

GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Reviving Tradition: The Last Route of Transhumance in Castro Daire

Destination, Country: Castro Daire, Portugal

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In the category: Culture & Tradition

The Story in a picture:

This picture represents part of the traditional event, highlighted in this Good Practice Story: “A Última Rota da Transumância”.



Summary:

The municipality of Castro Daire has always lived from livestock and nature; thus, shepherds and cattle have always been present in the past of this destination. The presence of these two elements resulted in a unique connection during the Transhumance. This was a practice done by the shepherds and the animals, which moved with the seasons; i.e., they exchanged places between winter and summer pastures and vice versa.

In this sense, and given the importance of keeping alive the traditions and memories of local communities, an event was created that recreates exactly the last route that was done, which was named "The Last Transhumance Route." Arising from this event, other initiatives were put in place to promote local culture and traditions.

You are about to embark on a journey through the lands of Castro Daire, where cattle and people leave their homes to welcome you!

Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

On the summit of a plateau hill, torn by the Paiva river, lies a territory boasting green landscapes, the valley, the river, the mountains, and the plateau.

Castro Daire has its origins in an ancient settlement on top of this land, which has been occupied since prehistoric times until today, with about 13.736 residents.

This city is located in the central region, in the district of Viseu, and extends over 380 km², divided into 16 parishes: Almofala, Cabril, Castro Daire, Cujó, Gosende, Mões, Moledo, Monteiras, Pepim, Pinheiro, S. Joaninho, the Parishes of Mamouros, Alva, and Ribolhos; the Parishes of Mezio and Moura Morta; the Parishes of Parada de Ester and Ester; the Parishes of Picão and Ermida; the Parishes of Reriz and Gafanhão.

Castro Daire opens doors to an impressive journey, which allows you to enjoy unique views and places by its landscape. Castro Daire, besides the landscape, holds a vast architectural heritage rich in testimonies of the past, in which culminate the authentic traditions that are worth being preserved and valued, including: monuments, religious manifestations, fairs, handicrafts, gastronomy, and much more.

In all parishes, agrarian practice prevails as an economic activity, and that, with the evolution of technology, has also resulted in an ethnological approach that allows you to make a voyage of discovery of the beginnings of the main form of sustenance of this place.

All this, combined with the hospitality of the locals, are good references for visiting this Magic Territory!

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

For as long as people can remember, they have always been fond of animals. Those who live in rural areas know the value of livestock and the importance of raising animals and simultaneously taking advantage of green spaces in their favour.

Early on, in the Iberian Peninsula, we began to witness natural and seasonal movements of cattle that left their home to go and taste the pastures of other territories. This phenomenon is called Transhumance. Transhumance is done by shepherds and animals that move with the seasons, i.e., they change places between winter and summer pastures and vice-versa.

In Portugal, transhumance had a great impact: in the summer, it was practiced from the Mondego lowlands to the Estrela and Montemuro mountains, and in the winter, it was done the other way around.

The Middle Ages was a key period due to the great demand for wool in the markets, but it was also the period where transhumance suffered a great decline! Despite being so valued, the working population was aging and no longer had the ability to guide livestock. This led to a shortage of shepherds, creating a consequent decline in cattle. In addition, it was at this time that technological practices appeared, which led to the creation of modern stabling systems, and this caused costs to increase, and there was a new orientation, which eventually contributed to the decline of the activity.

For those who don't know, transhumance was reflected in a route on cattle roads that the cattle crossed. However, with time, the ground of these roads was lost to give place to train or truck trips, which made the process economically more efficient and with greater convenience.

If not revived, ancient traditions like this will be lost forever and rural territories like Castro Daire will suffer from a huge heritage loss, namely on culture and identity!

Furthermore, we are witnessing a shift in the tourism paradigm. Visitors are now avoiding the “must-do” places, where overtourism is a big issue and turning their attention to authentic and unique experiences, which can more easily be found in rural destinations. With a century-old tradition like this on the verge of being lost, Castro Daire was also missing a big part of the tourist potential present in the territory.

But all of this was about to change! Come with us to revive this tradition and know more about Castro Daire!

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

Castro Daire did not want to lose such an iconic and meaningful tradition for its people and decided to innovate!

That was when the idea of creating an event originated—a concept aimed at recreating and reviving the tradition of the displacement of flocks and shepherds that had occurred for many years. This event was given the name of “The Last Route of Transhumance”.

This name culminates in the remembrance of tradition and results in the recovery of the section of the last route, which took place in 1999. Thus, the intention is for the memories of transhumance to be experienced by all who visit the territory through the recreation of the journey made on walks, experiences, and unique events where the pastoral imagery and transhumance mark these routes.

