



# 3<sup>rd</sup> European Trails & Paths Conference

*7-10 November 2024 in Paris, France*



European Hiking Federation  
*Hiking Europe*



Information available here: <https://www.era-ewv-ferp.org/3rd-european-trails-and-paths-conference/>



## STRUCTURE OF THE CONFERENCE ORGANISATION

### Organizing Committee:

Boris Mičić (ERA president)  
Steen Kobberø-Hansen (ERA Board)  
Josef Klenner (EUMA president)  
Andreas Aschaber (EUMA General secretary)  
Brigitte Soulary (FFRP president)  
Audrey Ramguth (FFRP office)  
Séverine Ikkawi (FFRP office)  
Jana Harnochová (ERA office)

### Executive and Editorial Board:

Boris Mičić (ERA president)  
Gerhard Ermischer (ERA vice-president)  
Steen Kobberø-Hansen (ERA Board, chairman of the E-path working group)  
Helmut Schuster (ERA, Leader of the working group Trails in the Erasmus+ project)  
Andreas Aschaber (EUMA General secretary)  
Bojan Rotovnik (EUMA, Leader of the Expert Group for Trails)  
Liane Jordan (Deutscher Wanderverband Service GmbH)

## CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

### Thu, 07.11.

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	Arrival of participants / Welcome /
19:00-20:30	Dinner

### Fri, 08.11.

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	Breakfast in your hotel
09:00-12:30	<b>Block I</b> <i>Presentations &amp; Discussions</i>
12:30-14:00	Lunch
14:30-18:00	<b>Block II</b> <i>Presentations &amp; Discussions</i>
19:00-20:30	Dinner <b>Networking</b>

### Sat, 09.11.

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	Breakfast in your hotel
09:00-12:30	<b>Block III</b> <i>Presentations &amp; Discussions</i>
13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00	Organized visit to the Olympic site - city hike (walking shoes and appropriate clothing for rainy Paris recommended)
19:00-20:30	Dinner <b>Networking</b>

### Sun, 10.11.

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	Breakfast in your hotel
09:00-11:00	<b>Block IV</b> The final output of the 3rd European Trails and Paths Conference Conclusions of the conference
@11:00 a.m.	Expected end of the conference Departure

## STRUCTURE OF ABSTRACTS

Friday, 08.11.

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09:00-12:30

### Block I

#### 1. Sustainable trail management and maintenance

*Key Focus: Best practices, technology integration, long-term sustainability, and data-driven decision-making.*

Related Abstracts:

- 1.1. Lessons learned from the E+ project "EUMA - Improving of good governance of climbing and mountaineering in Europe by Andres Aschaber (EUMA, AT), Helmut Schulster (ERA, DE)
- 1.2. Strategic Enhancement of EUMA's Trail Management through an Interactive Database and Map System by Alessio Piccoli (Webmapp, IT)
- 1.3. Safe and sustainable mountaineering infrastructure by Hrvoje Gold (Hrvatski planinarski savez, HR)
- 1.4. Digital Activity Control for More Environmental Sustainability by Thorsten Unseld (Digitize the Planet e.V., DE)
- 1.5. National Observatory of Pedestrian Traffic by Iris Heran-Gobert and Christophe Martinez (FFRandonnée, FR)

14:30 – 18:00

### Block II

#### 2. Impact of climate change on trails

*Key Focus: Climate change effects, adaptation strategies, and trail infrastructure resilience.*

Related Abstracts:

- 2.1. Causes of Damage to Paths and Trails including Climate Change and Their Impact on the Same Infrastructure by Guillaume Bernard (Traversée du Massif des Vosges, FR)
- 2.2. Implementing Best Practices for Trail Maintenance and Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability: A Case Study of Gendarmstien in Denmark, Gendarmstien by Liane Jordan (Deutscher Wanderverband Service GmbH, DE)
- 2.3. How Climate Changes Affect Mountain Trails by Bojan Rotovnik (EUMA, SL)
- 2.4. Climate-Adapted Quality Transformation by Liane Jordan (Deutscher Wanderverband Service GmbH, DE)
- 2.5. Climate change and the impact of fire on trails and vice versa by Ioannis Lagos and George Koulalis (Menalon Social Enterprise, GR)

