

## Guide to best practices and recommendations for accessible Greenways



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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

Leisure is considered to be a fundamental human right and an aid to personal development, and is something that no one should be deprived of due to reasons of disability, gender, sexual orientation, age, race, religion, belief, health, economic situation or any other personal or social circumstance. An inclusive leisure environment is one to which everyone has access and can interrelate, and outdoor spaces are increasingly popular as leisure and free time destinations. In order to ensure inclusive access to natural and urban areas we need look at what the routes providing this access are like. If these infrastructures enable us all to connect with the environment and enjoy it, and if we can make these routes accessible, we will be providing everyone with an equal opportunity of enjoying these sites.

This publication aims to highlight some



best practices for accessible greenways in Europe, some exemplary inclusion initiatives related to greenways, the basic characteristics to take into account when designing accessible greenways, and the advantages of moving forward towards resources and models of accessible tourism.

According to the classification of the World Health Organization (WHO), disability is defined as “the restriction or absence of the ability to carry out a task in the way or within the margins of what is considered to be normal”.

There are four main types of disability, classified according to which ability is impaired:

- **Physical or motor disability:** This refers to a difficulty to carry out conventional motor activities, whether regional or general, due to congenital or acquired causes.
- **Intellectual impairment:** This is characterized by an intellectual performance which is significantly below average, and which affects the overall development of the persons, since the development of other aspects such as motor, perceptive, cognitive, linguistic, affective and social skills is also affected.
- **Hearing impairment:** This impairment affects not only the ear but also the structures and functions associated with hearing..
- **Visual impairment:** This refers to the impairment of the visual apparatus, not only the eye but also the structures and functions associated with eyesight.

## 1.1. Accessible tourism in Europe. Towards tourism for all

As a result of their growing level economic and social integration, disabled persons, who in the European Union account for 10% of the total population, take an increasingly greater part in tourist activities. This is in spite of the obstacles and barriers of all kinds that still persist and which often prevents them from accessing tourism products and services in a normal manner.

disabled persons to start working towards a common goal: "Tourism for all".

### Main benefits of accessible tourism

Why promote tourism for all? The answer is simple and is based on two compelling reasons: firstly because it is a human right and secondly because it is a business opportunity. Undoubtedly two very weighty arguments for promoting accessible tourism and tourism for all European citizens through the development of greenways.

Benefits of accessible tourism:

**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. "Design for the minority", plan from the outset 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.



The elimination or reduction of these barriers which limit disabled persons' access to tourism is not only called for by the need to observe the principle of equality of rights and opportunities enshrined in the laws of the European Union and its member states, but it is also an effective way of bringing new groups of citizens into the tourism market.

Some years ago this unquestionable reality led to European associations of



**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.



Also, some thought should be given to the idea that, for the great majority of people, disability (or situations of disability and dependency) is only a matter of time.

**5. The disabled segment may be viewed as a “multi-customer” segment.** Studies performed in various EU countries confirm that every disabled person who travels will be accompanied by an average of 0.5 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 but instead depend on retirement or invalidity pensions and other benefits. However, it should be noted that, according to PREDIF, disabled people can afford to travel and spend an average of 79.3% more on their trips than people without disabilities. Another significant fact is that visitors who have a health condition or impairment - and their travelling companions - spend over £2bn each year in England (Visit England at ENAT)





**7. Creation of customer loyalty.** Disabled persons have fewer choices. 63% of the respondents say that they are very loyal to accessible destinations and to those they already know.

It is a fact that persons of reduced mobility do not tend to have access to a wide range of leisure options, which is especially serious in the case of children and young people. This lack of resources brings about a physical and intellectual impoverishment, which has a negative impact on their recovery and subsequent social integration.

The options of leisure activities for disabled persons are often limited to passive rather than active activities, and in particular indoor rather than outdoor activities, when the latter would provide them with a number of benefits:

- **Physical:** It improves people's state of bodily health and physical fitness.
- **Psychological:** It relieves anxiety, prevents depression, drives self-improvement, encourages acceptance and improves self-esteem.
- **Socials:** It fosters social relations, teamwork and the development of such values as camaraderie and solidarity.



## 1.2. Greenways4Tour Project

The Greenways4tour project fits in with the call to “promote transnational thematic tourism” products in the European Union to develop sustainable tourism. For the first time, greenways have been included in the grant programme of the European Commission's General Directorate of Tourism (2011), indicating that they are an area regarded to have great potential and value for the development of sustainable tourism within Europe.

The aim of the project, it promotes and increase international awareness of European greenways as excellent facilities for cyclists, hikers and people with disabilities and improving sustainable tourism choices in Europe. Objectives got:

- To launch the European Greenways Observatory, a web site (to provide an information channel on a European scale) which gives information on greenways in Europe, their main features, location and the general services they offer.
- To facilitate the exchange of information, drawing on existing expertise and sharing best practice experiences in EU Member



States, between relevant players and stakeholder organizations.

- To encourage improvement in the offer of services on greenways, through awareness-building and an improvement in the know-how of local service and equipment providers on greenways.
- To encourage the use of greenways, which generally run through rural areas, by specific groups of tourists, particularly cycle tourists and people with disabilities.
- To serve as inspiration for countries, regions and areas which do not yet have greenways and to encourage them to build greenways and include them in their tourism offer.

