Framework for the digital transition in agrotourism organisations

DigAccess
AGROTOURISM

Disclaimer

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*The Framework is available in English, Polish, Greek, Italian and Portuguese and can be accessed here.

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1. Glossary

Enabling Organisations (EO): An EO in the tourism sector in rural areas is, among others a group or entity that supports the development of the relevant SMEs by providing resources, training, advocacy, and networking. These organizations can be governmental or non-governmental and work to foster a supportive ecosystem for sustainable and socially responsible agrotourism and generally tourism in rural areas, often at local, regional, and national levels.

SMEs in social economy: Social economy in the tourism sector in rural areas refers to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and cooperatives that blend agricultural and other relevant practices with tourism while prioritizing social objectives like sustainability, community development, and inclusion. These SMEs often operate as non profit cooperatives, social enterprises, or clusters, reinvesting profits to support local employment, preserve cultural heritage, and promote sustainable practices. Social economy entities, within the tourism sector in rural areas, serve local economies, empower small producers, and provide tourists with authentic experiences connected to local culture and agriculture. [1]

Digital Service Providers: with expertise and demonstrable experience in developing digital tools that can be scaled and tailored to the accessibility needs of the end-users and beneficiaries (for instance, IT companies, startups, etc,).

Policymakers: at national, regional, and local levels, focusing on accessibility standards, accessibility audits, digital accessibility in the social economy of the tourism sector of rural areas.

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[1] For the purpose of this Framework, the definition of SMEs has been broadened up to reflect the variety of social economy SMEs of the tourism sector of rural areas. The definition draws its basis from the "social economy entity" as defined by the Social Economy Action Plan that "has the size of an SME" as defined by the EU SME definition.

2. Introduction

DigAccessAgrotourism is a European-funded project under the Single Market Programme that aims at supporting social economy organisations operating in the agrotourism and rural tourism sectors to become more accessible for individuals with disabilities through digital means, thus boosting their digital transition. The **DigAccessAgrotourism Framework for Digital Transition and Accessibility in Rural Agrotourism** contextualises the needs of social economy Enabling Organisations (EOs) and SMEs operating in the tourism sector of rural areas within the EU's policies and regulations on accessibility. The Framework views digital solutions as the means to advancing accessibility and lays the groundwork for the design and development of capacity building sessions for Enabling Organisations to be able to further support their members in regards to advancing their accessibility provisions, and tailored support for SMEs for the introduction, testing, adaptation and development of (new) digital processes, services or products and application of technology improving the performance of the organisation with the focus on accessibility.

2.1 Scope & EU Contextual background

The Framework is operating on the rationale built on the pertaining EU wide need of aiding agrotourism organisations to become more accessible to individuals with disabilities and the possibilities towards the development of universally accessible and barrier free accessible tourism offered by existing digital solutions, approaches and tools based on social economy's digital innovations such as the Internet of Things (IoT), data driven solutions and digital social innovations. Centred around the Digital Compass 2030, and in support of SMEs in complying with the Accessibility Act, the Framework seeks to address national priorities for higher accessibility through inclusive development of digital solutions. Thus, the scope of

the Framework is to create a comparative analysis of the gathered needs vis-à-vis the identified good practices to lay the foundations of the EOs' capacity-building requirements and the Individual Digital Development Plans for the SMEs. In addition to the rationale and its scope, the Framework has been developed against the backdrop of the multiple EU policies and strategies, inter alia:

Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP, 2021)[2]

The project supports SEAP's objectives by promoting social innovation through local capacity-building. It can also equip SMEs with inclusive digital strategies to engage marginalized groups. Lastly, it can strengthen the resilience of the rural social economy through peer mentoring and digital empowerment.

Digital Compass 2030[3]

DigAccessAgrotourism contributes directly to the EU's digital targets by, empowering rural SMEs to adopt basic digital tools, building digital skills for the tourism workforce in inaccessible areas and facilitating inclusive tourism through inclusive content and services.

European Accessibility Act (Directive 2019/882)[4]

DigAccessAgrotourism is also in line with the compliance requirements, by preparing SMEs for upcoming accessibility obligations, providing practical training

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in inclusive digital design and positioning accessibility as a competitive advantage in rural tourism.

The Framework is structured in the following way:

- Provision of a brief overview on the methodological approach in gathering the needs of EOs and SMEs in Poland, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Portugal.

- Provision of an overview of needs related to accessibility and digital transition of EOs and SMEs in the five abovementioned countries.

- Identification of regional, national and global digital solutions classified as good practices that can be scalable in advancing accessibility.

- The Framework's Innovation Outcomes Matrix establishes the roadmap of the capacity-building sessions and individual digital development plans.

3. Methodological Framework

A triangulated, mixed-methods research strategy was applied for the design and development of the **DigAccessAgrotourism Framework for Digital Transition & Accessibility in Rural Agrotourism**. This approach ensured that data collected was both quantitatively and qualitatively measurable. The research tools used were questionnaires and interviews to assess the accessibility practices, digital know how, training needs, and support gaps of the target groups. The framework is centred on the common needs among the total of 24 EOs and 113 SMEs interviewed from Poland, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Portugal, but also includes country-specific adaptations to address the specificities of the five participating countries, with the prospect of wider EU application. Furthermore, a wide research was conducted to identify digital tools and solutions on regional, national and global levels. The focus of the Framework is split into two main strands: firstly, to provide an assessment of current accessibility practices and awareness, digital tools in use, and desired support types for the introduction of digital solutions. Secondly to evaluate the readiness of EOs to support improvement in accessibility through digital solutions, training capacity and tools used in current digital support efforts.

