

## Greenways Product workshop was held at Viseu on September 13.

- Organized in the framework of the EU funded project "Greenways Product" which the main goal is to stimulate the creation of a new tourism product "Greenways of Europe"
- Nearly eighty participants from 8 countries
- It was followed by a Technical Visit to the Ecopista do Dão



Gilbert Perrin, president EGWA, with the President of the of REFER, Vice-President of the CIM Dão Lafões, and the Director of Turismo Centro de Portugal, at the opening of the Viseu Workshop.



The President of the Associação Portuguesa de Corredores Verdes (APVC) Prof. Reis Machado welcomed the attendees and spoke about the work that the APCV is carrying out to promote ecopistas.



Gilbert Perrin President of the EGWA, stressed the multipurpose nature of greenways and the complementarity between local use and use for tourism.



Américo Nuno, Vice-President of the Comunidade Intermunicipal (CIM) of Dão Lafões, highlighted the excellent opinion that citizens have of the Ecopista do Dão and CIM's commitment to its development and promotion and to attracting tourism through the *ecopista*.



President of Rede Ferroviária Nacional (Portuguese Railways - REFER), Rui Loureiro, spotlighted the Programa Nacional de Ecopistas that was set up by REFER in 2001 in order to reuse nearly 750 km of disused railway lines and potential *ecopistas*, which currently extends for over 200 km.

The workshop was organized in two blocks, one devoted to **sustainable tourism in greenways** and the other to the **tourism product**.

In the first session the Director of the EGWA referred to the excellent conditions provided by greenways for sustainable tourism as trails for exclusively non-motorized use that are safe, accessible, and very easy to use by any kind of user, including persons of reduced mobility. She made a brief overview of the activities carried out by the EGWA to promote European greenways and the information available on the Internet in various languages for both greenway promoters and managers and end users.



**Mercedes Muñoz, encouraged to use the best practices guides available on the EGWA web, to improve accessibility and services for cyclist and people with disabilities on greenways.**

[Best practices guides and brochures](#) are available on the promotion, accessibility and services of greenways, aimed especially at attracting cycle tourists and disabled persons. The [European Greenways Observatory](#), designed to be the gateway to information about European greenways in English, French and Spanish, offers basic information about greenways with photos and the possibility of including maps, and provides access to the own websites of the greenways. The observatory will promote the image of all the European greenways, both at a geographic level and in terms of the existing kilometers.

[Naviki](#) is the European internet portal for cycling navigation, communication and planning, that helps users cycle around a Europe without borders. Through Naviki, EGWA, as a partner of the project, promotes greenways and their integration within long distance cycle routes.

Finally, the ultimate aim of the [Greenways Product](#), in the framework of which the workshop was held, is to make the move from the greenway as a resource to the greenway as a tourism product, in order to realize the great touristic potential of greenways and to generate real and tangible economic resources in the areas they pass through. The design of greenway-based tourism packages forms part of the project's activities.



**Market trend in cycle-tourism is upward, and this type of tourism brings major benefits to areas that do not enjoy mainstream tourism development, pointed out Richard Weston.**

**Richard Weston**, of the University of Central Lancashire, a partner of the Greenways Product, revealed some very significant figures concerning the economic impact of cycle tourism in Europe, where there are an estimated 2,300 million cycle day trips per year and 20 million cycle holiday trips per year, which generate a gross revenue of 44 billion euros a year. He provided new figures expressly for Portugal and Spain, which put estimated cycle tourism revenues at 130 million euros and 1,620 million euros respectively. He pointed out that the perceived

market trend in cycle-tourism is upward, and that this type of tourism brings major benefits to areas that do not enjoy mainstream tourism development

The director of **Turismo Centro de Portugal**, **Pedro Machado**, made a presentation on the central region of Portugal which, with a surface area of 28,199 km<sup>2</sup> and 2.3 million inhabitants, represents 30.6% of Portugal in terms of area and 22.6% in terms of population, while its GDP accounts for 18.6% of the country total. In this presentation he framed his organization's 2014-2020 Development Model, which includes a development programme for trails for walkers and cyclists. Centro de Portugal aims to position itself as a sustainable and environmental tourism destination, in which the Ecopista do Dao stands out as one of the focal points of tourism in central Portugal.



Pedro Machado, talked about the support given to the greenways tourism product, of which the Dão *ecopista* is a benchmark example.



Miguel Pereira, APCV Vice-president presented a video showing the major steps forward made by *ecopistas* in Portugal.

The **APCV**, co-organizers of the workshop, represented by its Vice-President, **Miguel Pereira**, provided an overview of the network of eco-trails in Portugal, which currently extends for over 200 km. He also presented a video showing the major steps forward made by eco-trails in Portugal

The second session of the workshop was devoted to the **tourism product**. It included a presentation of the European project and the promotion of greenways in Spain. Also presented were three examples of **best practices** related to the **promotion of greenway-based tourism** in Ireland, Belgium and Spain, which have been honoured with 2013 European Greenways Awards.



The aim for Spanish greenways is to create and consolidate a tourism product, pointed out Carmen Aycart.

The **Director of the Greenways Programme of the FFE** (Spanish Railways Foundation) presented the Greenways Product project coordinated by the organization she heads. Ms Aycart reviewed the many and varied activities being developed by the FFE in the promotion of greenways in Spain (videos, guidebooks, website, brochures, campaigns, monthly bulletin with over 20,000 subscribers, social networks,

collaborations with all kinds of organizations and media, and the support of celebrities) to achieve the broadest possible awareness and reach the man and woman in the street.

