



AMAZON OF EUROPE BIKE TRAIL

QUALITY ASSURANCE PLAN
(OUTPUT T5.2)

Quality Assurance Plan for the Integrated Sustainable Tourism Products, including AoE Booking Center

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1 Introduction

The “Amazon of Europe Bike Trail” is an international long-distance cycling trail offering a unique opportunity for cycling holidays, following the natural meanders of the rivers Mura, Drava and Danube, for over 1,250 km. The bike trail gives access to the world’s first five country (Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia) UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The “Amazon of Europe Bike Trail” is offered in two different routes, one south and one north route. The in total 27 stages go along forests, rivers and wetlands in protected areas with a length of 1.250 km.

The Amazon of Europe Bike Trail has its own transnational “Trail Management & Booking Center” (later on called “AOE Booking Center”) which will offer a unique experience to its tourists by linking individual freedom with service, safety and sustainability as well as partnering international travel agencies with sophisticated services as a licensed and local based tour operator.

Furthermore, together with the WWF and the Destination Development Organization “Amazon of Europe Bike Trail” (later on called “AOE DDO”), the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail is managing a special impact program for supporting selected nature conservation projects in the UNESCO biosphere reserve.

Within this project of the Danube Transnational Program, 15 regional and topical partners from five countries (AUT, SLO, HUN, CRO, SRB) have been involved. For this reason, it is necessary to follow a clear concept to position the “Amazon of Europe Bike Trail” as a future leading long distance bike product in Europe, to open new markets for the transnational destination and to offer perspectives and benefits for the local partners. To guarantee quality and sustainability and to promote this development, the following quality assurance plan (later on called QAP) has been implemented as an important part of the future success of “Amazon of Europe Bike Trail”.

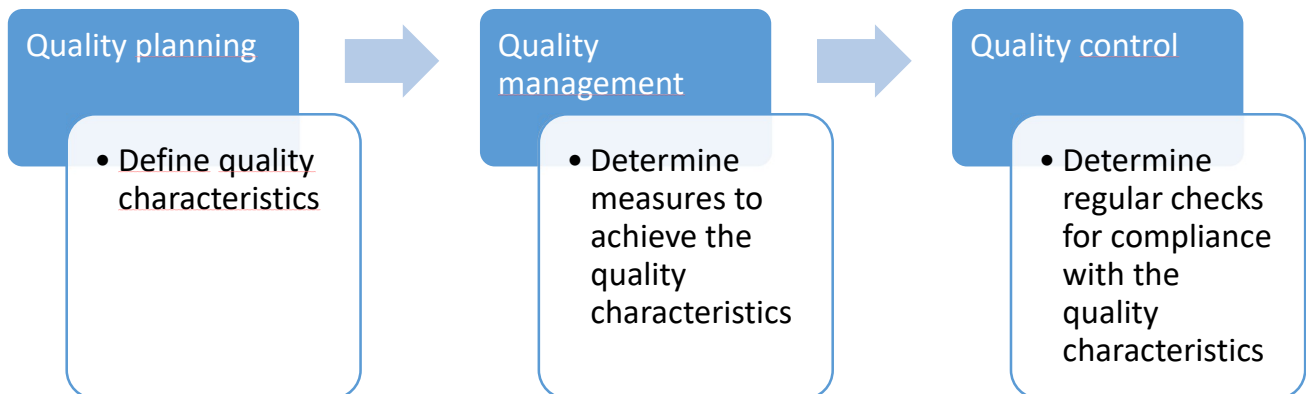
The QAP will be the most significant instrument for the evaluation, improvement, and further development of the product. The QAP is designed applicable and replicable. That means, it is ready for the roll out for other tourism projects within the regions of the Danube Transnational Programme.

2 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this quality assurance plan is to identify best practices that are feasible to implement in order to achieve and monitor a high quality. High quality is an important criterion

- to satisfy customers,
- to avoid follow-up costs through complaints or rework,
- to avoid a loss of image and
- to keep high motivation among all stakeholders and service providers.

The scope of this QAP covers the following steps: Quality assurance is based on the phases of quality planning, quality management and quality control. As shown in the figure, quality characteristics are first defined within these phases, then measures to achieve these characteristics are defined and these are finally checked for compliance.



The result of the quality planning will be a quality assurance plan that describes the quality assurance measures planned for the product AOE Bike Trail and specifies the responsibilities and deadlines.

The two main organizations involved in quality management and quality control are the AOE-DDO and the AOE Booking Center. Their roles and responsibilities within this QAP are described in chapter 4 in detail.

3 Reference Documents

The following documents are referenced elsewhere in the **Quality Assurance Plan**. Most of the documents are deliverables or outputs of the AOE Bike Trail project and could be found on the specified Url or as a deliverable in the EMS of the AOE Bike Trail project:

- AoE Bike Trail: Amazon of Europe Bike Trail Cycling Guide. URL: <https://aoebiketrail.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Amazon-of-Europe-Bike-Trail-Cycling-Guide.pdf> (accessed on 03/09/21)
- Iskriva: Amazon of Europe Bike Trail. Cycling map. URL: <https://aoebiketrail.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Amazon-of-Europe-Bike-Trail-Cycling-Map.pdf> (accessed on 03/09/21)
- WWF (2021): Der Amazon of Europe Radweg. URL: <http://www.amazon-of-europe.com/de/aoe-bike-trail/> (accessed on 03/09/21)
- WP3 Iskriva – AOE Destination Development Organization statute
- WP3 Trail Angels Quality Criteria and partnership model
- WP4 WWF Austria - Nature oriented visitor guidance
- WP5 Westpannon – Detailed route and infrastructure plan
- WP6 WWF Adria – Valorization programme
- WP7 Iskriva and Trail Angels – Digital Marketing Strategy

