Report on common methodology on accessible tourism

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Presentation

In recent decades, since tourism has established itself as a primary social need, we have increasingly heard about accessible tourism or *"tourism for all"* as a set of services and facilities that allow people with special needs to enjoy a fulfilling holiday, unimpeded, in full autonomy and with dignity.

Financed by the Interreg Program V A Italia Croatia 2014-2020, the Tourism4all project aims to develop and promote a cross-border network of accessible tourist destinations, concerning the natural and cultural heritage of the territories involved by promoting social inclusion through the sharing of methodologies and good practices. The interventions will, therefore, be focused on the following lines of action: nature itineraries, cultural art cities and beaches.

The partnership of the project formed by 7 Italian and 6 Croatian partners, includes high profile institutions: Municipalities, Local Groups of Action, Regional Administrations, Cooperatives, Tourism and University Agencies which cover an Adriatic area which goes from Friuli Venezia Giulia to Puglia, for the Italian part and from Buje to Split for the Croatian part.

Many Italian regions have identified accessible tourism as one of the strategic priorities for the continuously growing development of the tourist market, but most of the time with a "local" and often diversified approach. There is, therefore, a need to share a common framework: from training tour operators to implementing models and methods of action.

The project will enable the Italian and Croatian partnership to capitalise on experiences in an effort to harmonise policies for the development and promotion of accessible tourism through the transfer of knowledge and the sharing of best practices.

The project, therefore, aims to become a tool for the organization of long-term multi-territorial governance dedicated to the management of local tourist accessibility strategies involving institutions and private tourism service providers.

The project is divided into 3 stages:

1. best practice analysis and sharing of solutions and methodologies to improve the accessibility of natural and/or cultural heritage for tourism purposes through an

initial survey of the training needs of tour operators followed by on-site training sessions aimed at tour and cultural operators;

2. pilot projects to improve the accessibility of natural and/or cultural heritage for tourism purposes;

3. A promotional program represented by a catalogue of tour operators in the Italian-Croatian cross-border area containing an integrated offer of a network of accessible tourist destinations subject to the pilot interventions carried out by the different partners: each destination will be advertised with a dedicated brand to attract both cross-border and international tourism.

This Manual is part of the first phase of sharing a work method, glossary, best practice analysis and tools for a common approach concerning the objectives of the Tourism4All project.

What is Accessible Tourism?

Today there is a **strong demand for innovation of the tourist offer** that must no longer neglect the niches of the market, even if **accessible tourism** cannot be defined as a niche, but **a demand, which is transversal to all tourist products**. **The** common denominator that must be an integral part of an **innovative offer** is Quality.

In the last **few years, Accessible Tourism** has gone from an intuition of a few pioneers to a **business** recognized by the market. Let's talk, first of all, about tourism which takes care of ***everyone's needs***, therefore **a very high-quality offer**. It is essential *to answer the needs of people with mobility disabilities, of those who cannot see or hear, or have cognitive difficulties, without forgetting* that by 2030 **the increase of the average age of European citizens** will bring **the Over 65 population to 34%.** To be over 65 does not mean to have a disability, but there is certainly a need for **greater attention to the quality** of the **environments**, **spaces**, **services** that are provided within the facilities whether these are receptive, cultural, beach or nature resorts.

Accessible tourism means being able to combine the reasoning of the tourist enterprise with the ability to satisfy the ***demand for "Hospitality"*** that requires ***attention, dialogue and technical knowledge.*** We incorrectly tend to associate Accessible Tourism with disabilities thus obtaining an almost medical/clinical vision of this type of tourism. Nothing could be more wrong!
Accessible Tourism means same price, same place, and more tourists!

The market for Accessible Tourism

The Accessible Tourism market consists of **127 million customers in Europe**[1], 54 **million in America, 43 million in Brazil, 34 million in the Middle East;** they are

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[1] Source ENAT www.accessibletourism.org

customers who travel with **high frequency,** for **longer periods,** especially in the **low season,** spending more than average tourists[2] do**.** The lack of attention on behalf of the tourist entrepreneurs towards such a profitable target cannot be justified unless we consider the *distorted impact that the issue of accessibility understood* as breaking *down architectural barriers* has had on technical building standards. All too often, it is thought that compliance with the "technical standards" is sufficient to meet the demands of this market.

Instead, it is necessary to distinguish between compliance with the regulations and the offer of **Accessible Hospitality**.

The language

In Accessible Tourism, it is necessary to use the correct language, respectful of people through effective and unprejudiced communication.

Over the years, unfortunately, we have seen the most ambiguous terms used to define people with disabilities and all of them always with an intrinsic negative connotation.

Words NOT to be used:

- handicapped
- differently-abled
- retarded
- mongol

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[2] Source Mind the accessibility gap rethinking accessible tourism in Europe – Giugno 2014 https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/mind-accessibility-gap-rethinking-accessible-tourism-europe-0_it

- invalid
- subnormal
- brain-damaged
- maimed
- cripple
- normal person (referring to a person without disabilities)

It is correct to use **person with disabilities.** Disability is a condition but we must always concentrate our **attention on the person** and NOT the disability.

Paradigm shift from accessibility to Accessible Hospitality

For this reason, too, it is necessary to **abandon the concept of accessible tourism,** linked today just to the observation of the regulations concerning architectural barriers, to enter the broader and less marginalising concept of Accessible Hospitality. Transforming the obligation of accessibility, into **profitable Accessible Hospitality**.

Accessible Hospitality creates a **tourist product always attentive** to the usability of the services offered, paying particular attention to the fact that everyone should be the **active protagonist of their own holiday** and that there is an "ability to host" that is not only based on **friendliness and availability of the staff** (cit. Source Indagine CARE 2004) but is expressed with real **problem-solving abilities** and **professional skills** in dealing **with the requests of this target,** finding **appropriate answers** and **suitable services,** thus ensuring **Transparent Accessibility.**

Enough with "disabled restrooms" with aesthetics that have little to do with the world of Hospitality. **Today** with the right **skills and with the right aids there are the conditions, to create environments that respect design, aesthetics and**

functionality, satisfying the needs that some customers express and that today are completely ignored.

Paradigm shift objective and reliable information

Accessibility has always been summed up by the logo of a man in a wheelchair but it must be realised that a wheelchair is a tool of autonomy, an aid; it can be compared to a pair of glasses: many people wear them and even if they seem similar to each other they each have their own gradation or focal centre, based on the visual problem to be solved, and so they **are not all the same**, just like people who use a wheelchair are not all the same.

From this, we can better understand that not everything can be reduced to a standard logo when talking about accessibility!

And not only, but every person, understood as a thinking being, even if in need of an aid to move or other specific needs, still possesses, personal abilities, physical and cultural resources, strictly personal and non-standardised inclinations and stimuli. To satisfy the needs of these tourists there is only one-way to act: **to supply reliable information** so that everyone is in the condition of **deciding the quality of their holiday in complete autonomy**. To provide dimensions such as width, length, slopes, spaces, which must not be influenced by personal assessments and general statements such as accessible, partially accessible and not accessible!

Accessibility for everyone does not exist and a unique model of accessibility does not exist.

We must, therefore, **move on from disability to needs**. This is *the real cultural innovation* that has to happen to come close to accessible tourism in a professional way.

This approach will be completely neutral compared to the eventual disabilities that people might have, allowing them to make an informed choice independently from their needs*.*

Let's see what advantages a similar approach can give:

- **The decision** of the choice is **left up to the person,** thus becoming the protagonist of the choice

- **The tourist structure will not have the features** of a hospital but will retain its tourist appeal for everyone.

- **the tourist structure will not classify itself** as suitable for a category, but it will be chosen by the customer who will see in the structure the satisfaction of their needs, regardless of their disabilities.

- **No misunderstanding** concerning the interpretation of the meaning "*suitable for disabled*"

- **Tourist facilities could be chosen by tourists of any Country or Culture.**

Architectural barriers – what they are and how to overcome them.
Any building element that prevents limits or makes it difficult for people with disabilities to move or use services is defined as an **architectural barrier**. From this, it follows that an element that does not constitute an architectural barrier for one individual may instead be an obstacle for another; it is therefore understood that the concept of barrier is perceived differently by each individual. The need to guarantee the right to freedom of movement to the greatest number of people has led to the search for common parameters. The most important step has been taken at a regulatory level by identifying what building elements are to be considered architectural barriers.