Further Information:

[www.greenways4tour.org](http://www.greenways4tour.org)

[www.aevv-egwa.org](http://www.aevv-egwa.org)

[www.greenwayseurope.org](http://www.greenwayseurope.org)

*“Promotion of transnational thematic tourism products in the EU as means of sustainable tourism development” 12/G/ENT/TOU/11/411B in the framework of the preparatory action “Sustainable Tourism”*

*Partners of the project:*

- European Greenways Association (EGWA), Lead partner/coordinator, (Spain)
- Università degli Studi di Milano (Italy)
- Eurogites, European Federation of Farm and Village Tourism (Spain)
- Fundación de los Ferrocarriles Españoles (Spain)
- Basquetour Turismoaren Euskal Agentzia (Spain)
- Nadece Partnersvi (Czech Republic)
- Consorci de les Vies Verdes de Girona (Spain)
- Comunidade Intermunicipal da Região Dão Lafões (Portugal)









# Chapter 2 - European Greenways and their contribution to accessible tourism

## 2.1. European Greenways

Greenways are transport corridors, developed along independent routes following past or disused communication pathways and tracks that are available for non-motorised soft traffic.

They provide a series of common characteristics:

- Ease of passage: their slopes, either low or zero gradient, allow their use by all types of users, including mobility impaired people.
- Safety, due to their separation from roads, and to appropriate safeguards at the intersections.
- Continuity with suitable solutions for any difficulties and alternative routes.
- Respect for the environment along itineraries and encouraging its respect by the users.

Greenways provide facilities based on the infrastructures and fixtures of the old pathways and tracks, such as disused railway stations and lock keepers' houses. These facilities can take several shapes: general accommodation, museums, bicycle rentals, accommodation for equestrians, hostels... They serve local users as well as tourists.

The greenways should have information available such as maps and brochures, on the route itself and on access to nearby sites of interest is supplied.

Greenways...

- Improve communications and non-motorised itineraries in Europe: hundreds of kilometres running through European countries are available for pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians and mobility impaired people.
- Promote healthier and more balanced ways of life and transport reducing the congestion and the pollution of cities.
- Promote rural development, active tourism and local employment.
- Encourage a more human and closer relationship among citizens.
- Bring Europeans closer to both their natural and cultural environment.

## 2.2. Best practices for European greenways in matters of accessibility and inclusive leisure

Despite all the good reasons mentioned above, the truth is that the offer of accessible tourism is sparse. Hence the opportunity to

*The 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)**



promote greenways as an access to nature for everyone, and to drive the creation of business opportunities which take into account the needs and demands of all tourists.

In fact, when planning, designing, building, maintaining, managing or promoting greenways, objectives such as integration, adaptation of the routes, and accessibility are often taken into consideration. In the pages that follow we present some of these exemplary initiatives.

### Cross-cutting approach: Ever-present accessibility

In the workshops, conferences and courses that are organized around greenways, accessibility should always be present as a cross-cutting issue. It is a goal which should be taken into account during the planning, design, construction and maintenance of greenways. But not just then. In the publications, videos, brochures and any kind of promotional material, the disabled users must also be considered if we are to make greenways truly accessible to everyone. In this way, assuming no link fails, we will be able to achieve what is known as *“the accessibility chain.”*

Rapid progress is being made in this respect in many European countries. In fact, a very important change is taking place with regard to how the issue of accessibility is being tackled. Some years ago accessibility was the subject of special forums on disability; now the issue is considered at all kinds of events as a matter of course.

It is also significant that specific workshops on accessibility on greenways are being organized, such as the Workshop on Accessible Tourism on Greenways which was held in Madrid as part of the FITUR International Tourism Fair (February 2013).

The workshops were organized jointly by PREDIF and the European Greenways Association (EGWA) with the collaboration of the FFE, with the aim of calling attention to the new niche markets and the business opportunities linked to greenway-based tourism.

This workshop was opened by Pedro Ortún, European Commission Director of Tourism, who underlined the Commission's interest in fostering the development of





greenways as one of their priority strategies to promote sustainable tourism in Europe. He also highlighted the effort they were making to ensure that tourism takes its place as a cross-cutting activity in the various fields of work of the European Commission: transport, education, culture, rural development, etc.

During the event the Greenways4tour project was presented long with examples of best practices on accessible greenways and the promotion of tourism. The European greenways promotional video and the brochure on accessible tourism on greenways (on three languages), both

produced by FFE, were also presented in the workshop. Both are available at [www.aevv-egwa.org](http://www.aevv-egwa.org)

Similarly, in 2010 the FFE published an online brochure aimed at entrepreneurs and workers operating in the area of Spanish greenways entitled "Get employed: Accessible Leisure on Greenways", available at [www.viasdeempleoverde.com](http://www.viasdeempleoverde.com).

## The French Voies Vertes commit to accessibility

In 2001 the French Directorate General for Tourism presented its "Tourisme et Handicaps" classification label, with the aim of providing reliable, descriptive and objective information regarding accessibility to tourist areas and services, taking into consideration all kinds of disability. At the same time they were trying to drive the development of an adaptive tourism offer and integrate it within the more general offer.

For greenways, the label sets out a series of specific requirements to be met depending on each type of disability:

- Motor impairment.
  - A hard, smooth, non-slip surface with a minimum width of 3 m.





