

CReAIT CROSS BORDER STRATEGY

A Joint Road Map towards Inclusive and Accessible Tourism



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SCOPE and STRUCTURE of the CReAIT Strategy

The document represents the deliverable D.2.3.1 of the CReAIT project, and describes the vision and the course of actions to achieve sustainability mechanism to Accessible and Inclusive (AI) Tourism outcomes of the project that, according to project experience and approaches, can contribute to mainstream the concept of AI tourism to make the Adriatic area an accessible, sustainable, inclusive and off-season tourism destination.

This strategic Roadmap is arranged with the purpose of contributing to the strategic touristic development of the target sites and provide sustainability to the action implemented within the project.

It has been issued taking into account:

- The specific outcomes of the implementation of micro-projects developed during the project.
- The results of the stakeholders' consultation and the participatory processes activated in the Cities of Fermo and Trogir.

The document is composed of three main parts.

In PART I, we defined some **key concepts of accessible and inclusive tourism** as explored in our project, which are the founding reasons why the partnership and stakeholders decided to engage in this specific domain.

In PART II, a **general presentation of the process and actions of the CReAIT project** can be found.

In PART III you can find a **short summary of the vision, intervention areas and course of actions** that can contribute to the engagement of the partners and stakeholders involved in the CReAIT project to exploit main outcomes beyond the project duration and support the network over the time and in the target area.



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For each area of intervention, **priorities and actions are included** along with funding opportunities to sustain them.

The guiding principles of this Roadmap Strategy are:

- Clear and agile structure
- Focus on priorities as long-term objectives with
- Space for Creativity and Action based (as always) on Co-Creation and Collaboration
- Alignment with EU framework.



PART I : ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE TOURISM IN A SNAPCHAT

Around the world, about one billion people live with some form of disability, and according to the World Health Organization, the number of people with special needs will double by 2050. In Europe, accessible tourism generates annual revenues of 400 billion euros and is expected to grow annually by 1 percent in the coming years. This type of tourism accounts for 3 percent of the EU's total GDP and supports 9 million jobs. However, only 9% of tourism services in the EU are accessible. *There would be a potential increase in demand of 44% per year for accessible tourism if appropriate services were available* (Accessible Tourism Demand, Study 2014). An additional 1.2 million businesses would need to provide accessible services to meet future demand. These improvements could attract up to 75% more international travelers. According to the latest Istat data, potential tourists living with forms of disabilities number about 3 million 150 thousand, and it should be taken into account that these travelers are always accompanied by two or three people. As already mentioned, the protagonists of accessible and inclusive tourism are not only those who have disabilities intercepted by the “naked eye” rather, in this broad and generic market of needs, also represented by people who do not have obvious and detectable disabilities: people with mobility disabilities (with walking difficulties, with a walker, in a wheelchair, with a motor chair,...), people with sensory disabilities (people who are deaf or hard of hearing, people who are blind or visually impaired), people with cognitive disabilities, people with autism, obese people, the elderly, parents with strollers, children, pregnant women, people with special dietary needs (for physical or cultural reasons).

According to the (46 million people with some form of disability, plus about 81 million people over 65). *These numbers partially belie the common imagery that the Accessible Tourism segment is a niche factor, where in fact it affects about 17 percent of the European population* (Accessible Tourism, Europa without barriers).

Supporting the commitment that a tourist destination should put into implementing its accessibility are also data on the continuing aging of the population, which is mainly due to three causes: actual aging (in Italy, those born during the baby boom between 1959 and 1964



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will begin to reach the age of 65 in 2024), population decrease due to declining birth rates, and increasing life expectancy. Data from the World Health Organization show that in 2040 in Western Europe there will be 28.1% of the population over 65 and in Italy it will reach 32.6% with an average age of 52.

Alongside these numbers let us now also assess the economic impact that designing and offering increasingly accessible facilities develops on the tourism market.

It is stated that 70% of people who are part of the Accessible Tourism segment have both economic and physical possibilities to take a vacation (<https://nexttourismgeneration.eu/accessibility-in-tourism-challenges-and-opportunities/>).

Moreover, people with disabilities often need a companion to get around, a fact that increases the spectrum of opportunities offered by Accessible Tourism both in terms of the number of people involved and from the point of view of the needs and requirements included in this segment. The multiplier predominantly considered internationally is that for every person with a disability who has the economic/physical ability to travel, there are two others accompanying him or her, regardless of whether they are friends, relatives or actual companions.



