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WORKSHOP

Good practices:
ecotourism discovering
biodiversity

CERV Programme Network of Towns

EVENT 4

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Promoter:



Host:



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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE GREATER CÔA VALLEY: EXPLORING NATURE, HERITAGE, AND REWILDING

Located in the northeastern region of Portugal, the Greater Côa Valley is a breathtaking natural corridor stretching from the Malcata Mountains to the Douro River. This region is not only a haven for biodiversity but also a key area for rewilding efforts in Europe, aimed at restoring ecosystems and strengthening wildlife populations. The valley's sustainable tourism packages invite visitors to explore its remarkable landscapes, vibrant wildlife, and rich cultural heritage, all while supporting conservation and local communities.

The valley is home to an impressive array of wildlife, including iconic species such as the Iberian wolf, the Egyptian vulture, roe deer, and the majestic wild horses. Guided nature activities, like wildlife observation, birdwatching, and hiking, offer immersive experiences that showcase the beauty and fragility of the ecosystem. Knowledgeable guides provide insights into rewilding efforts, emphasizing the importance of sustainable tourism practices in preserving this vital ecological corridor.

Beyond its natural wonders, the Greater Côa Valley boasts a deep cultural heritage. Visitors can marvel at the region's prehistoric rock art, a UNESCO World Heritage site featuring some of the oldest open-air engravings in Europe. These ancient artworks are complemented by charming historical villages, such as Castelo Rodrigo and Almeida, where travelers can experience traditional Portuguese culture and architecture.

Local gastronomy is another highlight of the region, offering visitors a taste of authentic Portuguese cuisine. Many restaurants and lodgings in the area prioritize sustainability, sourcing ingredients locally and minimizing their environmental impact. Eco-lodges and traditional guesthouses provide accommodations that combine comfort with a commitment to preserving the environment.

Tourism in the Greater Côa Valley is closely tied to the ongoing rewilding initiative, which works in partnership with local businesses and communities. This ensures that tourism not only protects biodiversity but also promotes economic development and social well-being in the region.

Whether you're seeking adventure, tranquility, or a deeper connection to nature, the Greater Côa Valley offers an unforgettable journey. By visiting, travelers contribute to a rewilding movement that safeguards Europe's natural heritage for generations to come.



NATURE & CULTURE PATHWAYS INITIATIVE – MUNICIPALITY OF ALIMOS, GREECE

The "Nature & Culture Pathways" initiative, implemented by the Municipality of Alimos in Athens, Greece, promotes sustainable ecotourism while preserving the region's biodiversity and cultural heritage. This program connects local communities and visitors through guided tours, educational activities, and conservation efforts, fostering environmental awareness and responsibility. It aligns with European policies on biodiversity protection and sustainable tourism, creating a balance between environmental conservation, economic growth, and cultural exchange.

Objectives:

- Promote Sustainable Tourism:** Encourage responsible tourism practices that minimize environmental impact.
- Protect Biodiversity:** Highlight Alimos' rich ecosystems and foster conservation awareness.
- Engage Local Communities:** Involve residents in beach clean-ups and environmental initiatives.
- Educate Visitors:** Provide guided tours and educational programs to promote biodiversity conservation.
- Align with European Policies:** Ensure compliance with EU directives on sustainable development.

Implementation Strategies:

- Educational Programs:** Train tour guides and create bilingual, interactive materials like maps and virtual tours.
- Digital Outreach:** Use the municipality's website and social media to share resources, promote events, and engage audiences.
- Workshops and Training:** Organize workshops for citizens and local operators to strengthen sustainable tourism practices.
- Community Engagement:** Host conservation events, build partnerships, and collect participant feedback for ongoing program refinement.
- Local Business Involvement:** Collaborate with restaurants, shops, and hotels to promote ecotourism initiatives.

Through these efforts, the initiative encourages active participation from both locals and visitors, fostering a collaborative spirit to protect Alimos' natural treasures while supporting sustainable tourism. This program serves as a model for balancing ecological preservation with cultural and economic development.

For more information, visit:
www.alimos.gov.gr



ΔΗΜΟΣ
ΑΛΙΜΟΥ

GREECE
Dimos Alimos



ECOTOURISM IN DINGLI

Dingli, located in the western part of Malta, is a fantastic destination for eco-tourism. Known for its stunning cliffs, the Dingli Cliffs offer breathtaking views of the Mediterranean Sea, making it an ideal spot for nature lovers and hikers.

