DIVETOUR
Training Kit of the cMOOC of DIVETOUR project

Handbook of MODULE 2

Accessible tourism and its potential as one of the main levers for the recovery of the tourism sector

Topic 1
Accessibility as a business opportunity for tourism destinations and businesses

divetour.eu

Edited by

The DIVETOUR project team

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1.1.1. Vocational Education and Training (VET): a key to overcome the tourism and hospitality sector's staff shortage

One of the consequences of the Covid Pandemic, in its early and most dramatic days, was the almost complete stop in tourism flows, both domestic and international, and the closure of many tourism facilities. For those organisations which could not guarantee staff salaries; this meant that staff was forced to be sustained by schemes of "Wage compensation funds" if available, or to lose their jobs.

Many companies could not be sure that they will be able to re-open at the end of the Pandemic or when the strictest social distancing measures will be released. Thus, many employees, uncertain about the prosecution of their activities in the tourism area, looked for different job possibilities which eventually prevented them from being ready and available when the tourism sector planned its recovery strategy. Consequently, the staff shortage is now representing a major problem, since skilled and properly trained staff might be not fully available.

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Involving "newcomers" will require a long "training on the job" activity, which is not easy when tourism flows are increasing, and peak seasons require the full utilisation of all available human resources.

At EU level there are many VET (Vocational and Educational Training) opportunities, both as initial education or lifelong learning courses, as the result of many projects financed by the EC through programmes such as Erasmus+ or the EPALE platform.

Offering VET to young people and those who lost their job can show them new opportunities that exist in the Tourism sector and more specifically for employees who are trained in Tourism for All and acquire new skills. By focusing on this area, those who possess these competences will be better positioned to take on new vocational roles in tourism and hospitality.

It is important to consider that recovery of the tourism activities will depend on a more personalised service, as customers expect more attention regarding their health and safety. This applies especially to tourists with specific access requirements, including seniors who require in-depth knowledge, understanding and better customer service. Being trained on these specialised topics may be considered as an added value to the acquired skills

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of a person and to the increase of quality offer for all the companies who will enrol them in their workforce. As mentioned, many Projects financed in the framework of Erasmus+ projects, are already offering a variety of VET courses which may be adapted to the different situation of the learners, as we will see in the following point.

1.1.2. Creating time to train the workforce: adapting training modules to time-deprived professionals and embracing digital learning tools

One of the major challenges for companies which work with the full engagement of their staff, is to find time for initial or continuous learning during the working time.

However, improving the competences of the workforce is a strategic decision for the general improvement of the company's service and one of the main levers to meet the requirements of their customers and secure their appreciation and fidelity.

Appreciation is the tool to get a satisfied customer, to improve the company's image and its competitive positioning.

Customers with specific access requirements expect to be properly welcomed and that staff behaviour play a powerful role in influencing their experience in a tourism venue. The expectation of a good service, the positive attitude

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of staff and their capability to meet customers' requirements and provide adequate feedback and quality service are among the top priorities when looking for a journey destination and make the final choice.

As a consequence, the goals of the companies to qualify their human resources are paramount when approaching the market of accessible tourism and setting the marketing objectives and strategies.

Businesses need to bring in new people to help them stay in the market through the continuous updating of professional skills, taking into consideration also emerging markets and needs, such as those represented by tourists with specific access requirements.

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1.1.3. Digitalisation

The digitalisation process is now present in every area of our lives: work, entertainment, leisure, travel, relationships... The tourism sector, supported in its recovery after the pandemic emergency by public initiatives, is trying to exploit the opportunities offered by new technologies to achieve market objectives and increase the quality of its offer. Professional figures linked in particular to digital marketing also have a specific role to play in the world of travel and accommodation, provided they are part of an ongoing process of training and updating.

The massive use of the web, social networks and smartphones has transformed the boundaries and reshaped not only our lives, but also the idea of travel. Tourism experience is promoted, communicated, chosen, and purchased mainly through websites and online applications.

The pandemic has seen companies focus on their objectives identifying digital innovation as the priority for survival on the market.

The general orientation is towards the training of innovative professional

figures, who are increasingly in demand on the labour market: tourism sector promotion expert; itinerary and tourism product designer; destination manager; digital tourism expert; sustainable tourism operator; accessible tourism expert; online booking and reservation expert; heritage promoter. etc.

In order to get closer to these topics and stay up-to-date on marketing techniques, there are various learning possibilities:
- Online learning management systems
- The creation and use of self-learning apps in the world of travel
- Training processes delivered via MOOC (Massive open online course) methodology
- Follow training offers in streaming mode, tourism digital marketing webinars

Many of these possibilities consider the shortage of time which staff, already employed, may have, while contributing to the improvement of their skills on the issues requested by the employers; thus, the training management will take into account timings and duration which will be self-decided and will not interfere with the human resources routine work.

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1.2. Developing soft skills: the key to a more accessible and sustainable ecosystem

Soft skills are a combination of abilities related to people and social situations rather than a person's technical abilities. Some common examples of soft skills are relationship-building, teamwork, communication, problem-solving and leadership. They are necessary to live a good life as well as being able to look at others, connect with them and build strong and satisfactory relationships.

Soft skills indicate how well a staff member will work with others in a company as well as how they might treat clients or customers.

In the tourism sector these skills are very important since connections with customers are part of the building up of tourism as a service. Even more so if the target group of the company is tourists with specific access requirements. People with specific access requirements, seniors and any other groups who might require extra attention by the service providers are those who value

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the most staff who are able to listen to them accurately and communicate positively.

Many tourists with specific access requirements require more time to express what they need, to understand the answers that are provided, to get out of problematic situations during their trip. All these situations must be managed by staff who have:

- a full understanding of the variety of requirements and critical situations a customer might find him/her involved in
- a full knowledge of the possibilities that the company he/she is representing has to face those situations and find a positive and satisfactory solution
- the two abilities described above, while providing a quality service.

A pleasant and helpful attitude toward customers is crucial to good customer relations. These new skills help to build trust with customers who may be satisfied and make repeat visits.