PART II : CO-CREATION PROCESSES at the CORE of CReAIT project

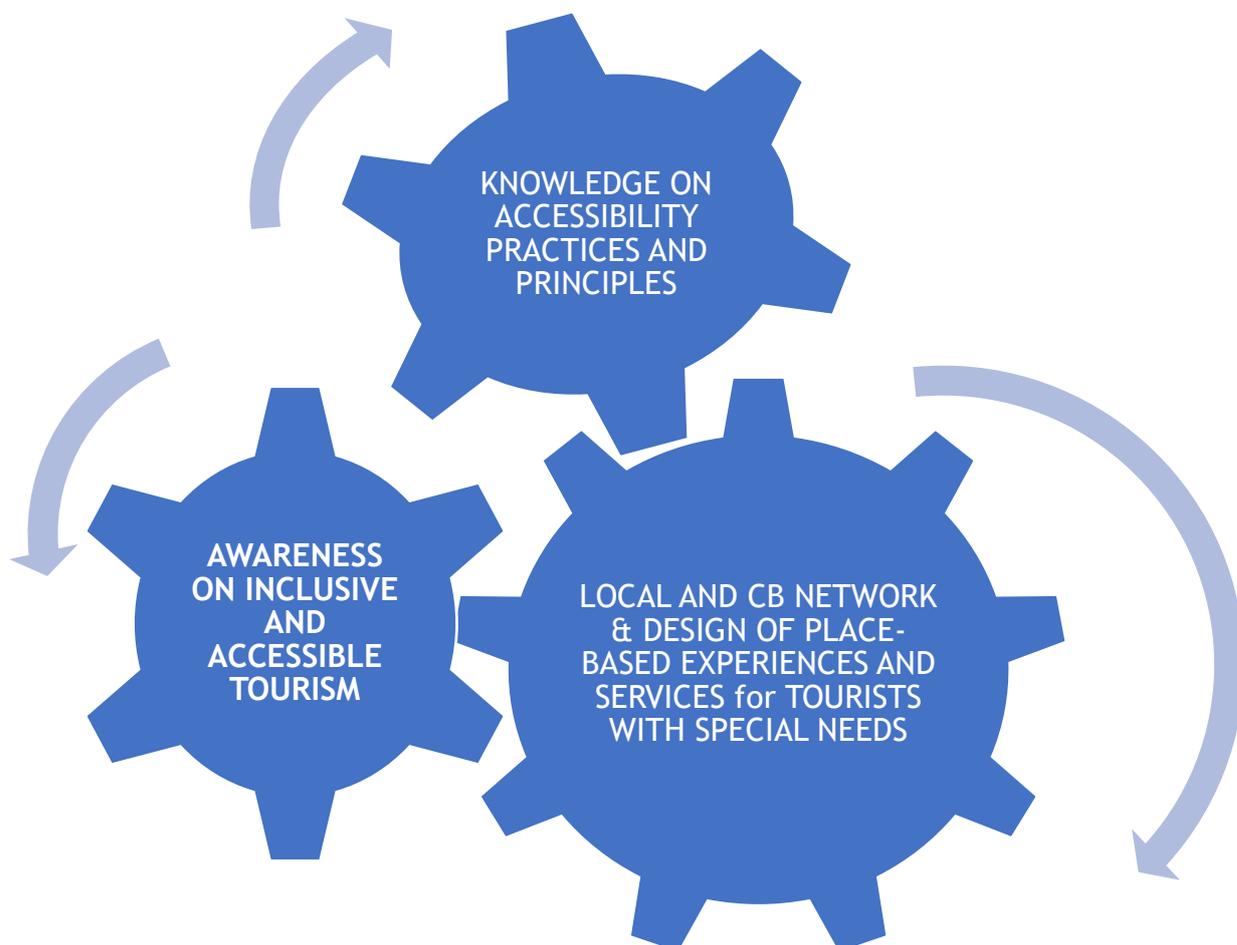
Building on the evidence described above, the project partnership implements an experimentation in the cities of Trogir and Fermo that would increase the accessibility of specific sites through the involvement of various actors from the tourism and social sectors with an emphasis on the inclusion of representatives of people with special needs throughout the entire process.