- Access car parks to the greenways with reserved areas, close to the greenway, for vehicles of persons with motor impairment, requiring an extra minimum width of 1.40 m and a wheelchair friendly surface.
- Slopes of less than 5% and camber of less than 2%, when possible.
- Systematically enhanced safety at points at which there is some kind of danger, such as ditches or bridges, by means of railings, barriers, etc.
- Descriptive, informative and directional signage at the correct height and adaptive (inclined when necessary).
- Toilets adapted to meet accessibility guidelines and standards.

- Adaptive furniture (properly designed picnic tables and chairs) distributed along the greenway and around the car parks.

## ► Hearing and intellectual impairment.

- Very specific information panels at the entrance, with information about distances, emergency telephones, map of the route, ....
- Good directional and informative signage, if possible combining text and image.

## ► Visual impairment.

- Signs with large lettering and contrasting colours.
- No obstacles at eye level.
- Systematically enhanced safety at danger points.
- Existence of tactile ground surface indicators.
- Audio announcements and information panels in Braille.

Below we describe two exemplary French experiences where these guidelines have been followed in the development of accessible greenways.





### • Gaves Greenway

The [Gaves Greenway](#), located in the French Pyrenees near Lourdes, is 18 km long and is run by SMDRA (Mixed Syndicate for Rural Development in the district of Argelès-Gazost). The Gaves Greenway is accessible to all types of users, whatever their disability.

Since the year 2000, three phases of work have been carried out so that this accessible route could receive “Tourisme et Handicap” certification. In the first phase the disused railway line was converted into a greenway,

Thus, in 2005 the Gaves Greenway was the first French greenway to receive the “Tourisme et Handicaps” label for three impairments: hearing, motor and intellectual (at the time there were still some issues to be resolved before the visual impairment label could be awarded). The total cost of this phase was €210,000, funded by the programme leader, the National Park of the Pyrenees, local commonwealths and municipalities, and the Department.

Five years after its issue, this certification requires a new assessment to take into



and in the second, work was carried out to ensure the trail's total accessibility, as required by the “Tourisme et Handicap” label. This included creating a lateral pedestrian track and resurfacing it with a different material to help the visually impaired, installing horizontal markings in white to indicate the centreline of the trail and its types of uses (cyclists, skaters and a pedestrian path for walkers).

account any changes to the standards. Thus, in 2010, a new effort would enable the greenway's information panels to be adapted to all disabilities and, in particular, visual impairment. Work was carried out along two lines. Firstly, on the installation of new panels (22 totems) giving information about the towns and villages of the valley and the valley's natural wealth. Each text is repeated below on a braille plaque, together

with an engraved map of the greenway. Secondly, work was done on the three Service Information Points located at the main accesses to the greenway, each with its own embossed map, with a legend also in braille, representing the entire extension of the greenway. These Information Points are also fitted with speakers which give a welcoming message in three languages and are triggered automatically by sensors. The total cost of this phase, also funded by the programme leader, the SMDRA and the Department, was €72,046.

With this new development work, the Gaves Greenway was awarded the "Tourisme et Handicaps" label once again in 2010, this time for all four impairments.

Thanks to these efforts, among others, in 2009 the Gaves Greenway received the Second European Greenways Prize in the category "Sustainable Tourism and Development".

### • Saône-et-Loire Greenways

In 1997 [Saône-et-Loire](#) became the first French Department to have an operational greenway, on the route of the old Givry to

Cluny railway line. Today, this route forms part of an important network of cyclable trails and greenways which have made the Bourgogne a benchmark for mobility and sustainable tourism, both in France and abroad.

With regard to the economic and touristic results, studies conducted by the managing authority of the Saône-et-Loire greenways report a 30% increase in the turnover of hotels and restaurants close to the greenways, and it is calculated that the economic impact of the Saône-et-Loire greenways is in the region of €45,000 per kilometre a year. Meanwhile, the counters installed on the various cyclable routes return a figure of 1,000,000 users in 2011, of whom 25% are tourists, half of them foreigners.

As early as the year 2000, the authority responsible for the tourism promotion of Saône-et-Loire carried out a survey on the offer of tourism in the region capable of meeting the specific demands of persons with disabilities, with the aim of raising the awareness of tour operators and implement the philosophy of accessibility at their facilities and installations. This entity







(the ADT) verifies the implementation of accessibility measures on the ground, advises greenway entrepreneurs on accessibility issues, forges links with associations, and raises the awareness of tourism professionals and the project's sponsors. It is also responsible for the communication and promotion of the project.



These measures resulted in the Saône-et-Loire region being awarded their first “Tourisme et Handicaps” certification in 2007, for a 3.2 km stretch of greenway, accessible for three types of disability: motor, hearing and intellectual. Later another 34.5 km of the Cluny to Buxy greenway was also certified. As happened with the Gaves Greenway, five years later, in 2012, a second inspection was made in order to certify that the Saône-et-Loire greenways had kept up with the new criteria in force.

Finally, it should be noted that as well as obtaining “Tourisme et Handicaps” certification, specific awareness raising activities were organized in the region to publicize the greenways’ accessibility certification to all interested parties. For example, on the greenways’ website it was pointed out which greenways had been awarded accessibility certification and a guide was published entitled “Tourisme et Handicaps” in which the accessible tourism areas and services were listed and explained.