Matched with the necessary technical skills, soft skills also constitute an asset to develop services which will be appropriate to cater for tourists with specific access requirements in inclusive environments. Understanding needs, use common sense, putting oneself in the shoes of our customers, will represent

the key to design quality products able to satisfy different requirements.

Developing soft skills requires a mindset which is ready to learn and improve. Besides possessing professional knowledge and technical abilities, tourism service providers need to have soft skills in order to offer a better tourism service. The management and the workforce of any enterprise active in the tourism service must share the same vision on how to welcome and cater for their customers. If a company has also undertaken the goal of being sustainable and accessible it is vital that every employee, from the CEO to the last newly hired person know that the capability to interrelate and understand customers' requirements is the key to guarantee the success of the enterprise and the satisfaction of the Customer. Soft skills are partially innate in people – something you are born with - but much can be improved through targeted training.

Soft skills training is training that focuses on developing skills such as communication, teamwork and problem solving.
It is important to consider that learning how to improve soft skills may have many positive effects:

1. Improve the work environment, making staff satisfied and "happy" at work and boost retention rate
2. Improve work productivity by reducing internal conflicts
3. Reflect the positive attitude of staff towards the customers, thus obtaining a better interpersonal relationship and an overall better quality service.

Staff who have acquired soft skills are:

- **experienced based**: the more you have the possibility to verify the outcome of a positive approach towards the customers and every customer related activity the more you become an "expert" on using the proper approach;
- **people-orientated**: this is the core of acquiring soft skills. The relationship between the staff member and customer is at the base of a good service or product which will improve the company economic results;
- **attitudinal and behavioural**: strictly linked to individual capacity to be professional and empathic in any situation.

The use of soft skills may be considered "intangible". It cannot be measured easily in accounting systems and is more related to the improvement of the

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company performance, which may be reflected in customer satisfaction.

Soft skills training can improve staff retention. From a managerial point of view, it is important not to underestimate soft skills development and to give them their due importance in company policy, training and hiring. Organisations can retain more of their talented employees because they have invested in their professional growth, and this pays off. It will reduce the need to hire and train replacement staff, thus reducing organisational costs.

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1.2.1. Acquiring knowledge and competences in the area of accessibility

Having training in disability, accessibility and inclusion can give employment advantages and open career opportunities, given the increasing relevance of these subjects in the tourism sector.

The scope of training includes:

- who are the potential customers and what are their specific requirements while travelling (considering all the different elements of the visitor journey and tourism value service chain)
- which are the tools to respond to those requirements and which skills are required
- what is the accessibility situation of the company/facility/ destination where the learner may be working
- how to improve accessibility by planning and designing interventions (Universal design, accessibility criteria, sustainability criteria, Experts)
- changing the company's internal procedures and the mindset, making accessibility an integral part of the business
- how to establish collaboration with other service providers.

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1.3. Accessible Tourism for All

The terms **Accessible Tourism and Tourism for all** have a long history, and they have been used through the years by advocates of the rights of people with disabilities to convince institutions, citizens and tourism suppliers to take into consideration the access needs of many people who did not have the right to travel as other citizens in the world. Most of the rights that are now taken for granted were not such only less than 50 years ago and many people fought for them. The inclusion of these rights in the agenda of many institutions and in the mindset of people have paved the way to new concepts related to the business opportunity of catering for people with specific access requirements, the overall quality of the tourism offer for all who are willing to travel with the same opportunities as everyone else.

In this very long process two main factors played a big role:

- the **change of the concept of disability** from a medical model to the social-environmental model
- **seeing tourism as a right and a leisure experience for everyone, including people with disabilities** and not a privilege only for some -"Tourism for All".

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1.3.1. Background & history

In 1976, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1981 **International Year of People with Disabilities**, "to promote the beginning of action plans at national, regional and international level, with an emphasis on equal opportunities, rehabilitation and disability prevention, for the full participation and equality, the right of persons with disabilities to participate fully in the life and development of their societies, to enjoy living conditions equal to those of other citizens, to be able to enjoy in the same way the improvement of the conditions resulting from socio-economic development."

The International Year focused especially on the image of people with disabilities in society, recognising that social attitudes were a major obstacle to achieving their full participation and equality in society.

In 1980, an important Conference was organised in Manila by the **UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)**, which declared the "…right to tourism as an aspect of the realisation of human being".

In order to provide a time frame during which governments and organisations

could implement the activities recommended in the World Programme of Action, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the **United Nations Decade of People with Disabilities** from 1983 to 1992.

1988 saw the creation in the UK of the Tourism for All Working Group and publication in 1989, at the end of a conference, of the "Tourism for All" report dedicated to tour operators.

In **1992** United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution **"Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities"** while in 1993, during the conference "Tourism for All in Europe – Tourism 2000" the **report produced by Touche Ross "Profiting from opportunities – a new market for tourism"** was presented. So around 30 years ago it was clear that the fight for rights made by people with disabilities introduced a new perspective, also for the tourism sector.

At the European level, 1996 saw the publication by the European Commission DG Enterprise of the Handbook for the Tourism industry **Making Europe accessible for tourists with disabilities**, while at world level 1999 was the year of publication of the **Global Code of Ethics for Tourism: "Tourism**

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for persons with disabilities should be encouraged and facilitated" by UNWTO.

The New millennium started with a number of significant initiatives at institutional level.

Concerning the concept of disability, the World Health Organisations published the **International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, (ICF, 2001)**, which recognised a new international, standardised and unified language to talk about people with disabilities. It provided a reference model for the description of health, disability and environmental factors, changing the paradigm of disability, defined as "the result of a correlation between people's health, characteristics and the environment", and it providing "action" tools for policy makers in various fields (social policies, transport ... tourism).

In Europe, **2003** was celebrated as the **European Year of Persons with Disabilities** with the famous motto **"Nothing about us without us!"** and the designing of a **Disability Action Plan** (2004-2010) by the European Commission.

The **United Nations "Convention on the Rights of People with**

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disabilities" of 2006 is another pivotal moment, as it aims to "promote, protect and guarantee the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and promote respect for their intrinsic dignity". In particular, article 30 requires: "Equal access to participation in cultural life, including leisure, tourism and sport". The Convention was ratified during the year by 185 countries.

