Guidelines for the implementation of a Customized Accessible Tourism Programme
Table of Contents

1. Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 3
2. Accessible tourism market............................................................................................... 4
   2.1 Joining up the accessible tourism value chain ......................................................... 6
   2.2 Return on investment ............................................................................................... 7
3. Destination planning ....................................................................................................... 8
4. Transport .......................................................................................................................... 11
5. Built Environment and Facilities .................................................................................... 13
   5.1 Universal Design ..................................................................................................... 14
   5.2 Built environment Standards .................................................................................... 14
   5.3 Examples of good practices ...................................................................................... 15
6. Creating accessible tourism experiences ........................................................................ 16
   6.1 Example 1: FIESTA TUR4ALL .............................................................................. 17
   6.3 Example 3: Across Lombards Lands in Italy and Slovenia ....................................... 19
   6.4 Example 4: Makingtrax, accessible adventures in New Zealand ............................. 20
7. Stakeholder engagement ............................................................................................... 21
   7.1 Participation of people with disabilities in planning ................................................. 21
   7.2 Participation of tourism suppliers, focus on tourist guides ...................................... 22
8. Benchmarking and performance targets ....................................................................... 23
9. Information ....................................................................................................................... 24
   9.1 Access schemes and auditing ................................................................................... 25
   9.2 Showing information, accessible websites ............................................................... 27
10. Marketing and Promotion ............................................................................................. 28
11. Monitoring and evaluating ........................................................................................... 30
   11.1 KPIs ......................................................................................................................... 31
12. The CAT assistant / expert ........................................................................................... 33
13. Case studies for the implementation of a CAT training programme ......................... 34
   13.1 Balearic Islands ....................................................................................................... 34
   13.2 Latvia ....................................................................................................................... 37
   13.3 Bulgaria .................................................................................................................. 39
   13.4 Lombardy – Province of Bergamo ........................................................................... 43
1. Introduction

These guidelines are intended for policymakers, in tourist boards, destination management organisations, and local administrations, to understand the value of accessible tourism and to help them in the implementation of a programme for the development of the accessible tourism destination, and to customize it to the needs of tourists with access needs.

Project NEWSCAT has developed different products and tools for the development of the skills of the Customized Accessible Tourism assistant (CAT), an experienced professional, entrepreneur or worker who can cater for tourists with specific access requirements, who is able to deliver a better service thanks to having knowledge of the opportunities of the destination, and thanks to creating a solid local network, joining all the links of the tourism value chain.

Knowing the needs of the visitors, the NEWSCAT partnership has worked to prepare the industry to raise awareness and learn about the accessibility movement and the market value of accessible tourism and has prepared the learning material to train assistants in CAT.

But for the integration of all actions towards accessibility and to ensure better coordination and planning, it is crucial to involve policy and decision makers in the tourism field. It is a policy maker’s responsibility to create the conditions for tourism which is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable both for visitors, local citizens and the business community.

Therefore, these guidelines are meant to provide support for policy and decision-making, explaining:

WHY develop Accessible Tourism?

- The Social and Economic objectives for a sustainable development
- The need to anticipate demand due to changing demographics
- The need to ensure the rights of visitors with disabilities and follow the law

HOW to achieve Accessible Tourism?

- Being able to develop a Road Map, a long term plan, considering all the necessary elements

WHO DOES WHAT to implement Accessible Tourism?

- The importance of creating a suitable environment for cooperation
The need to establish a dedicated team to focus on access in tourism

How to motivate all stakeholders’ businesses to engage in enhancing the tourism offer and creating a supportive environment for all.

The document will also present four case studies from the pilot sites of project NEWSCAT, Lombardy - province of Bergamo in Italy, Bulgaria, Latvia and Balearic Islands in Spain.

In each pilot site tourism entrepreneurs have been trained in Customized Accessible Tourism and have carried out workshops with the industry and decision makers.

Following a SWOT\(^1\) analysis, certain recommendations have been presented, giving examples and suggestions for the development of accessible tourism in every destination.

In this guideline we will often be using the word, “YOU”, referring directly to policy makers, DMOs staff and tourism organisations, trying to give examples and best practices for you to study, use or compare in your work.

2. Accessible tourism market

Accessible Tourism, which is often also called Tourism for All or Inclusive Tourism, means that any tourism product should be designed for visitors irrespective of their age, gender or ability and with no additional costs for customers with specific access requirements.\(^2\)

Accessibility deals with visitors’ abilities to approach, reach, enter, use, understand, touch, see, hear, speak and taste and it refers to the design of the environment and its components, including products, services, devices, information and orientation systems.

There are lots of myths connected to accessible tourism or accessibility in general.

A common one is that **accessible tourism is only for people with disabilities.**

That is not true because although persons with disability are mentioned most often when speaking about accessibility, accessible tourism covers a variety of customers with different access requirements (which are not always visible) which can be caused by impairment, illness, injury, age, lack of language proficiency or unfamiliarity with the local culture. Access

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\(^1\) SWOT – analysis of the locality’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats as a tourism destination

barriers can affect any person who, during travelling, faces some difficulties in accessing, using or enjoying tourism services and facilities comfortably, safely and independently.³

When we talk about accessible tourism we talk about the needs of persons with motor, hearing, speech or vision impairments, learning difficulties and cognitive impairments, long-term health problems (e.g. respiratory and circulatory conditions or invisible disabilities) etc.

But also, the accessible tourism market includes seniors with age-related impairments such as restricted mobility, ability to receive and process information, spatial and temporal disorientation, difficulty in speaking, reading, writing or understanding words etc. Nevertheless, we should also consider children, pregnant women, persons with allergies, asthma and/or food intolerances, persons with injuries, carers of persons with disabilities, people with pushchairs and prams or with luggage, local residents, foreigners etc.

In fact, accessible tourism can benefit everyone and all of us. At least once in our lives we will almost certainly have a need for accessible environments, products and services⁴.

**Accessible Tourism Market** Another typical misconception about accessible tourism is the idea that its customers are a niche market, while in fact it is a loyal, growing market which brings competitive advantage and new opportunities to businesses⁵.

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. According the World Tourism Organizations⁴, 1.4 billion people travelled to a foreign country in 2018 and their number is expected to reach 1.8 billion in 2030. Tourism accounts for the 9% of the world GDP and generates one job out of 11: it is, therefore, a key driver of socio-economic development, creating wellbeing for communities. It is also an integral part of the lifestyle of much of society and provides tourists with experiences for their personal growth.

The economic importance of people with specific access requirements for the tourism sector has been confirmed by the results of the study published in 2014 that the European Commission had commissioned in order to provide a coherent picture of the current and future potential demand of accessible tourism in Europe and to estimate its economic impact.⁵

According with this study, in 2011 there were 138.6 million people with access needs in the EU (around 27% of total population), of which 35.9% were people with disabilities aged 15-64, and 64.1% were the older population aged 65 or above. In 2012, people with access needs in the EU took approximately 783 million trips, thus generating a total gross value-added contribution of about €356 billion and a total employment of about 8.7 million persons.

