



DigiHike Joint Report

*IO1 – DigiHike Guide for the development
of basic hiking skills*





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Project: DigiHike Shaping sustainable local development in outdoor sports through volunteers' skills development

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Abstract: This report summarizes the findings of the desk and field research emerging from the analysis carried out in Italy, Croatia, Spain and Portugal. The research consisted in the implementation of a desk research aiming at exploring educational opportunities in each country in the broad field of outdoor education, trekking and heritage promotion. The field research consisted in the administration of online questionnaires addressed to the local communities of the countries involved with the aim of investigating the needs, trends and challenges. The findings of this report constitute the basis for the design and development of the 'DigiHike Guide for the development of basic hiking skills' (IO1).



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1. The DigiHike project

This section describes in brief the purpose of the project, the expected outcomes, the organisation of the activities that will be performed during the 24 months, the participating members and their role in the consortium and the legal data of the project.

The DigiHike project addresses the topic "Promote education in and through sport with special focus on skills development" with a two-folded objective:



supporting the promotion of grassroots sports, and in particular trekking outdoor mountain sports



developing trekking related hard skills and digital competences of voluntary staff

The proposal was triggered by the constant growth of what is called Adventure Tourism in the last years, a type of niche tourism, involving exploration and which may require special skills and physical exertion, a growth that represents a huge opportunity for both organizations and communities active in mountain areas or in areas that attract tourists looking for outdoor activities.

It is important to consider some of the factors that are related to this impressive growth that are relevant for the DigiHike project:



- adventure tourism opens new destinations thus encouraging tourists and travellers to visit remote areas, often far from the mainstream sites,
- support to local economies: adventure tourism helps remarkably the local economies and boosts the investments in local infrastructures,
- encourage sustainable practices: adventure tourism is connected in its core with the natural environment.

Not surprisingly, the relevance of mountain related activities has been recently confirmed by UNESCO that in 2019 inscribed Alpinism on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In consideration of this analysis, small organizations active in their regional context in the field of outdoor activities could play a major role. At the same time, those small organizations are facing several difficulties in the promotion of their activities and, in general, in the development of grassroot sport.

First of all, very often they lack hard skills related to trekking that could be very beneficial once the market offer, as described above, comes at hand.

As a matter of fact, not all the adventure tourists are experienced explorers or trekkers, on the contrary many of them are regular tourist looking for some exciting and unusual trips. In this regard, the role of local organization both in



planning and supporting tourists in their activity can be crucial. Most of the small organizations are made up of volunteers who might have hard time to develop trekking related skills, although they might have experience as trekkers. The formal development of a set of competences to be employed in the market would have a double benefit, for them as a professional development and potentially the creation of a on-the-side or part-time occupation, for the organizations that could in turn widen the services provided in a professional way.

Secondly, we should consider an additional barrier small organizations active in the remote areas are facing: the lack of digital skills useful for their own promotion and that of the areas they are active in. Very often organizations, their staff, collaborators and stakeholders do not have professional and advanced skills necessary for the online promotion. Whether some of those organizations might have sufficient technical skills thanks to the collaboration with professional guides for example, they often lack an appropriate digital and marketing strategy.

Summarizing the analysis carried out above, DigiHike aims at achieving the following specific objectives:

- ① Enhancement of small organizations capacity in outdoor activities
- ② Connection of trekking and outdoor activities with tourism opportunities
- ③ Promotion of rural areas and natural heritage
- ④ Development of staff trekking and digital skills





2. The research methodology

The production of the DigiHike Guide (D1) is developed in two main phases, the research phase (January 2021 – June 2021) and the development of the methodology and Guide content (June 2021 – December 2021). The activities are coordinated by the leader of the deliverable, F.I.E, with the contribution of all project partners. The tasks for the implementation of D1 are structured as follows:

- O1/A1 Definition of the research framework and tools

The research phase has been implemented both through documental and field research to identify the elements needed to develop the guide structure and its content. In the first task, the D1 leader with the support of the project coordinator defined the method and objectives of the research in agreement with the partners and provided guidelines, timeline and templates useful to collect the information in a structured way.

- O1/A2 Documentary and field research in each country

The second task concerned the actual research phase in each country and therefore the involvement of all project partners. The partners conducted the research which was carried out in two steps:

1. Desk research aimed at collecting relevant information about the resources (training offer and OERs) useful for the valorisation of environmental heritage (through outdoor activities) available in Italy, Croatia, Spain, Portugal and at European level.
2. Field research addressed to partner organizations & representatives of the local community. The survey aimed at collecting relevant information about the needs of: staff and volunteers of partner organizations, municipalities, bodies active in the promotion of territory in the areas identified for the valorisation of environmental heritage through outdoor/mountain sports. In addition, the research aimed at investigating into the skills and competence needed for the promotion of outdoor sports. The survey also aims to map the natural/cultural attractions of great interest in partner countries at local, regional and national level

The data emerging from the individual national desk and field research are collected and processed in this initial research report.

- O1/A3 Research report

The results collected at the national level are now being systematized in this report that will serve as a transnational guidance tool for the next task. F.I.E in collaboration with the project coordinator was responsible for the analysis and systematization of the national results in the consolidated report.

The analysis of all the national contexts represented in the partnership have been conducted during the first four months of the project (M1 January 2021 – M4 April 2021) and, thanks to the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, it allowed the setting up of a consistent framework and





content outline for the resulting Guide and the F.I.E with the support of Trekkify led all partners according to project application and work programme.

Therefore, such a research approach permitted to get a better understanding of the main target groups' training needs (staff and volunteers of partner organizations, municipalities, bodies active in the promotion of territory) in relation to the promotion of outdoor activities such as hiking and eco-tourism in order to valorise the local natural and cultural heritage. Such a bottom-up approach to the research contributed to:

- involve the target group and key stakeholders at an early stage of the project's implementation as a strategic factor for the sustainability of the project;
- make the target groups aware of the project's objectives and activities.

