Creating Spaces for All: From Mapping the Barriers towards Accessible Tourism

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Abstract

In a difficult time, when the coronavirus pandemic forced us to limit our contacts, the idea was born to promote tourism in rural areas where travelling and recreation away from large crowds is possible. This idea gave rise to the CE-Spaces4All project, which aims to open up rural tourism to persons with disabilities by putting together suitable packages of measures and breaking down existing physical and mental barriers. Due to the time and cost-intensive nature of removing physical barriers, the focus is on raising awareness. What needs to be done to improve the accessibility of tourism for persons with disabilities? Where are the responsibilities and which measures are suitable? The paper describes how these questions were dealt with and explains the measures using two examples from the project pilot regions. The project CE-Spaces4All focuses on persons with mobility impairments, blind people and persons with visual impairments, deaf people and persons with hearing impairment. Barriers were initially recorded in three pilot regions in a total of seven European countries and summarised in a joint database. The exemplary field surveys were carried out by the project teams directly in the pilot regions. Barriers were identified through this so-called mapping, for example in the road network or other municipal infrastructure, in the respective tourist attractions or in accommodation and catering establishments. This resulted in the Web Accessibility Viewer, which is an online geoportal that indicates tourist and tourism-related facilities in both public space and private areas and their degree of accessibility in three pilot areas in Central Europe: the cross-border area of Slovenia, Croatia, and Hungary. In the next step, the areas in which barriers can be removed as part of the project were identified together with the responsible tourism stakeholders in the respective pilot region. Sometimes these are minor structural measures, but often they are just comparatively simple things such as a lack of information. Although people with disabilities use many technological aids to help them cope better with everyday life, obtaining information before travelling is particularly important for people with disabilities because they need to know in advance whether the destinations they are planning to visit are actually usable for them. The awareness of what is important and that it matters is currently often underrepresented among those responsible for tourism and for policy planners. It is also a task of CE-Spaces4All to anchor this awareness more firmly and establish it as a matter of course in the long term. The paper presents the path to raising awareness using two examples from the sub-pilot regions of Austria and Slovenia, outlining the key points of the planned measures.

Keywords: *spatial planning, accessibility, rural tourism, geodata, barrier removal*

1. Introduction

1.1 Why CE-Spaces4All?

The development of tourism in rural areas is challenged by a lack of territorial planning ensuring the needs of persons with disabilities for independent tourism travel are respected. The project CE-Spaces4All addresses these key aspects: lack of awareness, capacities, and cooperation of stakeholders for territorial planning, lack of involvement of persons with disabilities in tourism planning, lack of data for accessibility planning, and lack of proper services for independent tourism travel of persons with disabilities [1].

The project first mapped and visualised barriers to accessibility, resulting in a catalogue of barriers in three partly cross-border pilot regions. This served as a basis for developing independent travel support services and tools for persons with disabilities and will result in action plans for long-term territorial cooperation on improving accessibility of these regions. A joint strategy will facilitate wider mainstreaming of solutions. Raised capacities and improved cooperation of stakeholders will lead to better governance for policy and territorial planning of accessible tourism, as well as to improved public services for persons with disabilities [1].

1.2. What have We Done so Far?

A major accomplishment has been the joint pilot testing of the Web Accessibility Viewer (WAV) across five pilot mapping areas in Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Poland. This process involved the collection of accessibility data in cooperation with persons with disabilities, based on a jointly developed methodology and pilot implementation plans. These plans guided the selection of mapping areas and tourism service providers and ensured that data was collected in a unified and technically robust manner.

Parallel to the pilot work, the project team developed the WAW. The platform allows users to view, assess, and download data related

to accessibility in tourism infrastructure. The WAV has undergone ongoing improvements, including usability enhancements, partner feedback integration, translation updates, and the development of an editor mode for future updates. A public mapping event and awareness raising activities also accompanied pilot testing, helping to disseminate the project's goals to a broader audience.

The project focused on understanding the needs and preferences of persons with disabilities. A questionnaire was developed and distributed across all participating countries, receiving strong engagement. This input is being analysed and will directly inform the design of future accessible services and tools.

A joint participatory approach has been adopted for developing and testing accessible tourism tools and services across three cross-border pilot regions: Slovenia-Croatia-Hungary (SI-HR-HU), Austria-Czech Republic (AT-CZ), and Podkarpackie in Poland (PL). This process was grounded in inclusive cooperation with local stakeholders and persons with disabilities, ensuring that identified solutions reflect real needs and challenges in each area.