⁴ UNWTO, Barometer 2019 Edition, UNWTO e-library
Driven by the ageing population, which in Europe is much higher than elsewhere, the demand is anticipated to grow by 10% to about 862 million trips per year by 2020, equivalent to an average growth rate of 1.2% annually.

However, the overall potential is far greater: if it would be possible to increase the accessibility of tourism-related facilities significantly, then up to 1.231 million trips per year could be realized, equivalent to a growth of 43.6%. If accessibility is significantly improved, the total economic contribution generated by the EU tourists with specific access needs is expected to increase against the current contribution by roughly 36%.

Moreover, like most of the people, persons with specific access needs rarely travel alone; on the contrary, they usually prefer or need to travel with relatives or friends. According to the previous study, on average, people with access needs in the EU travel with about 1.9 companions. Therefore, if we consider this, the economic contribution of Accessible Tourism will be amplified by a similar scale if the travel companion effect is considered.

Photo: Older man on seaside boardwalk walking with white cane. Source [www.goodtourismblog.org](http://www.goodtourismblog.org)

2.1 Joining up the accessible tourism value chain

Another typical misconception about Tourism for All is that accessibility means absence of architectural barriers.
But it is not restricted to that. Accessibility is often narrowed down to the construction or adaptation of physical facilities but there are many more types of barriers in all tourism and travel-related services, which can present various difficulties for tourists with diverse requirements. Accessible destinations must ensure the accessibility of the complete value chain, including hotels, transport, attractions, free-time facilities, tourism information offices, information and booking systems, marketing and an inclusive attitude among all relevant actors. Accessibility measures in tourism venues have to be accompanied by adequate accessibility of public spaces and involvement of public bodies. Only coordinated efforts combining each phase of the visitor’s experience may lead to visitor satisfaction.

It is necessary to understand that each element of the tourism chain influences and depends on the others: if one of the elements is weak, in terms of the quality and the experience offered to the customer, the holiday can be strongly compromised as a whole. A hotel without physical access barriers but located on a site where there are no recreational and cultural facilities accessible to people with mobility impairments, would not be assured of attracting these customers, however good the quality of its accessibility and usability is. The same would apply to a museum or monument that has good access conditions but cannot be reached by any suitable means of accessible transport or which lacks adequate accommodation in the local area for customers with specific access needs.

Destinations should therefore create a comprehensive supply of Tourism for All products and services in which all the elements of the supply chain (reservation systems, accommodation, transport, etc.) are easily accessed.

2.2 Return on investment

Tourism operators often think that accessibility is expensive and needs big investments, but even small adjustments and smart solutions can positively affect visitor’s decision and experience.

There are many low-cost actions with positive impact on tourists with access needs, like an accessible website and information, honest information about accessibility of facilities and services provided in alternative formats, trained staff capable of dealing with accessibility issues, an inclusive marketing, providing technical aids and disability equipment (wheelchairs, bath chairs, toilet raisers) to rent, giving free entry with assistance dogs, providing well-adapted hotel rooms with capacity for bigger groups, universally designed tourism products and activities.

Efficiency of investment in accessibility is often measured as costs in relation to the number of visitors with disabilities. In fact, accessibility measures improve safety and comfort and ensure that environment, products and services can be enjoyed by any person. That is why investment in accessibility should be perceived as an investment in dignity and quality for all.
Finally, it must be added that a tourism destination that adequately caters for the needs of visitors with specific access requirements leads to improved quality of service and ensures a good experience not only for them but also for all the other visitors and improves the quality of the daily life of the local population.

3. Destination planning

The fundamental step that YOU (as tourism destination manager) have to take, when you approach the accessibility of your destination, is taking a political decision: you should decide that you want to create an accessible, inclusive tourist destination for all visitors. This decision must be followed up by concrete objectives, plans and actions to establish an appropriate strategy and guide future development.

Where possible, it is beneficial to find an “Accessibility Champion” in the local community who can take up the cause and use their influence to drive access forward, gain wide support for inclusive, sustainable development and engage with the political decision makers and others who determine how local funds are spent.

From experiences in regions and cities across Europe, it is evident that, in order to create a destination with accessible and inclusive experiences for all, it is necessary to develop an Accessibility Action Plan, involving political decision-makers, city planners and technical managers, as well as businesses and citizens.
To bring tourism and tourism offers more strongly into focus, YOUR destination (be it a municipality, a city, a locality) should work closely with the Regional Destination Management Organisation (DMO). The DMO has the responsibility to liaise with all relevant actors and stakeholders, including public authorities and agencies, business chambers, non-profit and non-governmental associations, cultural operators and educational institutions to harness the creativity and energy which is needed to develop a coordinated and forceful plan of action to enhance tourism offers.

As part of your responsibilities YOU would maintain a single official web portal which signposts all tourism information and offers in the destination. The portal should be an accessible website and would clearly mark accessible tourism information and offers on the Home Page.

**Accessibility should become a key feature of the destination’s “brand”**.

To achieve this goal, we recommend YOU perform the following management actions:

a. **Establish a responsible office** at local/destination level to cooperate with the regional Tourism Destination Management Organisation (DMO). (It is likely that this office already exists but if not, it should be created).

b. **Establish an Accessibility Management Team** and Technical Working Group to develop an Accessibility Action Plan, involving stakeholder organisations, to implement and maintain the accessibility of infrastructure and accessible tourism offers of the destination. The team could be trained also with the learning content of NEWSCAT project, which helps workers to become Customised Accessible Tourism assistants.

c. **Train technical personnel** in the destination to increase their knowledge and competences in planning and implementing accessibility measures.

d. **Implement accessibility in renovations and new constructions** in the city in a consistent and correct way, according to national Accessibility Guidelines giving the same high standard, impression and message to citizens and tourists.

e. **Renovate and upgrade**, as necessary the accessibility of infrastructure in transportation ensuring that there is equitable and independent access for passengers with disabilities.

f. **Prioritise the purchase of accessible public transport vehicles** and ensure the provision of wheelchair accessible taxis for private hire.

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6 Accessible websites shall comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). See: https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG/
g. Establish a **Tourism Information Office (if not already in place)** in a central location which is accessible and equipped to inform visitors and users of its website about accessibility of facilities, transport and services.

h. **Maintain a single official web portal** which signposts all tourism information and offers in the destination. The portal should be an accessible website and should clearly mark accessible tourism information, clearly indicated from the Home Page.

k. **Create accessible, cultural pedestrian routes**, based on the principles, methods and proposals developed through a targeted project with technical specialists and user representatives.

j. **Cooperate with private and public sector** to make accessibility audits of all major tourist Points of Interest and plans for improvement where necessary.

i. **Establish awareness-raising, incentives and support actions to encourage businesses and stakeholders** (shops, small business owners, hotel owners, churches, tourism businesses and attractions, event organisers, NGOs, etc.) to improve and promote their accessibility, e.g. establish an annual access award for businesses and publicity/marketing scheme for all accessible businesses in the destination.

l. **Engage NGOs and other stakeholders** in the development and publication of on-line Access information describing, for example, the accessibility of pedestrian routes and Points of Interest, hotels, restaurants, cafés, shops, transport facilities and other parts of the tourism supply chain, making it easier for citizens and tourists to find, plan and book accessible experiences in the destination.

m. **Create an Accessible Shopping Guide** with a catalogue of accessible shops and businesses (as one of the incentives to businesses to make their premises accessible).

n. **Establish training programmes for managers and personnel in the tourism, hospitality and transport sectors** in disability awareness and customer care in order to create a better welcome for all visitors.

o. **Work with voluntary and advocacy organisations** (including disabled people’s associations) to provide volunteer assistance for people with disabilities who are attending, for example, festivals, religious tourism or other events.

p. **Utilise** where possible, **European Union funding Programmes** to develop accessible infrastructure, transport, venues and destinations and cooperate with other destinations in your country and with other countries.

q. **Join ENAT and/or national or regional accessible tourism networks**, to access resources and learn about good practices for inspiration and to disseminate the results of your efforts to peers.
4. Transport

Transport plays a key role for all travellers, everyone wants their journey to be easy and comfortable, but can those with access requirements easily reach a destination and move around it using public transport or a car?

