross border logo

4 Conclusion

The cooperation of the three applicants České Švýcarsko (Bohemian Switzerland) National Park, the Labské Pískovce (Elbe Sandstones) Protected Landscape Area and the Sächsische Schweiz (Saxon Switzerland) National Park and Protected Landscape Area is a very good example of a living cross border cooperation in the protected area management in Europe.

Important improvements have been achieved in the recent years. Exemplary is:

- the actualisation of the common vision and strategy in February 2012
- the bilingual organisation plan 2012 for the cross border cooperation
- the regularly meeting of the directors
- the regularly meeting of the working groups
- the two information centres

Based on the agreement from 1991, the common vision of 2004 and the actualised vision/strategy from this year the cooperation functions well.

The České Švýcarsko (Bohemian Switzerland) National Park, the Elbe Sandstones Protected Landscape Area and the Saxon Switzerland National Park and Protected Landscape Area meet all standards of the transboundary park (IUCN Cat II/V) and is a good excellent example how larger areas with a partly lower protection level (PLA) and national parks can be linked cross borders.

All Primary and Second Criteria and Fields of Work are fulfilled.

The basis of financing is only short-term on a year to year basis, depending on the budgets of the national authorities. In future further efforts on broader sustainable tourism together with the tourist agencies might add even more value to the cross border region and acceptance of nature conservation.

The applicants are therefore successful in achieving the level required for official EUROPARC certification. The personal impression of the verifiers during the visit was that the applicants cooperate already for several years according to the EUROPARC Federation Standards for cross borders protected areas in Europe.

Based on our evaluation, the České Švýcarsko (Bohemian Switzerland) National Park, the Labské Pískovce (Elbe Sandstones) Protected Landscape Area and the Sächsische Schweiz (Saxon Switzerland) National Park and Protected Landscape Area with its partners are a good example of transboundary cooperation and deserve fully the certification as Transboundary Park Following Nature's Design of the EUROPARC Federation.

5 Specific Recommendations to the Applicants

Although the criteria and fields of work are fulfilled according to the standards there are still some recommendations. For the applicants it will be a challenge to keep the high level of the cross border cooperation. Therefore it is important that the installed cross border working groups as well as the meetings of the directors continue their regular meetings in the next five years. Then a permanent exchange of information and planning is ensured.

Partner Protected Areas

- On the Czech side the management of the National Park and the surrounding Protected Landscape Areas is in two hands. Although this does not prevent the actual applicants to cooperate very well, it might be even more efficient that the management of the protected areas is in one hand as in the Saxon Switzerland.
- The signed memorandum of the Bohemian Switzerland National Park (CZ) and Saxon Switzerland National Park (D) with the Góry Stołowe National Park in Poland on the 25th of April this year can be a good beginning for the trilateral cooperation in the three Sandstone national parks in Middle Europe. Although the Polish region is not directly connected, a trilateral cooperation could be helpful to learn from each other for the protection and management of nature and for the sustainable marketing of the trilateral border region by means of trilateral cross border projects. This might be the beginning of a closer trilateral cooperation as now already exists between the Czech and Saxon partners.

Language

Although the current cooperation is not strongly affected by the use of different languages, some improvements could be gained by some more language education for the relevant staff members. Also the detailed information on the websites should be bilingual.

Research and Monitoring/Scientific council

- There is a lot of cross border research and monitoring and a lot of cross border data is available. It would be good to have some more publications on the results of the management, the monitoring and research of the cross border cooperation. Very important is to bring together the data of the visitor monitoring, in order to evaluate the visitor management.
- The Saxon Switzerland NP and PLA have an advisory board (Sachverständigen Rat), which does not meet regularly anymore. The functioning of a cross border scientific advisory board could be helpful for the improvement and acceptance of the management of the protected areas. Therefore we recommend the applicants to consider the realisation of one scientific board in the next years.
- In the Saxon Switzerland NP a research was done on the regional economic benefits. We recommend investigating the benefits of the cross border protected areas as a whole. The regional economic spring off of nature protection is an important factor for the acceptance by and cooperation with local stakeholders.

Infrastructure

- The planning and realisation of a dam in the Elbe near Děčín would mean a great negative impact on the ecological function of the Elbe River not only upstream but also downstream in the protected areas with their relative natural rivers. The Elbe plays an important role for the ecological functioning of the network of running waters in the protected areas. In times where in Europe according to the water directive a lot of rivers are restored it seems to be not very appropriate to build a further dam in the Elbe.
- The cross border region Saxon-Bohemian Switzerland is characterized by a unique landscape in central Europe. The dense forests in the National Parks across the border and the more open landscapes of the Protected Landscape Areas give the prospector beautiful and great sights. In future it is important that these excellent and unique sights are not interrupted by windmills or any other buildings that disrupt the natural skyline of the protected areas.