On this the 20th anniversary of the creation of the programme, **the aim for Spanish greenways is to create and consolidate a tourism product.**

This aim is driven by the existence of an important niche market based on greenways and the need to generate economic revenues while creating jobs in the areas that the greenways pass through. As part of this approach, Ms Aycart referred to recent surveys that reveal the existence of an important niche market for cycle-tourism and accessible tourism. With regard to the latter, the European Commission estimates that over 50 million people (4 million in Spain) have some kind of disability, accounting for over 15% of the total population.

**Brian Quinn** of Tourism Ireland presented the experience of the **Great Western Greenway (GWG)**, winner of the first [European Greenways Award 2013](#) in the Exemplary Initiatives category. With 42 km of trail for the exclusive use of cyclists and walkers, it is the longest greenway in Ireland. It is a top class tourist attraction, as evidenced by the growing number of users; 200,000 in 2013. Of these, 38% are local,

39% are from the rest of Ireland, and 23% are from the rest of the world. On average each visitor spends 50 euros a day and the estimated economic impact in 2011 was 7.2

million euros. Tourism has a direct impact on local businesses; 47% of the establishments that took part in the survey said that they had noticed an increase in their turnover.

GWG has a **tourist destination strategic plan** designed for various market segments, which aims to provide added value to tourism packages by offering activities that complement the greenway experience (adventure –including water sports-, gastronomy...) in collaboration with small local businesses. The plan calls for various specific campaigns targeting tourists from Germany, UK, France and Italy.



**The estimated economic impact of the Great Western Greenways in 2011 was 7.2 million euros, informed Brian Quinn.**



**European cooperation, marketing and the sale of tourism packages, key factor for the success of the Vennbahn.**

**Danny Heck**, head of marketing of the East Cantons Tourist Office (Belgium), presented the example of the **Vennbahn**, a cross-border greenway that passes through three countries (Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg) which, with a length of 125 km, is one of the longest and oldest disused railway lines to be converted into a greenway in Europe.

It is also an example of **European cooperation**, made possible thanks to two Interreg projects. The

Vennbahn represents an investment of 14.5 million euros, provided by the three countries and the various regions through which it runs, and by European co-funding. In addition to the excellent quality of the infrastructure itself, the project is particularly interesting due to the fact that, from the very beginning, the organizations involved have focused on the development of an integrated image and the **joint marketing** of tourist packages, the latter of which initiatives was deserving of the **Special Award for Tourism Product in European Greenways**.

Thus the tourism component has always been present from the start of the project, and this has led to the **sale of tourism packages** aimed at discovering the Vennbahn in March 2013, even before the greenway was officially opened in July 2013. Between March and August 2013, direct sales of tourism packages by the tourist office amounted to 35,000 euros (28 trips and 146 visitors, 80% from Belgium), to which total we need to add bookings made by other tourism agencies. These early results are very heartening for the recently opened Vennbahn and augur a great success in terms of visitors, aided by the **extensive network of cycle trails** totalling 850 km, which offer visitors a wealth of possibilities to discover the region by bike, with the Vennbahn as a starting and reference point. E.bikes are also offered to make the routes easier for those not wishing to pedal all the way.

The East Cantons Tourist Office estimates that in the medium term the average yearly spending by cycle tourists will amount to 2,560,000 euros.

The last presentation was made by **Juan Soria**, head of the *Consortio de las Vías Verdes de la Región de Murcia* (Consortium of Greenways in the Region of Murcia) who presented the '**Alverdes' Hostel Project** of the **Vía Verde del Noroeste**. This project has involved the conversion of 6 disused railway stations into hostels, and the creation of a bioclimatic hotel, all of which border the greenway from Murcia to Caravaca de la Cruz in the south-east of Spain.



**Alverdes program has provided greenway users with a wide range of accommodation while helping to conserve railway heritage.**

With an investment of a little over 4 million euros, the programme has provided greenway users with a wide range of accommodation (270 beds) and hospitality while helping to conserve railway heritage.

The chain of "Alverdes" hostels has been visited by around 740 users in the first year of operation (between May 2012 and April 2013) and provides an excellent accommodation option for young people.

Other noteworthy initiatives aimed at vitalizing the greenway are employment workshops and activities for schoolchildren, young people, seniors, women, and people with disabilities.



A lively debate followed the presentations.



Participants from 8 countries took part in the Workshop.

## Technical visit to the Dão ecopista

The workshop was followed by a technical visit, enabling attendees to enjoy in situ the excellent *Ecopista do Dão*, honoured with a European Greenways Award in the Excellence Category, and to discover some details about its conversion and learn about some of the most important milestones on the greenway (*Estação de Figueiró, Estação de Tonda, Ponte do Granjal* and *Estação de Treixedo*).



Viseu has provided an opportunity to get to know the Portuguese *ecopistas* and visit one of its most important examples of the progress being made in Portugal in this respect, the *Ecopista do Dão*. It was also an opportunity to get a feel for the great interest that these infrastructures arouse in the localities through which this valuable

resource passes, and their undeniable keenness to continue to make progress, despite the very difficult economic climate.

The examples presented in this workshop confirm that **tourism component and the economic impact that this component generates is a reality for a growing number of greenways**. The **Greenways Product** project will help this to be true for other European greenways, many of which still have a long way to go before they can turn what is an attractive resource into an excellent greenway product. The success stories and the conditions that have made them possible will serve as an inspiration to embark on new initiatives in other European countries that do not yet have a greenways programme but have a strong potential for setting one up.

Here at EGWA we would like to congratulate and thank CIM Dão Lafões and APCV for their excellent organization and warm welcome they gave us all.

Workshops presentations are available on the EGWA web site: [click here](#)

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Review of the Viseu workshop prepared by:

**European Greenways Association (EGWA)**

Web: [www.aevv-egwa.org](http://www.aevv-egwa.org) [www.greenwayseurope.org](http://www.greenwayseurope.org)

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