



PROJECT

Accessible Nature and Culture – Sustainable Tourism (IN-HERITAGE)

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Cyprus 2014-2020

INTERNAL DOCUMENT

Joint Strategic Plan of the municipalities of
Rethymno, Ayia Napa and Sotira for the
development of "accessible tourism"
through the exploitation of their natural and
cultural heritage

The project is co-financed by the European Union (ERDF) and
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Abstract	<p>This document is an internal document of the In-Heritage Project developed and made available by Beneficiary No.3 (National Confederation of People with Disabilities), as the summary version of the proposed strategy (strategic action plan) which is broken down into axes of action with individual indicative projects to be implemented in the coming years for the further development of "accessible tourism" in the municipalities through the improvement of access and the exploitation of their natural and cultural heritage.</p>		
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	4
1 The demand	14
1.1 Senior people	14
1.2 Persons with disabilities	18
2 The supply	35
2.1 Accessible tourism.....	35
2.2 Heritage tourism.....	46
2.3 A new term: “Inclusive Heritage Tourism”	50
3 Supply and demand: Understanding the gap.....	54
3.1 The tourism industry challenges at the Program Area.....	54
3.2 SWOT Analysis.....	62
3.3 Key areas where change is needed	82
4 Supply and demand: Towards filling the gap	96
4.1 Principles for a new strategy	96
4.2 Priority Axes	99
4.3 Indicative actions.....	100
4.4 Common branding	106
4.5 Joint marketing.....	107
Conclusion	114
Bibliography	116

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PREFACE

When the time comes for vacations, those who have the opportunity to travel, the only thing that may concern them is to choose, mountain, sea or city, and with whom they will share the trip, with family, alone or with friends. After all, the point is to rest and "charge" their batteries. But for some the issue is not always that simple. For example, for people with disabilities, "getting away" and visiting any place they want is never a simple process, as they do not enjoy the same variety of choices and equal opportunities in practice.

Until today, **lack of inclusiveness** and **accessibility barriers** –in a natural, physical and digital environments and services– create difficulties for elderly travellers, people with disabilities and many others, both during their travels as tourists and after they arrive at a destination of their choice, where they are unable to equally enjoy the facilities and services generally available to the rest of the visitors. Thus, as consumers of services, some of these people encounter difficulties in several processes and phases of a journey, such as, for example, barriers to movement, limited options for satisfactory accommodation, lack of access to museums, beaches and other places of tourist interest, lack of accessible signage and information, for people with vision problems for

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instance, problematic transactions, and services from human resources, etc.

“Accessible tourism” is the ongoing endeavour to ensure that tourist destinations, products and services are accessible to all people, regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities or age (i.e., age-friendly). It encompasses publicly and privately owned tourist locations. In addition to benefitting people with permanent physical disabilities, it also helps parents with small children, elderly travellers, people with temporary injuries (e.g., a broken leg) and their travel companions.

“Accessible tourism” is about making it easy **for everyone** to enjoy tourism experiences. Making tourism more accessible is not only a social responsibility – there is also a compelling business case for improving accessibility as it can boost the competitiveness of tourism. Although accessible tourism reflects significant benefits for everyone, there are two particular types of potential travellers, that of **persons with disabilities** and that of **elderly people**, travelling individually, in groups, with family members or with caretakers, who need and require most the delivery of accessible tourist experiences and who push hard for a **paradigm shift**, asking the sector to face a redefinition of its products, services and activities.

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Both **Senior Tourism** and **Tourism for People with Disabilities** are nowadays regarded as large, dynamically growing, valuable markets of tourists that may travel individually, in groups, with family members or with caretakers. The European market offers many opportunities, as it is growing and still largely untapped. For this reason, competition is limited. France, the United Kingdom and Germany offer the main markets. Trends that offer opportunities include focussing on multi-generational travel and offering soft-adventure activities that are suitable for disabled travellers.

EU Accessible Tourism in figures

- Accessible tourism generates **€400 billion** revenues per annum and is expected to grow annually by 1% for the coming years.
- **3%** of the total EU GDP.
- It supports **9 million jobs**.
- But: **only 9%** of EU28 touristic services are accessible.
- A potential **44%** increase in demand per year for accessible tourism if appropriate services were put in place.
- An additional **1.2 million enterprises** need to provide accessible services to meet future demand.

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- Improvements could raise its economic contribution by 25% and could attract up to 75% more international travellers.
- Lack of accessibility is a cost for the tourism sector: €142 billion each year and over 3.4 million jobs.

The above indicative figures concern Europe only. Essentially, at a global level it is now recognized as a dynamically developing market, that of tourists who encounter challenges and obstacles that prevent them from traveling or that seriously limit their options. Therefore, a very significant economic potential benefit is nowadays recognized for tourism professionals and local economies that will be able to respond to this growing demand and its characteristics.

At an institutional level, access to tourism is a right that must be ensured by the coordinated state, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In Greece and Cyprus, some steps are being taken by the state (central authority, local/regional authorities) regarding the improvement of the accessibility of tourist infrastructures, archaeological sites, visited routes and areas in nature, beaches, etc. while on the other hand, several entrepreneurs realize the importance and the financial benefit that accessibility and the attraction of categories of tourists who seek it can have for their business.

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Unfortunately, the actions taken are usually not part of a strategic plan to improve services for people with disabilities, as potential consumers of the tourist product, but are done individually and occasionally. Thus, in the end, the "tourism chain" remains broken. A typical example is the isolated installation on various beaches of Greece of automatic assistance systems for entering into the water for people with mobility disabilities, without, however, any provisions in place for (a) the creation of accessible infrastructure throughout the site (e.g., creation of parking spaces for vehicles with disabilities, installation of accessible toilets, changing rooms, showers, etc.), (b) ensuring the availability of other basic services and options close to the point (e.g., accessible accommodations, accessible dining and entertainment areas, trained rescue/service personnel, etc.) and/or (c) providing appropriate and accessible sources of information for the interested public, where they can learn about the options available to them and about their accessibility profiles. Information important, if not a prerequisite, for selection and use.

Until today, in Greece and Cyprus, but also in almost in many Europe areas, there is still a **big gap** between: (a) the needs for access (demand), (b) the obligations for access (institutions-laws), and (c) the access provided in the field (offer).

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The future in tourism relies also on innovation. On how, for example, a destination will be able to differentiate its product from competitors, to extend the tourist season. And in this direction, "accessible tourism" can work as a catalyst. Of course, the counter argument exists, and it has to do with the costs that will be required to form appropriate infrastructures and to make interventions at all levels. However, within the framework of regional and European funding programs, it is possible to cover the cost of logistical infrastructure, equipment, professional training, etc. The agencies and professionals of the tourism sector will thus be able to adapt infrastructure and services to meet the tourism needs of people with disabilities, as part of the actions for their social integration and this to be certified by the state. This reward can be an incentive for the tourism sector which, combined with a differentiation for the payback time of such an investment, will consolidate the human-centered approach, where tourism is a universal right, contributing to the development of the local/national economy.

Under the light of the above, it emerges today as an important challenge for the future of the tourism development of our tourism destinations, the elaboration of new development strategies that will include "accessible tourism" as a priority, and which will allow us to work systematically towards removing existing

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obstacles, creating attractive and barrier free destinations and options by exploiting our natural and cultural heritage in a coordinated and viable manner.

Even though tourism is already one of the fastest growing economic activities in the Program area, and one of the main contributors to the region's GDP, the full potential of the Region's rich natural, cultural, historical, and archaeological resources¹ has not yet been realized, nor sufficiently exploited in a sustainable and responsible way. The rich natural, cultural, historical, and archaeological resources of the region contribute to a **unique capital** and a significant comparative advantage over other tourist destinations, especially as a key pole and condition for **attracting tourists with disabilities and the elderly** who, as a rule, have a strong tendency for “Cultural tourism” and for “Nature tourism”, showing reduced interest to mass tourism activities and preferring not to travel during the high season.

Earlier in 2022, the Commission published the *Transition Pathway for Tourism*². The transition pathway is a plan

¹ Especially if one takes into account that according to estimates, for example, Cultural tourism represents 40% of all European tourism. 4 out of 10 tourists choose their destination based on its cultural offer, and these tourists spend significantly more than typical tourists.

² <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/404a8144-8892-11ec-8c40-01aa75ed71a1>

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jointly created with actors of the tourism ecosystem detailing key actions, targets, and conditions to achieve the green and digital transitions and long-term resilience of the sector. This report highlights how the European Union (EU), will support the increase in tourism in a sustainable and inclusive way, with accessibility being mentioned several times these plans and with dedicated actions being developed. Furthermore, Greece, in its *National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disability* has set *Accessible Tourism* as one out of the 30 Goals, with specific indicators, projects and actions to achieve significant effort in this field in the years to come³.

Building on such EU and national initiatives, **this Deliverable** is called upon to formulate an appropriate strategy for the joint development of Accessible Tourism in the cross-border area. Within this context, it aims to prepare recommendations for the joint (Greece-Cyprus) strategic development of Accessible Tourism in the cross-border area. In order to achieve the development goal of Accessible Tourism and to integrate it in the planning of every tourism initiative in the cross-border area, this study attempts to develop strategies to increase accessibility in tourism by applying principles of "inclusiveness" and "design for all" in all aspects of

³ https://amea.gov.gr/action#st_29

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destinations and services, aiming to meet the needs and requirements of potential visitors with disabilities, the elderly, people with reduced mobility, and people with chronic health problems. The Accessible Tourism encompasses various economic activities, such as travel agencies, tourist information offices, entertainment, transportation, cultural and natural heritage and health and wellness, all activities that complement an **integrated development approach**.

The proposed strategy **places at the core** of our development strategy and of all our joint efforts the capitalization of the regions' natural and cultural heritage assets for attracting and unlocking new markets of disabled and elderly tourists and aims at improving **skills, offer** and **communication and information** on accessible tourism opportunities in Rethymno, Ayia Napa and Sotira.

Methodologically, the elaboration was based on an extensive bibliographic approach and desk work analysis of findings, in order to capture the challenges and trends on issue of accessible tourism at an international arena. Furthermore, relative strategic policy documents and reports have been thoroughly recorded and assessed in combination with consultation with key stakeholders and representative bodies of people with disabilities.

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The adoption of a joint strategy will create the conditions for developing unique tourism experiences for all, both for the benefit of the recipients of services and for providers, leading to better quality, comfort, and safety of services, not only for disabled travellers, but for everyone.

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1 The demand

1.1 Senior people

Currently more than 128 million citizens in the European Union are aged between 55 and 80 years, representing about 25% of the total population⁴. This demographic development is having a considerable impact on the increase of the tourism demand and the European Union feels that the contribution of senior citizens to the European tourism industry is significant and should be reinforced to face the challenge of seasonality, stimulating economic growth and jobs in Europe. The European Commission acknowledges the importance of fostering transnational tourism activities by developing tourism off-season for seniors in Europe, a population group which includes individuals with both purchasing power and leisure time.

Tourism trends and ageing

- According to Eurostat (2015), 55-65 years-old tourists accounted for 15,3% of the total tourist market and 65-years-old people or more accounted for 17,7%.

4

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Population_structure_and_ageing

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- European tourists aged 65+ spend on average €53 per day and €66 billion per year, 16% of total tourism expenditure in the EU28.
- Globally, the 50+ population spend €109 billion per year on sectors directly related to tourism, close to 3% of EU GDP, and contributing to 100,000 jobs and inducing further economic growth in other sectors of the economy.
- Tourists aged 65 or over accounted for nearly 1 in 4 tourism nights for private purposes spent by EU residents in 2019, while people aged 55+ accounted for 41%.
- More than half of European residents aged 65+ did not participate in tourism in 2019, compared with 30% of people aged 15-64.
- Senior tourists make longer trips, preferably in their country of residence and staying at non-rented accommodation⁵.
- Older people travel more in the 'shoulder season', i.e., the travel period between peak and off-peak seasons⁶, with a less pronounced summer peak.
- During long domestic trips spent at rented accommodation, the average daily expenditure of

⁵ For instance at holiday homes they own.

⁶ just before summer (April, May, June) or early autumn (September, October).

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persons aged 65+ was nearly **equal** to the expenditure of people aged 15-64, while for similar outbound trips the average expenditure was higher for senior tourists (+4%).