F.I.E., in collaboration with the project coordinator, was responsible for the comparative analysis of all the collected data and the related production of this Joint Report in M6 (June 2021), which represents the first milestone of the DigiHike project and is made freely available through the project's website.

This analysis report has led to the elaboration of the Guide outline, the definition of its structure and its content in line with the needs and gaps identified during the research phase.



3. The desk research

Based on the extensive experience of project partners in the field of outdoor sports and natural and cultural heritage valorisation as well as according to the institutional and geographical scope of each partner organisation, the desk research consisted of the detailed analysis of:

- a) Analysis of existing training offers related to the valorisation of “environmental heritage” (through outdoor activities/mountain sports) in your country and/or at European level;
- b) Analysis of professional, personal and social skills addressed by the existing training offers;
- c) Available resources (OERs) in the field of outdoor sports and natural/cultural heritage promotion.

The main findings at country level were summarized in the specific desk research form¹ provided by the research leader. One form per country was submitted.

When analysing the outdoor activities/sports as a means for the valorisation of the local heritage, several areas were investigated and in particular:

- Trekking²
- Hiking³
- Adventure tourism⁴
- Eco-tourism⁵
- Slow tourism⁶
- Eno-gastronomic tourism⁷
- Other areas of interest

With regards to the professional skills addressed by the training offers analysed, the following skills were primarily considered:

- Trekking-related skills (e.g. what to wear for a trekking activity, sense of direction, ect.)
- Communication
- Team working
- Managing groups
- Touristic promotion
- Other skills

¹ <https://forms.gle/77VtvhhHvmMaSHEY6>

² The act of making a long journey across difficult country on foot, usually for pleasure.

³ The sporting or leisure activity of going for long, often strenuous, walks in the country.

⁴ Adventure tourism is defined as the movement of the people from one to another place outside their comfort zone for exploration or travel to remote areas, exotic and possibly hostile areas.

⁵ Tourism intended to promote ecological awareness and to limit damage to the environment.

⁶ A form of tourism in which tourists travel slowly from one destination to another, stay in a destination longer than usual, and consider the travel itself to be an essential part of their experience.

⁷ A type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor's experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling.



Similarly, a group of pre-set skills was identified in relation to social and personal skills addressed by the analysed training offers:

- Communication
- Cooperation/collaboration
- Well-being
- Autonomy
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Growth mindset
- Managing to learn
- Other skills

This approach allowed for a preliminary clustering of skills to be considered when developing the DigiHike Guide.

3.1 Italy

In the Italian context, F.I.E. and Trekkify identified several training offers that address fully or partially the scope of the research.

- F.I.E. as accredited body, delivers training addressed to volunteers trekking guides (“accompagnatore escursionistico”). Such trainings are organized in two levels:
 - Primary level - safety (cartography, orienteering, meteorology, first aid), local cultural heritage (geology, nature, history, archaeology), communication, leadership and group management, legal responsibility related to outdoor activities, planning, organizing and conducting outdoor activities
 - Advanced level – promoting local economy/territory, enhanced knowledge on biodiversity and sustainability
- Training course for “Technician for the valorisation of protected areas”⁸. The training course aims to train professionals to implement and manage eco-sustainable tourism development plans in areas of high environmental value.
- Training course for “Touristic promoter in rural areas”⁹. The course aims to develop skills related to definition and management of products/services needed to valorise the eno-gastronomic and environmental/landscape resources of the territory.
- The training course on “Quality and Hospitality Slow Tourism”¹⁰ aims to develop the ability to acquire skills and competencies needed to create a

⁸ <https://www.evolvere.net/course/tecnico-della-valorizzazione-di-aree-naturali-protette-e-altri-siti-di-pregio-ambientale-e-percorso-di-orientamento-a-supporto-accompagnamento-al-lavoro/>

⁹ https://store.aproformazione.it/img/cms/21/MDL/AL_IFTS_20_promotoretur.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.slowtourism-italia.org/wp-content/uploads/brochure2.pdf>





different kind of tourism experience, through "networking" activities with the local stakeholders.

- The training course on “Experiential and cultural tourism”¹¹ allows the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences associated with the following professional profiles: Experiential Tourism Operator and Cultural Tourism Operator.
- Training course for “Rural Tourism Operator”¹² Taking place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics: i) low population density, ii) landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry and iii) traditional social structure and lifestyle, rural tourism could play a key role in attracting visitors to Umbria.
- Training course on “Sustainable tourism for mountain areas”¹³. The course will explore, analyze and describe development trajectories, models, and existing examples from the economic, socio-cultural and natural sciences sectors in terms of how they relate to tourism. The course also aims to analyze the potential of new technologies and telematic tools for the organization and promotion of tourism activities.
- “Tourism management in mountain areas”¹⁴: the course aims at interpreting the communication and promotion of the destination in the light of the potential that current technology offers and suggests; promoting management of winter tourism that is effective in terms of profitability and innovative in the introduction of new fruition proposal.

