



**ACCESS IT**

**ACCESS-IT**

Innovation for Accessible Tourism  
in Natural and Rural Areas

Project No: 2019-1-PL01-KA202-065140

# How to engage Stakeholders in Accessible Product Development



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

Contents of this document are entirely produced by the ACCESS-IT project and reflect only the authors' views. Therefore, the EACEA and European Commission have no responsibilities for them.

CC-BY-NC-SA



This document may be copied, reproduced or modified according to the above rules. In addition, an acknowledgement of the authors of the document and all applicable portions of the copyright notice must be clearly referenced.

All rights reserved.

© Copyright 2020 ACCESS-IT

## Disclaimer

The views represented in this document only reflect the views of the authors and not the views of the European Union. The European Union is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained in this document. Furthermore, the information is provided “as is” and no guarantee or warranty is given that the information is fit for any particular purpose. The user of the information uses it at its sole risk and liability.

## Project Partners



For full details of partners go to <http://accessitpro.eu/#partners>



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

## Table of contents

---

<b>1. The WHAT</b>	4
<b>2. The WHO</b>	5
<b>3. The HOW</b>	6
3.1. Reasons for participation	6
3.2. Benefits of participation	6
3.3. Identification of interest groups	7
3.4. Ways to Engage Stakeholders	8
3.5. Planning the participatory process	9
3.6. Proposal for participation between different stakeholders	10
3.6.1. Cooperation with DMOs	11
3.6.2. Partnering and networking with local businesses	12
3.6.3. Development of joint offers	13
3.6.4. Organization of awareness campaigns	14
3.6.5. Fundraising	15
<b>4. References</b>	17

## 1. The WHAT

---

The development of accessible tourism products and services must have the participation of all the agents involved to ensure a correct conception, implementation and commercialization of the same.

The joint participation of the stakeholders is based on voluntary and collaborative relationships between the various parties, both public and private, in which they all agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits.

The result of cooperation with other stakeholders can result in increased competitiveness, market projection and reduced investment (for example, to ensure accessibility, companies and associations can make joint purchases of support equipment with the participation of the public administration).

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are expected to play an important role in achieving *Sustainable Development Goal 17* „Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”. It recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles to mobilize and share knowledge, experience, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the SDGs in all countries.



## 2. The WHO



Developing accessible and inclusive tourism requires a process of co-creation by all stakeholders, including various levels of participation, with broad perception and collaboration to design accessible products and services.

The main agents that must collaborate to achieve the highest level of accessibility throughout the tourism consumption chain are:

- **Organizations of people with disabilities / NGOs:** National associations of people with disabilities, foundations, local entities, NGOs and even individuals interested in participating. (Eg. [CERMI](#)<sup>ii</sup>, Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities)
- **Government agencies:** Town councils, supra-municipal, autonomous, regional, national, European and global entities.
- **Academic institutions:** pre-university education institutions, vocational training centres, universities and research institutions.
- **Private sector:** SMEs in the field of accommodation, services, restaurants, transport and leisure activities. Also associations and confederations of entrepreneurs in the tourism sector (Eg. [TURALCAT](#)<sup>iii</sup>, Confederation of Rural Tourism and Agrotourism of Catalonia)

It is important to remember that the participation of the group of users with access requirements is indispensable in the definition of a new accessible tourism product or service.

## 3. The HOW

---

When defining a new product or service, it is important to lay the foundations for participation and correctly define the process to ensure its success.

It is a process that brings great benefits to companies but that requires anticipating its preparation: identifying the interest groups, the form of participation, the preparation of a plan and its execution.

### 3.1. Reasons for participation

If we look at the traditional public consultation approach, the decision is made by a small group of people and is subsequently passed on to the public. On the other hand, in an inclusive participatory approach, all parties involved take part in the decision making. Real problems are addressed and well-informed decisions are made to solve for them.