- Older people would rather **travel with a partner**, with relatives or family members, as well as in **groups** with known people.
- Senior tourists prefer to travel with a budget of up to 100€ a day, to take **4-7 nights breaks**, and also to extend the length up to 13 nights, when possible.
- Growing older increases the will to be autonomous in planning and managing travels, opting less frequently for all-inclusive packages, **preferring to organise holidays individually**.
- Regarding transport, **accessibility** is more important for them than the means of travel.
- The preferred touristic themes are **nature** and **culture**, whose accessibility and security are rated as very important.
- They will seek **medical and health services**.
- **Safety** is a priority when it comes to senior tourism – as a matter of fact, it is the most important factor of decision making about destinations.

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The elder generation's enthusiasm (demand) for travel is growing rapidly and senior tourists are foreseen to become a powerful consumer group in the near future. However, "**senior tourism**" is not yet a clearly defined segment. For example, it is a general statement that the ageing of the body is a normal biological process, not necessarily accompanied by pathological lesions or diseases. However, the biological processes of natural ageing increase the vulnerability to diseases and accidents. With ageing, the body mass decreases, the movement ability decreases, cellular loss becomes continuous, the pain threshold becomes lower, blood pressure increases, lung capacity declines and muscular strength decreases; service providers must take all these aspects into account when developing targeted services for the elderly.

Senior tourists cannot be defined as a homogenous group. This is partially due to the fact that the age group of senior citizens (generally referring to 50+ people) itself consists of different generations. A two-generation model of parent and child(ren) can easily belong to the same group; in regions with higher life expectancy, even three generations: grandparent-parent-child(ren) can fall into the same category.

The elderly are a heterogeneous population group with different consumption demands that can only be met by

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a correspondingly differentiated range of products and services. The newly introduced term of **senior-friendly accessibility** will not only refer to a space developed especially for elderly people, but it will also mean a more user-friendly environment for the whole population. The decreased level of noise and electro-smog, the re-design of allotted passing time at crosswalks, the allocation of covered benches and resting places, the targeted distribution of public toilets and the re-organisation of the crossings of bicycle routes and pavements used by the elderly are all important innovations which will have a positive response from the senior citizens first. Such spaces with a higher level of safety will not only be suitable for the elderly: children, young single women and disabled people will also benefit from the changes.

1.2 Persons with disabilities

According to the UN, Globally, an estimated **1,3 billion people** (about 16% of the global population) currently experience significant disability. Along with over than 2 billion people, such as spouses, children and caregivers of persons with disabilities, altogether represent almost **a third of the world's population**, who are directly affected by disability. While this signifies a huge potential market for travel and tourism, it still remains vastly under-served due to inaccessible travel and tourism facilities and services, as well as discriminatory policies and

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practices. Many people have access needs, whether related to a physical condition (e.g., wheelchair users, visual or hearing impairments, allergies) or for other reasons. For example, older and less mobile people, or people with pushchairs have access needs that can become a huge obstacle when going on holiday. For those people, travelling can be a real challenge. Finding information on accessible services, checking luggage on a plane, or booking a room with special access needs often proves to be difficult, costly, and time consuming.

Tourism trends and disability

- 87 million Europeans have some form of disability. The EU average is 24%, i.e., 1 in 4 European adults, of which one third declare severe disability.
 - 5.6% of women and 4.4% of men in Europe report difficulties in activities related to lifting and carrying, while 4.2% of women and 3.4% of men in Europe report difficulties in activities related to walking.
 - 2.1% of women and 1.8% of men in Europe report difficulties in activities related to seeing.
 - 1.6% of women and 1.5% of men in Europe report difficulties in activities related to remembering or concentrating.
 - 1.0% of women and 1.3% of men in Europe report difficulties in activities related to hearing.

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- 48.5% of people with disabilities in the EU are aged 65+.
- Europeans with disability want to be able to travel regardless of their disability and will often carry out [extensive research](#) to find the right destination.
- They often rely on [specialist tour operators](#) to help them find the right package, yet they take each other's [opinion and recommendations](#) into account seriously.
- They require more [communication](#), and they will seek [accessibility services](#) and occasionally –especially people with chronic conditions– [medical and health services](#).
- Regarding transport, stress-free [accessibility](#) is more important for them than the means of travel.
- [Safety](#) is a priority when it comes to senior tourism – as a matter of fact, it is the most important factor of decision making about destinations.
- 26% of them declare themselves loyal to the tourist destination that will satisfy their expectations (repeat visitors).

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In the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD⁷), Article 9 on “Accessibility” calls for State Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to the physical environment, information, transportation and other facilities and services open or provided to the public. The same article also calls for the elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, including all transportation and facilities. Furthermore, Article 30 on “Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport” also calls for State Parties to ensure that persons with disabilities **enjoy the benefits of tourism.**

On the other hand, as the tourism industry has long advocated for the sustainable development of tourism (Gillovic and McIntosh, 2020), seeking to balance the protection of the environment, the promotion of economic growth, and the maintenance of social and cultural integrity, both in the present and in the future (Liu et al, 2013), it is nowadays clear to all that accessible tourism is a vital element in sustainable tourism development policy. In the recent *2030 Agenda for Global*

⁷ See <http://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>. **Note:** 180 Member States, including Greece and Cyprus, have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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*Action containing the Sustainable Development Goals*⁸ (SDGs 2015), Goal 11 focuses on principles to “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. This goal captures tourism and recreation through its call for the provisions of universal design for accessible and sustainable transport systems, inclusive urbanization, and access to green and public spaces. In its 2011 Declaration, the *United Nations World Tourism Organization* (UNWTO) predicted tourism will increase and experience sustained development, reaching **1.8 billion** international tourists by 2030. Accessible cities and tourism provisions therefore ensure the full social and economic inclusion of all persons with direct benefits of promoting more sustainable travel habits among users.

Accessibility is also an important aspect of realizing the rights of the world’s ageing population. As we grow older, our chance of experiencing a permanent or temporary disability is increased. A focus on accessibility can therefore ensure that we are able to participate fully in our societies well into our older years. Accessibility also benefits pregnant women and persons who are temporarily rendered immobile. Certainly, making basic

⁸ **Note:** 7 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals explicitly refer to persons with disabilities.

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adjustments to a facility, providing accurate information, and understanding the needs of disabled people can result in increased visitor numbers. Improving the accessibility of tourism services increases their quality and their enjoyment for all tourists, as well as improving quality of life in the local communities.

1.2.1 What are the characteristics and needs of persons with disabilities?

People with disabilities are a heterogeneous population group, whose needs vary according to the category and severity of the disability. People with disabilities, depending on the category and the severity of the disability, face different barriers and therefore the improvement of their position requires the implementation of additional interventions oriented to the particular needs of each category.

Persons with disabilities are *"persons with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory difficulties, which, in interaction with various barriers, in particular institutional, environmental or social behavioral barriers, may prevent the full and effective participation of these persons in society on an equal basis with others"* (Article 1 of the UN CRPD). The umbrella term 'persons with disabilities' encompasses various categories of disability, which may be visible or invisible, severe, or mild, permanent or temporary, isolated or a combination of these. The basic categories

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into which the various disabilities are classified are as follows: a) Motor disability (e.g. people with quadriplegia, paraplegia, absence of upper or lower limbs, etc.), b) Sensory disability (e.g. deaf, deaf, blind or visually impaired), c) Mental/cognitive/ developmental disability (e.g. people with autism), d) Mental disability (e.g. people with manic depression, schizophrenia, etc.), e) Chronic diseases (e.g. people with thalassemia, kidney disease, diabetes), f) Other disabilities (e.g. people with Down syndrome), g) Severe and multiple disabilities.

A person's environment has a huge effect on the experience and extent of disability. Inaccessible environments create disability, posing barriers to the participation and inclusion of people with disabilities. So, for example, a deaf person without a sign language interpreter, a wheelchair user in a high-rise building without an accessible lift, and a blind person using a computer without screen reader software etc. they will all experience the inability to participate and may lead to exclusion and/or isolation. Therefore, to be accessible, an environment must take into account the widest possible range of needs of all categories of people with disabilities and ensure that everyone can move and live as independently as possible.

To facilitate the comprehension of the basic accessibility requirements of people with disabilities, the following

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division into basic subgroups, with relatively similar characteristics and correspondingly similar accessibility requirements, is considered.

People with mobility disabilities face difficulties due to physical, architectural and mainly technological obstacles, e.g. stairs, lack of space for movement and maneuvering (narrow doors, small sanitary areas where no wheelchair can fit, small lifts, etc.), slipperiness (polished marble floors, found floors, etc.), obstacles on sidewalks (signs, outdoor merchandisers' equipment, cafe tables, parked vehicles, etc.), unsuitable furniture, mechanisms that require force to operate, etc. Therefore they may need: Flat surfaces or surfaces with small slopes, non-slip and continuous, without joints and steps; Sufficient free space for passing, overtaking and maneuvering as well as transfer from/to the wheelchair; Free space next to attendant seats; Rest areas at regular intervals; Ladders with handles on both sides, edge markings and comfortable treads; Markings at eye level; Easy-to-handle doors with handles at appropriate heights; Accessible sanitary facilities; Mechanisms at appropriate heights and easy handling; Sufficient times between successive phases of mechanism operation, etc.

People with visual impairments rely mainly on the perception of tactile and sound stimuli, and face difficulties mainly with information/communication and

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the use of devices, equipment and aids. They have difficulty, for instance when only conventional printed forms of communication or visual signage are used (price lists, timetables, safety signage, etc.), when large print and strong background-character color contrasts or Braille print or screen readers are not provided, as well as with their orientation in space, when e.g., no special embossed directional markings or specialized personnel are provided to assist them. Therefore, they may need: Corridors with sufficient crossing width with other users and a smooth finished surface; Distinct runway boundaries; Distinct marking of stairs; Highlight obstacles up to head height; Tactile or Braille signage; Audio marking and information; Strong color contrasts; Well-lit areas; Simplicity and clarity of forms and elements of the environment; Support services (guides, readers, etc.).

People with hearing impairments rely mainly on the perception of visual stimuli, and face corresponding difficulties with information when e.g. this is provided only with audio systems without visual information systems being provided at the same time, with communication when e.g. no sign language interpretation or sound reinforcement systems are provided, as well as the use of devices, equipment and aids if these are not adapted to their needs (e.g. have a visual alert or vibration, etc.) and possibly with the understanding

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written and spoken word. Therefore, they may need: Good room acoustics; Well-lit areas; Visual marking/updating; Sign language interpretation and alternative communication methods, e.g., SMS, text note, etc.; Audio enhancement aids; Simplicity and clarity of forms and elements of the environment, etc.

People with visual impairments face difficulties, mainly due to physical, architectural and technological barriers, e.g., in cases of unclear and complicated markings, in cases of spaces with a complex layout, in cases of equipment with complex instructions for use. Therefore, they may need: Simple layout of spaces; Simplified markup; Simplified instructions for use, etc.

People with mental or intellectual disabilities often require specialized ways of serving. So e.g., people with claustrophobia are likely to be unable to use public transport.

People with speech problems need special forms of communication, e.g., sign language interpretation, trained staff, etc.

People with allergies also encounter difficulties due to architectural barriers, e.g., in areas that do not have good ventilation, areas with many people or due to specific policies/procedures e.g., in areas where the presence of animals is allowed.

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People with other disabilities and chronic diseases are particularly susceptible to infections and germs, which requires strict cleanliness in public areas and therefore corresponding procedures/policies.

A particularly important role for the proper service and participation of people with disabilities of all categories is played by the proper training/information of the transaction staff of all businesses, but also of public opinion in general in matters related to the needs and ways of communicating with people with disabilities and accessibility.

1.2.2 Clarification of disability-related terms and concepts

In this section some basic definitions and concepts related to disability are provided:

- **Disability:** *"[...] is a complex and changing phenomenon, due to the interaction of a person's personal characteristics and the characteristics of the environment in which that person lives."* (World Health Organisation). Based on the above approach, a person with a physical handicap may experience the disability in one environment and not in another, depending on whether or not it has obstacles, but also aids. It is *"an evolving concept"*, *"[...] resulting from the interaction between disabled persons and the environmental and behavioral barriers that hinder their full and effective*

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participation in society, on an equal basis with others" (preamble, paragraph e of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

- **Access:** The provision of the possibility of participation of all citizens - including persons with disabilities - in all areas of social activities (e.g., in the production process, in education, in cultural activities, in sports) and therefore in the infrastructures, services, processes and goods related to them. Access is a broader concept of accessibility. Accessibility and all its manifestations (universal design, reasonable adaptations, including assistive technology, forms of live assistance and intermediaries) as well as "affirmative action measures" aim to ensure the right to equal participation of persons with disabilities, i.e., to "access", and in this sense they are tools for achieving it. According to the rights-based approach of disability, the participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of social life is an inalienable human right.
- **Obstacles:** anything that poses a barrier to the autonomous and equal participation (access) of people with disabilities and chronic diseases in all activities. Barriers can be institutional, architectural, technological, behavioral, ideological (e.g., attitudes, perceptions) and located in communication, information, practices, processes, etc.

