Title of the Story: European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, a participatory methodology for planning a more sustainable nature tourism model in Alto Minho

Destination Name: (include any state, province or region)
Alto Minho Region

Country: Portugal

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Position: Click or tap to enter text.

Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

☐ Culture & Communities
☐ Environment & Climate
☒ Nature & Ecotourism
☐ Islands & Seaside
☐ Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID-19
☐ Post COVID-19 recovery
☐ One of the 17 SDGs* (if yes, which one) Click or tap to choose

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html)

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: [http://tourism4sdgs.org/](http://tourism4sdgs.org/)

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices [here](#)
DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

- Consolidate the image of Alto Minho as a nature tourism destination;
- Involve the public and private agents of the territory in the planning and development of nature tourism in Alto Minho;
- Promote networking among nature tourism entrepreneurs aiming to create products that have higher added value;
- Raise awareness among the economic agents of the tourism sector to the importance of introducing environmental and social economy concerns into their activity.

Methods, steps and tools applied

a) Promoted (and continues to promote) an ongoing participatory process that actively involved (and involves) public and private actors in the Alto Minho territory and the local population in the:
   - elaboration of a territory diagnosis, identifying the main problems and opportunities of the territory in what regards its tourism development, particularly in the nature tourism component in its protected and classified areas;
   - identification of the necessary action lines to solve/minimize the identified problems and seize/enhance the opportunities;
   - prioritization of identified solutions based on their degree of importance and feasibility;
   - realization of the most important and feasible solutions and their subsequent implementation.

b) Promoted greater involvement of tourism entrepreneurs through the implementation of ECST Phase II which recognizes tourism entrepreneurs who are committed to developing a programme to improve their activity in what concerns environmental and social economy.
Key success factors
As the territories and the tourism sector itself are dynamic, Alto Minho European Charter for Sustainable Tourism continuously promotes the identification of problems/conflicts and their resolution through the involvement of all stakeholders. Among the main success factors of Alto Minho ECST highlight for:

a) high commitment from the Alto Minho Inter-municipal Community, which promotes and manages the Alto Minho European Charter for Sustainable Tourism;
b) active and continuous involvement of public agents and greater awareness of the need to think the territory on an inter-municipal basis to gain scale as the Alto Minho tourism destination;
c) active and continuous involvement of the private agents of the territory, especially of the tourism sector entrepreneurs and of the local population, developing cooperation opportunities among them and the perception of the need of developing products at inter-municipal scale as a condition for the tourism products have greater visibility and higher added value and that can be valued by foreign markets;
d) voluntary commitment of the parties to integrate and be an active component of this methodology.

Lessons learned
While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome? Click to add your text

Results, achievements and recognitions
a) development/consolidation of a supra-municipal (inter-municipal) idea of territory, giving coherence to the Alto Minho territory, as a NUT III and as a nature tourism destination, through a more sustainable practice and supply;
b) greater involvement of tourism entrepreneurs and of the local population in the management and development of tourism in the territory;
c) better communication between the public organisations and the private agents of the territory;
d) greater entrepreneurs’ awareness regarding the importance of sustainable resource management and the importance that visitors, of the nature tourism niche, attach to environmental and social concerns;
e) creation (and organization) of a consortium of 12 companies (accommodation, catering, tourism animation and Environmental Education and Interpretation Centres) that work in the organization/development, promotion and sale of territorial tourism packages and incorporating environmental, economic and social sustainability concerns.
The Alto Minho territory comprises 10 municipalities, three of which are part of the Peneda-Gerês National Park. Thus, part of the Alto Minho territory (the three municipalities that are included in the Peneda-Gerês National Park: Arcos de Valdevez, Melgaço and Ponte da Barca) is recognized by the EUROPARC Federation’s European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) since 2002, and the other seven municipalities since 2015, consequently Alto Minho became the first NUT III at European level fully recognized with the ECST award (https://www.europarc.org/sustainable-tourism/).

Alto Minho will also be the first ECST territory in Portugal to implement Phase II of this methodology, recognizing their tourism entrepreneurs as ECST partners. In a pilot experience at national level, the implementation process of the ECST Phase II in Alto Minho is currently in its final stage. Noteworthy to highlight that this process is also innovative as it will be the first time at European level that this award will be given to entrepreneurs that are organized in a consortium.

Additional references
More information (including photos) available in: http://www.cets.altominho.pt/