The European Union (EU), pushed by the implementation plan of the Convention, promotes a series of actions both in terms of accessibility and of accessible tourism.
In **2009** for the first time, in the **Lisbon Treaty**, the EU can promote tourism actions other than the national and regional policies, and in 2011 the document 'Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe' highlights the importance of accessibility in the tourism chain!
This led to the making of a number of important **European studies** (between 2013 and 2015) on the demand and offer of accessible tourism, its **economic impact** and its training provision. Those studies show how significant the economic growth can be by adjusting tourism offers to the needs of people

with access requirements, and how the offer has to grow to satisfy the rising demand by tourists. In the following years, a number of European projects were funded to develop accessible tourism products and implement the offer on European tourism destinations. These initiatives helped cooperation, the internationalisation of local best practices, and the use of common understanding and standards to cater for all.

In recent years, the EU has promoted many initiatives to support the development of accessible tourism, the rights of people with disabilities and the development of accessible cities and destinations, focusing on their interaction with the achievement of the **"Sustainable Development Goals"** (SDGs) promoted by the United Nations.

A number of awards (**Access City Awards** from 2010, **European Capital of Smart Tourism** from 2018) help disseminating the culture of inclusion and the idea that the benefits of inclusion are for visitors, economic operators and citizens.

The European Accessibility Act (2018) sets a number of binding norms, especially for the digital accessibility and the use of digital services, while new

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standards are published at European and world level which can give further instructions to designers and entrepreneurs (**CEN-CENELEC JTC 11** of 2021, the European Standard on accessibility of the built environment, and **ISO DIS 21902:2021** Tourism and related services - Accessible tourism for all - Requirements and recommendations).

1.4. Universal Design

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

Center for Universal Design, Raleigh, NC, USA
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The Universal Design Approach promoting access for individuals with specific access requirements benefits all users. It also supports sustainability by minimising the need for subsequent adaptations and re-design.

The term Universal Design (UD) was used for the first time in 1985 by Ronald Mace, an architect from North Carolina State University, who had to move on a wheelchair due to polio. His experience led him to dedicate all his work to this concept, which involves the creation of buildings and environments

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suitable for all individuals, without the need for adaptations for users with different access requirements and abilities. Today, the UD concept is also recognised as being applicable to the design of inclusive services, and delivery of information.

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1.4.1. The seven principles of Universal Design

In 1997, professionals from different disciplines at North Carolina University's Centre for Universal Design, where Ronald Mace and his pool of architects worked, developed the seven principles that define Universal Design:

- **Equitable Use**
  The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
- **Flexibility of use**
  The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- **Simple and intuitive use**
  Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
- **Perceptible information**
  The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
- **Tolerance for errors**

The design minimises hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

- **Low physical effort**
  The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
- **Size and Space for Approach and Use**
  Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

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Designing for **equitable use** means that everyone can participate, access and use the product or service. Touchless payment devices that use near field signals are one example of this.

Everyone must have the possibility of **flexibility of use**, for example, the use of a space or an object: whether with the left or right hand, with the desired speed, always favouring precision, even in the case of limitations.

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Buffet counter at two heights reachable by all

Simple and intuitive use focuses on the ease of understanding how to use a product, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

Tap which is simple and easy to use

Pull-down clothes rail, easily reached and used by standing and seated persons

The UD principle of **perceptible information** is applied to information design and delivery to make information accessible to all users, it should be easy to navigate, perceive and understand, using various senses. Moreover, the information must be structured in such a way that it can be delivered in alternative formats and "translated" by different devices and disseminated with various techniques, which can also be used by those for example, those with visual or hearing impairments. Such information products include pictograms and picture menus to enable understanding, use of large fonts for those with visual impairments, and images on websites with alternative text, allowing screen readers (used by blind people) to convey visual information in audible format.

Lift control buttons suitable for many users with: contrasting fonts, lit buttons and braille to indicate the different floor stops.

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Tolerance for errors supports users from the danger of misuse and accidents, reducing risk and ensuring the safety of users. Smooth and rounded corners of tables are simple examples of this, as they minimise injuries to children. Large glazed panels with visual markings at suitable heights draw the user's attention to their presence, helping to avoid collision.

Large glass panel with marking to warn the user and prevent collision

Automatically opening and closing doors contribute to l**ow physical effort**, which is of particular benefit to many users who, for example, are frail or may have a disability or temporary injury.

Entrance door with automatic or push button opening system requiring little or no effort from the user

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Environments that have adequate **size and space for approach** and use are usable by people with various abilities and specific physical characteristics, also accommodating the use of assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches or walking aids.

Hotel room with wide balcony door and sufficient floor space for easy circulation by a wheelchair user

1.4.2. Where do we apply Universal Design? Is it only something about the built environment?

Although the concept of Universal Design was conceived by an architect, its applications are absolutely not limited to removing architectural barriers. As we have already said, when we talk about people with specific access requirements, we are referring to a very wide range of people with different needs and abilities, and in all aspects of their lives, from moving, to using devices, to watching and listening, communicating, having fun and studying, doing all activities that human do during their lives.

Thanks to developments in the last two decades, more people can avoid the risk of marginalisation, and they may lead more active lives, supported by services that are developed according to UD principles. The application of the Universal Design principles is not intended to benefit only people with disabilities but benefits all users by creating comfortable and safe environments, products and services. It is not a set of specifications as

contained in accessibility standards or a set of specific solutions, but it is the way to understand and respond to users' diversity in order to develop accessible solutions which are suitable for the widest possible range of users.

In the tourism and hospitality sector there are many areas where UD can be applied, for example in transportation (vehicles and passenger terminals), accommodation premises, furniture design, leisure attractions, museums and exhibits, heritage interpretation and visitor information centres. Universal Design in Tourism for the whole supply chain supports Sustainability, Quality, Comfort, Safety, Inclusion, Equality, Independence and Growth.

The importance of the Universal Design principles in industry and its potential for society can be illustrated with examples that show the relevance of this approach to a wide range of contexts, from small-scale design to major infrastructure products and services.