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- **Discrimination:** means the different treatment of people who are in a similar position (direct discrimination) and the same treatment of people who are in a different position (indirect discrimination). *“Discrimination on grounds of disability or chronic condition” means “[...] any discrimination, exclusion or limitation based on disability, which has the purpose or effect of preventing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, individual or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including the denial of reasonable accommodation”* (Article 2 "Definitions" of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). For the national and European disability movement, the exclusion of disabled people from the labor market is a consequence of the discrimination they face in all areas of their lives, namely in education, training, the Information Society, transport, etc. Discrimination against people with disabilities and chronic conditions takes the form of barriers and leads to social exclusion. The existence of obstacles in one area inhibits the participation of people with disabilities in the other areas (e.g., the lack of accessibility to the built environment and public transport makes it difficult for them to be included in education, employment, etc.).

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- **Universal Design** (or "Design for All" or "Inclusive Design") means *"[...] the design of products, environments, programs and services that can be used by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The term 'universal design' does not [...] preclude assistive devices for specific groups of people with disabilities where this is required."* (Article 2 «Definitions» of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). "Universal Design" is a broader concept of accessibility. The implementation of "Design for all" adds value and widens the group of beneficiaries, while limiting the obligation to anticipate and provide additional specialized solutions (e.g., a building accessible to people with mobility impairment also facilitates the movement of the elderly or pregnant women). In essence, it ensures in practice the basic democratic principle of respect for diversity and equality. By applying its principles, as already mentioned above, the elimination of obstacles that also concern disabled people is achieved.
- **Reasonable accommodation** concerns the *"necessary and appropriate modifications and arrangements, which do not impose a disproportionate or unreasonable burden, where required in a particular case, in order to ensure, for persons with disabilities, the enjoyment or*

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exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). The difference between "accessibility" and "reasonable accommodations" is that accessibility refers to all people with disabilities as a group, while reasonable accommodation is individualized. The "adjustment" is considered "reasonable" when: a) it is justified by the category and severity of the disability and b) its cost is not so high as to create a financial problem for the institution that provides it. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the obligation to provide reasonable adjustments applies in the field of employment, but also in other areas, such as education, training and lifelong learning, but also in general during providing personalized services.

- **Rights-based approach to disability:** The rights of people, regardless of any of their individual characteristics (gender, age, colour, nationality, religion, disability, etc.), arise from their human status and citizenship as such. The rights-based approach to equal treatment must be the basis for the formulation of the policy and the institutional framework, at the same time, as a clear, strong, and non-negotiable argument, it constitutes the stable and indisputable

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starting point for formulating every goal and asserting every demand. The principle of equal rights implies that the needs of all people are of equal importance. Therefore, the functioning of society must be organized in such a way as to ensure equal opportunities for participation and satisfaction of the needs of each person. The basis for dealing with the problems of disability can be justified by a wide range of approaches, arguments and motivations (from the rights approach, the arguments of a political and economic nature, to "philanthropy", ethics and voluntarism). The above justifications differ significantly both in terms of their general philosophy, the visual approach to disability and of course their effectiveness. The demand for equal treatment based on human rights is a fundamental principle and should precede any other argument (political, economic, etc.). Disability has been treated in the context of human rights since the late 1960s. For human rights, international organizations (UN, etc.) have adopted a series of acts. However, radical changes in the approach to disability, in the direction of human rights, resulted in the adoption of disability-specific texts. Some of these constitute guidelines (see UN Model Disability Rules) while others have potential legal force to the extent that they are ratified by member states of international organizations (see UN CRPD).

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1.2.3 Some key aspects of the disabled traveler's profile

- They repeat their holidays in places with good accessibility and they become loyal customers more easily.
- They stay for longer periods of time.
- They prefer to travel in large groups.
- Their tourism expenditures are 1.16 times higher.
- Willing to pay twice as much for better accessibility.
- They systematically use forums and blogs and make recommendations through them.
- 88% of disabled travelers go on holiday at least once a year.
- 74% of disabled travelers are willing to travel more if the overall travel experience is improved.
- 70% of the disabled population have the financial and physical ability to travel, generating a potential income of €88.6 billion by 2025, an increase of 65% since 2005 while they are unwilling to travel to unsatisfactory destinations.

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2 The supply

2.1 Accessible tourism

Accessible Tourism⁹ (or “Inclusive Tourism” or “Tourism for All”) refers to tourism based on the principles of ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘Design for All’, with an emphasis on the quality of access and experience for all, including people with disabilities, elderly persons, and in general of people with reduced mobility/autonomy (e.g., families with small children, people with chronic diseases, etc.).

It should be noted that accessible tourism concerns people with different accessibility needs, and which are sometimes not obvious / perceptible. A basic categorization is:

- People with any kind of disability (with mobility, sight, hearing, speech problems, with cognitive dysfunctions and chronic diseases).
- 65+ population (often people with limited mobility and ability to receive and process information, spatial and temporal orientation, visual impairment, hearing loss, speech, etc.)
- Others (pregnant women, children who are unaccompanied by parents up to 12 years old,

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accessible_tourism

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caregivers of the disabled, injured, people with unusual or special physiques, people with baby carriages and luggage, foreigners, people from a different culture, etc.).

The *European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT*¹⁰) states that there is no single, universally accepted definition for "accessible tourism". The definition is constantly evolving as it is increasingly applied in different contexts around the world. It mentions various definitions like the one below. "Accessible Tourism"¹¹ is tourism and travel that is accessible to all people, with or without disabilities, including people with motor, sensory or intellectual disabilities, vision, hearing, mental problems, the elderly and people with temporary disabilities. According to ENAT, accessible tourism includes: Unrestricted destinations: infrastructure and facilities; Transportation: by air, land and sea, suitable for all users; High quality service delivered by trained staff; Activities, exhibits, attractions: allowing everyone to participate in tourism; Marketing, reservation systems, websites and services: information accessible to all.

¹⁰ European Network for Accessible Tourism - ENAT

¹¹ Also known as "Access Tourism", "Catholic Tourism-Universal tourism", "Participatory Tourism-Inclusive Tourism" and in some countries, such as in Japan "Barrier-free Tourism".

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Wikipedia states that *“Accessible tourism is the ongoing effort to ensure that tourism destinations, products and services are accessible to all people, regardless of physical limitations, disabilities or age. It includes public and private tourist areas. The term has been defined by Darcy and Dickson (2009), as follows: Accessible tourism enables people with access issues, e.g., mobility, vision, hearing and/or cognition, to function independently and with equality and dignity through the provision of universally designed tourism products, services and environments. Their definition includes all persons, including those traveling with children in prams, persons with disabilities and the elderly”*.

Over the past few years, accessible tourism is gradually taking shape and becoming a recognized necessary feature within tourism development efforts. Accessible tourism is identified today as ‘game changer’ for destinations. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) typically states in its Recommendation¹² text that: *“as the demand for accessible tourism for all increases, (it) is now seen as an opportunity rather than an obligation. If the tourism industry wishes to maintain and develop quality, sustainability, and competitiveness, it must support and develop tourism that is accessible to all, because accessible*

¹² UNWTO, Update of the 2005 UNWTO General Assembly Recommendations on “Accessible Tourism for All”, taking into consideration the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2007, 2013.

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tourism benefits everyone.". Finally, with regard to accessible tourism, the following phrase formulated by the Secretary General of the UNWTO for Accessible Tourism for All¹³ is worth mentioning: *"Accessibility is a central element of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. It is both a human rights check, but also a great business opportunity. Above all, it should be understood that accessible tourism does not only benefit people with disabilities or special needs, but it also benefits everyone"* (Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary General). The UNWTO recommendations refer to appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, transport, information, and communications, including IT and information and communication technology systems, as well as other services and facilities open to the public or for public use, in urban areas, as well as in rural and coastal zones. Accessibility should run throughout the tourism chain, the links between all attractions, services, and activities should be well planned and tested. Elements of the chain include:

1. Tourist destination management

¹³ Update of the 2005 UNWTO General Assembly Recommendations on "Accessible Tourism for All", taking into consideration the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2007.

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2. Tourist information and advertising (preparation, information and reservations)
3. Urban and architectural environment
4. Transport means and stations
5. Accommodation, catering services and conferences
6. Cultural activities (museums, theaters, cinemas, and others)
7. Other tourist activities and events

Therefore, accessible tourism is not an additional type of tourism, nor alternative, thematic, or special tourism. It is the contemporary, the **right way** to develop tourism. The general platform on which **all types of tourism** (mass, alternative or thematic) should be based in view of a sustainable economic development.

2.1.1 Identifying the barriers

Different barriers and constraints that senior and disabled people face are apparent in several ways during the different phases of the tourism travel chain, and how large these barriers are is highly determined by the individual's physical functioning (Bi et al., 2007). Nyman (2016) argued that tourism can contribute to increased well-being for people with disabilities. However, it can

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also be the other way around. If tourism is not accessible enough for these people, it can reinforce feelings of social exclusion and widen the gap between disabled and non-disabled people, elderly and younger people. It is, therefore, important to identify the barriers that these people face when they are travelling for tourism purposes, and work actively to reduce or even, when possible, eliminate those barriers (Stumbo et al., 2011).

Smith (1987) suggested that people with disabilities [and often this is the case also for senior persons] face three main barriers when they are travelling, which they must overcome to fully participate in tourism. These are '*intrinsic barriers*', '*interactive barriers*' and '*environmental barriers*'. The '*intrinsic barriers*' are the limitations that are associated with everyone's own physical, psychological or cognitive functioning, which are affected by the impairment (Yau et al., 2004). These barriers are usually not visible for other people (Packer et al., 2007) and includes fears or anxiety regarding tourism travel (Lee et al., 2012). Intrinsic barriers can limit peoples' tourism participating, and sometimes even prevent them from travelling (Packer et al., 2007). The '*interactive barriers*' can be actual communication problems, negative attitudes from other people (Card et al., 2006; Daniels et al., 2005; Dominguez et al., 2013), or feelings of social exclusion (Preston & Rajé, 2007). Third, the

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'environmental barriers' are usually seen as the major barriers once the individual is actually travelling and refers to the difficulties related to the physical environment (Blichfeldt and Nicolaisen 2011). The three main barriers can be categorized into 'internal' and 'external' barriers as well. The internal barriers are the initial obstacles in terms of, for instance, anxiety about being able to participate in tourism. Once these barriers are dealt with and the person starts to participate in tourism, he/she face the external barriers, which include both the environmental and interactive barriers (McKercher et al., 2003).

Most efforts in terms of reducing barriers that exist for people with disabilities have been made regarding the environmental barriers. A problem is, however, that the emphasis tends to be on ensuring the lowest required level of accessibility for disabled people, rather than planning and designing places that are fully accessible (Bromely et al., 2007). A further problem with focusing on the environmental barriers is that some aged tourists or tourists with disabilities experience negative attitudes from the surroundings as a larger barrier than the physical environment, and it is perceived as more difficult to overcome negative experiences in terms of interactive barriers compared to environmental barriers (Bi et al., 2007).

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Usually, people do not simply accept that different barriers exist and do not allow for these to prevent them from travelling but are rather dealing with these proactively (Lee et al., 2012). This indicates that if the motivation to travel is strong, some of the barriers can be negotiated. However, it is not considered possible to travel if the constraints are perceived as too difficult to overcome (Gladwell & Bedini, 2004; Kazeminia et al., 2015; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008). Different people are dealing with travelling constraints in different ways, and a barrier that can be negotiated and easy to overcome by some, may not be experienced as such by another person (Bi et al., 2007; Daniels et al., 2005).

Some people can learn the hard way that tourism travel is difficult, by having negative experiences from one trip and thereby feel like it is not possible to participate in tourism travel with their disability or impairment. Others, however, take the negative experience as a lesson to learn from and plan their tourism trip differently the next time they are travelling. It is, therefore, not only the three main barriers that need to be reduced, but it is also important that people with disabilities are encouraged to travel. Their attitudes towards travelling constraints might have to change if they are desiring to participate in tourism travel. However, this can be made more easily if the barriers are reduced, which indicates that there is a

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relationship between travelling constraints and attitudes regarding the possibility to travel among people with limited mobility/autonomy (Lee et al., 2012).