4 Management

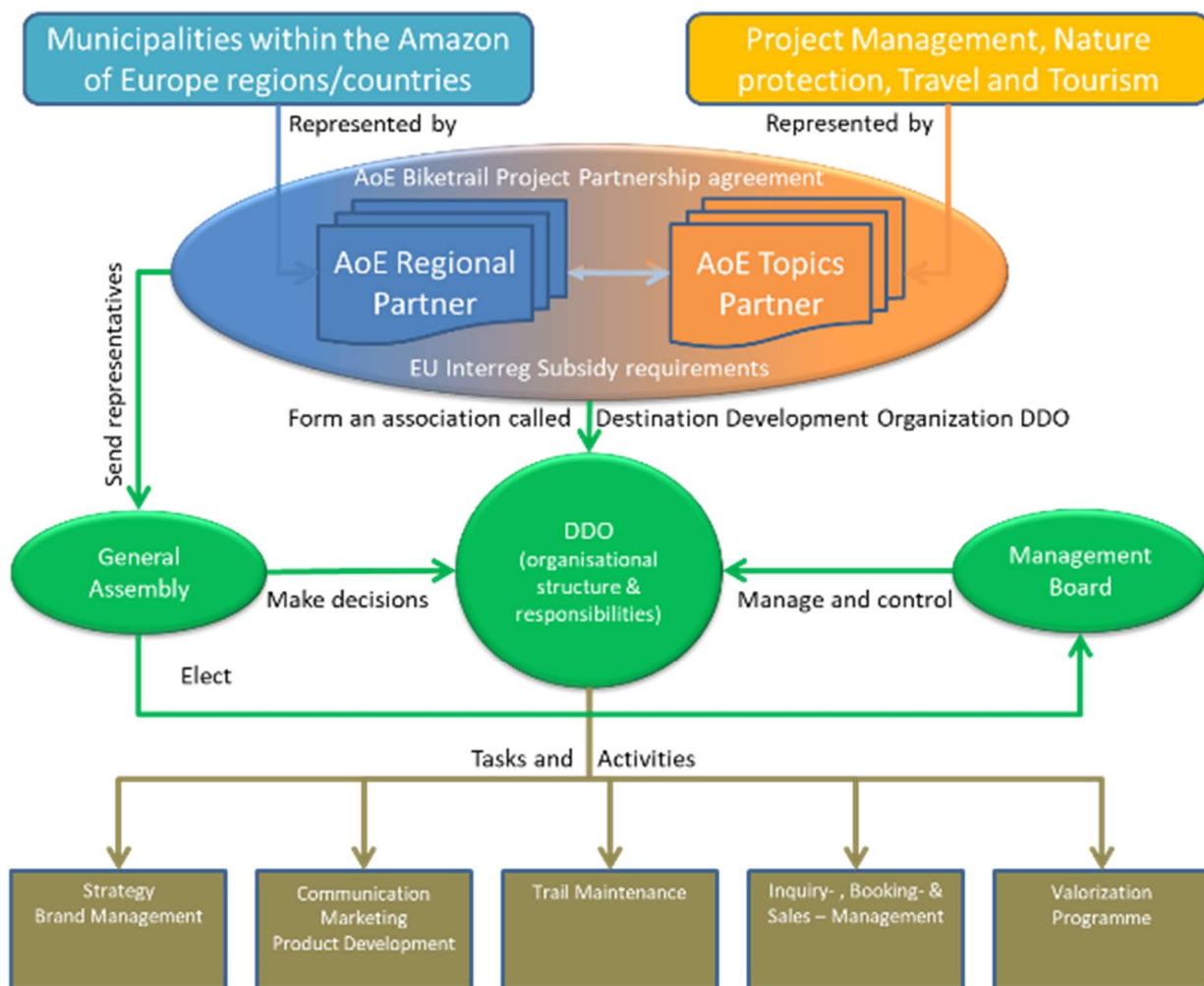
4.1 Organization

The AOE DDO is an organization formed as an output of the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail project and based on the rules and obligations in accordance with the provisions of its statute (see appendix).

The AOE DDO owns the trademark rights of the protected word and image trademark Amazon of Europe Bike Trail as well as the rights to the Internet domain www.aobikettrail.com.

The regions and municipalities (regional partners) on the AOE Bike Trail as well as international organisations responsible for project management (Iskriva), nature protection (WWF) and travel and tourism (Trail Angels) are partners of the AOE DDO and within the AOE DDO jointly responsible for the AOE Bike Trail product management including service quality, on-site handling for guests, quality assurance and brand management.

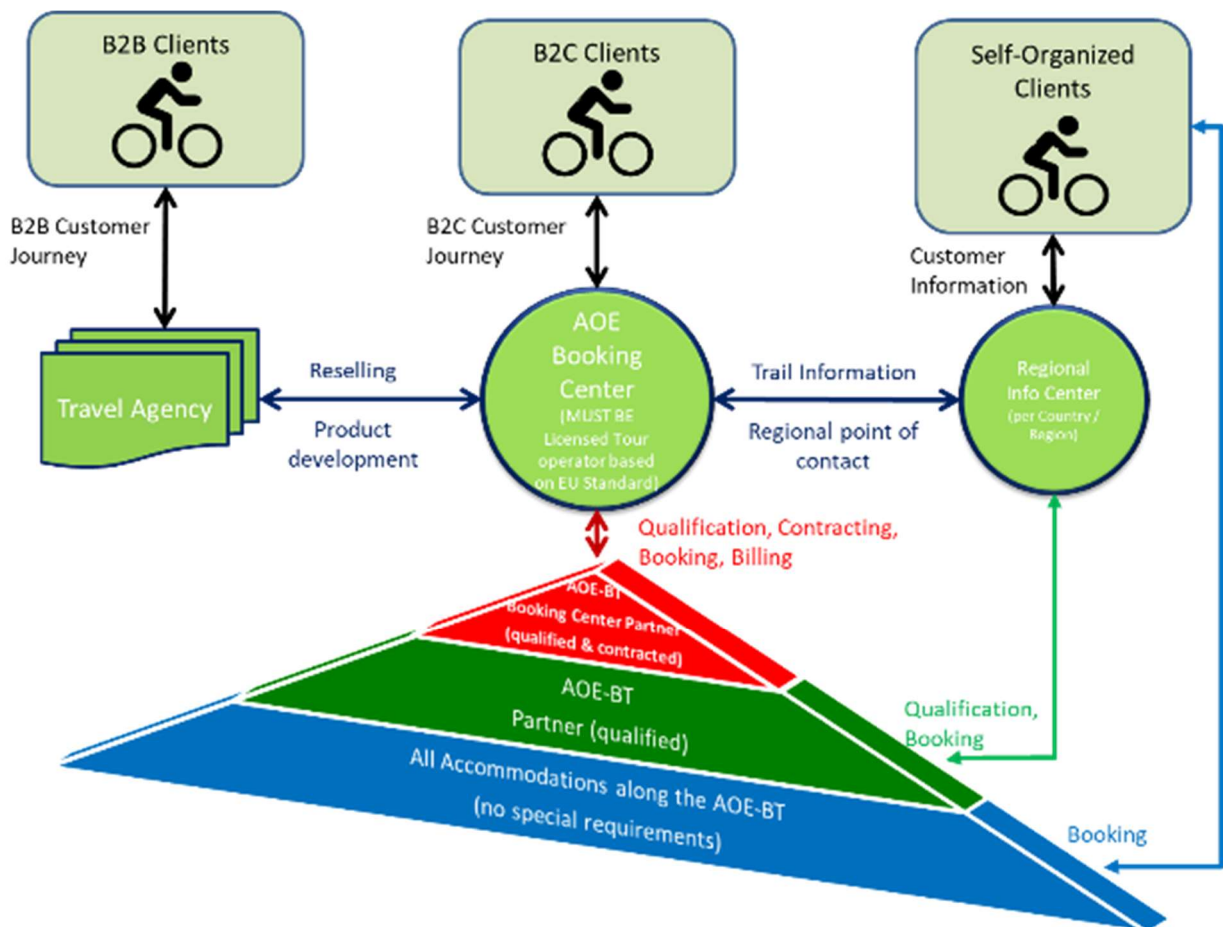
The following organigram shows the DDO partnership and its main bodies as well as the main tasks and activities, which are described in the next section.