Classic examples of architectural barriers are: steps, narrow doors, steep slopes, reduced spaces. There are countless cases of less obvious barriers, such as "full" railings, that prevent visibility to a person in a wheelchair or of short stature; bar counters, which are too high, gravel paths or uneven floors. In the case of blind people, traffic lights without an acoustic beacon or protruding objects placed along walkways can also represent architectural barriers.

We can also talk of obstacles and impediments, of temporary or permanent form, which prevent the user from enjoying in full safety all that set of functions, equipment and services, which the space created by man should guarantee to everyone. In this sense, alongside the physical and perceptual barriers, the world of communication barriers also opens up. That is all the signals that the environment generates towards its users.

Web Accessibility

By addressing the topic of architectural barriers, we cannot forget the information and technological barriers that have increasingly arisen on the web, when people with disabilities, vision, mobility, etc. have difficulty navigating on their own.

At this historical moment, the web is definitely the first communication media; this is the reason why it is important to be able to reach everybody with our communications, which is impossible if our website is not accessible.

What does it mean to have an accessible website? Improving User Experience, increasing the number of people involved, not forgetting that 40% of accessibility criteria also cover search engine optimization. For more details, we recommend the WCAG 2.1 – WAI and W3C International Reference Standards, web content accessibility guidelines that apply to desktop, laptop, tablet, and mobile devices.

What will an accessible website look like? An accessible website is not unattractive, the graphics and accessibility are not connected topics.

Who can say if a website is accessible? An accessibility expert, a user with disabilities.

Universal Design – one language for structures, services and organizations

For many years, the term accessibility was used when speaking about people with reduced mobility who need a wheelchair to get about.

In recent years, associations of people with disabilities have broadened the discussion on the need for rights in areas such as housing, transport, communication and tourism through an easy-to-understand language.

The ageing of the population and free movement have allowed the expansion of a broader concept that we could summarize in "for all".

This concept has spread with various names "Universal Design", "Design for all", "Inclusive Design". We like to talk about **Universal Design** because this concept is declined in 7 simple rules that immediately give the perception of simplicity with which complex topics can be addressed.

The 7 Universal Design principles

Principle 1: Fair use

Description | The project is usable and commercial for people with different abilities

Guidelines:

- Provide the same means of use for all users: identical where possible, equivalent where not
- Avoid the isolation or stigmatisation of all users
- The privacy, safety, and security policies should be equally available to all users
- Keep the design attractive for all users

Principle 2: Flexible use

Description | The project is suitable for a wide range of preferences and individual abilities

Guidelines:

- Provide the choice of using methods
- To help the access of right- and left-hand use
- To facilitate the accurateness and precision of the user
- Provide adaptability of the user pace

Principle 3: Simple and intuitive use

Description| The use of the project is easy to understand regardless of the user's needs, knowledge, language or current level of concentration

Guidelines:

- Eliminate any unnecessary difficulties

- Be compatible with the expectations and the intuition of the user
- Provide for a wide range of language and culture skills
- Display the information consistently with their importance
- Provide effective suggestions and feedback during and after completion of work

Principle 4: Information perceptibility

Description | The project communicates the necessary and actual information to the user, irrelevant of the environmental conditions or the sensory abilities of the user.

Guidelines:

- Use of different methods (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for a full presentation of essential information
- Provide adequate contrast between essential information and everything surrounding it
- Maximize the readability of essential information
- Differentiate items so that they can be described (such as making it easy to give information or dispositions)
- Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or tools used by people with sensory limitations

Principle 5: Error tolerance

*Description |*The project minimizes risks and negative or accidental consequences or unintended actions

Guidelines:

- Organize the elements to minimize risks and errors: the most used elements, the most accessible; eliminate, isolate or shield hazard elements
- Provide warning systems for danger or errors

- Provide characteristics that can avoid failure
- Discourage unintentional actions in tasks that require care

Principle 6: Reduce physical exertion

Description | The project can be used effectively and easily with minimal exertion

Guidelines:

- Allow the user to maintain a neutral body position
- Reasonable use of force to action
- Minimize repetitive actions
- Minimize prolonged physical exertion

Principle 7: Dimensions and spaces for approach and use

Description | Appropriate dimensions and spaces are provided for approach, accessibility, manoeuvrability and safe use regardless of the user's stature, posture and mobility.

Guidelines:

- Provide a clear vision of the important elements for every user in a sitting or standing position
- Make it comfortable for all users to reach all elements whether sitting or standing
- Provide different grip measurements
- Provide adequate space for the use of aids or personal assistance

In-depth insights – Bibliography

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Tourism for all Glossary

Accessible Tourism

"Accessible tourism" is a definition that is used to indicate tourist activities aimed at people with disabilities or specific needs so that they can travel, stay and take part in events independently, but also in safety and comfort.

In addition, considered part of this market are Over65s, families with children and people with food allergies and not only people with disabilities

Physical accessibility of facilities and equipment

Physical accessibility intended as the possibility for the tourist with special needs to access and use the structures independently.
Physical accessibility of a structure means the possibility for anyone to reach, enter, and use the environments independently and in safety.
There could be:

- obstacles or physical impediments (narrow walkways, objects placed too high, steps blocking access paths);
- perception barriers (absence of reference points, absence of tactile maps);
- sources of discomfort (inadequate access ramps or with improper slopes, uneven paths);
- sources of danger (slippery floors, glass doors or windows not properly marked, elements which could cause tripping);
- causes of fatigue (ramps which are too long or too steep, long staircases, unsuitable handrails, uneven floors, carpets etc.

Information Accessibility

Apart from the architectural barriers, clients with special needs have to be able to independently find the information about the use of services. Websites must, therefore, be accessible by applying the requirements of the wcAG 2.1 international standards, guidelines for the accessibility of web content applicable to desktop, laptop, tablet and mobile devices.

Physical disabilities
People with mobility disabilities may use a wheelchair (manual or electric), a walking stick, other aids or walk with difficulty. Other mobility problems can cause difficulty in controlling one's movements and the ability to express oneself;
Mobility disabilities do not alter intellectual abilities;
The distances that can be covered depends on the ability of the individual: better to avoid long journeys, long standing waits and paths with obstacles.
When the improvement of the environment is carried out taking into consideration people with disabilities, we improve the quality also for families with pushchairs and elderly people that walk with an aid, such as a walking stick or frame.

Sensory disabilities
Sensory disabilities generally involve sight and hearing. The impairment of these functions can pose limitations to a person's sense of direction, mobility and communication.

Visually impaired/blind
The blind person perceives information helped by the other senses (touch, hearing, smell). These elements contribute to creating a mental picture of the environment, of the paths and the people with whom he or she interacts;

Some blind people use a white stick or a guide dog to avoid obstacles and move freely. A guide dog can enter any environment such as shops, restaurants, museums and rooms, no limits or extra costs are charged. The regulating laws for accommodation facilities also foresee fines in case the above exemptions are not applied;

The person with impaired vision (not blind but with strong visual limitations) needs to get close to objects and people to recognise them. Good lighting and visual contrasts favour their needs.

Impaired hearing Deaf
The main communication systems used by people with impaired hearing or deaf are:

- Lip reading and LIS (Italian sign language): LIS is not an international language but a type of communication that provides for national languages, dialects and "slang";

- Written communication.

Mental disabilities
These are people with difficulties of comprehension, communication and decision-making. People with cognitive behavioural problems have difficulty placing themselves in space and time. They generally move with carers.

People with food allergies
Apart from spontaneous diets, for example, veganism or for cultural reasons, there are also different grades of intolerance and food allergies. The milder forms can give unpleasant problems such as heartburn and diarrhoea, while more severe ones can also lead to anaphylactic shock. There are product lines on the market, distributed by normal chains and supplies for hotels/restaurants/bars, which comply with different protocols such as gluten-free, lactose-free, etc.

People with environmental allergies
There are different grades and types of environmental allergy. The milder forms can give unpleasant problems such as skin rashes and coughs, while more severe ones can also lead to anaphylactic shock. The most common allergies are caused by:
- Dust mites
- pollen
- Animal fur

Accessible Hospitality
Over the years both in Europe and internationally many different definitions of Accessible Tourism have been used, from Tourism for All, Inclusive Tourism, Tourism for the disabled, etc...

Each of these is a synonym more or less appreciated depending on the cultures, the historical period and personal preferences.

The proposal **of Accessible Hospitality** stems from the belief that the tourism industry's response to certain Guests must not just concern compliance with the regulations. The regulations however complex and detailed, are not able to guarantee the satisfaction of everybody's specific needs (and we are not talking about every type of disability) **we must focus on the Guests**, on their needs and not on their disability or the regulations that govern the architectural barriers of buildings.