The main challenges for disabled people can include:

- Lack of information on accessible facilities, services, equipment rentals and tourist attractions.
- Inaccessible booking services and related websites.
- Untrained professional staff capable of informing and advising about accessibility issues.
- Lack of accessible airports and transfer facilities and services.
- Inaccessible streets and transport services.
- Lack of adapted and accessible hotel rooms, restaurants, shops, toilets and public places.
- Lack of barrier-free attractions and other destination-related services.
- Reviews of the tourist segment and stories to encourage travel.

2.1.2 Good practices

We certainly cannot claim that accessible tourism in Greece or Cyprus is mature. This fact is evident from the number of disabled people who visit our countries and the destinations they choose. Good practices related to accessibility have been developed which, in addition to benefits for disabled people, also contribute to strengthening the competitiveness of destinations.

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For hotel premises: Appropriate signage so as to facilitate the movement of people with cognitive functions and perception problems, adequate lighting, audio description of the space for people with visual disabilities, sufficient circulation space and free of obstacles for the free movement of people with visual disabilities in particular as and people with mobility problems in the interior and exterior areas of the hotel, the furniture in the rooms should be made to the right dimensions and the right height, an alarm system suitable for various types of disabilities as well as communication systems, the markings should be accompanied by corresponding text in braille and from a relief layout of the space, training employees to serve disabled customers and disseminating information on accessible websites.

For pedestrian areas: Installation of sound signals on traffic lights, construction of sidewalk ramps, creation of a network of accessible sidewalks with ramps and special guides for the visually impaired.

For transport: Buses equipped with ramps for entering the bus, audio stop announcement systems and guides for the blind at stations, for trams and metros safe intersections with vehicles, pedestrian movement through demarcated pedestrian crossings, ensuring safe access for passengers at stops with special ramps, elevators, guide plates, etc., to provide white taxis, which

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are special multi-modal vehicles equipped with a ramp or a special staircase to transport people with mobility problems within the area.

For communication – information: Construction of accessible public telephones, information forms in accessible formats (braille, large letters) as well as audio description, creation of websites according to international accessibility standards.

For museums: Placement of access ramps, smoothness of surfaces, call of routes, safe movement, elimination of obstacles and lighting floors, adjustment of the cost of entrance, souvenirs and other items and the cost of additional services, adjustment of the tour based on the characteristics of the audience (education, age, etc. .), information about the museum on the internet, social media and virtual tour, adjustment of the opening hours of the museum, sales, refreshments, catering to avoid overcrowding, friendly staff with knowledge of foreign languages and properly trained, translations in print, the signage and the internet, appropriate signage inside and outside the museum, appropriate museum parking and in the immediate area, appropriate rest area configuration, different ways of using the additional illustrated, tactile information that accompanies the basic one, adapting the information provided accordingly with their meaning and with the public, the same means of use

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to be provided for all users identically where possible if not equivalently.

2.2 Heritage tourism

Heritage Tourism¹⁴, more widely known as *Natural and Cultural Heritage Tourism*, refers to forms of tourism centered on the heritage capital of a region such as (a) the natural environment, (b) its history, and (c) its culture. There are two main subcategories of Heritage Tourism:

2.2.1 Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism, which focuses on the culture, history, customs, arts, architecture and religions of a region, and more generally on the exploitation of its historical and cultural stock, which may include, inter alia, museums and theatres, old towns and traditional villages, but also traditional festivals, traditional arts, and other forms of 'intangible' heritage of a place, and which includes various alternative forms of tourism, such as *Architectural tourism*, *Archaeological tourism*, *Religious tourism*, and *Educational tourism*.

Cultural tourism is defined as touring with the central motive of visiting the cultural monuments and cultural heritage resources of a destination, such as archaeological sites, historical monuments, religious monuments, the built

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heritage_tourism

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environment (residential complexes of architectural value, traditional settlements, historic city centers, historic lighthouses etc.) and cultural events (music, dance, art, theater etc.). It is a particularly important form of tourism, since the cultural motivation was and remains one of the main reasons for travel for tourists worldwide. In the case of Greece and Cyprus, the combination of archaeological wealth and ancient Greek culture has always been one of the main attractions for tourists in the country and an important comparative advantage over other tourist destinations.

Architectural tourism: Highlighting the architectural heritage of a region can be a component of the offer of alternative tourist activities. The richness and diversity of the architectural cultural heritage are highlighted in preserved traditional settlements, historical buildings, castles and fortresses of the Roman, Venetian, Byzantine and Ottoman periods, historical lighthouses as well as in monuments of recent history (public buildings, houses of famous persons, central city squares etc.) of great historical and architectural value.

Archaeological tourism as a subcategory of cultural tourism has as its main object the visit to archaeological sites and monuments, museums, etc. In the case of Greece and Cyprus, the combination of archaeological wealth and ancient Greek culture has always been one of the main poles of tourist attraction in the country and an important comparative advantage over other tourist destinations.

Religious tourism: Visits to religious and worship sites (Byzantine and post-Byzantine monuments / churches and

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monasteries) are a widespread form of activity in Greece and Cyprus, as in many areas there are religious monuments that are poles of attraction for thousands of believers from home and abroad each year.

Within the context of cultural tourism is also the special form of **Educational tourism**, which includes activities such as: (a) organization of educational programs for university and college students, (b) educational and cultural programs for school and university excursions from within and abroad, (c) programs of education and familiarization with the local cultural heritage, and (d) programs of learning the Greek language. Educational tourism is considered one of the most important growing tourism markets and can provide significant benefits to an area with rich cultural elements, which are a magnet for educational/student tourism (domestically & abroad).

2.2.2 Environmental tourism

Environmental tourism, which focuses on nature worship, wildlife observation and more generally on the valuable benefits of activities in nature, and which in addition to mass 'Nature Tourism' includes various alternative forms of tourism, such as *Ecotourism, Agritourism (or Outdoor), Geotourism, Sea/Marine Tourism*.

Ecotourism is a form of tourism which is linked to various forms of tourist activity in nature and develops in ecologically significant and mostly areas of statutory environmental protection (e.g., Natura areas) and includes activities that may

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have a scientific and educational nature (e.g., ecosystem observation tourism). Ecotourism is complemented by some other forms of tourism such as scientific tourism, sightseeing/hiking tourism and outdoor activity tourism (adventure tourism) which by definition do not necessarily contribute to the protection of the natural environment, but include all those activities organized in the natural environment and partly have a strong element of adventure.

Agritourism, in the broader sense of "rural tourism", is a mild and small-scale form of tourist development and multi-activity that develops in a spatial unit characterized as rural (in non-touristically saturated rural areas). It is characterized by accommodation on farms or in accommodation of a traditional character and small capacity, as well as a wide variety of outdoor leisure activities linked either to agricultural / livestock production, local gastronomy and local products and cultural elements of the rural area, or with outdoor activities such as mountain climbing, hiking, mountain biking, etc. In order for the agritourism offer not to be limited to the simple provision of accommodation, as is the case in the majority of "agritourism" destinations in Greece, it is necessary to provide opportunities for experiential experiences and to combine them with other forms of alternative tourism, such as ecotourism and cultural tourism.

Geotourism or Geological tourism: Active volcanoes, majestic caves, spectacular canyons, small or large geological faults, rare rocks and minerals. Greece and Cyprus have countless landscapes of rare geological beauty to explore. They are the

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"silent" witnesses of the eternal evolution of the earth and the proof of the incomparable power and art of nature. "Art" and power reflected in the fascinating changes of the earth's soil and rocks, but also in the grace of geological phenomena. Geotourism constitutes a *suis generis* form of alternative tourism, which has been developing extremely rapidly in recent years. For its admirers, the artifacts of geological time are monuments of unique importance.

Sea or Marine tourism refers to all the tourist activities that develop in the marine area and on the shores of a tourist reception area. Usually, marine tourism means cruises with cruise ships as well as sea tours with pleasure boats (sailboats, motorboats, yachts, etc.). The marine tourism category also includes a wide range of other activities, such as marine sports activities, underwater fishing, diving ("Diving tourism"), etc.

Source: <http://altertourism.gr>

2.3A new term: "Inclusive Heritage Tourism"

'Inclusive Heritage Tourism' or *'Heritage Tourism for All'*, is a new term introduced by NCDP, to refer to a novel strategy that will aim at the development **Accessible Tourism** while keeping at its core, at all times, the orientation and characteristics of **Heritage Tourism** (conventional and alternative or thematic). In fact, the term reflects the actual 'philosophy' of the *In-Heritage* project, which is based on the following:

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- Even though tourism is already one of the fastest growing economic activities in the Program area, and one of the main contributors to the region's GDP, the full potential of the Region's rich natural, cultural, historical, and archaeological resources has not yet been realized, nor sufficiently exploited in a sustainable and responsible way.
- The rich natural, cultural, historical, and archaeological resources of the region contribute to a unique capital and a significant comparative advantage over other tourist destinations, especially as a key pole and condition for attracting tourists with disabilities and the elderly who, as a rule, show reduced interest mass tourism activities and prefer not to travel during the high season.

Joint cooperation at (inter-)regional level for the strategic development of 'Heritage Tourism for All' will lead to:

- integration of the tourism potential of natural areas into the cycle of the economy in an intelligent, inclusive, sustainable and responsible way
- sustainable differentiation of the tourism offer of the region
- provision of products and services of high added value
- attraction of more and new tourist markets
- significant benefits from business opportunities

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- reducing the dependence of the tourism industry on the seasonal model, extending the tourist season, and strengthening tourism throughout the year
- limiting the environmental footprint and promoting and protecting areas of natural beauty from mass tourism and overdevelopment
- creating more and better jobs for the region's economy
- improving universal accessibility in the field of heritage tourism, with multiple benefits, including ensuring equal living conditions for citizens with disabilities, but also for all those population groups that have similar needs.
- creating, immediately but also in the long term, a branding image of the cross-border region as a single, modern, borderless and universally accessible, international tourist destination (destination branding), encouraging the influx and mobility of new visitors, with a clear contribution to the local economy, the social inclusive and sustainable development.

Accessibility is a social good, a driver of sustainable development and an indicator of culture for a tourist destination. The goal should be to have accessible infrastructures in public space, as well as in businesses (for the benefit of the employees). As mentioned above, the tourism sector, in general but especially in the

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Program area, receives the inevitable pressure on the one hand from the social fabric and the regulatory authorities for the rapid integration of good practices and innovative knowledge and technology in the direction of improving the services provided and on the other hand from the international competition to cut costs. Passing through this strait is the challenge of the times for the transition to "accessible heritage tourism", which includes elements from sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, off-season tourism, natural and cultural heritage tourism, alternative forms of tourism, tourism for all, etc.

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3 Supply and demand: Understanding the gap

3.1 The tourism industry challenges at the Program Area

The tourism industry, one of the most powerful and fastest growing industries of the 21st century, derives its strength from sources such as the environment, history, and culture, and is often characterized as a two-sided coin. On the one hand, it contributes to the economic prosperity of an area by creating jobs and inflow of foreign currency, while on the other hand, it is a factor in environmental and social burdens that often prevent the smooth functioning of local society and local tourism. Examples from the global reality, but also from many regions in Greece, show that the unrestrained, unplanned or incorrect development of tourism brings, in the short term, quick economic benefits, but ends up, in the long term, in low-quality tourism activity.

In the area of the Greece-Cyprus Programme, many tourist destinations, with the aim of continuously increasing the economic profit brought by tourism and attracting an ever greater number of tourists, have oriented themselves, over time, to mass tourism and, to

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the promotion of the classic "sun-sea" tourism development model, naturally driven by the particular characteristics of the area (coastal areas with a mild, Mediterranean climate) which obviously lend themselves to this choice. But the large concentration of population in areas with specific environmental and social potential creates disturbances in the habits of the local society and dysfunctions such as: overcrowding, pollution of the environment often with transboundary impact, waste or destruction of natural and cultural resources and competition between the local population and the tourist industry for the use of basic goods (water, fuel, etc.), infrastructure projects (roads, hospitals, etc.), recreational places (museums, parks, beaches, etc.).

Today, therefore, it becomes clear, more than ever before, that the Region, for which tourism is today the most dynamic economic sector, presenting timeless dynamics even today despite the prolonged economic crisis in both countries, needs to review its expectations from mass tourism and seek the necessary conditions for the development of sustainable tourism models by investing in tourism activities that (a) are environmentally sustainable over time, (b) bring sustainable economic benefits to the areas where it is developed, (c) are ethical and social compatible with local communities, and (d) ensure the conservation of natural and cultural capital for

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future generations. In order for the region to be able to cope with these challenges and in order to differentiate itself and strengthen its position in the international tourism market, especially nowadays where there is increased competition from other regions, and especially from those in the Mediterranean basin that also promote the "sun-sea" model, is today called upon to proceed dynamically in strategies and practices of sustainable tourism development, capable of bringing about on the one hand a quality upgrade and on the other hand an expansion of the offered tourist product.