The AoE Booking Center is responsible for developing and managing the AoE Bike Trail as a sustainable tourism product as followed:

- Fulfilling the values and principles of a fair, balanced, transparent & sustainable business model
- Taking responsibility for the product in its entirety
- Servicing the product's owners (DDO) based on a license contract
- Servicing the travellers (esp. the international ones) along the defined customer journey
- Partnering the local service providers and raising their skills and quality
- Steady work on the further development of the product and on the future strategy

The AoE Booking Center, which must be a licensed tour operator based on EU standards operates the whole customer journey and booking process for the clients as well as for acquiring and contracting the AoE Service Provider (accommodations, mobility, guides, etc.). It will be supported by regional info centers mainly for self-organized clients as well as by travel agencies for acquiring and servicing B2B customers.



The AOE service providers are divided into 3 different categories as follows:

Type of partnership	Main Benefits	Main requirements
AOE Booking Center Partner Based on partnership contract with official AOE Booking Center	Will receive Bookings by AOE Booking Center No marketing fee	Exclusive Trail Rooms (Allotments) Commission Quality Management System
AOE-BT Partner Based on cooperation agreement with AOE DDO	Participating in an international flagship product Presented on the Trail's official website & app Presented on the Trail's official leaflets & guidebooks	Marketing fee payable to AOE DDO Fulfill the Quality Criteria Setting
All other accommodations No contract / cooperation	No special benefits	No special requirements

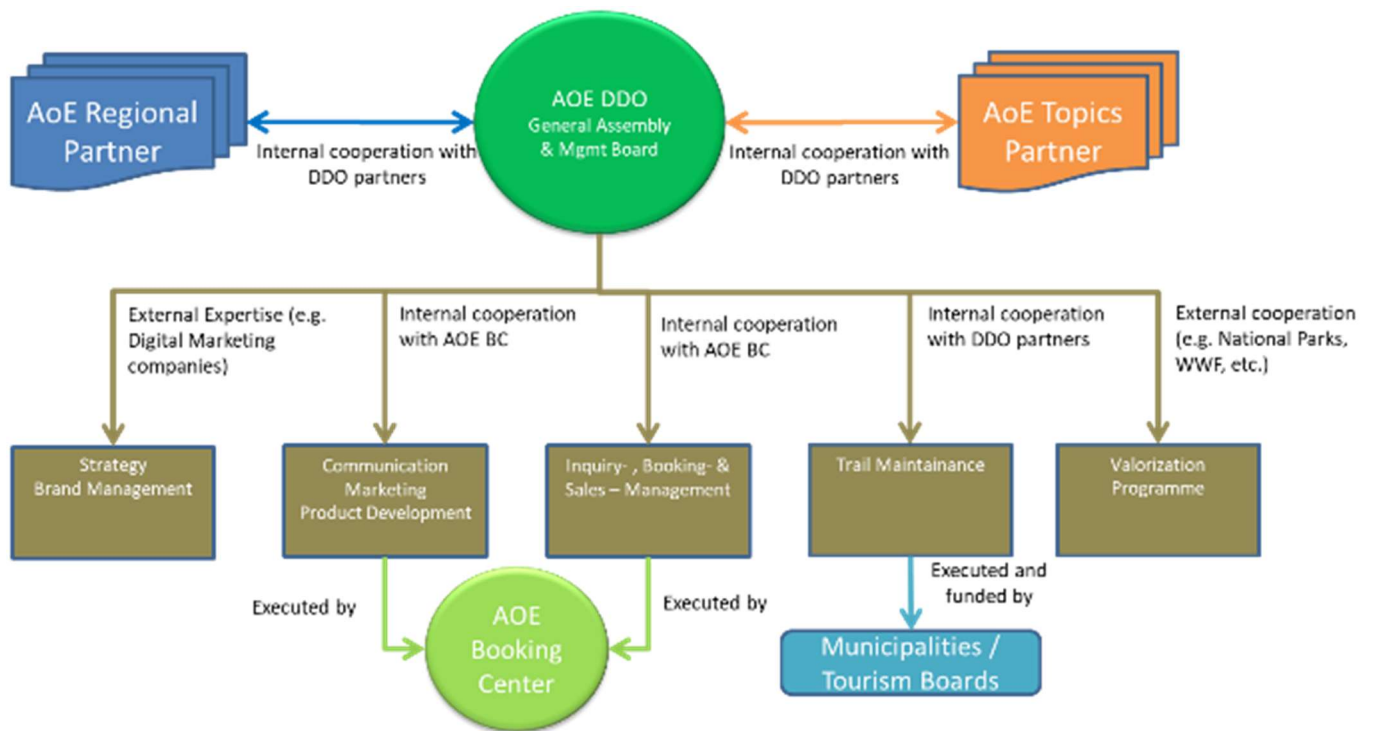
4.2 Tasks & Activities

The following tasks and responsibilities define the work content and the scope of work of the AOE DDO and the AOE Booking Center in respect of the quality assurance plan. Based on legal, economic and ecological requirements the daily business of these tasks will be delegated to sub working groups, external companies, public institutions, etc. The responsibilities will remain at the AOE DDO:

- Strategy, brand management: coordination of strategic decisions and brand management according to the vision, mission and values defined in chapter 5.
- Communication, marketing and development of tourist products: design of communication and marketing activities for the promotion of tourism products according to the marketing strategy defined during the AOE Bike Trail project and product development according to the sustainability criteria defined in chapter 5
- Trail Maintenance: development of a Trail Maintenance Plan, which clearly defines the responsibility for maintenance and improvements for each segment of the AoE Bike Trail and for existing and new infrastructure (Sign posts, info boards, etc.). Based on the Trail Maintenance plan the AOE DDO must control and manage the quality of the AoE Bike Trail.

- Inquiry-, Booking- & Sales-Management: setting up and working together with the AoE Booking Center according to the Booking Center Guidelines defined during the AoE Bike Trail project.
- Valorization program: implementing and expanding the valorization program – which has been developed during the AoE Bike Trail project – and try to find additional supporters who will support tourism products and the TBR MDD valorization program with donations and / or services.