In each region, partners developed pilot implementation plans based on initial research, including a cross-national survey on travel preferences of persons with disabilities and a catalogue of accessibility barriers. These plans define concrete locations, pilot teams, barriers to be addressed, and communication activities. The focus has been on co-designing tourism services, raising awareness, and building long-term cooperation among local actors.

In the SI-HR-HU region, efforts have focused on identifying and removing physical barriers at key sites, co-creating accessible tour packages, and piloting a cross-border travel itinerary. In the AT-CZ region, partners work toward creating a barrier-free cross-border tourism zone by standardising and sharing accessibility information, engaging tourism providers, and exploring physical improvements. In Poland, the Podkarpackie pilot addresses accessibility gaps in rural areas by mapping barriers, promoting good practises, and exploring innovative solutions like VR-based virtual tours.

Through joint activities and stakeholder engagement, all three pilot regions aim to test and implement accessible tourism solutions, contributing to a broader strategy for inclusive tourism in Central Europe.

2. Definitions

The EU and all of its member states have signed the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Via European legislation the convention's requirements are also laid down in national legislation [2]. For example, according to Austrian law, a disability is defined as the consequences of a non-temporary physical, mental or psychological restriction, i.e. one that lasts for six months or longer and makes it difficult to participate in normal social life [3]. The project CE-Spaces4All concentrates on three target groups of persons with disabilities. These disabilities are:

2.1 Mobility Impairment

Mobility impairment can sometimes be defined in very broad terms when it comes to someone being less able to get around than other people for any reason. This would include, for example, children and young people who do not yet have a driving licence, or people at risk of poverty for whom mobility is simply too expensive [4]. Here, however, we want to limit ourselves to mobility restrictions that are related to the human musculoskeletal system. In this paper, we therefore consider mobility impairment to be some kind of physical limitations of the musculoskeletal system. This includes, for example, older people or wheelchair users. Blind and visually impaired people and people with hearing impairments also have limited mobility due to their limited ability to perceive. However, as these groups have completely different accessibility requirements than people with physical limitations of the musculoskeletal system, they are treated separately in the project (see also Chapters 2.2 and 2.3).

2.2 Visual Impairment

The term visual impairment refers to a significant loss of sight that cannot be compensated for by visual aids and ranges from mild visual impairment to blindness. According to the legal definition, certain objectively definable and measurable thresholds are usually set above which a person is considered visually impaired or blind. This can, for example, have an impact on obtaining financial support or other forms of benefits from the public sector. Another, functional definition is based on the fact that visually impaired people require special aids such as large print, magnifying glasses or tactile methods in order to be able to read texts [5]. In the CE-Spaces4All project, we endeavour to cover as many aspects of this target group as possible – knowing well that this is one of the most heterogeneous groups with diverse demands on their environment and that it is not possible to fully address all forms of visual impairment within the available framework.

2.3 Hearing Impairment

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines hearing loss as not having the ability to hear with a threshold of 20 dB or more compared to someone with normal hearing ability [6]. While 20 dB does not sound much at first glance, it must be paid attention to the logarithmic nature of the decibel scale where a difference of 10 means a double or half relation, so that -20 dB says that only 25 % of the reference value can be heard. While hearing impairment can be caused by various genetic factors and diseases, the majority of people suffering from hearing impairments are the elderly. Hearing loss can usually be counteracted with technical aids, such as hearing aids or induction loops. Deaf people, on the other hand, have to rely on different aids, for example cochlear implants or using sign language.

2.4 Accessibility

Accessibility is defined as "the ability to move into and through an environment to reach places and use services." [7] People who do not have these abilities only have them to a limited extent can therefore be described as persons with disabilities because they are facing physical or mental barriers when trying to access places and services..As there are manifold different types of disabilities, the landscape of barriers is also extremely diverse. It is therefore almost impossible to design services that are really one hundred per cent barrier-free. Accessibility can of course be approached as closely as possible, but this usually depends on the available financial and time resources as well as the corresponding legal framework. This generally stipulates that people with disabilities must not be discriminated against, but cannot come up with specific measures [2]. These, in turn, are laid down in standards that are not legal in nature, but are de facto binding because they reflect the state of the art.