Hospitality means there is a **personal relationship** between the host and the Guest and accepting the reciprocity of the relationship is the condition for good Hospitality. Reception and Hospitality are synonyms and can both define a group of professional services for tourists which are promoted by a territory or tour operators.

It goes without saying that there is a difference between being accessible and being hospitable, Hospitality associated with accessibility is the expression of a higher quality of reception.

There are places and facilities that are "accessible by law" but that are far from hospitable and welcoming, places where you would not even return for a coffee! On the other hand, there are places that are not very accessible but where friendliness and availability, and in our case also the competence in welcoming the specific needs of our Guests, allow every barrier to be overcome.

Knowing about Accessible Hospitality does not mean having all the answers, **but having the knowledge and skills** to know how to deal with a situation, **knowing how to properly and objectively inform guests** knowing how to prepare adequate accessibility to their specific requirements. Not perfectly but in the best possible way.

Transparent Accessibility

A valuable competitive advantage for any tourist structure: by making quality improvements for all guests who stay and interact there, finding the easiest, most comfortable and safe way to carry out the activities, psychophysical well-being is obtained and opportunities for socialization and personal interaction are created. It is extremely

restrictive to think only of people with disabilities. It is about including the wider and more generic world of needs in this market, that can be represented by people who do not have obvious disabilities: **food allergies** (the best known is celiac disease), **families with young children** or the **elderly** and people with **temporary disabilities**.

Analysis of Best practices.

Tourism is complex but can generate wealth and promote social change. When we talk about tourism, we talk about a structured economic sector, which has undergone a <u>frantic evolution towards extremely complex models of hospitality</u>. Its evolution is directly proportional to the revolution in the changes concerning consumption and social behaviours. The components of offer and demand have almost instant evolutionary dynamics and it is not easy to capture their movement.

As has been well highlighted by the different analyses on tourist and business behaviours, there is no longer a general tourist demand, but an endless series of consumers with infinite different needs which are difficult to categorize. Also as far as supply is concerned there has been a passage in a short time from tourism to tourisms and from tourisms to niches: the hospitality industry has followed the "current" of the demand in the race to specialization, embracing the modularity of the proposals, but above all learning to promote its "identity".

However, 1000 different tourist products cannot be created for 1000 different needs in the same territory: we need to think in terms of integrated programmes where the different components coexist and are valued.

For those who work in tourism, it is extremely difficult to succeed in this highly competitive world and it is often complicated and costly, first of all, to focus on strategic planning and the choice of product specializations that, on the one hand, in tourism are now a necessity but, on the other hand, are subject to constant changes dictated by innovations and trends.

It is equally complex for companies to promote a single offer and to get to know other similar realities, with which to connect, without mediation or intermediaries, to reduce the costs of promotion and communication and amplify the effectiveness of their actions towards targets and markets.

It is therefore essential to provide tourism operators with new tools for qualification, innovation and productivity, able to support companies in this strategic positioning effort.

Competitiveness in tourism must rely on three fundamental levers:

- **the quality of service** intended as a model of hospitality which makes the offer efficient but maintains its typicality and characterization of small and very small businesses on the territory;

- **environmental protection**, not only because it is ethical and appropriate, but also because being sustainable in the long-term means cutting costs for businesses, obtaining a better position on the market and developing local economies. Therefore, the focus is on the development of slow tourist products (walks, cycle-tourism, trekking, etc.) counteracting the effect of short-stay tourism that if not governed can also result in negative impacts on tourist destinations;

- **accessibility**, because a heritage of culture, resources and businesses, is for everyone and must be accessible to all, but also because there are important market numbers involved.

All this because the consumer market is changing[3]:

 digital technologies are shaping the travel experiences of tourists

Artificial intelligence is transforming tourism, from digital assistants to companies that are able to offer hyper-personalized experiences to their consumers and develop increasingly innovative proposals. More and more destinations are measuring tourism in real-time to monitor tourist flows in a timely manner.

 there is a progressive growth of "access economy"

Economists are talking about the economy of access or a modern concept of capitalism that sees the transition from economy linked to the possession of goods, to ownership, to a sharing economy, an exchange economy in which "experiencing" and "accessing" is more important than "owning".

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[3] Top 10 Global Consumer Trends 2019 and 2020 . Euromonitor International

☐ individual trips and multi-generational trips

Travel proposals linked to "generational" demand targets and holidays for people travelling alone are growing as a result of an ageing population and the worldwide increase of single people

☐ travelling for change

Tourists are looking for holidays that allow them to live like the locals, looking for authentic life experiences in foreign countries. A type of tourism far from the old stereotypes where the tourist was "isolated", protected, in travel formulas in which everything was planned before leaving, following precise schedules without the possibility of interacting with the local inhabitants, to eat like them, to visit the same places, to share local customs and traditions.

☐ travelling to flaunt

Today's tourist looks for moments, experiences, destinations to photograph and post on "Instagram" and other social networks. The holiday is more and more like an occasion to show and share photo's, thoughts, places, experiences.

☐ research of a healthy lifestyle

The desire for tourism linked to healthy lifestyles, far from the usual stressful routine of daily life, is increasing, the result of a growth of tourist products linked to this image, such as sports tourism, wellness tourism and "walking tourism".

☐ sustainability and competitiveness go hand in hand

Destinations and companies are becoming more and more competitive through more efficient use of resources and the promotion of biodiversity conservation and actions to tackle climate change, to keep up with a demand that is becoming more aware of the responsibility and environmental sustainability.

☐ inclusiveness and accessibility as a kick-start for development

Corporate brands are increasingly targeting people with physical or mental disabilities, releasing the potential for an inclusive business model for all. Companies are rethinking their products and services to make them more accessible to everyone, to represent people beyond the "mainstream" and to help reduce prejudices about diversity and differences. The brands are answering to a social push towards change. Companies are taking steps towards authenticity and inclusion, putting accessibility at the heart of new product development.

After all, from a governance point of view, sustainability is also a decisive part of tourism policies. According to a survey conducted by UNWTO [4] in 101 member states:

- 100% have sustainability as their goal,
- 67% refers to the efficiency of resources,
- 64% links sustainability to competitiveness,
- 55% refers to extensive sustainability,
- The average length of tourist policies in these countries is 10 years.

On this basis, it should also be pointed out that the tourism sector is the one that is most involved in the digital revolution.

- Online travel purchases account for 24% of the total. They increase by 8% a year
- 82% of companies market themselves on large online websites. 10 years ago, it was 33%.
- 40% of tourists choose through social networks; 10 years ago, it was 10%
- 18% of online transactions are done with a mobile device; only 4 years ago it was 4%

Beyond the numbers, the passion for travel that unites different demand targets, drives the holiday industry with new trends activated by the protagonists of the tourist supply

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[4] https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development

chain, by the "leaders" of tourism, that is, those companies that "create new tourism models, new tourism products, new services, new holiday concepts.

Competition is based on innovation and the new lifestyles of consumers regardless of their physical abilities or their specific needs.

These trends of new millennium consumers, influence tourism and the choices that territories and companies have to make to successfully respond to these different needs of customers/guests.

Today's tourist expects to find a market proposal of personalized holidays, to be adjusted in real-time based on their needs, or trips and holidays that are increasingly becoming experiences, in contact with local populations, while respecting the territory that hosts them.

This, of course beyond quality and value for money, is now taken for granted, and to date, thanks to peer-to-peer platforms, is selected in advance by the customers themselves who choose, during the planning and booking of the trip, with an eye on social networks both in the preliminary, programming and choosing phase, and afterwards, when they tell of their experience, evaluating it according to their own standards, based on their own expectations and needs, activating a feedback that fuels the grapevine of the network.

The social aspect of holidays is increasing in interest especially towards responsible and environmentally sustainable forms of tourism

Holidays in the future will be shorter and more intense, planned in every detail, travel tips will be more personalized, general guides will become less popular, replaced by digital ones, with less but more dynamic information, customized on the basis of the preferences expressed.

The tendency among operators is to propose innovative out of the ordinary holidays, with trips as an instrument of personal realization, such as cultural or professional exchanges, voluntary work holidays, or trips to learn something new, holidays that are more active and with practical experiences.

Another trend of recent years is linked to the timing of the trip as well as the way in which it is chosen, booked and organized.