All the above have provided the contextual framework for interpreting field data and informed the development of the capacity building roadmap for EOs, training and individual support for SMEs tailored and specific to each organisation's needs. All research data, quantitative and qualitative, was systematically compiled and analysed to: identify country patterns and context specific barriers, define learning outcomes for SMEs and EOs, inform the selection of digital tools and accessibility approaches, and lay the foundation for individual tailor support for SMEs.

4. National vs. Transnational Comparison

Across all five participating countries: Poland, Cyprus, Portugal, Italy, and Greece, the research revealed several shared challenges and needs related to the digital transition and accessibility in the rural tourism and agrotourism sector:

Low Accessibility Awareness, especially Digital Accessibility: SMEs in all countries showed limited understanding of accessibility standards, such as assistive technologies, with some notable exceptions among Italian SMEs. Furthermore, accessibility was often focussed on removing barriers for people with mobility disability, with little awareness for digital inclusion measures and other strategies and tools to support accessibility for people with other kinds of disabilities.

Constraints to improvements on accessibility related to staff: with the exceptions of SMEs and EOs expressly devoted to people with disabilities, there is little room for trainings and other capacity building activities for the staff. For EOs, it is a matter of having small teams, concentrated on the core support activities to their constituents, with little time for something else. Activities to promote accessibility, when are organized, are usually linked to external funding and implemented by service providers.

SMEs in rural tourism and agrotourism face similar constraints, somewhat balanced by the seasonality of most tourism activities, which frees-up some space for training. However, the tourism sector, being generally low paid and low skilled, has an important turn-over of staff, which in turn discourages from training.

Constraints on improvements on accessibility related to capital and funding:

By virtue of their nature and statutes, Social Economy SMEs in the rural tourism sector have little spare capital and limited access to credit to invest beyond their core activities, with a firm focus on ensuring a return on the investments and the

long-term sustainability of the company. Therefore, they tend to be sceptical about making investments in accessibility features and strategies when they rarely host people with disabilities, since they do not see a clear return on their efforts.

The matter is debated since, as some SME focusing on accessibility pointed out, people with disabilities may not come to a place precisely because its accessibility for them is unclear. Investing in, and then showcasing, accessibility, in this sense, can be a rewarding marketing strategy.

Limited Capacity for Digital Upgrades: both SMEs and EOs lack, in most cases, the technical knowledge to assess digital needs, including accessibility of their presence in the digital space, and to introduce and consistently review improvements, citing also in this case budgetary constraints and lack of internal IT personnel as major barriers. Also in these cases, significant upgrades and introduction of digital innovations is not usually a streamlined process but rests on aleatory access to external funding,

Need for Basic and Tailored Training for accessibility and digital tools to support it: SMEs and EOs collectively requested simple and practical training programmes and hands on workshops. In Italy, a pressing need included the understanding of what people with disabilities need to feel welcome indicating an anthropocentric approach towards their training for accessibility.

Desire for Regional Peer Learning: there was a strong interest across countries in sharing best practices and learning from peers via transnational networks, toolkits, and demonstration events.

While the overarching trends were similar, the national context influenced the depth and nature of the needs which arise. In **Cyprus,** the majority of the SME establishments lack basic physical accessibility infrastructure, particularly because Cypriot villages are built in such an amphitheatric way that makes

mobility difficult. Some villages, however, do address other types of disabilities. Furthermore, SMEs had basic digital presence (websites, Facebook pages), but lacked structured content on accessibility. The identified core need is training on communication strategies to present accessibility information clearly online. In spite of the strong collaboration observed between public authorities and agrotourism bodies, technical gaps still persist. SMEs in **Poland** although the majority is familiar with accessibility regulations and have a digital presence, they require further training and structured guidelines, grants and technical support and further awareness on accessibility. In terms of the **Portuguese** geographically dispersed SMEs with poor digital infrastructure, there is a core need for mobile solutions and low bandwidth accessible tools. Priority is also given in sensory accessibility (for vision/hearing impairments) due to older tourist demographics. In **Italy**, where a significant portion of the SMEs surveyed are Social Cooperatives[5], SMEs showed higher awareness of sustainability and accessibility principles, in line also with cooperative values. However, many lack digital integration beyond seldomly updated websites and a presence on social media. EOs are well organised and some provide already training and assistance on digitalisation and on website accessibility, albeit noticing a lack of interest among some of their constituents. They have difficulties in keeping-up with innovations both related to accessibility and digitalization and would profit from train-the-trainer material. Last but not least, in **Greece**, accessibility is seen as important due to the growing tourism demand, but actual implemented practices are inconsistent. There is a high interest in integrating IoT solutions, but there is a limited capacity to

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[5]A kind of cooperative that caters for and/or employs people from vulnerable backgrounds, including people with disabilities, involving them in a variety of sector, including tourism and agrotourism.

implement these digital practices. An identified core need is mentoring by tech professionals within EO support schemes.