3. The Pilot Regions

3.1. Overview of the Pilot Area Austria – Czech Republic (Weinviertel – Znojmo)

The division of Lower Austria into four quarters has evolved historically and does not affect today's administrative boundaries.

Nevertheless, these quarters are still common geographical names among Austria's population. The Czech region of South Moravia (Jihomoravský kraj) consists of seven districts, one of which is Znojmo. The city of Znojmo is the capital city of the district of Znojmo. The Austrian-Czech pilot region Znojmo-Weinviertel has 440,009 inhabitants as of 1 January 2022 [8].

An important connecting element on both the Austrian and Czech sides is the cross-border Thayatal/Podyjí National Park. For half of a century, this area was the Iron Curtain zone and remained untouched nature. Now cycling and hiking are popular activities in the area because Weinviertel and South Moravia are a warm, sunny region and are therefore inviting all year round. The pilot area is cross-border and the project activities are focused on the area around Retz and the National Parks on both sides of the border. Growing together across the border is one of the biggest challenges of the region, not only by the completely different languages spoken in Austria and the Czech Republic. In order to appeal to regional tourists, it is important to offer multilingual information (e.g. German, Czech, English) [9].

3.2. Overview of the Pilot Area Slovenia – Croatia – Hungary

The Pomurje region (Slovenia) along and around the Mura river in the far north-east of Slovenia is rich in cultural heritage, natural beauty and thermal springs. Pomurje is known for its wellness and spa tourism and a wide range of water activities. The region is famous for its cuisine and tradition of wine growing. Visitors can explore wine roads and enjoy tastings in cosy wine cellars.

Međimurje County (Croatia) is geographically divided into two parts, Lower and Upper Međimurje. Naturally and culturally rich, Međimurje as the "flower garden of Croatia" is a green oasis and part of the UNESCO Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve. It offers rich possibilities for cycling and walking tours.

Zala county (Hungary) lies near to the borders of Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria. The varied landscape makes it a major tourist attraction with forests, vineyards, valleys, meadows as excellent site for ecological tourism. Some parts of the region are within the Natura 2000 network, with valuable habitats and special animal and plant species. The area is also well-known for hiking and cycling trails. The pilot region Slovenia – Croatia – Hungary has 488,000 inhabitants as of 2021 [10].

3.3. Overview of the Pilot Area Poland

Podkarpackie Region is located in the south-eastern part of Poland, bordering Ukraine to the east and Slovakia to the south. It has 2.1 million inhabitants as of 2021. The capital and the main administrative and economic centre is Rzeszów. Ecologically, the region is one of the cleanest in Poland with two National Parks and includes numerous tourist trails for hiking, cycling, horseback riding or canoeing, while the largest and most significant tourist attraction of cultural significance is the Route of Wooden Architecture with more than 130 buildings mainly of a sacred nature [11].

4. Identification of Barriers and Awareness Raising

4.1. Mapping

The goal of the joint pilot testing of the WAV out across five mapping areas in three cross-border pilot regions was to evaluate and improve accessibility in tourism environments for persons with various types of disabilities, while fostering strong cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange among project partners.

The pilot testing was divided into two main phases – preparation and implementation. During the preparation phase, partners participated in technical trainings led by the Geodetic Institute of Slovenia, where they learned to use specialized tools such as QGIS and the open-source field mapping app QField [12]. These trainings ensured all partners had the necessary technical skills and shared understanding of the updated methodology, which was adapted from existing good practises and aligned with international standards (ISO 21902 for Accessible Tourism [13]).

Each partner selected a mapping area based on stakeholder input, regional priorities, and predefined project criteria. They prepared process plans outlining selected urban areas, key nodes (such as hotels, transport hubs, and attractions), and points of interest (POIs) both in urban centres and more remote tourist destinations. Importantly, each mapping team included persons with disabilities to ensure fieldwork reflected real-world user experiences.

In the pilot testing phase, data was collected in the field using QField, verified, and later imported into the WAV platform. The data covered various accessibility features and barriers related to mobility, visual, and hearing impairments. To further support stakeholder engagement, awareness-raising events were organized, where public and private actors participated in field visits and discussions to gain deeper insights into accessibility issues in their regions.

The result of this collaborative effort is a significantly enhanced Web Accessibility Viewer which now includes real-world data from all pilot areas.