### Accessibility diagnostics on Spanish greenways

Since its creation in 1993, the Spanish Greenways programme has been in the forefront of the promotion of universal accessibility standards on its many greenways, which now total 2,000 km in length. The public foundation which coordinates this national programme, the FFE, is directly in charge of the development of a number of accessibility projects, apart from being responsible for the production of this Best Practices Guide within the framework of the Greenways4tour project.

During 2013, FFE has been working on two complementary projects with the collaboration of various foundations, both public (Fundación Biodiversidad of the Ministry of the Environment) and private



(ONCE, Vodafone), and of PREDIF, a not-for-profit association dedicated to promoting actions on behalf of all physically disabled persons:

- Greenways accessibility diagnostic
- Natural tourism for all through greenways

Within the framework of these two projects, the FFE is conducting an accessibility diagnostic on 12 greenways. This involves making an in-depth analysis of all the elements of the infrastructure (track bed, viaducts, tunnels, bridges, rest areas, etc.)

and identifying those which could hinder or restrict the passage or orientation of persons with any kind of disability. A number of establishments and tourism services in the vicinity of the greenway will also be studied (accommodation, bars and restaurants, adaptive bike rental...) in order to audit their accessibility levels. The intention is to provide a comprehensive tourism offer to disabled persons visiting greenways, who need to have accessible services in addition to those already provided along the greenway. One of the most essential facilities for a disabled tourist visiting a greenway are adaptive toilets near the trail.

On the basis of this audit, a number of specific measures will be proposed for the greenways that were studied, and others of a more general nature for the greenways as a whole. All these proposals will be included in a “Best practices guide for the creation of accessible greenways”, which will be disseminated through [www.viasverdes.com](http://www.viasverdes.com). This guide will be aimed at the designers and managers of the 102 Spanish greenways currently in existence and all those in their

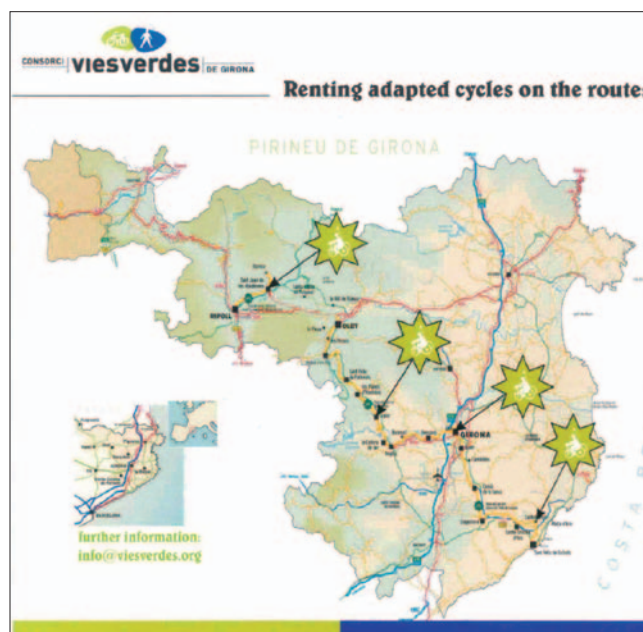






planning stage or under construction. It will cover both the accessibility of greenway infrastructure per se and that of its complementary services (car parks, toilets, rest areas), signage and furniture.

A “Guide to Accessible Greenways” covering these 12 greenways will also be published. This publication is aimed at the general public, especially those who have some kind of disability, and to greenway managers, promoters, tourist guides and journalists, with information about both the route and the tourist establishments and facilities evaluated. It will be available in printed form and online and an adapted version, “Tour4All” app for mobiles, will also be available.



### • Girona Greenways

One of the pioneer organizations in matters of accessibility on Spanish greenways is the Girona Greenways Consortium (Consorti Vies Verdes de Girona), responsible for the management of 150 km of greenways in this province. In 2007 they put in place a Greenway Enhancement Plan, which aimed to address a number of problems at the most conflictive points of the routes. Thanks to a grant from the Department of Tourism of the regional government of Catalunya, and to the collaboration of persons of reduced mobility for the development of these actions, the Girona Greenways have become more accessible.

After some direct experiences with disabled users, a technical inspection was made of the greenways with a user of an adaptive bike, who made an on the ground accessibility diagnostic, checking the degree of accessibility at various points. On the basis of his suggestions, it was decided to widen the running surface from 1.5m. to 2.5m and concrete ramps were positioned at the accesses to bridges. Alterations were also made in places where there were cattle grids, providing them with lateral running surfaces to allow the passage of electric wheel chairs.



The Girona Greenways Consortium also acquired 10 adaptive bikes for persons of reduced mobility, which are rented out at the regular bike rental points on this route, where users are given information about the most recommendable sections to ride. Thanks to this equipment, other collaborations have been set up on this greenway network with disability-related entities who are loaned these special bikes for their activities on the greenways (Fundación También, Asociación Esclerosis Múltiple, Institut Guttmann,...).

All these accessibility-related actions have been widely disseminated by the Girona Greenways Consortium through various media: informative dossiers, the presentation of audio-visual material, exhibition of adaptive bikes at national tourism fairs and fairs in nearby countries, such as FITUR (Madrid), The Bike Show (Barcelona) and Handisport (Toulouse). Information has also been disseminated through the specialized mass media, press trips and fam trips, links on accessible tourism websites, specific activities, and technical conferences and courses such as the “Conference on Universal Mobility and Greenways” organized by the Spanish Railways Foundation (Valencia, 2009)

For these efforts the Girona Greenways received a special mention at the **3rd**



**European Greenways Awards** (2007), in recognition of the consistent quality of the infrastructures and the promotion of accessibility on greenways.