*Using the knowledge, opinions, and ideas of a broader group builds social capital, enriches discussion, and leads to better-informed, better understood, and supported outcomes (Pound, 2008).*

This process involves engaging stakeholders at an early stage when options are open and can influence the outcome. (Bahadorestani, A., Naderpajouh, N. & Sadiq,R.,2020). They all share knowledge and ideas and have the possibility of incorporating them into the final decision.

### 3.2. Benefits of participation

A properly managed participation process provides various benefits for all parties involved. Depending on each case we will see specific benefits, but in general it leads to better informed and supported decisions, resulting in a win-win situation, as well as time and money savings.

The key benefits of a well-planned and implemented stakeholder engagement process are:

**Informed decisions:** a good process allows collecting different forms of knowledge from the participants, thus generating a collective intelligence

**Property:** participation in the process generates acceptance and active support for implementation by all parties involved.



**Lasting change:** the fact of being part of a group and being an active part in decision-making and their implementation generates a belonging to the group that guarantees positive results and long-term benefits

**Avoid or manage conflicts:** By engaging stakeholders at an early stage, when options are still open and flexible, it is possible to identify potential or actual conflicts and actively work to resolve them.

**Reduced costs:** the participation process implies an investment in time and money that is low given in the long term it translates into a faster and more fluid implementation. It also allows savings in marketing campaigns and promotional events since the participants become the first prescribers of the product and / or service.

Stakeholder participation is an underlying principle in all actions taken in a process; it is not just a method or a technique that is used in an event with a certain purpose. These principles include inclusion, transparency, openness and clarity, independence, commitment and responsiveness.

### 3.3. Identification of interest groups

When we consider the stakeholder engagement process, the first step is the identification of the different stakeholders.

Once identified, it is very important to go on to analyse the roles and interests of the different groups, and based on this, define what we want to achieve and what is the most appropriate way to involve those groups.

**Important:** *Each of the interested parties should be included in the participation process in a particular way and this should be adjusted to the evolution of the process.*

#### Helpful questions to identify stakeholders:

- What organizations or individuals have an interest in planning accessible tourism?
- Who are the people who represent them?
- What is the information / knowledge they need?
- Who will be directly affected by the results of the event / project?
- Who is directly responsible for making decisions on the issues discussed? Who influences this issue / region / organization?
- Who was not involved but should have been involved?

- Who are the key „movers and shakers” that can help further drive results and decisions?
- And who are the opponents or „blockers”?

Remember that we will never find the same level of participation for all stakeholders throughout the process. It is also important to consider the power of different groups or individuals to influence decisions and the level of their interest in the issue at hand.

### 3.4. Ways to Engage Stakeholders

There are different approaches to involving stakeholders in planning, decision-making, and implementation processes.

Stakeholders can participate in different forms:

- Sharing information
- Collecting information
- Consultation
- Shared decision making

It is possible to carry out a participatory event in which the three forms of participation take place:

- Information gathering: participants have no influence on how the information is used.
- Consultation: participants contribute their points of view and these are transmitted to decision makers
- Shared decision-making: participants directly assist in decision-making
- To implement the integrative approach in practice, we must consider the various stakeholders and their different views, opinions and approaches.



### 3.5. Planning the participatory process

A process of participation with the various stakeholders requires carefully planning and defining said process, its purposes, the activities that we will carry out and the roles of the people included.

#### Before starting

The collaborative approach means recognizing that oneself is one stakeholder among many and for the best decisions to be made, other voices must be involved in the discussion. We have seen previously that there are many benefits to involving stakeholders, but organizations need to think through the implications carefully before deciding to be part of a participatory process.

**Participatory process:** *process in which we define our way of involving stakeholders in a desired field of action. We define the purpose of the process, the desired outcomes and outcomes, the activities and the number of events that we will implement, who will be involved, etc.*

Inviting people to participate should be because there is a genuine opportunity for them to influence the outcome. Participation should not be used to confirm decisions that have already been made. If people think that their time has been wasted in poorly managed workshops, or that their attendance does not influence the outcome, they will lose trust and respect for the organizations in question.