There is a tendency to divide the planning phase into two parts: the booking of the plane and accommodation takes place in advance, the additional services are postponed until the arrival at destination, although some people perhaps look for information in advance about the opportunities offered by the territory, the final booking takes place at the last minute.

This necessary premise becomes even more important when we talk about accessible tourism and the ability of companies to respond to the needs of people with disabilities. Families with children or those who have food allergies or have certain dietary preferences (vegan, vegetarian, raw or specific diets)

In the global scenario, companies are obliged to innovate their business models according to important issues such as accessibility, putting the client's expectations at the centre of their business policies, especially if they have special needs: which must be anticipated understood, studied and satisfied. Furthermore, it is necessary to point on the combined use of innovative means and/or original services offered so that the tourist constantly has the feeling of having had a unique travel experience.

Holidays that are increasingly seen as a form of discovery, as a life experience, for increasingly innovative travel formulas, linked to new technologies, but also attentive to the environmental protection of the territory, the customs and traditions of the local population. The tourist with accessibility needs has the same requirements as any other customers, therefore, they can be amazed if served with innovative products and services.

In this Interreg project, **28 European cases** were examined, as examples of excellence, cutting edge and territorial best practices, which proposed a highly innovative offer, where "innovative" means all those goods and services that, not only respond to the new needs of customers but also and above all to those services that go one step further, creating new trends, new ways of enjoying the tourist product. Examples from which all companies can take inspiration to innovate their offer in the tourism supply chain.

Specific project analysis

Number of Projects presented for area	
Italy	22
Croatia	6

The 28 projects analysed, of which 22 Italian and 6 Croatian, cover all the areas considered, but with a predominance of culture and art cities and in second place the initiatives concerning beaches and the coast.

Some of these projects have been developed in several areas (4 for example) with all-round initiatives concerning the different components of the territorial offer (City, coast, nature and themes such as food and wine etc.)
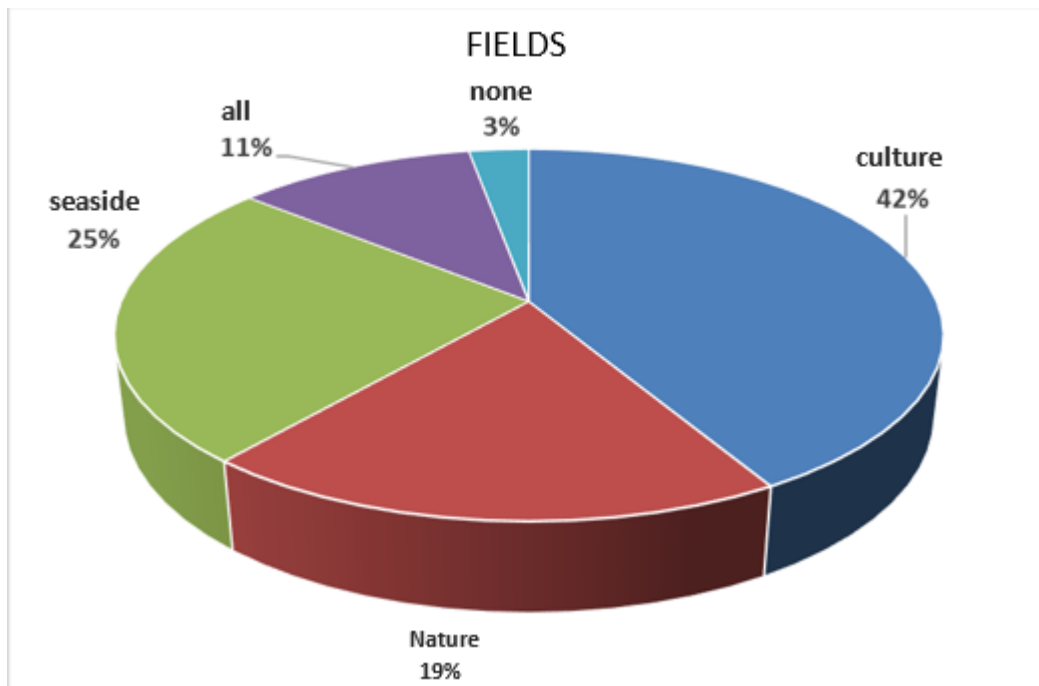
It should be noted that these projects were carried out mostly thanks to public funds. 18% thanks to European funds (in Croatia 50% of the profiles submitted), 40% on national and local public contributions and funds.

To be noted, however, a share of projects/initiatives of companies that financed themselves with their own or private funds.

Type of funds				% of column		
	Croatia	Italy	Total	Croatia	Italy	Total
Public funds	1	8	9	16.7	36.4	32.1

Public funds private funds		3	3	0.0	13.6	10.7
European funds	3	2	5	50.0	9.1	17.9
European funds public contributions		1	1	0.0	4.5	3.6
National funds	1		1	16.7	0.0	3.6
Private funds	1	8	9	16.7	36.4	32.1
Overall Total	6	22	28	100.0	100.0	100.0

The predominance of public funds indicates that accessibility still needs sustenance and support, even if there are signs of private interest on these issues.

The issue of the source of funding becomes relevant when it comes to imagining long-term designs and achievements that are often necessary for accessibility, especially when dealing with structural hardware issues such as breaking down barriers, urban planning of usable spaces, and the creation of new tourism and cultural products, etc.

Number of projects/initiatives by type of intervention for innovation

	Croatia	Italy	Total
Breaking down barriers	1	2	3

Aids		3	3
Training	2	2	4
Guidelines	1	1	2
Business mapping/selection		1	1
New cultural/tourist products	1	10	11
Tourist services	1	3	4
Overall Total	6	22	28

The 28 profiles show projects and initiatives of different degrees of intervention and highlight the current "emergencies" for consistent development of methods, and shared approaches for accessible tourism.

The most discussed topics focus on several aspects:

- The **first** substantial intervention that develops solutions for the structural change of territories (barriers, maps, urban interventions, accessibility guidelines)

- The **second** on the culture of accessibility pointing on professional growth with specific training interventions

- The **third** on the implementation of services that allow better use of the territory and its offers (info points, guides, etc.)

- The **fourth** on the implementation of timely tools and aids for the use of tourist services

- Lastly the **fifth** is the creation of real proposals for the enjoyment of tourist and cultural experience (new tourist/cultural products)

The interpretation of these projects and the areas in which they have been implemented indicate how much the interventions carried out are still based on basic development

aspects. Elements highlighted in fact are: an integrated design for accessibility and sharing among the various participants, guidelines, mapping and selection of accessibility companies for tourists/end users, urban planning, etc., information services that define priority lines of action for territories that need to be rethought from an accessibility point of view. It must be pointed out that these interventions are of a basic first level, and that at present it is very difficult to talk about the implemented accessibility which needs to be improved to reach higher levels.

Half of the projects are aimed at multiple targets (types of needs such as mobility disabilities, impaired vision, etc.) with the logic of universal design. About 2 out of 10 are specialized in specific types of needs (mobility disabilities, impaired vision etc.) about a third are aimed at two different targets of tourists with disabilities.
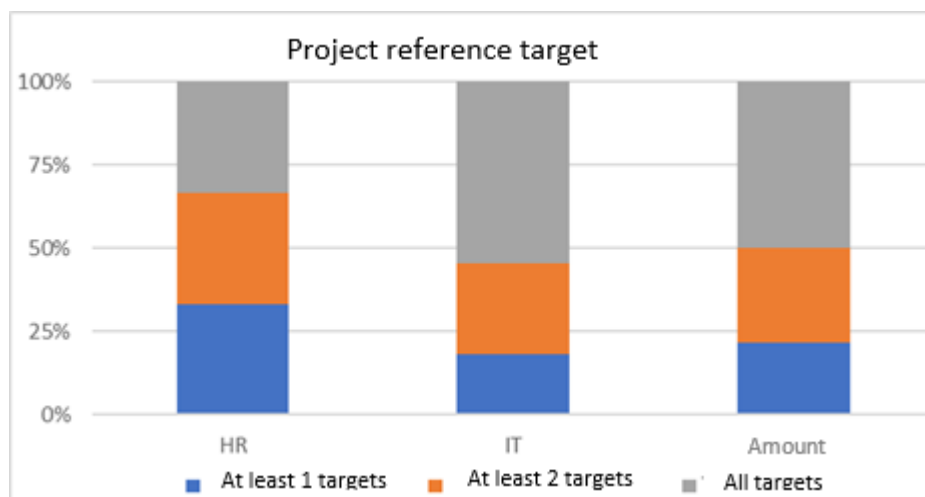

