



ACCESS IT

ACCESS-IT

Innovation for Accessible Tourism
in Natural and Rural Areas

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Recommendations Booklet IO4



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Project Partners



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



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1. Introduction

About the project

The Recommendations Booklet of the Access It project is designed not only to present the results of the project, but above all, its purpose is to show how the methodology and educational tools developed by the partnership are able to stimulate curiosity and learning of the issues of physical, sensory and cognitive accessibility in relation to tourism services. The theme of accessibility has been stressed in the academic literature on tourism in the last twenty years, and the importance of this issue has been increasingly recognised in the organisation of tourist, sports and cultural offerings in European countries.

The videos and guidelines developed by the ACCESS IT project during the pilot training phase have given excellent results. The quality of the videos, the strength of the images and music, are able to stimulate the attention and curiosity of hoteliers, cultural operators and educators on the issues of accessibility. The practical arrangement of the guidelines encourages the curiosity of the reader, generating action, and offering practical advice on how to transform and make a tourism business accessible and attractive to all visitors. From the accessibility of information and communication, through the physical accessibility of facilities, to embracing the entire philosophy of Universal Design.

Impacting reality in an effective way is not a simple thing, reality is never easy to read, and it's never easy to monitor the results of your actions. For this reason, in the Recommendations Booklet the results of the project will be presented through the results of the experimentation of the intellectual outputs during the pilot training and through the stories and best practices that we have encountered during the progress of the project. With the hope that this booklet will be a stimulus not only to use the tools, the toolbox developed by the Access IT project but also, as a stimulus to work together for a more accessible Europe for all.

Mapping Accessible Tourism: Surveys and Focus Groups

The ACCESS IT “**Mapping report**” presents an overview of accessible tourism services in Europe, based on a review of previous studies and market data, followed by an examination of the conditions and potentials for improving these services in natural and rural areas (NRAs).

The report presents the results of new surveys of:

- **Visitors** with disabilities and other specific access requirements and
- Representatives of Small and Medium-sized Tourism Enterprises (SMEs) in 6 countries
- Public authorities and DMOs

as well as Round Table focus group interviews with tourism stakeholders.

Responses from 152 visitors and 161 businesses generated a large body of information which explored general assumptions on accessible tourism and supported the existing body of knowledge relating to NRAs in particular.

The surveys were not intended to be statistically representative but were targeted to respondents who have direct personal experience of either disability or other access requirements (in the case of visitors) or as tourism providers (in the case of the business survey). Therefore, the findings are largely of a qualitative nature. However, some statistical data shows evidence of common tourist activities, travel habits, barriers that are often experienced and perceptions of the accessible tourism market.

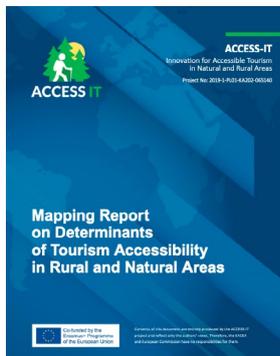
The two surveys were designed with reference to accessibility requirements and barriers experienced by tourists, identified initially through desk research and also through the knowledge and long experience of the ENAT team members. One ENAT team member who has a mobility impairment runs her own travel company specialising in accessible tours. With this background, the project team was able to develop the online questionnaires for visitors and a second questionnaire for SMEs.

It should be noted that a third questionnaire, for **policy-makers**, was also developed and launched as an online survey but it received very few responses, mainly due to public offices being closed during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. This study was not defined in the project proposal and was intended only as an extra research contribution but, sadly, it proved impossible to complete.

The findings of these studies have been used by the ACCESS IT partners to identify the specific themes of accessible tourism training and the types of training interventions that would help tourism business owners and managers to remove the existing barriers and meet the needs of



travellers with access requirements. From the desk research, lists of online publications and other resources suitable for developing ACCESS-IT training content are also provided.



Download the ACCESS IT Report:

“Mapping Report on Determinants of Tourism Accessibility in Rural and Natural Areas”

(59 pages, PDF, English)

<http://accessitpro.eu/wp-content/uploads/IO1-en-l.pdf>

Video Making, good practices

Project partners have produced 12 films related to accessible tourism. The videos show good practices in this area. The presentation of good practices has been designed in such a way that each film explains a specific issue and provides an inspiration for the local organisation of tourism in rural and natural areas.

The themes of the films were agreed by the partners based on the interviews conducted in the framework of IO1 with representatives of various stakeholder groups in accessible tourism.

The issues addressed in the films include:

1. [Why it is important?](#)
2. [How to do it? – Check your facilities](#)
3. [How to do it? - Implement simple solutions](#)
4. [How to do it? – How will a person with a disability travel?](#)
5. [How to promote it? – Practical guide](#)
6. [Accessible accommodation example](#)
7. [Accessible transport examples](#)
8. [Accessible recreation example](#)
9. [Advantages / benefits of accessible tourism in society / employment](#)
10. [Communication of accessible tourism -1](#)
11. [Communication of accessible tourism -2](#)
12. [Accessibility information provision in websites](#)

Due to their short formula, films are an introduction to the subject of available tourism, they are an inspiration to deepen knowledge on this subject by studying the materials available on the project platform.

All videos have been translated and subtitled in English and other partner languages and are available on the YouTube channel.

Educational action: Manuals for Training

The Business Support Toolkit represents a set of “How to” guidelines, aimed to support tourism enterprises in undertaking strategic approaches to innovation in the development of accessible tourism products and services. These guidelines contain practical information and instructions and include the following sections/topics:

1. How to assess accessibility of a tourism product/service
2. How to address the requirements of the target customer segments
3. How to develop a truly accessible tourism offer and meet demand
4. How to bring to market and promote an accessible product
5. How to involve stakeholders in accessible product development

The “How to” guidelines are elaborated in their long and short versions in order to respond to the needs of the main target groups of the project – Tourism SMEs operating in NRAs and VET providers offering programmes and courses in the field of tourism.

The guidelines are delivered as e-publications available at the project website: <http://accessitpro.eu/#outputs> and were used to produce a web-based business self-assessment tool. This tool should help tourism SMEs assess the extent to which their tourism product or service is geared to attract customers with accessibility needs. It allows users to enter their answers to closed questions structured in five main accessibility sections/aspects, namely:

The self-assessment tool aims to help tourism SMEs to evaluate the extent to which their tourism product or service is oriented towards attracting customers with access



requirements. It allows users to enter their responses to closed questions structured in five main sections/aspects of accessibility as follows:

1. general accessibility
2. accessibility of information
3. design of accessible tourism services
4. marketing of accessible products
5. stakeholder cooperation for accessibility improvement

This web-based tool generates a comprehensive performance appraisal report that gives overall evaluations and recommendations to the users on how they could improve the accessibility of their offers.

The guidelines and the web-based tool are supplemented by scenarios for practical sessions aimed to support tourism SME managers in studying their own business based on hands-on methodology. These sessions are dedicated to developing new (or improving existing) accessible tourism offers. They utilise a variety of creative problem-solving techniques and encourage stakeholder co-design of product or service offers. The Business Support Toolkit also provides didactical resources for hands-on training sessions ready to be integrated as part of the VET offers and practice.

2. Overview of the pilot training in the partners' countries

The resources of ACCESS IT were tested by partners in different formats and concepts. Here you find the activities, methodologies, and experiences that were gathered. They are useful to showcase the different options for implementation in practice.

Universal Design Experience

Location

The pilot was held in a mixed location combining online webinar on zoom digital space participants, due to the presence of stakeholders of other Italian region, and face to face participants in Campobasso, Molise in the office of Gal Molise Verso il 2000 on the 28th of April.

Target Group

Travel Agencies and other local tourism stakeholders

Travel Agencies and other national tourism stakeholders

Representatives of Regional Government institutions.

Methodology and Manual used

GAL Molise implemented pilot training through a mixed Zoom and face to face Webinar. All the participants received all the training material developed by the course, including all guidelines, video links and access to the self-evaluation tool. The pilot training was structured around the creation of new project proposals for the implementation of new accessibility activities and implementation of the Universal Design principles in service design.

The trainers introduced the topic of accessibility and all the training documents and explained the overall structure of the course. After the presentation of the topic and the materials a brainstorming was implemented with the participants. During the debriefing session the trainer let the participants perform the self-evaluation test webtool, the participants observed that the self-evaluation tools were really representing their actual skills in accessibility. The subject of accessibility was well explained through the vision of all the video produced by the access it project. During the Webinar with the help



of Guideline 3 the concept of design and universal design was fully introduced, linking the previous subject to the concept of designing for all. The class was divided into 3 groups and they started discussing and implementing a project to improve accessible design. Then it was asked to the group to work on the project separately and to send the result through a google form to GAL MOLISE simulating the competition of an application form.

Brief Report of the Results

The meeting was attended by 2 people with disabilities, 2 restaurateurs, 3 tour operators, 1 recreational organisation, 4 representatives of public bodies and 3 tourism organisations that also work with people with disabilities.

The session was generally successful, and according to feedback from users, it succeeded in improving their knowledge of accessible tourism and in evaluating services on accessibility. The training was also useful in increasing design skills through the universal design philosophy. The evaluations of the project results were very good and the participants mostly stated that they will use these materials to promote accessibility events with other tourism stakeholders.

Presentation of ACCESS IT for awareness raising

Location

The meeting was held on Skype with a duration of about 1.5 hours.