Concerning the professional skills addressed by the analysed training offers, the following key skills and areas of competence were identified:

- Trekking-related skills (e.g. what to wear for a trekking activity, sense of direction, ect.)
- Communication
- Team working
- Managing groups
- Touristic promotion
- Safe conduct of outdoor activities
- Social media
- Community based approach
- Stakeholder engagement
- Sustainability

¹¹ <https://www.formazioneperilturismo.it/corsi-settore-turistico/corsi-di-alta-specializzazione-per-il-turismo/esperto-del-turismo-esperienziale-e-culturale/>

¹² <https://www.istitutoeuropeodelturismo.com/nuova/corsi/corso-operatore-turismo-rurale/>

¹³ <https://www.unimontagna.it/en/percorsi-didattici/sustainable-tourism-for-mountain-areas/>

¹⁴ <https://www.unimontagna.it/en/percorsi-didattici/advanced-training-course-tourism-management-in-mountain-areas/>



With regards to the social and personal skills that can be developed by the analysed offers, the following were found relevant:

- Communication
- Cooperation/collaboration
- Autonomy
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Growth mindset
- Safety
- Knowledge of the territory

In addition to the clustering proposed in the desk research form and listed above, F.I.E. and Trekkify carried out a deeper analysis of the learning outcomes that are relevant for the objective of the research.

The training offers described above aim at:

- providing the basic tools to develop and strengthen the business in the mountain tourism sector;
- developing in-depth knowledge of the local area, its traditions, geography and food and wine culture, as well as the tourism product and services;
- acquiring the competences needed to give new life to the local areas while safeguarding its history, according to a less productive and more participatory development model;
- encouraging the use of new technologies, ICT and digital tools for the promotion and organisation of local tourism;
- favouring the identification of strategic prospects for tourist destinations;
- planning and effectively managing what the tourist destination offers, a factor which tends to diversify more and more in relation to new expectations and demand;
- interpreting the communication and promotion of the destination in the light of the potential that current technology offers and suggests;

3.2 Spain

There are different courses available for each of the mentioned categories and they range from academic/university certified courses to training offered and certified by the different federations as well as individual clubs and sport centres.

Training offers range from day courses of a few hours for beginners and leisure but also professional training to academic courses which offer full time courses related to eco-tourism.

In the case of eco-tourism, the general offer of training tends to incorporate concepts such as sustainable agriculture, conservation of cultural heritage, natural resources and outdoor activities.

In particular, the following courses seems relevant for the scope of this research:

- Hiking offer by FEDME for guides and instructors¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://misendafedme.es/formacion-para-el-senderista/>



- Montañismo in Aragon “técnicos deportivos de montaña”¹⁶
- Montañeros de Aragon¹⁷
- IAJ Hiking and Mountain instructor¹⁸
- Slowdriving rutas de Aragon¹⁹

In addition, among the relevant training offers that would be useful in order to promote specific cultural/natural attractions of the territory the Spanish partner is operating in, the following were mentioned:

- Hike and recycle/ Plogging: there are many activities offered related to going for a hike and recycling your own waste as well as collecting anything you find on the way. Such actions have been organized on the St. James's Way and in other locations. A training on how to organize such hiking events, how to recycle properly and how to minimize your own waste could be of interest.
- Intangible cultural heritage and nature- stories and legends from the mountains.
- Astro-tourism.
- Geocaching in groups.
- Training and networking for women in rural areas as local experts in gastronomy and the elements such as food and local cuisine. To develop activities that help to fight against depopulation and sustainability.
- Agritourism - Sheep migration experience, timber transportation.

Concerning the professional skills addressed by the analysed training offers, the following key skills and areas of competence were identified:

- Trekking-related skills (e.g. what to wear for a trekking activity, sense of direction, ect.)
- Communication
- Team working
- Managing groups
- Touristic promotion
- Design your own itinerary
- First aid and rescue in the mountains
- COVID regulations

¹⁶ <https://tecnicosdeportivosmontana.com/>

¹⁷ <https://www.montanerosdearagon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/calendario-actividades-2021.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.aragon.es/-/tiempo-libre-asociacionismo-y-participacion-1>

¹⁹ <http://www.slowdrivingaragon.com/>





With regards to the social and personal skills that can be developed by the analysed offers, the following were found relevant:

- Communication
- Cooperation/collaboration
- Wellbeing

According to the training offers analysed in Spain, in most cases the trainings aim to provide additional professional skills to accredited mountain or tourism guides (adventure tourism, trekking, hiking). On the other hand, the short courses provide training on basic orientation, safety and well-being for beginners.

As for eco-tourism and enogastronomic tourism courses focus more on the overall wellbeing and connection with nature and the environment as part of leisure activities.

3.3 Croatia

The desk analysis carried out in Croatia also showed a variety of training offers in the field of outdoor sports and promotion of the territory. The educational level concerned is quite wide ranging from academic to non-formal educational opportunities and they cover the area of interest of the DigiHike project: trekking, hiking, Adventure tourism, Eco-tourism Slow tourism, Eno-gastronomic tourism. The following training courses were taken into account:

- HPS Planinarska škola²⁰: The Croatian Mountaineering Association (Hrvatski Planinarski Savez - HPS) has verified 12 basic and advanced hiking courses held by local non-profit hiking associations all around Croatia. The HPS also verifies summer and winter alpinism schools organized by its member organizations, around 7 courses per year.
- There are for-profit organizations that also offer hiking courses (e.g. Mountain fit²¹: or My Hiking Feet²²
- The Croatian Speleology Association²³ gathers 8 local non-profit speleology clubs. The national association verifies speleology courses.
- The Croatian Chamber of Economy (HGK) organizes 2-day educations for providers of outdoor tourism activities. The certificate from this education is obligatory for all businesses and organizations who provide touristic activities in the outdoors.
- The Croatian Mountain Guides Association (Savez Gorskih Vodiča) provides courses for becoming a mountain guide. There are 4 levels of certification.²⁴

²⁰ <https://www.hps.hr/skolovanje/planinarske-skole/>

²¹ <https://www.mountain-fit.com/usluge/edukacije/planinarska-skola/>

²² <https://www.mpolim.mojweb.com.hr/opcenito/kako-poceti-planinariti/>

²³ <https://www.speleo.hr/postupak-prijave-speoloske-skole/>

²⁴ <https://sgvh.hr/skolovanje/>





- The Istrian Developmental Agency (IRTA d.o.o.) organizes courses for biking guides, verified by the Croatian Biking Association. (HBS)²⁵.
- The Virovitica University of Applied Sciences offers a course on Eco-tourism²⁶.
- The “Dalmatia Green” project is a certificate for eco-tourism accommodation recognized by the Ministry of Tourism. Tourist Associations organize courses for eco-tourism guides and interpreters²⁷.
- The association G.E.T. provides various educations for eno-gastro tourism, and the Institution for Adult Education Studium offers a course for eno-gastro activities specialists²⁸.