One example of the fields of application of Universal Design is in **home design and automation** and technologies at the service of independent living. This is an issue which is increasingly important as a means of allowing people with disabilities and older people to remain independently in their own

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The Tourism Value chain – diagram by Fundación ONCE

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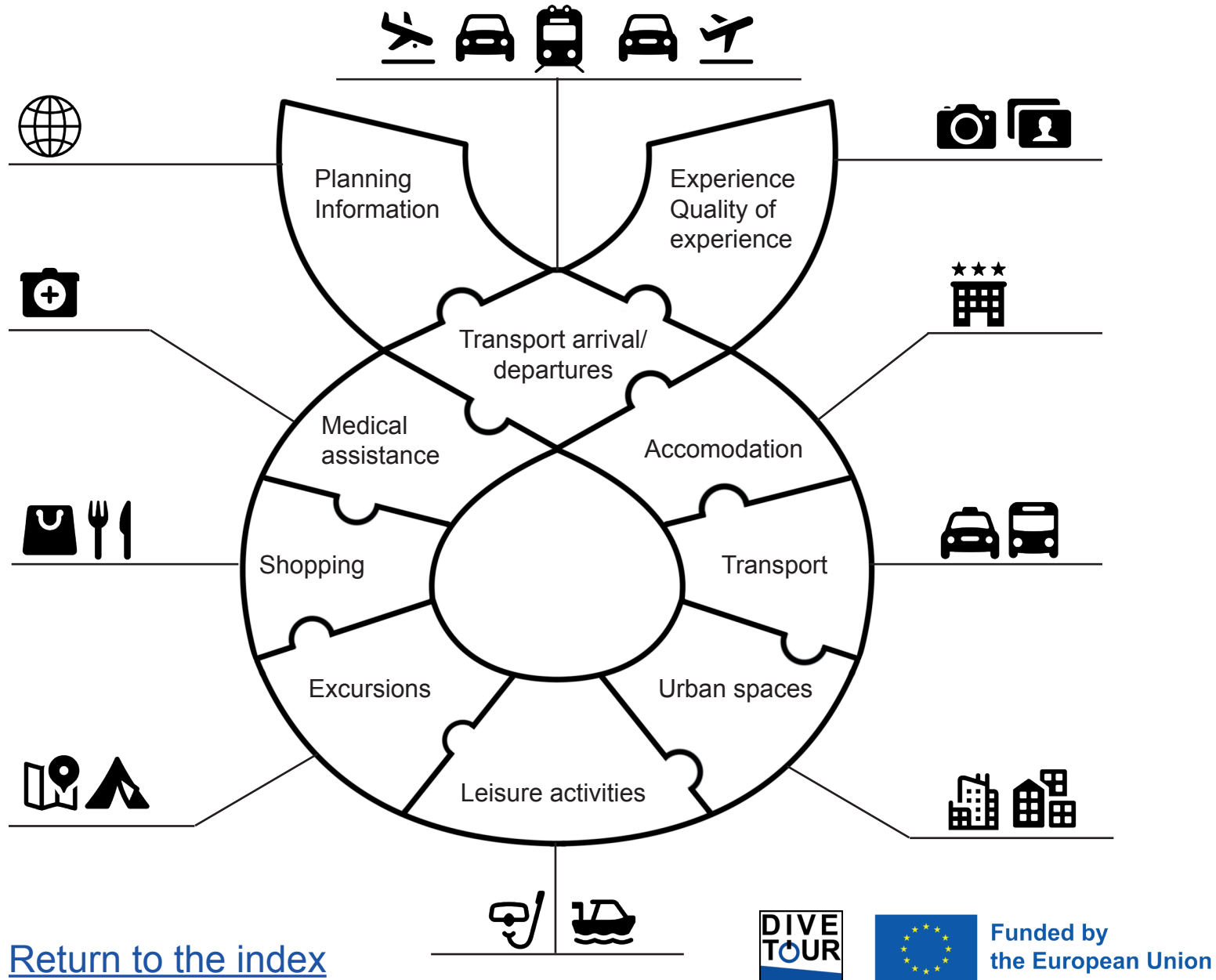
homes. In this case, the application of the concept of Universal Design to architectural design is essential for the creation of spaces that can be adapted at low cost through the resident's lifespan and equipped with environmental controls and devices as required.

In the same way, the development of increasingly complex **technologies**, such as smart phones, which can control many functions, requires engineers to make them easy to understand and use for everyone.

Over the years, many companies have realised that the **objects** they produced were not practical for many people with access requirements and have, accordingly, worked to improve their design and ease of use. This is how digital thermometers, mobile phones with simplified use, containers whose lid opens with a simple push, and many other objects that are today considered commonly used are improving the lives of thousands of people.

The **web** plays an increasingly central role in people's lives, and even **virtual worlds** are now made available throughout "meta-verses" to interact with other virtual or remote people, to work and to communicate with organisations or, as mentioned in Module 1, to explore a digital version of the venue

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before visiting it to check its accessibility features[1]. The ease of use of an internet website, a portal, a tablet, smartphone touch application is of great importance, with an increasing number of big and also small companies rethinking or redesigning their products to widen access to everyone.

In the design of tourism offers, the UD approach can be applied to staff training, ensuring good **customer service** with appropriate communication and interaction when serving customers with various access requirements. This will ensure that all customers enjoy access to the experiences that a tourism venue or attraction offers.

Considering the design of **public spaces**, it is very important that the public bodies of cities and destinations adapt urban planning with the creation of policies and with the allocation of funds to promote an inclusive public realm.

Despite the increasing awareness and uptake of UD, it should be emphasised that this approach is not yet part of "mainstream" practice. Indeed, only a minority of universities and design schools in Europe teach UD to their

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1 Refer to Module 1 part 2.1.2.3.

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students. The fundamental concepts of accessibility, diversity and inclusion are rarely present in the training courses for designers, and even less in schools of tourism and hospitality. Yet UD is gradually being recognised by tourism entrepreneurs and managers who have been exposed to its ideas and the emerging examples of good practice.