Overall, the transnational findings demonstrate a clear, shared demand for digital upskilling and an interest towards accessibility and inclusion, with training and mentorship identified as more adapted to meet the expressed needs. Yet, country specific conditions such as infrastructure quality, national policies, stakeholder coordination, and SME readiness to incorporate digital upscaled transitions, shape how these capacity-building approaches unfold locally. Thus, the DigAccessAgrotourism project adopts a dual level approach: (1) transnational level with core methodologies, toolkits, and standards through capacity-building sessions targeted towards Enabling Organisations and the more advanced SMEs in terms of accessibility provisions and use of digital tools; and (2) national level, training and individual support customised to the needs of each participating SME, to be implemented in collaboration between the project's experts and newly trained staff from participating EOs.

5. Accessibility: Needs & Opportunities

In the section below, the needs and gaps related to accessibility, both in terms of accessibility of structures and of accessible presence in the digital space are analysed to develop the learning opportunities and outcomes that will drive the capacity building sessions of EOs and the training and support services for SMEs. As observed, the needs regarding accessibility are quite similar among the two target groups with the common denominator being the interest in fostering accessibility beyond the elimination of physical barriers and a lack of experience and awareness of the solutions to achieve the above, including digital tools and approaches. The **EOs** lack experience with innovative approaches to accessibility, including digital tools and platforms for inclusion, and require the further acquisition of knowledge and tools to assess accessibility, propose upgrades in line with accessible design principles, and keep-up with further innovation. **SMEs**, besides knowledge limitations, also face design and user-experience barriers and limited funding. Knowledge limitations also cover the return of investment on accessibility which is not always clear. Another problem of SMEs in the tourism sector of rural areas is the high staff turnover, making it costly to keep training newcoming staff on accessibility measures, both physical and digital. Overall, however, the rural tourism SMEs demonstrated strong positive attitudes toward accessibility and a foundation of physical adaptations, but comprehensive and integrated approaches — particularly regarding digital and sensory accessibility — are still at an early stage of development, requiring further attention as it will help them expand their customer bases.

5.1 Categories of Support for EOs and SMEs

To support the efforts of rural tourism SMEs in improving their accessibility, it is fundamental to rely on solutions and approaches that have been positively tested by their intended users, namely people with disabilities and, in some instances, their caregivers, as well as that are considered economically viable and structurally feasible by the SMEs themselves. As such, **community-driven solutions**, aligned with local tourism initiatives, seem the more promising to boost the competency of EOs and SMEs, by minimising barriers to accessibility and particularly digital accessibility, lack of awareness and technical knowledge. Through peer-learning and through their Eos, the SMEs can gain access to innovative methodologies and tools to make their structures and activities more accessible, including applying and utilising digital solutions and services.

Below, there is a list of specific tools and approaches that can support in responding to accessibility needs of rural tourism structures and activities, accompanied by their expected outcomes and by examples of existing good practices that have successfully incorporated them.

Welcoming Structures for People of Disabilities

This category includes trainings, networking and technical assistance opportunities that can help improve accessibility of the structures and which are not, strictly speaking, linked to adoption of digital tools, but that make use of the digital space to provide guidance and boost awareness.

1. Auditing the accessibility of the premises (Training)

Expected Outcome 1: Trainees are able to assess the accessibility of rural tourism structures, taking into account the needs of various kinds of disability.

Example of Good Practice: TrentinoPerTutti (HandiCrea) [IT], as it provides video guides with multiple accessible languages to ensure that it covers all disabilities. The best practice contributes to the approach of HandiCrea of providing information on which the person can decide, based on their situation, whether a place can be visited autonomously, or if someone needs to come, and what will be the difficulties to expect.   Similar to this, the AccessiblePortugal [PT] platform provides opportunities for accessibility consultancy, training and awareness and the Multiformat Kit, a versatile and practical solution that delivers the same message in different ways.

2. Accessibility audit from remote (Technical assistance)

Expected Outcome 2: Premises are assessed from remote, through videos made following specific guidelines, to evaluate accessibility based on the needs of various kinds of disability.

Example of Good Practice: TUR4all Platform [PT] which is a collaborative platform where everyone can report on tourist establishments, resources and services with accessibility features for all. It started in 2012, in Spain. In 2016, Accessible Portugal joined. With an objective and informative approach, TUR4all provides essential information on the accessibility of tourist sites, from accommodation to cultural activities; and offers information on physical, visual, auditory, cognitive and other types of accessibility needs of travellers.

3. Video-tutorials for staff, made by people with disabilities (Technical assistance)

Expected Outcome 3: Short videos to show how to make people with different disabilities feel welcome in specific situations to give staff quick and direct information on how to adapt their approach to a client with a disability.

Example of Good Practice: GuestAccess App [PT] which provides training content on profiles of limitations of people and areas in tourist accommodation, with the aim of providing greater knowledge of the appropriate attitudes to take in each case.

4. Exchanges with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) focussing on disabilities (Networking opportunities).

Expected Outcome 4: Participants can get first-hand information on how to make people with disabilities welcome and establish relations in view of possible collaborations.

Examples of Good Practice: GuestAccess App for the aforementioned reason and the Azores for All which provides activities and services to make islands more accessible such as, accessibility consultancy, sightseeing tours in wheelchair-accessible vehicles, jeep tours, accessible cultural and religious tours, and many other accessible options.

Accessible activities

This category presents opportunities to support the organization of accessible outdoor activities and to overcome, also through digital solutions, unavoidable barriers.

1. Mapping accessibility of paths and trails (Technical assistance)

Expected Outcome 1: Circuits and portions of trails are assessed to verify their accessibility, flag difficult parts, and provide suggestions.