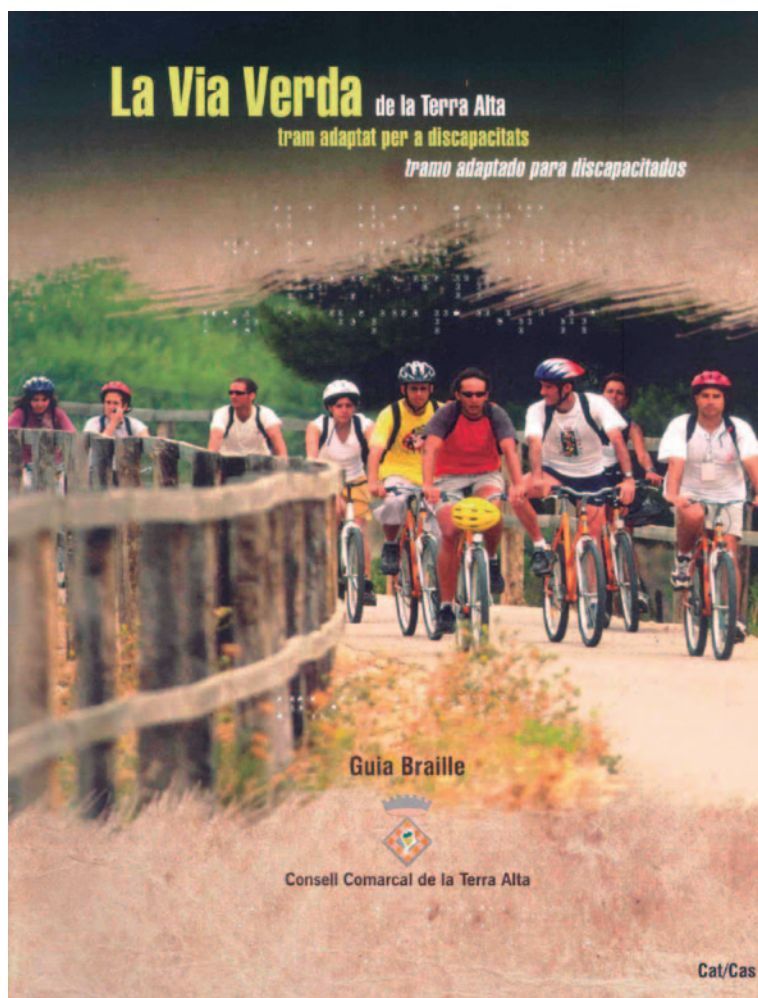
One very significant development evidencing the great progress made in tourism for all is that, since 2008, the Girona Greenways Consortium used to organize adaptive cycling activities for disabled users and their families, but since 2012 the activity has been completely inclusive, since the special category for adaptive bikes has been eliminated, and they have been included in the general cycle ride with all the other users and types of bicycles.

#### • **Terra Alta Greenway**

Meanwhile, in 2010, a little further south, the Terra Alta District Council completed its alterations of the first 5 km of the Terra Alta Greenway to make it accessible to all types of people, whatever their impairment. This project, costing €155,000 and framed within the Tourism Promotion Plan for the area, was funded by the District Council (the managing authority of the greenway) and other regional and national tourism authorities.

On this stretch of the greenway one side of the track has been bordered by 12 cm high kerbs to act as guides for the visually impaired. Safety railings have been installed





on sections considered to be dangerous and tactile ground surface indicators have been laid to warn of tunnels and crossroads ahead, while rumble strips are used at the crossroads themselves. Also, natural stone paving has been laid to indicate to users that they are at a rest area.

Adaptive directional signs have also been installed at three stations of this disused railway line and at the accesses to the greenway, which indicate the way to go on the adaptive section. The location of the signs, all in Braille, is indicated by a means of an embossed indicator located in the kerb. Signs have also been installed at the entrance to tunnels indicating their length, while others inform users of the points of interest along the greenway. There are also new signs at the rest areas indicating the layout of the furniture in

the area. Finally, a brochure has been published about this fully adaptive greenway and a tourist guide on the greenway has been published in braille.

Thanks to these exemplary actions, in 2011 the Terra Alta District Council received an award from the regional tourism agency in recognition of the improvements made to the accessibility of this Catalan greenway and its adaptation to the needs of persons with physical or sensory disabilities.

## Old railway stations accessible to all

### Montes de Hierro Greenway (Vizcaya, Basque Country)

There are now a great many cases of former railway stations along greenways which have been rehabilitated as tourist facilities, especially in countries like Spain, where there are already over 70. In these areas of extraordinary beauty a special effort is being made to make them totally accessible. Below we provide some examples:



In 2011-2012 the Enkarterrialde Association for Rural Development refurbished two railway stations as information centres designed to meet every accessibility requirement. In one of them (La Aceña), as well as being an interpretation centre for the area, the station has become home to a shop selling local products, an information point, and other complementary services, together with a small business incubator for active leisure companies. In order

### • The La Sierra Greenway (Cadiz and Seville, Andalusia)

The La Sierra Greenway is a well-established tourist resource in the south of Spain, which has won several European Greenways Awards and welcomes some 150,000 visitors a year. The La Sierra Greenway Foundation, the managing authority, decided to create an information point to provide visitors with a comprehensive interpretive view of this important eco-tourism resource.