Training and awareness-raising actions on the potential of inclusive tourism were carried out to *prepare* the group for the ***process of co-creation and implementation*** of micro-projects as practical examples of a paradigm shift: by enriching the sites with experiences, initiatives and tools designed for “special” needs, they become accessible for all, opening up ***new scenarios*** for the provision and the fruition of tourism offer, capable of triggering simultaneous processes of ***economic growth*** (for tourism facilities and local communities) and ***social benefits***.

The innovation lies both in the micro-projects designed and implemented by actors who usually do not collaborate with each other and in the process itself, which has generated direct and indirect effects, such as:

- Increased knowledge on accessibility and inclusion in tourism sector so to foster ability of stakeholders to serve effectively diverse populations
- Increased awareness on the potential of an underestimated market niche
- the design of place-specific experiences and services for tourists, enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of the selected sites in the cities of Fermo and Trogir
- the creation of local and cross-border network of collaboration that continue to thrive and bring about cultural change.





The co-creation process was carried out at the *local level* to ensure genuine involvement and site-specific responses and at the *cross-border level* to standardize the process and involve the different stakeholders, both Italian and Croatian in the drafting and endorsement of this strategy.

The *participatory lab “CReAIT’s CREW”* organized in Trogir in September 2024 was the occasion where all the stakeholders involved in the two cities worked together to find solutions and perspectives to make the lived experience in the CReAIT project lasting.

The laboratory was conducted using the training technique of RPGs (role playing game), a valuable training tool, based on stimulation of something that has or could have relevance to a



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real situation and is structured in such way as to be emotionally engaging. The structure invites players to act as a group, collaboratively and non-competitively to analyze and solve situations. The trainer (Master) had the role of “facilitator” of learning, rather than “provider” of knowledge and the stakeholders and partners had the role of “players” guided into an adventurous journey, in which they are asked to exercise social, communication, organizational soft skills, to activate processes of cooperation and foster network building and group dynamics. The main objective was not to win “something” but to continue the adventure by completing the various tasks that are assigned to the characters.

This experimental training method was designed in this context to make the project strategy development process participatory taking advantage of the collaboration and co-creation approach. Each proposed stage goes to stimulate specific cognitive functions such as attention, orientation, memory, problem solving and is closely related not only to project activities but also to the exploration of social community dynamics and promotion of concentration and call to action through guided process.

In addition to gathering input and ideas related to the project's strategy and sustainability, the laboratory was tailored to CReAIT by tracking as goals: improving tourism conditions and promoting social inclusion among partners and Stakeholders; fostering network building and group dynamics; exercising social, communication, empowering of soft skills; cooperation among peers promoting team building. The focus once again was on the importance of social relationships and collaborations to strengthen sustainability.



PART III OUR VISION: 2 CITIES for 1 INCLUSIVE DESTINATION

Starting from all the above-described experiences, the vision of the CReAIT partnership and stakeholders was shaped based on *three areas of interventions and related long-term objectives*:

Area 1 "system": to nurture the cooperation among partners and stakeholders in support of Accessible and Inclusive Tourism, through networking, research of resources, mapping of inclusive and accessible services and projects in the specific area of inclusive and Accessible Tourism and related sectors, data analysis of the local context.

Area 2 "awareness raising and training": promoting access to the learning contents of the CReAIT project and other training initiatives made available in the two territories to enhance innovative, inclusive and sustainable tourism offers.

Area 3 "empowerment and network's enlargement": to promote engagement and empowerment of communities, focusing the valorization of CReAIT cross-border network and its enlargement to other Adriatic municipalities and organizations, in order to promote useful relationships for local development as a whole.

Each area of intervention includes a *course of actions* evidencing how all these composing our CReAIT Roadmap, tackles the specific challenges and priorities defined at EU level.