## **Saturday, 09.11.**

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09:00-13:00

### **Block III**

#### **3. Innovative use in trail networks**

*Key Focus: New practices, social inclusion, and diverse use of trails.*

Related Abstracts:

- 3.1. Development of New Practices and to See Their Impact on Environment by Cécile Legrand (FFRandonnée, FR)
- 3.2. Via Romea Sanesa Accessible: When a Cultural Route Meets Social Inclusion by Angelo Lattore (ERA, IT)
- 3.3. Hiker's Charter by Richard Lallemant (FFRandonnée, FR)
- 3.4. Status and development of E-Paths, LQT and Green Trails by Steen Kobberoe-Hansen (ERA, DK) and Liane Jordan (Deutscher Wanderverband Service GmbH, DE)
- 3.5. PAW – Project AlpsWatch by Michael Rosendorfer (Tyrolean mountain sports association, AT)
- 3.6. Trails for All and Everyone - Accessible Hiking Trails in the Baltic Countries by Asnate Ziemele (Baltic Country holidays, LV)

## **Sunday, 10.11.**

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09:00-11:00

### **Block IV**

#### **Final output of the 3rd European Trails and Paths Conference**

Conclusions of the conference

Discussion panel: „World Coffee“

# ABSTRACT

## 1.1.

### Lessons learned from the E+ project “EUMA - Improving of good governance of climbing and mountaineering in Europe.

#### A sustainable approach for European mountain- and hiking trails

Andreas Aschaber

**Keywords:** marked trails, management of trails, existence of trails, sustainable trail management

#### ABSTRACT

Marked trails, whether in the mountains or in the lowlands support recreational sports like hiking, running, mountaineering, climbing and serve many other users. Trails connect people across countries in the same way as streets or railways and therefore serve an important function for European cohesion. Basically, walking, hiking, and mountain trails are footpaths in the public interest for the purpose of walking, running, or climbing, located in all landscapes, visible and clearly recognised in the terrain and are physically marked and signposted.

Proper management is required to keep trails in appropriate condition which is done by national hiking and mountaineering associations which are represented by the European Union of Mountaineering Associations (EUMA) and the European Ramblers Association (ERA).

Trails have a very important function for visitor guidance in each European country. They guide people with the help of markings and signposts through difficult terrain, complex landscapes, or environmentally sensitive areas. The latter is highly important since it helps people to stick to a certain route without damaging the nature. This function has become very important, especially since the demand for relaxation and exercise in nature has increased and amplified the pressure on nature in the last couple of years.

The existence of trails is at stake due to missing legal status in many European countries. Trails lose their attractiveness due to sealing or merging in urban structures. Furthermore, ownership conflicts and the lack of funds are generally leading to the closure of trails while the impact of climate change increases the maintenance effort. A fundamental problem is the lack of understanding they facilitate the wellbeing of a society. They are generally taken for granted without knowing about the efforts standing behind. There are more than 1,5 million km of trails across Europe which are mostly voluntarily maintained by national associations. There is no European-wide trail register which could ensure a sustainable European-wide trail management system to preserve nature and allow individuals' a responsible outdoor experience under the free right to roam.

The study which was conducted in 30 European countries where data was retrieved from 37 leading hiking and mountaineering associations revealed results on existing national trail management systems. These comprise details about structure, costs, composition, legal status, and major obstacles for trails. From these rich data, recommendations for sustainable trail management were derived to develop a more nature sensitive approach to trails management.

**Literature:** Mitten, D., Overholt, J. R., Haynes, F. I., D'Amore, C. C., & Ady, J. C. (2018). Hiking: A low-cost, accessible intervention to promote health benefits. *American journal of lifestyle medicine*, 12(4), 302-310.

