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INTERREG ITALY-CROATIA PROJECT ADRINCLUSIVE

D1.2.1 TOURISM COMPETENCIES REPORT

(Version 1.0 – 30/10/2025)

ADRINCLUSIVE Project

WP1 DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR CREATING AN INCLUSIVE AND RECOGNIZABLE TOURISTIC MODEL

D1.2.1 TOURISM COMPETENCIES REPORT

Report on necessary skills for an inclusive and sustainable tourism transition



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Focus groups report - T 1.2

1. Introduction

Purpose of the report

The "D.1.2.1 Tourism Competencies Report" is a critical component of the Adrinclusive project, a European initiative focused on enhancing inclusive tourism practices for individuals with dementia, to use the words of a participant to the focus group event "There is a lack of knowledge about what dementia actually is" [*Focus Group Notes, PP4-PP7*]. This report aims to provide a detailed overview of the skills and knowledge required for tourism professionals to develop an innovative and inclusive model of hospitality. By identifying these competencies, the report seeks to guide the development of training programs and educational curricula that can effectively prepare tourism professionals to provide supportive and accessible services tailored to the needs of travelers with dementia.

Background

The Adrinclusive project is a collaborative effort involving partners from Italy and Croatia, with a particular focus on the Adriatic region. The project aims to address the growing need for inclusive tourism services that can accommodate the unique challenges faced by individuals with dementia and their caregivers. Recognizing that traditional tourism models often fall short in meeting these specific needs, Adrinclusive seeks to foster innovation and collaboration to create more inclusive travel experiences.

The need assessment phase of the Adrinclusive project involved conducting focus group sessions with a diverse range of stakeholders, including tourism operators, healthcare professionals, educators, caregivers, and individuals with personal experience in caring for those with dementia. These sessions provided valuable insights into the current state of inclusive tourism, identified key challenges, and highlighted opportunities for improvement. The data collected from these sessions form the basis of the recommendations and findings presented in this report.

Objectives

The report is structured around several key objectives, which are designed to address the multifaceted nature of inclusive tourism for individuals with dementia. The primary objective is to identify and articulate



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the core competencies that tourism professionals need to effectively support travelers with dementia. This includes both technical skills and interpersonal abilities that are crucial for providing inclusive and supportive services. Another objective is to promote inclusive practices by highlighting successful initiatives and best practices in inclusive tourism that can serve as models for future development. By showcasing these examples, the report aims to inspire and guide tourism professionals in adopting more inclusive practices.

The report also provides actionable recommendations for enhancing training programs and educational curricula. These recommendations are designed to help tourism professionals acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to provide inclusive hospitality. Additionally, the report encourages collaboration between tourism stakeholders, healthcare providers, and educational institutions. By fostering a collaborative approach, the report aims to create a supportive network that can drive the development of inclusive tourism practices.

Supporting policy development is another key objective. The report provides insights and recommendations that can inform policy development at both the local and regional levels. By advocating for policies that support inclusive tourism, the report aims to create an enabling environment for the development of inclusive practices.

By addressing these objectives, the report seeks to contribute to the development of a more inclusive tourism sector that can cater to the diverse needs of all travelers, including those with dementia. The ultimate goal of the Adrinclusive project is to enhance the quality of life for individuals with dementia by ensuring they have access to meaningful and enjoyable travel experiences that are tailored to their unique needs.

2. Methodology and report structure

Focus group sessions

The methodology employed for this report is centered around the idea that expertise and knowledge are already available within the actors involved in this sector, hence allowing us to gather these insights through a series of focus group sessions conducted under the Adrinclusive project. These sessions were organized in various regions across Italy and Croatia, involving a diverse array of stakeholders and experts in the field of inclusive tourism. The primary aim of these sessions was to assess the current state of inclusive tourism practices, identify gaps and challenges, and explore opportunities for improvement. An additional strength of this approach is to directly engage stakeholders in discussions allowing "Participants [to] build on each other's ideas, leading to a deeper understanding of the issues at hand" [*Focus Group Notes, PP5 - AFAM*].