The area is rich in natural beauty and provides a peaceful escape from the hustle and bustle of urban life.

Hiking and Nature Walks: The Dingli Cliffs are surrounded by scenic countryside, perfect for hiking and nature walks. There are various trails where you can explore local flora and fauna, and enjoy views of the coastline and surrounding fields.

Birdwatching: Dingli is a great location for birdwatching, especially during migration seasons. The cliffs offer a high vantage point where you can spot various species of birds, including migratory birds stopping off in Malta.

Agricultural and Farm Tours: The area around Dingli is known for its agricultural activities. You could visit local farms to learn about traditional Maltese farming practices, organic farming, and sustainable agricultural methods.

Cultural and Historical Exploration: While focusing on eco-tourism, you can also explore Dingli's historical sites, such as the Dingli Village Church or the Megalithic Temples in the nearby area. These sites are part of Malta's rich heritage, which can be appreciated while maintaining eco-friendly travel practices.

Cycling: The landscape of Dingli is perfect for cycling enthusiasts, offering routes that allow you to explore the area in an eco-conscious way.

Local Cuisine: Enjoy traditional Maltese food in eco-conscious restaurants or farm-to-table eateries that prioritize locally sourced and sustainable ingredients. The Dingli area is ideal for anyone looking to enjoy the beauty of nature while minimizing their environmental footprint.



MALTA
Kunsili Lokali Dingli



VILCE NATURE PARK

The **"Vilce" Nature Park** is specially protected natural area in Jelgava Local Municipality, near Vilce village. It is located in the lower course of Vilce Valley, near its confluence with the Svēte River. The protected area was established in 2004 to safeguard natural values, including river valleys, slope and ravine forests, sandstone outcrops, rare and protected plant species, as well as the Vilce Hillfort.

The park covers 144 hectares and is one of the most scenic places in the Zemgale region. The Vilce and Rukūze rivers flow through the ravines, creating a diverse landscape in contrast to the surrounding flat agricultural lands. In early spring, blue, white, and yellow anemones bloom along the riverbanks. The Baron's Trail, part of the Natura 2000 network, is an excellent destination for educational walks, hikes, jogging, nature exploration, or simply relaxing in the fresh air. Visitors can listen to the sounds of nature, observe animal tracks, and take part in other nature-related activities guided by an environmental expert.

There is an opportunity to visit the Vilce Hillfort, located at the confluence of the two rivers. On the Rukūze River's bank, visitors can see a Devonian sandstone outcrop and quench their thirst at the Lielmāte Spring.

Baron`s Trail

The 14 km long Baron`s Trail leads from Vilce Manor, through slope forests, to the Vilce Hillfort. Along the trail, educational stands provide information about forest wildlife. Vilce Manor, formerly the hunting lodge of the Hahn family, now houses Vilce Primary School.

A viewing platform is installed at Vilce Hillfort, offering a clear view of Zaķu Meadow, where a recreation spot has been set up. Together with the trail to Zaķu Meadow, the Baron`s Trail forms a circular route of approximately 2 km.

Disc Golf in Vilce Manor Park

Vilce Manor's scenic park is an ideal location for Disc Golf tournaments, with 12 baskets set up throughout the park. Disc golf discs can be rented at the Vilce Tourism Information Point.



LATVIA

Jelgavas Novada Pasvaldība

BRIDGING HERITAGE AND NATURE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF KAUNAS FORTRESS PARK

From its inception, Kaunas Fortress Park has integrated the preservation of cultural heritage with ecological conservation. The park's history dates back to 1916, when bats began inhabiting structures abandoned during the Soviet era. Today, Forts I, II, III, IV, and VIII have been designated as Kaunas theriological (bat) reserves and are part of the "Natura 2000" network, protecting habitats of European importance.

Committed to responsible and sustainable tourism, the park adapts its activities to the bats' wintering season. Visitors are offered guided tours of external territories and barracks, avoiding areas where bats hibernate. The park's excursions provide a uniquely ecological experience, as thick masonry walls block mobile phone signals, ensuring an immersive and distraction-free visit.

Kaunas Fortress Park encourages tourists to embrace simplicity, advising them to wear comfortable, durable clothing suitable for long walks and exploration of dungeons. In 2024, the park joined the "Social Recipe" program, organizing lectures and sustainable excursions specifically tailored for seniors, or "silver members." These activities received widespread support and interest.