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Andreas Aschaber

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## 1.2

### Strategic Enhancement of EUMA's Trail Management through an Interactive Database and Map System

**Alessio Piccioli**, President of the Operative Structure for Trails and Cartography of CAI, and Project Manager of EUMA's Interactive Map Project

**Keywords:** Sustainable trail management, interactive database, map system, navigable data for mountaneers

#### ABSTRACT

The European Mountaineering Association (EUMA) introduces a revolutionary interactive database and map system to bolster sustainable trail management and maintenance across Europe. This platform allows EUMA members to uniformly publish and share trail information, ensuring comprehensive and navigable data for mountaneers. It promotes a unified vision in hiking, addressing difficulty classification, quality certification, and maintenance cost estimates. By standardizing trail information, EUMA aims to enhance user experience, foster environmental care, and uphold high standards in hiking networks, reinforcing its role as the principal intermediary for European mountaineering. This initiative not only supports responsible access to mountain areas but also strengthens community spirit and environmental awareness among diverse member associations. The system also highlights the crucial contributions of volunteers, utilizing OpenStreetMap for data collection and validation, exemplified by the Club Alpino Italiano's successful workflow model that integrates OpenData platforms with proprietary validation systems to ensure accuracy and reliability.

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## 1.3

### Safe and sustainable mountaineering infrastructure

#### A collaborative project of the Croatian Ministry of Tourism and Sport and the Croatian Mountaineering Association

**Alan Čaplar**, General Secretary,

**Hrvoje Gold**, Commission for Mountaineering Trails

**Mladen Vrabec**, Secretary for mountaineering infrastructure and project implementation  
Croatian Mountaineering Association

**Keywords:** Mountaineering infrastructure, Mountaineering trail maintenance, Governmental support, Mountaineering trails data base

#### ABSTRACT

The mountaineering infrastructure in Croatia encompasses a network of over 6,500 kilometres of marked trails and 160 mountain lodges, houses, and shelters. These are maintained by the Croatian Mountaineering Association (CMA) and its more than 340 member associations.

To enhance the quality of these trails and facilities, which form part of the public tourist infrastructure, the CMA proposed a project to the Croatian Ministry of Tourism and Sport (CMTS) in 2022. This project aimed to arrange and upgrade the registered mountaineering infrastructure in Croatia. Based on the data from the data base of mountaineering trails and facilities, the CMA expressed the need for investment in their reconstruction and maintenance. The CMTS gave its consent and approved support to this initiative [1].

This initiative ensures direct state-level funding for the reconstruction and maintenance of mountaineering trails and facilities. Recognizing the necessity for stable and ongoing investment in mountaineering infrastructure, a model for long-term cooperation between the CMTS and CMA was established, leading to the creation of relevant agreements and contracts.

The groundwork for these agreements was laid by numerous CMA activities over the years. Decades ago, comprehensive registers of mountaineering trails, transversals, way markers, and facilities were established, which have been regularly updated with numerous valuable data on the layout and condition of the infrastructure and their maintainers. The implementation of CMA's infrastructure projects is guided by a series of programmatic and analytical documents, adopted by the CMA's administrative bodies over the years. In addition to these project funds, CMA annually, invests significant resources in maintaining this infrastructure [2]. After completing two cycles of the collaborative project, a third cycle is being prepared, with implementation scheduled for 2025 [3].

This paper describes the organization, preparation, and execution of the project, particularly focusing on the renovation and arrangement of mountaineering trails infrastructure.

**Literature:** [1] Croatian Mountaineering Association (2022). The Ministry of Tourism and Sport and Croatian Mountaineering Association concluded an Agreement on long-term cooperation on the development and maintenance of mountaineering infrastructure in the function of tourism. Available at: <https://www.hps.hr/vijesti/18341/ministarstvo-turizma-i-sporta-i-hps-sklopili-sporazum-o-dugorocnoj-suradnji-na-razvoju-i-odrzavanju-planinarske-infrastrukture-u-funkciji-turizma> (in Croatian)

[2] Čaplar, A. (2023) A step forward in the improvement of mountaineering infrastructure, Hrvatski planinar, 1, 15 (in Croatian) [3] Croatian Mountaineering Association (2024). Safe and sustainable mountaineering infrastructure project. Available at: <https://www.hps.hr/vijesti/24883/projekt-sigurna-i-odrziva-planinarska-infrastruktura> (in Croatian)

**Contact:**

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## 1.4

### Digital activity controll for more environmental sustainability

Thorsten Unseld

**Organisation:**

Digitize the Planet e.V.