Any company or organization that wants to start a participatory process and search to involve stakeholders, need to be clear about the purpose and what will be the result of their participation in the overall decision-making process. As we have indicated in the previous point, there are different ways to participate with different results in the project. Thus, the agents must know this information from the beginning to guarantee the success of the participatory process

#### Develop a stakeholder engagement plan

A key recommendation is to develop a stakeholder engagement plan that specifies activities, methods, times, roles, responsibilities, reports, and resources necessary to meet the identified stakeholder engagement objectives.

The plan must be recognized by the interested parties and for this purpose, it must be brought to their knowledge and encouraged to review it with the aim of increasing the probability that it will meet the intended purpose and objectives.

The key to a successful process lies in good preparation.

Once it's decided to involve stakeholders in a participatory process, it is crucial to start with careful planning and preparation. The planning of the participatory process contains several steps, which do not vary depending on the type of project, timing or number of participants.

**The participation plan should be divided into 5 sections:**

1. Understanding the situation: purpose and results
2. Process planning: action plan
3. Event design: planning, implementation and follow-up
4. Planning tasks or sessions
5. Practical organization

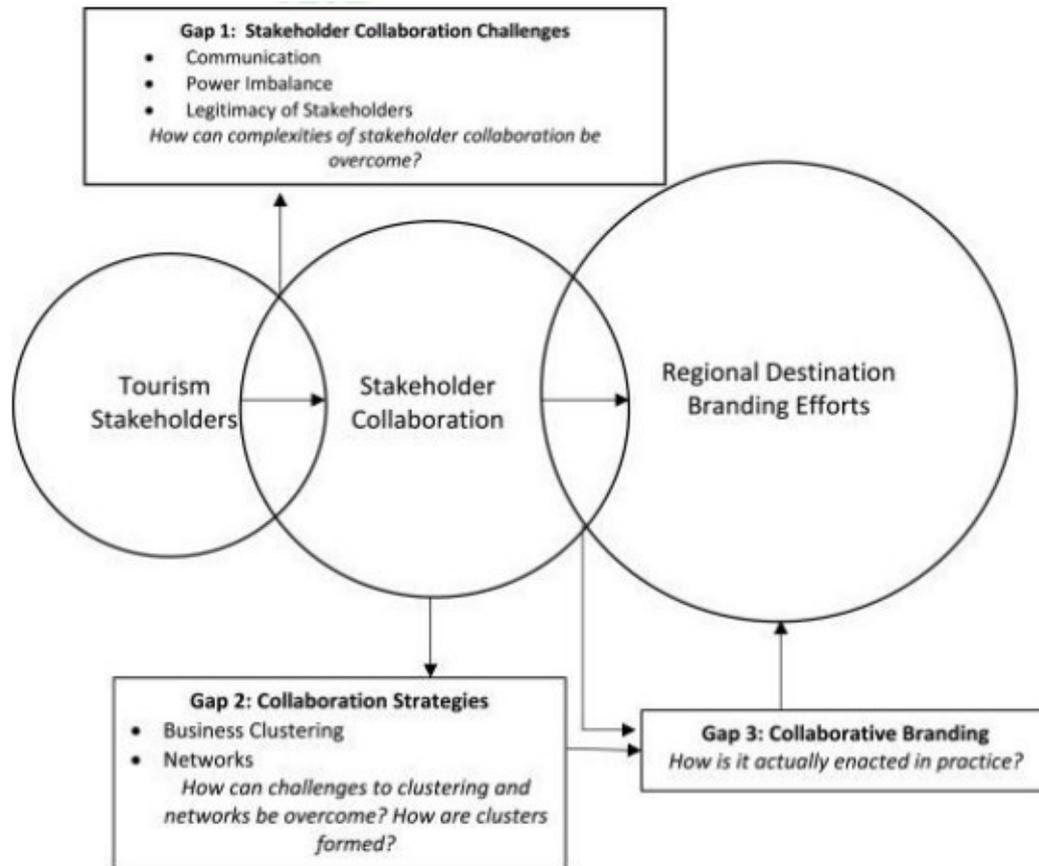
### **3.6. Proposal for participation between different stakeholders**

In order to address the problem of stakeholders' participation and define an effective plan a key issue is to have proper understanding of the specifics in the target region.