Target Group

The meeting was addressed to all people interested in the subject of accessible tourism, including: people with special needs, institutions dealing with the organisation of accessible tourism, employees of facilities providing tourism services, people studying in the field of tourism services, etc.

Methodology and Manual used

The meeting was organised in the form of a webinar during which the results of the project were presented:

Result 1: Report on the determinants of the accessibility of tourism in rural areas based on research on the accessibility barriers and challenges related to their improvement experienced by tourism SMEs.

Result 2: Accessibility tourism case studies in the form of video presentations with tourism SMEs that implemented innovative solutions improving the accessibility of their products / services and managed to commercialise their new or improved offer.

Result 3: An interactive business support toolkit, including „How to” guidelines for a strategic approach to innovation in the development of accessible tourism products, an online accessibility performance assessment tool, and collaborative design session scenarios.

Result 4: Brochure for the recipients of the project, containing tips on co-designing accessible tourist offers.

The meeting also aimed at discussion and exchange of experiences in the field of accessible tourism.

Brief Report of the Results

Information about the meeting was widely disseminated among travel agencies, organisations associating people with special needs, institutions providing tourist services. About 20 people signed up for the meeting. This shows that the issue of accessibility in tourism still seems to be a „niche” issue. Nevertheless, the participants of the meeting accepted the presented materials with interest. During the feedback given during the discussion, information was provided that disseminating the idea of accessible tourism is an important element of the activities of tourist offices and agencies. People with special travel needs reported that transport seems to be of particular importance in the area of accessibility. The key conclusion resulting from the meeting is information about the need to disseminate the idea of accessibility in Poland.



Structured training for SMEs and local entities at local level

Location

Autonomous region of Catalunya / Spain, covered through the regional rural tourism entrepreneur association TURALCAT.

Target Group

Providers of rural tourism services

Local tourism infrastructure (museums, sight-seeing points) and tourist offices,

Municipalities

Methodology and Manual used

TURALCAT implemented a full testing course with a calculated duration of 25 hours per participant. First, a call amongst the relevant target group was published. All interested participants received a course pack that includes the dates of joint sessions (online and F2F), structure of the course, and access to the relevant training resources - videos, guidelines (short and full), and self evaluation tool.

The course itself is structured around an active acquisition of knowledge based on the improvement plan that each participant shall produce for his service. In a first introduction session, the overall objectives and concepts were explained to the participants, and they received a full explanation of the available resources. During the following four days, each participant had to formulate an improvement idea for his service, to send to the course leader. These ideas were evaluated ahead of a second joint session where some most relevant aspects or questions detected were discussed. After this session, a series of five thematic in-depth sessions took place where participants had to choose at least three that are most relevant for their improvement plan. During another 10 days, they had time to prepare their improvement plan in detail, counting with assistance (tutoring / advisory service) from the course leader.

All improvement plans had to be sent two days ahead of the last joint meeting, where a selection of the most representative and best prepared plans was presented and discussed.

Brief Report of the Results

We spread the word about the ACCESS-IT course to a thousand rural accommodations in Catalonia and various institutions (natural parks, museums, regional authorities, tourist offices...). We managed to inform and create awareness amongst many companies and entities. Finally, a total of thirteen people representing different types of tourist services signed up for the course: 6 rural lodgings, 1 hotel, 2 natural parks, 1 tourist office, 1 receptive agency and 2 other service companies. Of the total registered, only seven (55%) have developed an accessibility project for their tourist service. Five projects (71%) have the main objective of improving accessibility and communication for customers with mobility difficulties. The remaining 2 projects (29%) are mainly aimed at people with visual impairments, but also take into account, in addition, other segments (hearing and cognitive impairments).

At the end of the course, an evaluation survey was sent to the participants, which gave significant results showing that 83% are „much more motivated” to implement tourist accessibility measures and 66% valued the course quality at “5” (values from 0 to 5).

Assess the accessibility of a tourism product

Location

Online Training Webinar on 20th June 2022, “How to Develop Accessible Tourism in Rural and Natural Areas”

Recorded and distributed on ENAT YouTube Channel. (1 hour 42 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/xalJbE7Pbbc>

ENAT distributed the training course, including slide presentations through its Accessible Tourism Events page at: <https://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.events.2293>

Target Group

SME tourism providers in natural and rural areas, destination managers, VET trainers, public officials and anyone interested in the subject.

Limited to 30 persons, in English language.



Methodology and Manual used

This webinar shared some of the results of the Access IT project, with new insights, training tools and suggestions for delivering services for visitors with access requirements in Natural and Rural Areas.

The emphasis was on “How to...” make your services accessible.. The webinar addressed:

- How to assess accessibility of a tourism product/service
- How to address the requirements of the target customer segments
- How to develop a truly accessible tourism offer and meet demand
- How to bring to market and promote an accessible product
- How to involve stakeholders in the development of accessible products.

Training materials included the ACCESS IT “How to” Guides, the ACCESS IT Webtool and some of the ACCESS IT videos.

Brief Report of the Results

During the Webinar, some discussion took place with questions, in particular, from the owner of a travel agency and tour operator, Accessible Tromsø (Norway). He was eager to share his experience with the participants. His company arranges tours for visitors with reduced mobility including blind, deaf and hard of hearing, persons with cognitive impairments and families. His tours include husky dog-sledding, reindeer tours, whale-watching and other activities in the nature around Tromsø. He uses a blind qualified tourist guide at the local museum. He pointed out that many companies do not have accessible websites which means that they cannot reach customers with sight impairments. Even a company that makes devices to help blind people to navigate has an inaccessible website!

Other issues were addressed by the speakers and in a short panel discussion.

The ACCESS IT self-assessment tool for small businesses was demonstrated by the ACCESS IT team.

Participants had all agreed for the webinar to be recorded and the Webinar is now available on ENAT’s YouTube channel. Comments on the YouTube site are monitored by ENAT and any questions from viewers will be answered there.

The training evaluation form link was distributed to the participants, and it also appears on the ENAT Event webpage (see above).

Transnational online training with tutorial service

Location

All Europe - 32 countries covered by the Ruraltour network

Target Group

Rural tourism service providers

Technical advisory staff of professional organisations in rural tourism

Methodology and Manual used

Ruraltour implemented a full testing with a calculated duration of 25 hours per participant under the same overall methodology as explained above for TURALCAT, but organised as a fully online course held in English. A call amongst the relevant target group was published through the Ruraltour network, providing a course pack that includes the dates of joint and thematic online sessions, structure of the course, and access links to the relevant training resources - videos, guidelines (short and full), and self-evaluation tool.

The course itself was structured around an active acquisition of knowledge based on the improvement plan that each participant shall produce for his service. It consists of two blocks: 1) generic awareness rising and knowledge of basic accessibility concepts; 2) application of this understanding in a concrete improvement plan for a service or installation.

In the introduction session, the overall objectives and concepts were explained to the participants, and they received a full explanation of the available resources. During the following six days, each participant had to formulate an improvement idea for his service through an online form. These ideas were evaluated ahead of a second joint session and the most relevant aspects or questions detected were discussed.

After this session, a series of five thematic in-depth sessions was planned. Participants had to choose at least three that are most relevant for their improvement plan. During another 5 days, they had time to prepare their improvement plan in detail, counting with assistance (tutoring / advisory service) by the course leader. All improvement plans had to be sent two days ahead of the last joint meeting, where the most representative and best prepared plans were presented and discussed.



Brief Report of the Results

The initial participation was 21 persons from 11 countries, with 15 of them present at the first online session. In spite of reminders this number reduced considerably over the course, with only 5 improvement ideas. Accordingly, the planned five thematic sessions were reduced and joined into two longer Q&A sessions. Finally, four improvement plans were produced by participants.

From this trial - combined and compared with the similar testing done in Catalu a - we learn the critical importance of an intermediate structure in close contact with the reality of the participants. This can be either a local DMO, a local-regional professional association, or similar entities that know the territory, culture and the reality of the participants. Regarding the training materials, videos were mentioned by participants as most interesting and easy to use. On the other hand even the short version of the Guidelines were considered as too complex for self-study, their understanding required additional individual interpretation and support by the intermediate entity.

Face-To-Face training workshop

Location

Sofia, Bulgaria

Institute for Postgraduate Studies at University of National and World Economics

Target Group

Providers of rural tourism services

Provider of other tourism services and products

Representatives of tourism associations and organisations

Owners of rural tourism travel blogs and magazines

Teachers at universities in Rural and alternative tourism studies

Representatives of associations, organisations and governmental entities working with and for people with disabilities and different access requirements

Methodology and Manual used

ECQ implemented a full testing face-to-face training workshop. The testing was divided into several sessions that covered the Access-IT project materials and instruments. The total number of participants were 15 and in order to best accommodate the needs of the training, a hall was equipped with computers and Internet connection.

The first session was dedicated to introducing the topic of accessible tourism and raising awareness of the importance of providing accessible tourism offers. Particular focus was given to the establishments and tourism services in natural and rural areas. During this session some of the video materials, as well as the How-To Guidelines were presented. The topics of the How-To guidelines are:

1. How to assess accessibility of a tourism product/service
2. How to address the requirements of the target customer segments
3. How to develop a truly accessible tourism offer and meet demand
4. How to bring to market and promote an accessible product
5. How to involve stakeholders in accessible product development

During the second session, Eleonora Yosifova who was a guest speaker from the Bulgarian Association of Alternative Tourism (BAAT) discussed several challenges related to the development of accessible tourism offers and also shared a few examples of accessible tourism initiatives developed in Bulgaria. She further developed the topics of accessibility by explaining the benefits and advantages of developing tourism products and services that serve the needs of people with special access requirements.