It is important that YOU take into account the transport means to:

- reach a destination

- move within a destination

Accessible taxi in Wexford, Ireland

The following list of recommendations will help YOU to plan a better transport network for the tourists and the citizens:

a. **Sharing transport information.** The sharing and promoting of accurate information around the visitor journey are a quick win. Don’t be afraid to start small. The most apparently trivial pieces of information or well-placed web links can make a huge difference to visitors researching your destination. Develop a dedicated section on your website providing links to all the relevant transport companies serving your destination (suggested list below) and provide, where possible, information on their accessibility. Where it is not available encourage transport providers to review this policy and provide information so that it can be published on both your website and theirs.

b. **Infrastructure plans.** Be aware of any planned infrastructure changes, with either changes or additions to the transport provision. Where possible, influence these to ensure that accessibility is taken into account and Universal Design principles are being applied. Also take into account parking provisions for people with disabilities who use cars: Is there an adequate
number of spaces, are they in the right places, are they of the correct size and clearly marked, is it clear whether there are any charges or not? Are there dropped kerbs at drop off / pick points and where pavements end?

c. Disability awareness. Working with the relevant local partners, ensure that all businesses and service providers undertake disability awareness training to ensure the best customer service is offered to everyone. Where training is not offered, encourage the operator to look at any appropriate training that you may have identified and can signpost them to.

Photo of two women, one using a wheelchair and the other, who is blind, with guide dog on railway platform. Source Swiss Railways

Who are the key players YOU need to work with?

Below is a list of major providers but they can be identified others in the destination which are not listed here. It is important to consider them all and work closely with them, involving them in your strategy and long-term development plans:

- Airports and passenger services companies
- Trains / Stations
- Boats / Ports
- Buses / Coaches /
- Local transport: Buses / taxis / self-drive vehicles for hire
- Cars / Parking / Motorway services
- Rental companies offering cycles, electric bicycles, mobility scooters and other personal transport services.
5. Built Environment and Facilities

In tourism, as in ‘everyday life’, visitors and citizens make use of both public and private buildings, wherever their interests and requirements take them. The lack of accessibility makes people with disabilities wary of travelling to unknown places due to the difficulties they may encounter. Inaccessible infrastructure and facilities abound in hotels, restaurants, transport terminals, tourist attractions, and other venues, where the needs of people with disabilities have been given little or no consideration.

The built environment today is still not accessible to many people. There are many physical barriers that need to be removed and which create problems, not allowing all people to visit, to participate and to enjoy in full what a destination may offer. We continue to design, build and create buildings and public spaces that are not accessible for All, not responding to all people’s needs. It is rather obvious that this is the main reason for disabling and excluding people with various access requirements from living in a place from visiting a place with safety and comfort, rather than people’s specific requirements.

Visitors must be able to enjoy the places they visit with comfort and dignity and this includes having a predictable and satisfactory level of access.

**Good design enables, bad design disables!**

Venues and destinations with good access for all will potentially attract a greater number of visitors, thus directly increasing revenues in the tourism sector.

Improving accessibility of the built environment of a destination can give direct benefits not only for visitors, but also for its citizens, as well as for businesses and public enterprises.
5.1 Universal Design

Universal Design is the key to ensuring good access for everyone.

'Universal Design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The intent of the universal design concept is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications, and the built environment more usable by more people at little or no extra cost. The universal design concept targets all people of all ages, sizes and abilities'\(^7\).

In Europe a similar development to Universal Design has taken place, referred to as “Design for All”, 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. This approach to design also includes the need to ensure that mainstream products and services can interface with assistive systems and technologies that are used by some people. The design of accessible websites is an example of this.

5.2 Built environment Standards

When YOU prepare calls for tender for public works you should adopt a Universal Design/Design for All approach. Accessibility should be a requirement for all public procurement of buildings, infrastructure works, facilities and services, in order to promote social inclusion, contribute to full employment, save public money and ultimately foster economic growth.

YOU should include Accessibility in:

- Project objectives and requirements, award criteria
- The design phase
- The follow-up during the construction throughout the whole project
- Conformity assessment – upon the delivery of the project-check the compliance with the procurement accessibility requirements and the design.
- Experts on accessibility should be involved in the whole process.

\(^7\)Center for Universal Design, Raleigh, NC, USA
5.3 Examples of good practices

5.3.1 Accessible Footpaths in Telemark (Norway)

Telemark’s County Council, County Governor, Road Administration and Trekking Association have stimulated upgrading of walking trails from central urban areas to surrounding areas in Telemark county (located in south-eastern Norway) to allow access for persons with various disabilities. Currently, 12 of the 18 municipalities have at least one footpath installed and there are plans for the other six.

Photo of two people using electric scooters on a forest trail in Norway.
Source, www.zeroproject.com

5.3.2 Breda (Netherlands), Access City Award 2019

The Access City Award (ACA) recognizes and celebrates EU cities of over 50,000 inhabitants which proactively support accessibility for persons with disabilities and take exemplary steps to improve accessibility in the urban environment.

This year’s prize went to Breda, since the city, thanks to cooperation between the institutions and the disability organisations has made public places accessible to all. Technologies ensure that everyone can use public transport. And Breda has showed that its investments pay off. Tourism is doing better thanks to the city’s commitment.
6. Creating accessible tourism experiences

In principle, all tourist venues and activities should be equipped and designed to allow visitors with the widest range of ages and abilities to visit, enter all public areas, and use the available facilities. However, there may be certain activities, such as adventure sports, that may be beyond the capabilities of some guests.

Each venue requires a thorough review of its facilities and the activities that take place there, in order to identify any gaps or weak spots in provisions for visitors with mobility impairments, sensory (hearing / vision) impairments, cognitive impairments, dietary requirements, allergies and so on.

Conducting tours and carrying out activities with groups of individuals with specific and different access requirements can reveal where obstacles are encountered, where possible technical aids may be required and where tourist guides, group leaders or other hospitality staff may need to be aware of any particular issues that may arise.

Attractions and activities may need to be re-designed – starting with examining the perspectives of visitors with disabilities, who may experience the place in a quite different way from others. By focusing on their abilities, rather than their disabilities or limitations, experiences can often be opened up for visitors in ways that were not previously anticipated.