Finally, OBC also offers yearly education courses for outdoor education instructors (Outward Bound instructors) that covers both soft skills and hard skills in outdoor adventure education. The variety of courses mentioned, organized by both state, private, and civil organizations in Croatia cover quite fully the areas identified. However, most of the offered education courses cover only little of "soft skill" - interpersonal skills, communication and cooperation, that are all important for the implementation of outdoor and tourist activities.

With regards to the specific learning objectives, the focus of outdoor tourism educations is on safety, the correct use of equipment, navigation, meteorology, nutrition, ecology, communication, and crisis management. The learning outcomes are preparations for mountain hikes, safety and dangers in the mountains, orientation, correct use of equipment, knots, meteorology, nutrition, basic knowledge of alpinism, speleology and alpinism and mountain-rescuing. On the other hand, the training offers in the field of eco, slow, and eno-gastro tourism focus on communication, visibility and promotion of their offer and their regions.

All the areas addressed by the research concerning the professional skills (question 1.3) were then covered by the training offer existing in Croatia. Regarding the social and personal skills addressed, the following were identified:

- Communication
- Cooperation/collaboration
- Well-being
- Autonomy
- Empathy
- Growth mindset

²⁵ <http://www.irta.hr/hr/>

²⁶ <https://vsmti.hr/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Ekoturizam-autorizirana-predavanja-i-primjeri-vjezbi.pdf>

²⁷ <https://tourism-pitomaca.hr/2018/10/02/edukacija-turisticke-interpretatore-selektivne-oblike-turizma-kulturni-turizam-ekoturizam>

²⁸ <https://www.educentar.net/Program/19920/Specijalistica-za-eno-gastro-poslove/>



3.4 Portugal

Among the four partner countries, Portugal was the country where the training offers in the fields of interest of the DigiHike project seem less developed and diversified. Among the existing trainings, the following were considered:

- The training offers in Hiking and Trekking are responsibility of the Portuguese Federation of Mountaineering and are developed and implemented by the National School of Mountaineering²⁹. Some for-profit organisations also organise courses in these areas but by law the only recognised courses are connected and under the supervision of the National School of Mountaineering.
- In the areas of Adventure, Eco and Slow Tourism the “Tourism of Portugal”, the Portuguese Tourist Authority that is a branch of the Ministry of Economy, has its own vocational training schools where they prepare students for the multiple Tourism offer of our country. This organisation also has protocols of collaboration with academic institutions like Universities and Polytechnic Institutes where offer academic Tourism graduations that develop knowledge in this particular fields³⁰

In addition, considering the geographical area of interest of the Portuguese partner, religious tourism should also be considered as a potential agent of development for rural areas.

With regards to the development of professional skills, those mostly addressed by the training offers analysed are:

- Trekking-related skills (e.g. what to wear for a trekking activity, sense of direction, ect.)
- Communication
- Managing groups
- Touristic promotion

In the case of the Adventure Tourism and Outdoor Sports the focus is on the preparation of the technical aspects of the instructors, and they also give a great importance to security and rescue.

With regards to the development of social and personal skills, those mostly addressed by the training offers analysed are:

- Wellbeing
- Leadership

²⁹ <http://www.fcportugal.com/Apresentacao.aspx>

³⁰ <https://escolas.turismodeportugal.pt>

3.5 OERs in the field of outdoor education

The second part of the desk research focused on the identification and collection of Open Educational Resources³¹ with a two folded objective:



Analyze existing resources (e.g. curricula, learning material, etc.) in order not to replicate resource in the DigiHike Guide, get inspiration from them and compare what is existing in order to identify what is missing



Collect resources at an early stage of the project so to have additional material that might enrich both the Guide and the Toolkit

Partners were able to group the resources identified according to type and topics covered:

a) Software (app, platform)

- <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>: a collaborative project to create a free editable map of the world. The geodata underlying the map is considered the primary output of the project
- <https://openmtbmap.org/>: free maps for mountain bike and hiking based on OSM data
- <https://it.wikiloc.com/>: not open source but freely accessible: Wikiloc is a place to discover and share the best outdoor trails for hiking, cycling and many other activities
- <https://osmand.net>: Global Mobile Map Viewing and Navigation for Online and Offline OSM Maps

b) Resources on natural/cultural promotion

- <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/NPA-Handbook2020-A5-EN-72dpi.pdf>: Handbook on community-sourced cultural heritage valorization model 2020
- <http://www.ceeweb.org/stcdb/handbooks-and-guidelines/>: free and accessible documents on sustainable tourism: guidelines, handbooks
- <https://www.interregeurope.eu/ramsat/>: interesting project on “Revitalizing Remote And Mountainous areas through Sustainable Alternative Tourism”, very much in line with DigiHike