UD can be a way to stimulate economic, environmental and social sustainability, quality, comfort, safety and inclusion. At the same time, the UD approach can favour equality, independent living and the growth of a bigger tourism market appealing to a wider diversity of visitors, leading to more jobs and more value. This underlines the importance of UD as a "must" for the inclusive development of societies and a great economic opportunity for businesses and communities.

In Europe, a similar development to UD has taken place, named "**Design for All**", which means designing, developing and marketing mainstream products, services, systems and environments to be accessible and usable by as broad a range of users as possible. Design for All is not defined in terms of principles, like UD, but follows much the same logic, addressing diversity,

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inclusion and accessibility. One point of difference is that Design for All places more emphasis on the technical integration of assistive technologies for persons with disabilities through the use of common protocols in mainstream technical systems and devices such as mobility aids, screen readers, ATMs and other communication interfaces.

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1.5. Accessibility is not a 'separate' workstream:
it must be integrated across all the activities, organisation and services of the whole tourism value chain

Workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism sector know well that their own activity is only one link of the entire tourism value chain.This value chain consists of all the services provided to visitors, from the moment of the choice of a destination, to the booking, the transport, the destination, accommodation, eating, seeing attractions and events, travelling back home and sharing feedback and memories of the trip.
This means that if just one of the links of the chain is broken (is not accessible), the travel can be disrupted, so all the efforts made throughout the chain can be in vain and the whole visitor journey can be spoiled.

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Accessibility must be taken into consideration "horizontally" across all sectors of activity and at every step in organising a tourism service and experience, as it has to cover all aspects of the travel experience. Tourism operators in a destination must focus on cooperation and exchange of information, for example by developing joint offers and marketing. The success of an accessible tourism experience usually depends not only on one supplier but also on the quality offer of other service providers, who must endeavour to meet the same high standards.

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1.6. Introduction to ISO Standard 21902 'Tourism and related services – 'Accessible tourism for all'

The importance of an approach which can help designing and organising accessible tourism destinations, services and facilities has been taken into account by the International Standards Organisation, which has worked with stakeholders to develop the standard 21902:2021 'Tourism and related services - Accessible tourism for all'.

The standard is voluntary, like any other ISO standard, but it has been made to be applied internationally and recognised by all economic operators as an important and impartial tool. The need for this standard was identified by UNWTO, due to the lack of awareness about customers' access requirements and knowledge on accessibility among tourism providers about existing tools and possible solutions.

Tourism providers often have difficulties in finding information on where to get guidance and it is a fact that different national guidelines can give

contradictory information between different countries and regions. Moreover, a sector like tourism needs to be internationally standardised to some extent, as clients using services are often not local and they cannot know the local standards. Because of this they might have some expectations which may not be met.

The public sector has a responsibility to promote equal access to tourism and leisure opportunities for persons with disabilities, according to the UNCRPD, Article 30 and its enactment in the European Union and in Member States. The European Commission has established Directives and a European Accessibility Act to regulate certain services, for example by requiring accessibility standards in public procurements, when giving public funds to develop the sector. In this way public authorities can lead tourism development by requiring the use of Universal Design solutions in public procurements, funding infrastructures, buildings, transportation and equipment which are compliant. Planners, investors, designers and manufacturers would be stimulated to create accessible tourism environments and destinations, which will bring benefits to visitors, businesses and communities.

The ISO document, which is available for purchase, consists of a set of core requirements and recommendations for different involved tourism operators and tourism institutions, in all different aspects of the tourism chain, not leaving any link of the tourism supply chain uncovered. It gives public administrations, travel and tourism industry stakeholders, enterprises and organisations from the support sectors, tourist destinations and end users requirements and recommendations for the different domains of the tourism chain. Chapters include policies and strategies for passenger transport, urban and rural touring spaces to leisure activities, from MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions), to accommodation, food and beverage services, tour operators and travel agencies.

ISO Standard 21902:2021 web page

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1.7. Introduction to Web accessibility and the WCAG 2.0 guidelines

It is nowadays clear that a web environment which is not accessible to everyone does not take for granted the rights of people with access requirements. The growing importance of digital devices and the internet in our societies have made it more and more important to programme the web in a way that it can be used by all people, taking into consideration all the ways the internet can be read by users. Often people who do not have the possibility to use their hands need other devices, like for example a mouth stick or their eyes to type, people who cannot hear may use captions to watch videos. People who cannot see may use screen readers. To make this happen, websites and web tools need to be properly designed, with the use of the right "code" to be used by everyone.

Since many years, the Web Accessibility Initiative has taken the lead in producing international standards which can clearly define what is needed

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for web accessibility. The **"Web Accessibility Initiative"** claims that "making the web accessible benefits individuals, businesses, and society" (WAI). Accessibility can benefit everyone: for example, captions benefit anyone in a loud or in a quiet environment, and a good colour contrast can help anyone using a smartphone or a screen in a lighted environment causing screen reflections. At the same time many people with the age can experience problems in the use of their hands such as dexterity.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are intended for web designers and coders, to programme the web to be accessible and to give them tools to check for the compliance of their work. The four "user centred" guiding principles of accessibility of this pivotal document (version WCAG 2.0) are presented below. Each principle helps, from a user perspective, to anticipate issues and solutions to accessibility.

Principle 1: **Perceivable**
Users must be able to perceive the information being presented. It cannot be imperceptible to all their senses. From a "service design" point of view, programmers should ask themselves if there is anything on their website or

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app that a person with a disability would not be able to perceive?
They should take into consideration different types of assistive technology devices, as well as the widest variety of access needs, like for example, adding text alternatives to non-decorative images, adding captions and transcripts to videos, making sure the colour is not the only method used to convey meaning.

Principle 2: **Operable**
Users must be able to operate the interface. The interface cannot require interaction that a user cannot perform.The web or app designer should be able to ask him/herself if an users can control the interactive element. Its new website may contain a so-called "keyboard trap", one of those errors which prevent a user to find a way out from a page typing on a keyboard. This event should make the designer consider using a keyboard-only navigation to make its product accessible. Another example could be making sure that slideshows and media players have all of the controls shown.

Principle 3: **Understandable**
Users must be able to understand the information as well as the operation

of the user interface. The content or operation cannot be beyond their understanding.