The following slide shows the cooperation paths for these tasks, more detailed activities according to the quality assurance plan will be described in chapter 6.



5 Quality Planning

In today's hospitality and tourism industry, the pressure to meet and surpass customer expectations are higher than ever, so what sets apart a regular experience and a great experience? Regular assessment of quality is a key factor in the success of any tourism product, regardless of the size or type of operation.

Quality planning describes the quality characteristics and criteria, which will be used for quality control and quality management. The following categories are used within this chapter

- Vision, Mission & Values
- Sustainability Criteria & Development
- Stakeholder & Service providers
- Guests & Customers
- Routes & Infrastructure

5.1 Vision, Mission & Values

The vision of the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail is to be the most famous bookable long-distance bike trail in Europe, allowing responsible travel, discovering unique river landscapes along the Mura, Drava and Danube rivers.

The mission of the "Amazon of Europe Bike Trail" is to open with the new perspectives for sustainable development in the river landscape of the area, by connecting responsible tourism with the preservation of nature:

- combining lifetime cycling experiences with well-defined contributions for nature conservation within the cycle for nature program
- pioneering environmental, economic, and social sustainable development
- involving and empowering local communities to cherish and commit to the preservation of their environment and to partner with them for the sustainable tourism business model
- championing the unique river landscape of the future 5-country UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube and contributing, on the long-term, to its protection

Brand values are leaning on the following immanent values in this region:

- Intactness of the river landscape
- Wilderness
- Fragility
- Natural richness and vitality
- Source of inspiration and mindfulness
- Source of life and abundance

The Amazon of Europe Bike Trail Value Diamond includes the following values that must be embodied by everyone involved in the tourism product:

- Sustainability (ecological, economic, social)
- Collaboration (cooperation, inclusion, transformation)
- Integrity (transparency, honesty, ethics)
- Commitment (passion, competence, pioneering).

During quality control AOD DDO and AOE Booking Center must ensure that all decisions, activities and further developments within and around the AOE Bike Trail always follow the vision, mission and values defined here!

5.2 Sustainability Criteria & Development

The aim of AOE Bike Trail is to combine lifetime cycling experiences with well-defined contributions for nature conservation within the cycle for nature program, pioneering environmental, economic, and social sustainable development. Championing the unique river landscape of the future 5-country UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube and contributing, on the long-term, to its protection. Furthermore, these should result in benefits for the rural areas along the Mura, Drava and Danube.

There are 3 main pillars of sustainable tourism:

- Environmental responsibility– benefit for river wilderness future 5-country Biosphere reserve, including valorization program and nature oriented visitor guidance
- Social development – including a broad circle of stakeholders in the regions along the trails especially small scaled family run accommodations, mobility services, etc.
- Economic development – long term sustainable business model for benefitting the rural areas, based on bookable cycling products.

An important part within these criteria will be the **Valorization Programme**, which was created during the AOE Bike Trail project. It seems worth mentioning that the AoE Bike Trail funding mechanism is not just the traditional process (e.g. the donations from big tourism corporations - like the German Tour Operator “TUI” for instance – to some foundations/NGOs devoted to nature conservation) where an »impacting« activity (as tourism is) has to pay back a little % of its revenues for »partially compensate« the damages created by its business-related activities.

In the case of AoE Bike Trail project (and the current Valorization Programme is the instrument for it) is concerned, there is a sort of pre-DDO (i.e. the project partnerships) that has created a “destination” for bike tourism (roughly corresponding to the TBR MDD) who generates new incomes for the local economic operators and in last instance for local communities: therefore it seems pretty fair that a % of such incomes has to be re-invested by the AOE DDO for improving the product also through the protection of the main natural assets, that are actually the main tourism attractors of this destination for the tourism target group that has been selected (i.e. the bikers).

This is typically an entrepreneurial-based approach, and it’s very innovative that a mainly public conservation based partnership applies such a complicated system in its operation, taking a strong commitment well beyond the end of the funded project.

The Valorization Programme should always be an important quality criterion for AOE DDO to keep the environmental responsibility at a high quality and to ensure that the economic benefits of the AOE do not come too much into the foreground!

The AOE Booking Center will be the main player in the social part of sustainability. Based on the partnership model with accommodations (see chapter 4), there is also a close relation to many other regional service providers, like mobility services, biking guides and shops, etc. The involvement of the regional partners also gives the guests an authentic experience and on the one hand increases customer satisfaction and on the other hand strengthens the motivation of regional partners.

The following slide illustrates the multiple connections, which ensures social sustainability and development within the region:



Beside the ecological and the social aspect of sustainability, the AOE DDO and the AOE Booking Center will need a hardnosed business approach too. Simply because the AOE Booking Center must carry itself from the revenues of its travel operations. However, the following cornerstones - based on the above mentioned criteria for sustainable tourism - have to be taken into account for its operations:

- transparent & measurable: Implementing a transparent and measurable business model, which is important for the credibility in many ways.
- balanced & fair: Designing a balanced and fair business model, which could be optimized for very specific project for the benefit of all participants
- applicable & replicable: a business model easy to implement and fully scalable for further products.

During the AOE Bike Trail project the following business model for the AOE Booking Center has been developed:



The implementation of this business model for operating responsible tourism products has been designed on the principles for responsible tourism. Additionally, the conditions of the license contract of the product owner (AOE DDO) must be considered. The following issues have been specified in a cooperative way:

- Pricing strategy
- Commission strategy
- Invoicing management
- Conditions for reselling
- License & impact fee
- Reporting

Details about these topics could be found in the license contract between AOE DDO and AOE Booking Center, which has been created in a draft version during the AOE Bike Trail project and will be finalized and signed after the end of the project.

The social development aspect among regional partners and a transparent and fair business model towards stakeholders and guests should always be an important quality criterion for AOE Booking Center in order to assure a high quality tourism product!

5.3 Stakeholder & Service Providers

Beside the quality criteria for sustainability as described in the previous chapter, which mainly concerns the AOE DDO and the AOE Booking Center, there are also important criteria for the quality assurance among stakeholder and service providers directly.

In these cases, quality marks are often used to convey and communicate quality used. The following quality marks could be used within the AOE Bike Trail quality assurance plan.

Certifications

Certificates are time-limited certificates for companies that are operational committed to quality management and meet certain criteria / requirements, which generally cover all levels of quality management sufficiently.

Classifications

Classifications make statements about the level to be expected in tourist businesses. These are usually carried out by means of announced examinations according to a defined catalogue of criteria or unannounced mystery guest visits.

In addition, an ongoing, internal quality management ideally provides a supplement to the classification. However, this is usually not anchored in a mandatory manner, i.e. this form of quality assurance is mainly based on the levels of quality control and communication.