After participants got familiar with different concepts and knowledge related to accessible tourism in natural and rural areas, they were involved in a practical session. During the practical exercises participants worked in small groups. Each group was given a task to create an accessible tourism offer for a group of tourists with special access needs (e.g., handicapped impaired people) or to organise a bike tour for deaf people). Participants had to use the How-To Guidelines in order to develop a successful offer and effective communication strategy considering the target group they were given. At the end of the practical session each group presented their offer followed by a discussion in the big group. Participants shared their opinion, made comments and raised new questions related to the topic.

The next session was dedicated to the self-assessment appraisal web-tool. All elements and components of the tool were explained and it was demonstrated how to navigate through different modules. After that the attendees tested the web-tool themselves.



During the testing different questions arose and participants were sharing their opinions simultaneously.

The last part of the training was a discussion session, during which all participants actively participated and shared their opinions and perspectives on the different topics related to accessible tourism offers.

Brief Report of the Results

At the end of the training participants were asked to complete a feedback form and to evaluate the training. Based on the received feedback the following conclusions were made:

- All participants replied positively and agreed that the training session helped them to improve their knowledge in the field of accessible tourism. 12 of the respondents completely agree, while 2 answered “For the most part”, which is also considered a positive answer. One participant did not fill in the questionnaire. Similar were the received answers to the questions “The training session has helped me to get more prepared to design and deliver accessible tourism products and services” and “The training session has helped to learn how to co-design accessible tourism products or services together with key stakeholders” where 11 respondents answered “Yes” and 3 of them answered “For the most part”.
- When asked to evaluate on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) the training materials of 13 of the respondents marked 5 and 1 marked 4. On the question to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the training 11 replied with 5 (highest), 2 of them marked 4, and 1 did not reply.
- None of the questions received a negative evaluation from any the participants.
- The majority of participants (10) pointed out that they will use the training materials as a guide for improving their products and services. Also, about half of the participants stated that they will recommend the materials to their colleagues (8 respondents) and will promote them to other tourism stakeholders (7 respondents).

From these results can be concluded that the training workshop was highly effective and successful. Participants find the training interesting and useful, and consider using the materials in their future work. All of them stated that they would like to be informed and to receive further information on the topic of accessible tourism.

3. Good practices

Importance of Universal Design and accessibility in Europe

‘Universal Design (UD) is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. The intent of the universal design concept is to simplify life for everyone. The universal design concept targets all people of all ages, sizes and abilities.

Revisiting the definition, UD is:

- A process that enables and empowers a diverse population by improving human performance, health and wellness, and social participation.
- Making things easier to use, healthier and friendlier (Steinfeld and Maisel -2012)
- An approach to design of environments, products and services that considers many human factors.

Universal Design is based on 7 principles:

1. Equitable Use, 2. Flexibility in Use, 3. Simple and intuitive use, 4. Perceptible Information, 5. Tolerance for Error, 6. Low Physical Effort and 7. Size and Space for Approach and Use.

Universal Design is a holistic design approach, reflecting a way of understanding and responding to people’s various needs. In its wider perspective it is the key to removing barriers and ensuring good access for everyone, including people with disabilities. UD supports the functionality of a building, product or service and provides independence for people and it contributes to creating comfortable, sustainable, inclusive and safe environments, products and services for ALL.

Therefore, regarding tourism, Universal Design has to be considered and applied throughout the whole tourism supply chain.

Universal Design (UD) originated in the USA. “Design for All” is a similar approach developed in Europe, which means designing, developing and marketing mainstream products, services, systems and environments to be accessible and usable by as broad a range of users as possible.

Design for All, is now being considered within a number of policy areas by the European Commission as a tool for improving goods and services and making them suitable for all consumers, as in the European Accessibility Act (2019.)



Designing for the widest range of guests, including those with disabilities, gives added value to a tourist venue or facility since all people can benefit from the space standards and many of the accessibility features that people with disabilities need. Customers arriving tired or stressed after a long journey, carrying heavy suitcases, older people and families with small children will all enjoy a safer and more comfortable stay. Clearly, Universal Design must consider the access requirements of users with many kinds of disabilities and how to address these in the design solution.

Accessible tourism is increasingly becoming recognised as a quality brand which serves the broad interests both of the industry and of the local citizens at destinations as well as the diversity of visitors who come to enjoy accessible experiences. While we often think of accessibility as a technical approach or tool, it is more than that. It is also a cultural attribute which supports and enriches all aspects of customer care, making every visitor a valued guest and contributing added benefits to every tourism business.

Relation between Accessibility and Tourism

There is no single, universally accepted definition of „accessible tourism“. Here we refer to some of the ways in which the term is defined and used. The concept is certain to evolve as it is applied in more and more contexts around the world.

“Accessible tourism enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments. This definition is inclusive of all people including those travelling with children in prams, people with disabilities and seniors.” (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

Accessible Tourism, also referred to as Inclusive Tourism, Barrier-Free Tourism or simply, Tourism for All, should not be understood as a separate type of tourism but as a set of pre-conditions for every type of tourism. People of all ages and abilities, including persons with disabilities and other tourists with specific access requirements, experience many barriers to participation in tourism, throughout the whole “visitor journey“. This is largely because products, services and the built environment are not designed to be accessible to the widest range of users. These visitors may require certain accommodations when travelling, in terms of information design, environmental design, equipment or services and a welcoming attitude, ensuring that they can have a safe, comfortable and fulfilling experience.

In order for tourism to be “accessible“, all parts of the value chain, from better information and booking, transportation and through to facilities at the destination, including accommodation, catering and activities, as well as tourism services must be made accessible

- better suited to the needs of all customers, including those with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

In Europe, Accessible Tourism is increasingly gaining attention as a potential growth area for destinations and businesses, due to three main factors or “drivers”. These are:

1. Demographic ageing of the population
2. Legislation on human rights and accessibility
3. The business case for accessible tourism

Reference:

“Accessible and Inclusive Tourism” by Ivor Ambrose, in *Encyclopaedia of Tourism Management and Marketing*, (2022), Buhalis, D. (Editor).

<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.accessible>

Why is accessible tourism important?

Introduction to accessible tourism: Why is it important?

Accessible tourism is tourism that meets the needs of various groups, incl. people with disabilities, the elderly, families with children, pregnant women, people with mobility limitations or specific nutritional needs.

It is based on a Universal Design philosophy that aims to create an environment, places and services that are convenient for all types of customers, including people with disabilities and/or other specific access requirements, without the need for additional adaptation.

Accessible tourism poses certain expectations to all its entities and organisers. It may seem that it is a niche market or requires large financial outlays, e.g. for infrastructure adaptation. Very often, however, simple actions and amenities significantly facilitate the stay of tourists with specific access requirements, enabling them to communicate, enter, move around and use a place, giving a sense of security and comfort while travelling.

It is especially important that tourism operators inform visitors about access conditions in all information materials, bearing in mind that accessible tourism is not only the journey itself, but equally requires careful preparation for the trip, that is, determining the destination, means of transport, finding suitable accommodation and sightseeing opportunities. Accessibility requirements apply already in the information materials that tourism operators



publish (mainly on websites) and consists in precise communication of information about all amenities, but also paying attention to the difficulties that some customers may face.

An open attitude, good intentions and kindness of tourism organisers should be the starting point for creating a space and services accessible to all tourists. Accessible tourism gives the same rights to travel and use tourist services and attractions to all those who love to travel.

Therefore, it is not enough that a given facility is adapted, for example, to the needs of people with disabilities, but it is important to remember about appropriate and comprehensive information on all amenities, and to offer various forms of communication and booking.

This places specific requirements on tourism organisers, such as tourist offices, transport-related institutions, accommodation facilities, tourist attractions, event organisers, but also the customers themselves, who should be able to communicate their needs in a safe and confidential manner.

Accessibility applies not only to - as it commonly seems - people with disabilities, and often even more narrowly - to people using wheelchairs. It is difficult to meet all the needs of the groups mentioned above, but it is very important to consider as many of these needs as possible. Awareness-raising and training on accessibility and customer service enables operators and staff to cater for all customers with confidence.

How to do it? – Check your facilities

Usually, rural accommodations were built a long time ago. Back then, people didn't pay much attention to making the facilities accessible for clients with different impairments. This is why many rural complexes already in their structure have obstacles that cannot easily be modified and improved. The owners of such facilities are often aware of that, and they are afraid of the thought of having to have their property redone. Almost nobody wants to invest too much time or money in a big reconstruction without being sure that they will get a relevant immediate return on investment.

Owners are not aware that there are many "small" improvements that they can easily make on their own, and on a tight budget. These improvements may seem small, but already make a huge difference for clients with certain difficulties. This is exactly the idea behind the video "How to do it? – Check your facilities". We wanted to show to the accommodation owners how easy it actually is to check their facilities on their own and detect the problems. Therefore, we went to a rural complex called "Las Monjas" in Malaga, Spain. This complex is 300 years old, and was restored 20 years ago without thinking of making it accessible.