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**Keywords:** Digitization, open data, visitor guidance, digital activity controll, rules for the use of nature, species extinction, minimizing biodiversity loss.

**ABSTRACT**

The digitization of the leisure sector poses new challenges for nature conservation in the area of visitor activity controll, as users and tourists increasingly inform themselves via digital media.

After all, the rules for the use of nature are not known and are not accessible online either.

The consequences are pressure on the environment, damage to nature, unsatisfied tourists, closed trails and conflicts with the local communities.

The solution is to create a complete, open, international and machine-readable dataset on all protected areas in Europe with the rules for the use of nature, purpose of protection, basic information and official statutes. The data set will be open data and is put out via various tour platforms, map applications and navigation system and can reach every user of nature at the right time and in the right place, with the necessary information.

The non-profit association Digitize the Planet sees itself as an interface between nature conservation, administration, tourism and the outdoor industry and takes a neutral position in terms of orientation and communication.

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## 1.5

### National Observatory of Pedestrian Traffic

Christophe Martinez, Iris Hérán-Gobert

**Keywords:** Hiking, pedestrian traffic, preservation of hiking trails

#### ABSTRACT

Outdoor activities, hiking in particular, have been booming since the end of the Covid period. 56% of French people aged between 18 and 80 say they go hiking or walking, representing 27 million hikers<sup>1</sup>.

Although it is a success, we need to be vigilant about a number of issues. The increasing number of pedestrians on hiking path is a growing concern regarding the preservation of natural areas. Furthermore, new types of hikers, discovering hiking activities, are arriving on trails. They are often unfamiliar with good practices to preserve the environment and their own safety.

To take these issues into account, it is necessary to be able to estimate and qualify the pedestrian traffic. Several tools are currently being developed to achieve this goal:

- « National Observatory of Pedestrian Traffic » which is developed by the French hiking federation based on different partnerships.
- « Outdoorvision » which is managed by the National resources center on outdoor sports and relies on millions of GPS tracks delivered by connected users.

The aim of this presentation is to make an overview of both of these tools and show how they could be useful in structuring, maintaining and promoting a network of hiking trails.

<sup>1</sup> Survey : « FFRandonnée » and « Union Sport&Cycle », « Hiking and me », december 2021.

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## 2.1

### Causes of damage to paths and trails, incl. climate change, and their impact on the same infrastructure

**Guillaume Bernard** – Alsace Destination Tourisme (France)

**Markus Schluep** – Berner Wanderwege (Switzerland)

**Keywords:** Trail Maintenance, Climate change, Sustainability

#### ABSTRACT

This document provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges, causes, and solutions related to the maintenance and sustainability of hiking trails across Europe. It identifies natural events, such as storms, floods, and avalanches, as significant causes of trail damage, along with damage from animals, forestry, and neglected maintenance. Key maintenance challenges include erosion control, water management, and the structural aging of trail fixtures.

The document outlines practical solutions for trail maintenance, focusing on slope stabilization, drainage systems, and structural repairs using local materials. It emphasizes early detection of damage, timely repairs, and the importance of a clear division of responsibilities between various organizations such as municipalities, nature parks, and volunteers.

Sustainability is a central theme, with special attention given to mitigating water damage, as it is often the primary cause of trail degradation. Finally, the document provides resources, including manuals and guides, to support the implementation of best practices in trail maintenance.

**Literature:** Suisse Rando - Office fédéral des routes OFROU (2017) Construction et entretien des chemins de randonnée pédestre (Manual of construction and maintenance of hiking trails).

Ducornet, A. (2023) Hiking trail maintenance manual : water. Working document from Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe - Working Group 2023.