4.2. WAV

The WAV, accessible via https://spaces4all.gis.si/, is an online geographic information system (GIS) tool and a database. It maps and assesses the accessibility of tourism locations in Central Europe. Specifically, it covers three pilot areas in Slovenia – Croatia – Hungary (1), Austria – Czech Republic (2), and rural Poland (3). WAV provides detailed accessibility data for persons with mobility impairments, visual impairments, and hearing impairments. Each country assesses accessibility primarily for wheelchair users, with additional data for visual and hearing impairments in specific areas.

Users of the platform can freely view and download spatial data, providing an evidence-based foundation for developing accessible tourism strategies, tools, and services. The collected data, as presented in WAV, includes information on barriers, paths, tourism facilities, public transport stations, parking places for disabled persons and parking lots, points of interest and tactile walking surface indicators. The methodology for data collecting specifically refers to the rules and guidelines outlined in the ISO standard 21542:2021 Building construction – Accessibility and usability of the built environment [14] and ISO standard 21902:2021 Tourism and related services – Accessible tourism for all – Requirements and recommendations.

WAV was developed using the existing GIS viewer and adapted to better serve accessible tourism needs. Initially developed in December 2023 by Geodetic Institute of Slovenia, WAV underwent testing and evaluation by project partners, and subsequent upgrades. An editor mode was developed, enabling partners to independently make some changes, define accessibility assessment of tourism facility for wheelchair users and make translations into their languages. Additional updates, such as photos and data corrections or expanding the amount of data, were provided by some partners.

WAV was together with the collected data presented at national events for stakeholders.

Main features included in the tool are:

- graphic display of map data,

- free data download (with more than 1.400 captured objects in total),
- search, toggle, and display data and its attributes,
- data export,
- filtering based on accessibility criteria,
- access to high-resolution photos,
- messaging for user feedback,
- multilingual platform in seven languages.

By using this tool, policy planners and decision-makers involved in local, national and regional territorial development can strengthen multilevel governance and foster cross-sectoral institutional cooperation. WAV serves as an evidence-based foundation for developing tourism strategies and territorial planning, creating tools and services for persons with disabilities, and emphasising capacity building and policy integration. The tool will further contribute to the project through capacity building programmes.

Stakeholders can use WAV in various ways:

- policy planners: Enhance governance and policy integration to promote more accessible tourism, preparation of strategic development and tourism strategies,
- local/regional authorities: Integrate data into local GIS systems, remove barriers in public spaces, ensure compliance with accessibility standards, analyse data, and incorporate findings into local tourism strategies and action plans,
- persons with disabilities and disability organisations: Use WAV for travel planning, capacity building, and sharing information about accessible spaces,
- tourism providers: Promotional tool to attract new clients,
- sectoral agencies: Compare data across countries and pilot areas, highlighting best and worst practises.

4.3. Choice of Barriers to be Removed

Once the barriers had been recorded and catalogued in the WAV, the next step was to create a catalogue of barriers for all three pilot regions as a snapshot at the time of the respective mapping. As both the time and budget available for the project were limited, the barriers to be removed in the course of or with the help of the project were selected from the catalogued barriers for each pilot region. A distinction was made between hard and soft barriers [15]. Hard barriers are physical obstacles that stand in the way of accessibility, such as a pavement edge that is too high for a wheelchair user to negotiate or a missing pavement edge that cannot be felt by a blind person using a cane. Soft barriers are understood to be all those obstacles that do not manifest themselves in physical form, but nevertheless prevent people from reaching places and using services – the major one is the lack of information about available barrier-free services on tourism provider websites.

	Sleep In Eggenburg	Sporthotel Hollabrunn	Freilich, Laa a.d.Thaya	Laa Natura, Laa a.d.Thaya	Hotel Therme Laa, Laa a.d.Thaya	Sgrafit Hotel Retz	Obenauf Unternalb	Wachtelwerkstatt Unternalb
Barrierefreier Eingang	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Art des Eingangs	In der Ebene	In der Ebene	In der Ebene	In der Ebene	In der Ebene	In der Ebene	In der Ebene	In der Ebene
Rollstuhlgerechtes WC im Empfangsbereich	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Rollstuhlgerechtes Zimmer	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Griffe an den Seiten im WC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Rezeption - barrierefreier Zugang	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Barrierefreier Zugang zum Speiseräume	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Barrierefreier Lift	✓	✓	✓	nicht relevant	✓	✓	✓	nicht relevant
Gesamtbewertung	♿	♿	♿	♿	♿	♿	♿	♿
Information auf Webseite	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
Beschreibung+Fotos des barrierefreien Zimmer	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Beschreibung+Fotos des Gesamtobjektes	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

Vollständig zugänglich für Menschen mit eingeschränkter Mobilität

Teilweise zugänglich für Menschen mit eingeschränkter Mobilität

Fig. 1. Mapping results for hard and soft barriers from tourism facilities in Austrian pilot region. Source: [17], used by permission.