In order to find the obstacles we used a wheelchair, crutches, glasses and earplugs. The owner used the wheelchair and crutches while touring around the parts of the complex she would like to make more accessible. We took note of all of the obstacles we encountered in our way, like stairs without ramps, narrow doors or spots that need handrails for easier access (e.g. bathroom). We also checked if acoustic signals (e.g. the bell that is used in case of emergencies) were loud enough for clients with hearing impairments. Symbols and written messages (e.g. Wi-Fi password) needed to be easy to read while wearing the glasses that make our sight worse.

Since this rural accommodation has an outdoor area that is commonly used, we checked that part as well by using the wheelchair. A few spots were impossible for a wheelchair user to access without the help of another person, and that was the indication that those spots needed fixes (usually just ramps).

In conclusion, if you want to make your facilities more accessible for your clients and make their stay more enjoyable, you do not need too much time nor money. Just follow our example and do the tour of your place on your own or with the help of a friend. It will take up just a little of your time and effort, but will have a great positive impact on the overall satisfaction of your clients.

How to do it? - Implement simple solutions

The next step after analysing accessibility issues of a rural service is the decision about the feasible improvements, their planning and the implementation.

After we went through the whole rural complex looking for accessibility obstacles, we produced a report with suggestions for improvements. The report was reviewed and it was decided which measures were going to be implemented. If you are thinking of making your rural accommodation more accessible, these ideas can be easily replicated and helpful.

The next step is looking for the material that will be needed. To do this you can:

- Search on websites - Start typing “disability equipment” and the search engine will generate other relevant suggestions.
- Go to *Do It Yourself* stores - Railings, handrails and other basic items are easy to find at good prices
- Ask specialist shops that provide disability aids for advice



Here are some of the improvements that we came up with:

- For wheelchair users, in order to move independently (without needing an attendant), for every step/stairs a ramp should also be provided. A ramp can either be fixed or mobile and should have sufficient width and a slope of maximum 5-6% (10% for short distances such as 2 steps, with assistance).
- All of the stairs should have handrails on both sides, or a handrail in the centre in case of wide staircases.
- Adapt at least one bathroom in one of the apartments or rooms.
 - You can widen the door for the wheelchair user to pass autonomously, and install grab bars for the users who can cover short walking distances.
 - Install a shower tray (roll-in shower) at floor level.
 - Replace the cabin with curtains.
 - Provide a chair.
 - Place the fittings at a height, suitable for wheelchair users and short persons.
- Ensure that floors are level, but with a slightly rough surface to prevent slipping both inside the accommodation and in the common outside areas.
- All the texts (WiFi password, menu, accommodation leaflets, etc) should be written in large font, legible even without glasses.
- For emergencies use both an audible and visual alarm equipment (sound and light signal at the same time).
- Place warning indications and hazard protection materials, where there are obstacles in areas with poor visibility, so that the person would notice and avoid them (e.g. lower their head).

The price of material for the improvements we agreed on is less than 500 EURO (not including the installation). Some of the solutions are even free.

Although these are not perfect solutions, they are very easy to implement and can significantly improve accessibility in many beautiful rural complexes.

How to do it? – How will a person with a disability travel?

An increasing number of people with disabilities or others with specific access requirements, such as seniors, wish to travel and participate in tourism. They may travel alone or with their families, or with a group of friends or with an assistant.

The video of how to plan a tour for visitors with mobility impairments shows the services and facilities at Parques de Sintra World Heritage site in Portugal.

A Tour Operator who is organising this type of activity must remember that each tour is unique and requires an individual approach, suited to the range of differing client needs. The organiser must thoroughly check all the facilities and services in advance, to ensure a good experience for everyone. The tour must be planned in a logical, client-focused manner, taking into account the accessibility conditions of accommodation and transportation; access to a local guide with the required language skills; the location of adapted toilets and purchase of the required range of tickets. All these elements of the tour must be identified, assessed and finally selected well in advance of the tour dates.

A checklist of tasks and questions is necessary for checking the accessibility of the venue when preparing a tour. First it is important to know the needs and abilities of each member of the group to understand the access requirements. The next step is to search for the information. The Internet is a good source of information. Next it is necessary to contact the venue either by phone or e-mail to ask about accessibility issues like access to the venue, renting equipment, availability of a tourist guide, accessible toilets, etc. Since some clients who use wheelchairs need adapted vehicles with a ramp or a lift the organiser must arrange this for them. Before confirming the service, the client should be presented with the itinerary and the price.

To check if the client was satisfied with services the customer can be asked to fill in a customer satisfaction survey after the tour. It is essential to have a “Plan B” for all major aspects of the tour, in order to avoid a crisis. For example, a typical tour problem can be the breakdown of a bus... The team leader **MUST** know where to obtain a replacement bus quickly.

How to promote it? – Practical guide

The film presents activities in the field of accessible tourism carried out by the authors of the blog „Robimy prodróże”. The material is not a lesson in marketing and promotion, but a set of practices that result from the experience of the blog’s authors, one of which is a disabled person - moving in a wheelchair.



The key elements presented in the film are the bloggers' statements as well as photos and videos from their travels.

The authors talk about the way of presenting information on available tourist attractions as part of their blog.

An important issue in promoting accessible tourism is accurate and reliable information. The authors of the blog emphasise that all materials prepared by tourism organisers should precisely define the tourist offer and present the facts. If the materials are reliable then those interested will be willing to use this offer.

It should also be remembered that the quality of communication with customers with special needs means that they will recommend places and attractions to another powerful customer.

Customers with specific access requirements are also customers who have money to spend when travelling, but they need to be sure that the offer is suitable for them. Therefore, the best promotion of an accessible facility is to prepare their offer considering the access requirements of the target groups and also provide/publish the relevant accessibility information for the potential customers.

Accessible accommodation examples

This video shows us an example of fully accessible rural accommodation. In 2006, three families bought an old traditional farmhouse in Can Morei, Barcelona with the aim of renovating it to create a barrier-free environment accessible to all types of clients.

Can Morei is more than 450 years old and when it was purchased it was in very poor condition. This complex has four floors with seven apartments, a terrace, a swimming pool, a large meeting room, common areas and parking. All fully accessible for wheelchair users.

The meeting room has a magnetic induction loop that connects wirelessly to the guest's hearing aid. The open-space concept allows all rooms to be very spacious, with access on both sides of the bed. Beds have space underneath for approaching with a wheelchair. The 90-centimetre-wide sliding doors allow easy access in and out of the bedrooms.

In addition, guests at Can Morei have access to a specific type of chairs, with and without wheels for use in the bathroom. The sink and mirror are placed on a lower level so that guests can use them from the wheelchair. The shower is barrier-free. The faucet handle is extra long and there is also an extendable work table. Room names are written in Braille so that visually impaired guests can locate themselves. Can Morei also has a swimming pool with an easy-to-install hydraulic chair and high hammocks for safe wheelchair transition.

All in all, Can Morei shows us easy and practical solutions. Considering the necessary measures for a barrier-free environment from the beginning allows easy solutions to be implemented. Therefore, there is no additional cost for the renovation of the farmhouse. However, some of the barriers could be easily removed afterwards. Such as allowing easy access to the terrace.

During the last few years, the owners have developed a close collaboration with several travel agencies that are specialised in accessible tourism through different channels. Between 2019 and 2020, 10% of the bookings included customers with disabilities, especially wheelchair users. These bookings came from 8 different countries.

All customers leave with a high degree of satisfaction, specifically with the idea of invisible accessibility. The accommodation owners are very grateful for the feedback in order to improve current practices and optimise the site as much as possible.

Accessible transport examples

The story of Santilli Trasporti company is the story of the only Molise transporter with a vehicle set up with ramps to make tourism accessible in the inland areas of Molise.

In a region where traffic is not excellent, and where public transport has poorly equipped and untested means of transporting people with physical disabilities, the importance and value of this story is immediately evident. Carlo, the owner of the company, is a 30-year-old man who, together with his father Polifemo, have been equipping their means of transport with a ramp for a few years to make transport in the internal areas of Molise accessible to anyone. Carlo told us that at the beginning of this adventure, in 2012, it was not easy to promote this type of solution. At the beginning, Carlo tells us, the demand for this service was hardly present, only starting from 2017 did the demand become more consistent. The difficulty, however, was also in the management and in the relationship with the person with physical disability. „We did not know the right etiquette to relate to people with disabilities, we were always afraid of hurting their feelings, the Access It project is helping us in the management of interpersonal communication, but also in the management of our website and in better communicating our offer.

From 2017 onwards Carlo and his father managed to bring hundreds of people with physical disabilities from Rome and Pescara to the inland areas of Molise that are difficult to reach. Otherwise, these people would not have been able to visit these beautiful places. This is also helping to improve tourist accessibility of the entire region. „We are not only satisfied that we have been able to bring many people with disabilities around Molise, but also that we have been able to help them in different aspects - finding hotels and bed and breakfast that



are able to offer them appropriate services, hotels and accommodation facilities that have accessible rooms and promote cultural services accessible to all”.

The story of Santilli company demonstrates that from a small initiative, such as the installation of a ramp on a single vehicle, a broader discussion can start and be generated. It may even improve the tourist offer of an entire area. This story also demonstrates how adequate training, such as that promoted by Access It, can help tour operators to relate better to any type of disability.

Accessible recreation examples

Play and Train is a non-profit association, declared of public utility that aims to provide families with people with disabilities access to sports practice. In this way, sport is used as a tool to normalise, include and educate people with and without disabilities. This association has been managing the Center for Adapted Sports at the La Molina Mountain Resort. For more than ten years it has been offering adapted sports activities in the natural environment throughout the year.