This route marks the difference in this territory. It goes through several villages in a rural itinerary, giving the opportunity to go through stretches of mountains, valleys, rivers, and streams. It is a journey through time, always meeting in the end with the local culture and traditions. The inherent culture of each people and the customs of the region have always been part of this very important milestone.

For all those who want to embrace the culture of Castro Daire through the route, several interpretative panels were placed to describe the main moments of everything involving Transhumance, so that they can authentically understand how everything was done. This recreation of years of memory can be experienced throughout the year, allowing you to enjoy the differences highlighted between the various seasons of the year because you can see different landscapes, but all of them are enchanting. Thus, it is also possible to promote territorial cohesion by reinforcing the need to preserve the heritage and value the authentic traditions, leading to the dynamization of local economies and attracting the maximum number of visitors. Visitors are attracted to participate in this event not only by the unique experience but also by the fact that it is a free entrance event and allows access to several different artistic and cultural practices.

This project thus intends to:

- Emphasize transhumance and traditional pastoralism;
- Preserve the culture inherent to the people who inhabit the territory;
- Increase the level of participation of the local population;
- Mitigate the regressive tendencies that the territory faces, through the qualification and valorization of endogenous resources;

- Develop a dynamic program of activities, promoting regional artists and artistic groups and all the economic agents of the destination, to increase their visibility and recognition.

Still connected with the topic of Transhumance, the municipality of Castro Daire has also developed several other initiatives besides this event. These initiatives include:

- Creation of “Sabores da Transumância” – This a gastronomic festival that aims to highlight the two endogenous products of the territory - the goat and the lamb;
- Still in gastronomy, the Confraria do Bolo Podre e Gastronomia Montemuro launched an innovative product related to transhumance. They used the dough of rotten cake and, in the shape of a rattle, they filled it with ham and cheese and called this product chocalhito. Today, you can find it in one of the various pastry shops in Castro Daire;
- In Handicrafts, taking advantage of the raw material, burel, Handicraft Cooperatives innovated their work by developing pieces related to the transhumance theme;
- Creation of the “Transhumance Pedagogical Farm” - This project aims to promote and preserve the memories and traditions of this territory, valuing its identity and contributing to the recovery of ancestral practices that have been disappearing over the years. The dissemination of this project aims to bring the authenticity and cultural genuineness of this tradition to the school population and, consequently, to the local population of Castro Daire. The main focus of this initiative is based on the dynamization of several pedagogical actions and the dissemination of this cultural heritage. This includes the making of artifacts through workshops and sessions for sharing customs and popular wisdom.

Lastly, there is another initiative managed by the municipality of Castro Daire that should also be highlighted. It is called “Castro Daire – 1000 Experiences”.

The Municipality of Castro Daire, as a way of promoting the great potentialities of tourism, has developed tourist packages designed for the promotion of this magical territory. These packages offer unique and differentiating experiences, and partnerships have been established with several local agents. New dynamics were created, bringing the tourism potential of the territory—natural, heritage, cultural, thermal, gastronomic—closer to the markets and agents of the tourism sector. This allows for the encouragement of attracting new tourists and visitors, which is fundamental to leverage the development and growth of this region.

The Tourism Offer Package “Transhumance Experience” is created for two people, available from June to August. It provides tourists with unique moments of a culture loaded with stories of transhumance. On the first day, you will be received at the Thermal Spa of Carvalhal, enjoying a facial massage “Rosmaninho,” followed by a visit to the Interpretation and Information Centre of Montemuro and Paiva. In the afternoon, we propose the stretch “The Last Route of the Transhumance” - Castro Daire - Vilar (7Km). In the village, you will be treated to the “Flavours of the Transhumance” (tasting and snack). On the 2nd day, there will be the experience of “Being Shepherds for a day,” having the opportunity to live with the shepherds and admire the flocks. Lunch will be served in the mountains.

In the afternoon you can visit the village of Campo Benfeito which is part of the “Aldeias de Portugal”.

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

“A Última Rota da Transumância” is being a success!

Since 2015, the municipality of Castro Daire has seen the positive impact that this practice brought to the territory. Firstly, they managed, through this practice, to recover the forgotten traditions of this territory through the routes that were outlined and all the activities that were developed around this tradition.

The residents were the key element for the municipality to achieve a great reach with the realization of this event because they themselves wanted to see the memories of transhumance present. They made a point of helping the municipality in the promotion of the event. Expressions from the shepherds of Castro Daire that prove this involvement are remembered, such as Mr. Júlio, who spent much of his time saying, "Bring visitors and tourists to see this great journey that we made!" All this, and the initiatives that were created, demonstrate the involvement of the entire community and, above all, the passion of the residents and the pride for their land.