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_educational_resources



- <https://www.ruritage.eu/>: H2020 project on heritage for rural regeneration that offers several resources
- <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2478&context=thesesdissertations>: Sustainable Tourism Marketing Strategies at UNESCO World Heritage Sites
- https://eefect.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Manual-for-the-ecotourism-promotion_final.pdf: manual for Ecotourism promotion
- https://www.aragon.es/documents/20127/674325/MANUAL_DEFINITIVO.pdf/3c2b11bf-5b0c-c540-7592-5f0f42cec46b: Sustainable tourism manual Gobierno de Aragon
- <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284420995>: Guide for the development of gastronomic tourism UNWTO
- <http://www.redeuroparc.org/publicaciones/boletin>: EUROPARC España
- http://www.sustainit.eu/toolkit_es.php: Toolkit sustainable tourism SUSTAIN IT project
- <https://www.slideshare.net/guestd5dce3/senderismo-2608986>: UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Kit
- <http://rutasdeturismogastronomico.es/revistas-digitales/magazine-ecotourism/index.html>: Enogastronomy magazine
- https://elecoturista.com/espacio_natural/: El ecoturista Digital Magazine
- <https://slowtravelaragon.wordpress.com/>: Slow Travel Aragon video
- https://assets.bondlayer.com/nsjqnmvun/_assets/nlw2gdguddnbg7tdeupky.pdf: The curriculum of Adventure and Tourism in Nature from the School of the Tourism of Portugal

c) Resources on trekking-related skills

- <https://www.hps.hr/skolovanje/prezentacije/>: The Croatian Mountaineering Association offers 15 PPT on their website that are used on all their verified hiking schools. They cover Hiking, The History of Hiking, Mountains, Equipment, The Usage of Technical Equipment, Preparations for Going to the Mountains, Moving in the Mountains, Orienteering, Staying in the Mountains, Speleology, Ecology, Meteorology, Dangers in the Mountains, First Aid, Rescuing and the Croatian Mountain Rescue Service.





- <https://www.hps.hr/skolovanje/Metodicki%20prirucnik%20za%20opcu%20planinarsku%20skolu.pdf>: free Methodical Guide for instructors on hiking schools
- <http://goo.gl/FwbPy>: The hiking club "Željezničar" that offers alpinism schools has uploaded their learning material on their website in form of a guide and videos of all their lectures on YouTube (<http://www.aozeljeznicar.hr/page.php?id=2513>).
- https://www.montanasegura.com/PDF/Proyecto_Interdisciplinar_MS_2016.pdf: Hiking for school children
- <https://www.slideshare.net/guestd5dce3/senderismo-2608986>: FEDME ppt on trekking
- <https://senderosturisticos.turismodearagon.com/descargas/>: Hiking routes Aragon



4. The field research

The field research phase was implemented through the administration of an online survey³² aimed at collecting relevant information about the needs of:

- staff and volunteers of partner organizations;
- municipalities, bodies active in the promotion of territory;

in the areas identified for the valorisation of “environmental heritage” through outdoor/mountain sports.

The survey also aimed at investigating into the skills and competence needed for the promotion of outdoor activities/sports. Finally, the survey facilitated the mapping of the natural/cultural attractions³³ of great interest in partner countries at local, regional and national level. Of the three parts of the survey, we present in this report the findings emerging from part 1, which are the most relevant for the scope of the research and the building of the Guide. Part 2, (the knowledge of trekking and outdoor activities of the respondents), and part 3 (demographics) are not presented here but are available on aggregate.

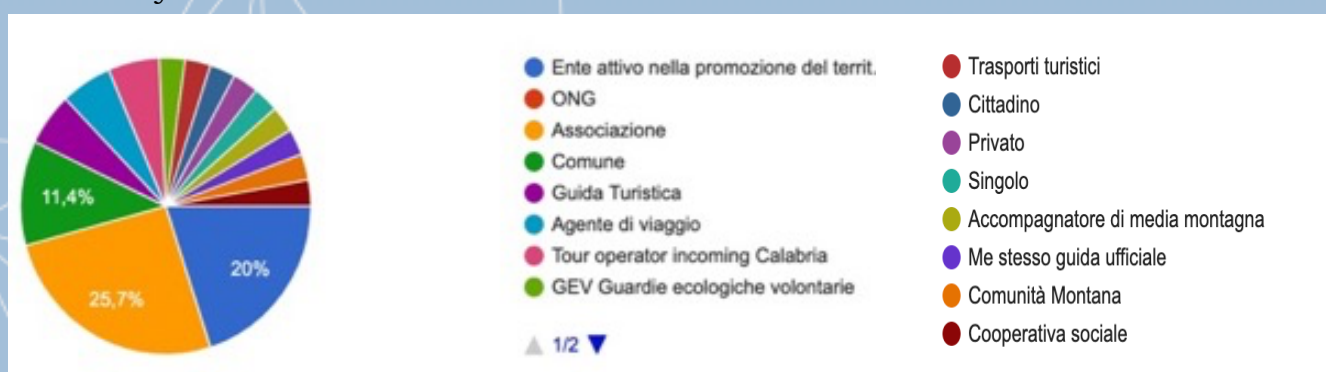
- N° of total respondents: 94 from the four countries
- Country specific data:

- a) Italy: 35
- b) Portugal: 20
- c) Spain: 22
- d) Croatia: 17

The minimum number set in the application was met at European level (80 expected as minimum number) but not on the country level (Croatia did not reach the 20 respondents).