There are examples of accessible experiences that have been developed in tourist destinations, showing the range of possibilities in Accessible Tourism – when creativity and innovation are allowed to flourish. Examples include projects, guidance documents and tourism enterprises that have produced “accessible experiences” in Europe, providing inspiration and practical demonstrations of the “state-of-the-art”.

Photo of a square and cathedral in Breda. Source Europa Decentraal
6.1 Example 1: FIESTA TUR4ALL

Tur4all is a comprehensive initiative, which consists of an application for experts and users, to verify the accessibility conditions of venues and services in Spanish tourism destinations. It was developed by Predif, the Spanish State Representative Platform for People with Physical Disabilities, a non-profit state entity, declared of public utility, that represents and promotes actions in favour of almost 100,000 people with physical disabilities. It is co-funded by Vodafone Foundation Spain Tur4all has a web portal to show the tourism facilities and the information taken both by the experts of Predif and the feedback given by the users.

![Photo famous blogger Martin Sibley with participants of the TUR4ALL fiesta in Valencia in 2018. Source, PREDIF.](image)

Every year Predif organises a FIESTA in a Spanish tourism destination, involving tourists and locals with disabilities to test the application, to test the audited venues and to verify new ones.

The initiative is supported by the city councils and is well covered by the media.

Fiestas have already been taken place in Madrid, Malaga and Valencia among other main destinations in Spain.

Project TUR4ALL has also been endorsed by Turismo de Portugal, the Portuguese NTO, which will promote the system in its main destinations.
6.2 Example 2: Adaptive surf in Cape Town (South Africa)

Cape Town is the second-most populous urban area in South Africa after Johannesburg, and it is also the legislative capital of the country. The city is famous for its harbour, for its natural setting in the Cape Floristic Region, and for such well-known landmarks as Table Mountain and Cape Point. It is one of the most multicultural cities in the world.

The city has also a great coffee culture, fun markets to explore and a flourishing food movement, not to mention its historical and natural heritage.

For water sports fans, Cape Town is a big destination for surf, and there is a well-known adapted surf school. The Club is for anyone with a mobility impairment in Cape Town who wants to learn to surf. They hold frequent adaptive surfing days at Muizenberg - where surfers are given the opportunity to have fun in the ocean. They have volunteers, safety officials and coaches who are available to the surfers. No experience necessary.

Photo of man with a crutch and surfboard on a sandy beach with bathers in the waves. Source Adaptive Surf in Cape Town

Photo of a woman with a mobility impairment on a surfboard with an assistant-trainer behind him. Source Adaptive Surf in Cape Town
6.3 Example 3: Across Lombards Lands in Italy and Slovenia

A.L.L. – Across the Lombards’ Lands was a European project funded by the COSME programme. It developed and promoted transnational tourism offers “for all” based on the common Lombard heritage of selected destinations in Italy and Slovenia.

Photo of an ancient Lombard settlement in a rural area of Rifnik, Slovenia. Photo: National Museum of Slovenia.

Itineraries and tour packages taking into consideration the needs of tourists with specific accessibility requirements were developed with the involvement of local public authorities and SMEs, thus contributing to the enhancement of tourism quality, sustainability and accessibility and to the increase of SMEs’ business opportunities by expanding their services to a large and growing market of potential customers. To further support SMEs, a business toolkit is available that provides practical tips and guidance for businesses to improve and market their accessible tourism services.
6.4 Example 4: Makingtrax, accessible adventures in New Zealand

After a life changing canyoning accident in the Swiss Alps, Jezza Williams looked into the adaptive adventure industry. Encountering a huge lack of adventure opportunities and infrastructure for persons with disabilities, he founded Makingtrax.

Makingtrax non-profit platform initiates and facilitates experiences for people who normally would not have access to them.

Initially focused on finding leading adventure companies that would tailor trips for Makingtrax clients, their experience and knowledge of the industry expanded. Makingtrax opened ground-breaking opportunities and has provided life changing adventure experiences for appreciated clients ever since.

Makingtrax helps to transforms adventure companies by educating and when necessary designing and/or acquiring adaptive equipment to make their activities possible to all abilities.

Over the last few years they have been providing adaptive adventure experiences and fully guided tours, whilst developing inclusive adventure tourism operators. As experts in this field they have become New Zealand’s point of reference when it comes to Inclusive adventure consulting and services.
7. Stakeholder engagement

If you want to develop YOUR tourism destination, it is of key importance to cooperate with all stakeholders of the supply chain, with the designers of the built space and with the final users.

When all key actors are engaged and involved in planning the developments of the destination, the outcomes are proved to be better and the policy makers will gain a better support from their citizens.

7.1 Participation of people with disabilities in planning

As UN points out in "Accessibility and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Urban Development" (2016):

“An accessible and disability-inclusive urban development agenda can be realized everywhere. This requires strong commitments in concrete terms, which include inclusive and disability-responsive urban policy frameworks, appropriate regulatory structures and standards, "design for all" approaches in planning and design, and predictable resource allocations. It also requires active and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations, as rights-holders and as agents and beneficiaries of development during all stages of the urbanization process”.

Best practices are of help to learn how to involve people with disabilities in tourism and urban planning.

The first suggestion is:

Walking the Talk, A framework for effective engagement with people with disability, families and people who support them an Australian Document published by the Queensland’s Disability Services under its community engagement improvement strategy.
Another useful document is:

Accentuate toolkits. How to involve disabled people. Establishing an inclusive steering committee made by Accentuate, a UK national program to support and promote the talents of deaf and disabled people in the cultural sector.

7.2 Participation of tourism suppliers, focus on tourist guides

Tourist guides are often seen as “ambassadors” of a destination. They are a human point of contact with the visitors and though their daily work they inform, advise, and shape the visitor’s experience of a place, its history and its people. Many tourist Guides have established links with museums, monuments and heritage sites and here they can bring their skills in guiding people with disabilities.

Training is of paramount importance in these professions.

2 best practices can be mentioned here, supporting training and engagement of tourist guides to the development of accessible tours.

T-G GUIDE, a Continuing Professional Development course in guiding people with learning disabilities, is offered by FEG and ENAT. Thanks to this training, accredited T-Guides are able to assist destinations and cultural heritage venues in making their offers attractive to visitors with intellectual impairments, ensuring inclusive experiences and sharing cultural heritage with new audiences.

ELEVATOR’s “Inclusive tourism guiding”, is a handbook developed by Erasmus + funded project “Elevator”, made also with the support and the participation of tourism guides from Italy, Slovenia and Czech Republic. It is a complete guide on how to prepare and conduct a guided tour taking into account the needs of people with specific access requirements.
8. Benchmarking and performance targets

“Benchmarking” for YOUR destination means that you have to compare your destination’s progress towards the goal of providing “accessible tourism for all” against internal and external performance measures.

Even if two destinations start from different points and they do not have the same resources conditions for development, YOU can follow the experiences and practices of other destinations that are working towards becoming an accessible tourism destination.