Skiing is one of the most adaptable sports for people with any type of disability, whether physical, mental or sensory. The equipment used for this sport is very diverse, with a high level of development and comfort. In order to carry out an adapted activity or any type of sport, it is essential to have an accessible environment.

The mountain resort of La Molina, in collaboration with the Johan Cruyff Foundation and the Play and Train Association have been working for years to achieve adequate and accessible facilities for everyone. The Adapted Sports Centre has preferential parking spaces for people with disabilities, a flat entrance and an adapted bathroom. In addition, it is located in front of a beginners' slope of preferential use for people with disabilities. There is a ski lift to facilitate access to the ski slopes.

Another aspect to take into account is the adapted material, the cost of such material is high, so it is one of the biggest challenges in the practice of adapted sports. For this reason, the Play and Train association, through donations and collaborations, has been acquiring different types of adapted material for years in order to facilitate the access of more people to the world of snow.

Every year, Play and Train carries out specific training in adapted skiing for ski and snowboard instructors. For all this, it is essential to have professionals who understand the needs of each person.

There are more than 500 people with disabilities who, together with their families and friends, enjoy the sport and the mountains, with all the benefits that this entails.

To achieve all this, the key has been the adaptation of the resort, making its different services and lifts accessible. In addition, Play and Train offers a wide variety of adapted equipment that is provided free of charge in their ski lessons.

And finally, the association has a team of trained and specialised professionals who understand the importance of breaking down barriers and moving towards a society where everyone has the same rights and opportunities.

Advantages / benefits of accessible tourism in society and in employment

Evrika Beach Club Hotel in Bulgaria is a good example of a responsible employer of people with hearing impairments. Over the last five years, the hotel has offered these people seasonal jobs in the hotel kitchen, restaurant, bar, laundry and reception, including frontline positions. The process of employment goes through several key phases and is facilitated by a consultant specialised in working with deaf people and qualified as a sign language translator. First, the consultant discusses with the hotel management vacant positions and creates spreadsheets describing in detail job functions and requirements for each position. Then, she distributes this information among her network of people with hearing impairments and leads the recruitment process. The short-listed candidates are interviewed by the hotel manager, who takes the final decision about employment.

The selected candidates start working at the beginning of the season. For those who live in other cities it is arranged transportation to the hotel and accommodated in near-by villages. The hotel also organises transportation of their new employees from the place of their stay to work. The work itself begins with a comprehensive induction training carried out by the hotel manager, senior staff members occupying similar positions and the consultant (sign language translator). The induction training is very practical. Verbal explanations are supported by handouts containing all relevant information. New employees are shown what exactly they are expected to do. While the induction training is facilitated by the consultant/translator, during normal working days the main media of communication between deaf employees and other staff members are information boards. All tasks allocated to deaf people (as well as to other employees) are written there.

The majority of job positions offered to people with hearing impairments do not require direct communication with hotel guests. However, sometimes deaf people are employed as bar attendants and front cooks and have to take orders from their guests. The hotel supports this process by providing menus with pictures of all dishes and drinks offered



in the restaurant and the bar. Guests should just point out the picture of what they want to order. If they start talking with the deaf employee, he/she shows them a special sign of an ear on the uniform and tries to explain with signs that he/she cannot hear. Evrika's experience has proven that employing people with access requirements is mutually beneficial. Deaf people get employment on fair conditions. Hotel permanent staff is trained to work with people with access needs and thus gets more prepared to meet guests who may have similar health conditions. The hotel builds an image of a responsible tourism service provider, which helps them to attract more domestic and international tourists.

Communication of accessible tourism - example 1

The Multimedia Visitor Center Tsarevgrad Tarnov in Veliko Tarnovo, also known as The Museum of Wax Figures is the only museum of its kind on the Balkan Peninsula similar to the world-famous Museum of Wax Figures of Madame Tussauds.

The museum presents historical figures and memorable events from the period of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom in the form of sculptures and murals. The exhibition contains 29 sculptural figures of different social layers in mediaeval Bulgarian society – kings, boyars, clergy and craftsmen.

The figures are made of special silicone used in cinema and resembles the type of human skin which makes them very real and authentic. All these allow the museum to present the history in an attractive, interesting, and understandable way. The exhibitions - figures, their clothes and accessories, the scenes they present deliver very well the stories, information and messages to the visitors of the museum. People can clearly understand and differentiate various social groups, particular activities depicted and the way of life back in history. Therefore, it is very easy for people with disabilities to understand the information that the exhibition wants to deliver.

In addition, several kiosks with interactive touch screens are placed across the museum. They provide descriptions and additional information about the screens that can be seen, as well as general information about the museum. The content and texts are specifically developed in such a way that are easily readable and understandable by all visitors, regardless of their age or disability. Additionally, descriptions are supported by pictures of the screens in order readers to easily find the information they look for. Thus, people are able to understand the content alone without support. Inside the museum there are navigation arrows placed everywhere across the centre. They show visitors the direction to the next section of the exhibition. Other distinctive signs are also displayed to navigate visitors and help them find particular areas, rest rooms, emergency exits, etc.

Communication of accessible tourism - example 2

The history of the Samnite Museum of Campobasso shows how the application of Universal Design can make museum structures accessible not only from the point of view of physical accessibility, but can also make the cultural paths proposed for all types of sensory disabilities usable.

The accessibility of culture for all is a theme that has only been concretely implemented in recent years, also thanks to the possibilities opened up by new digital technologies. The University of Molise and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage have developed two applications that can be downloaded on smartphones within the Samnite Museum of Campobasso that allow people with visual impairments and hearing impairments to enjoy the cultural itineraries inside the museum. Professor Maddalena told us about the immersive tactile narration called „travelling with Asparukh“: This app works with three aspects, on the one hand there is an innovative technological aspect, there are the beacons. The objects reproduced in 3D which in turn have an electronic system inside them which is necessary to start the storytelling. This system of vocal narration unites the presence of objects to be touched, making the blind person participate in the cultural material proposed by the muse, and in addition it opens up the able person who wants to experience this blindfolded path of being able to put himself in the shoes of a visually impaired person and experience the disability on his skin.” This application has the dual function of allowing the use of cultural paths to the deaf and at the same time to raise awareness on the issue of disability and accessibility.” Doctor Delfino, on the other hand, told us about another application for the deaf public which is called Tik & Tuk:” This application is created through fast motion, developed with graphics that have been taken from European rock art. Since even the deaf feel certain vibrations of the rhythm, in this way they can understand the contents of a showcase in the protohistoric room that tells of the invention of the metallurgical technique.”

Professor Maddalena and Dr. Delfino tell us that they have found very positive feedback after the development of these applications from the public. The history of the Samnite Museum demonstrates how Universal design can work both as a method of attracting and disseminating culture for all, and as a tool to raise awareness of accessibility 360 degrees.



Accessibility information provision in websites and marketing information for visitors

Information about the accessibility of a venue, its facilities and services can be vital for visitors with disabilities, long-term health conditions or other specific access requirements. Service providers who provide accessibility information in their website and other marketing channels will not only reach and attract a wider market of customers, they will also enhance their reputation as a responsible and inclusive tourism operator.

Accessibility information should be collected in a systematic way, following a checklist, either by the venue manager or by an access auditor. (See section: "How to do it - check your facilities", above). Information should be presented factually and objectively, avoiding subjective opinion, and in a well-organised layout. Text should be easy to understand and the use of images and room plans can be helpful.

It is important to make sure that the website itself is accessible for persons with disabilities; that is, the website should be designed according to the internationally recognised [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#) which ensure that the pages are correctly organised and rendered for navigation and use by users who may have mobility, sensory or cognitive impairments.

Some examples of well-documented accessibility information are given in the following websites:

- [Parques de Sintra, Portugal](#)
- [Eden Project, UK Accessibility Guide](#)
- [Hotel Hochfilzer, Austria](#)
- [The Unicorn Cave, Germany](#)

4. Success stories

Testing and training sessions developed during ACCESS IT provided insight into the wide scope of realities and possible approaches to improve accessibility for rural services. From each of the sessions, we selected one story from an association, SMEs, VET trainer or others that caught our attention as best practice or example.

Italy: Accessibility in the mountains

Stakeholder

Representative of Molise region

Title of the project:

Accessibility in the mountains

The objective:

make the Campitello Matese mountain tourist facility accessible for winter sports and also for summer tourism.

Main points of improvement:

1. Improve the accessibility of the website;
2. Make an agreement with an accessible transport agency;
3. Create ski lifts suitable for people with all kinds of disabilities;
4. Purchase special equipment to allow disabled people with all kinds of deficits to try winter sports activities;
5. Create new routes to be accessible to all kinds of disabilities;
6. Train qualified personnel to welcome tourists with all kinds of disabilities and allow them to make the most of the special equipment and the new routes created.

Stakeholder Feedback

“The training was really stimulating, the online evaluation tool was responsive and was able to correctly determine our level of knowledge on accessibility and accessibility of tourism.



And obviously there is still much to improve both in our knowledge and in the approach that the tourism sector of the Molise region has to the issue of accessibility. The guidelines have helped us to better understand the aspects of universal design and the concept of accessibility for all. The video series, on the other hand, was a roundup of good practices that stimulated us. Thanks to the project we learnt about the Samnite Museum project in Campobasso and through the video on winter sports instead, we came up with the idea of trying to imagine a project that could make the Campitello Matese ski resort more touristy.”