Area 1 “SYSTEM”

- 1.1. Collaborate on the mapping of initiatives, projects, practices of inclusive tourism and data research/analysis of the local economic context in relation to the evolution of the touristic sectors’ trend and needs.
- 1.2. Collaborate in the search for resources, funds and opportunities to support micro-projects/” recipes” co-created and implemented during the project.
- 1.3. Promote an annual partnership meeting in order to give continuity to the network and to share the progress and achievement of the Roadmap strategy.
- 1.4. Creation of a permanent committee with representatives from both Italy and Croatia partners and stakeholders to oversee the ongoing implementation and expansion of inclusive tourism initiatives and to ensure continuous dialogue, share progress, and address challenges collaboratively.
- 1.5. Support broader access to culture and cultural heritage of touristic destinations and sites for people with different abilities, through digital solution and social/educational services.
- 1.6. Use of innovative solutions as technologies and strategies to improve accessibility and inclusivity, such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and assistive devices, educational services, etc.
- 1.7. Development of digital solutions to facilitate access to tourist information and enhance the experience of visitors with disabilities.
- 1.8. Promote inclusive tourism in the Adriatic cities (small and medium) through the enhancement of experiential tourism, new services provided by Third Sectors organizations and new routes linked to local resources and stakeholder’s engagement.



Area 2 “AWARENESS RAISING AND TRAINING”

- 2.1 Planning cross-border information campaigns and training activities for policy makers, administrators and operators on accessible tourism concepts including processes of contamination and mutual learning between tourism and social operators.
- 2.2 Establish a committee of partnership as body for sharing knowledge and addressing the specific needs of different actors: SMEs (touristic sectors and related) social groups of users/tourists with special needs (informal), Municipalities and NGOs-
- 2.3 Establish a formal program of life-long learning skills for every specific sector, exploiting the toolkits for inclusive tourism and the toolkit for training trainers in inclusive tourism, as documents that are not only the result of the CReAIT project but, above all, high-quality manuals for further dissemination to all those interested in engaging in the field of AI tourism.
- 2.4 Developing certification programs for inclusive tourism providers to standardize quality and ensure adherence to best practices.
- 2.5 Facilitating exchange programs for stakeholders to learn from successful models and practices in other regions
- 2.6 To promote the access and exploitation of interested parties to project training contents and to any other training activity promoted on the territory on the theme of Accessible and inclusive tourism.
- 2.7 Public awareness and education programs promote a culture of inclusivity and respect for people with disabilities.
- 2.8 Developing Shared Resource Pools
- 2.9 Initiatives to strengthen the capacities of local partners and communities, enhancing their knowledge and skills in managing inclusive tourism



Area 3 “EMPOWERMENT AND NETWORK’S ENLARGEMENT”

- 3.1 Support the ideation, development and creation of new cross-border brand/labels as a hallmark of Adriatic cities that are willing to orient their tourist offer toward the principles of accessibility and inclusion.
- 3.2 Brand Advocating for the adoption of inclusive tourism brand at local, regional, and national levels in both Italy and Croatia.
- 3.3 Developing joint marketing strategies to promote inclusive tourism across the region/sites, leveraging the strengths and attractions of both countries
- 3.4 Engaging with government/public institutions or private foundation, associations, etc. to secure ongoing support and commitment for inclusive tourism initiatives and brand.
- 3.5 Collaborating to develop awareness and legal frameworks that support and protect the rights of tourists with disabilities
- 3.6 Active involvement of local communities in the future initiatives, ensuring that initiatives meet the specific needs of residents.



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Implementing the Strategy

The strategy will be carried out by partners at the *local and cross-border level*, will be dropped within the activities of the four partners using already scheduled projects and funding, a special effort will be employed in finding new sources of funding through the submission of new projects involving the network, expanding it according to topics and specific needs.

Below are the key actions that the partners commit to undertake to support the “CReAIT micro-projects” as exemplary and replicable initiatives that allow increasing the diversification of touristic flows.

The Social Cooperative COOSS MARCHE Onlus intends to invest further in the tourism sector, going to expand the educational and social services it currently provides.

Building on the experience of the micro-project “On Vacation, Yes You Can!” and on collaborations emerged from this experimental service, it was envisaged for the future to model this type of service and offer it to tourism facilities as an “educational package” to be offered to customers when booking their vacation.

The benefit of this experience is the combination of social workers and tourism entrepreneurs, who together were able to offer a pleasant holiday under the banner of wellbeing and improved services, all protagonists in the art of care and relief.

So new services that combine the social and touristic sectors can be thought and implement in the mid-term period (Summer 2025).

At organizational level, COOSS experimented through the project new solutions based on innovative methodologies inspired to co-creation principles, such as role-playing, to foster the processes of awareness, experiential learning, soft skills and motivation development.

