

# INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKING STUDY

about inspiring income-generating activities along  
hiking trails

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS



June 2024

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for the

Emergence of the first trails network from the Mediterranean AFD  
project

The conclusion of the interviews with the various international trail management organisations clearly showed that the majority of them face one or more of the following challenges:

- **Lack of consistent financial resources** for the management and promotion of the trail organisation and the ongoing maintenance of the trail.
- Problems with the **institutional set-up** of the trail management organisation
- **Lack of monitoring tools** and systems to monitor visitor flows and to identify the profile and needs of visitors hiking the trail.
- The **good news** is that each of our case studies selected has at least one good approach to address one of these challenges or had even developed a complete system to address these challenges.

And this is actually the main **outcome of the benchmarking of all our case studies**: There is no one solution or system that can be recommended to all trail organisations, but rather a mix of direct and indirect IGAs that make trail management successful and more self-sustaining.

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There is no one solution or system that can be recommended to all TMOs but rather a mix of direct and indirect IGAs that make a trail organisation successful and more self-sustained.

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Direct IGAs are activities that generate direct income, such as the sale of merchandising products, while indirect IGAs are activities that increase visitor numbers, such as certain marketing activities, or reduce staff costs, such as certain volunteer programmes.

It's therefore advisable to **choose the most appropriate recommendations** for your trail organisation and try not to rely on one IGA, but rather set up a mix of different IGAs, like the success stories in our case studies: **La Rota Vicentina No. 5**, the **Alpe Adria Trail No.11**, the **Kumano Koto Pilgrims Route No.19**, or the **Trans Canada Trail No.17** demonstrate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL TRAIL MANAGEMENT

- 1) **Organisational set-up.** The organisational set up also depends on the local context and the legal framework in the destination. But in general, it's advisable to choose a set-up that allows the generation of income (no profit) and gives the opportunity to obtain funding from local and international organisations. An advisable option is the new, internationally recognized organisational structure of a social enterprise. The social enterprise is a non-profit organisation with a commercial arm. Another set-up could be a public private partnership model or an NGO as a mother organisation with a commercial daughter company.
- 2) **Booking system.** Several of our case studies show that an internal booking system where hikers have the opportunity to book various hiking and accommodation packages, authentic experiences, day trips, thematically guided hikes and other packages, are a

solid income generator for the trail organisation and the local community businesses involved. Good examples are the **Alpe Adria Trail No. 11**, **Meditation Trail No.12** and the **Rota Vicentina No.5**.

- 3) Booking & welcome centre.** A top-up to the online booking option on the webpage is a physical booking centre, combined with a welcome centre. A physical booking centre can handle all type of booking and can advise hikers on their booking decisions, support the planning process and provide all types of information. The best solution is if a booking centre is combined with a welcome centre where the hiker finds information on the trail structure, the trail's, local culture and biodiversity, and branded merchandising articles. This model is implemented by the **Alpe Adria Trail No. 11** and has strongly contributed to the economic success of the Alpe Adria Trail. Palestine is also planning to have a visitor centre using the first floor of the building where PHT Union is based at, in a charming authentic building – **No. 32**.
- 4) (Branded) Partner system/network.** A network of trail partners (accommodations, transports, restaurants, transport services etc.) branded or labelled with the logo of the trail organization visible for the hikers creates trust and reliability for the hiker and a strong commitment among the network partners. The partner network needs a structured approach of partner benefits and yearly fees to be paid to the TMO. Partners are marketed via the website of the TMO and should adhere to certain quality and sustainability criteria. An example for such a partner network is the Proud Supporters System of the **West Highland Trail No. 2** or the **Rota Vicentina No.5**.
- 5) Specially tailored,** high quality & sustainable schemes. This approach can be strengthened even further through a professionally developed quality and sustainability system that trains and labels partners, and in the best case certifies and re-certifies its partners. This assures a high level of quality that generates a higher economic benefit (see chapter 2). Example that demonstrates this approach is the case study **Wilderness Trail No. 21**
- 6) Sponsor programme.** Professionally designed sponsorship or supporter programmes can be a solid income generating source. This can be either programmes related to yearly events or challenges such as the **True Hike from the Jordans Trail Organisation No 24** or a sponsorship or supporter programme related to a marketing activity demonstrated by the case study **No. 17** the **National Partner Programme** of the **Trans Canada Trail**.
- 7) Professional & creative merchandising.** A professional and creative merchandising system can create a bit of additional income, but it can also be a very efficient marketing and branding tool if the products are well thought through, designed in high quality, a creative approach and with a certain variety every year. Also, a good idea is a specially tailored finisher concept. This approach is successfully featured by case study **No. 3** from the **West Highland Way**.