Example of Good Practice: ViaLibera Toscana, by CoopItinera [IT], where so far 3 hiking trails running through Tuscany were mapped, with detailed information on the conditions of the routes and of accessibility of places of interest, rural accommodation and restaurants, etc. Maps are available for downloading to be

used also offline. Videos and descriptions construct also "digital tours" of the places.

2. Online mapping for accessibility (Training)

Expected Outcome 2: Trainees are introduced to commonly used mapping tools and on how to add detail about accessibility.

Example of Good Practice: *See above, ViaLibera Toscana*

3. Multi-accessible infopoints (Reference of service providers)

Expected Outcome 3: Provide accessible information and guidance along trails and paths.

Examples of Good Practice: Smart City Accessibility Integration (Pafos) [CY] where key landmarks have been made accessible through physical methods for achieving accessibility as well as digital methods.

Santa Rosalia Trail (Korai) [IT]: Il Cammino di Santa Rosalia is a 185 km hiking trail from Palermo to central Sicily. Korai has set up an accessible showcase of the Trail, featuring touch screen, scent, audio, and subtitled information.

Oltre l'Arte per l'Accessibilità (Oltre l'Arte) [IT]: in Matera, a city of inherent difficult access, Oltre l'Arte identified a relatively easier path to reach "cave church" (chiesa rupestre, in Italian), and worked in its physical accessibility. In there, they installed tactile panels and dioramas, sign language videos, and audio-guides translated in 7 languages showcasing also the least accessible churches.

4. VR-Tours (Reference of Service Providers)

Expected Outcome 4: Give the possibility to experience places of difficult access to everyone.

Example of Good Practice: ForSanta Rosalia Trail, Korai has also installed standing bikes in the visitors center for an immersive virtual experience of the trail, while Oltre l'Arte per l'Accessibilità provides VR-tours of landmarks of difficult access in Matera.

5. <u>Sharing of equipment for accessible activities (joelettes, tandem bikes, skis, etc.) (Networking opportunities)</u>

<u>Expected Outcome 5:</u> Organize sharing and renting of available equipment among participant SMEs to foster their availability for people with disabilities.

Example of Good Practice: see above for Smart City Accessibility Integration [3] (Pafos).

6. <u>On-call health care assistants (Networking opportunities).</u>

<u>Expected Outcome 6:</u> Allow caregivers to spend time on their own thanks to trusted health care assistants to cater for a person with disabilities.

Example of Good Practice: The cooperative Le Rais, in Trentino (Italy) has agreements with local social cooperatives to provide, upon request, professional health care assistants.

Fostering Innovation and Learning

In this category, training and networking opportunities to support the learning process of SMEs are presented.

1. <u>Shooting videos with an accessible approach (Training)</u>

<u>Expected Outcome 1:</u> Trainees include considerations on the language and on how to provide information, verbally and/or visually, in order to ensure that the messages are understandable to people with different sensory and cognitive disabilities. In fact, inclusive content can be developed for users with **visual**, **auditory**, **cognitive**, or **mobility related needs**. Inclusive content can vary, from depicting how the SME is minimizing physical barriers, to how it makes their establishment more physically accessible to providing subtitles to their videos. The above proficiency can be gained in using tools like **captioning software**,

accessible CMS platforms, **alternative text editors** presented in the next session, but also in simply **writing and speaking in accessible ways**.

Example of Good Practice: see above from Trentino da Esplorare per Tutti (HandiCrea) [1].

2. Simplified overview of the EU Accessibility Act (Technical Assistance)

Expected Outcome 2: Easy to access version of the EU Accessibility Act that provides guidance about EU standards on accessibility. It has become apparent, as aforementioned that broader awareness is needed of EU accessibility standards and **understanding of EU frameworks like the EU Disability Rights Strategy**. Although the majority has a good overview on their local accessibility regulations, the awareness on digital requirements for accessibility is much less. Such measures will support the identification of EU policies that impact digital service provision in rural tourism and will help **EOs to train on and SMEs to apply legal and ethical considerations related to accessibility obligations and user rights.**

3. Idea Labs (Networking opportunities)

Expected Outcome 3: Connecting SMEs with experts in creating tailored plans to support their efforts in becoming more accessible through agile methodologies, design thinking, digital solutions and risk and impact assessment.

4. Mentoring strategies (Networking opportunities)

Expected Outcome 5: Improve efficacy of assistance through exchanges and peer-learning on best practices about how to impactfully mentor adults, with a specific focus on mentoring about IT and innovation.

6. Digital Transition: Needs & Opportunities

In anticipation of the growing divide among urban and rural areas, the digital transition of SMEs, and the subsequent support by their EOs, is becoming a key priority. For SMEs, there is a clear recognition of the value and necessity of improving digitalisation, although actual capacity to implement needed changes remains limited. Financial constraints were consistently highlighted as the primary barrier to digital transformation. Many SMEs noted that while they acknowledge the importance of updated websites, links to booking platforms, and smart communication tools, limited budgets and staffing prevent long-term digital upgrades and timely updates. To address the digital divide and its risks, it is important for EOs and SMEs alike to reach an efficient level of digitalisation, by understanding the current digital tools in use by them and their members, and what it is out there to utilise and optimise. Indeed, especially when it comes to digital accessibility, built-in tools in web-browsers, apps and devices are more and more common and user-friendly, significantly lowering the costs and complexities of setting-up a coherent accessible digital presence. Caution must be applied, however, in order to avoid adopting digital solutions that are more a performative act to showcase accessibility than something actually useful for their expected users. Listening to them, is therefore a key preparatory step.