In the medium and long term, COOSS intends to use these methodologies both to modernize the educational and social services it provides and to think of new ones that put the user, his or her needs, demands, and aspirations at the center of operations.



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Cluster for Eco-Social Innovation and Development - CEDRA Split intends to connect the experiences, results, strategy, and documents from the CReAIT project with the extension of another project in which CEDRA was the lead partner (*CZI-Targeted Scientific Research*), where we would link the STEM field and research with Accessible and Inclusive tourism, and encourage young researchers and the scientific research community from three Croatian universities to actively engage in modeling and developing solutions for people with special needs, especially those who are visually and hearing impaired, as well as people with limited mobility. This niche of tourism is undoubtedly a top challenge for them, as they have not had deeper involvement in these areas so far.

To do that, CEDRA has already arranged the preparatory activities for the upcoming calls for proposals /Norway grants.

The Municipality of Fermo aims to further develop accessible and inclusive tourism initiatives by focusing on fostering collaboration among private tourism operators, third sector entities, and cultural and sports associations operating locally. The aim is to become an attractive destination for people and families dealing with disabilities, through:

- Mapping and enhancing local initiatives for inclusive and accessible tourism, as initiated with CReAIT micro-projects. This process will help identify gaps and strengths, improving the overall tourism offer.
- Creating a permanent committee of local and regional stakeholders (public, private, third sector) to oversee the implementation of accessible tourism initiatives at the local level.

The committee we are going to build will have the following duties:

- facilitating local actors to tackle needs of tourists with disabilities by developing and exchanging specific knowledge and skills;
- Identifying funds and opportunities to support accessible tourism initiatives and projects, including European funds, public-private partnerships, and regional grants.



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Furthermore, the micro-projects co-designed and implemented during the project will be replicated and/or integrated into the regular planning of events and tourist itineraries of the town. In particular, at Palazzo dei priori, the tactile stands and VR installations will continue to operate, and local staff will be trained to accompany visitors to the multisensory experience. Inclusive events, such as "Inclusiveness on the move", will be planned in the city's tourism calendar (summer 2025) and more training activities on inclusive and accessible tourism involving local tourist operator will be promoted by strengthening the relationship with partners in the framework of the regional Project "Marche4all".

For the City of Trogir, CReAIT project launched an avalanche of potential solutions for increasing inclusivity at the local micro-level. Additionally, it is proof that we do not have to wait for big projects and financial opportunities to make a difference in our approach to the problem. Nevertheless, the imperative in further planning is the stronger inclusion of elements of accessibility in cultural, sports and tourist content, because this is what is missing the most. In 2025, we are obliged to adopt a four-year strategy - **the implementation development plan**, and, based on CReAIT project, we will include in it the learned principles of creating solutions for inclusive and accessible tourism.

However, we wish to continue developing solutions on site, realizing their importance for users.

The solutions implemented in the Kamerlengo Tower will continue to be developed in such a way that they will be available throughout the season when the Tower is open to visitors. According to our records - in the 2024 season we have 1,200 visitors with disabilities and more than 40,000 children for whom the facility is now more accessible and interesting.

Another prescription within the Tower, a model with sensory indicators and an audio guide is also planned as a permanent exhibition for visitors with visual impairments. During the project, the stakeholders expressed their desire to create special tours adapted to blind people, and this will also be part of our offer.



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As for the Museum, the storytelling tour of Katarina's House is a great example of the development of a tourist product for different types of guests. It is a tour that includes a historical presentation of the creation and setting of the museum by telling the story in the first person, of a historical person who really lived in the palace of the museum. Through the project, we turned that story into a multimedia form so that deaf and blind people could experience the Museum.

In addition, we included 10 exhibits in the museum with an audio guide adapted to blind people with tactile markings, and we will ensure sustainability through a permanent offer of museum tours.

At cross-border level, the Roadmap strategy aims to impact on different strands of Interreg Programmes: ITALY-CROATIA CBC 2021-2027, CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-27, ADRION 2021-27 AND INTERREG EUROPE 2021-27.

Partners and stakeholders will explore opportunities arising from territorial cooperation both for new interventions under “small scale” projects and standard projects.

Moreover, thanks to the opportunity we had to participate in the #CROssingITA-SLOWly Participatory Lab (October 2024), chances for dialogue and reflections on the possibility of creating new collaborations in the future were opened and will be explored.