- Ducornet, A. (2023) Hiking trail maintenance manual : vegetation. Working document from Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe - Working Group 2023.

- Club Vosgien - Charte de balisage (2024) [www.club-vosgien.eu/le-balisage/](http://www.club-vosgien.eu/le-balisage/) Page 150 to 154.

#### Contact:

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Photo credits : Freiwilligeneinsatz ©Wanderverband Service GmbH for European Ramblers Association (ERA).



## 2.2

### Implementing Best Practices for Trail Maintenance and Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability: A Case Study of Gendarmstien in Denmark

Johanne Burgemann, Soenderborg municipality

**Keywords:** LQT-BE Long distance Gendarmstien, flooding, restored trail in environ-mentally friendly way

#### ABSTRACT

The Gendarmstien is a LQT Long distance trail, 84 km in 5 daily stages and is located in Denmark near the German border. It was certified for the first time in 2015 and in 2024 it will be re-certified.

Most of the trail runs along the coast by Flensburg Fjord and Soenderborg Bay who are both connected to the Baltic Sea.

The storm surge in October last year, 2023, hit the shores of Denmark, crashed buildings, harbours, dikes and destroyed roads and paths and caused major flooding.

The entire Gendarmstien, mostly in Soenderborg municipality, was more or less affected by this weather event that felt almost like if a little “tsunami” came by.

The water made a lot of damage to Gendarmstien, primarily due to soil erosion. Trees fell across the trail. Marking poles, wooden bridges and stairs disappeared and a huge amount of seaweed was washed up on the shores along with building parts, driftwood, garden fences, bridges and more.

Today most of the destroyed parts of Gendarmstien have been restored by making new bits of trail along the new coastline. They have been established in good co-operation with the landowners in an environ-mentally friendly way and in respect of the history of Gendarmstien.

We expect that parts of Gendarmstien will be vulnerable to future weather situations with high water lev-els and strong winds, and over time parts of the trail will probably have to be moved further into the fields.

**Literature:** GEUS (03-06-2024): <https://www.geus.dk/om-geus/nyheder/nyhedsarkiv/2024/jun/klima-skred>

#### Contact:

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## 2.3

### How climate changes affect mountain trails

**Bojan Rotovnik** (Head of EUMA expert group for hiking and mountain trails)

**Keywords:** Trails, effect of climate changes to trails, trails maintenance

#### ABSTRACT

Walking, hiking and mountain trails are footpaths of public interest for the purpose of walking, running or climbing, are located in any kind of landscapes, are visible and clearly recognisable in the terrain, and are physically marked and signposted. In Europe, walking, hiking and mountain trails are part of the network of trails under the umbrella of one of the two European NGOs: the European Union of Mountaineering Associations (EUMA) and the European Ramblers' Association (ERA). Trails are primarily managed and maintained by volunteers, way markers and members of mountain clubs and societies affiliated with national and regional associations.

The results of Erasmus+ project evaluation carried out on the basis on 37 questionnaires coming from 30 different countries show that we have about 1.500.000 km of trails in Europe. The total length of hiking trails maintained by members of EUMA and ERA is 1.145.976 km. Based on trail definition it is not possible to set a clear line between hiking and mountain trails because a lot of mountain trails start in the valleys where there are also walking and hiking trails. Also in the highland often it is not possible to distinguish between hiking and mountain trails because where technical difficulty of mountain trails is easy it is not a big difference compared to hiking trails.

Under this topic we will present effects of climate changes to the trails in highland/mountains including effects to the connecting trails from the valleys. The most important climbing change effects in the highlands are: the retreat and disappearance of mountain glaciers, heavy storms (high speed wind, heavy rain and lightning), flooding, landslides/rock falls, fires in nature, desertification of trails and changes in flora including the growth of invasive vegetation. Also we will present how national mountaineering associations are dealing with this kind of effect on trails.

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## 2.4

### Climate-adapted quality transformation

Liane Jordan, Deutscher Wanderverband Service GmbH

**Keywords:** climate change, influences, consequences, solutions, resilient

#### ABSTRACT

Diverse influences on hiking trails and their infrastructures were the catalyst for a new project by the German Hiking Association, which focuses on current challenges and possible solutions.