- Type of respondents per country:

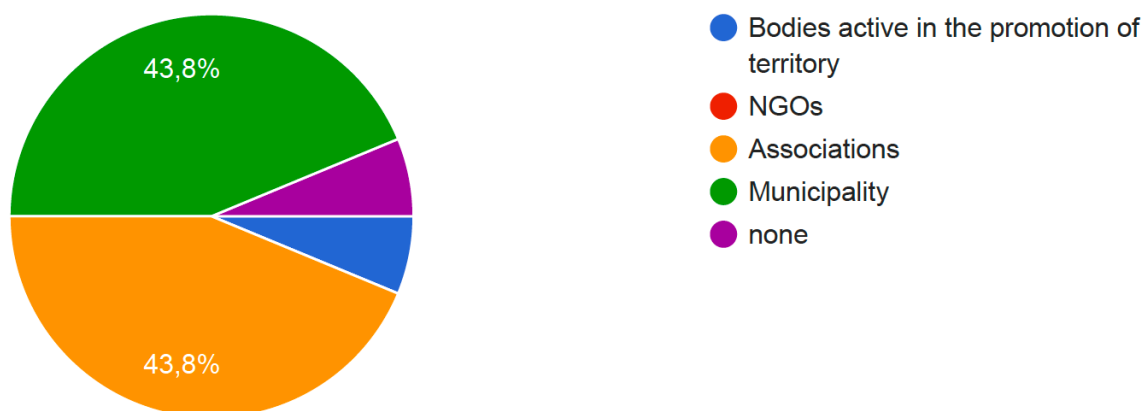
- Italy



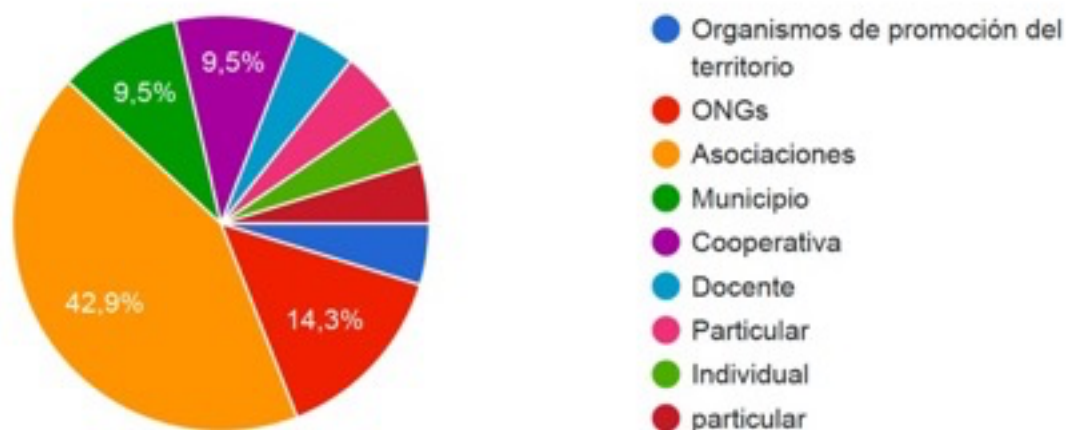
³² <https://forms.gle/iYMfrEAXoeJYLShA8>

³³ We refer both to natural - “Natural attractions are protected rare, beautiful and valuable natural sites from a scientific, cultural or aesthetic point of view, preserved in their most natural kind and forms. These natural objects can be both from the animate nature and from the inanimate one. The specific site declared a landmark includes the natural environment in which it exists. In these areas are prohibited activities that may disturb their natural condition or impair their aesthetic value” (From: http://responsalliance.eu/rplearn/?page_id=101) – and cultural attractions (e.g. historic sights, food festival etc.).

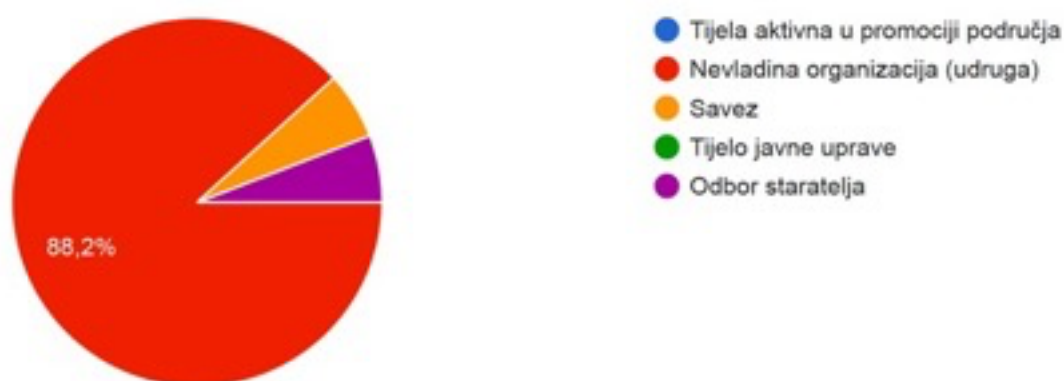
- Portugal



- Spain



- Croatia





On average, more than 50% of the respondents belong to Associations or NGOs (56,2%). Regarding the role respondents have in their organizations, more than 50% of the respondents (58,7%) are staff members or volunteers with only few respondents covering institutional or managerial roles.

Among the mountain outdoor sports proposed (question 1.4) Nordic skiing, Skiing/snowboarding, Ski mountaineering, Climbing, Free climbing, most of participants in the survey responded that they rarely or never practice such sports, assuming that the most practiced sport is trekking (deliberately not listed in the question). This finding should be taken into account as those sports could represent and innovative and added value for the areas of investigation.

Concerning question 1.5 and the knowledge/experience of respondents around the core elements to be investigated as tools for the promotion of rural areas/regions (Trekking/Hiking, Adventure tourism, Eco-tourism, Slow tourism, Eno-gastronomic tourism) the field research shows different levels in the four countries. The overall results with the country specific average are reported in the table below:

Country/ element	Trekking	Adventure Tourism	Eco- tourism	Slow tourism	Enogastronomic tourism
IT	6,4	5,8	6,2	6,6	7,3
PT	7,0	6,1	5,7	5,5	6,1
HR	7,6%	6,9	5,6	4,	3,3
ES	6,	4,	4,5	3,4	4,0
Cross-country average	6,8/10	5,8/10	5,5/10	4,9/10	5,2/10

The results show how on average the knowledge and presumably the potential of the activity/type of tourism analyzed are not very well-known by the local communities. This also suggests that the DigiHike Guide might provide an overview on this kind of touristic offers in connection with outdoor sports such as trekking.