The profiles have then been evaluated based on a few distinctive elements such as:

- The originality of the intervention with innovative elements

- The presence of an economic advantage for the body/company

- The long-term sustainability of the initiative, especially financial

- The promotional activity launched

- The aspects of innovation in terms of tourist accessibility

- The positive aspect of the territory

All of these elements assessed at a scale of 1 to 10, showed the good placement of the projects within these elements with points of greater criticality.
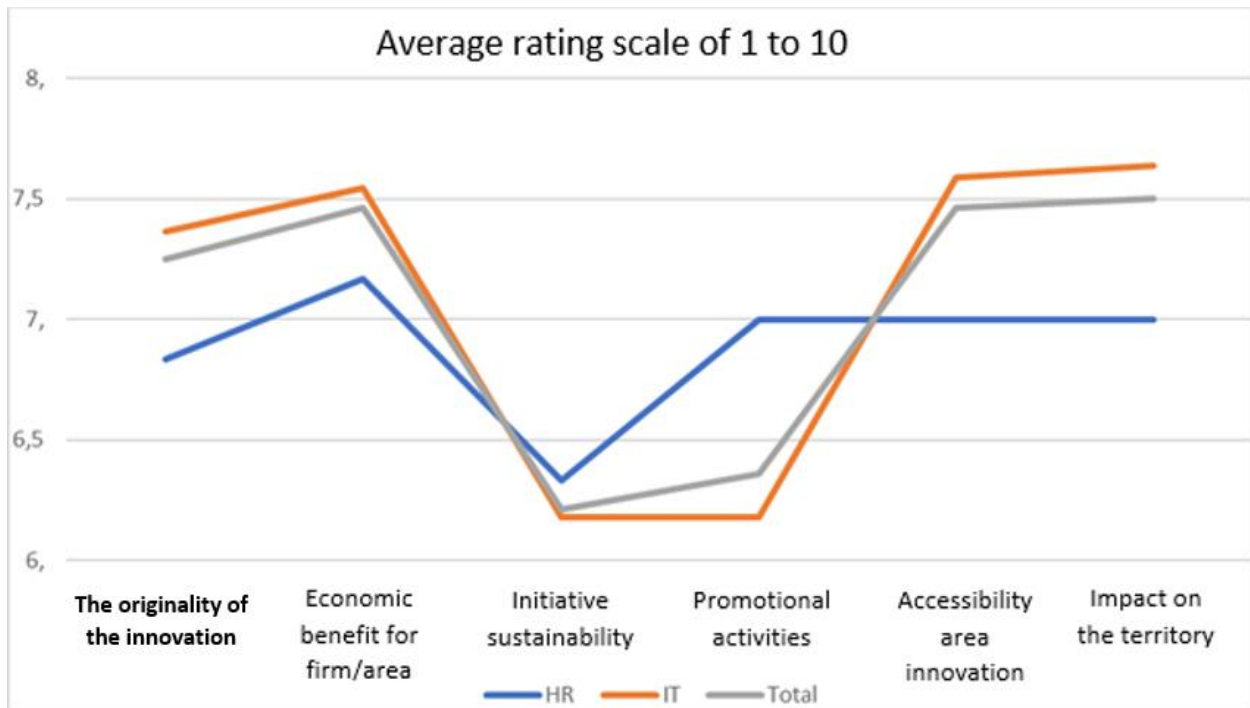

From the graph, it can be seen that it is precisely the aspects related to sustainability, especially financial, economic advantage and promotional activities that have a lower valuation than the others. Average valuations are, however, sufficiently positive with average values ranging from 6 to 7.5/8.

It should be noted that the aspects related to promotion are slightly more consolidated in Croatian projects.

In the following graph, all the projects are positioned (characterized by different colours depending on the type of intervention and with the size of the bubbles calculated on the total evaluation score considering all aspects).

In the graph, the positioning was achieved taking into account the assessment on two central aspects: the innovation of the accessibility initiative, and the sustainability of the initiative itself.
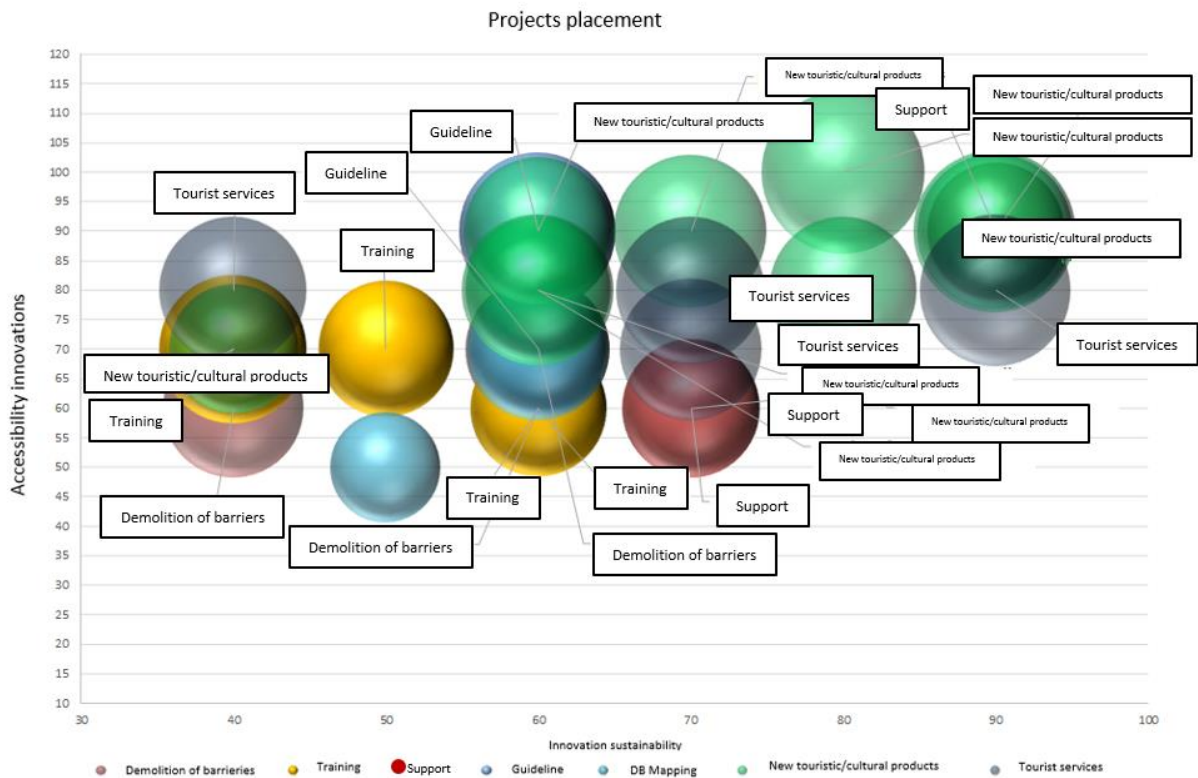
On the left side of the axis are the projects that have reached the best results (both in terms of effect and sustainability).

Interestingly, it is precisely the projects focused on the implementation of new tourist products (thematic itineraries, tourist experiences) that characterize the greater potential for economic sustainability.

Alongside these is also the theme of the creation of specific aids for the usability of services aimed at the tourist experience.

Furthermore, a separate comment should be made on the theme of **training**.

At present, training in the chart described is still the prerogative of public funds and as such is likely to be interrupted with the end of public funding.

This suggests how the system of companies that could benefit from customers with accessibility needs does not believe, and therefore does not invest, in the potential market success of this type of customer. Therefore, it is necessary to stimulate businesses to introduce the issue of accessibility into company policies as a development and turnover asset.