- 8) Well-designed passport programme.** A passport programme is an incentive for hikers and a marketing tool for businesses. It generates a small income for the TMOs. To make the programme more efficient, trail partners can become “passport points” that are featured on the digital map of the trail and the passport could come in a practical packed format. This is well demonstrated by case study **No. 1** from the **West Highland Way**. To create a stronger incentive for the hikers, the programme could be for example a lottery where hikers that buy the passport can win a free dinner along the trail. Another idea could be a particular challenge combined with the passport e.g. every hiker that has a certain number of passport stamps from passport points receives a small trail giveaway e.g. a branded trail patch.
- 9) Volunteering programmes.** Volunteering programmes are a typical form of indirect income generation by saving the costs of a workforce. We have several good examples of successful volunteering programmes among our case studies. For example, the Closed for Maintenance Programme of the **Faroe Islands No. 4**, which attracts volunteers from around the globe to support its yearly general maintenance, or the case study **No. 9 the Transcariorca Trail** in Brazil which is completely run on a voluntary basis. Here, volunteers are driven by their passion for nature conservation.
- 10) Ambassadors programme.** To motivate and assign immigrants living in the diaspora and foreign enthusiasts, to organize donorship and sponsorship events among their country folks to collect money to support the trail and the local community in their home country. A creative IGA that can considerably contribute to the management and maintenance costs for TMOs. Demonstrated by the case study of the **Lebanon Mountain Trail Association, No 42**.
- 11) Conservation approach.** Whenever the trail crosses or incorporates a protected area or if there are protected flora and fauna along the trail it's worth checking if there are any national or international funds for nature conservation available. The same funding approach applies for cultural or historic values along the trail. Case study **No. 9**, the **Transcarioca Trail**, surrounding the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro, demonstrates this approach well.
- 12) Creative marketing solutions.** Creative marketing solutions generate indirect income by creating positive attention and awareness for the trail and thus increasing the visitor flow. Ideally, marketing activities are low in costs and high impact. A good example are specially-tailored press and fam trips for special target groups and target markets. A good idea is to combine both create direct sale links to tour operators to certain target destinations. A good example how this was successfully done is case study **No. 10**, The **Peaks of the Balkans**, where a press trip was organized for the travel press in Germany combined with a fam trip for 10 selected members of the Forum Anders Reisen (<https://forumandersreisen.de>), the sustainable travel association for the German speaking markets (139 members). The trip resulted in a huge press campaign and direct sales to the German market.

Another very good example for a very creative and high impact marketing solution is the case study No. 4 the Faroe Islands, where the international volunteering programme Closed for Maintenance attracts worldwide attention to the Island. The press loves the Closed for Maintenance campaign and keeps on writing about it, ensuring free worldwide marketing without any additional marketing budget. It is not a good idea to copy the same approach, but to think of a special event, activity unique for the region and invite volunteers from all over the world.

- 13) Set up of monitoring systems.** Setting up professional monitoring systems is a must in the long-term to monitor your trail success and to get to know your hikers and their need. Chapter 5 will take a closer look at these monitoring tools.
- 14) Professional trail performance.** A professional trail performance as described in chapter 2.3. is essential for a positive visitor experience, which leads to more visitors and more income at the end.
- 15) Marketing Partnerships.** Marketing partnerships, e.g. with the national tourism board or regional tourism boards, can also be a very valuable tool to generate income and stabilise the budget. Typically, these marketing partnerships/collaborations involve some, but mainly direct, marketing support through the tourism boards' strong marketing channels. Several case studies illustrate this successful approach: **No. 11**, the Alpe Adria Trail; **No. 5**, the Rota Vincentina and **No. 16**, the Golden Road in Norway.
- 16) Creative donation programmes.** Creative donation programmes can also be an additional way to generate income. Which donation programme is suitable for which destination depends very much on the conditions and culture of the destination. An inspiring example of creative donation programmes is the **Trans Canada Trail** case study **No. 18**.