The digital uptake of SMEs also becomes a catalyst in upscaling digital transition, particularly when accessibility standards are concerned. Only then, will the opportunity arise to tackle barriers to innovation (technical, strategic and financial) and for improvement in in their support mechanisms for their members.

6.1 Categories of Support for EOs and SMEs

Understanding the Learning Outcomes and Opportunities for EOs and SMEs serves as the steppingstone to guiding capacity building activities for social economy EOs and training, supporting, mentoring and advisory services for rural tourism and agrotourism SMEs. What is more, supporting targeted learning paths for different organisational roles can enable self-assessment and action planning for improved digital accessibility.

In regards to the needs of digital transition, it is important to identify the core, technical, and support competences needed, for SMEs and EOs to be able to improve their accessibility with the use of digital tools. The core goals are **to equip EOs with the knowledge and skills** to support rural SMEs in adopting digital tools for accessibility and enable EOs to act as multipliers of accessibility know-how, providing mentorship and training.

Welcoming structures for people with disabilities

The tools and approaches presented below complete the offer to improve accessibility of the structures, focussing on innovative solutions.

1. Sign-language translation services (Reference of service providers)

Expected Outcome 1: Present providers of sign-language translations through videocalls in different languages.

Example of good practice: Veasyt app (used by Albergo del Cuore) is a subscription based service that grants 24/7 sign language translation through videocalls.

2. Audio navigation of the premises through NFC or Qr-Code (Technical Assistance).

Expected Outcome 2: Guide people with visual disabilities through an offline audioguide, activated automatically on the user's phone thanks to NFC technology or through strategically placed QR-codes.

Example of Good Practice: Parco della Chiusa (COPAPS): a portion of the trails crisscrossing the park has been equipped with smart panels that, through NFC technology, activate an audio guide. BlindTag App (used by Albergo del Cuore): the app is able to recognize QR-codes and activates to provide guidance.

3. Training platform for staff on welcoming people with disabilities

Expected Outcome 3: Free web-based tool trains accommodation staff in how to serve guests with diverse disabilities. It uses short training modules, quizzes, and examples based on real guest scenarios.

Example of Good Practice: GuestAccess App [3] as seen above.

4. Assistance towards accessibility labels

Expected Outcome 4: Support SMEs to understand and implement the technical requirements foreseen to access to labels clearly identifying them as accessible.

Example of Good Practice: TrentinoPerTutti (HandiCrea) [1] as seen above.

Accessible digital presence and conduct accessibility audits

The development of an accessible presence is a key component of the learning and innovation outcomes expected by the project.

Therefore, a common 1-day on-line in-depth training on the web content accessibility guideline, assistive technologies workshops, User experience (UX) design for accessibility will be organised for all SMEs interested in digital accessibility at transnational level. This training will be propaedeutic for achieving the various learning outcomes composing this category.

At the end of the implementation of the capacity building and accessibility development activities, two rounds of demo days follow (1-day events in every project country) where, "digital challenges and solutions" will be presented at the national level with the participation of agrotourism SMEs, social economy enabling organisations, IT providers, startups, stakeholders, and the general public.

1. Digital Literacy (Training)

Expected Outcome 1: Train-the-trainer and MOOC modules to acquire basic digital skills.

2. WCAG 2.1 simplified checklists and compliance toolkits. (Training)

Expected Outcome 2: Trainees are able to provide guidance on website design and content based on the four principles of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust. Skill-building in assistive technology and inclusive content can be achieved by implementing assistive tools like **screen readers**, **alt-text generators** and **voice commands** which bring the desired value and which are the object of the following learning outcomes.

Example of Good Practice: Azores for All through its accessibility consultancy.

3. Screen Reader Compatibility (Technical assistance)

Expected Outcome 3: Website in line with EU's accessibility standards: all relevant information on the website can be accessed through a screen-reader.

Example of Good Practices: Azores for All [4], TrentinoPerTutti (HandiCrea) [1]as seen in previous sections.

4. Alternative Text for Images (Technical assistance)

Expected Outcome 4: Website in line with EU's accessibility standards: all images on the website have a description.

Example of Good Practice: TrentinoPerTutti (HandiCrea) [1] as analysed in previous sections regarding its all inclusive approach to digital accessibility.

5. Easy Navigation (Technical assistance)

Expected Outcome 5: Website in line with EU's accessibility standards: websites have easily adaptable font sizes and a facilitated version with AAC features. In fact, **User Experience (UX) for tourism websites** can be enhanced, through Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) approach which helps with increased understanding of principles of widespread design and how they apply to tourism websites. Navigation structures, contrast and readability and mobile responsiveness are things to consider when developing or redesigning the website to ensure accessibility.

6. Auditing the accessibility of website (Training)

Expected Outcome 6: Trainees are able to assess the accessibility of websites.

Learning how to **test websites for accessibility compliance** using automated and manual tools is very useful. Therefore, it is important for SMEs to know how to re-design their current websites or create new ones following accessibility protocols, while EOs are required to know how to conduct these accessibility audits on their members websites.