With regards to the organizations of activities aimed to promote the valorization of natural heritage through outdoor activities (question 1.6), the survey showed the following results:

Country	Yes	No	Not sure
IT	77,1%	14,3%	8,6%
PT	31,3%	37,5%	31,3%
HR	29,4%	17,6%	52,9%
ES	50,0%	18,2%	31,8%
Cross-country average	46,9%	19,4%	31,1%





We can observe a quite important difference from country to country with on average less than 50% of respondents who have organized such an activity. In this regard, the connection between outdoor sports and the valorisation of the cultural/natural heritage should be explored.

Question 1.8 was a fundamental one in the survey as it asked what the core competences are needed for the valorisation of the natural/cultural heritage that a guide should address according to the respondents. Here below we reported the recurrent ones:

- Knowledge of the natural heritage
- Digital competences (video editing)
- Updating promotional channels (website, social media, etc.)
- Safety issues
- Social skills (empathy, enthusiasm, kindness, motivation, networking, teamwork)
- Managing groups
- Communication and marketing
- Foreign languages
- Stakeholders and community's engagement
- Organizational skills
- Sustainability skills (eco-consciousness)
- Trekking related skills (guiding skills, knowledge of nature)

There seems to be a common agreement (question 1.9) among respondents from the four countries that the following areas of competences are all very relevant:

- Trekking/Hiking related competences
- Competences related to "natural heritage"
- Communication and marketing competencies
- Organizational competences (to be able to plan, organize and manage an outdoor activity)

In addition, in the four country there seems to be a general opinion (question 1.12) that the local natural and cultural heritage is not fully valorised:

- In Italy 68,8% of participants in the survey believe that the valorisation should be improved
- In Portugal 68,8% of participants in the survey believe that the valorisation should be improved
- In Croatia 82,4% of participants in the survey believe that the valorisation should be improved
- In Spain 59,1% of participants in the survey believe that the valorization should be improved

In question 1.14, participants were asked to identify which kind of tools should be developed/improved in order to support the full valorisation of the natural and cultural heritage. The following results emerged:



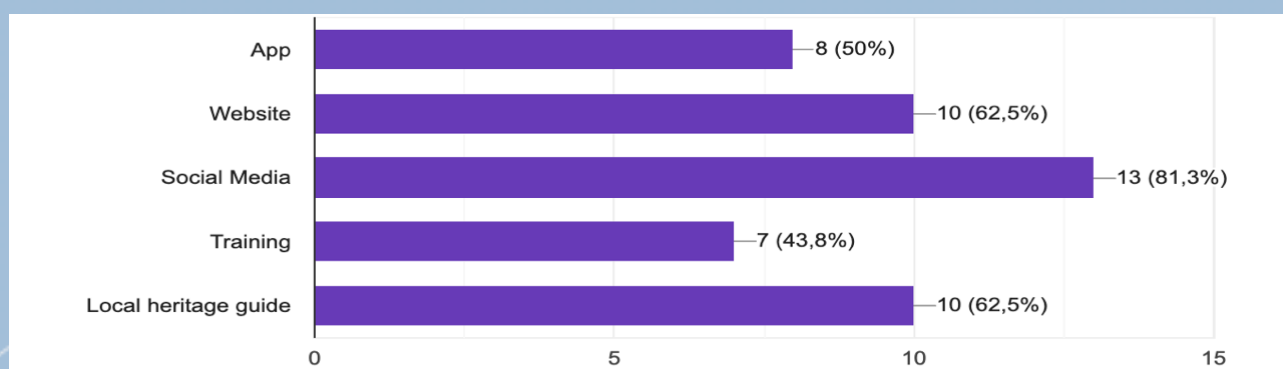
- Italy (35 responses)



- Spain (22 responses)



- Portugal (20 responses)



- Croatia (17 responses)



Except for Portugal, all the three countries seem to confirm that there is a skills gap that should be addressed by specific training and tools.

Among the several strategies aimed at boosting the promotion of the natural/cultural attractions those that according to participants (question 1.15) those that were more highly rated are

- Combination of a trekking tour with Enogastronomic experiences



- Experiential travels
- Adventure activities (rafting, climbing etc)
- Cultural events (e.g., music, conference)

These four strategies should be considered when drafting the DigiHike Guide as they represent innovative ways to promote the cultural and natural heritage through outdoor activities.



5. The cross-country analysis

When comparing the results emerging from the desk research, we can observe the presence of several training opportunities in the partner countries with a slightly less developed offer in Portugal. The training offers observed have been grouped according to their type and scope:

- a) Trekking-related training
- b) Natural/cultural heritage promotion

A common observation was highlighted regarding the fact that in the four countries what can be found is either related to trekking and similar or to rural promotion in terms of touristic attraction while a direct connection between the two is often missing.

Concerning the professional skills addressed by the analysed training offers, the following key skills and areas of competence were identified and are considered relevant in the four countries.

- Trekking-related skills (e.g. what to wear for a trekking activity, sense of direction, ect.)
- Communication
- Team working
- Managing groups
- Touristic promotion
- Safe conduct of outdoor activities
- Social media
- Video editing
- Digital skills
- Community based approach
- Stakeholder engagement
- Sustainability
- Design your own itinerary
- First aid and rescue in the mountains
- COVID regulations

Similarly, common social and personal skills were identified:

- Communication
- Cooperation/collaboration
- Wellbeing
- Autonomy
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Growth mindset
- Safety
- Knowledge of the territory
- Autonomy
- Empathy
- Growth mindset



- Leadership

The results emerging from the online survey show how on average the knowledge and presumably the potential of the activity/type of tourism analysed are not very well-known by the local communities. This also suggests that the DigiHike Guide might provide an overview on this kind of touristic offers in connection with outdoor sports such as trekking.