Since the tourism sector can have various structures of actors who provide for the tourism experience of visitors, a good knowledge of ongoing partnerships in the area would give a foundation which the accessible tourism initiative can build upon.

Figure 1 shows an example of stakeholder collaboration process in a tourism context. Three important gaps are defined that must be overcome answering the specific questions as follows:





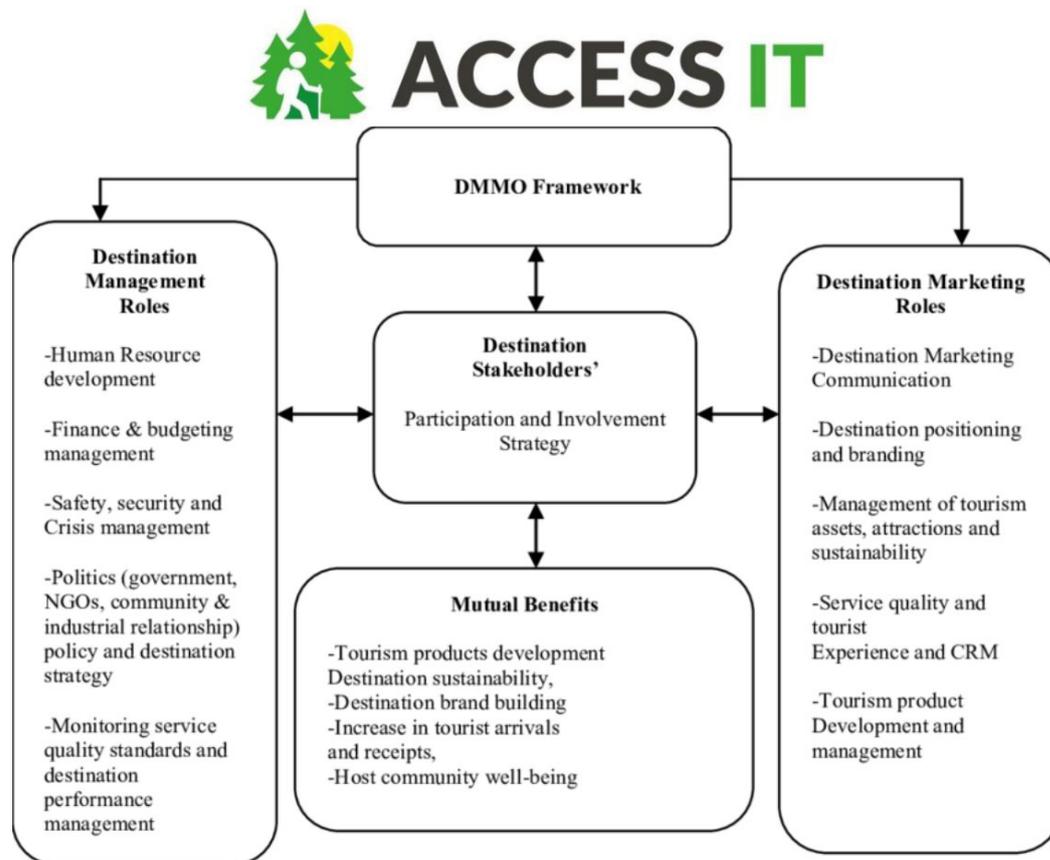
**Figure 1 stakeholder collaboration towards regional destination branding<sup>iv</sup>**

Existing and new partnerships can be described as networks and clusters. Networks usually consist of businesses in the same sector e.g., networks of wine producers. Clusters comprise of different businesses who serve for an overall need e.g., a tourism cluster unifies providers of different services to tourists.