The same is applicable to our community-driven IGAs. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for all trail communities, as it always depends on the local context and assets of the destination. However, the following patterns of success, where local communities or community stakeholders benefit strongly and where IGAs have a strong positive impact on the destination, was identified by benchmarking all our case studies:

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY- DRIVEN IGAS

- 1) Authentic local products.** The offer of local products is a solid income generator for local trail communities. Local, authentic products of eco-quality can be offered in several ways: in the accommodations, restaurants, and shops along the trail. Other ways of offering are via small workshops or organized routes where local products and producers are the focus, or a theme trail with a local focus. An excellent example of an organized local product approach is the case study from **Norway No.16** the Golden Route and the case study and from **Lebanon, No. 48**.

- 2) **Experiences related to local production.** This approach can be further developed to an experience related to local production so that the entire production process of an authentic local product can turn into a live experience for the hiker. A good example is the **case study No.7, the Wool Route**, where the visitor can experience the different production processes of local wool from the sheep to the sweater.
  
- 3) **Experiences related to local gastronomy.** Experiences around local gastronomy are also good business for local businesses. There are different ways to integrate the gastronomic approach into the experience. One example is the case study No. 13 Explore Marlboro from New Zealand where visitors cycle from one winery to the other and enjoy local gastronomy served there. Also, in Jordan, a local family business is offering an authentic experience of preparing a local special dairy product Jameed and a local dish Mansaf, **No. 30 Beit Al Jameed**. Another example from Palestine, where experience is designed combining shopping in the local market and cooking local dishes, **No. 40**.
  
- 4) **Authentic local experiences based on the cultural heritage of the local community,** help to preserve the heritage, provide additional income for local people and is an interesting product for visitors. Such professionally developed products can become one of the main attractions and motivations to stay in often overlooked rural destinations, like in Jordan, case study **No. 27**. Or be a part of the bigger tourism offer, like in **Lebanon, No. 48**, a project by young entrepreneurs is working with a local elderly woman practicing the Kanoon making which became very popular among the young urban visitors, or immersing in the local culture, like through the experience of Bedouin culture in **Palestine, No. 39**.
  
- 5) **Thematic guided tours.** Another easy to implement approach is thematic guided half day hikes or tours. The tours could be organised around any natural or cultural asset of the destination. This IGA is not a huge money-making machine, but it is a very valid IGAs for community members to set up a small business without major investment. A good example is the case study **No.8**, the discovery tour for local herbs and medical plants. Ideally the tours are sold over the TMO's website so that the TMO also gains a small commission.
  
- 6) **Soft mobility practices.** Other soft mobility options such as cycling, horseback riding or being accompanied by a donkey add to the attractiveness of the trail and can turn into good business for local community members. A good example of such a slow mobility option is the case study **No.14 the Stevenson Path** in France or the case study **No. 35, cycling in Palestine**.
  
- 7) **Theme trails.** Are an excellent tool to integrate local communities along a trail. A theme trail could be designed around any authentic local asset of the local community. That could be for example a culinary speciality of the region (e.g. cheese trail); the flora or fauna; local products or historic buildings and living traditions. A good example is the Ultentahler Farmerstrail in the Mountains of Italy, No.20. The trail leads visitors past very old traditional farmers houses of the region and the hiker can experience this way of life

by staying or dining in one of the local farmhouses, and by trying and buying locally made products. Several local stakeholders benefit from this practice.

- 8) Competitive accommodation services related to hiking and trekking.** Authentic quality accommodation is actually a key element to attract a higher segment target group. Tastefully designed in the local authentic style, using material from the region and authentic cultural elements with double rooms and equipped according to the hikers needs. Good examples are actually the case study **No. 22 from Turkey** or the case studies or from **Jordan No. 27** and **No. 31**.