Examples of tourist destinations that are focusing on accessibility and inclusion can be helpful at the very outset of YOUR new accessibility project, by providing reference examples of:

- how to develop an overall strategy,
- learning about the practical steps to introduce change to an organisation,
- identifying good practices,
- assessing competitors and
- establishing a first set of Key Performance Indicators.

Seeing how others address similar challenges – organisational, managerial, technical or financial – can help YOU to shape ideas and perhaps also avoid some of the difficulties that others may have encountered.

Developing benchmarking tools for accessible tourism provision is one of activities of the ENAT NTOs learning group, which brings together DMOs, regional and national tourism organisations to discuss and share best practice. Every year a workshop is organized hosted by one of the participants, while during the year an online messaging board provides group members with news, study reports and trends analysis.
You can see other examples of best practices in designing facilities and built environment and benchmarking of a destination, by checking this EU Study: **Mapping the Supply and Performance of Accessible Tourism Services in Europe.** Fifteen Case Studies, (2014) by EWORX S.A., ENAT and VVA.

Fifteen Case Studies of Accessible Tourism Destinations were commissioned in 2013 by the European Commission (Tourism Unit) as part of a research project examining the supply side of accessible tourism in Europe. The studies examined: London UK, Frankfurt Germany, Arona Spain, Stockholm Sweden, Lousã Accessible Destination Portugal, Paris - Ile de France, Disneyland Paris, France, Slovenia NTA, ŠENT NGO and Premiki, Slovenia, Moravia-Silesia & Tešín Czech Republic, Athens Greece, Trentino Italy, Schloss Schönbrunn, Vienna, Austria, Hérault, France, Barcelona Spain and Rovaniemi Finland.8

### 9. Information

People with disabilities and older people need more information than other guests to be able to decide to travel.

The decision-making process of each tourist starts from the decision to go on a trip.

He/she makes an initial selection, among several offers available on the market, based on his/her own needs and wishes.

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8 See: https://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.reports.1739
So, the information system allows the description of the various components of the tourist package and it enables potential clients to:

- take the decision to go on holiday;
- plan the holiday;
- be aware of the characteristics of the tourist structures;
- choose the package best responding to his/her needs;
- purchase a suitable tourist package;
- be confident in the use of devices and equipment available in the various tourist structures;
- orient him/herself and enjoy places and equipment safely.

Therefore, the information they are searching for has to be:

- **Easy to find.** Remember, people usually travel on holiday in groups and bookings are often made by friends and family. If they cannot find the information they require, you could be missing out on the expenditure of the entire party.
- **Up to date and reliable.** Check the source and reliability of the information you upload. Get feedback from your visitors to help keep it up to date.
- **Detailed and accurate.** Every person with an impairment has a different need and a different level of expectations. Although only a small percentage of disabled people are wheelchair users, this group has the highest need for detailed information.

### 9.1 Access schemes and auditing

The reliability and the completeness of the information for tourists with specific access needs are largely dependent on the procedures used to collect them.

The **Accessibility Information Schemes** (AIS) to which any tourism services provider may refer to, in order to collect the information which will eventually be provided to the customers, are much more detailed and reliable, in so far as the collection tools are very well described and the staff who are going to perform the accessibility surveys are properly trained in the use of the tools.

Photo of man with tape measure performing an accessibility assessment on an outdoor path. Source: [www.apptouryou.eu](http://www.apptouryou.eu)
YOU should use an access scheme to collect the information. It is possible that there are already professionals in your area who have developed it, in some country there is even a national scheme, or you could use the scheme which was developed by another destination which can cooperate with you to adapt it to your language and offer.

If you check [https://pantou.org/accessibility-info](https://pantou.org/accessibility-info) the Accessible Tourism Directory, you will find around 40 Accessibility Information Schemes which have been recognized by ENAT, the European Network for Accessible Tourism.

It will be very important for you to have trained staff to perform access audits of the facilities and attractions throughout your supply chain. In this matter, staff trained to become a Customized Accessible Tourism assistant could be of great help.

On a temporary basis, while developing your access scheme, it could be useful to ask your supply chain to make “access statements” of their services, as it is an easier way to engage the businesses. Pantou has its own free access statement questionnaire which can be used by the businesses to gather access information.

Photo of home page of Pantou – The Accessible Tourism Directory. Source Pantou.org
9.2 Showing information, accessible websites

Nowadays the most used media to retrieve tourism information is the internet.

People with disabilities rely even more on websites, blogs and social medias, as they search for additional information regarding the access conditions of their travel.

Developing YOUR destination website, you need to make sure that it is compliant with accessibility rules (since April 2019 the European Accessibility Act makes it compulsory to design accessible websites). Moreover, you need to know how you present your information to make it more attractive and effective to your audience.

Here we give you the main aspects you should care about to give an effective and accessible information:

9.2.1 Navigation and links

- Ensure your content is accessible and adheres to Universal Design or Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). The added benefit of Universal Design is that an accessible site is more visible to search engines, 50% faster to navigate and can offer savings through reduced maintenance.

- Clearly signpost your access information from the home page. Call it ‘Access for All’ or ‘Accessibility’. (Don’t use the terms ‘disabled visitors’, ‘special facilities’ or ‘disability requirements’).

- Don’t confuse the link to this information with the website accessibility link, which usually appears at the bottom of the home page and outlines the accessibility of the website for its users.

- Link your access pages to family pages or multigenerational travel pages: they often have the same access needs.

- Link your access pages to the access pages of key public realm providers in the destination e.g. transport companies, parking, museums and parks.

9.2.2 Content

- Photography that represents a diversity of visitors does much to raise confidence to visit.

- Highlight testimonials from previous visitors. ‘Word of mouth’ information is particularly valued by disabled travellers. The testimonials can be used in other marketing channels and on your social media too.
• Encourage visitors to ask tourism venues for their Accessibility Guide. There is a suggested form of words in the Winning More Visitors guide.

• Link to your local access groups as a way of complementing your access information and to build traffic.

Photo of the cover of a Guide to Flanders Celebration of Great War Centenary, showing an old man in a wheelchair with young girl beside him. An example of accessibility marketing in a publication targeted to the wider audience. Source: Tourism Flander

10. Marketing and Promotion

Now it is time to promote YOUR destination as accessible and inclusive. By now you have already understood how the information has to be given to reach your target, but you may want to follow these suggestions to start your marketing campaign at best:

Don't assume all disabilities are the same - Think of the spectrum of different access requirements and remember that every person is different and with different needs, even if with the same general disability;

Don't hide the accessibility information, instead put it together with the rest of the information of facilities and services are. Bookings are often made by friends, family or
employers. Headings such as “special facilities” or “compliance requirements” are meaningless and demeaning. (Have a clear link on the website home page to accessibility information - avoid using the term disabled or disability);

**Provide enough detail.** This is critical, as every person with a disability has a different need and a different level of expectation. Don’t try and categorize. Provide the detail so that they can make the decision as to whether a facility is suitable for them or not. Any customer would make a choice based on the information about room types – visitors with access needs have preferences. (There is a balance required in providing what information that needed and no more: information overload may make it unusable);

**Get feedback from visitors** to understand what information is key for them. The “look and feel” of the information is important to them, as well as the access information itself;

**Include photographs** of your accessible facilities;

**Include people with a disability in your general marketing and imagery** (e.g. as shown in chapter 8 - but not in a tokenistic way e.g. a solitary wheelchair user sitting on the edge of a cliff)!