### 3.6.1. Cooperation with DMOs

Depending on the maturity of a tourism destination it is possible that a separate structure is dedicated for coordination and management of common initiatives with regard to tourism. Usually, such organizations deal with the promotion and marketing of the tourist product of the destination. Such organizations can have competence to form the tourism policy and coordinate the efforts of separate tourism actors in their quest to make the destination more attractive for tourists and offer top-quality experience. If such separate organization does not exist, usually, the coordination and marketing functions are within the competence of local public authorities.

An example of Destination management and marketing organisation framework is given in Figure 2.



**Figure 2 Destination management and marketing organisation framework (DMMO).<sup>v</sup>**

A successful accessible tourism initiative needs to take into account the specific structure and the existing partnerships dealing with tourism management and coordination.

Example:

The Madrid Council, in conjunction with Predif (an NGO representing people with disabilities) and other tourism organisations, has developed the **Accessible Travel Guide, containing information** on tourist sights for disabled visitors. The Guide is designed to help tourists plan their visit to Madrid, whether on holiday or business, providing information on accessible tours, useful tips, museums, theatres, cinemas, restaurants, etc.

At the city's [official tourism website](#) there is a dedicated section on [Accessible Madrid<sup>vi</sup>](#).

### 3.6.2. Partnering and networking with local businesses



Except for the ideal case where a well-developed Destination marketing and management organization exists and is capable to include the accessible tourism objective in its framework, the reality usually comprises fragmented partnerships and networks between different local actors. The worst scenario is that such partnerships do not exist on local level and the tourism actors have their own tourism product realization channels. Depending on the situation, the approach used to involve local businesses shall include some or all of the following strategies:

- incorporate the accessible tourism initiative within an existing local tourism coordination body e.g., DMO, local hotelier association, green business network;
- identify collaborative businesses to become part in a dedicated local accessible tourism network;
- interview separate businesses to identify their competitors and search for common grounds between them which can serve as incentives for cooperation.

#### Example:

As businesses reopen, or prepare to reopen, following closures due to COVID-19, the City of Fresno<sup>vii</sup> recognizes the need to assist small businesses with their accessibility compliance efforts. The City is providing eligible small businesses with free Certified Access Specialists (CASp) inspection services. A CASp can inspect a business for construction-related accessibility issues and provide information to help make a reasonable compliance schedule.

### 3.6.3. Development of joint offers

Based on the findings about interactions between local tourism actors, the potential for joint offers will become clearer. Examples of joint offers:

- a small hotel offers dinner to their guests in the local restaurant or breakfast in the local bakery;
- a winery or a farm cooperate with an operator to transport tourists accommodated in the nearby town for a rural wine or farming tour;
- two hotels from neighbouring towns cooperate with transport company to ship the luggage of guests who take a trip through the natural area between the two towns;
- a travel agency engages the authority of a local protected area in order to guide their tourists and explain about protected species.

The possibilities for joint offers are endless but depend on the availability of business providers in the area and their capacity and willingness to engage with services for people with special needs.

Example:

Every guest who spends a night in one of the partner accommodation businesses receives the Lake Neusiedl Card absolutely free and as a result can use 50 free services. To ensure climate-friendly mobility within the region, overnight guests which own the Lake Neusiedl Card can also use public transport in the region free of charge.

<https://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-pearls/lake-neusiedl/>

### 3.6.4. Organization of awareness campaigns

Information campaigns for raising awareness about the importance and benefits of accessibility are an essential instrument to engage stakeholders with the cause. The first step for implementing an information campaign is to define target groups properly. Tourists in the destination need not only an accommodation, a restaurant and a guided tour, but other services from sectors such as retail, banking, postal, medical, cultural, etc. This is why an information campaign shall target different sectors with interest in providing services to tourists.

Once the target groups are defined the other important element for a campaign is the main message that must be communicated.