The project “Climate-Adapted Quality Transformation. Solutions for hiking infrastructure affected by climate change and digital quality monitoring” is funded in Germany by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection. Over the course of the project, analyses and further developments will be carried out in order to make hiking tourism in Germany more resilient for the future.

The basis for this is a Germany-wide survey that focuses on the current challenges and influences on hiking trails due to climate change and extreme weather conditions as well as the resulting consequences. In addition to a guideline with effective and practicable solutions, a digital quality monitoring system is being developed. The resulting digital record will be useful and helpful for sustainable maintenance of trails. An advisory board is supporting the whole project. First milestones of the project will be presented at the conference.

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Gefördert durch:



Bundesministerium  
für Wirtschaft  
und Klimaschutz

aufgrund eines Beschlusses  
des Deutschen Bundestages



## 2.5

### Climate change and the impact of fire on trails and vice versa

Ioannis Lagos, Georgios Koulalis

**Keywords:** LQT-BE Menalon Trail, fires, protection of forests

#### ABSTRACT

Our organisation, Menalon Social Enterprise (MSE), was founded in 2012.

Based in Arcadia, Peloponnese, MSE created and was certified by ERA in 2015, the LQT Menalon Trail.

Located in the centre of the Peloponnese, it runs along the slopes of the Menalon mountain range at an altitude of over 1000m connecting 9 old villages

Dear friends,

According to the EU Science Hub we lose in the EU every year 0.5 million hectares of forest to fires, in addition to the ecological, human and economic consequences.

MSE is actively involved with about 200 government-approved volunteers in the fire protection of the Menalon mountain forest.

We focus mainly on prevention, early detection and logistical support .

In Greece so far ,the summer of 2021 was the second disastrous one, with over 130,000 acres burnt by fires.

In 2021 on 6 and 7 August the state of emergency was at the highest level of fire risk 5 .

On August 8, 2021,a wildfire threatened our Arcadia region .

Through messaging apps we had instant communication between volunteers.

We guided the firefighters through our known trails with transit capability in the area. After the fire was extinguished, we observed and patrolled for reignition and kept watch at the forest entry points .

Fortunately near to our region Arcadia, in Olympia 15000 hectares was burned by the same fire threatening the ancient area of Olympia .

In conclusion, our operation substantially assisted firefighters and local authorities in protecting the forests in our area.

How to prevent fires that threaten our sparsely populated villages? Urbanization leads to the abandonment of forests and the absence of their protectors, shepherds, woodcutters, resin harvesters.

In the municipality of Gortys (Menalon paths area) the population has decreased by 20% in the last decade.

The promotion of sustainable walking tourism helps rural areas to strengthen their economy and resist the disasters of climate change. Fortunately this is happening in our region!

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## 3.1

### Development of new practices and to see their impact on environment

Cécile LEGRAND, FFRandonnée

**Keywords:** Promotion of hiking, Environmental impact, Fragile ecosystems, Impact study, Diversification of practices, Sustainable practices, Fast Hiking

#### ABSTRACT

The French Hiking Federation (FFRandonnée) plays a crucial role in promoting walking and hiking activities in France.

In recent years, and even more so after the COVID period, the growing enthusiasm for hiking and related activities has led to an increasing number of visitors to the ecosystems crossed by trails. Increased or unsuitable use of trails and activity sites weakens these ecosystems, making them increasingly fragile. FFRandonnée has therefore taken up this issue to better understand the impact of these sporting practices. Before conducting an impact study that could be endorsed by various stakeholders, the federation undertook a preliminary phase consisting of a report based on findings from literature reviews (studies conducted in France and abroad on the subject), surveys, and interviews with members of the FFRandonnée network. With the evolution and diversification of practices and an increasing awareness of environmental issues, FFRandonnée is pleased to present a summary of the main impacts observed to date, as well as initial initiatives implemented by the federation to encourage more sustainable and environmentally friendly practices, particularly with the development of a new discipline: Fast Hiking.