By analysing the grouping of the same variables best practices in the relevant fields of intervention (Culture and art cities, nature, beaches and other trends and all areas), it is clear that projects that consider territories integrated with various trends and fields have a more innovative and even more sustainable vision (they are in fact located in the upper quadrant to the right of the chart). This is because they include accessibility initiatives consistently throughout the territory and not only in a single scope/field of intervention
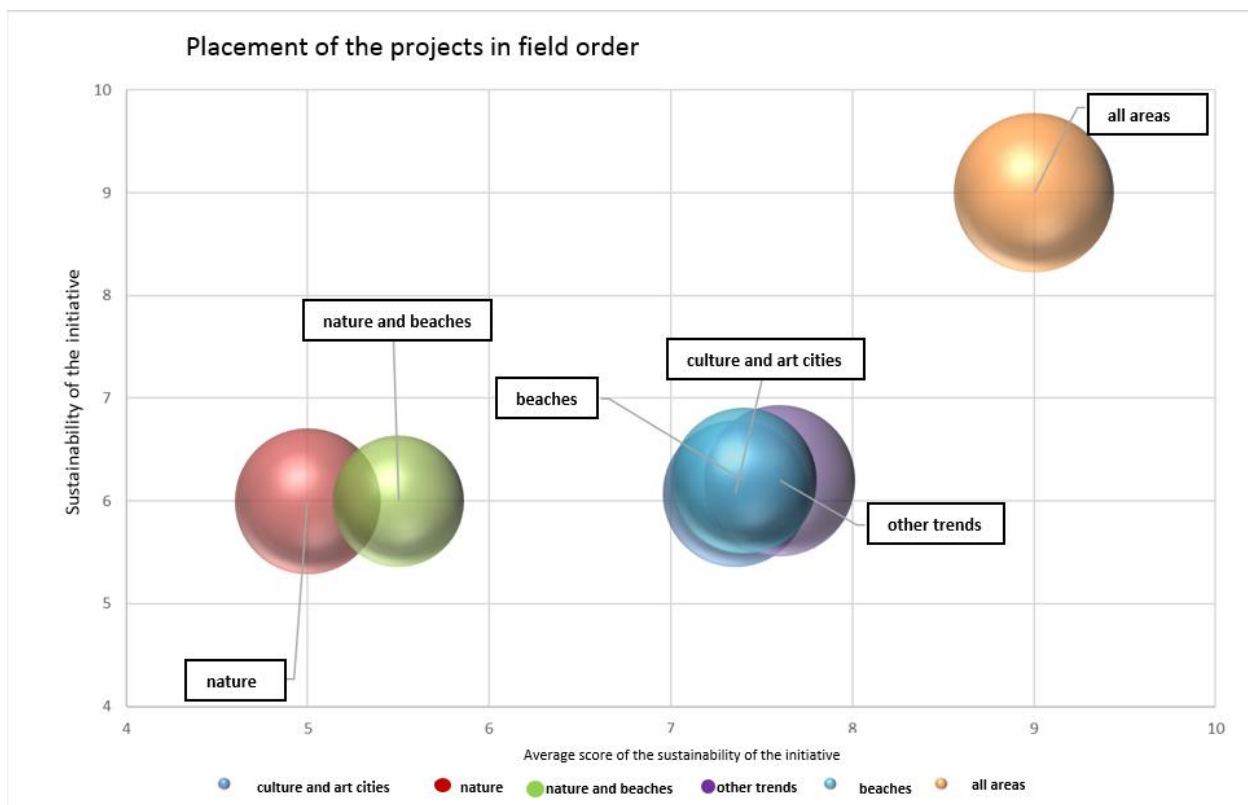

The originality of the initiative

The profiles submitted were evaluated on the basis of originality (considering original those initiatives that stand out for having opened up new frontiers and new lines of work).

The level expressed by the projects in this sense is quite high, with an average score of 7, which if analysed reveals a division between projects with a high level of innovation and originality and others with less satisfactory scores with areas of insufficiency.

The latter are guideline development projects or mappings that reveal a critical starting level of accessibility, still requiring initial design for accessibility development, or projects very focused on breaking down architectural barriers.
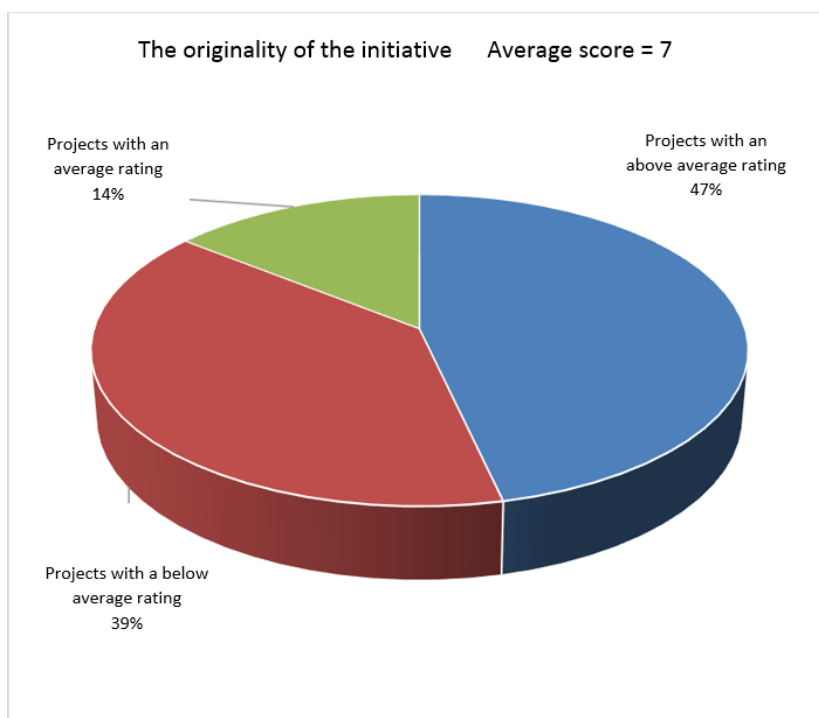
These initiatives are fundamental to the accessibility of tourist and cultural sites and destinations, and they correspond precisely to those first-level projects discussed before. It must be pointed out that the approaches and working methods are properly set up and that they just need future support to implement the project phases and to actually raise the level of territorial accessibility.

Among the most original projects are initiatives that focus on creating the so-called experiential or motivational holidays for customers with disabilities or specific accessibility needs (e.g. families with children)

![Interreg Italy - Croatia TOURISM4ALL / European Union logo]

In these activities the concept of Hospitality for all is strengthened, where the person with disabilities is welcomed according to his desires of holiday and activities related to his preferences and expectations. A way to consider the tourist and not his disabilities, treating him precisely as a guest.

The ability to generate economy

An important aspect that has been assessed is the ability to transform an initiative even financed with European public funds into an opportunity to generate revenue for the company or developer and for the surrounding territory.

Accessibility initiatives often do not take into consideration economic sustainability at the end of funding and this prevents the development of an overall improvement of tourist destination accessibility.
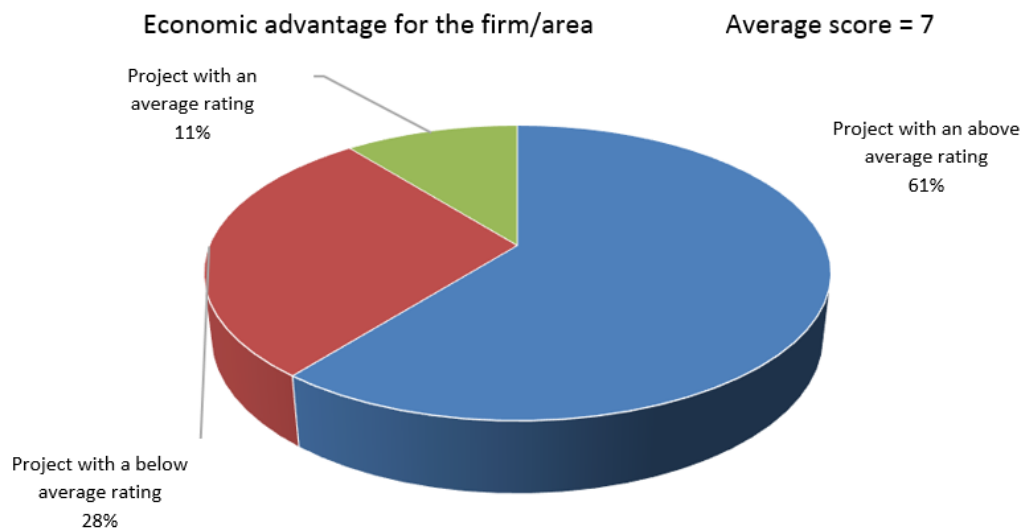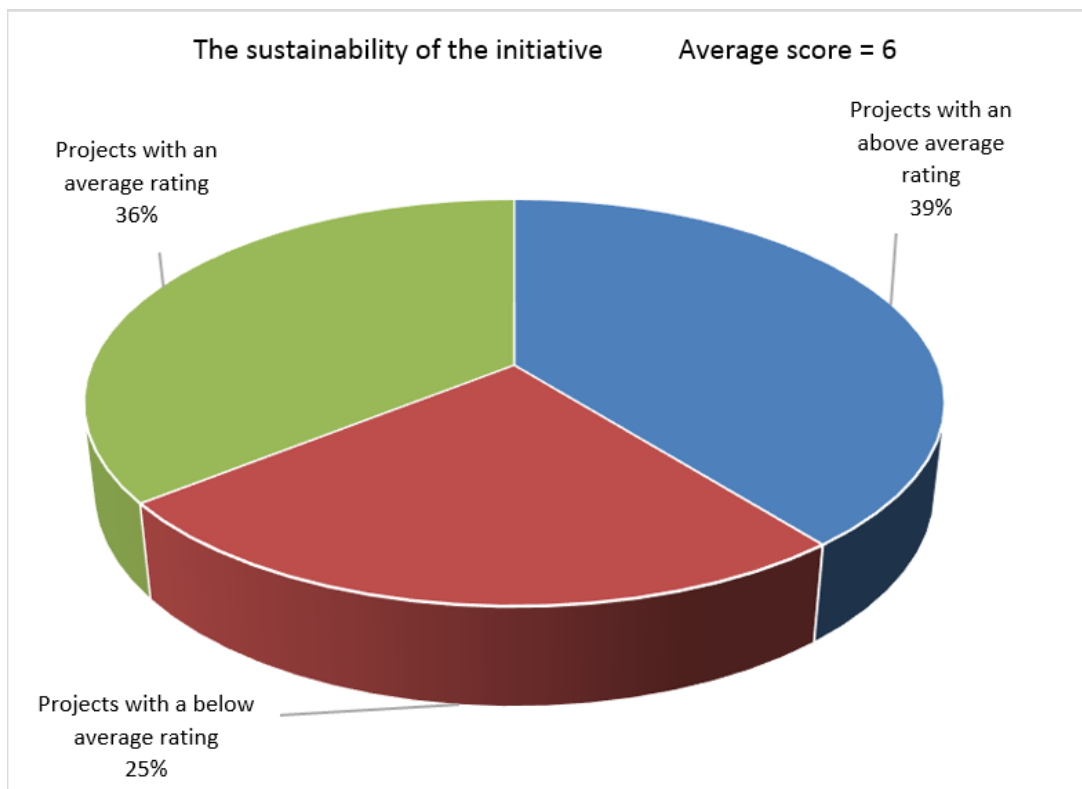