Observation

We are pleased to note that this design story by the representatives of the Molise region was stimulated by the viewing of the videos containing the success stories. video tools once again prove to be a powerful form of both education and dissemination of good practices and success stories that are being implemented throughout Europe. If the evaluation kit and the guidelines give body and structure to the course, surely the videos and success stories are the part that captures the attention and most stimulates the imagination of the training participants. We are delighted that our course was able to stimulate the thought of designing accessible tourist routes for the Campitello Matese mountains.

Poland: Modernisation of a museum

Stakeholder

Modernization of the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejówek. A museum-educational-conference complex with a cultural park with an area of 4 ha. The combination of the intimacy of the historic manor house and the surrounding area with the modern space of the new building.

Stakeholder Project and success story

The building is one of the best adapted tourist attractions in the region to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Improvements in the building:

- Touch paths on levels 0 and -3 and in staircases (+ handrails and rest points)
- There are two parking spaces for people with disabilities on the square.
- All entrance doors - width min. 90 cm, entrances without threshold.
- Glass walls with warning signs to increase visibility.
- The main elevator connects all levels of the building. Equipped with a hands-free system and Braille subtitles (+ elevators in the exhibition).

- Mezzanine - 90 cm ramp with an 8% slope with resting points or with a lift.
- Tactile models of the permanent exhibition. The mockups are described in Braille.
- Induction loops amplifying the signal in hearing aids, at the cash desk and at the audioguide point.
- 3 prams for adults.
- Call system in toilets for disabled people.
- Tactile models of the permanent exhibition.
- The mockups are described in Braille.
- The audio guides have an audio description of the sightseeing path. 50 individual neck loops (audio guide or tour guide).
- Presentation of a sign language interpreter displayed on the screen of the audioguide.
- The sightseeing path at the core exhibition is not narrower than 90 cm.

Still need to improve:

- The sidewalks surrounding the museum complex and the entrances to the building do not have tactile paths.
- The alley in front of the main entrance and the courtyard of the Museum are covered with gravel. The administrative entrance at Paderewskiego Street has a paved surface with paving stones.
- The staircase to the Permanent Exhibition does not have a tactile path (handrail).
- The permanent exhibition does not have tactile paths.
- Grids in the floor
- Narrow aisles
- Some of the subtitles are too high
- The historic garden is not adapted to the needs of people with physical disabilities. The paths in the garden are narrow, unpaved and covered with gravel. No touch paths, mockups and typhlographs of the square
- No use of audio guides - no audio description of the tour path and no presentation of a sign language interpreter displayed on the screen. 50 individual induction loops - tourist guide.



WEBSITE AND ONLINE MATERIALS

The Museum website is adapted to the WCAG AA standards to a standard extent:

- Contrast and character size proportions are maintained
- The information is easy to read with the assistance of assistive applications
- Most of the images on the website have alternative content (they are also systematically supplemented)
- We are constantly working on supplementing the film materials provided by the museum on YouTube with subtitles
- In most cases, new recordings are translated into Polish Sign Language
- „Sulejówek in the neighbourhood” - audio descriptions of 20 materials

Stakeholder Feedback

It is extremely important that subsequent tourist attractions change for the needs of people with special needs. The facility is a good practice. Information on this subject should be disseminated at home and abroad.

Observation

It is important that the museum becomes a model for tourism institutions in other regions as well. Currently, adjustments can be expected in attractions located in large cities. The museum should be an inspiration for objects located also in smaller towns and villages.

Spain: Improvements in local tourist office

Stakeholder

Tourist Office of a medium-sized town (12,000 inhabitants) in the high mountains (Seu d'Urgell, Catalonia, Spain).

Stakeholder Project and success story

This city has a solid position as a tourist destination and with remarkable heritage attractions, it is proposed to make its offer of itineraries through the historic and monumental core accessible to segments of the public with sensory impairments (people with hearing impairments, low vision and blind people). The itinerary through the historic centre and monuments is already accessible to people with reduced mobility.

Improvement actions are being implemented:

- Tour of the historic centre for the blind and visually impaired
- Specific audio guide for blind people (to download to mobile phones).
- Creation of an itinerary through the historic centre for blind people by installing a guide base that allows them to follow the itinerary using a cane-guide.
- Incorporation of vertical signage with information in Braille.

Improvement of the visit to the monuments for people with hearing impairment:

- Specific videos for people with hearing impairments (sound information is transmitted through two channels: an interpreter with sign language + subtitles in different languages is incorporated).

Improved pre-visit information for people with disabilities:

- Incorporation of a plug-in in the tourist website of the municipality that allows converting text into sound messages.
- Introduction of improvements in the design of the website to facilitate reading (including the option of enlarging the typography of the texts).
- Preparation of a brochure-catalogue of all the information on the itineraries and main heritage attractions adapted for the different segments of the public with disabilities (mobility and sensory deficits). This material will be prepared to be distributed on-line (pdf + audio format) and on paper (also printed in Braille).



Stakeholder Feedback

„The project is in the preparation phase and hopes to be able to count on the support of the municipal politicians.”

Observation

Excellent proposal for a medium-sized city with a consolidated position as a tourist destination. It involves the incorporation of various improvements in accessibility that will allow it to become an inclusive tourist destination, enhancing the value of its tourism brand and allowing it to attract new customer segments.

It is a good example of a project that could be implemented in many other locations in the natural and rural regions of Europe.

Ireland: Corporate policy and actions on accessibility: Gleneagle Hotel Group

Stakeholder

Gleneagle Hotel Group, Killarney, Ireland (<https://www.gleneaglehotel.com/>)

Between 2016 and 2018, ENAT trainers, in association with the Irish consultants, *Universal Access*, carried out a training programme on Disability Awareness and Accessibility for the Gleneagle Hotel Group's staff in three 3 and 4-star country hotels. The training was delivered under an Irish government sponsored programme for upskilling employees in SMEs, with a 90% grant to participating businesses.

Over 60 managers and front-line staff received interactive face-to-face training, with 4 hours for managers and 8 hours for front-line staff. The training was linked to the ENAT “World Tourism for All Quality Programme” which includes: 1. Venue Access Audits, 2. Development of Accessibility Action Plans, 3. Development of Policy Statements on accessibility and inclusion, 4. Accessibility Information Provision and Accessibility Marketing.

Reference: ENAT World Tourism for All Quality Programme

<https://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.world-quality-programme>

Stakeholder Project and success story

The Gleneagle Hotel group has implemented a wide programme of investments in accessibility adaptations and development of accessible services to cater for customers with specific access requirements. The hotel management states its mission for improving accessibility on its website and has won several national awards for accessibility. They write:

“The ethos behind The Gleneagle Group is to be more than just a group of hotels - to offer more to our guests and to do more for them too. And so, in August 2015, in a new departure for us and a first in the Irish accommodation sector, we embarked on a mission to make our properties an accessible, welcoming and supportive environment for everyone.”

Stakeholder Feedback

“Gleneagle Group Win Major Tourism Award for their work in Accessible Tourism”

The Gleneagle Group was named the ‘Best Innovative Place to Stay’ at the Irish Tourism Industry Awards.. The hotel group received the award for their innovative work in making their hotels and visitor experiences accessible to all.

Considered to be the highest accolades in the tourism industry, the Irish Tourism Industry Awards encourage, recognise and celebrate excellence in the tourism sector. They are organised by the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC), Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Presenter, Kathryn Thomas hosted the gala awards evening, which took place in Dublin at the Clayton Hotel Burlington Road. The awards were presented by Minister for Transport, Tourism, and Sport, Shane Ross TD.

Speaking on behalf of the judging panel, John Naughton CEO of Glen Dimplex Group said; “We chose The Gleneagle Group as the winner of this category. They have developed an excellent and well thought out concept and have delivered on it. They have supported this with an investment commitment to broadening accessibility to all and we consider them to be a leader in this field and a worthy winner.”

Commenting on the win Gleneagle Group CEO Patrick O’Donoghue said “It is an honour to be recognised for our work in accessible tourism. Our ethos is to be more than just a group of hotels, to offer more to our guests and to do more for them too. For the past three years, we have focused on making our properties an accessible, welcoming and supportive environment for everyone. We have implemented a series of improvements and innovations to ensure our guests experience an unbroken chain of accessibility whilst on their customer journey. Our work in this area is ongoing and we are fully committed to continuously improving our offering through research and customer feedback.”



The Gleneagle Group had already made history in the hospitality industry in July 2018 by becoming the first business in the world to be accredited by the European Network for Accessible Tourism.

Observation

The Gleneagle group's 3 hotels in the South-West of Ireland are included in the Pantou - the international Accessible Tourism Directory managed by ENAT at www.pantou.org.

Spain: Adaptation of a rural house for hearing impairments

Stakeholder

Rural accommodation Sierra Alcaide. Village of Zagrilla Alta, Priego de Córdoba. Andalusia. Spain. <https://www.ruralandpersonal.com/sierra-alcaide/>

Capacity for up to 7 guests maximum in three bedrooms. Outside patio and pool. Operational since February 2001. The owner was motivated to start accessibility improvements for visitors with hearing disabilities after participation in the Access IT training course. He is a tourism professional and former VET teacher, therefore used to deal with technical documents and able to conduct own research.

