

Project Idea European Trails



HETAC: Holistic European Trail Assessment and Certification

Initiating Organization:

- European Trails e.V.*

The Challenge:

The network of European trails is highly fragmented and managed by different types of organizations. Trails are mostly maintained by volunteers with no governmental support. There are no standards for sustainable trail management existing.

- There is no stable funding, limited institutional support, and a lack of long-term structures
- No harmonized standards for trail management, quality, safety, and sustainability across Europe
- Trail managers face a fragmented landscape of certifications, tools, and requirements
- Limited access to professional trail know-how and training slows down sustainable development

Target Groups:

- Trail managing organizations and associations,
- Protected areas and national parks
- Destinations and DMOs
- Professional trail assessors and future assessors
- Certification bodies and sustainability organizations

Project Goals:

- Define unified quality and stewardship standards for trail management across Europe - based on the tested criteria of the international Green Flag Trails program.
- Establish standardized trail assessment and certification system as a **open** shared European reference framework
- Professionalize trail management and support volunteer-based structures
- Build long-term capacity for sustainable trail development - Train the Trainer

Description of project approach:

1. Building a European Trail Network:

- Establish a network of trail specialists across countries and regions
- Foster peer learning, exchange of best practices, and problem-solving
- Strengthen cooperation between existing trail and sustainability initiatives

2. Training and Accreditation:

- Develop a **comprehensive training system** for trail assessors at national and regional level
- Assessment of some trails in pilot regions and certifications with **WTN / Green Flag Trails**

- **3. Knowledge and Capacity Building:** Create comprehensive information material, training series, video tutorials, guidelines, website:
- Assessment and Certification methodology,
- Sustainable trail management, safety, visitor management, and quality assurance

Expected output/products:

- A European network of trained trail specialists
- A structured and accredited trail assessor training pathway with a regular training program online and offline, certificates and accreditations of the assessors
- Comprehensive assessment and certification knowledge and training materials (GFT based)
- A free-of-charge, easy-to-use framework for Level 1 self-assessment
- A digital online assessment support tool that can be used as a standalone tool or be integrated in online platforms – proof of concept with the Outdooractive platform
- Improved data-driven trail management across participating regions

Targeted funding sources:

- ERASMUS+

Target region/countries:

- Whole Europe

Desired project partners:

- Outdooractive (DE) - **LEAD**
- European Trails (DE)
- Paths of Greece (GR)
- Green Destinations (NL)
- Responsible Trails/A2Z (PT)
- Ellare Oy (FI)
- Triglav National Park (SL) - Pilot
- Trail Organization (CZ) - Pilot

Maturity level:

- GFT system is relaunched and ready to be (re)started
- Rough project plan existing

Why we think a funding application for this project idea will be successful:

This project is highly "fundable" because it addresses the fragmentation of European tourism services, a key priority for the EU's Green and Digital Transition.

- **Multiplication Effect:** By empowering and targeting the "multipliers" and "certifiers" the project's impact is scaled across thousands of kilometers of trails managed by the participating organizations.
- **Introduction of a Standard:** With the implementation of the international system, comparable KPIs and digitization will be introduced —on this basis, status, benchmarks, progress will quickly become visible.
- **Sustainability of Results:** Unlike a one-off event, establishing a formal network ensures that the results of the project are preserved as a lasting resource for the European trail community.

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