Strengths of focus groups

Focus groups are a qualitative research method that brings together a small group of individuals to discuss a particular topic or set of issues. This methodology was particularly well-suited for the Adrinclusive project for several reasons. Firstly, focus groups allow for the collection of detailed and nuanced insights that might not emerge through other research methods. Participants can build on each other's ideas, leading to a deeper understanding of the issues at hand [Liamputtong, P. (2011)]. For instance, discussions during the focus groups highlighted the importance of personalized support and adapted itineraries for travelers with dementia, as noted by a tour operator who shared their experiences [Focus Group Notes, PP5].

Secondly, by including participants from various backgrounds—such as tourism operators, healthcare professionals, educators, caregivers, and policymakers—the focus groups provided a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities in inclusive tourism. This diversity of perspectives was crucial in understanding the multifaceted nature of inclusive tourism.

The interactive nature of focus groups encourages participants to share their experiences and opinions openly. This dynamic exchange of ideas helps to uncover underlying assumptions, attitudes, and perceptions that are crucial for understanding the complexities of inclusive tourism [Kitzinger, J. (2005)]. For example, healthcare professionals emphasized the need for training that focuses on communication and emotional support, which is often lacking in current educational programs [Focus Group Notes, PP4-PP7].

Focus groups also allow researchers to gain a contextual understanding of the issues discussed. Participants can provide real-life examples and anecdotes that illustrate the practical challenges and successes in providing inclusive tourism services. This contextual understanding is essential for developing meaningful recommendations and strategies.

Lastly, engaging stakeholders directly in the research process ensures that their voices are heard and that their insights inform the development of recommendations and strategies [Grill, C. (2021). *Involving stakeholders in research priority setting: a scoping review. Research involvement and engagement*, 7, 1-18.]. This engagement is essential for building support and buy-in for the initiatives proposed in the report.

Participant selection

Participants in the focus groups were carefully selected to represent a broad spectrum of perspectives and expertise. They included tourism operators, healthcare professionals, educators, caregivers, and policymakers. Tourism operators, such as hotel managers, travel agents, and tour guides, provided insights into the practical challenges and opportunities in providing inclusive services. Healthcare professionals, including medical practitioners, nurses, and caregivers, offered their expertise on the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals with dementia. Educators, who are involved in



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developing and delivering educational programs for tourism professionals, shared their insights on current training practices and gaps. Caregivers and family members provided firsthand accounts of the challenges and needs of inclusive tourism, while policymakers discussed policy frameworks and support mechanisms for inclusive tourism. Finally, policymakers were included in the process as they have the power to support the values that the Adrinclusive project is seeking to promote and ultimately, favor inclusive initiatives and push for social change.

Data collection and analysis

The focus group sessions were structured to encourage open dialogue and the sharing of experiences and ideas. Key themes and insights were identified through a qualitative analysis of the discussions. The data collection process involved several steps. First, a set of guiding questions and themes was developed to explore during the sessions, based on the objectives of the Adrinclusive project. Each session was then conducted with the help of one facilitator who ensured that all participants had the opportunity to contribute their insights and a note-taker who would aid the facilitator in the process of data collection, by transcribing the most important elements of the discussion and other contextual notes.

Additionally, to further guarantee the transparency of data collection, the discussions were recorded to preserve the richness and depth of the insights shared by participants. The notes were then analyzed, supported by the audio recording when necessary, in order to identify common themes, challenges, and recommendations for improving inclusive tourism practices.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the focus group sessions, ethical considerations were paramount. Participants were informed about the purpose of the sessions and the use of the data collected. Consent was obtained from all participants, and measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of their contributions.

Furthermore, during the event the facilitators took care of informing the participants on the relevance of their participation in the focus group as part of a broader project and process, hence involving them in the major scheme and aims of Adrinclusive. This process helped us transmit the importance of the focus groups to the stakeholders while also engaging them more deeply in the conversations and project process.