Seal of approval and labels

These are often closely related to classifications, mostly from respected institutions, but also through little-known private initiatives be awarded. This is a definition of minimum criteria, ideally to enable further differentiation / (thematic) orientation.

Essentially, this form of communication and mediation is used as a basic quality to the guest. Ideally, there is only a small number of quality seals and labels so that they serve as orientation for the customer - and not to cause confusion for the guest.

Awards, Quality Awards and Accolades

Awarded companies or locations / regions are considered "best practices", "benchmarks" and should be used by other service providers / locations / etc. to serve as a role model and provide implementation points for a quality improvement.

Ideally, these awards do not only concern (thematic) sub-areas, but a holistic view of the tourist offer. Furthermore, the decision-making processes of the respective jury should be made transparent or be easy to understand for the customer.

Offer cooperation and branding

These are operational cooperations with the main task of bundling marketing resources. For the customer, these offer cooperations, often with a common "Quality marks" appear to the outside world, an added value, as they give the customer the impression of a common quality assurance.

It will be the task of AOE DDO to define, which quality marks should be used for the AOE Bike Trail. The challenge in that case is the cross-border characteristic of the AOE Bike Trail, that brings with it quite different certifications, classifications and quality features.

5.4 Guests & Customers

With regard to measuring the quality of products and services or their subjective assessment by the customer (= satisfaction), different methods will be used:

Guest Feedback

Guest feedback can be provided directly by the customer in the company or indirectly through evaluation platforms take place on the internet. A systematic evaluation of the guest feedback is essential for an efficient quality assurance and development process essential. Within the AOE Booking System an international leader in guest feedback – TrustPilot – is already in use and guarantees independent and trustworthy evaluation.

What our customers say



Hervorragend 
Bewertet mit 4.7 von 5, basierend auf 334 Bewertungen auf 

Unsere neuesten Bewertungen

Review	Date	Rating
<p>Bernhard Malin OÖ</p> <p>Die Organisation der gesamten Reise war... Bemerkenswert: Etappe 3-4, organisiert von Travel Angel! Die Organisation der gesamten Reise war perfekt!</p>	13 Oktober	5 stars
<p>Gabriele M.</p> <p>AAT Etappe 18 bis 26 Wir sind von Ammach (Etappe 18) bis Tolmin (Etappe 26) gelaufen, 8 Tagestouren, eine Etappe mussten wir überspringen, da kein Quartier zu bekommen war. Es war wieder ein</p>	12 Oktober	5 stars
<p>Elke Deier</p> <p>Wandern mit Hund Wir haben vom 18. - 25.09 2021 die ersten 5 Etappen des Trails bei schönstem Bergwetter zurückgelegt. Vom ersten Kontakt bis zur Organisation vor Ort waren wir mit dem Team</p>	11 Oktober	5 stars
<p>Randy Hauer</p> <p>Again, another fabulous experience in the good hands of AAT ! This was our second AAT trip. When Covid travel restrictions came into play we had to change the booking three times over ~20 months. At each and every change the AAT "Tal</p>	8 Oktober	5 stars

Complaint management

Complaint management describes the handling of customer complaints within the AOE Bike Trail. Criticism should be evaluated systematically and in an orderly manner and positive effects should be drawn from it - and the trigger of the criticism eliminated in the interests of the customer. The purpose of complaint management is to strengthen customer loyalty and quality assurance.

It will be one of the main tasks of the AOE Booking Center to develop a central registry of complaints and reviewing this info at agreed intervals to and review this info at agreed intervals to identify and act in areas for improvement.

5.5 Routes & Infrastructure

The existing care of cycle paths by the respective trail keepers (municipalities, national park administrations, tourism organizations, etc.) is an essential prerequisite for the development and sustainable management of a bike trail.

The main criteria of maintenance are:

Rights & Liability

Restrictions on only marked & signposted bike trails - with designated signposts and the obligation to provide information to the bike trail maintenance keeper.

EU package travel guideline

Minimization of the tour operator's liability through the design of the daily stages and limitation of the physical requirements with defined daily biking time.

Limitation of the technical challenges and risks: no busy streets and a sufficiently good condition of roads and bike paths.

Booking infrastructure

Selection of the stage locations according to the minimum requirements for booking infrastructure:

- Overnight accommodation (including availability of dinner)
- Priority for accessibility with mobility services

As the main starting point a detailed Routes & Infrastructure plan has already been developed within the AOE Bike Trail project. The following abstract out of the WP5-devliverable Detailed Route Plan shows the very detailed and comprehensive information about each section within one example stage of the bike trail:

Abstract from stage N03 Lendava (SI) – Letenye (HU)

Basic information

- **Start point of the daily stage:** Vinarium tower at Lendava (Slovenia): Hosszúfaluhegy 229, 9220 Lendva (coordinates: 46.567550, 16.467801)
- **End point of the daily stage:** Letenye (Hungary), centre of the city: 8868 Letenye, Kárpáti u. 1. (coordinates: 46.433861, 16.722436)
- **Length of the daily stage:** 62,65 km
- **Length of the detour(s):** 6,33 km



3rd map: The daily stage between Lendava and Letenye

Information about the route and its condition

The route from the Vinarium tower at Lendava to Lenti goes through the settlement of Lendvadedes, after Lenti other 11 settlements can be found on the route: Kerkateskánd, Szécsisziget, Tormafölde, Dobri, Kerkaszentkirály, Muraszemenye, Szentmargitfalva, Kiscsehi, Lipeszentadorján, Bázakerettye, Kistolmács. The other stage point is the city of Letenye. Table below contains information on each sub-sections of the daily stage.

See the following example table with very detailed route quality information:

	Start point	End point	Length	Type of road	Type of the surface	Road no.	Traffic (AADT)	Quality
MAIN ROUTE								
N3/1	Lendava (Vinarium tower)	Lendava-Dedeskecskés intermediate point - 46.566680, 16.501135	3,33 km	municipality road	asphalted			***
N3/2	Lendava-Dedeskecskés intermediate point	Rédics (Dedeskecskés)	1,23 km	municipality road	asphalted, gravel mixed			***
N3/3	Rédics (Dedeskecskés)	Lendvadedes road crossing	0,75 km	bicycle/walking path	asphalted			***
N3/4	Lendvadedes road crossing	Lendvadedes lake	0,67 km	municipality road	asphalted	75155	1218	***
N3/5	Lendvadedes lake	Lenti (Lovarda utca)	3,87 km	bicycle path	asphalted			***
N3/6	Lenti (Lovarda utca)	Lenti (Petőfi út – Harangláb út crossing)	2,50 km	municipality roads	asphalted			***
N3/7	Lenti (Petőfi út – Harangláb út crossing)	Lenti (Máhomfa), Bedőmajor bus stop	3,76 km	bicycle path	asphalted			**
N3/8	Lenti (Máhomfa), Bedőmajor bus stop	Kerkateskánd, Petőfi Sándor u. 1.	1,74 km	bicycle path	asphalted			***
N3/9	Kerkateskánd, Petőfi Sándor u. 1.	Szécsisziget, bejárati út bus stop	2,63 km	low traffic public and municipality roads	asphalted	7549	648	***
N3/10	Szécsisziget, bejárati út bus stop	Dobri (Bende-hegy crossing)	6,26 km	low traffic public and municipality roads	asphalted	7539	702	**
N3/11	Dobri (Bende-hegy crossing)	Dobri Church	0,96 km	municipality road	asphalted			**
N3/12	Dobri Church	Kerkaszentkirály, bridge	1,87 km	municipality roads and low traffic public road	asphalted	7538		***
N3/13	Kerkaszentkirály bridge	Muraszemenye, II. Rákóczi Ferenc út 6-2	4,94 km	municipality roads and low traffic public road	asphalted	75149	276	***
N3/14	Muraszemenye, II. Rákóczi Ferenc út 6-2	Muraszemenye (Alsószemenye), II. bejárati út, bus stop	1,26 km	municipality roads and low traffic public road	asphalted	75149	276	***
N3/15	Muraszemenye (Alsószemenye), II. bejárati út, bus stop	Muraszemenye (Aligvár major), road nr. 7538 crossing	1,05 km	municipality road	asphalted	75149	276	***

End of abstract

This very detailed table will be the basis for the maintenance plan, that must be setup by AOE DDO and will assure, that a maximum quality assurance along the whole route could be ensured.

6 Quality Management

Quality management describes the measures and activities, which will be taken in order to achieve the quality characteristics and criteria defined in chapter 5. It is structured along the main activities of the AOE DDO and will be executed either by AOE DDO itself or in cooperation with other organizations, e.g. AOE Booking Center.

6.1 Strategy and Brand Management

Strategy and Brand management is a key task of AOE DDO and is strongly bound to the vision, mission and values as described in chapter 5. As a first step, a follow up project - Responsible Green Destination Amazon of Europe - has already been launched, which follows these key strategies:

- TBR MDD area with pristine natural beauty, endangered habitats and diverse cultural traditions represents enormous potential for development of sustainable tourism.
- Responsible Green Destination Amazon of Europe is an upgrade of the DTP project Amazon of Europe Bike Trail, which will be a joint and integrated solution for sustainable tourism, including Green Destination Tourism Impact Model, combining social and technological innovation, joint strategy and management model for the destination, joint flagship tourism products connecting top experiences along the rivers: River Trail, Hiking Trails, AOE Experiences, model validation in 2 transnational pilot areas and training stakeholders for responsible green destination.
- Results of the project will foster sustainable use of rich natural and cultural heritage and smart consumption of resources in AOE, support circular economy and creation of green jobs, and improvement of economic and social conditions for the residents while minimizing the impact on the environment.

This follow up project with almost the same project partners also ensures, that the brand of Amazon of Europe will be strengthened and further products will be developed.

6.2 Communication, Marketing and Product Development

Communication

The quality of communication – internally within the AOE Bike Trail organizations, stakeholders and service providers as well as externally towards guests and customers – is an important part of a sustainable tourism product. AOE DDO and AOE Booking Center will be responsible to ensure high-quality communication based on the following values and principles, which have been designed during the AOE Bike Trail project.

Spanning across Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia, the lower courses of the Drava and Mura Rivers and related sections of the Danube are among Europe's most ecologically important riverine areas: the so-called "Amazon of Europe". The rivers form a 700 kilometres long "green belt" connecting almost

1,000,000 hectares of highly valuable natural and cultural landscapes from all five countries. The Amazon of Europe consists of many single protected areas of different categories (Natura 2000 areas, Nature Park, National Park, Regional Park) and shall become a symbol of unity by becoming the world's first five country Transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube" (TBR MDD).

It is of high importance, that the messages, sent through communication activities, events, websites, or through the establishment of cooperation comply with the principles of the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail – be it in the form of cooperation (offering services) or texts and pictures shown through various communication channels.

The immanent values of the Amazon of Europe:

- Intactness of river landscape
- Wilderness
- Fragility
- Natural richness and vitality
- Source of inspiration and mindfulness
- Source of life and abundance

The principles that lay basis of all work within the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail, ensuring that the Amazon of Europe values are respected and cherished:

- Respect and understanding for nature and its creatures
- Touristic development in harmony with nature.
- Sharing benefits among nature and people
- Cooperation and mutual respect
- Transparency

Respect and understanding for nature and its creatures. Despite numerous man-made changes (including the loss of habitats), the area's value lies in its still well-preserved riverine habitats and the richness in biodiversity that can survive here in harmony with the people who have inhabited it for centuries. Furthermore, the rivers crosscut the country borders and connect five countries and their people across cultures, languages, but also across large distances and time. On these free-flowing river stretches, water flows in a way nature leads it and the rivers undergo natural processes like seasonal discharge fluctuations and floods that shape gravel and sand bars or steep banks. The animals and plants living in the Amazon of Europe are dependent on such dynamic processes that form their habitats. People living within this area benefit from the intact river ecosystem as well. As natural processes such as occasional floods take water through side arms or back and forth between floodplains and the main riverbed, water is filtered and groundwater table is recharged, providing clean drinking water, and watering crops. Allowing the river to seasonally flood its floodplains additionally brings the benefit of releasing pressure on inhabited areas from floods.

In order to achieve the high-quality communication, the AOE DDO needs to prepare a communication kit for all service providers for their further use and implementation in the necessary folders, Websites, flyers and others. The content of such a communication kit should be:

- AOE Key Visuals and further TOP pictures
- Logo Kit
- text modules for website
- Long communication text for promotion
- Short communication text for promotion

In addition, the AOE Bike Trail Academy, which has been setup during the AOE Bike Trail project, should offer regular trainings for stakeholders and service providers. This will directly raise the quality of accommodations along the AOE Bike Trail and indirectly result in better customer feedback.

Marketing

This digital marketing strategy is an integral and priority component of the strategic marketing plan for the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail and must be closely related with brand management and values for communication towards guests and customers.

It is also essential for promoting the AOE Bike Trail as an attractive and sustainable tourism offer into the international target groups, who might not even heard of an Amazon of Europe region so far.

Finally, a high-quality marketing will be the key success factor for economical sustainability. Without international guests and bikers, the AOE DDO and the AOE Booking Center will not be able to keep the AOE Bike Trail up and running at a high quality.