These issues have now been recognized and included as key priorities in the policies of both countries, both at national and regional and local levels, including in the sectoral priorities proposed in the context of the Smart Specialization Strategy (RIS3) of each Region. This common interest of the two states, as well as cross-border characteristics of these issues, are reflected and confirmed, among other things, in the CB Cooperation Program Interreg Greece-Cyprus for the period 2014-2020. Nowadays, with a vision of establishing the cooperation area as a pole of sustainable development in the direction of strengthening competitiveness, Accessible Tourism, and in particular Tourism for the disabled and Silver Tourism, can be an important

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parameter and it is appropriate to integrate in the planning of every tourism initiative.

Considering the contemporary challenges in the tourism sector as summarized above, *InHeritage* concerns a strategic cross-border cooperation initiative with the main purpose of jointly promoting and supporting, at cross-border and local level, the development of 'Inclusive Heritage Tourism', as an important, if not the only, driver for sustainably expanding the tourist season and increasing the carrying capacity and visits of the region, as briefly documented below. The main objective of the *InHeritage* project is to serve as the starting point for the development of 'Accessible Heritage Tourism' across the cross-border area. The project partners believe that there is a need to adopt a holistic model to improve accessible tourism that will lead to better quality, comfort and safety of services for all. This objective obviously aims to cover a number of priorities that have been set at various levels:

- a) **Strengthening competitiveness**, through the provision of improved tourist services for all, but also through the development of new services suitable for attracting more special tourist markets that are traditionally under-served, such as that of tourists with disabilities and the elderly.
- b) **Promotion of equal opportunities and non-discrimination**, both for the residents with

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disabilities of the area and the disabled people worldwide, through the development and availability of tourist services and products without unjustified accessibility obstacles and discrimination-related barriers, as required by the UN CRPD, European directives and regulations, etc.

- c) **Promotion of a more responsible and sustainable tourism development** in the coming years, with respect for people, the environment, the customs and traditions of the region, in the way that most local and regional strategies in the region require these days, as and the goals of the Program, through the utilization of the cultural heritage as a central element for the design and differentiation of the tourism product of the region.

Obviously, this goal is also in line with the strategy of the Greece-Cyprus Interreg Program which for the period 2014-2020 has the goal to establish the cooperation area as a pole of sustainable development in the direction of strengthening competitiveness, since "Tourism for All", and in particular "Tourism for the Disabled" and "Silver Tourism", can be an important parameters of tourism development in the region in the coming years and it is advisable to integrate them into the planning of every tourism initiative.

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The foreseen outputs of the *InHeritage* project designed to contribute in this direction include the following:

- Development of common testing systems for “disability-friendly” (i.e., accessible), natural and cultural heritage assets (destinations and services) and of new accessibility quality signs.
- Field accessibility inspections and development of an inventory of the elderly and disability-friendly tourism options in Cyprus and Greece.
- Development of traditional and digital means to increase the visibility of the area’s accessible natural and cultural heritage sites and other key tourism services.
- Pilot actions (technical works) to improve the accessibility of selected sites.
- Pilot programs to raise awareness, activate and train stakeholders.
- Actions to strengthen agencies, tourism entrepreneurship and professionals to take advantage of new opportunities and provide more efficient service (physical and electronic) to the target groups.

The Project, capitalizing on previous results of successful cross-border cooperation, undertakes an innovative venture that will result in strengthening the competitiveness of the tourism sector of the two regions. The proposed Joint Action Strategy, as well as the tools

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developments and the data collection actions that were implemented collaboratively in the context of the Project, attempt to grant a common branding to the cross-border area and introduce it to the international market as unified destination of unique history and natural beauty and to encourage the mobility of visitors throughout it. After all, the developed transport network that connects the various areas of the region, as well as the major common characteristics they share, lend themselves to the creation of this common image. The Project looks forward to the joint exploitation of this potential and invests in the promised added value for local economies of the regions that will emerge from the promotion of the Greece-Cyprus cross-border area as a unified destination, free of borders and accessibility obstacles, rich in services and options for all. The cross-border strategic cooperation promoted by the Project, in contrast to an attempt to approach tourism with disabilities and the elderly, separately at national level by each country, in parallel and essentially competitively from each country, saves significant resources for the two countries and promises the creation and promotion to the outside of an even stronger identity for the regions of the two countries, attracting new markets.

The Project is a comprehensive intervention purely linked to *Equal Opportunities and Social Integration*, especially for

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the benefit of people with disabilities and the elderly, actively promoting the spirit and obligations that currently impose: (a) the UN CRPD (preamble, articles 4, 5, 8, 9 and 11), which the EU and both countries have ratified making it part of their institutional framework, (b) the new European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, (c) article 7 and General Applicability 3-Disability of the General Regulation (EC) 1303/2013, (d) the EU Active Aging Policy, and (e) the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

As the main objective of *InHeritage* is the exploitation / capitalization of the cultural and natural heritage of the cross-border area in the context of strategic development and promotion of integrated tourism products and services capable of attracting and satisfying visitors with disabilities and elderly. In this direction, among other things, it was generally considered necessary on the one hand to train and inform agency executives and professionals in the field, and on the other hand to implement pilot interventions in selected points/infrastructures, with innovative features that will make them accessible, attractive and enjoyable for everyone, including people with disabilities and older people with special access requirements.

Also, the project, with the vision of promoting Accessible Heritage Tourism in the cross-border region, made a pioneering effort for the two countries, and an important

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first, and fundamental, step towards increasing the visibility of the region's accessible tourism product to new potential markets: It proceeded with a wide-scale assessment of key sites and routes of natural and cultural heritage of tourist interest in Cyprus and Crete (with an emphasis on Natura 2000 areas, the European path, cultural heritage sites included in the UNESCO list, blue flag beaches, archaeological sites, etc.), by conducting autopsies and checks by local teams for the collection of useful information for travelers and persons with disabilities and elderly people. The final output of the proposed evaluation methodology led to a new inventory with tourist information, accessibility data, etc. for the cross-border area, which consists of two complementary means: a new *InHeritage Tourist Guide* (available in printed and various accessible digital formats) and the *In-Heritage Tourist Web Portal*.

3.2 SWOT Analysis

3.2.1 Strengths

- Thematically rich tourist offers, high cultural-historical and natural potential in the cross-border area.
- Very strong organizations for people with special needs, especially at the Greek side.

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- Ideal natural environment, where the coast alternates with the mountainous landscape, with a variety of natural ecosystems.
- Favorable geographical location and climate of the region, clearly expressed four seasons in the studied areas.
- Strong historical, archaeological and cultural heritage of the area.
- Existence of a natural environment with significant biodiversity, fully protected by international rules.
- Favorable weather conditions for the development of annual tourism.
- Strong connection with the local community.
- High degree of tourist safety compared to competing destinations.
- Rich production of traditional primary and secondary products.
- Very good geographical location. The tourist attractions are close to each other, so the coastal and inland/mountain zones can be visited even in one day.
- Variety of resources, providing potential for sustainable development and strategic positioning of the region at the domestic and the international tourism market: Rich cultural and historical heritage, creating excellent opportunities for development of cultural-historical and cultural-event tourism; Beautiful, well-preserved and ecologically clean natural

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environment; Excellent opportunities for development of various traditional and alternative types of tourism in the whole cross-border area; Resources for further development of mountain (winter and summer), as well as stimulating the development of rural, balneological and religious tourism; Opportunities for building accessible tourism, which will favor the overall development of tourism and increase the flow of tourists, including vulnerable groups and people with special needs; Financial opportunities for investments in tourism and especially accessible tourism, through instruments financed from the state budget of Bulgaria and the European Union funds.

- Existing infrastructure for the development of the tourism and touristic attendance, products and services: Reconstruction and restoration of important local and national tourist sites and landmarks; Availability of new and renovated accommodation facilities; Training of the staff involved in the field of tourist services, aimed at raising the qualification of the workforce; Specially developed tourist products and packages, including for elder people and people with disabilities; Developed tourist products, destinations and packages; Relatively well-developed domestic and foreign market with loyal customers (with a high tendency for a revisit); Built accessibility of natural, historical and cultural sites - especially in the centers of

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the four districts, as a model for the implementation of accessibility and accessible tourism in other tourist centers and smaller settlements.

3.2.2 Weaknesses

- There is no expressed will of the political leadership to promote and organize accessible tourism.
- Insufficient information on accessible tourism issues among tourism actors.
- Lack of specialized personnel regarding the principles and techniques of accessible tourism.
- Low level of innovation in the tourism chain, responding to the new accessibility demand trends.
- Lack of a satisfactory network for easy access and networking of natural and cultural resources.
- The low degree of utilization of natural and cultural resources in relation to people with disabilities.
- The non-existence of a special spatial plan for tourism with provisions for accessibility.
- Inadequate transport infrastructure.
- Inadequate maintenance and utilization of sites of archaeological and cultural interest.
- Problematic operation of health infrastructure.
- The continuing stereotypical attitude of society towards people with disabilities
- Economic factors - the crisis limits all activities.

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- A targeted research on the competing destinations, both in terms of territorial positioning and tourist products they offer, has not been done properly.
- It has not been determined in practice how all small businesses active in the tourism industry can cooperate for the development of sustainable and accessible tourism.
- No specific steps are envisaged such as meetings, conferences, studies that should enrich this sector, which at the same time constitutes a sure economic development in the long term.
- Factors with unfavorable effect on the development of tourism and the opportunities for full utilization of the tourist potential: Presence of inaccessible sites of tourist interest; Presence of inaccessibility in sections of the sites visited by tourists; Insufficiently developed road infrastructure and insufficient investments for its modernization; Slow pace of renovation, modernization and reconstruction of museums, galleries and tourist attractions, inequality between larger and smaller settlements; Presence of urban and rural areas and regions with tourist potential that do not have the necessary infrastructure that meets the tourists needs, demands and interests; Insufficient qualification of the workforce in some regions where tourism is less developed but there is potential for further development; Imbalance in the tourist offer

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and services, both between the four districts and between their settlements.

- Negative influence of the institutions, the state and local policy for tourism development in the cross-border area: Insufficiently efficient state tourist administration; The policy of the local authorities in the field of tourism is inconsistent and its intensity depends on the activity of the respective municipality; Insufficiently good interaction between the state and the tourism business, especially in the smaller municipalities and settlements; Altering regulatory framework in tourism, including with regard to institutions and their powers in support of local and regional tourism; Lack of effectively working policies and systems for the promotion of the local and regional tourism or presence of unfocused and ineffective ones; The accessible tourism is not a leading priority for the administration and business, it is fragmented in some villages and sites, there is a lack of active communication with the society and people with disabilities for the achievement and permanent establishment of this type of tourism.
- Increased competition from the Balkans and EU countries in field of the offered balneological and spa tourism, as well as rural tourism; Internal competition from other districts, due to many factors, such as

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insufficient promotion, poor or low quality of services, cleanliness of the sites, price competitiveness.

3.2.3 Opportunities

- Increasing the activity of local authorities in the direction of cooperation for the creation of the local tourism chain.
- The emergence of new markets beyond those that traditionally feed tourism in the cross-border region.
- The possibility of using local / traditional products from the tourist circuit with the aim of upgrading and diversifying it.
- The variety of the tourist product gives the opportunity to the travel agents to create a diversified tourism package.
- Since there is no relevant branding in the area yet, if all stakeholders work together, they can create a new, detailed branding and image management strategy on solid foundations.
- Existence of potential for development of different types of tourism.
- Increasing the awareness and knowledge of the tourists about the opportunities for practicing different types of tourism, as well as the combination of these types.
- Improving the quality of the tourist offering and services, as well as the satisfaction of the tourists by

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improving the tourist infrastructure, the qualification of the workforce and the interaction between the institutions and the tourist business.

- Activation of the contacts in the cross-border region between Greece and Cyprus, with an objective for a creation of common tourist areas and packages.
- Building infrastructure and development of specific services for people with disabilities in order to expand the tourists' number, as well as to attract representatives of vulnerable groups from abroad.
- Ensuring qualified personnel for the regions and municipalities with unexploited potential for tourism development.
- Building new and long-term partnerships of the tourism business in the cross-border region with partners from Cyprus, Greece and other European countries.
- Opportunity to impose the accessible tourism for elder people and people with disabilities as a regional brand, given that accessibility in tourism is not covered anywhere entirely in the rest regions of Greece.
- Implementation of innovations and diversification of products, processes and services in tourism in the four districts, as well as in the specialization for market niches, especially accessible tourism for people with disabilities, in order to overcome dependence on low added value and seasonal employment and to ensure

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economic activeness and jobs outside the tourist season.