Example of Good Practice: GuestAccess App [3] as analysed in previous sections and AccessMonitor [PT] which is a website that assesses the degree of accessibility of a website.

7. Website Accessibility self-check toolbox (Digital Tools)

Expected Outcome 7: Self-check tools, audit report templates & action planning formats.

Example of Good Practice: The TUR4all Platform [2] and AccessMonitor [6] as analysed above.

Expected Outcome 8: Evaluate existing accessibility of SMEs' websites and propose recommendations.

Facilitate planning

1. <u>Videoguides presenting the premises. (Technical Assistance)</u>

Expected Outcome 1: Potential clients with disabilities have a clear idea of the structure, groups can plan the composition of rooms and dorms.

Example of Good Practice: The Essence Inn Marianos in PT is providing a clear overview of the accessibility provisions to ensure that people with disabilities are fully aware.

2. Chatbot trained on accessibility (Reference of service providers)

Expected Outcome 2: Present AI assistants for bookings that are able to process also requests of information about accessibility of premises and activities.

Example of Good Practice: The use of AI Chatbots [PL] provides guests and potential customers with real-time support on queries regarding the accessibility provisions of the establishment.

Fostering Innovation and Learning

1. <u>Platform of practitioners - fair of best practices (Networking opportunities)</u>

Expected Outcome 1: Foster awareness of scalable and transferable accessibility solutions from peers thanks to an online platform.

Example of Good Practice: The TUR4All Platform [2] as seen above.

2. <u>Fundraising strategies (Training)</u>

Expected Outcome 2: Trainees understand where to apply to get funding for implementation of the selected digital solutions towards accessibility.

3. Platform of practitioners - Partnerships to access to EU-funding. (Networking opportunities)

Expected Outcome 3: Share information on sector specific funding opportunities and facilitate the establishment of consortia to apply to them.

Example of Good Practice: The Smart City Accessibly Integration for Paphos is under the ECOSTA initiative of the EU. Being aware and knowing how to use such EU-funded initiatives will support SMEs to a great extent in fulfilling their accessibility targets.

4. Support in project identification and proposal drafting (Technical Assistance)

Expected Outcome 4: A-la-carte assistance to consortia to prepare proposals linked to improving accessibility for funding opportunities.

5. PCM and proposal writing training (Training)

Expected Outcome 5: Trainees understand the project cycle management approach and are able to identify interventions and draft proposals.

6. Local champion scheme (Networking opportunities)

Expected Outcome 6: Identify local "champions" to become ambassadors of accessibility, promoting their role as focal points within communities for suggestions and referrals about managing disabilities.

7. Inclusive Hackathons (Networking opportunities)

Expected Outcome 7: The DigAccessAgrotourism hackathon will drive sustained innovation and solutions to address digital accessibility of SMEs in the agrotourism and tourism in the rural areas. A hackathon as a time-bound competitive event will gather agrotourism SMEs from the project countries and IT providers/startups, stakeholders and enabling organisations to innovate and build proofs of concept/minimum viable products for a specific pre-defined problem. As an international online event, this hackathon will last between 12 and 24 hours to drive

sustained innovation and solutions to address advancing accessibility through digital means.

The hackathon will allow realisation of solutions to SME-specific challenges in terms of accessibility through inclusive solutions oriented towards SME digitalisation. SMEs from the project countries and IT providers/startups will collaborate to introduce viable products for pre-defined problems.

8. Understanding digital challenges for the business model of SMEs (Training, advisory service)

Expected Outcome 8: Every SME is aware what digital challenges they face that impact on their business model.

9. Support in process of design, development and implementation of digital tools (Training, advisory service, mentoring)

Expected Outcome 9: Trainees understand the process of design, development and incorporation of digital solutions in their companies; Trainees know how to plan this process.

10. Business Experiments (Training, advisory service)

Expected Outcome 10: Trainees understand the need of business experiments and know how to do it. Business experiments are crucial for innovation and informed decision-making because they allow companies to test new ideas and hypotheses in a controlled environment before scaling them up.

Besides the good practices mentioned above that cater directly to the expected outcomes of the support provided to EOs and SMEs, there is of course a significant number of tools and practices that can be applied. Some are as follows:

Vacayit (Australia): Though non-EU, this platform is highly replicable. It delivers immersive audio travel guides, screen-reader compatibility, and transcript-based search. With scalable architecture, it sets a benchmark for inclusive content

creation that SMEs in Europe could localise. This platform's difference lies in its targeted approach to create detailed audio guides on the ground.

The City Sound Trail (Poland): in the footsteps of city rights and burgher traditions" was created in the form of audio recordings that can be listened to in the mobile application. The paths consist not only of a story read by a narrator, but also of background sounds that reflect the probable sounds of the city in individual places, so that a tourist or resident can feel the atmosphere of the former stronghold. In addition, the trail is based on GPS location. The application user is guided to subsequent monuments via a map, and after reaching the destination is automatically informed about the possibility of listening to the recording (number of stops: 10).

The Trail of Non-Existing Monuments (Poland): It consists of non-existent monuments recreated thanks to AR (augmented reality) technology. It enables a virtual tour of the iconic parish church of St. Michael the Archangel and the water tower on former Bernardyński Sq. It is possible to upload the 3D model by scanning the tracker placed on dedicated plates located in the city space. The application generates a three-dimensional virtual image through the smartphone camera and overlays it on the real environment in camera mode. The component in AR technology is available for mobile devices with AR Core support.

