



## BEST PRACTICE: VALONGO, PORTUGAL



### Key Challenge

Degradation and loss of biodiversity.

### Type of Solution

Adoption of a tourism strategy and a monitoring framework; Stakeholder participation and management; Promotional campaigns; Digital solutions; Investments in infrastructure and product development; Research and innovation.

### Case Classification

**Type of Destination** | Rural

**Territorial Level** | < NUTS 3

**Size of the Tourist Area** | 75.7 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population** | 94,795 in 2021

**Type of Tourism** | Ecotourism; Rural tourism; Mountain tourism; Educational tourism; Cultural tourism.

**Tourism organisation** | Tourism department of the municipality, supported by the regional Destination Management Organisation (DMO).

**Main Stakeholders Affected** | Local authorities/ government; Local Residents; Tourists; Research and Development (R&D) organisations.

**Additional Challenges Covered** | Adaptation to climate change; Limited financial resources to support sustainability activities in tourism; Effective community participation in tourist activities; Lack of awareness and know-how among tourism stakeholders.

### Context & Background

Tourism development in Valongo has gradually increased in recent years with 102,246 overnight stays recorded in 2023. Located 10 km from Porto, Valongo is a popular destination for day-trippers visiting the Porto Mountain Park Natural Park. Accommodation capacity in Valongo is limited and the tourism strategy focuses on creating added value through restaurants, outdoor service providers and promoting local products.

### Key Challenge

Tourism in Valongo depends on natural resources. However, it can also pose a threat to those same resources, with forest fires, endangerment of endemic species, etc. External funds and income from tourism are needed for nature conservation and sustainability.



**Implementation of Solutions:** Nature conservation and renaturation, awareness-raising and educational measures for the community and tourists are implemented with public and private financing.

## SOLUTIONS

- The Association of Municipalities of Porto Mountains Park, founded in 2016, is the result of the synergy between the municipalities of Valongo, Gondomar and Paredes and is strategically located in the metropolitan area of Porto. It is recognised as a model of political, technical and civic competence in the integrated management of protected areas. The association supports studies as well as the conservation, and sustainable use of the park. Among the [conservation projects](#) implemented is the [LIFE Serras do Porto project](#), funded by the LIFE programme, that includes a set of integrated interventions in forested areas to promote native species, adaptation to climate change, as well as monitoring, dissemination activities, awareness-raising and citizen participation.
- The Leça River, crossing the municipalities of Valongo, Maia, Santo Tirso and Matosinhos, has been considered one of the most polluted rivers in Europe, due to discharges from industry and agriculture. Recognizing the importance of preserving this watercourse, in 2016, the municipalities began to investigate solutions at a local level and in 2021 [Association of Municipalities of the Leça River Corridor](#) was created, focusing on implementing actions dedicated to its rehabilitation. To preserve its landscape and biodiversity, several actions were carried out with the support of EU Funding, such as waste collection, control of invasive exotic vegetation and natural engineering interventions (revegetation) to protect the banks from erosion and flooding, and to increase water quality and reduce its scarcity in drier periods.
- To involve the local population in environmentally friendly activities, several initiatives are being taken, such as the promotion of educational games in schools related to water, climate change and the SDGs. The Municipality also encourages citizen participation through composting training, tree planting, river cleaning, provision of vegetable gardens for communities, guided tours in the mountains etc. Furthermore, the Municipality participates in the European Union's [BiodiverCities project](#), which involved citizens in the co-design of greener cities.
- Tourists are also involved in conservation activities to raise awareness, to encourage them to protect nature and to promote and enhance the vast and valuable natural, geological, archaeological and mining heritage of the territory. For this purpose, Valongo Municipality developed the [Centre for Environmental Interpretation and Roman Mining](#).

**Replicability potential:** High (requires political will, leadership, and funding).

**Cost & funding source:** (1) Costs of conservation projects vary; mainly co-funded by the European Union (e.g. LIFE, COSME) and [other funding programmes](#); (2) 4 million euros for the Leça River Corridor funded by [REACT-EU](#); (3) 230,000 euros for the Centre for Environmental Interpretation and Roman Mining funded by the municipality.

## Success Factors & Barriers

Success factors: Community commitment to conservation activities and a positive attitude towards tourism; A deep understanding that the mountains are an important natural resource for the municipality; Successful funding applications (mainly to the European Union).

Barriers: Lack of cooperation with the private sector (especially regarding river restoration); Insufficient number of stakeholders located in Valongo (they are scattered throughout the Nature Park region).

### Results and Impacts

- A greater emphasis on nature conservation both in the community and among tourists promotes species protection and contributes to greater cleanliness in the nature park.
- An improved tourism offer, both in quantitative and qualitative terms (more hiking trails, improved infrastructure). Over the last three-year period, the Valongo Interactive Tourism Store recorded annual growth of around 10%.

## Recommendations by the Destinations

- A destination must be aware of its own unique selling points and the destination's DNA.
- Tourism should always involve the local population in development projects and activities to ensure a high level of acceptance of tourism.
- Environmental protection must always be viewed from two perspectives: an intact environment attracts tourists, and it must be protected by tourists.
- A good relationship with local authorities is essential to drive projects forward.
- To maintain the attractiveness of a tourist destination, it is important to focus on the quality of tourism rather than the quantity of tourism.

## Useful Links

[Nature Conservation Projects](#) | [Valongo: Intelligent City Transformation Overview](#)

## Contact

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