Under these conditions the goal of successfully addressing new, international guests, especially from the two priority markets DACH (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) and BENELUX (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg), the following professional and efficient community marketing is indispensable.

The digital marketing strategy will follow the following attention funnel:

- **Brand Marketing (positioning):** draw attention to the new brand "Amazon of Europe Bike Trail" on the market; to position this brand successfully and to trigger a desire among customers.
- **Sales Marketing (differentiation):** To draw attention to the USP services and the concrete travel services and products, to differentiate from competitors on the market and to sell the travel products with sales-oriented measures.
- **Community marketing (profiling):** Build up a community through real experiences of the customers when biking the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail, with the services of the official AOE Booking Center and the regional service partners and distinguish itself on the market through these experiences.

To this end, the digital marketing strategy has defined a carefully selected mix of online marketing measures that represents an efficient use of resources with the greatest possible reach and optimal targeting. In addition, measures are included that, if successful, go beyond the instruments to be implemented in the short term and thus additionally strengthen the development of a dynamic community for the AOE Bike Trail. More detailed information about the Marketing Strategy could be found in the Deliverable of WP7 (as listed in chapter 3)

Product Development

Touristic development within the AOE region must always be in harmony with nature. All services and activities (e.g. bike rental, boat tours, fishing, hunting etc.) offered in the area of Amazon of Europe have an impact on it. It is therefore imperative for all the services and activities offered to be done in consultation and cooperation with the protected areas' administrations.

Naturally, the first and foremost requirement is respect for and fulfilment of all the legal requirements. Nevertheless, protected area administrations (or other nature conservation experts) have worked out recommendations for all types of user groups (water management, the energy sector, forestry, fishery, agriculture, water and land-based tourism) within protected areas. These recommendations might not be legally binding but should be respected by partners offering their services as part of the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail, keeping in mind the goal of turning the AOE Bike Trail into a flagship nature-friendly product.

For this principle to work, a good cooperation between the AOE Booking Center and protected area administrations, who have a leading role, is aimed for.

6.3 Inquiry, Booking and Sales Management

A competent and responsible management is of decisive importance for the quality and the effective success of sustainable products in tourism. The AOE Booking center will be responsible for the full service of guests and travelers along a defined customer journey (B2C Management) as well as for the full service and logistics management of the regional service providers and cooperation with international tour operators and reselling partners (B2B Management).

6.3.1 B2C Management

The following slide shows the customer journey with guests and travelers from the first contact on the trail website and in best case – if the website visitor books a bike trail journey - until the final travel reflection and feedback procedure.



The aspects and tasks of quality assurance run through the entire circuit as follows:

Inspiration and Seeking Info

The website must always be up to date and represent the AOE Bike Trail as a high-quality tourism product based on sustainability criteria defined in chapter 5.

Booking

Asking for offers, getting information about the trail and the accommodations, getting a fair price, etc. are important activities, where the the guest will build up trust and hopefully decide for a booking and becoming a bike trail traveler. The AOE booking center staff should be well trained in communication with customers at all channels: personal contact, email, telephone, chats, etc.

Anticipation

Detailed travel information, secure payment and a travel manual in advance are important for the customers before they start their journey. The AOE Booking System has been designed and implemented to deliver high-quality within this stage of the customer journey.

Travel Experience

Beginning with the arrival of the traveler on the first day and ending with the departure after the trail, a Trail Hotline is available for any kind of information, questions, help needed by the traveler. This service is an essential quality aspect and needs to be organized by the AOE Booking Center in cooperation with regional

partners throughout the whole bike trail. Also for complaint management the Trail Hotline will be the first contact point and the connection to the AOE Booking Center to further handle the complaint.

Travel reflection

Gathering feedback – positive and negative – from the travelers will help the AOE Booking Center to discover problems, fix errors and to improve the quality in the long term. In addition, the independent guest feedback system TrustPilot will show other guests a real and trustworthy feedback about the quality of the AOE Bike Trail.

6.3.2 B2B management

A similar customer journey could be used to illustrate the service provider management. AOE Booking Center must be a fair partner and clearinghouse for the regional service providers of the AOE Bike Trail.



In contrast to B2C management, which relates to the individual guests/travelers and their trip, B2B management focuses on providing year-round support for service providers. Starting from the first contact with information, confirmation, contracting, etc. before the season starts, up to the final evaluation after the season and the preparation for the next season, there are many aspects of quality assurance, that needs to be covered.

Classification and Certification

Within the AOE Booking System there is already a classification into three categories Basic, Classic and Comfort as follows:

- Basic: Simple, clean, functional – inn, guesthouse or mountain lodge
- Classic: Mid-range accommodation – 2-star or 3-star inn or hotel
- Comfort: High-end accommodation – 4-star hotel, often with spa area

In principle, accommodations will decide on their own and based on their regional or national classification, which category they could offer. But of course, the AOE Booking Center will do regular quality checks and controls, if the category really fits.

A recommendation of quality assurance will be a AOE certificate for partner accommodations and other service providers. This could be a Amazon od Europe partner sign or similar, which would be bound to high-quality criteria and further conditions like regular training sessions or similar. This certificate does not exist yet, but will be a task of AOE DDO as part of quality management.

Customer satisfaction & Quality checks and advices

The accommodations and sometimes other service providers – e.g. mobility service - are often part of the customers feedback, which will then be communicated by AOE Booking Center during the regular checks and the yearly meeting with the service providers. The main goal is to raise the customer satisfaction, which does not only help one specific accommodation, but the whole AOE Bike Trail will take advantage of it.

In addition, AOE Booking Center is also the professional reselling partner for selected, leading specialty tour operators around the world. In this area its important, to clearly identify reselling partners, that follow the high-quality criteria of sustainable tourism defined in chapter 5.

6.4 Trail Management

This guideline describes the procedure and the key points when creating a maintenance plan from the point of view of the trail operator AOE DDO and the AOE Booking Center. An option could be, that the AOE Booking Center is commissioned by AOE DDO for the management towards the guests as well as towards the trail keepers.