By employing this methodology, the Adrinclusive project has been able to gather comprehensive and nuanced insights into the competencies required for inclusive tourism, providing a robust foundation for the recommendations and findings presented in this report.



Report structure

The report, from the next chapter and forward, describes and discusses the findings of the different focus groups divided by emerging themes.

The report is structured as follows:

3. Overview of inclusive tourism
4. Key competencies for tourism professionals
5. Specific skills and knowledge areas
6. How to create a training schedule
7. Conclusion

3. Overview of inclusive tourism

Definition and importance

Inclusive tourism refers to the practice of ensuring that tourism services, facilities, and experiences are accessible and welcoming to all individuals, regardless of their physical, cognitive, or sensory abilities. This concept is particularly important for individuals with dementia, who often face unique challenges when traveling. Inclusive tourism aims to break down barriers and provide equal opportunities for all travelers to enjoy meaningful and enriching experiences.

The current state of inclusive tourism

The current state of inclusive tourism varies widely across different regions and sectors. While some progress has been made in improving accessibility for individuals with physical disabilities, there is still a significant gap in addressing the needs of those with cognitive impairments, such as dementia. Many tourism operators and destinations lack the knowledge, training, and resources necessary to provide truly inclusive experiences for this demographic.

During the focus group sessions, participants emphasized the need for more training and awareness regarding dementia. As one healthcare professional noted, "[t]here is a lack of knowledge about what dementia actually is" to highlight a significant barrier to providing inclusive services [Focus Group Notes, PP4-PP7]. This underpins the importance of education and training in enhancing the ability of tourism professionals to support travelers with dementia but also calls for greater efforts in spreading awareness about dementia among the general public.



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Key challenges

As previously stated, one of the key challenges in inclusive tourism is the **lack of awareness and training among tourism professionals**. Many professionals are not adequately trained to understand and address the needs of travelers with dementia. This lack of awareness and training can lead to misunderstandings, inadequate support, and a poor overall experience for these travelers.

Infrastructure and accessibility are also significant challenges. While physical accessibility has improved in many areas, there is still a need for more inclusive infrastructure that caters to the specific needs of individuals with dementia. This includes clear signage, quiet spaces, and support services. As one participant noted, "Infrastructure working with these groups often employ healthcare assistants (OSS)," highlighting the need for specialized support in tourism settings *[Focus Group Notes, PP1]*.

Stigma and social barriers are additional challenges faced by individuals with dementia and their caregivers. Addressing these barriers requires a shift in attitudes and the promotion of more inclusive and supportive environments.

Policy and regulatory frameworks are also crucial for supporting inclusive tourism practices. There is a need for policies and regulations that support and encourage inclusive tourism practices. This includes guidelines for accessibility, training requirements, and incentives for tourism operators to invest in inclusive practices.

Opportunities for improvement

Despite these challenges, there are numerous opportunities for improving inclusive tourism for individuals with dementia. Developing and implementing training programs that equip tourism professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to support travelers with dementia is one such opportunity. As a disability rights advocate noted, "It is important to distinguish between daily local tourism and vacation travel" when considering the needs of travelers with dementia *[Focus Group Notes, PP1]*. This highlights the need for tailored training programs that address the unique challenges and opportunities of the multifaceted reality that tourism is, especially as for some people a vacation can have a great impact on the tourist.

Investing in infrastructure that is designed to meet the needs of individuals with dementia is another opportunity for improvement. This includes clear signage, quiet spaces, and support services that can enhance the travel experience for individuals with dementia.

Policy development is also crucial for supporting inclusive tourism practices. Creating policies and regulations that support and encourage inclusive tourism practices can create an enabling environment for the development of inclusive practices.



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Collaboration and partnerships between tourism stakeholders, healthcare providers, and educational institutions can create a supportive network for inclusive tourism. By fostering collaboration and sharing best practices, the tourism sector can work towards creating more inclusive and supportive travel experiences for individuals with dementia.