## List of case study:

No	Country	Name of Case Study	Topic	Com	Theme	TMO / DM O
1	Scotland	West Highland Way	Passport Package			X
2	Scotland	West Highland Way	Proud Supporters System			X
3	Scotland	West Highland Way	Finisher Merchandising Concept			X
4	Faroe Islands	Faroe Island	Closed for Maintenance			X
5	PORTUGAL	Rota Vicentina	Partner Network			X
6		Rota Vicentina	Tile Painting Workshop	X		
7		Rota Vicentina	Wool Route	X		
8		Rota Vincentina	Medical Plants Tour	X		
9	Brasil	Transcario ca Trail	IGA Conservation			X
10	Albania, Mor Kosovo	PoB		X		
11	Italy ; Austria, Slovenia	Alpe Adria Trail				X
12	Germany	Meditation Trail	Thematic Trail with booking option		Hiking, spiritual experience	
13	New Zealand	Explore Marlboro	Wine& Bike Tour	X		
14	France	Stevenson Trail	Hike with a donkey	X		
15		Wilderness Trail	Quality Scheme for Accommodatio ns			X
16	Norway	Golden Route	Cooperative for local products & arts & crafts	X		
17	Canada	Transcanda Trail	National Supporter			X
18	Canada	Transcanda Trail	Trans Canada Trail's TrailKeepers Program		Capacity building	X
19	Japan	Kumano Koto	Community driven Tourism model	X		

No	Country	Name of Case Study	Topic	Com	Theme	TMO / DM O
		Pilgrims Route				
20	South Tirol /Italy	Ultenthal farmers trail	Theme trail – local living culture	X	Living culture, traditions	
21	Theme Case Study	Turkey	Authentic Quality accomodation	X		
22	Theme Case Study	Albergo Diffuso	Repopulation			
23		Leading Trails in Europe	Trail quality scheme			
24	Jordan	Jordan Trail Association	Sponsorship programme of the Thru Hike			X
25	Jordan	Jordan Trail Association	Adopt a Trail programme			X
26	Jordan	Jordan Trail Association	Jordan Trail Passport			X
27	Jordan	Baraka destinations	Experiences & high-end accommodation	X	Capacity building cultural activities	
28	Jordan	Hike Jordan! Hiking, Homestay, Camping with Eisa	Adventure tourism guide with local homestay	X	Outdoor activities	
29	Jordan	Iraq Al-Amir women co-operative	Handicrafts, restaurant	X	Local services / service providers	
30	Jordan	Beit Al Jameed	Culinary experiences Homestay	X	Cultural activities	
31	Jordan	Feynan Ecolodge	Ecolodge and local experiences	X	Service providers	
32	Palestine	PHT Union	Visitors center			X
33	Palestine	PHT Union	PHTRAIL Application			X
34	Palestine	PHT Union	Capacity Building for Women Center			X
35	Palestine	Cycling Palestine	cycling	X	Outdoor activities	

No	Country	Name of Case Study	Topic	Com	Theme	TMO / DM O
36	Palestine	Al-Mardawi Guest	Accommodation Organic olive oil	X	Service provide	
37	Palestine	Dura Cooperative Association for Agricultural Production	Food production	X	Local services	
38	Palestine	Al-Rozana Association for the development of Architectural Heritage	promote sustainable development in rural Palestine	X	Capacity building	
39	Palestine	Tal al-Qamar Guesthouse	Bedouin local experience, stargazing	X	Cultural activities	
40	Palestine	Qandeel	Culinary experience	X	Local products	
41	Lebanon	LMTA	Thru Walk and Fall trek			X
42	Lebanon	LMTA	Ambassadors programme			X
43	Lebanon	LMTA	Mountain Explorers capacity building			X
44	Lebanon	Akkar Trail Association	forest management, forest fire fighting, research and conservation, trails maintenance, local guiding, bakery, geological museum under preparation	X	Capacity building local services	
45	Lebanon	Bchaaleh Trails Association	Experiential tourism activities on nature culture crafts culinary	X	Local services	

No	Country	Name of Case Study	Topic	Com	Theme	TMO / DM O
46	Lebanon	H Management Adventure Tourism	Adventure tourism, focus caving	X	Outdoor activities	
47	Lebanon	Ardoum Guesthouse & Winery & Local Guide:	Winery, plus accommodation, plus hiking tours	X	Service provider sector/local service sector/outdoor sector	
48	Lebanon	Cezar's Projects for Sustainable Rural Tourism:	Local craft making, farm experiences, local products, accommodation	X	Cultural activities sector	