So in May 2012 the La Sierra Greenway Interpretation Centre was opened in Olvera, at kilometre zero of the greenway, in a newly constructed building, designed to fit in with the railway architecture of the time when the railway was operational. It was built with special care to ensure the universal accessibility of both the building and the interpretive equipment (single storey building without stairs, accessibility standards applied to all elements, adaptive toilets, etc.), with solutions for certain special needs:

- Correct widths at accesses, both to the building and to the exhibition, audio-visual room and toilets
- Stickers on glass doors
- Loan of audio-guides to the visually impaired
- Adaptive furniture in the reception and the shop
- Interpretive resources for all, with activities and content which can be accessed using other senses (apart from sight) such as touch, smell and hearing.

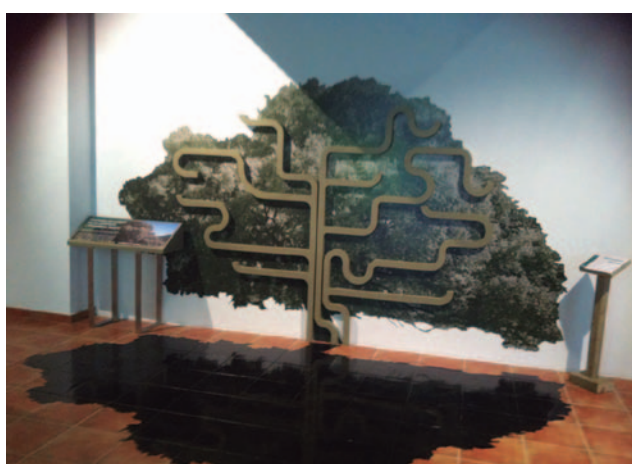
The accessibility diagnostic of the Interpretation Centre offered up suggestions for improvement, such as translating the interpretive resources into Braille and training the staff of the centre in how to treat visitors with different types of disability. These are already being put in place.

to exploit the tourist appeal of the rural district, the association works with local entrepreneurs to create and offer tourism products aimed at the accessible tourism market, consisting of accommodation and activities along the route of the greenway, all 100% accessible and homologated.

In 2012 the station of La Aceña was assessed by the regional government for compliance with the requirements of the Accessible Tourism Model of the Basque Country "For accessible tourism in the Basque Country", and was rated as accessible for at least one type of functional impairment.







## Advertising and promotion of accessibility on greenways

The communication and dissemination of existing facilities on greenways for disabled persons is essential if all these best practices are to be useful for their target audience. Hence the importance of advertising campaigns and involving disabled groups and associations in promotional events.

One of the best practices in this respect was developed in 2009 by the National Organization for the Blind in Spain (ONCE) - the most important disability-related organization in Spain - and the Fundación de los Ferrocarriles Españoles (FFE). It consisted of the launch of a collection of 60 lottery tickets commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Greenways Programme. The tickets were printed with photographs of various greenways and a reference to the special appeal of each one, and

the official greenways website address, [www.viasverdes.com](http://www.viasverdes.com). Five million tickets were issued, and by the end of the collection a total of 300 million tickets dedicated to greenways had been distributed through 22,000 points of sale throughout the country.

In the 4 months the campaign lasted, a number of activities promoting greenways, were carried out, including several press conferences in various regions of Spain to publicize this collection of lottery tickets, stressing the high levels accessibility that greenways enjoyed. Other activities of a recreational/sporting nature were organized, such as groups of blind cyclists riding tandems along different greenways. In fact, Spain is currently the country in which most tandem cycling competitions are held, and the country which has most tandem riders. The accessibility of greenways is part of the reason why this is so.



Spanish greenways have also become ideal spaces for the practice of adaptive cycle tourism and hiking activities organized by many different organizations and associations for disabled persons. Among such organizations we would highlight the Fundación También, which in 2002 set up a programme of cycling and hiking for disabled persons using innovative and adaptive material, which enabled them to enjoy cycling regardless of their functional impairment. Thousands of people have benefited from this programme and have become users of Spanish greenways as a result of these adaptive activities.



Meanwhile, since 2002 the National Hospital for Paraplegics in Toledo has been organizing adaptive sport workshops with a wide-ranging programme of activities, including excursions by wheelchair along the La Jara Greenway (Toledo). Medical practitioners agree that sport can be an excellent therapeutic and rehabilitative tool for their patients, not only as part of their physical treatment, as an activity which aids the recovery of a diminished function, but also as a way of helping a disabled





person return to a normal, independent life. It is worth mentioning that the lion's share of sportspersons with spinal cord injuries in Spain are ex-patients of this hospital.

## Adaptive bikes on Spanish greenways

As a result of the "Huella Sanitas" project - a charitable initiative by a medical insurance company - 10 more Spanish greenways,

apart from the Girona Greenways (see the previous case) are equipped with adaptive bikes. This campaign, aimed at promoting adaptive sport, was set in motion thanks to an agreement with the Fundación También in which the Fundación de los Ferrocarriles Españoles (FFE), the public foundation which coordinates and is the driving force behind the Spanish greenways programme, also collaborated.