Art also plays a vital role in attracting visitors, with installations integrated into the park's historic spaces. Additionally, in collaboration with the Kaunas District Municipality, a 700-meter Health Trail was constructed near the 3rd Kaunas Fortress Fort. This trail features observation decks with informational stands, benches, and an educational area. At the end of the trail, visitors can explore a scaled-down model of the fort, doubling as a children's playground.

Kaunas Fortress Park masterfully combines the preservation of natural habitats with cultural and historical education, offering visitors a sustainable, enriching experience that highlights both ecological and architectural heritage.



LITHUANIA
Kauno Tvirtovės Parkas



SINGEL SAFARI

Singel Safari is an innovative project aimed at creating an ecological connection in Breda's canals while transforming them into recreational and tourist attractions. This initiative combines ecological development with recreational opportunities, allowing residents and visitors to engage with nature in a city setting.



Gemeente Breda

THE NETHERLANDS

Objectives

1. Ensure the waterway functions as an ecological connecting zone between Natura 2000 areas.
2. Develop innovative ecological solutions adapted to the limited available space.
3. Enhance recreational experiences by integrating nature into the canal areas.
4. Prevent adverse developments that could harm the ecological connection.

Program Development

The City of Breda, in collaboration with the local water board, is working to design the city's canals as ecological connections while complying with environmental legislation. The canals, known for their historical significance, are located in a dense urban environment where space is limited. This project seeks to harmonize ecological development with the canals' recreational and tourism potential.

Under the name **Singel Safari**, the initiative inspires people to explore and appreciate local nature without the need to travel far.

Integration into Breda's Vision

Singel Safari is part of Breda's broader program to align nature and recreation across the city. The goal is to ensure that all residents live within 200 meters of green space and a 15-minute bike ride from a major nature reserve. The project encourages a unique blend of experiencing historic city life alongside natural beauty, making it attractive for both residents and visitors.

This innovative project sets an example of how urban spaces can balance ecological connectivity with recreational and cultural experiences.

DISCOVERING LOCAL BIODIVERSITY THROUGH ECOTOURISM IN TOWN FILAKOVO

Filakovo in southern Slovakia is the gateway to the region's rich biodiversity and offers a variety of ecotourism opportunities for nature lovers. The surrounding areas are characterized by diverse flora and fauna, making it an ideal destination for those interested in the natural heritage of Central Europe. The region around Filakovo has a mixture of woodlands and meadows that are home to a variety of flora, small mammals, birds and many invertebrates. The surrounding landscapes provide hiking trails and the observation of local flora and fauna. Participating in wildlife tours, such as deer and bird watching, is not just a fun experience for children.

The town park of Filakovo was originally created from Turkish gardens in the second half of the 19th century. Count Berchtold built his mansion under the castle. The castle belonged to the largest owners of Filakovo until the Second World War. They followed the style of English gardens, keeping the natural vegetation. The paths and small bridges were adapted to the environment, and flower beds were planted only near the manor house. In addition to local trees and plants, many exotic species were planted. There is a lake on the edge of the park, below the castle.

One of the attractions of the park is a small zoo (supposedly the first in Slovakia in the 1950s), located on the left side of the stream flowing out of the lake.

Nowadays, the new project of the town of Filakovo, "Revitalization of Filakovo City Park" will improve the park's microclimate. Landscaping helps the park's environmental stability and serves as an eco-corridor for wildlife. Planting more densely will increase vegetation, help absorb more water and reduce evaporation. A zone of water-filtering plants around the lake creates a natural barrier and a smooth transition to the environment. The main goal of the project is to renew the park with natural water absorption principles, make it more attractive, strengthen biodiversity, and create a pleasant environment. Catchment tanks collect rainwater from nearby building roofs to fill the lake. A footbridge over the lake connects the area, and new sidewalks and ramps make it accessible to everyone. The functions of the proposed modifications include ecological, architectural, urban and psychological aspects, among others.

Visitors can gain a deeper appreciation of Filakovo's rich biodiversity and contribute to the sustainable development of ecotourism in the region. Guided tours and local ecotourism services can enhance the visitor experience. Learning about nature conservation efforts and the importance of biodiversity in the region can be helped with educational programs and guided tours. Sustainable tourism initiatives are supported to balance visitor access with environmental protection.