This event worked as well as expected because not only did the residents put their hands to the work, but also the businesses and all the local economic agents who grabbed the opportunity that the town council threw to everyone. All of them, whether related to crafts, gastronomy, hospitality, agriculture, or any other sector of activity, were committed to helping and being present in the organization of the event.

Thus, with the involvement of residents, along with businesses and the City Council, the result was very positive. This ended up being commented on in neighboring municipalities, as they consider it was a very well-run event and of great relevance to those who visit this territory.

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

Organising an event as significant as "The Last Route of Transhumance" poses several challenges, the foremost being the coordination and involvement of numerous community members. The event brings together a diverse range of participants, including shepherds and their companions, the esteemed Confraternity of Bolo Podre and Montemuro Gastronomy, local producers, Folkloric Groups, Philharmonic Bands, Craftsmen, Traditional Music Groups, Concertinas, and Challenge Singers from Beira Alta, not to mention the indispensable support from restaurants and many others.

To tackle these challenges, effective coordination and communication are paramount. Establishing a dedicated organizing committee comprising representatives from each participating group can ensure smooth collaboration. Regular meetings, both in person and virtual, can facilitate open communication, allowing for the exchange of ideas, updates, and addressing any concerns. Clear channels of communication, such as email lists, social media groups, and a centralized event website, should be established to ensure that all participants stay informed and connected throughout the planning process.

Furthermore, in the first edition, "The Last Route of Transhumance" presented a new experience for many shepherds, who initially exhibited some reluctance in participating. However, that inaugural year proved to be a turning point, as it showcased the event's genuine appreciation for shepherds, pastoralism, flocks, and the majestic Montemuro Mountains.

This recognition and celebration served as a catalyst for subsequent editions, fostering increased interest and greater participation from shepherds and other stakeholders. Over time, the event's significance and positive impact on the community propelled its growth, garnering wider support and enthusiasm from all involved. More detailed information on the results is available in the section below.

Today, "The Last Route of Transhumance" stands as a testament to the enduring value placed on shepherds, the pastoral way of life, the welfare of flocks, and the cherished Montemuro Mountains.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

"The Last Route of Transhumance" has yielded remarkable results, with the number of participants steadily increasing year after year and extending its reach to encompass more locations across the country. The latest edition, held on 24 and 25 June 2023, witnessed an unprecedented surge in

participation, with a remarkable 50% increase in the number of attendees hailing from diverse regions throughout Portugal.

Accommodation options also experienced a significant boost, particularly in the realm of local lodging within the municipality, with a remarkable increase of over 200%. This surge in accommodation availability further facilitated the influx of participants and ensured their comfortable stay during the event.

Since its inception in 2015, the recreation of "The Last Route of Transhumance" has seen a substantial rise in the engagement of shepherds and their herds. What began with approximately 800 cattle and 50 shepherds has gradually expanded over the years. Presently, the event attracts a range of 1500 to 2000 cattle and around 100 shepherds, underscoring its growing significance in the preservation and celebration of pastoralism.

Events of this nature have proven instrumental in driving local development and enhancing the profile of the region. They serve as catalysts for economic growth by generating opportunities for the local territories, boosting consumption, and promoting the region's offerings. "The Last Transhumance Route" has successfully enticed an increasing number of tourists and visitors to Castro Daire, leading to a surge in overnight stays, meals sold, and the consumption of local products. This surge in visitor numbers has had a positive impact on the local economy, creating job opportunities and fostering the production and recognition of endogenous products. Moreover, the event amplifies the intrinsic value of pastoralism, bolstering the appreciation and preservation of this cultural heritage within the territory.

In summary, "The Last Route of Transhumance" has left an indelible mark on Castro Daire, attracting a growing number of participants, stimulating the local economy, and amplifying the value of pastoral traditions and the region as a whole.

Tips for other destinations

Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions

The preservation of identity, culture, and traditions inherent to the people of a place should always be a priority, because it is these people who contribute to the existence and dynamism of a destination.

People are the link between what exists in the territory and those who visit it; they are the ones who create unique and personalized experiences, and should therefore be prioritized.

In this sense, it is important to involve people, create events or activities that can arouse interest and more than that, that are authentic and recreate or revive moments from the past, because it is also important not to lose traditions!

The case of Castro Daire is very particular, because it is a unique practice worldwide, the recovery of the last transhumance route, but the principle adopted by Castro Daire with the creation of the same, can be applied in other destinations but allied to other themes, as long as the focus is to involve communities, preserve traditions, always allied to the creation of unique memories in the place!

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence. Rather than written, this event is better experienced through photos and videos. To enable this visualization, a shared folder was created with beautiful pictures and heart-warming videos about the event and it is available at <https://1drv.ms/f/s!AkbYqacPRQNjeZ7gCPp9WgiWd9JiQ>.