With regards to the organizations of activities aimed to promote the valorisation of natural heritage through outdoor activities (question 1.6), the survey showed that on average over 50% of the respondents in the four countries have never organized/participated in activities aimed to promote the valorisation of natural heritage through outdoor activities or are not familiar with it.

The core competences identified by respondents and considered necessary for the valorisation of the natural/cultural heritage that a guide should address seem to be matching those identified by partners in the desk research.

Finally, in the four country there seems to be a general opinion that the local natural and cultural heritage is not fully valorised, with around 70% of respondents on average agreeing on the issue.



6. From the research to the DigiHike Guide

The observation resulting from partners' research for resources and training offers is that often what can be found is either related to trekking and similar or to rural promotion in terms of touristic attraction. In this regard, what it would be useful to consider in the elaboration DigiHike guide is to bridge these two aspects: the guide should help associations and volunteers to be able to both design and organize trekking events (in all their aspects) and at the same time promote these activities and in turn the rural areas they operate in. To this end, the personal and professional skills that the guide should support should be related to:



Trekking (to design and organize trekking events)



Communication (to produce effective and attracting promotional content)



Promotion (being able to promote one's own natural/cultural heritage)



Stakeholders' engagement (to engage the local communities in order to maximize the impact and attract people/tourists)

The observations coming project partners highlighted the relevance of being able to enhance the peculiarities of a given area through the generation of empathy with the local stakeholders (public authorities and private bodies/associations) and potential basins of national and international tourists/ramblers in order to increase the effectiveness of the activities organized. To this end, the management of the excursion and the group, enhancing the skills of the participants so as to involve them emotionally as well, while deepening the local culture, history and naturalistic aspects was stressed.

These peculiarities should be then combined with outdoor activities, for example, circular economy and rural tourism. Essential information related to circular economy and how it can be applied to tourism, more specifically rural tourism could be provided thus favouring in-depth understanding of where opportunities for implementing circular solutions can be found within rural/eco-tourism.

The DigiHike guide should guide the reader and therefore the organizations active in the area on how to operate between the world of hiking, rurality and sustainability.



Given the context and finding described above, F.I.E. has moved forward in the elaboration of a structure of the guide that addresses the needs and gaps observable from the desk and field research and at the same time could represent a practical and useful tool for all stakeholders interested. The model proposed by F.I.E. is inspired by Lasswell's model of communication and outlines the Guide according to the 5 Ws (Why; Who; What; Where; When).

The main components of the Guide should then be:

INTRODUCTION

It explains our approach to the guide. Each chapter will explain benefits and challenges of hiking/outdoor activities. Thus, they will deal with two points of view: the hiker (as a “final consumer”) and the association responsible for the organization of the event. It's a fact that, in order to organize any event, the organizer needs to know what the user is looking for.

Moreover, the guide will provide some information about a new identity of the walker/hikers or, better say, the traveller: the attitude to visit a place as a “rambler”. In this identity you can find the new dimension of a innovative way to discover a “minor” place (i.e. sights not placed on main touristic flow): on one hand the will to be immersed in local heritage (visitors) and, on the other hand, the need to be ready to give answers to local issues (actors/residents).

At the end of each chapter could be useful to put three (or more, if necessary) “questions and answers” in order to help to focus on the main issues of the chapter.

CHAPTER 1 – WHY

This chapter initially deals with the health and social benefits for hikers. However, the main subject will be to explain the economic and social benefits for the territory.

CHAPTER 2 – WHO

This chapter will explain that hiking/outdoor activities are intended for anyone, no matter of the age or physical capabilities. Everyone is able to face this kind of activities, at its own level. There are not whatsoever counterindications.

However, since the guide is intended to give tips to organizing association, the main goal of this chapter will be to point out the steps and the POC's for a useful planning of the outdoor event. The organizer must be aware that hikers have different physical capabilities and consequently it should be able to offer different solutions.

CHAPTER 3 – HOW

Hikers should know what is important for the activity they are going to face and “master” the content of their backpack, understand the basic rules of safety and know their own capabilities.

The association must have a minimum knowledge of subjects like meteorology, local history and heritage, botanic, communication and should have the ability of storytelling. It should then be well aware of local dangers. They absolutely need to master first aid procedures.

In order to improve their activities, the organizers should improve also their ability to learn from mistakes and without the natural fear of doing mistakes.

In addition to this, the organizer should be also able to help local actors to understand the needs of hikers and adapt their offer.





CHAPTER 4 – WHERE

Hikers, while they are wondering along territories, are looking for different things. Some could search for gastronomic experiences related to the local traditions/history, some for a better knowledge of local environment, some for the perfect picture of the best landscape.

The organizers need to differentiate touristic offer in order to meet all those needs. Since their activities are rooted in a deep knowledge of local area, they have to concentrate on events that will be able of meeting the requests of the hikers and improving local economy.

Their knowledge of the territory should drive hikers to appreciate all aspects of the touristic sight, making an offer - for example - for photo contests of the same sight in different seasons.

CHAPTER 5 – WHEN

This chapter is intended to focalize on the necessity to vary touristic offer in order to attract hikers not only in summertime but all year long. For hikers this means the possibility to deepen their knowledge of local heritage/environment throughout the year.

For organizers represents an additional challenge that will give the possibility to differentiate experiences and will have important implications on local economies.

APPENDIX A - MY PERFECT WALKING EVENT

Some tips to effectively organize hiking/outdoor events

APPENDIX B - TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE PLANNING

APPENDIX C – CHECKLIST





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