In this case, however over 60% of the projects were found to be economically interesting for the companies or for the territory by giving added value and so becoming more attractive to clients with accessibility needs.

For 28% of projects with a lower score, the description of the results in the profiles highlighted the most valid and fundamental initiatives, which however did not have lasting results, often caused by the end of European funding, or general public funding.

The **economic convenience** factor is a value that can mark the success or failure of an initiative. Of the initiatives presented, 25% had no strong elements of financial-economic sustainability with risks of ruling out the possible positive effects of the project.

More emphasis should be given to these aspects, to allow accessibility activities to become business and wealth-generating opportunities for the territory.

The sustainability of the initiative   Average score = 6

Projects with an above average rating 39%

Projects with an average rating 36%

Projects with a below average rating 25%

Promoting to become known and grow

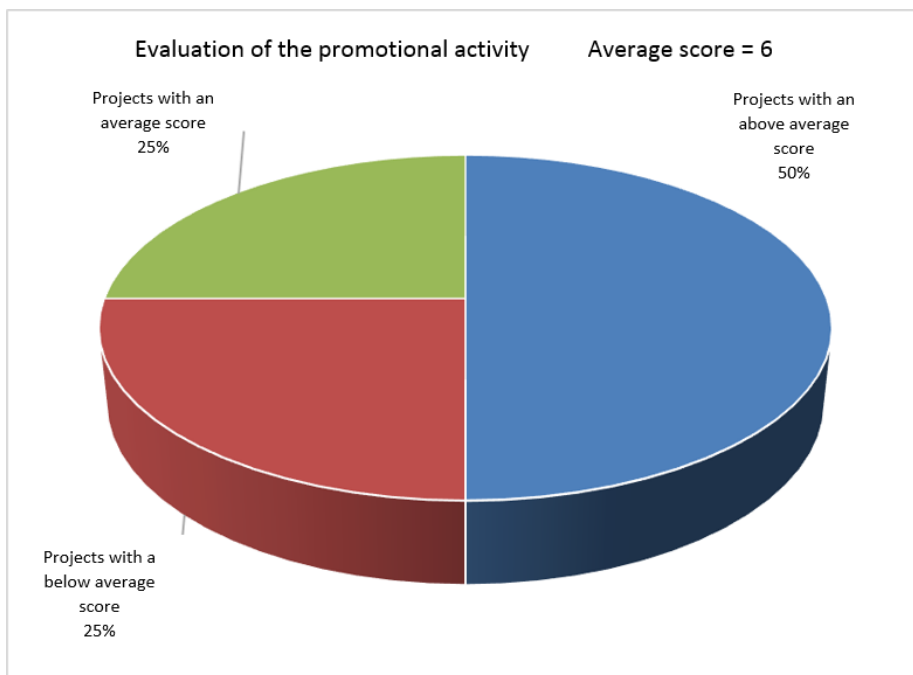Promotional activities are fundamental to:

- Increase awareness of initiatives to end-users

- Raise awareness among the world of operators

- Increase the flow of accessible tourism

First of all, it should be stressed that promotion was the <u>weakest spot</u> of the cases analysed.

Even among best practices with higher than average ratings, promotion was ineffective to achieve the goals of the initiatives. The planning of promotion is usually local, and not aimed at the potential tourist.

There are social activities through specific active profiles, where some projects tried to position themselves on the web usually on institutional sites (regions, municipalities, etc.). But to activate a real promotional activity important investment is necessary (even on socials) to reach good results.

This is certainly a disadvantage of the projects, above all for the lack of adequate investment.

Evaluation of the promotional activity   Average score = 6

Projects with an average score 25%

Projects with an above average score 50%

Projects with a below average score 25%

Accessibility as a driver of innovation

Accessibility and the solutions to be found are a major challenge for tourist destinations. On this front a path of growth and improvement can be activated that can even and above all affect the lives of residents and then that of guests. To make a museum, a city, a beach

more accessible without discrimination and autonomously means making important changes in the social and economic fabric of a territory.

Of the best practices analysed the average assessment gives interesting merit indications. It starts with a very satisfactory average score with almost 50% of projects well above this average.

Innovation within the accessibility field   Average score = 7
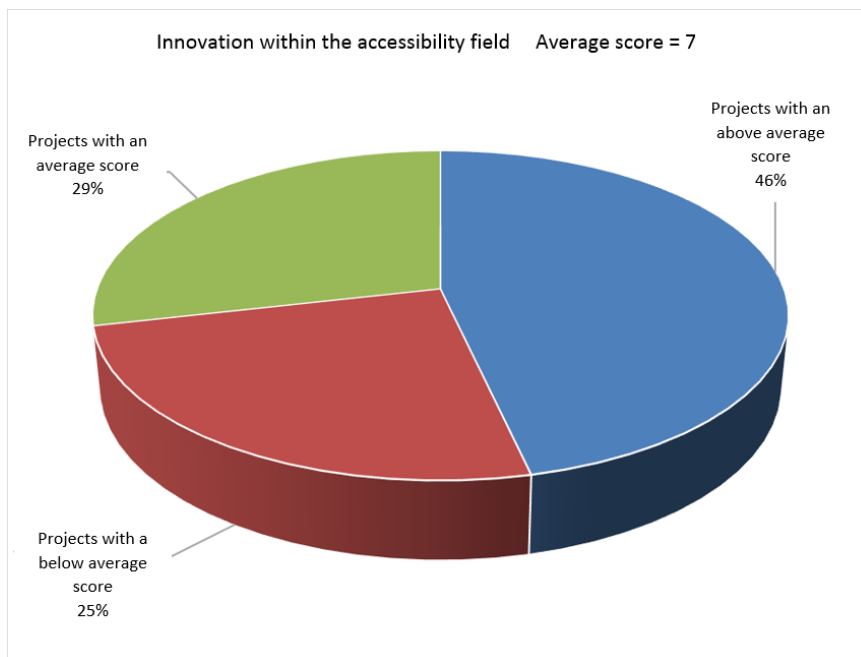
Particularly innovative are the initiatives that in the logic of universal design or transparent accessibility (the new frontier of the world of accessibility) manage to make works of art and historic centres easily accessible combining in a fascinating unicum a new way of living a city, or a cultural proposal etc.