3.2.4 Threats

- The economic crisis, which is still ongoing and affects all sectors, especially tourism.
- Emergence and unpredictable development of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Additional reduction of funds for further development of tourism.
- Further reduction of tourist flows due to insufficient quality, structure and accessibility of tourist infrastructure.
- Lack of interest in accessible tourism from key stakeholders.
- The increasing competition from countries with upgraded quality and high differentiation of tourism products.
- The concentration of decision-making in government power structures often creates an obstacle to cooperation with the private sector.
- The lack of proper training for a quality service cannot create a marketing relationship that means loyalty to the tourist destination.
- Less developed tourist region, disparities in the development of tourism and tourist services in the different districts, municipalities and settlements, as

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well as lower values of the main economic indicators characterizing the tourism development.

- Underestimating the need of accessible tourism introducing due to the lack of good practices in Cyprus and Greece and not good enough assessment of market benefits and attracting the loyal segment of tourists - the elder people and people with disabilities, and especially those of them, who need specific types of tourism - such as medical, spa, etc.
- Insufficient opportunity to accelerate investments in traditional and alternative types of tourism.
- Deterioration of the indicators of the tourist business in the region and its impact on the labor force.
- Non-employment of people with disabilities or their short-term or seasonal employment in the field of tourism, in order to offer tourist services to people with disabilities, thus missing the opportunity to build trust between people seeking and offering tourist services in this vulnerable category.
- Increasing the differences in the level of development of the tourism sector in the cross-border region.
- Strengthening the international competition, especially in spheres of balneological and spa tourism, winter tourism, historical tourism.
- Continuation of the inconsistent policy of the state regarding the construction of infrastructure related to tourism, as well as regarding the normative base and

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the interaction with the institutions in the field of tourism.

- Lack of enough skilled tourist staff, especially in the more remote areas from the traditional tourist centers and places.
- Permanent non-attraction of tourists from the country and abroad from the group of people with special needs and the loss of this essentially loyal category of tourists

3.2.5 Conclusions

1. Placement of Crete and Cyprus as a joint tourist destination in a higher class of the local market (Mediterranean Sea), the market of the partner EU member states and the world tourist market as a quality of the offered tourist product and added value. For the purpose, it should be worked in different trends in the different areas in order to unify their development and to establish sustainable tourism, which will provide a significant contribution to the social and economic development of the region, thus favoring the overall development of the common cross-border region between the two countries. The sustainable tourism must include accessibility, especially for the elderly people, people with disabilities and their families.

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2. Increasing the share of specialized types of tourism, leading to year-round and more intensive workload - balneological (medical spa), spa and wellness, cultural (in all its forms - historical, archaeological, ethnographic and pilgrimage), eco and rural tourism, adventure, congress, hunting, golf, wine and gourmet tourism, etc. The four districts offer rich opportunities in these types of tourism, especially in balneological (medical spa), spa and wellness and cultural (in all its forms - historical, archaeological, ethnographic and pilgrimage), eco and rural tourism. That would promote the achievement of the goals of the sustainable tourism, related to the natural and cultural heritage in the cross-border area and the consolidation of the area as an international tourist destination. The specialized types of tourism should be targeted at people with disabilities, because sustainable tourism requires the service of all categories of tourists, including vulnerable groups such as elder people and people with disabilities.
3. Stimulating the integrated regional development of tourism by forming appropriate organizational structures, coordinating the supply and implementation of regionally differentiated state tourism policy, as well as promoting cooperation between institutions at central and local level and

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representatives of the tourism industry and creating opportunities for development of partnership. The studied cross-border region needs rapid action in the direction of state-local authorities-business in order to impose the region as a single tourist area. Thus, it would be created a common tourist product, to promote sustainable tourism, to support small businesses and small municipalities for the improvement of the tourist infrastructure, for the creation of new jobs and for generation of the tourism imposition as a structure-determining factor for the four districts. The involvement of people with disabilities in this process is imperative in order to achieve sustainable accessible tourism. In this aspect, the interaction of state-local authorities-business obligatory must include people with disabilities and their organizations, the elderly people and their associations.

4. Preservation and sustainable use of tourist resources, including natural, cultural and anthropogenic. In order to achieve a further development of tourism in these areas, it is necessary to take measures to protect the available resources. Their preservation from unreasonable usage or damage/destruction, due to the impossibility of the owner of a specific tourist site to protect it, is possible in the four studied districts. On

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one hand, the businesses in a competitive environment, can operate unreasonably and damage the managed site, while site owners in smaller municipalities and villages often do not have the financial resources to protect them and maintain them thus generating short- and medium- term negative consequences and trends. Sustainable tourism, as well as increased accessibility for elderly people, people with disabilities and their families, cannot be achieved without the protection and sustainable use of tourist resources, including the adaptation of natural and cultural-historical resources to the needs of people with disabilities.

5. Improving the quality of education and training in tourism in accordance with the needs of the tourism sector and the development of the labor market. That's particularly urgent in the short term for all four areas in the studied cross-border area. The demographic trends in all four areas are negative - the population is diminishing and aging, migration (internal and external) leads to a decrease in the number of young people who stay in their native places and can be attracted to work in tourism. Therefore, the available resource of young people willing to be involved in tourism should be attracted and trained. The qualification and re-qualification of those employed in

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tourism is of high importance. Emphasis should also be placed on the qualification for achieving accessibility in tourism for people with disabilities. People with disabilities should also be involved as learners. They are a vulnerable group that will find it difficult to migrate, but it will be able to qualify and use to offer tourism services. This will provide employment for the disabled, but it will also attract other people with disabilities as loyal customers, because it knows their needs best. In order to have highly qualified and skilled personnel in the tourism sector, incl. the sustainable accessible tourism, it is necessary to have an appropriate state policy, market-oriented and social business, well-functioning connection state-tourism business-educational institutions, including and taking into account the opinions and needs of the organizations of disabled.

6. Increasing the protection, rights and security of consumers of tourist services. In this aspect, there is a lot to be done in the four areas, thus ensuring loyal customers and attracting new tourists. A special accent here should be placed on the protection, rights and security of customers of tourist services from one of the most vulnerable groups - the disabled. Addressing these issues and attracting them as loyal customers and regular visitors will increase the number of tourists

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and the package of services offered to them. This will stimulate the achievement of sustainable accessible tourism related to the natural and cultural heritage in the cross-border area and the consolidation of the area as an international tourist destination with improved and increased accessibility for the users - elderly people, people with disabilities and their families.

In order to implement, as specific actions, the above stated conclusions, in the short and medium term it is necessary to improve the following directions in the field of tourism, the accessibility in tourism and the related infrastructure:

A. Improving the qualification of the entire workforce in the tourism sector (from service personnel to management teams), taking into account, that the workforce is a key factor in exploiting the potential for tourism development of a site or territory and has image implications for the tourist destination or settlement, respectively the municipality, district or region in which it is located. Improving skills in the area with potential for tourism development, which at the time of the analysis can be assessed as underutilized, is particularly urgent. The latter applies mainly to small municipalities. Self-employment in the field of tourism should also be developed, especially for young people, for example as independent guides. This can be

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especially useful for tourists wishing to see all the sights (including the little known or those with potential for development) in a settlement, municipality or region, thus providing them with individual service and a longer stay. The qualification and re-qualification of the workforce is a leading factor in ensuring sustainable tourism in the cross-border area, as well as in the consolidation of the region as an international tourist destination with increased accessibility for users - the elderly people, people with disabilities and their families. The qualifications for working with disabled should be based on the scientific base, innovations in the field of tourism, as well as on international good practices. People from the vulnerable category should also be involved, who after training should offer services to people with disabilities - as an individual service (if physically possible) in hotels, restaurants or tourist sites. This will build greater trust, stimulate the creation of a new group of loyal tourists, increase business revenues and improve its image. A specific regional brand "Sustainable accessible tourism for elderly and disabled" will be created, which will be an innovative model.

- B.** Raising the awareness and the knowledge of the tourists about the opportunities for practicing different types of tourism and the services provided to the

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tourists. The availability of tourist resources (sites and landmarks), favoring the development of a particular type of tourism, in itself does not guarantee tourists interest, realization of tourists visits and stays in the territory and leading to final result - the formation of sustainability in tourism. From this point of view, the activities of marketing and advertising in the field of tourism have a key place in the pursuit of creating conditions for optimal utilization of the tourist potential. Therefore, tourist products should be worked out for exercising one or more types of tourism on the territory of one or more municipalities or districts, as well as for the entire Greece-Cyprus cross-border area. So far, with some exceptions, there are not many such products; there is nowhere concentrated information about the types of tourism and services offered in the four areas. The little information available (provided by local and state authorities and in a lesser extent by business) usually is not fully translated into English or another internationally used language, which makes it inaccessible to foreign tourists. The activity should be intensified with regard to the combination of a popular with a not so well-known tourist product in the given territory, to diversify the offered services, to combine such in several municipalities or districts. Together, these actions will lead to the formation of sustainable

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tourism. Sustainability has also to be linked to accessible tourism for disabled. Marketing and advertising should be focused on this target group, to visualize and promote that different types of tourism and services are available to people with special needs, the translation into foreign language(s) of tourist information should be also targeted to them, with an emphasis on accessibility and services in this aspect, thus creating an opportunity for individual and/or group visits of people with disabilities from abroad.

- Γ. Improvement of the transport accessibility. This measure can be implemented from short to medium term, but it is no less important than the previous ones. On the contrary, without it, the implementation of the other measures will have no overall effect. This measure is crucial for the achievement of accessible and sustainable tourism for people with disabilities, and in general for all groups of tourists and types of tourism. This will make it possible, for example, to better develop cycling or hiking. The realization of the improvement of the transport accessibility can be achieved by funds from the budgets of the local authorities, and mostly through state interventions and the active use of the EU financial instruments defined for the two countries and the cross-border and transnational programs of the Union.

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- Δ.** Consolidation of international partnerships, both of the tourism business from the four districts, and of its organizations and the owners of tourist sites (business, municipalities, state). This is an opportunity to share experiences, apply good practices, internationally promote a product or service and internationalize the business, and also an opportunity to share experiences and apply good practices to build sustainable accessible tourism for the elderly people and people with disabilities and their families. In this respect, Greece and Cyprus, at national and local levels, must work at a faster pace than other European countries. Cyprus and Crete region under the project, can together develop international activity through the search for partnerships with other European countries.
- E.** Accessible tourism and consolidation of the region as an international tourist destination with increased accessibility for users - the elderly people, the disabled and their families. The measure fits as activities in all of the above, but tourism for people with disabilities, in addition to demonstrating humanism, has its strong economic logic in many countries around the world, including Greece and the neighboring Cyprus cross-border region. Accessibility is available predominantly in larger and well-known tourist sites, so work in this direction, as a commitment of the state / municipalities

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in direct partnership with the tourism business and organizations of people with disabilities should start immediately, and where it has started, to upgrade activities. In both cases, the experience of other regions and countries should be useful, taking into account the local specifics. Additionally, the inclusion of people with disabilities in the form of employment in the field of tourism is also valuable and beneficial. The achievement of sustainable accessible tourism for people with disabilities will also help to improve their situation, improve the image of the four districts, give a more attractive look to tourism in the Greece-Cyprus cross-border region, make it more competitive and help to establish the area also as an attractive tourist destination, including for the elderly people, the people with disabilities and their families.

3.3 Key areas where change is needed

The *InHeritage* strategy should help the region and all stakeholders involved in achieving and delivering accessible tourism in the years to follow in addressing some key areas where most challenges are identified.

3.3.1 Transport

The issue of transportation begins upon arrival. The issue of transportation is further accentuated when a traveller must negotiate the transportation system to reach a

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destination area. Barriers highlighted include extended travel time, unfamiliar areas and unfamiliar transport options (boat, coach or plane). All separate transport options are listed here for completeness. Various options (taxi, rental cars and vans, buses) can be applied to mobility once one arrives at the destination (and potentially affect the experience negatively). In this context, the following are recommended:

- Developing the skills of employees so that they can properly inform customers with disabilities.
- Provisions for pre-booking/priority of seats for persons with disabilities, elderly, pregnant women and others without jeopardizing anyone's safety.
- Create new protocols for passengers with disabilities/access requirements.
- Regular disinfection of mobility equipment used to assist in accessing transport facilities.
- Review and communicate the opening hours of repair shops and mobility device rental companies at the destination.
- Main sources of information on transport and tourism, booking and electronic payment (e-payment/m-payment) websites and applications should ensure accessibility 0 for all groups of people

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with disabilities (i.e., compliance with WCAG 2.1 guidelines).

