



## Good Practice Story Title

**LIFE Águeda: a commitment to nature, rivers and communities**

**Destination:** Águeda

**Country:** Portugal

**Submitting Organization:** Municipality of Águeda

### Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

### Destination description:

Águeda is located in the central region of Portugal, in the Iberian Peninsula, has an area of approximately 335 km<sup>2</sup> and ~47000 inhabitants. Located in the Aveiro region, between the sea and the mountains, has a privileged geographical situation, being served by road and railway easily accessible. The Municipality covers a vast and rich natural heritage and landscape, with 11% of the territory protected by NATURA 2000, a RAMSAR area and more than 1500 kilometers of rivers. Within the DNA of its people there's creativity and a great capacity of entrepreneurship which resulted in a strong business sector, and it's considered one of the most industrial regions of Portugal, but also a green destination and one of the most colorful cities in the world! Águeda promotes the sustainable development of the territory aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

### Summary of Good Practice Story:

LIFE ÁGUEDA is a project, cofinanced by European LIFE program, that aims to (re)naturalise several areas of the Vouga, Águeda and Alfusqueiro rivers, as well as restoring the associated habitats, in order to achieve the objectives of different European directives (Birds, Habitats or even Water Directive). The project also aims to give the river back to its communities, promoting an increase in





biodiversity and the natural conditions of these areas, helping to bring people (locals and visitors) closer together to enjoy the natural space more through leisure activities, sports or nature tourism. The interventions resorted to the use of natural solutions, rehabilitating the river banks, controlling invasive species of flora and reforestation using native plant species. The project also includes a strong promotion component, which encompasses various aspects, including the creation of a place to learn about the river, volunteering activities for groups and families, workshops and ateliers for young people, the promotion of activities for young people and the valorisation of the natural heritage. Nature tourism is present and is promoted through the benefits of the landscape, the improvement of the environmental quality of the rivers and leisure areas, the installation of landscape descriptors and interpretive panels, as well as the creation of trails (pedestrian and off-road) accessible to all, which lead visitors to visit and interpret the natural and cultural legacy of this territory.

### **Issues faced:**

The problems targeted by this initiative are hydromorphological alterations in watercourses that are habitat for migratory fish, which make it impossible for them to migrate. However, the solutions are approached in such a way as to ensure the compatibility of the various uses and needs, not only targeting the conservation of biodiversity, but also including environmental and socio-economic concerns, such as professional and sport fishing, hydroelectric production, water abstraction for human, agricultural and industrial consumption, and outdoor recreative activities (hiking trails and river parks).

This initiative aims to overcome the following problems:

- longitudinal discontinuity of the Águeda River, ensuring the renaturation and recreation of habitats and the favourable ecological status of the WFD for fish fauna populations;
- degradation of terrestrial habitats adjacent to aquatic habitats, encouraging potential vegetation and controlling invasive exotic species;
- in a transversal way, the existence of incompatibilities in the use of ecosystem services provided by the Águeda and Vouga rivers, for which it intends to involve the various stakeholders in the adoption of solutions to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

### **Solution:**

To address the issues identified, a series of nature-based actions were implemented that contributed to the removal of obstacles and the renaturalisation of 50 km of rivers, with the respective restoration/renaturalisation of riparian habitats. In addition, a pilot programme for the monitoring/capture and translocation of European eels was implemented, as well as the development of an APP to support recreational fishing and the development and implementation of a pilot solution for a "Mobile Quota". There will also be a series of awareness-raising sessions, the creation of a River Interpretation Center, the installation of panels and interpretive trails with the corresponding



descriptors, and the dissemination of these natural spaces to various publics/entities in order to promote their enjoyment, preservation and enhancement.

### **Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:**

As part of an extensive network of short walking trails, the **three adapted LIFE Águeda trails** take pedestrians along almost 23 km to discover the Águeda river valley, its habitats, woodlands and riverside galleries, a refuge and sustenance for species of fauna. The adaptation of the trails makes it easier for people with reduced mobility to access the river's surroundings, from the city of Águeda to the Pateira de Fermentelos lagoon. Interpretive panels located along the way, allow to immerse yourself in the science behind the interventions, while providing an insight into the surrounding natural and cultural heritage. In addition to this adaptation, people with mobility difficulties can request the use of the e-CaR at the Tourism Office, an adapted equipment consisting of a wheelchair with a Swiss Trac electric motor.

**Removal of obstacles in the river**, such as weirs, which made it possible to restore river continuity over about 34 kilometers, namely in the Águeda and Alfusqueiro rivers, as well as rehabilitation using nature-based solutions.

**Fish passages** are an alternative route to the watercourse that helps fish species to cross the rivers up(down)stream. To ensure their effectiveness, the type of fish passage is adapted to the location and the fish species that will potentially use it. In Águeda, 3 permanent (naturalized) fish passages and 2 temporary fish passages have been installed, allowing the compatibility of uses in the river parks (Redonda and Bolfiar).