Taking the perspective of the user, the designer should ask if all of the content has been clearly written and all of the interactions made available are easy to understand, and the logic order of the pages makes sense.

Taking into consideration these aspects can help writing a simpler text, with more predictable interactions and choices.

Principle 4: **Robust**

Users must be able to access content as technologies advance. As technologies and user agents evolve, the content should remain accessible.

The typical consideration that designers should do is whether their product can be used only in the newest versions of an operating system or browser, in a different mode depending on the screens and devices used (landscape or portrait orientation).

Designers are therefore forced to make sure that the website/app is still accessible with the evolution of the web.

As already mentioned in the introductory paragraph, the **European Accessibility Act** (2019) has complemented the Web Accessibility Directive

(2016) and binds the European countries legislations to comply with the digital accessibility standards which are presented in the **CEN/ CENELEC standard EN 301 549** which embraces the **WCAG** guidelines in their entirety.

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1.8. Accessibility for all as a major business opportunity and a competitive advantage

The experience of travelling as the opportunity to get to know new realities and new locations and as an experience of personal growth is everyone's right. Although some have more difficulty in doing it than others; that difficulty often arises from the existence of cultural and architectural barriers. Accessible Tourism seeks to provide higher quality experiences for everyone and that is why it concerns and involves the whole society.

It is about enhancing accommodation services and ensuring the accessibility to the accommodation facilities, transportation and mobility services, restaurant services and leisure and recreational services; it's about linking all the services in such a way that they can all be equally and easily used, seamlessly, to grant people with specific access requirements and their families a higher degree of autonomy in enjoying their tourist experience. Ensuring accessibility is thus the KEY to success.

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1.8.1. Breaking the myth that accessibility is necessarily costly

Small changes in attitude, behaviour and services offered can have a significant impact.

There are many myths and prejudices about the provision of an accessible environment, facilities and destinations.

The most common ones are:

- Accessibility benefits a small minority of the population
- Accessibility is ugly
- Accessibility should be added later
- Accessibility is hard and expensive

The managers of any facility, public or private, a hotel or a museum, a restaurant or a shopping centre, must have in their minds the concept and aim to make any public or private building accessible and usable by every person, from any possible angle of usage and following any personal decision on how to enjoy tourism and leisure time.

This is a conceptual starting point which will reflect on any subsequent decision to modify, if necessary, the built environment and hospitality. Interventions on accessibility differ in the following two situations:
1. Start a new building
2. Restore an existing one

In the first case there are several laws and regulations in many countries which direct the architects and the builders on how to include provisions for people with specific access requirements so that the final building will prove to be user friendly and completely inclusive for everybody.
Following the principles of Universal Design will add to the realisation of an accessible, aesthetically pleasing and fully responsive environment. In addition, planning from the very beginning all accessibility features will involve no additional cost in the building process.

In the second case there are many managerial decisions to reduce or minimise refurbishing costs:
1. Start by introducing those improvements which are easy to do and at a minimal cost. Short-term actions can be very effective in demonstrating to

customers that the business is embracing accessibility and that changes are on the way.

2. Plan larger modifications with a longer time span, in order to spread investments over the medium to long-term, absorbing them over several financial years.

In both cases, accessibility will benefit building owners and managers in the long term, increasing the value of their buildings while enlarging their clientele.

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1.8.2. Accessibility as a driver for innovation

The answer to meet the needs of customers with specific access requirements is the provision of services which will allow a complete accessible and inclusive participation in any tourism activity, along all the components of the tourism service chain.

Thus, being accessible will require to put in place any support that will allow all tourists to participate without any hindrance to their activities. Meeting the needs requires to know them and to provide all the tools that will overcome the constraints with personal technological assistive devices.

To illustrate how accessibility may be a driver for innovations, let us look at some of the **customers' needs**:

1. **Obtain clear and reliable information** on the destination, the activities he/she wants to do, how to move around, sightseeing etc. This brought to the development of a lot of systems, in the digital world, to give an answer to such an important requirement. From company websites, made accessible following the criteria of WAI W3C, to social media where information was exchanged on a peer-to-peer level to videos showing the destination and its

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level of usability, to many assistive devices which met the needs of people with specific disabilities (Visual and hearing impaired people) with speaking or captioned texts. It is also important to notice that the same means were largely used by the tourism industry to promote their products and services, speaking "the language" of their potential customers. Many information Apps filled the gap of "traditional information systems", providing interactive instant information and location of facilities, selected on the basis of filters (such as accessibility) required by the users and structured to be accessible for everyone.

2. Be able to participate

Any tourist, in the destination of their choice, is looking for activities which complement their stay, such as visiting monuments, participating in sport events, eating out, attending events or conferences.

This brought to the design and provision of some tools which then proved to be useful for every visitor.

- Audio-guides in museums or historical areas
- Picture menus in restaurant for children or people with learning difficulties or those who cannot understand the language

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- Large print information on printed material and variable font size on websites for people with visual impairments
- Subtitled speeches in conference and events
- Hearing enhancement systems such as induction loops for people with hearing impairments. The "induction loop" or "hearing loop" connects a speaker's microphone by radio frequency waves directly to the user's hearing aid).

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1.8.3. Accessibility as a driver for sustainable, liveable and welcoming destinations

As already highlighted in Module 1, accessibility and sustainability are closely related. Responsibility in tourism means the respect of both the destination, its citizens and tourism providers and the recognition of the rights of each customer, regardless of their condition, to enjoy tourism and leisure time.

The concept of sustainable tourism entails that everyone in the supply chain should be considerate of the destination's welfare and preservation. A tourist with a disability should be treated in an equal manner to any other tourist and is consequently responsible with regard to any offer that they will be able to enjoy.

Accessibility helps in creating an inclusive destination to the extent that the different offers of the tourism service chain are all open to everybody, in a seamless system. This will involve all the actors in charge of the development and promotion of a destination, public and private bodies, to design the type of tourism that will be acceptable and comfortable for them.