Stakeholder Project and success story

The infrastructure of the accommodation (location on a strong slope and traditional construction) make adaptations for mobility impairments almost impossible. Therefore the owner decided to focus on sensorial - and especially, hearing - disabilities. They are of increasing relevance due to the general demographic ageing trend. Hearing issues are common in the group of 55+ visitors, while high noise levels in urban or work environments result in higher frequency of these problems also in the younger generation.

The adaptation of the accommodation to this target group was done in various phases:

1. Study of the materials and resources provided by the Access-It project, in particular all those related to hearing disabilities. This was complemented by consulting the reference documents and by own research on the internet.
2. Comparative self-assessment of the current situation of the accommodation in relation to the necessary requirements to be able to adapt it for people with hearing disabilities.

This included a self-test with ear plugs and strong hearing protection gear.

3. After defining the needs for improvement, the owner contacted individuals and stakeholders with accredited experience in the adaptation of buildings for people with hearing disabilities: associations for the deaf, specialised architects' offices, web and social media designers, etc. One association provided on-site consultancy service, in another case the conversation took place through an online video conference.
4. With the previous report of the self-assessment, plus all the observations detected in the technical visit and online conversation, the adaptation project was defined as follows:
 - Updating the establishment's website to universal accessibility criteria
 - Training of staff in basic sign language for the most relevant topics
 - Use of symbols and leaflets with sign language symbols
 - Videos of the establishment and the tourist offer in the area with subtitles
 - Specific signage inside the accommodation for the deaf and hard of hearing
 - Use of magnetic loops for people with hearing aids or other technologies
 - Awareness-raising meetings with the owners of other complementary basic services in the village (bar-restaurant, shops) to inform them about future possible increase in clients with hearing issues and provide basic suggestions on how to deal with them.

The adaptation process was initiated in June 2022. It is planned to be finished by the end of the year or early in 2023 (180-300 days).

Stakeholder Feedback

"Access IT gave me the overview to decide which adaptations are realistic in my case. Few rural services address specifically the sensorial and hearing impairments, I am sure this is an interesting market niche and is also helpful to an important number of potential visitors."

Observation

This experience showcases that action on accessibility is not limited to mobility issues, which are sometimes difficult to solve in rural areas. Both the guidance of an organised course and the videos were critical for awareness and for funnelling the realistic options. The professional background of the owner allowed him to make direct use of the Access IT materials. Owners without this background will require further support such as advisory, tutoring or mentoring services.



Bulgaria: Velosigners - deaf cyclists

Stakeholder

Velosigners are a group of deaf people who are active cyclists.

Stakeholder Project and success story

The group travel actively across Bulgaria and Europe and participate in various tours and bicycle races. The group very often uses trains as a means of transportation to reach long-distance destinations. Because people of the group are in a good physical shape very often, they face difficulties communicating with others, remain misunderstood, and cannot obtain needed information.

The objective of the training task is to create a plan for developing a tourist offer suitable for the Velosigners group. The tourist offer includes transportation and accommodation for the group in a guest house in a rural area.

Main points to consider

In order to create a suitable tourist offer participants developed the following list of topics/information that needs to be collected and taken into consideration:

- The length of their travel, desired destination (if any), any particular activities that have to be organised during the travel; information about any available services that are adapted for deaf people; information about group visits of museums, attractions, cultural sights.
- To choose suitable communication channels in order to communicate with the group.
- How to collect information about the group satisfaction of the tourist offer

Suggestions and solutions

- In the preparation of the travel and its implementation the entire communication with the group will be held in writing via emails, text messages, Viber or Whatsapp, and other applications that allow video calls when a sign translator is available.
- Once the needed information is collected the tour agent/tour operator has to inform all service providers about the specific requirements of the group in order to avoid any misunderstandings.
 - Accommodation facility – to be informed about the specifics of the group and if possible, to provide a sign language translator on the spot. Alternatively, they can

record a video with sign language translation that describes the services offered and the rules of the guest house. Also, the guest house has to offer a suitable place to store the bicycles of the group.

- Transportation – the driver must be informed in advance about the requirements of the group and to know that the group will travel with bicycles. A suitable vehicle has to be organised for the transportation of the passengers and their luggage.
- Tourist sights – once the group sends the list with desired attractions that they want to visit, it has to be checked if these places offer sign translations. If they do not have translations, it is recommended to find alternative solutions before the group arrives in order to avoid misunderstandings.
- The most suitable way to receive feedback from the group is by creating an online form (Google Form) or another questionnaire that could be sent via email.

Stakeholder Feedback

„It is indeed very important to include all stakeholders in order to develop really accessible tourism products and services. Particularly important is the active participation of the government and local authorities. For example, it is needed and it is very important for the information about accessible tourist destinations and places to be translated in sign language. Because deaf people often cannot fully understand the written texts. Therefore, in order for them to be able to understand a certain message, they need to have a sign language translation.”

Observation

It is a very good example of analysing and developing a tourist offer for groups / individuals with specific access requirements. The practice shows how to think and involve other stakeholders from the tourism chain in order to create a good overall experience for the tourists.



5. Implementation Tips

General overview

ACCESS IT provides a wide series of resources that cover the following topics:

- Tourism planning and programming deepening the theoretical background on accessible tourism and the scenarios for the future; the placement of the accessible touristic product and services in the international market; overview on European legislative frameworks relating to accessible tourism.
- Innovative programs of accessible and sustainable tourism deepening accessible itineraries; hospitality for all, good practices and virtuous activities attentive to the needs of all creation of the offer for market niches.
- Tourism destination management models that improve the accessible tourism management of a destination.
- Funding channels for accessible tourism.

They are designed for rural service providers and related stakeholders such as municipalities or small destinations and can be used in multiple ways and formats.

- Awareness raising
- Self-study and training
- Technical support through intermediate entities (tourism offices, professional organisations, advisory services)
- Training activities related with accessibility, implemented by above smaller organisations but also through the formal and informal VET system

In the first place, they aim to raise interest and motivation as a precondition for putting effort and dedication in further training. Once users have acquired specific skills through the Access IT materials, they should be able to

- put into practice innovative tourism development alternatives
- generate initiatives and entrepreneurial companies
- design and develop tourist services, products and up to packages
- identify and create accessible itineraries or routes
- generate new benefits for the tourism sector
- set the ground for future further evolution and development

In addition to learning how to take care of the organisational aspect and how to meet the „special” needs of this tourist target, the participants will also be able to monitor the services provided and possibly intervene to improve them.

Resources and implementation options

The ACCESS IT resources are structured in four different levels that are meant to be used and combined depending on the objective and target group. The following table summarises the resources and indicates the implementation context where they are most adequate:

	Awareness	Self-study	Advice and support	Structured training	VET
Mapping study	Best use	Best use	Best use	Best use	Best use
Videos	Best use	Best use	Best use	Best use	Best use
Short Guidelines	Best use	Best use	Best use	Best use	Limited use
Full Guidelines	Best use	Best use	Best use	Best use	Best use
Session plans	Not recommended	Not recommended	Best use	Best use	Best use
Self-assessment	Not recommended	Best use	Best use	Best use	Limited use
Handbook	Not recommended	Not recommended	Best use	Best use	Best use



Best use



Limited use



Not recommended

The **Mapping Study** provides important insights and data about the importance and priorities related with accessibility as seen from users, SMEs and public authorities. It is an excellent “further reading” in the case of awareness raising and self-study for those interested. In the other use cases, it sets the base for the staff involved in advisory services or training to get a full overview of the topic.



The **Video Cases** proved highly effective and with an excellent acceptance by SMEs during the testing and trial training sessions. They are ideal for self-consumption without previous knowledge in accessibility, and are the first obligatory step in any of the five use cases.

Short Guidelines provide a summary overview about five core topics related with accessibility that are then presented in full detail in the **Full Guidelines**. Experience during testing indicates that the Short Guidelines are adequate for situations of self-study. However, the Full Guidelines were considered as too complex and difficult for self-study by the SMEs. In most cases, they will require additional support through advisory, tutorial or mentoring services that help in their understanding. *Due to their core role in the Access IT training materials, the Guidelines are presented in more detail below.*

Session Plans are specifically designed to enhance the structured training such as a local accessibility development plan, individual or group training and VET. In the first of these cases, they help the advisors or tutors to structure specific thematic sessions or actions depending on demand and need. In the others, they are an integral part of the respective organised training programme.

The online **Self Assessment** Tool is ideal for businesses and other tourism services. To give useful results and orientation about further needs for improvement, it requires a basic understanding and knowledge of the five guidelines topics.

Finally, this **Handbook** provides comprehensive information and guidance for implementing agents that apply the Access IT materials for advice, support or training to a wider audience. Like a “teacher manual”, it is not meant for direct use by learners at least when they have only a low and medium level.

Implementation Formats

Without being exhaustive, we propose a couple of standard formats for implementing the Access IT resources as already mentioned above:

- **Awareness raising** amongst local or regional stakeholders from the side of businesses, visitor sites and public administration. This can be done e.g. through informative sessions, in the context of annual or periodical meetings, or as a stand-alone campaign at local or regional level.
- **Self-study and training.** Self-study will mostly make use of resources that are available on the Access IT online platform. Results depend on the motivation of stakeholders to dedicate time and effort. The possible depth is limited unless further guidance and support is provided by an intermediate entity such as a professional association, DMO or a training entity.