Here is an example from the Czech pilot region: “As has transpired from our project survey and mapping, that tourism facilities do not publish information about accessibility on their websites. Persons with disabilities have to carry on lengthy self-investigation, including contacting every single one of the venues they want to visit to obtain specific information on accessibility. When it comes to accommodation, persons with disabilities have to e-mail for information on access to the hotel facilities and adapted shower room with toilet, often asking for photographs which allows for the best evaluation of the offered facilities. This process takes a lot of time and effort. In many cases, hotel staff provide insufficient information (‘we are barrier-free’) and photographs do not show all that is required to be viewed for proper evaluation of the place.” [16] Fig. 1 shows a survey on accessibility features from selected tourism facilities in the Austrian pilot region. While the upper part of the chart represents hard barriers such as wheelchair accessible entrance, wheelchair accessible toilets etc., the lower section is all about soft barriers, indicating the availability of textual and graphic (photos) information regarding accessibility on the websites of the respective tourism facilities.

4.4. Responsibilities, Local Contacts, Willingness to Cooperate

At the same time as the barriers were selected, the respective persons responsible were also named and recorded in an internal project document. These responsible persons were contacted by the teams in the pilot regions and possibilities were explored with them as to how the selected barriers could be removed. The willingness of tourism providers to co-operate was very high. Although it was not possible in all cases to arrange for the complete removal of hard barriers, it was usually possible to at least take the first steps in the right direction.

Here is an example from the Hungarian pilot region: “In the case of the Kerka Water Mill Museum, only the ground floor is accessible, a steep staircase leads to the first floor, but a digital screen is provided with the aim of playing video clips about the upper floor exhibitions to wheelchair users.” [18]

In addition, the project team has offered and continues to offer a large number of measures and events on the topic of awareness raising, which have met with lively interest among tourism operators and have already shown their first visible effects (see chapter 5).

4.5. Awareness Raising

One of the most important findings of the project work so far has been that the responsible stakeholders in tourism are by no means lacking in interest in opening up to the needs of people with disabilities and making their facilities and services accessible. The most common obstacles were a lack of knowledge about the actual requirements of true accessibility and a lack of information on how to approach accessibility. For this reason, various forms of events were organised in the project in order to give the stakeholders in tourism clues as to where they can start with their measures and how they can provide information about existing accessible offers in a form that is also meaningful and useful for the disabled.

4.6. Example from Austria: Video Eggenburg

When creating a video, it is important to remember that image, sound and text form a coherent construct and you have to pay close attention to the message you want to convey. A video is not only a transmitter of information, but also a transmitter of a message. Due to the limitation that a video can only depict a small part of reality, the first step at the beginning of the work is to formulate the desired message. Every video, every film consists of a sequence of shots. Special attention must be paid to each shot: [19]

- the choice of framing (what is shown and in what size?),
- the perspective (where is the viewer, where is the subject or object of the shot?),
- the viewing time (How long is something shown?

Switching between the individual settings is generally done by switching a camera on or off

- by switching a camera on or off,
- by moving (panning, zooming) the camera,
- by post-production at the editing table.

Sound also makes a significant contribution to the message to be conveyed by the respective shots. It consists of spoken text, music, atmosphere, noises and effects and is therefore an indispensable and versatile tool for triggering, intensifying or softening emotions in addition to the visual material shown. The sound creates an inner image, as it were, which forms a unit together with the visually perceived image [20].