Creation of a maintenance plan for the entire bike trail per stage or per trail section

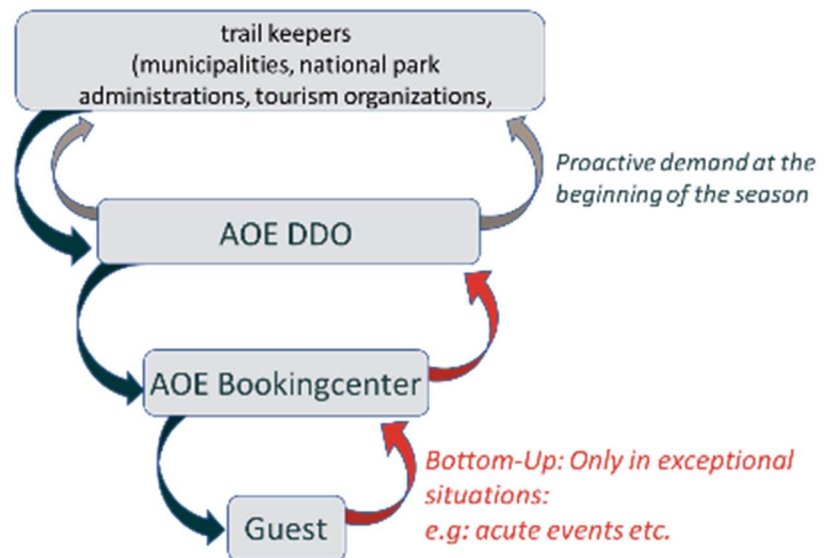
First of all, the following questions have to be asked and clarified in detail, based on the Bike Trail Route and Infrastructure plan as described in chapter 5:

- Which organization / company / community is responsible for maintenance (trail keepers)?
- Who is the trail keeper and who is the landowner?
- Who is the contact person / representative / weekend service?
- Is there a plan for checks and maintenance work?
- How is maintenance financed?
- How is the communication path with the AOE DDO and with the AOE booking center for the trail and the guests?

Control and maintenance

With the answers and the knowledge of the previous mentioned questions, the following control and maintenance plan needs to be setup in detail by AOE DDO

- Active control 1x/year
- Establishment of a diversion after consultation with AOE DDO
- Information to AOE DDO
- Changing route description and GPX tracks
- Publication on trail-website und Outdooractive
- At the same time information to AOE Booking Center
- Publication on website of AOE Bookings System
- Information to guests (if necessary reorganisation of trail journeys)



Obligations of the trail keepers

- Obligation to maintain the trail assessment / improvement of the condition of the trail and signage by trailblazers once a year as well as after extreme weather events (including preparation of a protocol)
- Duty to provide information and if necessary, identification / signage of diversions or temporary closures and timely information of the AOE DDO about them

Obligation of the AOE DDO (these tasks could also be delegated/commissioned to AOE Booking Center)

- Changing route description and GPX tracks
- Publication on Trail-website und Outdooractive
- At the same time information to AOE Booking Center

Obligation of the AOE Booking Center

- Publication on website of AOE Bookings System
- Information to guests (if necessary, reorganisation of trail journeys)

Only in exceptional cases there will be a bottom up communication, if the guests realizes problems/issues on the bike trail and will inform the AOE Booking Center. But in that case, it could already be too late and complaints from guests could reduce quality and guest feedback (see TrustPilot at chapter 5).

As worst case it could even come to a liability case, if an accident happens, which has been caused by inadequate and/or neglected trail maintenance.

6.5 Valorization Program

The main goal of the valorization program is to share benefits among people and nature. The Amazon of Europe Bike Trail project has marked giving back to nature as one of its vital elements. In the implementation, this meant that the product is not only put into practice in a nature-friendly way, i.e. avoiding sensitive areas and making sure that partners comply with nature protection requirements (even if only recommended, but not legally binding), but it also returns parts of the income it generates, to nature protection.

The valorization scheme implemented means that a defined percentage of the revenues generated from reservations of the product via the booking platform get funneled back to the protected area management bodies, thus ensuring that they also benefit from the potentially increased effort through the increased visitor numbers and requirement to be actively involved into ensuring nature-friendliness of activities in their areas.

The main task of AOE DDO will be to identify new potential partners and supporters of the Amazon of Europe destination and thus generate additional income for the valorization program. But its essential, that all the donations are clean and of good will and are not linked to any hidden conditions (e.g. a company plans to build a power plant and offers a "green donation" as compensation).

7 Quality Control

A detailed plan of measures and activities in combination with a schedule and a responsible person and/or organization is the basis for quality control. It will be one of the first tasks of AOE DDO after the end of the project to develop the Quality Control Plan and take care of its execution and then it needs to be updated on a regular basis.

The following table shows only a few selected recommendations coming out of the AOE Bike Trail project.

Objective	Activity	Tool	Responsible	Schedule	Status
Strategy and Brand management	Further development of the AOE Bike Trail Strategy into a AOE Destination strategy as defined in the Amazing AOE project	SCOM Meetings with partners Workshops with external experts	AOE DDO	Kick-off Yearly General Assembly Meetings On demand (if strategy changes arise)	In Progress
Communication	Inform stakeholders and service providers about values and principles of AOE Bike Trail	Communication Kit	AOE DDO	Once during first contact On demand, if changes arise	New
Communication	Inform guests and customers about news on the AOE Bike Trail, stories about interesting nature and animals (e.g. Kingfisher) and special offers for bikers	Newsletter	AOE DDO together with AOE BC	One per month	New
Marketing	Build up a community through real experiences of the customers when biking the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail	Explorer Tours	AOE Booking Center	2-3 times per season	Done for 2021
Trail Management	Setup and define a detailed trail route maintenance plan	Project management	AOE DDO	Setup once	New
B2B Management	Season end meeting with all service providers to discuss the past season, provide feedback from customers, check quality standard and discuss areas for improvements	Personal Meeting	AOE Booking Center	End of season	New

8 Conclusion and Outlook

The quality assurance plan has been developed during the workpackage 7 within the AOE Bike Trail. An intensive research of many existing quality plans, discussions with project partners during SCOM meetings and a very detailed work with the main result documents of the past 6 periods was the basis of this document.

The following statements have been found during the research and by asking various AOE service provider during the AOE field trips:

- "Company quality management needs simplified models that are adapted to the size of the company. Accompaniment, advice and support is desirable, not just external assessment. "
- "Company quality offensives need financial or material incentive systems (e.g. marketing reinforcement, etc.)."
- "Areas of responsibility with customer contact (inquiries, etc.) are to be standardized or centralized in order to achieve consistently high quality."
- "There is no integrated quality management at destination level in order to identify gaps in the service chain on the basis of meaningful customer perception / complaint analyzes."
- "We have no legal control in the case of low-quality companies (exclusion, etc.). Simply not supporting them would not be possible due to our corporate structure. "
- "There is currently no systematic evaluation of evaluation platforms."

We hope, that we could give an answer to these statement with this quality assurance plan. It should be used as a guideline for setting up a detailed quality management and quality control by AOE DDO.

The fascination of the past DTP project and the new product "Amazon of Europe Bike Trail" lies in its long-term design focused on regional value creation and the synergy of nature conservation and sustainable tourism. Although we are convinced that the Amazon of Europe Bike Trail will be a great success in terms of sustainable tourism, the proof can only be seen in five or ten years.

The Quality Assurance Plan could be a key factor to make this happen.