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## 3.2

### 'Via Romea Sanesa Accessible': when a cultural route meets social inclusion

Angelo Michele Latorre, Federazione Italiana Escursionismo

**Keywords:** people with disabilities, particular use of trails, technological aid

#### ABSTRACT

In European countries, the average age is gradually rising, the increase in the number of elderly people forces us to rethink spaces and also outdoor activities, in particular the use of paths by these people and people with disabilities.

Is it possible to make the network of trails accessible without undertaking expensive renovation investments? The presented project suggests yes and provides practical guidance on the necessary technological aids.

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## 3.3 Hiking's Charter

Démoulins Perrine, FFRandonnée

Richard Lallemant, FFRandonnée

**Keywords:** Hiking, Charter, sustainability, respect, education

### ABSTRACT

How to raise awareness among the growing hiker community, specifically new hikers? The French Hiking Federation gets start on renovation of its Hiker's Charter. The challenge is significant: preserving biodiversity, reducing the carbon impact on the planet and reducing conflicts of use and accidents. The aim is to inform and raise awareness among hikers about the environment and their own safety when hiking. The project is being carried out in collaboration with partners in tourism, the environment, etc. in order to increase its impact on the territory and create synergies. The ambition is to build innovative tools and forms of communication that take into account the digital, fun, international dimension, etc.

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## 3.4

### Status and Development of E-Paths, LQT, and Green Trails

**Steen Kobberø-Hansen**, European Ramblers' Association (European Hiking Federation)

**Liane Jordan**, Deutscher Wanderverband Service GmbH

**Keywords:** E-paths, verified E-paths, Leading Quality Trails - Best of Europe, LQT-BE Day Walks, LQT-BE Region, Green Trails, Green Chapter

#### ABSTRACT

The European Ramblers Association (ERA) continues to champion the development of sustainable, high-quality hiking trails across Europe. The E-Paths, Leading Quality Trails (LQT), and Green Trails initiatives are cornerstones of this effort, facilitating cross-border connectivity, outdoor recreation, and cultural exchange.

#### E-Paths

E-Paths are a network of 12 long-distance trails, extending around 75,000 kilometers and connecting 20 countries. The recent inclusion of Romania in the E8 route highlights ERA's commitment to expanding access to new cultural and natural landscapes.

In addition to general trail maintenance and marking, ERA has introduced a verification process for selected paths under the "Verified E-paths" initiative. This process ensures that certain sections meet specific quality standards, making these routes highly recommended for hiking holidays. Verified E-paths are now accessible in countries like Norway, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, further enhancing the reliability and safety of these iconic trails.

#### Leading Quality Trails (LQT-BE)

The LQT certification program, "Best of Europe," continues to set the standard for hiking trail excellence, emphasizing landscape diversity, sustainable management, and a superior hiking experience. In addition to the 22 long-distance trails, ERA is working to expand its offering through "Quality Day Walks." These shorter, high-quality trails are designed to enhance local tourism and provide accessible hiking experiences. The recent assessment of 10 new potential Quality Day Walks in Nationalpark Hoge Kempen underlines the continuous development of this initiative. Moreover, the "Quality Day Walk" initiative, which certifies shorter trails across Europe, reflects ERA's commitment to making premium hiking experiences accessible to a wider audience. The LQT portfolio also offers the holistic approach of a "Quality Region" - it promises the perfect hiking experience: whether a day tour with friends or family, a complete hiking vacation without changing accommodation or a multi-day tour with a large pack: the criteria of the "Quality Region" meet the highest standards in terms of trails, hosts, service and tourist information. In addition, the certification process strengthens networking and exchange within a region and gives the hiking offer the necessary focus on sustainability.

## Green Trails

The Green Trails initiative is dedicated to promoting sustainability in trail development, focusing on biodiversity conservation, eco-friendly infrastructure, and community involvement.

The future inclusion of a “Green Chapter” in the LQT certification process will embed these principles into the framework, ensuring that environmental concerns are a core consideration in the management and development of certified trails. This initiative demonstrates ERA’s forward-thinking approach to trail management, aiming to reduce environmental impact while promoting educational opportunities on sustainability.

