



2022 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: *From 0 to 516 – The “Bridge” for Sustainability*

Destination Name: *Arouca – UNESCO Global Geopark*

Country: *Portugal*

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Submission category: *(Please check one of the boxes that indicates the focus of your story)*

Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module ‘Good Practice Story’.

- Governance, Reset & Recovery
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module “Good Practice Story”.

Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact top100@greendestinations.org





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

What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice?

Arouca is a municipality in the Metropolitan Area of Porto, in the Northern Region and in the district of Aveiro. The municipality has 21.154 inhabitants and 328 km² of land area. A territory that is over 600 million years old, and which has been inhabited for over 3,000 years. Men and women who, yesterday as today, continue to shape mountain ranges and valleys, and who are the best hosts you can find. Genuine, welcoming, affable, and attentive people, always ready to talk and proud of their roots and heritage.

In 2009, under the auspices of UNESCO, the entire geographical area corresponding to the Municipality of Arouca was accepted as a member of the European and Global Geoparks Network. The scarce 328 km² of territorial area now gathers charms and potential of diverse nature, highlighting the unique geological heritage, listed in 41 geosites. Of these, we highlight the geosites "Pedras Parideiras", "Trilobites Gigantes", "Icnofósseis de Cabanas Longas" and "Icnofósseis de Mourinha". The Monastery of Santa Maria de Arouca and Museum of Sacred Art, the Municipal Network of Walking Trails, the Geosites Route, the Trilobites Museum and the Canelas Geological Interpretation Center are other attractions of this territory.

At the time, Arouca was mostly well-known for its *Carne Arouquesa*, which is a very distinguished type of meat and for *Serra da Freita*, an "enchanted" mountain which is one of the mandatory crossing and stopping points of the Arouca Geopark. In this mountain, it is possible to observe a unique phenomenon in the world called *Pedras Parideiras*, which are rocks that "give birth" to other rocks. Despite having these two main tourism attraction points, the territory was mainly visited by local tourists that would not stay overnight. Accommodation sites were low in number, and the tourism infrastructure was not developed at all.

Within the territory, there is also the Paiva Valley. This valley was (and still is) sought after for adventure sports like canoeing and rafting due to the perfect conditions offered by the Paiva river. Once again, despite the existence of some demand for this type of activities, there were no infrastructures to enjoy the surroundings, to enable people to watch others going down the river on their canoes/rafts and even the access to the riverbanks was very poor.

The territory of the Arouca Geopark had a huge tourism potential that was not being maximized. There was a need for an integrated strategy and for the creation of other attraction points, namely on the Paiva Valley.

Let's embark on this journey from 0 to 516!





Methods, steps and tools applied

How was the good practice implemented?

This Good Practice was implemented through a number of initiatives that helped maximize the tourism potential of Arouca's Geopark. These initiatives included:

- Creation of observation platforms along the Paiva River to allow watching sport activities;
- Creation of the Paiva Walkways - Located on the left bank of the Paiva River, in Arouca. A total of 8,5 kms that provide an “untouched” walk, surrounded by unique beauty of landscapes, in an authentic natural sanctuary along the brave waters’ downhill, quartz crystals and endangered species in Europe. The route extends from the river beaches of Areinho and Espiunca, lying between them, the Vau beach. A journey through biology, geology and archeology that will remain, of course, in heart, soul and in mind of any nature lover;
- Promoting various types of tourism, which include, for example, adventure tourism, nature tourism, food tourism, cultural tourism and geotourism;
- Creation of support infrastructures on the Paiva Walkways:
 - Ticket Offices
 - Parking Spots
 - Toilets
- Constant maintenance and improvement of the Paiva Walkways:
 - Hiring controlling officers to monitor the route
 - Substitution of damaged wood planks
- Creation of 516 Arouca - 516 Arouca is the most iconic infrastructure in the Arouca Municipality, consisting of railings and steel cables, with a span of 516 meters, 1.20 meters wide and 175 meters high above Paiva River. Despite its impressiveness, this nature tourism attraction was built based on sustainability principles, and it is completely integrated in the landscape, not causing any harm to the existent wildlife. Furthermore, the bridge is accessible for people with reduced mobility. This Bridge was also an effective solution to control tourism flows. By crossing to the other side, tourists are spending more time in the local parish of Alvarenga, also known for its excellent gastronomy, and reducing the amount of people in the city center of Arouca.
- Training for taxi drivers;
- Training for specialized tour guides to carry out visits to 516 Arouca;
- Implementation of an efficient visitor monitoring system:
 - A ticket is now required to enter the Paiva Walkways
 - Only 2.000 per day can enter the Paiva Walkways
 - Only 70 people can be at the 516 Arouca at the same time (despite having a capacity of carrying 2.000 people at the same time)





- Creation of promotional videos and campaigns and other marketing materials about Arouca's Geopark and its tourism assets;
- Development of a Smart Geotourism Destination platform that will allow for a better management of the territory;
- Creation of a Code of Conduct for Arouca's Geopark;
- Creation of 4 Guidebooks on different topics:
 - Visitor Guide
 - Paiva Walkways
 - Geosites Route
 - Discovering Arouca Geopark's Biodiversity
- Implementation of a card for residents so that they can enjoy both the Walkways and the 516 Bridge without having to pay the same as tourists. This card is valid for 3 years and has a cost of 5€. With this card, residents have free entrance on both attractions.

Key success factors

What helped you tackle the issues?