- **Advice and support services** can make excellent use of the materials. In a first step, the future advisors / tutors / mentors should undergo an in-depth training based on the materials of Access IT equivalent to “train the trainer”. After this, they can provide tailor-made information and advice to associated SMEs or tourism services, or organise small local training courses themselves.
- **Structured training.** The most usual options include Face to Face learning, frontal lesson, discussion, focus group, jigsaw, brainstorming, case studies. This training can be implemented for the full range of Access IT topics and guidelines, or concentrate on one or several of them. It makes use of all available resources. In the case of blended structured training, resources are bundled at the Access IT Platform. This platform is useful to complement on-site training for purpose of self-study during a blended learning session. It also contains the **Self Assessment Tool**.
- **VET training.** Though not mainly designed for this purpose, the Access IT resources can also be used in formal or informal (lifelong learning / on the job training) VET activities. VET schools or private training entities may stick to the Access IT content, use it as base for enhanced training programmes, or simply use part of its resources such as videos, session plans or the self-assessment tool in their own curriculum.

Duration

The duration of ACCESS IT resource implementation varies depending on the target group and the objectives. Some tentative values are:

- awareness raising:
10 minutes (short speech), 40 minutes (roundtable),
2 hours (full informative awareness event)
- initial basic training for staff
12/16 hours
- full training for staff
30-50 hours
- modular training (guideline)
5-10 hours
- train the trainer
50-70 hours

Practical Suggestions and Hints

Any format of implementation must have an organic and coherent structure that defines the objectives, duration, which materials to be used and at what moment, practical sessions, etc.

It also should clearly define the operational concept such as creating simulated front/office training desks, itinerant seminar events, annual meetings for the dissemination of the themes to policy makers and entrepreneurs also using digital communication tools, etc.

The first step is to consider the target audience and the physical conditions where the implementation will take place: these elements are crucial and determinant for the following decisions.

Practical Ideas. Training for providers, staff members and policy makers could be done in a talk or in a round table through blended learning, where the results could be available also for delayed study (video recording). Program simulated situations with customers, where the training has a focus in emotional and experiential learning like the blind dinner. We suggest a simple cognitive methodology for carrying on the training, for example you can create a cognitive map of accessible tourism, of open air activities, installations, etc.

After the presentation of the action, we suggest a presentation of the member of the group where they explain their motivation to participate. This can be combined with a brain storming. The trainers need to keep the discussion active, and slowly guide results towards the prepared cognitive map. At the end of the brainstorm, the trainer can show his cognitive map. The cognitive map is an easy way to illustrate the accessibility in tourism under different perspectives.

In the next action on a specific topic, this cognitive map can be used as an orientation guide to the participants. Another possible methodology could be the jigsaw technique: after the presentation, the class is divided in various work groups that focus on one topic and is provided with material to read for this. Each group at the end of the time should do a presentation to return the knowledge and conclusions that they acquired to the other groups. The presentation is followed by a full / plenary discussion of the various topics. During the discussion you can help participants understand the subject of the lessons around some pivotal point or statement that you should prepare beforehand. This method can also be used as a “case based reasoning” by choosing a best practice case of an accessible tourism service and discuss its reality under the different aspects that the training action is dealing with.

The ACCESS IT Guidelines

Access IT already provides you with a basic set of materials, as listed above and explained in detail in this chapter. However, for each specific implementation you will want to search for addition videos, tech talks, audio as podcast, interviews, journals, newspapers, institutional documents, legislation etc. Adding such materials does not only enhance the contents already provided by Access IT. They also make the whole action more diverse and

entertaining for participants. Everything could be used for teaching purposes, it is important to structure it in an appropriate way.

The EXAMPLE is the ACCESS IT Material for a training course, organised as follows.

Topic 1 How to assess accessibility of a tourism product/service

Topic 2 How to address the requirements of the target customer segments

Topic 3 How to develop a truly accessible tourism offer and meet demand

Topic 4 How to bring to market and promote an accessible product

Topic 5 How to engage Stakeholders in Accessible Product Development

Topic 1 How to assess accessibility of a tourism product/service

How to assess accessibility of a tourism product/service gives the general tips for how to analyse the stages of the visitor journey and analyse the possible problems that can arise where customers would be exposed to the businesses or the destinations through so-called “touch-points”. These touchpoints can be, for example, the website when looking for information or meeting the receptionist at the reception desk when checking into an accommodation facility.

Before the stay, focus is placed on the planning and booking phase and the travel and arrival/departing including multimodal transport both for long distance and local travel. In the destination, accessibility needs to be considered in overnight accommodation, places to eat and drink, activities or visitor sites and general infrastructure. Finally, recalling and sharing the experience is important for a positive image and long-term promotion of services and destinations, which can be supported by social media and content provided by the tourism operator or destination management.

The tourism operator should follow an accessibility checklist or engage a professional access auditor to make a thorough assessment of the facilities and services on offer. Working with local associations of people with disabilities also helps to identify barriers and difficulties.



Topic 2 How to address the requirements of the target customer segments

How to address the requirements of the target customer segments illustrates the importance for an accessible tourism manager to understand concepts such as: target market, segmenting the market, target group. A target refers to a group of potential customers to whom a company wants to sell. Knowing the needs and preferences of this target is a precondition for defining the critical elements that need to be covered by the products and services that are offered. This group also includes specific customers to whom a company directs its marketing efforts.

Topic 3 How to develop a truly accessible tourism offer and meet demand

How to develop a truly accessible tourism offer and meet demand uses the concept of the “Visitor Journey”. It starts from browsing and booking to travelling by international and local transport, to accommodation, experiences at the venue, travelling home again and recollecting and sharing memories of the event. At all these stages, the tourism provider or tour operator should consider the possible obstacles that may hinder a person with specific access requirements from using the service. These can be related to online presentation (Web accessibility), to modes of transportation and transport terminals, to overnight accommodation or in attractions, events or other venues. This “How to” Guide is supported by a video which illustrates the steps for organising a one-day tour to the Parques de Sintra (Portugal) museum, castle and gardens for a group of persons with mobility impairments.

Topic 4 How to bring to market and promote an accessible product

How to bring to market and promote an accessible product gives an overview on the marketing of accessibility. Regarding new technologies, this includes the use of Social Media channels and content, information provided on websites and automatic text-to-sound plugins. Texts or print materials should consider accessible fonts, signs and images (size and contrast), also in the case of individual communication e.g. through emails. The participation in events that are adapted to the target customers can be very effective as it allows for personal direct contact between provider and visitor, generating a higher level of trust.

Topic 5 How to engage Stakeholders in Accessible Product Development

A Destination Management Organisation (or a Municipality or group of cooperating businesses) that plans actions on accessibility needs to identify the relevant stakeholders who can work together at the regional and local levels. Especially the policy makers and political decision makers can play a key role in establishing the framework for actions, with financial support or incentives. Key benefits need to be defined at an early stage to assure involvement and commitment. Implementation requires clear guidance and leadership, while at the same time being transparent and participative in discussion and process. Once in operation, communication and information campaigns for raising awareness and fundraising are other critical elements to keep in mind.

Expected results

Any implementation aims to create operators that can develop an offer comprising diversified accessible solutions for all visitors with specific access requirements. The relevant information must be easily communicated to the customers, e.g. with subtitled videos, print and narration. For the training of staff and other trainees and for policy makers the information has to be detailed and based on verified data. Moreover, the training material for the course must be clear, precise and detailed, and always up-to-date.

The implementation intends to improve awareness and knowledge of participants, equipping them with skills and competences that include:

- Identify and enhance the educational need on accessible tourism in the area and create new accessible and sustainable tourism courses;
- Understanding the demands of visitors with disabilities and other specific access requirements
- Prepare and support a training course for tourism accessibility
- Promote new tourism products on online and offline channels
- Promote and coordinate relations between guests, private operators and tourist offices by aggregating entities, institutions and companies in order to create an accessible tourism educational offer
- Present how to become an Accessible Tourism Operator, explaining the required knowledge and skills, and the professional profile in case of a specialised position.
- Understanding and knowledge of the market and the role of tour operators, travel agencies, local tourist bodies, airlines, hotel or non-hotel accommodation facilities such as rural houses, villages or campsites, especially in professional contexts that are organised and oriented towards the acquisition of new slices of the tourist market with high development potential.



6. References to open educational resources in the field of accessible tourism.

External links to material related to the ACCESS IT topic

Online Accessible Tourism resources (Websites)

Accessible Poland Tours <https://accessibletour.pl/en/>

European Commission - Accessible Tourism
https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/accessible-tourism_en

European Network for Accessible Tourism
<https://www.accessibletourism.org>

European Greenways Association
<http://www.oevv-egwo.org/>

Pantou - The Accessible Tourism Directory
<https://pantou.org>

UN World Tourism Organisation - Accessible Tourism
<https://www.unwto.org/accessibility>

Free Training Courses on Accessible Tourism (funded by ERASMUS+)

ETCAATS Accessible Tourism Introductory Training Course
<http://www.accesstraining.eu/?i=accessibility-training.en.etcaats-course>

GAMES WITHOUT BARRIERS - Teachers' Training Kit
<https://www.gameswithoutbarriers.eu/training/online-teachers-training/>

NEWSCAT - New Skills for Accessible Tourism
Register at <https://dlot.eu>
and go to NEWSCAT <https://dlot.eu/course/index.php?categoryid=19>

TAD - The Ability Advisor
<https://learning.abilityadvisor.eu/>

T-Guide - Tourist Guides for People with intellectual Disabilities and Learning Difficulties in Europe
<http://www.accesstraining.eu/?i=t-guide.en.home>



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