**Removal of Invasive Exotic Species** along 50km of riverbank, using methods of debarking, uprooting and removal of specimens with the immediate application of biocides. Reforestation is then carried out by renaturation of the river banks and riverside areas and the placement of species characteristic of the native riverside flora (e.g. alder, ash, willow), promoting good environmental and health conditions in the waterways. More than 15000 plants and cuttings were planted.

**Awareness-raising activities:** the project has a strong component of raising awareness and involvement of the population. In schools (in the municipality and region), various recreational-pedagogical programs are promoted to raise awareness of the importance of nature conservation and biodiversity. Community initiatives are also promoted, such as volunteer actions to remove Invasive Exotic Species, lectures and workshops.

**Mobile registration station:** Adding value to fish from the Vouga river basin by attributing a seal of origin - mobile auction. The Mobile Fish Auction is a pilot solution developed in partnership with Docapesca which is based on adding value to the project's target species with commercial value (shad, sea lamprey) by supporting the registration of fish transactions, avoiding the need for local fishermen to travel to Docapesca's fixed facilities.

Fishing in Portugal App: "Fishing in Portugal" was conceived as an APP that aims to involve the entire recreational fishing community in the promotion of sustainable management and conservation of the



natural heritage that is freshwater fish populations, from a citizen-science and recreational perspective. It should be noted that a partnership was established between public and private entities to implement these measures: the University of Évora/MARE Institute (coordinating), Municipality of Águeda, the Municipality of Mora/Fluviário de Mora, Docapesca and Aqualogus.

### **Achievements and Results:**

The results achieved by the LIFE Águeda project were the following:

- improvement of the ecological status of 51 km of river stretches, with the improvement of the ecological structure of around 30 ha of riverside galleries and woodlands;
- implementation of accessible walking and cycling trails ~20km, as well as others for the enjoyment of natural spaces, where there is already increased interest and use by the population and visitors for leisure, sporting and other activities;
- provision of equipment for accessible tourism;
- the definitive removal of 8 obstacles to fluvial continuity in the Águeda and Alfusqueiro rivers, creating a 34 km corridor favourable to the progression of migratory fish;
- installation of 3 permanent (naturalized) fish passes and 2 temporary passes;
- increasing the resilience of 35 ha of river plains to flooding by improving the ecological conditions of 9 km of riverside galleries and woodlands;
- sustainable fisheries management along at least 50 km of river, including the implementation of new practices and tools for managing commercial fishing in coastal, estuarine and river areas;
- creation, testing and evaluation of a pilot "mobile auction" and "quality seal" model, designed to ensure the distinction and economic valorization of fish from the project's area of intervention (making it possible to increase its commercial value by at least 25%);
- habitat improvement for a diadromous species classified as Critically Endangered in the Portuguese Red Book;
- improved habitat conditions for 4 other protected and threatened species;
- more than 7,000 participants in awareness-raising activities;
- implementation of a River Interpretive Center.

### **Lessons Learned and Advice:**

LIFE Águeda is a project that brings many positive environmental, social and economic impacts, in line with the various SDGs 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals), and one of the factors that most contributes to solving the problems and respective solutions previously indicated, is the network of mutual help implemented between the Municipality, the partners (Municipality of Mora / Fluviário de Mora, Docapesca Portos e Lotas SA, Aqualogus, University of Évora and MARE Institute) and the local community. The involvement of the local community ensures that the interventions carried out are well accepted and reflect their durability over time. The integration and adaptation of various projects to make them accessible and inclusive also means that the next projects and interventions to be



implemented are already designed with the necessary characteristics for everyone to benefit from, helping to improve the visitor and resident experience.

### **Recognitions and Additional References:**

LIFE Águeda contributes to sustainability transitions an innovative nature and model for other cities! In addition to the several municipalities that have already visited Águeda with the aim of acquiring new knowledge and getting to know the initiatives implemented as part of this project, some organizations have also visited Águeda, namely the ICNF - Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests, what most honours the Municipality of Águeda. This project also received a Good Practice Award has stated 5th edition - <https://www.cm-agueda.pt/viver/comunicacao/noticias-agueda/noticia/agueda-recebe-selo-de-boas-praticas-e-e-finalista-de-premio-de-boas-praticas-de-participacao>

**(video) LIFE Águeda: a commitment to nature, rivers and communities -**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm6KuNWStSk>

#### **Additional references:**

<https://www.life-agueda.uevora.pt/>

<https://www.cm-agueda.pt/visite/turismo/percursos-pedestres-de-agueda/trilhos-adaptados-life-agueda>

<https://www.cm-agueda.pt/viver/ambiente-e-sustentabilidade/sustentabilidade/life-agueda>

<https://www.cm-agueda.pt/viver/comunicacao/noticias-agueda/noticia/obras-na-redonda-valorizam-ecossistema-fluvial>