The Beki Nature Reserve App (Poland): The mobile application for BEKI provides comprehensive information about the nature reserve and the protected bird species found in these areas. In addition to photos, descriptions, and distribution maps, the app allows users to listen to the sounds these birds make. The birds are categorized according to the areas where they can be encountered. The map module offers precise locations of sites included in the reserve. Furthermore, the app features a QR code scanning function, allowing users to access additional

information. To stay up to date with ongoing activities, users can quickly connect to social media through the app.

La Petite Cantine (Greece): operates as a social restaurant and inclusive space offering accessible cooking workshops, educational events, cultural activities and digital outreach. It serves as a welcoming hub for people of diverse backgrounds and abilities.

The Chios Mastic Museum (Greece): has enhanced access to culture for visitors with disabilities and educational groups. Its accessible design, tactile exhibits, and inclusive audiovisual material allow people with visual, mobility, or learning difficulties to fully participate in the museum experience. This has improved learning outcomes, visitor satisfaction, and positioned the museum as a national reference point for inclusive cultural tourism.

7. Innovation Outcomes Matrix

This competence and learning outcome framework becomes the starting point of the capacity building activities, training materials, and individual support for SMEs to contribute to a more inclusive and digitally empowered agrotourism sector.

The information it contains is further analysed via the Innovation Outcomes Matrix. Along with the outcomes and methodology for each category of support, a series of good practices are also identified to help draw inspiration from. The crux of the Framework lies in the needs identified and the learning opportunities that arise for both EOs and SMEs. The key competences and learning outcomes mentioned above are further detailed in the Learning Outcomes Matrix below.

The matrix provides information on the specific opportunities that the project DigAccessAgrotourism is offering to participant EOs and SMEs, outlining for each one of them what shape the support will take (training, technical assistance, mentoring, etc.), and whether it will be provided through the capacity-building programme for EOs or training and individual support for SMEs, or both. The Innovation Outcomes Matrix, in its final form, addresses all the needs that became apparent, but the DigAccessAgrotourism consortium shall address emerging needs raised during the implementation of capacity building, training and support on an ad hoc basis. Therefore, the matrix shall inform the capacity-building of EOs to train and improve their knowledge and skills on innovative methodologies and tools that put digital solutions to the service of improving accessibility. At the same time, the Matrix shall inform the development of custom-made plans to SMEs that will boost their accessibility through digital tools.

Category of Support	Specific tools & approaches	Expected Outcomes	Type of support	Work stream		Specific disability supported
				Group Capacity Building	Individual Support Plan	
1. Welcoming structures for people with disabilities	Sign-language translation services	Present providers of sign-language translations through videocalls in different languages	Reference of service providers		✓	Hearing
1. Welcoming structures for people with disabilities	Auditing the accessibility of the premises	Trainees are able to assess the accessibility of rural tourism structures, taking into account the needs of various kinds of disability	Training	✓		Multiple
1. Welcoming structures for people with disabilities	Accessibility audit from remote	Premises are assessed from remote, through videos made following specific guidelines, to evaluate accessibility based on the needs of various kinds of disability	Technical assistance		✓	Multiple
1. Welcoming structures for people with disabilities	Audio navigation of the premises through NFC	Guide people with visual disabilities through an offline audioguide, activated automatically on the user's phone thanks to NFC tehcnology	Technical assistance		✓	Visual
1. Welcoming structures for people with disabilities	Audio navigation of the premises through Qr-code	Guide people with visual disabilities through an audioguide, activated automatically on the user's phone thanks to strategically placed Qr-codes.	Technical assistance		✓	Visual
1. Welcoming structures for people with disabilities	Training platform for staff on welcoming people with disabilities	free web-based tool trains accommodation staff in how to serve guests with diverse disabilities. It uses short training modules, quizzes, and examples based on real guest scenarios.	Software & Apps		✓	Multiple
1. Welcoming structures for people with disabilities	Video-tutorials for staff, made by people with disabilities	Short videos to show how to make people with different disabilities feel welcome in specific situations to give staff quick and direct information on how to adapt their approach to a client with a disability.	Technical assistance	✓	✓	Multiple
1. Welcoming structures for people with disabilities	Exchanges with CSOs focussing on disabilities.	Participant can get first-hand information on how to make people with disabilities welcome, and establish relations in view of possible collaborations.	Networking opportunities	✓	✓	Multiple
1. Welcoming structures for people with disabilities	Assistance towards accessibility labels	Support SMEs to understand and implement the technical requirements foreseen to access to labels clearly identifying them as accessible.	Technical assistance		✓	Multiple