The Austrian project partners' video will show a journey to Eggenburg made by people with visual impairments. As far as possible, the entire travel cycle will be depicted. This means that a camera will be present during the preparations for the trip and will accompany the protagonists. In Eggenburg, a visit to the museum and a tour of the town are undertaken, as well as visits to a restaurant and the public toilet facilities. An overnight stay is also simulated by fictitiously moving into a room. The respective visual impairments can be simulated in the video with visual effects in order to draw attention to particular impressions or problems. The emotions of the test persons during the journey are captured using the Wheel of Emotions [21] in order to categorise and evaluate them. The test persons are also asked to comment on their impressions themselves. At the end, there will be a reflection on the trip with the test persons.

To accomplish these tasks, the BOKU project team works closely with the in-house media centre, which not only has all the necessary technical equipment, but also experts in the field of video filming and post-production.

4.7. Example from Slovenia: Accessible Pomurje Region

The Pomurje region of Slovenia is making important progress in accessible tourism. As part of a cross-border initiative with Croatian and Hungarian partners, several steps were taken to improve travel experiences for persons with disabilities.

The review of accessible travel packages across Europe has been implemented, followed by on-site pilot testing of locations and activities in Pomurje. Destinations such as Bukovniško Lake, Restaurant Kodila, Hiša Gibanice, Luštna domačija, and Expano were assessed by individuals with disabilities. Feedback helped evaluate their accessibility and potential for inclusion in an accessible tourism program.

A highlight was adaptive cycling along a 14 km route between Dobrovnik and Renkovci, using specialized bikes for wheelchair users and tandem riders. While enjoyable, the activity also revealed the need for better support for people with hearing impairments.

The final accessible tourism programme, confirmed in February 2025, includes various inclusive providers such as Terme Vivat, the Vinarium Tower and Zipline, and Zavod Uvid for accessible bike rental. An international test of the programme is planned for June 2025.

To support education, case studies were developed in cooperation with the European Disability Forum, outlining key accessibility challenges and solutions. A joint promotional video is also in progress to highlight the SI-HR-HU region as an inclusive destination.

Findings from the project show that flexibility, staff support, and diverse activity options are crucial. While some attractions like the

Vinarium Zipline can be used with assistance, many barriers remain – especially for people with sensory or mobility impairments. This highlights the need for ongoing collaboration, awareness, and improvement in the tourism sector.

5. Expectations

5.1. Achievement of the Project Goals

After it became clear during the first half of the project that the main problem with accessibility in tourism was a lack of information, various measures were taken to remove this barrier – a classic form of soft barrier. The following formats proved to be particularly promising:

- scientific papers: mainly project partner BOKU aimed at the publication of scientific papers and addressing the topic of the project at various international planning, tourism and accessibility conferences for knowledge exchange with scientific experts from these fields,
- proposal for a master thesis: there is a potential for cooperation with Mendel university in Brno on the topic of accessibility of the viewpoint Iron Trails. Some of the park's improvements in accessibility could be a topic for a final university degree thesis,
- workshops for public and private stakeholders to provide practical knowledge on accessible tourism. These workshops covered key topics of inclusivity and accessibility in tourism for making tourist attractions more accessible and to help their stakeholders in communication with persons with disabilities,
- online webinars for tourism providers: these webinars aimed at tourism providers to prepare them for having an accessibility guide on their websites. The reasons for providing an accessibility guide were presented as well as a step-by-step tutorial on creation of content for the accessibility guide,
- leaflets to popularise the accessibility guide for representatives of tourist facilities. The purpose of these leaflets is to show that accessibility is often not a difficult thing to achieve,
- video production: several awareness raising video and/or promotional videos are produced to underline the importance of accessibility. For example, the video of the Austrian project partners will depict a one-day itinerary of people with visual impairment to Eggenburg (see chapter 5.2).

Each pilot region will develop their joint action plan for improving accessibility of tourism. In order to further reduce obstacles to accessible tourism in the region, these action plans will outline additional steps, actions, and funding sources. In addition, a joint strategy on territorial planning for accessible tourism in rural regions of Central Europe will be developed. This document will contain lessons learned, guidelines, services and tools, actions to promote and implement the strategy, taking up and promoting, mainstreaming outputs and results. This strategy aims at policy and decision makers, tourism and regional development planners. Besides optimising the framework for the implementation of accessibility in tourism, the CE-Spaces4All project also aims at the intensification of cross-border cooperation between tourism stakeholders

5.2. What do we Achieve with the Austrian Video

The Austrian awareness video is made explicitly for a specialised audience. This includes tourism providers, spatial planners, advertising experts in the tourism industry, the chamber of commerce, associations for people with disabilities, travel agencies and related professions. The video will have a length of approx. 25 to 30 minutes and will only be shown at relevant specialist events. There will be a short introductory talk beforehand and a discussion round with the experts present after the video. A short version of the video will be edited from the existing material in order to provide information about the agendas in the Austrian-Czech pilot region on the project's public social media channels to ensure that also the requirements of the project with regard to publications by the project partners are met in an appropriate manner.

