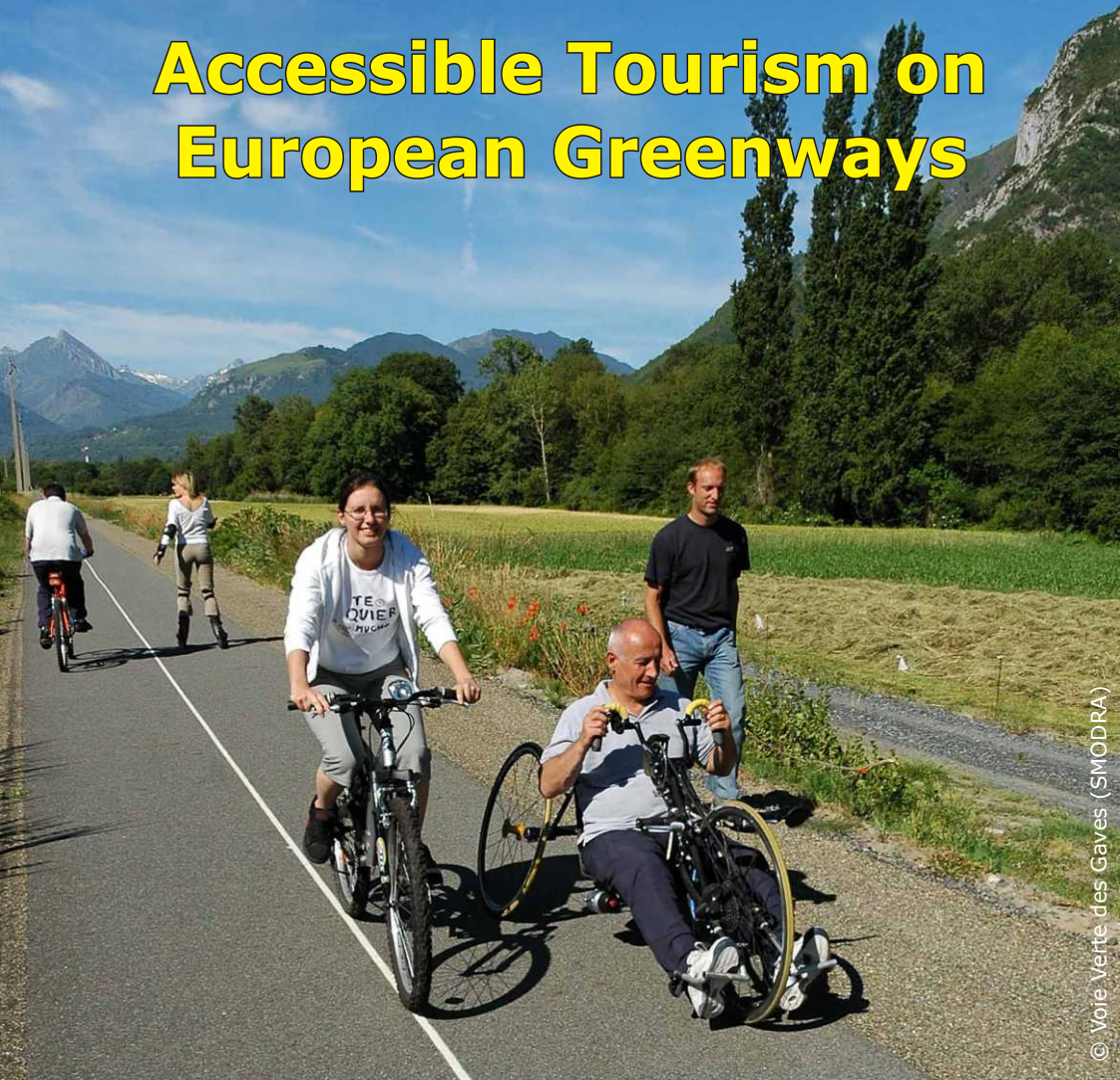


Accessible Tourism on European Greenways



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GreenWays4tour



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Why promote tourism for all?

A right and a business opportunity

1. It ensures equal opportunity in the use and enjoyment of tourism services. The right of all citizens to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport is enshrined in Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Non-accessibility to tourist destinations, products and services is without a doubt a subtle but very effective form of indirect discrimination.



2. Accessibility enhances the quality of the tourism offer. Although no European certification of accessible tourism currently exists, standardization agencies of the various EU member states are incorporating “Universal Accessibility” criteria into their quality standards. It is important for the planners, managers and promoters of the

various European greenways to meet the standards in their respective countries. “Designing for the minority”, planning from the outset, and thinking about the needs of customers with different abilities (persons with physical, sensorial or intellectual disabilities, but also senior citizens and children) is more economical and efficient than adopting corrective measures afterwards.