SLOVAKIA
Mesto Fil'akovo

TWO ECOREMEDIATION ISLANDS ON THE LAKE VELENJE

On the northern side of Lake Velenje, where agricultural land predominates, two eco-remediation islands, each covering an area of 50 m², have been installed on the water surface. The project aims to protect the lake's natural heritage as a counterbalance to the development of tourism infrastructure. By utilizing natural systems and processes for environmental restoration and protection, plants help reduce excess nutrients in the water and restore essential oxygen levels. The islands serve as a habitat for numerous species, from microorganisms and fish to birds. The goal is to maintain and improve the lake's water quality, enabling further sustainable development on, in, and around the lakes.



MESTNA OBČINA
VELENJE

SLOVENIA

The eco-remediation islands on Lake Velenje are floating structures planted with wetland vegetation that purify the water and enhance the lake's ecosystem through natural processes. Their primary function is to remove excess nutrients, thereby reducing the risk of algal blooms while enriching the habitat for microorganisms, invertebrates, fish, and birds. The plants on the islands not only filter the water but also contribute to greater biodiversity and the stability of the aquatic environment.

The construction of the eco-remediation islands took place in three phases. The first phase involved plant preparation, which lasted several months. The investor provided space for growing native wetland plants collected from the vicinity of the lake. The surface was shaped into a shallow basin, and the plants were carefully nurtured until they were ready for transplantation onto the islands. The second phase involved the assembly and planting of the islands, which took up to two weeks. The floating modules were assembled at the launch site, then planted and connected into two larger units. The final phase included transport and anchoring, during which the islands were launched onto the water surface and secured using sustainable materials. The installation process was carried out in collaboration with the investor, experts from the company Limnos, and on-site support.

The project was funded with the support of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, with the Municipality of Velenje responsible for its implementation. The managing authority designated for the execution of the Rural Development Program of the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2014–2020 was the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food.

Total budget: 30.000 EUR

<https://www.velenje.si/projects/za-aktivnejši-jutri/>

THE EO GREEN ROUTE

Vía Verde del Eo, located between the municipalities of A Pontenova and San Tirso de Abres, is a perfect example of sustainable ecotourism in Galicia. Stretching over 12 kilometers, this greenway follows the former railway line that once connected the mines of A Pontenova to the Eo River, transforming this historic industrial route into a trail that combines biodiversity, unique natural landscapes, and cultural heritage.

This itinerary traverses an area of great ecological value, recognized as the Río Eo, Oscos, and Terras de Burón Biosphere Reserve. Along the route, visitors can enjoy an immersive experience in nature, discovering a rich biodiversity that includes native flora and fauna. The predominant trees include chestnuts, oaks, and alders that make up the riverside forest, while birds such as herons, kingfishers, and cormorants offer unique spectacles for birdwatching enthusiasts.

The route is ideal for walkers and cyclists, featuring a smooth and accessible path that allows visitors to enjoy exceptional landscapes like the Eo River, whose crystal-clear waters wind through mountains and valleys. Along the way, travelers pass through tunnels, historic iron bridges, and rest areas that invite them to pause and appreciate the tranquility of the surroundings. Informative panels along the route explain the history of the railway and its importance to the region's economic development.

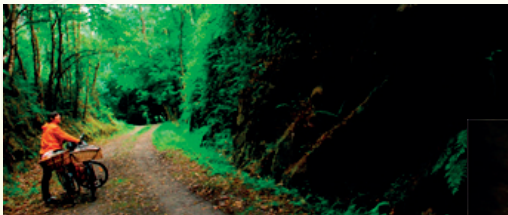
The Vía Verde del Eo stands out not only for its natural richness but also for its commitment to sustainability. By promoting environmentally friendly tourism, it encourages the conservation of this protected area while boosting the local economy. Small villages such as A Pontenova and San Tirso de Abres offer rural accommodations and typical local products that enhance the experience, allowing visitors to enjoy Galician gastronomy and the warm hospitality of the region.

This route is much more than a path; it is an example of how environmental conservation can be integrated with the enjoyment of active tourism. The Vía Verde del Eo invites you to discover the most authentic side of Galicia, where history and nature come together to offer an unforgettable experience, becoming a model of ecotourism that respects and celebrates the region's biodiversity.