**Use at best Social media and apps.** People with disabilities are often major users of social media and several positive mentions of your destination can go a long way. You might use testimonials to help you grow your audience. And do not forget, as with all social media, the key to success is responding quickly to any negatives.

There are many review sites and forums with reviews by travellers with disabilities.

The larger forums worth posting on (and keeping an eye on through a Google Alert account) are:

- TripAdvisor Travelling with Disabilities Forum
- ENAT Accessible Tourism Group on Facebook.

**Develop and market new itineraries within your destination**

Visitors with disabilities and older travellers are grateful for suggested itineraries and highlights as they can take away much of the guesswork about access issues. You may choose to group businesses together in an itinerary and, depending on your budget, highlight them on your website, make their Access Guides available in pdf downloadable format, or use them to form the basis of a PR or marketing campaign.
Make sure your supply chain is well covered on Pantou

As already mentioned, Pantou (https://pantou.org) is the name of the On-line Accessible Tourism Directory. (Pantou means “Everywhere” in Greek).

Photo of Pantou Listed Supplier badge. Source : pantou.org

This is a Website where businesses from all over the world can register free of charge to promote their accessible tourism services. To be listed with Pantou, tourism suppliers must indicate the type of service(s) offered and the particular target groups they can serve.

Tourism providers should either join an Accessibility Information Scheme (AIS) that verifies the accessibility of the services offered - or fill out and submit the Pantou Accessibility Guide self-declaration form.

Each supplier is given a profile page showing name, their logo (or photo), location on an interactive map, service description, a link to their Accessibility Information Scheme and contact details.

As a tourism destination, YOU can be represented for free in the portal, with an account of the local tourist board, with its AIS, and profiles of all suppliers of your destination who are committed to cater for people with access needs.

11. Monitoring and evaluating

If you want to improve the accessibility of YOUR destination throughout the all supply chain and if you want to make sure that your efforts had the desired impact in the market YOU need tools to measure and evaluate your achievements.
11.1 KPIs

When YOU will start considering measuring your achievements you will have to set your Key Performance Indicators (KPI), ideally at destination and business level. These KPIs will help you understand what is happening, where you are succeeding and where you may need to take corrective action and adjust your strategy accordingly.

Your development strategy is always subject to changes so you have to review it constantly, and the only way to do it is by monitoring if you have reached your goals.

In order for your strategy to be meaningful you must be able to measure against the aims and objectives you have set for Your destination and your businesses, to understand whether they have been achieved and how you can build on these, or where they have not been met, take corrective action.

Without understanding this you may not be using your limited resources most effectively. You may therefore need to review such things as business relationships, key messages to partners businesses and visitors, communication channels, tools provided for the industry, to ensure you remain on track and your strategy or action plan is being effective and bringing about the changes you want.

Through your strategy or accessibility action plan, you will have agreed a specific aim and objectives, with allocated responsibility and timescales against a budget, where applicable. It is vital that there is someone nominated to monitor the plan and actions on a regular basis and give feedback to the partners / key stakeholders who are participating in any project management team.

A good starting point, as it is a standardized system developed by the European Commission, is the European Tourism Indicators System for sustainable destination management (ETIS), produced in 2016, and which comprises a number of indicators related to accessibility.⁹

The main ones are included in the Social and Cultural impact indicators:

C.4 Inclusion: accessibility

C.4.1 Percentage of rooms in commercial accommodation establishments accessible for people with disabilities

C.4.2 Percentage of commercial accommodation establishments participating in recognised accessibility information schemes

⁹ ETIS, see: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/indicators_en
C.4.3  Percentage of public transport that is accessible to people with disabilities and specific access requirements

C.4.4  Percentage of tourist attractions that are accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognised accessibility information schemes

There are also additional indicators for the destination management organizations who have already set up a monitoring system following the above guidelines:

**Sustainable tourism policy**

- Percentage of the destination with an accessible tourism strategy/action plan, with agreed monitoring, development control and evaluation arrangement

**Equality/accessibility**

- Percentage of commercial accommodation with rooms accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognised accessibility information schemes

- Does the destination have an identified accessibility management office or person available to the public?

- Percentage of businesses that have a budget for accessibility improvements

**Reducing transport impact**

- Percentage of each category of transport in the destination that is accessible, i.e. public transport and private hire coaches, minibuses, taxis or minicabs

Another important document to help you set YOUR KPIs can be the Manual on Accessible Tourism for All: Principles, Tools and Good Practices, Module IV: Indicators for Assessing Accessibility in Tourism (Fundación ONCE and ENAT. UNWTO Publications, 2015).

https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284418091 It sets lists of indicators per every aspect of the tourism chain from booking, to transport, to tourist information to accommodations etc. The PDF is also available in Spanish.
12. The CAT assistant / expert

One of the main objectives of project Newscat was developing a training course to teach the basics of accessible tourism and customer care for a person working in the tourism sector who is specialized in understanding the needs of people with disabilities in his tourism destination. The training course has been delivered to a number of students and worker coming from different parts of the tourism chain in 4 pilot destinations:

- The Balearic Islands in Spain
- Lombardy in
- Varna in Bulgaria
- Riga in Latvia

The 4 different areas are quite different and tourism and accessible tourism is been developing differently. These differences are important to test the training course, the interest of the stakeholders, and to see how destinations would see the presence of new skilled workers in the sector.

The path taken by the participants to the course could lead them to become “customized accessible tourism experts”. Their knowledge could be used in different ways, either working as:

- staff of a tourism supplier
- a freelance expert to help tourism suppliers or tourist offices
- working for a tourism destination

In all 4 pilot sites workshops were organized with the policy makers, to present the initiative, the outcomes, to disseminate the goals of accessible tourism, and to gather information of where there is more room to develop the skills of the customized accessible tourism expert.

Almost unanimous answer in the 4 pilot was that the most effective way to develop the skills of accessible tourism is throughout either prepared staff working directly for the suppliers, or with experienced consultants who could help at the same time the tourism operators to become more accessible and the tourism destination to plan accessibility.

In the next chapter the outcomes of the workshops with the policy makers from the 4 destinations will be presented, together with a set of recommendations per each site.
13. Case studies for the implementation of a CAT training programme.

In this chapter we present here the outcomes of a number of workshops that have taken place in the 4 project pilots, where the Newscat training course for Customized Accessible Tourism assistant has been organized. The workshop with policy makers was designed to collect data and attitudes from the decision makers of the 4 tourism destinations toward the development of accessible tourism and the skills related to a more qualified quality tourism for all.

We see the policy makers’ feedback as an important addition to our Guidelines, as they present real cases and different ways to approach customized accessible tourism in a holistic way.

For each destination we present a SWOT analysis developed together with policy makers, and a set of recommendations to plan more effectively and to use the knowledge and expertise of the Customised Accessible Tourism experts.