In two months (December 2009 and January 2010) nearly 10,000 customers of this medical insurance company signed up to the initiative. They were later invited to take part in a Christmas campaign to vote online for the 10 greenways to which Sanitas should donate 30 adaptive bikes for disabled persons. The FFE made a pre-selection of the greenways, taking into account a number of criteria: geographic (so as to cover as much of Spain as possible); the degree of local involvement, from both local government and local groups and associations; and accessibility, having ruled out those routes which would be difficult for persons of reduced mobility.



### Types of adaptive bikes:

**HANDY:** The perfect bike for developing the upper limbs. Especially suitable for sportspersons with motor impairment (spinal cord injuries or similar); they enable you to keep fit while enjoying cycling.

**MICAH:** Ideal for children and young people with children cerebral palsy or a similar disability. The use of the tricycle promotes the child's growth and learning in a healthy, enjoyable and safe manner.



The donation of the 30 handbikes and trikes was made through the Fundación También, which works to ensure the social inclusion of disabled persons through adaptive sport. The bikes were handed over to the 10 greenways chosen to be enjoyed free of charge by disabled greenway users. A plaque commemorating this donation was put up wherever one of the 30 bikes are available, with the names of all the insurance company customers who had voted for that particular greenway.

The FFE posted all this information on [www.viasverdes.com](http://www.viasverdes.com), the official Spanish greenways website greenways, as well as the specific times and places for access to these bikes. A special section was created on the website under the heading “adaptive bikes”.

Some greenways which benefited from this donation helped disseminate the action, one of them being the Plazaola Greenway, which published an explanatory brochure and created a dedicated area on their website. This website also posts comprehensive information regarding recommend accessible sections.

Thanks to this action and the fact that their existence is well advertised, these bikes are being used a great deal by visitors and tourists and also by disabled inhabitants of the towns and villages close to the greenways.

In 2007, again at the La Sierra Greenway (Cadiz and Seville, Spain), 8 electric bikes were acquired to be offered to people with certain mobility problems or who were in poor physical shape.

### Involvement of disabled persons in greenways

#### • A very special plantation on the Northwest Greenway

The active participation of disabled groups in the activities held on greenways is one of the most successful ways of raising their awareness of these sites and encouraging them to use them. The possibilities are many and varied.

In May 2012, a tree planting event was held on the Northwest Greenway in Spain by pupils of a public special needs school in a nearby town. The event was supported



by the Town Council, the managing authority of the greenway, an employment workshop, and the General Directorate for the Environment for the Region of Murcia.

In this activity, in which 42 intellectually impaired boys and girls aged between 4 and 21 took part, the idea was to familiarize children with special educational needs with the natural environment of their municipality in order to consolidate, through first-hand experience and observation, the content of a classroom learning unit entitled “The Spring and plants”.

In the morning the pupils planted autochthonous species with the help of students from the gardening and landscape restoration module of the “Northwest Greenway Employment Workshop”. Later the group met at the old railway station where an area had been prepared for artistic creativity so that they could express the feelings and emotions associated with

the activity. With paintbrushes and paints they personalized stones which remain as witnesses of their passage through the Northwest Greenway.

From this activity we can conclude that the promotion of recreational and artistic areas for schoolchildren with special needs is an excellent tool for enhancing the development of their creative and personal capabilities, while establishing more appropriate social ties with their peer groups and with adults outside their immediate circle, and increasing their self-esteem.

This activity had a strong media impact locally and regionally, something which is not uncommon when activities for disabled persons are organized.

#### • European Greenway Day with disabled persons

Since 2003, every September the European Greenways Association organizes European Greenways Day, which is framed within European Mobility Week. A large number of entities take part, such as the La Sierra Greenway Foundation, which tends to hold a meeting at this time for groups with physical and/or intellectual disabilities from the localities bordering the La Sierra Greenway (five small municipalities of the provinces of Seville and Cadiz) and others nearby. Activities include bike rides on adaptive bikes, recycling workshops and activities, didactic games, video and talk about the vultures at the observatory of a nature reserve which the greenway passes through (housed in a disused railway station), and a lunch.

The municipalities from which the participants of the meeting came are basically small rural villages, depending largely on agricultural and livestock for their existence, and located a long way away from the provincial capital or any





major population centre. This project aims to give a sector of population with some special needs, which does not always have the possibility of accessing outdoor leisure opportunities, a chance to engage in healthy pursuits and to enjoy nature. This is why it is so important to promote these activities as an essential factor for health, enhancing the quality of life and social welfare, and all-round personal development.

#### • Pedalling with my hands

Since January 2013, Sergio Martín, a disabled person who loves cycling, has been riding round the greenways of Spain to demonstrate that any barrier can be overcome. A special cycle company has backed Sergio's project, which aims to encourage others in similar situations to his own to keep on practising their favourite sport or activity because it is possible thanks to adaptive bikes and in particular to greenways. A calendar of handbike-related activities and coverage of Sergio's experience can be followed on a blog and at the bike manufacturer's website <http://www.3ike.es/>.

Sergio suffers from Perthes disease, which consists of the necrosis (cell death) of the femoral head, leading to progressive fracturing and collapse. His Hase handbike allows him to pedal normally with the strength of his arms, although with somewhat more effort than would be required if he could pedal with his legs.