SPAIN

Asociacion Cultural Enrédate



'MICRO-ADVENTURES' IN THE GRAND AVIGNON: THE ART OF FINDING EXOTIC PLACES NEXT DOOR

From 2019 onwards, the strategy of the Greater Avignon Tourist Office will revolve around 'well-being' and 'consuming well', in particular by thinking 'locally'. The pandemic will only confirm this choice. Two years later, in 2021, one thing became clear: it wasn't just a question of shifting up a gear, but rather of reinventing the tourism offer in a way that was slower, more respectful of the environment and more humane. In short, more responsible. So the urban area started playing a very practical card: establishing itself as the ideal base camp for exploring rivers, canyons, beaches, garrigue and summits. On foot, by bike

The concept is based on being able to set off each morning on an adventure within a radius of less than 50 kilometres of this real base camp. One day in the Luberon park, the next heading for the Alpilles hills, the Camargue or the Ventoux mountain. No car to manage, no bag to pack or unpack every day, and no unnecessary stress either. Just explore the region's legendary sites in slow-travel mode, as well as the countless lesser-known nuggets scattered around the 15 municipalities surrounding Avignon. Avignon is the railway hub of the south of France, directly connected to the major French and European cities by its TGV station.

This initiative was the start of a genuine transition for tourism, combining the enhancement and preservation of outstanding natural areas, ecomobility, structuring the hiking/cycling/outdoor activities offer and micro-adventures. But also for the circular economy: the aim is to take into account the capacity of the tourist industry to generate indirect spin-offs (food, local produce, etc.), by promoting local producers and short distribution channels. This means extending the season, not just from June to August, to ensure that tourist flows are more evenly distributed over time and space.



FRANCE



KAYLAKA PARK – ECOTOURISM AND CONSERVATION

Kaylaka Park, located near Pleven, Bulgaria, is a prime example of eco-friendly tourism in a natural environment. The park focuses on sustainability by preserving biodiversity, offering eco-conscious activities, and promoting cultural and historical conservation.

Key aspects of sustainable tourism in Kaylaka Park include:

- 1. Conservation of Biodiversity:** The park protects diverse flora and fauna, many of which are endangered. Educational efforts emphasize the importance of preserving ecosystems, with park rangers monitoring wildlife health.
- 2. Eco-friendly Activities:** Visitors can engage in low-impact activities like hiking, cycling, birdwatching, and rock climbing. These activities reduce ecological footprints and promote sustainability through waste reduction initiatives.
- 3. Cultural and Historical Preservation:** The park contains historical landmarks such as Roman ruins and an old fortress. Visitor access is carefully regulated to protect these sites, with guided tours focusing on historical education and preservation.
- 4. Sustainable Transportation:** The park encourages walking, cycling, and the use of electric scooters and clean energy buses, reducing the carbon footprint and promoting green mobility.
- 5. Wine Tourism – Organic Practices:** Local wineries around Pleven are embracing organic practices, offering wine tours that highlight sustainable viticulture and environmentally friendly production methods.
- 6. Community Engagement and Education:** The park actively involves local residents in tourism management and educates visitors and locals about sustainable practices through workshops and events.

By integrating these initiatives, Kaylaka Park provides a model for responsible tourism, balancing environmental preservation, cultural heritage, and community involvement.



BULGARIA

Asotsiatsia Za Kulturen Obmen I

Razvitie Na Lichnostta

Vav Vsya Vazrast



"LE SOSTE DI ULISSE"

An excellent example of good practice in discovering diversity through ecotourism in Sicily is the network "Le Soste di Ulisse", which combines sustainable tourism with cultural and environmental diversity.

The network supports environmental sustainability by promoting low-impact tourism, celebrates cultural diversity through cuisine and heritage, and ensures that visitors engage meaningfully with local communities and ecosystems.

It is a holistic approach to ecotourism that enriches the visitor experience while preserving Sicily's rich natural and cultural resources.

A good way to discover diversity through ecotourism in Sicily is to participate in community-led agritourism and ecotourism initiatives. Many local farms, vineyards and small ecovillages offer experiences that showcase the region's biodiversity, cultural heritage and sustainable practices. Choosing ecotourism activities that involve local communities, you not only discover the environmental and cultural diversity of Sicily, but also contribute to sustainable development and conservation efforts.



ITALY





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