By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on these opportunities, the tourism sector can work towards creating more inclusive and supportive travel experiences for individuals with dementia. This scenario poses the basis for the creation of dedicated “university courses for inclusive tourism workers with a focus for people suffering from dementia” [*Focus Group Notes, PP1*]

4. Key competencies for tourism professionals

Communication skills

Effective communication seems to be a cornerstone of providing inclusive tourism services, particularly for individuals with dementia. Tourism professionals need to develop skills that enable them to communicate clearly, empathetically, and respectfully with travelers who may have cognitive impairments. This includes active listening, using clear and concise language, being aware of non-verbal communication, and demonstrating patience and empathy.

As one participant noted, “A vacation is an opportunity to do something different, which, in some cases, can be uniquely transformative” [*Focus Group Notes, PP1*]. This highlights the importance of effective communication in creating a positive and inclusive environment and travel experience for individuals with dementia. The vacation should then result in a moment in time when something different can happen, and the tourist should be able to experience something new, stimulating, and enjoyable while keeping aside their clinical conditions. To reach this objective is then necessary that the staff is properly communicating with the tourist. Effective communication is a cornerstone of providing inclusive tourism services, particularly for individuals with dementia. Tourism professionals need to develop skills that enable them to communicate clearly, empathetically, and respectfully with travelers who may have cognitive impairments. This includes active listening, using clear and concise language, being aware of non-verbal cues, and demonstrating patience and empathy.

As highlighted by a stakeholder who works in the tourism sector, “when discussing dementia, for example, the most useful approach might not be to use overly clinical or distant language. If a person has difficulty orienting themselves, the solution is not to label them with technical terms like ‘disoriented,’ but rather to address the situation with language that respects their dignity, avoiding reducing them to a condition. This also applies to public communications, such as announcements for lost individuals: simply saying ‘this person may need help’ instead of labeling them as ‘someone who cannot explain themselves’ could change the perception of those listening and reduce embarrassment” [*Focus Group Notes, PP3-PP6*].



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A faculty teacher in neurological subjects affirms “the primary focus should be on communication skills, general knowledge about Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and dementia and their main differences and symptoms. Also, basic etiquette with patients is important. Furthermore, memories have a big importance in patients’ everyday lives (evoking memories can affect a positive atmosphere) and this should be taught as well.” [Focus Group Notes, PP2]

This approach emphasizes the importance of using respectful and dignified language when communicating with individuals with dementia. It underscores that the goal is to create an environment where these individuals feel valued and supported, enabling them to fully enjoy their travel experience. By adopting this communication strategy, tourism professionals can foster a more inclusive and supportive tourism industry, ensuring that all travelers, regardless of their cognitive abilities, have positive and enriching experiences.

Understanding dementia

Given what we just discussed, a basic understanding of dementia is then essential for tourism professionals. This includes knowledge of the types and stages of dementia, common symptoms, and the individual needs of travelers with dementia. As one healthcare professional noted, “there is a lack of knowledge about what dementia actually is,” highlighting the need for education and training in this area [Focus Group Notes, PP4-PP7].

Understanding dementia is crucial for providing appropriate support and creating a positive travel experience for individuals with dementia. Tourism professionals should be aware of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes that individuals with dementia may experience and how these changes can affect their travel needs and preferences. Ultimately, tourism workers must know what the characteristics of this condition are, not because they should intervene on the healthcare side but because “understanding the specific needs of individuals with dementia or other cognitive difficulties [can help] to manage situations in a respectful and sensitive manner” [Focus Group Notes, PP3-PP6], which is a required skill in any context of touristic work.

Practical training

The participants discussed practical techniques that may be implemented in the teaching programs for dementia-friendly tourism.

It emerged that practical training is crucial for preparing tourism professionals to support travelers with dementia effectively. This can include role-playing and simulations that allow professionals to practice their responses and develop appropriate strategies. As one participant noted, “we must avoid being constrained by labels” when interacting with individuals with dementia [Focus Group Notes, PP1]. This highlights the importance of practical training in order to adapt a trainee language so that during their work shifts they can comfortably face different situations thanks to practical training.