Policy makers’ statements in the SWOT analysis are generally left unedited but in some place explanations are given, thus: [placed in square brackets] by the NEWSCAT editor.

The Recommendations after each SWOT analysis are presented by the NEWSCAT experts.

13.1 Balearic Islands

13.1.1 Strengths

- The Balearic Islands are a top leading tourism destination
- The destination is very appealing to visitors. It generates high overall satisfaction of stay and high recommendation rates (repeating visitors is a significant segment, 76%).
- Well-known destination for the customer, with a great variety of economic visitor profiles: from low-cost to luxury-high spending.
- High degree of efficiency and good value for money.
- Proximity to outbound travel markets and easy access, with direct flights from and to the main European cities throughout the year, is an advantage that no other competitor in the Mediterranean can offer.
- Excellent accommodation and tourist facilities, good health services & infrastructures and fast and efficient public transport.
- Worldwide leading Majorcan hotel companies that maintain main offices in the region.
- More than 50 years of tourism know-how which has been exported to other worldwide tourist destinations.
- Highly specialised and professional services.

13.1.2 Weaknesses

- Lack of more accessible services at all levels.
Shortage of studies on tourism accessibility and tourist guides informing about hotel & accessible services of the Balearic Islands.

Strong dependence on 3S (sea-sun-sand tourism) although many efforts are currently being done to develop alternative off-season products.

Two elements are worse rated in comparison to other emerging competitor destinations: expensive commercial offer and high prices outside hotels.

Lack of new experiences that could provide wider content to the current agenda of possible activities to be undertaken by tourists during their stay.

13.1.3 Opportunities

Better coordination could be established between the public, the private sector and Associations of Persons with Disabilities, for a better management of accessible tourism and to improve accessibility of the tourist offer.

To provide the destination with more detailed and accessible information on the conditions of accessibility of the tourist offer and its diffusion through the different channels and tools of promotion and marketing.

To design an offer of accessible tourism products & experiences, attractive to the tourist market and different with respect to other destinations, so that it represents the identity and the unique values of Balearic Islands.

To provide the local tourism industry with the appropriate support and tools to significantly advance on issues of universal accessibility.

Existence of a growing accessible tourism market (there are only in the European Union 138 million people with accessibility needs).

New technologies, such as information and promotion support, allow customers to have more detailed information about the offer of accessible tourism and with tools and channels with higher levels of accessibility and usability.

Photo of a boat on a beach by a rocky coast. Source Balearic Islands Tourism Board
• Favourable public policies and commitment from the Regional Government to move towards a more accessible tourism destination.
• Training and educational courses for the tourist sector to raise awareness on accessible tourism but also on satisfying accessibility needs and on how to offer more accessible services.
• Information on the region's accessibility of the establishments and the resources is vital so that people with accessibility needs can plan their trip, knowing in advance what are the conditions.

13.1.4 Threats

• Strong external competition faced by tourist companies and destinations.
• Profound changes in the tourist markets and the tourist demand.

[Photo of the Cathedral of Santa Maria of Palma, Source Balearic Islands Tourism Board]

13.1.5 Recommendations

• Follow up on the identified opportunities for accessible tourism destination development in order to promote Balearic Islands as a destination for all.
• Create additional training opportunities on Customised Accessible Tourism and promote the training to tourism providers.
• Develop and enlarge, with the help of suppliers and experts the comprehensive tourist portal of the Region portal with information on accessibility throughout the entire chain.
• Support and promote accessible tourists’ experiences in the area, together with the local suppliers.
• Use social media (invite travel bloggers, etc.) as part of your marketing to promote the accessibility of the destination. Even when the offers may be limited: promote the ones that already exist.
13.2 Latvia

https://www.latvia.eu/

Photo of Riga, city skyline

13.2.1 Strengths

- Latvia is known for cultural heritage and is popular destination for short getaways among neighbouring countries.
- Geographical location.
- Mild climate.
- Fairly good accessibility to most popular tourism attractions in big cities.
- Many natural attractions, trails, long white sand beaches, natural parks.
- Highly qualified personnel in facilities and great quality services.
- Very good accommodation and dining facilities in Riga.
- Many unusual and interesting tourist attractions all year round.
- Application and website “Mapeiorns” which maps all the accessible facilities in Latvia (accommodation, dining, attractions, etc.), which is a useful tool for travellers with different abilities [i.e. specific access requirements] and families with small children.

13.2.2 Weaknesses

- Weather can be unpredictable
- Seasonality for leisure travel
- Lack of accessibility in many facilities outside usual tourist trail
- Tourism supply chain for people with special access needs can be inconsistent at times, weakest link is local public transportation accessibility (outside main cities)
- Not all natural attractions are accessible
- Lack of education for tourism professionals on all levels
• Infrastructure in general is often not good enough, especially for individual travellers and families traveling with own transportation.
• Lack of information before travel on accessibility in English.

13.2.3 Opportunities

• Mild climate provides big interest for travellers with special needs, especially seniors, since it is one of the fastest growing sectors in the field
• Cultural heritage and fairly good access to Riga from most European countries (direct flights with Air Baltic and low-cost airlines) makes it a popular and not costly destination
• With CAT and similar courses general accessibility and service can be improved thus improving Latvia as accessible travel destination
• It is possible to create a more person-centred approach to travellers by implementing several strategies: 1. education of tourism professionals; 2. specialized programs for students in the field of tourism and hospitality management on how to manage accessible facilities and train front line staff to provide best service for all; 3. improving facilities and infrastructure in older and less popular tourism attractions
• Already existing application “Mapeirons” can be improved and enlarged to accommodate all of the tourism and leisure related facilities in Latvia and public transportation therefore improving.

13.2.4 Threats

• Lack of government involvement in organizing and monitoring tourism facilities
• Lack of government involvement when creating an interrupted tourism supply chain for travellers with different accessibility needs.
• Estonia and Lithuania – neighbour countries generally have better access, stronger tourism supply chain and better government support
• Air Travel to Lithuania is cheaper from most European destinations than to Riga

Photo of Lake Skaista, in Latvia
13.2.5 Recommendations

- Have a better understanding of the supply chain by organizing a committee with representatives of all tourism actors and stakeholders for meetings and focus groups sharing challenges and goals. This would help having a better picture to start planning an accessible destination.
- Focus on transport to and within Latvia and on local transport. It is pivotal to develop an accessible transport system to link the tourist attractions and suppliers. It is possible, in the short term, to favour the development of private accessible transport services to offset the lack of accessibility of the mainstream system.
- Invest in accessibility training for the local tourism information offices and for the tourism suppliers. The training modules developed for project NEWSCAT can be a good base to start with.
- Support local start-ups and organizations offering innovative information systems like Mapeirons (and cooperating with Mapeirons) and favour the exchange of tourism accessibility data for citizens and tourists.
- Follow up on the identified opportunities for accessible tourism destination development in order to promote Latvia as a destination for all.
- Use social media (invite travel bloggers, etc.) as part of your marketing to promote the accessibility of the destination. Even when the offers may be limited: promote the ones that already exist.