Among these are also proposals which permit people with disabilities, to experience sports activities, emotional and sensory experiences, to offer a real emotionally engaging holiday even to those who have more difficulties and special needs.

Within the innovations, there is also the development of innovative aids that respond in a "smart" way to physical needs of usability and use.

An accessible system

In the logic of informing about the initiatives, the key factor is that of internet, of the implementation of real supply systems, of the implementation of approaches and models that connect territories with businesses and end-users with different accessibility needs and responses.

The initiatives were therefore analysed in terms of their positive impact on the territory and their ability to connect with other businesses in the tourism and/or economic supply chain.
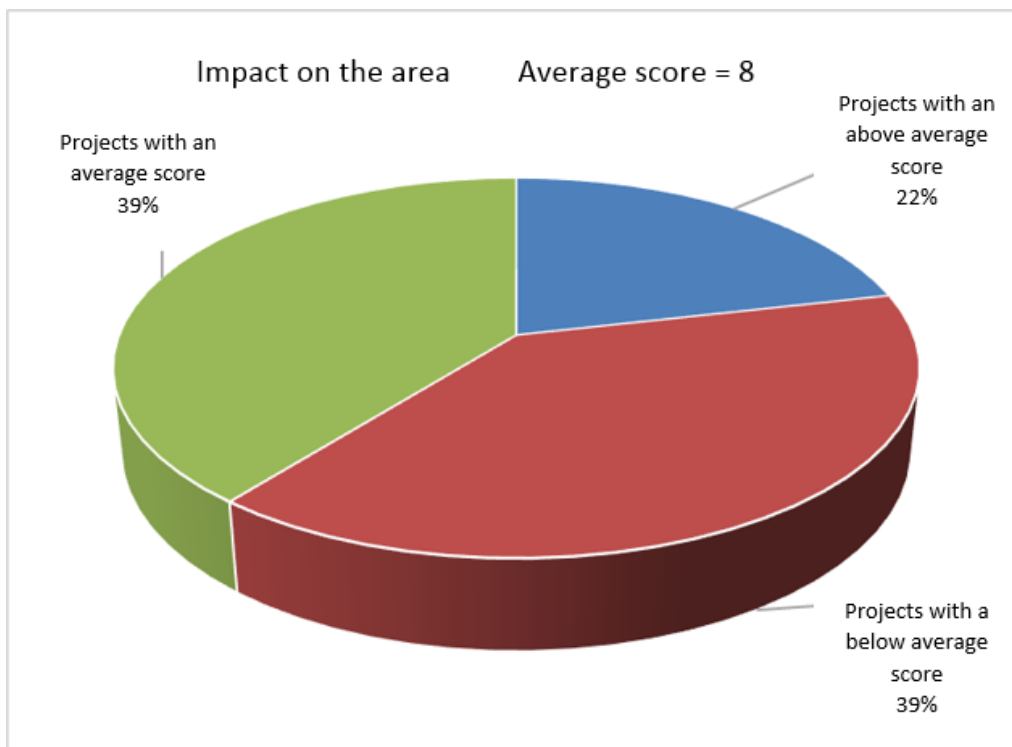
It should be noted that all the cases analysed obtained excellent assessments of the positive impact on the territory, both at a first level and in more advanced cases.

It is clear that the initiatives have all taken into account the importance of solving problems effectively.

Projects with below-average valuations are in fact all of an excellent impact on the territory with assessments between sufficient and satisfactory, which concerned those initiatives that are working on the method and approach and which still have not carried out real

steps of concrete implementation. A pre-implementation phase is fundamental to initiate a proper approach to accessibility in the future.

Finally, the **relationship with other companies in the supply chain**.

However, there are not many initiatives, among those with above-average scores, that have managed to involve many different participants in the tourism supply chain.
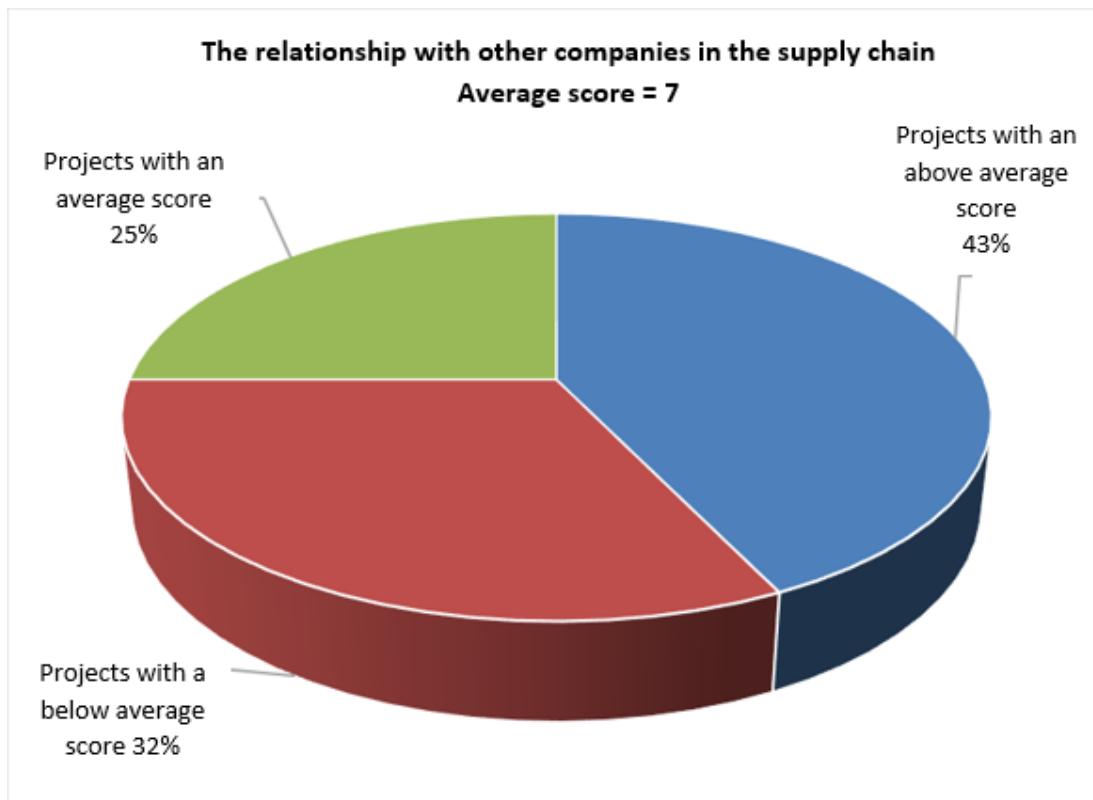
Predominantly the involvement is simply directed at the authorities and tourist companies. It is recommended for the continuation of the various initiatives that more connections be made with the other territorial economic systems and also with the various tourist supply chains with the aim of allowing an increasing number of operators to understand the importance of the cultural, social and economic revolution in the world of accessibility.

SUMMARY

The strengths and weaknesses of these initiatives

The cases analysed present common points both in their strengths and weaknesses.

Among the **strengths** we point out:

- A great effort by the public authorities to implement and develop accessibility on their territories

- The presence of projects funded by European and public funds, which have given a significant boost to the issue of accessibility

- A major boost to integrated design and direct involvement of tourism companies, with forecasts of positive impact on the territories

- The inclusion of promotional and social activities aimed at the local population and businesses

- A choice, towards initiatives conceived with the principles of universal design that tend towards transparent accessibility especially in art cities.

- The interpretation of accessible tourism from a universal design point of view and the creation of holidays and experiential itineraries tailored to tourists with disabilities

On the other hand, among the **weaknesses** found in the initiatives there are:

- A lack of private investment in projects that have been encouraged by public bodies.

- Duration of the project limited to the period of public funding

- A level of innovation that is still not optimal, with many first-level proposals that highlight a need for territories to work on the basis of accessibility

- A presence of projects "on paper" that show the work and approach prospects but which do not have the certainty of being implemented, without public funds of a certain entity.

- Difficulty in moving away from the logic of accessibility as a purely public asset to become business opportunities for the economic fabric of the territory

- A lack of promotional activity and related investments to launch campaigns able to attract markets and tourist targets with accessibility needs.

The analysis of these projects brings to our attention elements of potential criticality that are difficult to solve if not by investing more in the training and involvement of entrepreneurs. It is necessary to promote a lasting development in this sector because accessible tourism must go from being a supported and assisted sector to an economic sector, with dignity and development able to bring wealth, culture and opportunities for Italian and Croatian tourist destinations.