Because as Sergio says: “Disability may be inevitable. To be beaten by it is an option”

*Hi ! I read the article about accessibility on greenways in the latest news bulletin. I am quadriplegic and my wife and I have found in greenways the chance to relive old feeling and enjoy the countryside again. Which is why I bought a motorized handbike. For the last couple of years, weather permitting, we have been going for bike rides on the greenways. Thanks.*

*(message received from a disabled Spanish greenway user)*

## Jobs for disabled persons on greenways

The MAP Foundation is an aid foundation working to improve the quality of life of persons with intellectual impairment and to aid their inclusion in the job market. Since

2003 it has been responsible for the upkeep of the Ferro i del Carbó Greenway (Girona, Catalonia, Spain).

Several people belonging to this foundation, which participates in the economic and industrial fabric of the area through the Special Employment Centres of the rural district, perform various maintenance tasks depending on the time of the year or to cover any ad hoc needs: scrub clearance, replacement or repair of furniture, placement of signs, installation of rising barriers at crossroads, cleaning, etc.

Thus greenway management authorities, which like the Girona Greenways contract services of this type from foundations and Special Employment Centres, not only meet the human resources requirements of their services, but also collaborate in the employment and social inclusion of disabled persons by providing jobs which

are in tune with the reality of the labour market and the business world and also with the tourism activities of the area.

Meanwhile, the Centre d'Iniciatives per a la Reinserció (Centre for Reintegration Initiatives or CIRE), dedicated to the socio-occupational integration of other groups at risk of exclusion, such as ex-inmates of penitentiary and correctional centres of the Justice Department of the Catalanian Regional Government, also performs maintenance work on the Carrilet Olot-Girona Greenway, the Girona Greenways Consortium being one of its main clients. CIRE is staffed by 45 people, 8 or 9 of whom work on greenway maintenance.

A third Special Employment Centre, Tramuntana, which has been responsible for maintenance tasks on the Tren Petit route (Palamós - Palafrugell) since 2009, has been carrying those same duties for the Carrilet Il Girona - Sant Feliu de Guíxols Greenway since 2012.

The concession contracts for the performance of maintenance on the Girona Greenways amounts to some €85,000 a year for these three associations.

This excellent practice also shows that greenways can be catalysers of social integration for persons who have serious difficulties entering the job market.





# Chapter 3 - Conclusions and recommendations

## 3.1. Conclusions

### Accessible tourism on European greenways

With these examples of specific actions aimed at promoting inclusive leisure through greenways we wish to make it abundantly clear that Tourism for All is an important business opportunity and a new source of green employment in the area served by these accessible routes. Greenways, like very few other spaces, enable everyone to reach the most fascinating corners

of our natural environment, easily and comfortably, something which otherwise would be impossible for persons of reduced mobility or suffering from other disabilities.

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... Greenways 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 of these routes tend to apply technical solutions to optimize accessibility levels, thereby turning to large number of European greenways into tourism resources that are accessible for all.

However, to 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 to 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 accessible, complementary services, and that will be achieved by working in to coordinated manner in three scopes of action:

- 1) The physical setting of the tourism resources.** The hotels, bars, restaurants, information offices, transport, shops and leisure opportunities available at 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 adaptive toilets in the area and the possibility of using cycles adapted to their needs (handbikes, ...)

**2) Customer care.** For everyone, whether disabled or not, the customer care received during the various stages of the trip will have a decisive impact on their level of satisfaction with the tourism experience. For this reason 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 establishment has

in order to be in a position to provide visitors with accurate and truthful information.

**3) Dissemination of the offer of accessible tourism.** At present, disabled visitors have to make a number of queries in order to be sure which areas and establishments are accessible and the precise accessibility features that they provide. The information provided to disabled tourists must be clear, detailed and truthful.

By carrying out the recommended actions in these three areas we can promote the development of tourism for all, business initiatives, job creation, and citizen education.

*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.*

**Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. United Nations World Tourism Organization.**  
*Right to tourism. Article 7. December 21, 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.

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







# Appendix

## European Greenways Association



In May 1997, it was decided within the framework of the First European Conference on Soft Traffic and Railways Paths (Val-Dieu, Belgium) to set up the European Greenways Association.

The association's constituent assembly was held in Namur, Belgium, on January 8th, 1998. A statute was signed by 17 representatives of institutions and associations from many European countries.

The European Greenways Association...

- Contributes towards the preservation of infrastructures such as disused railway corridors, tow paths and historic routes (Roman roads, pilgrimage routes, cattle trails,...) in the public domain by developing non-motorized routes along them.
- Encourages the use of non-motorized transport, draws up inventories of

potential routes, and writes technical reports.

- Promotes and coordinates the exchange of expertise and information among various associations and national and local bodies which are currently developing these initiatives in Europe.
- Informs and advises local and national bodies on how to develop non-motorized routes.
- Collaborates with European bodies to support their policies in terms of sustainable development, the environment, regional balance and employment.

Since 2009 the Secretariat General of the EGWA has been in Madrid, in the offices of the Spanish Railways Foundation (FFE). Currently 45 member organizations from 13 countries support EGWA.

From the EGWA we encourage all Greenways promoters to take part in this active association.

Join us: EGWA encourages all promoters of Greenways to take part in this active Association to spread in Europe the concept of greenways so that they can be recognized as indispensable infrastructures to move towards a more sustainable Europe with a better quality of life for its citizens.

**European Greenways Association**  
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