Category	Topic	Description	Service type			
2. Accessible activities	Mapping accessibility of paths and trails	Circuits and portions of trails are assessed to verify their accessibility, flag difficult parts, and provide suggestions.	Technical assistance	✅	✅	Multiple
2. Accessible activities	Online mapping for accessibility	Trainees are introduced to commonly used mapping tools and on how to add detail about accessibility.	Training	✅		Multiple
2. Accessible activities	Multi-accessible infopoints	Provide accessible information and guidance along trails and paths.	Reference of service providers		✅	Multiple
2. Accessible activities	VR-Tours	Give the possibility to experience places of difficult access to everyone.	Reference of service providers		✅	Mobility
2. Accessible activities	Sharing of equipment for accessible activities (joelettes, tandem bikes, skis, etc.	Organize sharing and renting of available equipment among participant SMEs to foster their availability for people with disabilities.	Networking opportunities		✅	Multiple
2. Accessible activities	On-call health care assistants	Allow caregivers to spend time on their own thanks to trusted health care assistants to cater for a person with disabilities	Networking opportunities		✅	Multiple
3. Accessible digital presence	Digital Literacy	Train-the-trainer and MOOC modules to acquire basic digital skills.	Training		✅	n/a
3. Accessible digital presence	WCAG 2.1 simplified checklists and compliance toolkits.	Trainees are able to provide guidance on website design and content based on the four principles of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust.	Training	✅		Multiple
3. Accessible digital presence	Screen Reader Compatibility	Website in line with EU's accessibility standards: all relevant information on the website can be accessed through a screen-reader	Technical assistance		✅	Visual
3. Accessible digital presence	Alternative Text for Images	Website in line with EU's accessibility standards: all images on the website have a description.	Technical assistance		✅	Visual

Category	Item	Description	Type			Disability
3. Accessible digital presence	Easy Navigation	Website in line with EU's accessibility standards: websites have easily adaptable font sizes and a facilitated version with AAC features.	Technical assistance		✅	Cognitive
3. Accessible digital presence	Auditing the accessibility of website	Trainees are able to assess the accessibility of websites	Training	✅		Multiple
3. Accessible digital presence	Website Accessibility self-check toolbox	Self-check tools, audit report templates & action planning formats	Digital tools	✅		Multiple
3. Accessible digital presence	Accessibility audit of website and of the presence on platforms and social media	Evaluate existing accessibility of SMEs' websites and propose recommendations	Technical assistance		✅	Multiple
4. Facilitate planning	Videoguides presenting the premises.	Potential clients with disabilities have a clear idea of the structure, groups can plan the composition of rooms and dorms.	Technical assistance		✅	Multiple
4. Facilitate planning	Chatbot trained on accessibility	Present AI assistants for bookings that are able to process also requests of information about accessibility of premises and activities	Reference of service providers		✅	Multiple
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Shooting videos with an accessible approach	Trainees include considerations on the language and on how to provide information, verbally and/or visually, in order to ensure that the messages are understandable to people with different sensory and cognitive disabilities	Training	✅	✅	Multiple
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Platform of practitioners - fair of best practices	Foster awareness of scalable and transferable accessibility solutions from peers thanks to an online platform	Networking opportunities	✅	✅	n/a
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Fundraising Strategies	Trainees understand where to apply to get funding for implementation of the selected digital solutions	Training	✅	✅	n/a
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Platform of practitioners - Partnerships to access to EU-funding.	Share information on sector specific funding opportunities and facilitate the establishment of consortia to apply to them.	Networking opportunities	✅	✅	n/a

5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Support in project identification and proposal drafting	A-la-carte training and assistance to consortia to prepare proposals linked to improving accessibility for funding opportunities.	Training	✅	✅	n/a
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Project cycle management and proposal writing training	Trainees understand the project cycle management approach and are able to identify interventions and draft proposals.	Training	✅		n/a
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Local champion scheme	Identify local "champions" to become ambassadors of accessibility, promoting their role as focal points within communities for suggestions and referrals about managing disabilities.	Networking opportunities		✅	n/a
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Simplified overview of the EU Accessibility Act	Easy to access version of the EU Accessibility Act that can provide guidance about EU standards on accessibility.	Technical assistance	✅	✅	Multiple
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Inclusive Hackatons	Realisation of solutions to SME-specific challenges in terms of accessibility through inclusive solutions oriented towards SME digitalisation. SMEs from the project countries and IT providers/startups will collaborate to introduce viable products for pre-defined problems.	Networking opportunities	✅		Multiple
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Idea Labs	Connecting SMEs with experts in creating tailored plans to support their efforts in becoming more accessible through agile methodologies, design thinking, digital solutions and risk and impact assessment	Networking opportunities	✅		Multiple
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Mentoring strategies	Improve efficacy of assistance through exchanges and peer-learning on best practices about how to impactfully mentor adults, with a specific focus on mentoring about IT and innovation.	Networking opportunities	✅		n/a
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Understanding digital challenges for the business model of SMEs	Every SME is aware what digital challenges they face that impact on their business model	Training, advisory service	✅	✅	n/a
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Support in process of design, development and implementation of digital tools	Trainees understand the process of design, development and incorporation of digital solutions in their companies; Trainees know how to plan this process	Training, advisory service, mentoring	✅	✅	n/a
5. Fostering Innovation and Learning	Business Experiments	Trainees understand the need of business experiments and know how to do it	Training, advisory service		✅	n/a

It is trite but true; digital accessibility is not just about compliance—it's about connection. EOs and SMEs need to have a broader understanding of their accessibility and opportunities to advance it through their digital transition as a means to an end, but what is of outmost importance is to create the connection with the people they wish to cater for people with disabilities. To help them, we need to understand them, to see how and what makes them welcomed and at ease. SMEs in rural areas and EOs have the potential to lead Europe's next chapter in inclusive tourism by offering accessible experiences to all tourists throughout the year and not only during peak seasons to avoid overcrowding. With the right digital tools, a package of skills and funding knowledge, and enabling support, accessibility becomes more than a checkbox—it becomes a competitive advantage, and the step to a right direction.

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