The aim of the video is to demonstrate the barriers that blind and visually impaired persons face when travelling into and in rural areas. In contrast to the urban environment, rural areas provide significantly different conditions due to the different composition of their infrastructure. The lower population density makes rural infrastructure more expensive per capita to build and maintain than in conurbations, meaning that infrastructure investments are made to a lesser extent on average and accessibility measures can only be implemented very slowly as a result. For example, the requirements for accessibility are set out in the current Austrian guidelines and regulations for road construction (RVS). These guidelines are declared binding by the Austrian Ministry of Infrastructure and are therefore binding, although they are not of a legal nature [22]. However, application to existing infrastructure is not mandatory.

However, even small and minor interventions in the existing building are often effective in achieving at least a low-barrier situation. The video is intended to illustrate that, due to the longevity of built infrastructure, such compromises and temporary solutions can also be a viable option with a small investment of funds, which can, however, significantly improve the basic situation.

On the other hand, the video will point out that many services and facilities are already accessible and usable for blind and visually impaired people. What is currently still lacking is a comprehensive lack of information –In both directions: blind and visually impaired persons are unable to find out whether tourism offers and services are suitable for them because no information is provided by tourism providers. And the tourism providers in turn cannot provide the information because they lack the knowledge of what is important when blind and visually impaired persons use their offers. This awareness raising is an essential core topic of the video and will also be the main focus of the discussion rounds following the screening.

5.3. What do we Achieve with Slovenian Pilot Activities?

The Slovenian pilot activities have served as a practical and transformative step toward inclusive tourism. By engaging people with disabilities directly in the testing and co-creation process, the initiative has moved beyond theory to identify real world challenges and opportunities for improvement.

The on-site visits and pilot testing revealed valuable insights. Locations were assessed not only for physical access but also for the overall visitor experience from the perspective of those with visual, hearing, or mobility impairments. The feedback helped shape a more refined, person-centred tourism programme that reflects actual needs rather than assumptions.

The testing phase also helped tourism providers better understand what accessibility means in practise. Facilities like the Vinarium Zipline, while not fully accessible in structure, were shown to be usable with trained assistance. This demonstrated that with the right support and willingness to adapt, more activities can become inclusive, even those traditionally considered out of reach.

Case studies developed during the process provided concrete examples of barriers and solutions for three major disability groups.

These materials are now available to educate tourism workers, municipalities, and information centres, helping to strengthen communication and service provision.

Moreover, the initiative fostered collaboration among Slovenian tourism stakeholders and their Croatian and Hungarian counterparts. The development of a joint promotional video and shared messaging highlights a shift in thinking – viewing accessibility not as a national challenge, but as a regional opportunity.

The biggest gain from the Slovenian pilot is the understanding that accessible tourism cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all approach. It must be diverse, flexible, and built around choice. By involving people with disabilities at every step, from testing to programme design, the project set a standard for inclusive practise.

This pilot marks a meaningful step forward – one that proves inclusive tourism is not only possible but also enriches the travel experience for everyone.

6. Concluding Remarks

This paper analysed which measures are effective in facilitating access to rural tourism for persons with disabilities. During the work on the CE-Spaces4All project, it emerged that the difficulties are mainly to do with a lack of information (so-called soft barriers). Many tourist facilities are fully or partially accessible, as the data collection for the Web Accessibility Viewer revealed.

Rather, it is the lack of information that represents one of the main barriers, in two different aspects:

- persons with disabilities are unable to adequately prepare themselves in the course of their travel preparations because they are unable to find information on whether the desired destinations or the desired tourism attractions and tourism offers are actually accessible to the extent that is necessary for them,
- tourism providers are not sufficiently prepared as to how they should prepare information on accessibility so that this information can be interpreted and correctly assessed by persons with disabilities.

The project is working on eliminating these gaps and other barriers in order to ultimately turn rural spaces into spaces for all in terms of tourism.

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