- Research on the functional accessibility requirements of users in the daily life of the visitor (movements and tourism), leading to typologies suitable for the provision of multimodal transport and tourism services.
- Research the potential economic impact of achieving substantially higher levels of accessibility.
- Standardization of information in an accessible format about the accessibility of local transport.
- At least 1/3 of local transport vehicles are accessible to provide a minimum acceptable frequency for local transport accessibility. This should be included as a quota in the relevant future public procurement.
- Harmonizing the training of local transport staff (in vehicles, stations and operations) covering all types of staff (for providing information, booking, ticketing, assisting or checking vehicles, as well as planning transport services). It should include awareness of behavioural aspects. It should include accessible equipment operation and maintenance, emergency handling, as well as proactive thinking and removing obstacles.
- Develop a holistic tool for accessible urban transport planning and design across all modes.

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- Research into the accessibility of autonomous vehicles, related to people with impaired mobility guidance, boarding, safe and secure transport and emergency handling.

Directions for buses and coaches:

- Buses/coaches that "kneel" or have ramps to provide "roll on/off" access.
- Spaces for at least two wheelchairs.
- Voice assistance on board.
- Trained customer support.
- Accessible ticketing infrastructure/procedures.
- Universally accessible information about services

Instructions for boats and ships:

- Universally accessible information about the service.
- Accessible parking/boarding.
- Elevators where required.
- Accessible surfaces on board.
- Trained customer support - management staff and crew.
- Elevators/elevators for access between decks.
- Accessible cabins with accessible bathrooms.

Taxi directions:

- Universally accessible central reservation system.
- Either co-level access or by lifting means.

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- Locking points for wheelchairs to avoid accidents while moving.
- Provision for suitable/adjusted seat belts.
- Availability of accessible/white taxis.
- Trained staff.

Instructions for renting cars and vans:

- Either co-level access or by lifting means.
- Installation of hand controls (at no additional cost to the customer).
- Locking points for wheelchairs to avoid accidents while moving.
- Provision for suitable/adjusted seat belts.
- Central, accessible reservation system.
- Accessible sources of information.
- Provision of accessible tourist information (added value).

3.3.2 Accommodation & Food

Guidelines for food services:

- Ensuring accessibility at receptions (adjusted heights, accessible/appropriate signage, installation of sound systems at counters and areas with safety glass, etc.) so that all users can check-in and transact comfortably and without barriers.
- Automated check-in/out processes through accessible websites/apps

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- Availability of accessible service directories/menus
- Physical distances between serving tables so that all users can move around safely.
- Dealing with possible obstructions to sidewalks and traffic surfaces from bar and restaurant furniture that do not allow use by people with disabilities.
- Limiting the use of accessible sanitary facilities by those who do not need them and ensuring frequent disinfection.
- Guarantee individual use of sealed cutlery sets and/or disposable equipment by disabled and elderly customers.
- Trained staff to provide a seamless service experience to disabled customers, and able to provide assistance if requested.

The issue of housing and accommodation is an essential part of tourism activity (UNWTO, 2016). In particular, accessible tourism requires accessible accommodation, in the sense that all necessary and appropriate measures and adaptations should have been taken, so that the space in which the tourist with disabilities resides does not constitute an obstacle but instead ensures that individuals with disabilities the enjoyment and exercise of their rights on an equal basis (European Commission - Directorate General XXII, 2003). In this context universal

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design is a key component of hotel accessibility, since it takes into account the needs of guests with disabilities and achieves the transition to design with a holistic method aimed at accommodating people with disabilities (UNWTO, 2013).

Instructions for accommodation:

- The website should be multilingual with information describing access.
- Parking with spaces for disabled vehicles, access to mass transport means.
- The accommodation must include a level entrance, lift or ramp access.
- Access to reception, room, restaurant and other common facilities.
- Accessible movement surfaces.
- Accessible kitchens and equipment (e.g., in apartments).
- Accessible WCs.
- Detailed information using measurement diagrams (plans) and photographs.
- Facilities, for example a pool with a lift system or 'slides'.
- Maps.
- Additional services & equipment, such as provision of wheelchairs, lifting mechanisms, shower chairs, etc.

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- Availability of personal assistant or escort services

3.3.3 Social perceptions and beliefs

Perceptions may influence the acceptance of travellers with disabilities in destination areas. Dealing with cultural differences includes issues of language, religion, social expectations, family, finances and the need for support, care and assistance. All of these issues apply to both sides of the travel equation. The target market and the destination. This is a difficult area to offer specific guidelines as it involves historically rooted long-term beliefs and these are often intangible benefits of the tourist experience.

Guidelines for cultural restrictions:

- Language barriers can be overcome by providing information in multilingual formats and clear concise labelling.
- The provision of systematic disability education may seek to explain different religious and social beliefs or even prejudices.
- Developing tourism experiences designed to meet the needs and limitations of these travellers, for example budget accommodation not five stars.

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3.3.4 Travel preparation

Poor information dissemination is a major weakness of tourism for people with disabilities. It is the most important element in the decision-making process as it is the first step in the process. State tourism authorities play an important role in coordinating the local tourism industry, reducing the fragmentation of local tourism, competition between organizations and regional destinations, and assisting cooperative marketing in tourism-producing areas. This role of marketing and promotion coordination should extend to the collection, marketing and dissemination of travel information without barriers (even replacing independent travel guides). Gathering information about the barrier-free tourism product is one of the easiest ways for national tourism organizations to start the process of creating a new market segment campaign.

On this basis, the following are recommended:

- Update information, instructions, and notices in accessible, readable, and plain language formats so that any customer with specific access requirements knows how to proceed.
- Extend the use of braille and disinfect it regularly as it is touched frequently. Provide alternatives for new audio announcements (video subtitles, images,

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pictograms, QR codes, elevator voice announcement systems).

- Install contactless and buttonless technologies, interface terminals and ticket machines.
- Make all websites and apps accessible and include all accessibility information on these platforms, especially those related to travel advisories and COVID-19 warnings.
- Regularly remind physical distancing rules and help travellers who do not understand the local language or those with learning disabilities to comply.
- Consider specific locations and signage of hand sanitizers and transparent dividers so that customers with different disabilities can enjoy a seamless travel experience.
- Assist travellers with mobility impairments to safely handle masks and sanitizers in case they are unaccompanied and require assistance.
- Avoid adding unnecessary furniture and obstacles to accessible routes that would cause confusion/accidents.
- Install beacons to make it easier to locate indoor spaces for blind travellers as they encounter new obstacles.
- Make complaint forms available in QR or other email formats if they are not available in hard copy.

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- Ensure that Destination Managers (DMOs) / Tourist Information Offices are involved in the design of all protocols to be able to provide correct and up-to-date instructions to any visitor with a disability.
- Maintain effective communication between tour operators and travel agencies and other service providers so that customers with specific requirements are informed about their travel decisions.
- Adapt protocols for visitors with disabilities in museums, such as first-in first-out priority, capacity and security projections, etc. they don't work well for all visitors.
- Adhere to the proportions of reserved seats for disabled visitors when deciding on new transport capacity rules at monuments, cinemas, theatres and concert venues.
- Avoid "sealing" accessibility features in physical environments and ensure security for all.
- Be aware of potential hazards in amusement parks, sports and fitness facilities and follow hygiene rules for frequently used equipment.
- Keep pool/beach accessibility equipment in working order and sanitize properly.
- Ensure tour guides adjust their itineraries/routes and consider group sizes and the safety of customers

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with disabilities and the elderly when using equipment, providing information and scheduling visits.

3.3.5 Accessibility information resources and maps

These maps can convey a lot of information in a very compact (printed) format or can be downloaded or offer details when interactive. Good mobility maps contain key user information. They can describe access to a cityscape, gardens and parks, archaeological sites or other attraction such as a theme park.

Guidelines for mobility maps:

- Specific area coverage.
- Accessible routes.
- Identify key features. crossovers (holding ramps/intersections), traffic signals.
- Icons identifying accessible toilets, on-street car parking, off-street car parking.
- Identify gradients.
- Buildings and features of interest.
- Entrances to railway stations, buildings, features of interest.
- Main taxi rank and bus stops.
- Public seating, accessible fountains, etc.
- Location of police or assistance.
- Telephone accessible.

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3.3.6 Regional/local policies

- Inclusion of the disability dimension in every tourism policy, process, action, measure and program.
- Establishing a strong legal framework for the implementation of the principles of "Accessible Tourism" as a basis for the planning and development of any type of tourism policy and activity.
- Promotion of cross-sectoral cooperation (tourism, transport, culture / sports, nature, trade, etc.) to develop synergies related to ensuring a universally accessible tourism chain.
- Informing stakeholders at the destination/raising awareness of the target market.
- Design, adaptation and promotion of tourist services and products in the logic of universal access and according to the requirements of various types of disability.
- Collecting and providing tourist and practical information for travellers who have accessibility needs.
- Ensuring reduced tickets in tourist facilities for people with disabilities,
- Provision of specially designed tours, leisure etc. for people with disabilities to encourage them to travel.

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- Systematic recording, continuous updating and promotion, in a manner accessible to people with disabilities, of the offered accessible infrastructures and services of tourist interest in local and regional areas.
- Inclusion in the study programs of the Schools of Tourism Professions, of all levels, a compulsory course on the service / dealing with disabled people.
- Ensuring the accessibility of persons with disabilities to the website of the agencies, in accordance with the current institutional framework and its requirements, and its use for the posting / promotion of information of tourist interest in accessible formats.

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4 Supply and demand: Towards filling the gap

4.1 Principles for a new strategy

The basic principles for the intended development strategy of *inclusive heritage tourism*:

4.1.1 Holistic Concept (Development at all levels)

Tourism development is a multifactorial activity that is linked to the organization of the administration, to the existing infrastructure, to the culture of a region, to the culture and society's perception of tourism and to a multitude of other factors. Accordingly, our planning for the development of *inclusive heritage tourism* needs to be spread over more fields than purely touristic or communicative, including actions and proposals for infrastructure development, for education and training, for spatial planning, for environmental policy. The challenge is to find the optimal way to allocate resources among competing uses. The requested development can only be achieved when it is addressed and planned as communicating with the other levels of development actions and in a permanent "functional synergy" with them. Furthermore, it presupposes synergies and

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collaborations at the level of people, supervisory bodies, professionals and citizens.

4.1.2 Sustainable Development (For Long Term Benefits)

It is a basic principle that our planning should follow in order to ensure the development path in the present without compromising the future but instead creating conditions for a significant improvement of the future of the next generations. We propose a form of "operational development" in which our objectives and all of our proposals are coordinated so that the development/promotion of *inclusive heritage tourism*:

- contributes to the preservation and improvement of both the natural and man-made environment,
- is compatible with the requirement to preserve the stock of natural resources for present and future generations through the efficient, rational use of land and the avoidance of waste,
- is a lever not only for the preservation, but for the promotion and improvement of the natural environment,
- contribute to the preservation of traditions and local arts,
- contributes to greater economic well-being of the region but also to the effort to achieve greater social equality.

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4.1.3 Lifecycle - Carrying Capacity (Right from the start)

There can be no planning for the tourism development of an area without studying its life cycle and carrying capacity. When we refer to the concept of the life cycle of a tourist destination, we mean the eternal course of the destination starting from the moment of its discovery by the first visitors to the decline, saturation and alienation of tourist flows or rebirth. From the study of the life cycle of the tourist destination, it is found that it faces different challenges and problems in each of the phases it goes through. Consequently, the planning and development strategy will be different, "so as to methodize in the best possible way the guarantee", of the sustainable tourist development of each tourist area. Our plan should pay due attention to the determination of the life cycle and the carrying capacity of the cross-border area, despite the fact that, with the exception of some popular destinations there is no question of saturation of more areas. However, it is important to integrate studies into the strategic plan to fully capture the carrying capacity of regions, in order to set from the beginning rational conditions for development per region. It is important to operationalize the principle of carrying capacity in order to define the limits which should not be exceeded.

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4.1.4 Intergenerational Justice (For the Next Generations)

According to this principle, the needs of future generations should be taken into account by the activities of the present age. Current generations should hand over to the next, at least the same number or volume of resources that they themselves inherited. This means minimizing the use of non-renewable resources as well as efficient use of renewable resources based on increasing efficiency, reducing waste, recycling and introducing alternative technologies.