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Tourists, tourism destinations, local communities, tourism operators can be considered as being part of the same ecosystem. From this point of view, suppliers and destination managers should start considering new models of tourism development where a tourist destination has the task of bringing together tour operators and communities to build their offers together
A thriving tourist destination is a place where guests and community are able to "give more" to each other generating more well-being (economic, environmental, social).
A community that chooses its own way of welcoming will be **more welcoming, inclusive and accessible**.

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1.8.4. Accessibility as a driver of higher quality hospitality services

Accessibility in Tourism stands for "quality ". It is the set of services, facilities and infrastructures that enable tourists with specific access requirements to enjoy their holidays and leisure time without obstacles or difficulties.

It is a matter of improving reception services and ensuring the accessibility of accommodation, transport and mobility, catering and leisure facilities; of linking these services together so that they can be truly usable, without interruption, to guarantee a large degree of autonomy. If the provision of accessibility is planned based on the principles of Universal Design and not creating "separate" areas in the facilities, where guests with access requirements will be hosted exclusively, the whole structure will be designed as an inclusive environment where every guest will feel comfortable.

Moreover, the use of digital devices, some of which were initially designed to help customers with specific access requirements, can be appreciated by all customers. Making life easier is mandatory for some guests but it is extremely well received by all customers. Accessibility has to be regarded as a measure

to increase the appeal of any facility, as the key success factor to achieve a wider market share, higher customer satisfaction and greater loyalty of guests.

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What is convenient for you may be essential for others. The improvements we are making at our hotels are not just of benefit to guests with a disability.
Did you know that comforts such as height-adjustable beds, remote controls and single-grip mixer taps were originally designed to help disabled people.
But that doesn't stop everyone being able to benefit from them.

 Quote from Scandic Hotel Group
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1.8.5. Accessibility as a benefit for both visitors and the local community

If Accessibility is applied with an overall vision of "destination accessibility" all the different components of the tourism service chain should be taken into consideration. Many of these components: transport, cultural heritage venues, sport facilities, parks, restaurants, ATMs, shopping centres etc., will be used by visitors with specific access requirements but they offer services that are normally used also by local residents. Residents may have some specific access requirements as well.
Consequently, what is normally considered as an accessible provision for tourists will prove useful and comfortable for the inhabitants of the destination. The quality of life will be enormously improved.

To reach this objective, however, public and private bodies must have a common vision of the wellbeing of their citizens, sound strategies and a short/medium term planning and shape their place as a "welcoming destination for all".
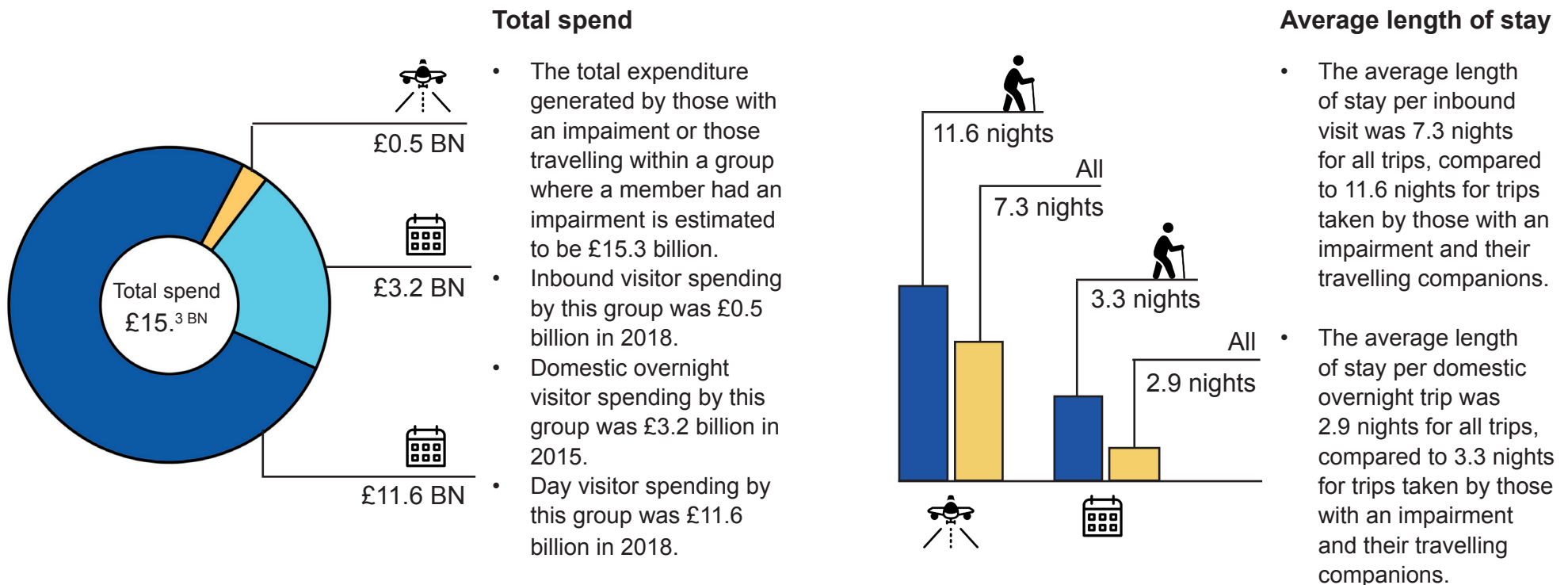
1.8.6. Accessibility and return on investment (ROI)

The Return On Investment (ROI) of accessibility measures must be seen against the background of figures that show how the market of tourists with disabilities is huge and still largely underserved. Despite the drop in travelling, due to the Pandemic, the number of people with disabilities able and wanting to travel is still there and ready to resume travelling in the near future.

Consequently, we may consider past data on the volumes of travel generated by tourists with disabilities as worth considering in the strategies of enterprises that are looking ahead for a more profitable management of their offer. A few examples show that providing products that are suitable for the target represented by people with specific access requirements gives a good return. This growing market is more active and is producing more revenue, compared to the rest of the market.

Total value of accessible tourism market in Great Britain is around £17.7 billion (England £15.3bn, Scotland £1.3bn, Wales £1.11bn)[2].