3. Accessible tourism benefits everyone. According to figures published by ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism), it is estimated that 127 million people, or 27% of the EU population, would benefit from accessible tourism, and that this niche industry has an estimated value of 80 billion euros per year. That figure doesn't include pregnant women, families with young children and, vitally, travellers with disabilities from the US, Australia and the rest of the world. (ENAT Congress. Valencia, Spain. November 2007). The UK figure for the National Cyclist Network indicates that “on rural traffic-free sections over 6% of trips are made by those registered as disabled” (Sustrans 2010).



4. People with disabilities and senior citizens form a growth market segment. There are over 500 million disabled persons in the world today, over 50 million of them in Europe. This means that 9% of the world's population has some form of disability, 12% if we take into account the elderly. What we call “senior tourism” is an important and growing niche market: in Europe alone there are 90 million people between 55 and 80 years old. The UN estimates that 21% of the world's population will be over 60 by 2050.

5. The disabled segment may be viewed as a “multi-customer” segment. Every disabled person who travels will be accompanied by an average of 1.5 people. A survey of the tourism habits of physically disabled people (PREDIF, Spain. 2004) reveals that 92% of those surveyed travel accompanied by friends or relatives.

6. Senior and disabled tourism reduces the seasonality of the tourism sector. In common with those who have retired, a large number of disabled people have no work responsibilities. However, according to PREDIF, disabled people can afford to travel and spend an average of 79.3% more on their trips than people without disabilities.



Accessible tourism at European greenways



Greenways are characterized by being among the few nature routes which are accessible to people with different levels of mobility; the elderly, pregnant women, young children, the disabled. They rarely involve slopes steeper than 3%, since most of them follow the routes of disused railway lines and canal towpaths. Furthermore, the engineering projects behind the development tend to apply technical solutions to optimize accessibility levels, thereby turning a large number of European greenways into tourism resources that are accessible for all.

However, a greenway will only be truly accessible when the entirety of the settings, services and products on offer can be accessed, used and enjoyed by everyone, in a standardized, independent and safe manner. It is not enough for the routes to be merely accessible; all the elements making up the travel experience (previous information, transport, settings, activities and products offered, etc.) must also be accessible. This is what is known as the “accessibility chain”.

In this respect, the most accessible localities close to greenways which have been adopting accessibility criteria, now have another business opportunity as “accessible tourism destinations”. Meanwhile, local tourism enterprises have the chance to capture this new market segment, composed of disabled travellers who wish to make use of European greenways.



In order to achieve this goal it will be essential to create:

1.- The physical setting of the tourism resources. The hotels, bars, restaurants, information offices, transport, shops and leisure opportunities available in the vicinity of the



greenway should meet the needs of this market segment. Among the features most valued by people of restricted mobility who use greenways are the availability of adapted toilets in the area and the possibility of using cycles adapted to their needs (handbikes, ...)

2.- Customer care. It is important for the customer care staff of the various tourism resources to be aware of the needs of the disabled and to develop skills and abilities

so as to give them the attention and service they require, and to know what level of accessibility the facility has in order to be in a position to provide visitors with accurate and truthful information.

3.- Dissemination of the offer of accessible tourism. The information provided to disabled tourists must be clear, detailed and truthful

Towards accessible tourism

People with disabilities normally encounter limitations on the options open to them in terms of tourism and leisure activities, because most of the tourism offer is not accessible to them.

The prospect of direct and personal access to the discovery and enjoyment of the planet's resources constitutes a right equally open to all the world's inhabitants... Family, youth, student and senior tourism and tourism for people with disabilities, should be encouraged and facilitated.

Right to tourism. Article 7. Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. United Nations and the World Tourism Organization. 21 December 2001

The right to tourism for all highlights the need to create spaces and resources suitable for everyone, thereby ensuring the right of the disabled to free choice. In this respect, European greenways are ideal tools for the development of tourism for all.



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European greenways are “Communication routes reserved exclusively for non-motorized journeys, developed in an integrated manner which enhances both the environment and quality of life of the surrounding area. These routes should meet satisfactory standards of width, gradient, and surface condition to ensure that they are both user-friendly and low-risk for users of all abilities. In this respect, canal towpaths and disused railway lines are a highly suitable resource for the development of greenways” (Declaration of Lille, September 2000)

European greenways open up a future full of possibilities for the tourism sector.



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www.greenways4tour.org

European Greenways Association

www.aevv-egwa.org

www.accessibletourism.org