**Figure 3 Campaign of Visit England to encourage tourism sites and businesses to improve accessibility.<sup>viii</sup>**

When setting up an information campaign it is useful to search for partnerships with advertising agencies, but also with the media. As the former may be costly, social media also

offers powerful tools to reach your target audience with a minimum expense. It would be best to use different communication partners and channels as much as possible according to the assigned budget.

The next step is to produce the content of the information campaign depending on the selected communication channels. The content may include posters, brochures, videos, articles, blog posts, social media #hashtags. As these are the 'classic' instruments for promotion, it must be clear that information campaigning is an area of great creativity where innovative instruments can also be used. The big goal here is to engage with the senses and feelings of the target groups. A very powerful strategy for raising awareness about the benefits of accessibility is to offer to healthy people a try of what it feels like to have some disability – provide them with a wheelchair or cover their eyes and ask them to accomplish a specific task.

The last decision to be taken when organising a campaign is its timeframe. It is best to limit the campaign over a couple of weeks and repeat it annually.

#### Example:

Campaign for free disabled parking at hospitals in England - <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/policy-campaigns/campaigns/nhs-disabled-parking>

### 3.6.5. Fundraising

Fundraising is in the essence for every cause in order to accomplish its mission. Two main approaches can be brought to attention – apply for public funds or raise funds through donations.

As a recognised public need, accessibility is an appropriate objective to apply for public funding. These can be local, regional, national or transnational programmes. The first step is to find the right programme which would support the cause we want finances for. Also, the eligibility criteria must be met by the applying candidate. It is important to know that the application processes usually consist of lots of documentation and have tight deadlines. Because of this, an experienced agent can offer significant support if the candidate organisation is not familiar with the procedures. Some grants may not cover all the expenses in a project, and thus require the candidate to partly finance (co-finance) the project. In this case, different ratios can apply, e.g. 15% of the costs must be the candidate's own contribution.

Another strategy is to organise a donation campaign that can be closely connected with an awareness raising campaign, or be a separate fundraising campaign. For example, through such initiative the own contribution for a publicly funded project can be raised.

Additional information:

Principles of effective fundraising -

<https://www.hawthornbusinessgroup.co.uk/principles-effective-fundraising/>

It is also possible that the initiative for accessible tourism can act as a donor. After accumulation of some funds through the above-mentioned solutions, a grant can be offered to service providers under the condition that they also provide their own contribution to cover some of the expenses.



## 4. References

---

- <sup>i</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal17>
- Bahadorestani, A., Naderpajouh, N., & Sadiq, R. (2020). Planning for sustainable stakeholder engagement based on the assessment of conflicting interests in projects. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 242, 118402.
- Jones, C., & Pound, L. (2008). *Leadership and management in the early years: From principles to practice*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cermi.es/en/cermi>
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.catalunyarural.cat/>
- Mathur, V. N., Price, A. D., & Austin, S. (2008). Conceptualizing stakeholder engagement in the context of sustainability and its assessment. *Construction Management and Economics*, 26(6), 601-609.
- <sup>iv</sup> Rachel Perkins, Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore, Charles Arcodia. (2020). Understanding the contribution of stakeholder collaboration towards regional destination branding: A systematic narrative literature review. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Volume 43, Pages 250-258 (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1447677020301364>)
- <sup>v</sup> Samuel Adeyinka-Ojo, Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore, Vikneswaran Nair. (2014). A Framework for Rural Tourism Destination Management and Marketing Organisations. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 144. 151–163.
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.accessible-cities.2038>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.fresno.gov/news/accessible-fresno-small-business-initiative-to-help-businesses-with-ada-compliance-as-they-reopen-following-covid-19-closures/>
- <sup>viii</sup> <http://travability.travel/Submissions/a-blueprint-for-accessible-tourism.html>



**ACCESS IT**

## **ACCESS-IT**

Innovation for Accessible Tourism  
in Natural and Rural Areas

---

**[www.accessitpro.eu](http://www.accessitpro.eu)**