Data from VisitEngland (2018)

Total spend

£0.5 BN

£3.2 BN

Total spend
£15.3 BN

£11.6 BN

- The total expenditure generated by those with an impaiment or those travelling within a group where a member had an impairment is estimated to be £15.3 billion.
- Inbound visitor spending by this group was £0.5 billion in 2018.
- Domestic overnight visitor spending by this group was £3.2 billion in 2015.
- Day visitor spending by this group was £11.6 billion in 2018.

Average length of stay

11.6 nights

All
7.3 nights

3.3 nights

All
2.9 nights

- The average length of stay per inbound visit was 7.3 nights for all trips, compared to 11.6 nights for trips taken by those with an impairment and their travelling companions.

- The average length of stay per domestic overnight trip was 2.9 nights for all trips, compared to 3.3 nights for trips taken by those with an impairment and their travelling companions.

2 Great Britain Day Visitor Survey 2018, Great Britain Tourism Survey 2015 and International Passenger Survey 2018

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Watch on YouTube:

Advice from Ross Calladine, VisitEngland - Boost Accessibility - YouTube

Additional data on the volume and value of the accessible tourism market is provided by the US-based Open Doors Organization, which released its 4th nationwide study on the travel patterns and spending of American adults with disabilities. Conducted by The Harris Poll in June/July 2020, it focuses on 2018-19 when travel was still booming. During that 2-year period, 27 million travellers took a total of 81 million trips and spent $58.7 billion on just their own travel, up from $34.6 billion in the prior 2015 Study.

1.8.7. Employment of persons with disabilities in the tourism sector

Employing persons with disabilities creates business opportunities. When supporting the rights and the opportunity to extend the possibility to travel and to enjoy tourism experiences to people with access needs, it is clear, as already explained, that training the staff and the managers is a crucial issue. Adding the subjects of accessibility, universal design, customer care and service design for all to a quality training curriculum for workers in the sector can enhance the offer of an enterprise and the skills and employability of the workforce. But there is another **"win-win" aspect** to be considered, which is the importance and the **opportunity to employ people with disabilities in this sector**. This is complemented by introducing practices in the **VET sector to work together with people with disabilities.**

An environment which is accessible can be an inclusive environment for people with disabilities, and at the same time people with disabilities can become an important resource for a tourism enterprise because of their abilities of knowing the various needs of people and to care for them with the

right empathy.

A key publication by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), indicates the many benefits of employing people with disabilities in the workforce, including the following:

- Positive impact on workforce morale
- Benefits of a diverse workforce, including people with disabilities
- Improved service for disabled consumers
- Good levels of productivity linked to low levels of absenteeism and low levels of rotation
- Improvement in business practices to accommodate people with disabilities resulting in
- Practices benefitting all employees[3].

'Experiencing' disability:
how to make aware and inform co-workers and staff

It is, however, important to stress that the entire process of searching for staff,

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3 Business as unusual: Making workplaces inclusive of people with disabilities (ILO, 2014)

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interviewing, hiring and welcoming people with access requirements in the workforce can become positive and also a viable business case only if the managers and companies approach the employment of people with disabilities in the right way.

There are a number of official resources, made available by organisations such as the ILO which can give a number of important insights, tools and instruments in helping people with disabilities to prepare for work, managers and workers to be well prepared to welcome colleagues with disabilities in the workplace. There are also a number of important best practices and stories to remember. These can be found in videos and media on the Internet.

Despite the possible different provisions for the employment of a person with disabilities set by national laws, there are a number of general points which should be considered which can help the process to be effective both for managers, co-workers and workers with disabilities.

It is important first of all to consider the entire candidate "journey" for a position, which starts from the **search of a job**, before any curriculum vitae or an interview.

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It is important that the information channels through which the post is advertised are accessible for people with disabilities. Secondly, it is important that the same **advertisement is inclusive** and without conditions which could be an obstacle for people with access needs.

Digital communication channels must be inclusive as well, to help candidates to declare any possible need for the post itself or for the interview process.

The **interview** must happen in an accessible environment and a **questionnaire** with request for **specific needs** in terms of accessibility and in terms of "reasonable accommodation" should be available and provided to the candidate by the manager, who should not underestimate the importance of working in an inclusive environment.

In this regard it is important to clarify the difference between the concept of accessibility and that of "reasonable accommodation". Accessibility covers matters such as the design of the built environment, the types of technologies used in the workplace or other ways in which work is structured. Accessibility implies strategic planning by managers and entrepreneurs in advance, and on a continuous basis. As mentioned above, Universal Design is an approach

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that aims to ensure that products, environments, programmes and services are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation. Effective approaches to accessibility should reduce the need for individuals to seek reasonable accommodation; if **information technology (IT)** equipment is designed for the needs of a variety of users, then requests for specific adaptations will be less frequent.

The great advantage of **planning for an accessible hotel or restaurant** for guests is that that environment will probably be **already inclusive for workers with disabilities**, while the managers and the workers will only have to see how it is more efficient to work with a new colleague, being ready for possible adaptations.

One of the best practices in the tourism sector is the experience of ILUNION HOTELS, a Spanish chain of 29 hotels (3, 4 and 5 stars) in 13 destinations, in which 40 per cent of the employees have some type of disability. In addition, four of the hotels are Special Employment Centres – workplaces where at least 70 per cent of the staff are people with disabilities. The main purpose is to create and guarantee paid employment for people with disabilities under

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the same fair conditions that might be found in other companies. It offers opportunities to those that encounter the most problems in finding a job, including people with intellectual disability, mental illness, visual and audio impairments and physical disabilities.

Watch the video by ILUNION Hotels

In Brussels, the restaurant, 65 degrés, is run by a non-profit association whose goal is to support the inclusion of persons with learning difficulties in society - and in employment. Its staff include young people with cognitive impairments working as cooks, waiters and in other roles.

In Italy and other EU countries the Valueable Network, comprised of socially responsible companies in the hospitality sector, supports the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities.

One of the big advantages of these initiatives is that everything is planned and designed to be accessible for all, which makes shared spaces and rooms particularly comfortable, with inclusive digital devices and services. All employees receive specific training on accessibility, and customer service for people with disabilities.

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