The application of this principle in relation to Accessible Tourism has the meaning of creating conditions for future generations so that not only natural resources are preserved but our development interventions provide/release material resources for future generations and real hope for a better tomorrow.

4.2 Priority Axes

To address the areas and challenges presented above and achieve systematically the vision of inclusive heritage tourism in Crete and Cyprus, it is proposed that our strategy should be organized in the following priority axes:

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PA1. Improving accessibility – highlighting natural and cultural resources, controlling tourism development

PA 2. Development of accessible thematic and alternative forms of tourism -
Networks/Partnerships

PA 3. Upgrading, modernizing and supplementing accessible tourist offer

PA 4. Development – infrastructure improvement / technical support

PA 5. Promotion, information and awareness, training of human resources

4.3 Indicative actions

Under these Priority Axes the bundle of actions proposed are organized in six (6) basic sections.

4.3.1 Elaboration of special studies

In order to achieve the maximum possible result, it is necessary to prepare certain studies before the competent bodies proceed with the implementation of certain projects (interventions in the natural and built

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environment, development of specialized strategies, market research, etc.). These studies are expected to highlight the level and size of the investments that should be made inter-regionally, intra-regionally and locally.

Indicatively:

- Studies of the existing situation and improvement of accessibility (physical and electronic)
- Studies on special forms of accessible tourism and tourism for the disabled.
- Elaboration of a Communication Program for tourist promotion

4.3.2 Implementation of construction projects

It refers to technical projects, based on prepared studies, for the creation/improvement of paths/routes and infrastructure (physical & electronic), where necessary.

Indicatively:

- Technical projects to improve physical accessibility and use of environmental heritage: visitable parts of National Parks, Natura areas, eco-routes/trails, the countryside; archaeological sites, monuments of traditional architecture, etc.; recreation & adventure infrastructure in riverside, lakeside and forest zones (observatories, fishing, kayaking, etc.); medical tourism & spa tourism infrastructure; religious sites; UNESCO monuments; museums, art galleries,

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cultural and conference centers, etc.; beaches, lakes, rivers and other swim areas; venues for events, celebrations, festivals, etc.; urban infrastructure and traditional villages/settlements, historic urban centers, etc.; agritourism infrastructure; marine tourism infrastructure (marinas, pleasure boats/excursions, etc.); sports tourism infrastructure; accommodation infrastructure.

- New infrastructures for special forms of accessible tourism
- Creation of accessible information and Visitor Reception Centers

4.3.3 ICT exploitation projects (new / accessible technologies)

Indicatively:

- Improving the accessibility of media/promotional actions (prints, websites, promotional videos, events, etc.) of public and private sector entities (creation/transcription into alternative accessible formats)
- Improving the accessibility of systems, mechanisms & equipment with which visitors interact (ticketing, booking machines, infokiosks, etc.)
- Use of new ICT applications for mobility (in the city, in nature, on beaches, in archaeological sites, in transport, etc.)

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- Use of new ICT applications for the (interactive) presentation of cultural & natural heritage, including intangible heritage (digital museums, audio-visual events, representations of historical events, projections)
- Development of electronic applications / tools in order to promote (marketing) accessible tourism through new technologies

4.3.4 Actions of training, education and information-awareness, reinforcement

Indicatively:

- Informing entrepreneurs about the use of incentives and programs related to the modernization and upgrading of the accessibility/friendliness of tourist businesses
- Informing stakeholders of mature and dynamic tourist areas for the development of accessible tourism in combination with the extension of the tourist season.
- Professional training in professions related to accessible tourism, with an emphasis on the special forms of tourism that are promoted in each region.
- Specialized information/education/training of all categories of people employed in tourism, as well as entrepreneurs.

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- Training of executives of public bodies and Local Authorities executives.
- Information/awareness of the population (residents) about accessible tourism.
- Providing support for the upgrading, organization, completion of tourist supply (modernization, renovation/accessibility, construction of new units, replacement of equipment, expansion and improvement of services offered, organizational restructuring, training of human resources, utilization of technological developments in terms of modern means of communication, etc.)

4.3.5 Networking, monitoring and identification actions

Indicatively:

- Local Cooperation Agreements in order to create a homogeneous network of cooperation in a common framework of rules and configurations
- Thematic networks between tourist areas and the collaborations between the network operators and the private sector, for example, to stimulate Accessible Sports Tourism, to stimulate Accessible Religious Tourism, etc.
- Creation of DMOs (Destination Management Organizations) and establishment of an annual inter-regional/cross-border Forum of DMOs

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- According to Quality for products and services that serve accessible tourism
- Formulation of joint crisis management and civil protection plans with an emphasis on the needs/risks of visitors with disabilities
- Unified guest satisfaction tracking
- Establishment of an inter-regional/cross-border Organisation/Agency for the Development & Promotion of Accessible Tourism
- Creation of a Unified Identity of the Accessible Tourist Destination

4.3.6 Unified marketing & communication/promotion actions

Indicatively:

- Preparation of a joint marketing & branding plan
- Staff training in targeted electronic marketing
- Development of necessary electronic applications / tools in order to promote through new technologies (portals, mobile apps, etc.)
- Creation / Transcription of traditional promotional media and actions such as posters, brochures, documentaries, etc. in alternative accessible formats.
- The organization of relations with foreign tourist agencies and renowned tourism journalists
- The promotion of the tourist product at home and abroad

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4.4 Common branding

Approaching the market through strategic product portfolio management necessitates the development and adaptation of the region's tourism branding to the new data. In the logic of umbrella branding, where it should be communicated to the market that Cross-Border Area Authorities do not constitute the product. They are the institutions that promote a set of attractive, exciting and everyone-friendly travel products in the Greek, the Cypriot and international tourism market. As they represent one of the most endowed in terms of natural and cultural wealth in the Mediterranean. This new emphasis should be properly depicted through the appropriate logo and other necessary branding applications.



Indicative proposal for umbrella branding of accessible destinations & services in Crete and Cyprus

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In line with the general slogan of the National Tourism Organization of Greece (EOT), "All you want is Greece", the message "All you look for [is Crete & Cyprus]" is proposed in combination with the message "[Crete & Cyprus is] open for you all" (i.e., Crete and Cyprus are open and accessible for everyone). These two messages contain a "play on words" around the words "ALL YOU" ("Everything You [are looking for]", with an indirect reference to personalized services and the wide range of options) and "YOUALL" ("For all of you", with indirect reference to the general public and universal access).

4.5 Joint marketing

Based on the proposed strategic approach, the following central strategic objective can be formulated for the next five years 2022-2027:

To highlight in an integrated way all the tourist wealth of the region, with an emphasis on its cultural and natural heritage, through a range of attractive, competitive and mature tourism options/destinations that offer clear accessibility elements and provisions for everyone, especially for aged and disabled people and their co-travelers.

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Note: In order to identify the priority markets, research is required to capture the trends of disabled and aged travelers (packaged tourism and individual tourists) domestically, in Europe and overseas markets, in order to enrich the existing prioritization accordingly.

4.5.1 Thematic priorities (Action packages)

1. Online Viewing Actions

- Tourism website/portal upgrade (identity, content, accessibility) – Leveraging the InHeritage portal
- Production of photographs ("positioning" of target groups)
- Production of maps (accessibility information)
- Video production ('placement', information, semantics & subtitles)
- Writing texts, website/portal and social network content management and content seeding
- Search Engine Marketing actions
- Production and distribution of newsletters, periodicals, etc. (our news)

2. Publicity and Promotion Actions

- Promotion for the implementation of a new destination brand (manual, etc.)
- Compilation and distribution of regular press releases

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- Hosting and organization of press trips
- Other contacts with media
- Targeted short-range advertising actions (selected media)
- Promotional material & Accessible formats

3. Promotional actions with distribution channels

- Participation in exhibitions with professional meetings and presentations
- Hosting and organization of fam trips
- Other contacts with distribution channels
- Cooperation program with airlines, ferry companies, cruise companies (magazine)

4. Promotion of products & destinations

- Creation of the Products Clubs (collaboration networks of businesses, municipalities and organizations targeting the same market)
- Upgrading the narrative approach to accessible tourism (storytelling conference, seminars, e-tour, etc.)
- Establishment of Accessible Tourism Awards (competition, award event)
- Educational actions (for tourism industries/businesses in marketing matters)

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- Accessible Tourism Marketing Council (as a consultation platform)

5. Cooperation with local agencies

- Invitation to join local authorities and agencies in the tourism campaign
- Program "Hidden treasures in Crete and Cyprus" (listing/highlighting isolated products/destinations - "Lost treasure of the month")
- Conducting local satisfaction surveys of (disabled) visitors (through a common mechanism/platform)

6. Evaluation of tourist promotion

- Conducting satisfaction survey/interviews with departing guests
- Researches abroad (primary research on final "obstructed" consumers-tourists)
- Accessible Tourism Observatory (register of accessible products/ destinations, businesses, accessibility information, tourist traffic, visitor satisfaction surveys, demand studies, semi-annual reports, etc.)

4.5.2 Common / horizontal actions

A) Scientific and advisory support

- Adaptation of the destination brand

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- Upgrading the narrative approach to accessible tourism – establishment of a magazine
- Create story/image/video/map bank
- Establishment of Accessible Tourism Awards
- Educational actions
- Market/demand research
- Offer research
- Creation of an Accessible Tourism Observatory

B) Travel, hospitality, events

- Hospitality of journalists and organization of press trips
- Other contacts with media
- Participation in exhibitions with professional meetings and presentations
- Hospitality of tourism professionals and organization of fam trips
- Other contacts with distribution channels
- Hosting famous people-symbols (disabled, chronic/rare diseases, elderly, etc.) and organizing fam trips
- Organization of "Accessible Tourism Awards" Events

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C) Promotional Material & Accessible Formats (Prints, Videos, Maps, Web Content & Accessible Format Publishing)

- Storytelling
- Production of accessible printed material
- Production of accessible video
- Production of maps & models with accessibility information
- Production of other accessible promotional material
- Transcription into alternative formats
- Production of promotional gifts

4.5.3 Expected benefits

The expected benefits from the implementation of the proposed actions are summarized as follows:

- The economic development of Greece-Cyprus CB area with the aim of being among the rich regions of Balkans.
- The dispersion of the developmental and economic benefit throughout the economic and social stratification of society in the CB area to remove or mitigate inequalities between urban and rural populations, regions and urban centers.
- Upgrading the standard of living of the residents.
- Tourism development in harmony with the environment, which will not only not burden the

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environment but will also result in environmental upgrading through development interventions.

- The long-term and structural upgrade of the tourism product that will create sustainability and development with a perspective of decades.
- The utilization of development interventions for tourism as a driver of development and modernization of the whole of the CB area.
- Tourism development as a driver of cultural and social osmosis with cultures of other countries.
- The international promotion of CB area as yet another modern, unified, international tourist destination of excellence, but perhaps the only "4 seasons destination" really.

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Conclusion

Tourism, promoting accessible tourism practices, making use of the rich natural and cultural heritage, can be for the CB region a driver of development which will give blood to the place and contribute decisively to progress and the reduction of unemployment. An indispensable condition is a strategic planning which will organize development on the right basis, at the local, regional, inter-regional and even cross-border level, so that it is successful, beneficial and sustainable for all.

Accessible tourism involves a collaborative process among all stakeholders, Governments, international agencies, tour-operators and end-users, including persons with disabilities and their organizations (DPOs). A successful tourism product requires effective partnerships and cooperation across many sectors at the national, regional and international levels. From idea to implementation, a single destination visit normally involves many factors, including accessing information, long-distance travel of various sorts, local transportation, accommodation, shopping, and dining. The impact of accessible tourism thus goes beyond the tourist beneficiaries to the wider society, engraining accessibility into the social and economic values of society. Accessible

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tourism can be a real ‘game changer’ for destinations and businesses, helping them recover from the crisis and grow back in a more inclusive and resilient way.

The recommendations advocating for accessibility during the recovery of tourism insist on three main action areas:

- Accessibility in business planning: Treating accessibility as a competitive advantage, improving customer service, and the application of harmonized international standards to enhance quality of life for all.
- Staff training and inclusion: Extending professional training to better cater for tourists with different abilities, and ensuring equal opportunities in the tourism workforce.
- Innovation and digital transformation: Embracing innovation to make travel and tourism safer, smarter and easier for all.

Keep in mind!

- Culture & nature are unique assets for attracting and satisfying disabled and elderly tourists.
- Tourism inclusion for those who face barriers and exclusion perennially is itself an indication of advanced civilization, of humanitarian culture.
- Tourism accessibility is a legacy; the heritage that we all must leave behind for future generations.

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