In conclusion, ERA’s ongoing work on E-Paths, LQT, and Green Trails exemplifies its commitment to enhancing the hiking experience across Europe while prioritizing sustainability and environmental protection. These developments will be explored in more detail at the 3rd European Trails Conference in Paris, offering further opportunities for collaboration and growth in sustainable tourism.

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## 3.5

### PAW – Project AlpsWatch

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**Keywords:** natural hazards, systematic monitoring schemes, safety information, mountain areas, highly qualified crowd

#### ABSTRACT

Engaging a highly qualified crowd as human sensors for natural hazards

Project AlpsWatch aims to address one of the more pressing issues in alpine science – the availability of reliable data about hazardous natural processes. As remote mountain areas are not typically covered by systematic monitoring schemes for natural hazards, Project AlpsWatch will leverage the power of a ‘highly qualified crowd’ of professional mountain and hiking guides, alpine rescue squads, and groups of similarly skilled professionals in adjacent areas (e.g., volunteer organisations) to capture natural hazards in an alpine environment.

The focus will be on providing these groups with an easy-to-use tool (a web-app) to capture and categorize observations to increase relevant safety information for themselves as well as their peers. By the same token, the captured data will provide sufficient depth of information for subsequent research to inform future policy decisions and further academic research in relevant fields. In addition, the collected data will also be made available to regional and local governmental agencies and related entities (e.g., disaster and recovery teams) to allow for swift intervention for the most urgent and impactful natural hazards. In a first phase, Project AlpsWatch will provide an MVP pilot to a subset of its defined user group by the end of 2024; a broader roll-out is planned for phase 2 in 2025.

Project AlpsWatch is a cooperation of the Tyrolean Association of Mountain Sports Guides, the Austrian Board for Alpine Safety (ÖKAS) as well as the Department of Geography at the University of Innsbruck. The project is sponsored by the Austrian Region of Tyrol under a lighthouse digitization project framework.

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## 3.6

### Trails for All and Everyone - Accessible Hiking Trails in the Baltic Countries

Asnāte Ziemele

**Keywords:** Coastal Hiking Trail, Forest Trail, accessibility, improvement for different social groups, specific criteria, hiker-friendly sign.

#### ABSTRACT

The Forest Trail and Coastal Hiking Trail are two long-distance hiking paths that cross the three Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Both trails are part of the ERA network, with the Coastal Hiking Trail forming part of the E9 route and the Forest Trail being part of the E11 route, both connecting from Poland. As their names suggest, the Coastal Hiking Trail follows the coastline of the Baltic Sea, offering diverse landscapes with white sandy beaches, while the Forest Trail leads hikers through some of the most beautiful forest landscapes and national parks.

Accessibility issues on both trails have been addressed by the project “Forest and Coastal Hiking Trails’ Accessibility Improvement for Different Social Groups,” supported by the Interreg Est-Lat programme. Ten partner organisations from Latvia and Estonia are working together to develop and pilot accessibility solutions for wheelchair users, people with visual impairments, seniors, families with young children, and school-aged youth. Last summer, the solutions were piloted with the target groups and, after improvements based on the findings, were made available to the public. Floating wheelchairs and special decks for accessing the sea were introduced on the beach in the popular resort town of Pärnu in Estonia and in the village of Apšuciems, Latvia, along the Coastal Hiking Trail. A specialised audio guide for visually impaired people was installed on the section of the Forest Trail that passes through Kuldīga, a UNESCO World Heritage town. Special hikes were organised with school-aged youth to teach skills in hike planning and orienteering in nature.

The Hiker-friendly sign, used across all three Baltic countries to mark accommodation, food, and other services that cater to hikers and understand their needs, was expanded with additional signs: wheelchair accessible, visually accessible, and children-friendly. Each additional sign indicates specific criteria that ensure safety and convenience for the respective target groups. The criteria, along with explanations, are available online for service providers operating along the hiking trails.

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