13.3 Bulgaria


13.3.1 Strengths

- Location of Bulgaria in one of the most attractive tourist regions in Europe
- High level of price competitiveness
- Relatively high level of safety and security
- Great variety of natural and cultural-historical tourist sites
- Climate with a healing effect in many regions of the country
- Border with the Black Sea, and hence, an attractive coast with a large coastline
- Wide variety of mineral water springs, which have a healing effect
- Great number of protected areas, natural landmarks, natural and national parks
- Beautiful landscapes and a soil allowing the growth of grapes and the development of wine tourism
- Various regional and local tourist products providing different opportunities in the sector of tourism
- Network of units and institutions offering vocational training in the field of tourism
- Many experienced professionals in the tourist sector
13.3.2 Weaknesses

- Gaps in the legal framework regulating the development of the tourist sector
- Lack of an adequate marketing strategy for the promotion of Bulgaria as an attractive tourist destination
- Lack of a sufficient communication between the stakeholders involved – entrepreneurs, public structures, state institutions, etc.
- Lack of accessibility at all levels and at all departments responsible for the provision of tourist services
- Lack of efforts for the provision of accessible services at all levels in the field of tourism
- Clear seasonality of the tourist sector
- Low salaries in the sector of tourism
- Shortage of well-trained staff
- Built image of Bulgaria as a cheap tourist destination
- Lack of a reliable information about the accessibility of the tourist attractions

13.3.3 Opportunities

- Use of foreign experience in developing and increasing the accessibility in the tourist sector in Bulgaria
- Raising of the awareness about accessible tourism and the accessibility of tourist sites in particular
- Increase of the number of legal requirements about accessible tourism
- Improvement of the coordination and the communication between the different stakeholders regarding the accessibility in the tourist sector
- Provision of greater support by the local authorities in order to enhance the accessibility in the sector of tourism
• Provision of more education and training opportunities with regard to accessible tourism
• Greater influence of ICT on the developments in the tourist sector and on the issue of accessibility in particular

13.3.4 Threats

• Inconsistency of the national policy regarding the implementation of measures for accessible tourism
• Limited state funding of the tourist sector
• Lower prioritisation of the tourist services for people with disabilities at a national level

13.3.5 Recommendations

• Promote the national adoption of accessibility standards, sharing best practices of other countries and destinations, studying and adopting international standards for the built environment for new realizations and renewals public tenders.
• Invest in accessibility training at all levels of the supply chain, for the decision makers and as well for the citizens.
• Start the development of your destination plan by analysing the state of the art of the accessible tourism offer and by designing a tourism portal which conveys all necessary information for tourists from booking to travel from stay to travelling back.

• Involve the organizations representing people with disabilities and older people in all phases of the plan, as their feedback is valuable to the process of developing accessible offers.

• Use social media (invite travel bloggers, etc.) as part of your marketing to promote the accessibility of the destination. Even when the offers may be limited: promote the ones that already exist.
13.4 Lombardy – Province of Bergamo

http://www.visitbergamo.net/en/

![Photo of a mountain refuge in the Alps near Bergamo](image)

13.4.1 Strengths

- Italy is one of the most important tourist destinations in Europe, with the greater number of cities of art where tourists could enjoy history, culture, and beautiful landscapes
- The mild Italian climate is an advantage for people with special needs
- Possibility of heterogeneous tourist experiences: cities of art, sea, mountains, lakes, natural parks, etc.
- Restaurants and food experience are two key elements of the tourist offer
- Huge cultural and historical heritage
- Qualified staff in the tourism sector. Italy has one of the highest shares of people employed in tourism in Europe, with highly qualified personnel and good quality services
- Great variety of hotels, hostels, etc. for overnight stays
- Lombardy region is experiencing growing tourism, both in the main cities (Milan, Bergamo, Mantova, Como) and natural landmarks (mountains and lakes)
- The province of Bergamo has a huge offer of naturalistic (mountain walking and biking) and agri-food tourism destinations
- Competitiveness of prices compared to other more famous mountain locations
- Wide variety of tourist facilities and accommodation, from luxury hotels to mountain lodges
13.4.2 Weaknesses

- Lack of knowledge of foreign languages and lack of translated information for foreign tourists
- Lack of information in other languages for foreign tourists
- Often high prices for international flights
- Presence of tourists concentrated in certain periods of the year
- Lack of visibility and promotion of structures, services, and experiences
- Accessibility should be strengthened at all levels (structures, services, tourism professionals, transport)
- Presence of architectural barriers and uncared roads that hinder the use by disabled people with specific needs
- Lack of communication regarding accessible places and services for people with special needs
- Lack of adequate promotion of sector tourism (mountain area) compared to other regions of northern Italy
- Lack of reliable information about the accessibility of the tourist attractions

13.4.3 Opportunities

- Better coordination and communication regarding accessible tourism among all possible stakeholders
- Other laws and regulations concerning accessible tourism
- Increase in information about accessible destinations and services through the use and promotion of mobile applications or new technologies
- Training and refresher courses for tour operators on the topic of accessible tourism
- Get inspired by the "best practices" of other countries to implement accessible services and destinations
- Consistent with what is happening in the whole Lombardy region, the incidence of foreign tourism in the Bergamo area is constantly increasing
- Possibility to provide different personal services, including assistance, on-call transportation, entertainment and relief, thanks to the collaboration with local social cooperatives
- Possibility that Lombardy Region specializes in accessible tourism, in order to differentiate its offer from other Italian tourist destinations
- Increase in the number of tourists during the low season with targeted planning and marketing strategies
- Increase of employment opportunities, also for people with disabilities, in the local tourism sector

13.4.4 Threats

- Limited use of funding to implement accessible tourism and to eliminate any architectural barriers and obstacles
- Limited use of funding to encourage young people to develop branches of business in the accessible tourism sector
- Lack of involvement and support from local institutions on the development of accessible tourism sector
- Presence of structural barriers in the main (public) artistic and cultural sites
- Lack of accessible local transport facilities
- Lack of public awareness about accessible tourism issues

Bergamo and the Alps

13.4.5 Recommendations

- Do not take for granted the fair share of tourists that your destination hosts every year, tourism habits evolve and without offering quality accessible and sustainable tourism for your customers and your citizens, you can loose your market.
- Start planning improvements by bringing together all tourism providers in a series of open meetings and make a state of the art analysis of the accessible offer.
- Establish a database of detailed information on the accessibility features of the tourism attractions and suppliers and promote these on your destination website.
- Invest in accessibility training for the local tourism information offices and for the tourism suppliers. The training modules developed for project NEWSCAT can be a good base to start with.
- Involve the many local social enterprises of your destination, some of them are already trained and with experience in accessibility: they can help you in many actions of awareness raising, in audit campaigns, in training the supply chain.
- Promote mainstream tourism offers with accessibility information and highlight accessible experiences in your varied offer (accessible sport experiences in the mountains, by the lake, accessible art tours etc.).
- Invest in accessible transport and inter-modality to connect your destination and make the information widely available to visitors in mainstream channels.
- Use social media (invite travel bloggers, etc.) as part of your marketing to promote the accessibility of the destination. Even when the offers may be limited: promote the ones that already exist.