As mentioned previously, the Paiva Valley was an almost untouched part of the territory despite its huge tourism potential. Therefore, the main success factor was the intrinsic characteristics of the territory. Its location and pristine attributes were the starting point for everything that happened next.

For this transformation of Arouca's tourism paradigm to take place, the strategic vision of local authorities and the good cooperation between all stakeholders were also decisive. The creation of the Paiva Walkways and the 516 Bridge were only possible because the municipality had the audacity to create something innovative, competitive, and sustainable and to involve all interested stakeholders on its development.

Both attractions are having a major success and thousands of people are visiting them every day. In order to manage this number of tourists in an efficient and sustainable way, two key success factors were to create a visitor monitoring system that limits the number of people that can visit both attractions simultaneously and to have a team of specialized technicians of various areas.

Lastly, another relevant success factor was the huge media attention that was given to these two attractions. When the Paiva Walkways opened, loads of articles were written and pictures/videos displayed on national television. The 516 Bridge caught the attention of international media because of its magnificence and for being the longest in the world at the time. Big TV chains like ABC (from the USA) opened their daily news with a live broadcast from the middle of the bridge.





Lessons learned

While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome?

Paiva Walkways were the first attraction to be created in the Paiva Valley. At the beginning, entrance was free and there was no monitoring system in place as no one was expecting such immediate demand. Thousands of people were visiting them every day but there was no control and infrastructures around them were very little. This created a big challenge and was making them unsustainable. As if that was not enough, only two and half months after being inaugurated, a huge forest fire destroyed a small part of the walkways (around 600 meters), leading them to close momentarily and to reopen after 6 months.

However, these two challenges were the motto for change to take place. There was a clear understanding that in order for it to work, infrastructures needed to be created and a monitoring system needed to be developed.

When the Paiva Walkways re-opened in 2016, several changes had already taken place:

- Ticket Offices
 - Entrance started to be paid
 - There are also different prices for high season and shoulder season and also depending on whether tickets are bought online or on-site. In shoulder season, the price is 1€ (online) and 2€ (on-site) and in high season, visitors pay 2€ (online) and 4€ (on-site)
- A limit of 2.000 people per day was implemented
- Parking Lots were created
- Controlling Officers were hired to walk along the Walkways to monitor them
- Toilets were placed along the path

These changes were crucial for the Paiva Valley to be what it is today. The need to have a proper monitoring system and to have proper infrastructures to support tourism activities were the main lesson learned during the implementation of this Good Practice. Without these, it was certain the destination would suffer the consequences of over tourism.

Results, achievements and recognitions

What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice?

The municipality of Arouca and the Arouca Geopark have seen some great results proceeding from this Good Practice.

- Number of visitors:
 - In 2021, Paiva Walkways reached the milestone of 1.000.000 visitors





- The 516 Bridge opened on the 2nd of May 2021 and in the beginning of 2022 had already reached 100.000 visitors
- 31.574 overnight stays in 2019, a 27,5% increase when compared to 2014 (before Paiva Walkways existed)
- Economic Growth/Employment:
 - Only 1 Short-Term Rental in 2014 vs 110 Short-Term Rentals in 2022
 - 11 accommodation sites in 2014 vs 20 accommodation sites in 2022
 - 1 tour operator in 2014 vs 22 tour operators in 2022
 - 40 restaurants
 - 0 Travel Agencies in 2014 vs 6 Travel Agencies in 2022
 - From 2014 to 2020, accommodation sites generated a total of 4,8 million euros
- Awards/Recognitions:
 - 2016
 - Paiva Walkways - "Best Tourism Development Project in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - 2017
 - Paiva Walkways - "Best Tourism Development Project in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - 2018
 - Paiva Walkways - "Best Tourism Development Project in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - Paiva Walkways – "Best Adventure Tourism Attraction in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - Paiva Walkways – "Best Adventure Tourism Attraction in the World" – World Travel Awards
 - 2019
 - Paiva Walkways - "Best Tourism Development Project in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - Paiva Walkways – "Best Adventure Tourism Attraction in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - Paiva Walkways – "Best Adventure Tourism Attraction in the World" – World Travel Awards
 - 2020
 - Paiva Walkways – "Best Adventure Tourism Attraction in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - Paiva Walkways – "Best Adventure Tourism Attraction in the World" – World Travel Awards





- Green Destinations 2020 Top 100
- 2021
 - Paiva Walkways - "Best Tourism Development Project in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - Paiva Walkways – "Best Adventure Tourism Attraction in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - Paiva Walkways – "Best Adventure Tourism Attraction in the World" – World Travel Awards
 - 516 Bridge – "Best Tourism Attraction Development Project in Europe" – World Travel Awards
 - Green Destinations 2021 Top 100
 - Top 100 Tourism Destinations in the World in 2021– TIME Magazine
 - 516 Bridge Arouca selected as one of the most emblematic works in the beginning of the century by the National Council of the College of Civil Engineering
- 2022
 - 1st Prize - ATEG de Arquitectura y Construcción Otilio García 2021 – 516 Arouca
 - Honorable mention in the National Tourism Awards 2021, in the category Innovative Tourism - 516 Arouca
 - Nominated for "Revelation Destination of the Year" at the AHRESP'22 awards (results to be announced July 1, 2022)

Additional references

Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from YouTube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL (not WeTransfer).

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Ntj0XU0DqnHkGyNkgFLzBzRc6yz7OIB4?usp=sharing>