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Different ideas emerged from the focus groups:

- *Case studies* can also be used to analyze real-life examples of providing inclusive tourism services. By examining these case studies, tourism professionals can gain insights into the challenges and solutions in providing inclusive tourism services.
- *On-the-job training* is another important aspect of practical training. Providing opportunities for professionals to gain hands-on experience in supporting travelers with dementia can enhance their skills and confidence in providing inclusive and supportive services.
- *Artificial Intelligence for Support Simulation*: An AI-powered virtual assistant that could guide participants through simulations of interactions with people with dementia. The AI could answer questions, correct behaviors, or suggest better approaches, acting as a “coach” that provides real-time feedback on how to approach, communicate, and interact with individuals with dementia [Focus Group Notes, PP3-6].
- *Gamification and Interactive Challenges*: Develop interactive games that can motivate young people to learn crucial skills for inclusion, such as appropriate language, non-verbal communication cues, and how to handle sensitive situations. The game could include real-life scenarios where players must make decisions that impact the well-being of a person with disabilities.
- *App for Continuous Training and Resource Access*: An app that centralizes all educational resources, including instructional videos, articles, and case studies, while also allowing users to book specific courses either in-person or online. This ensures that everyone, even those with time constraints, can access training. It could also integrate with other technologies, such as augmented reality guidance or real-time skill tracking.
- *Facilitated Communication Technology*: An app designed to improve communication with people with dementia. It could include voice assistance features, visual reminders, and suggestions for family members and caregivers on how to engage effectively, reducing frustration for both the caregiver and the person receiving care.

Cultural sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is essential for providing inclusive tourism services. Tourism professionals need to be aware of and respectful of the cultural backgrounds and preferences of all travelers, including those with dementia. This includes understanding how cultural differences may influence communication, behavior, and expectations.

As one participant noted, "The important thing is to hear your voices and points of view" when providing inclusive tourism services [Focus Group Notes, PP1]. This highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity in creating a positive and inclusive travel experience for individuals with dementia.

Respecting individual preferences is also crucial for providing inclusive tourism services. Tourism professionals should recognize and respect the unique preferences and needs of each traveler with



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dementia. Adapting services to meet the cultural and individual needs of travelers with dementia can enhance their travel experience and create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

By developing these competencies, tourism professionals can create more inclusive and supportive environments for travelers with dementia, ensuring that they have positive and enriching travel experiences.

5. Specific skills and knowledge areas

Accessibility and infrastructure

Ensuring that tourism infrastructure is accessible to individuals with dementia is a critical component of inclusive tourism. This involves physical accessibility, clear signage, quiet spaces, and support services that cater to the specific needs of individuals with dementia.

Physical accessibility is essential for ensuring that individuals with mobility impairments can navigate tourism destinations easily. This includes accessible buildings, transportation, and public spaces that are designed to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Clear signage is also crucial for creating an inclusive environment. Signage that is easy to understand and navigate can help individuals with dementia feel more comfortable and secure in unfamiliar environments. As one participant noted, "The goal of a vacation should be to foster meaningful experiences and enable people to relive them" [*Focus Group Notes, PP1*]. This highlights the importance of clear signage in creating a positive and inclusive travel experience.

Quiet spaces are another important aspect of inclusive infrastructure. Creating quiet, calming spaces where individuals with dementia can retreat if they feel overwhelmed can enhance their travel experience and create a more supportive environment.

Support services are also essential for creating an inclusive environment. This includes assistance with daily activities, medical support, and emotional support that can help individuals with dementia feel more comfortable and secure during their travels.

Customer service and support

Providing excellent customer service and support is essential for creating a positive and inclusive travel experience for individuals with dementia. This includes personalized assistance tailored to the unique needs and preferences of each traveler with dementia.



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Emotional support is also crucial for creating a positive and inclusive travel experience. Providing emotional support and reassurance can help individuals with dementia feel more comfortable and secure during their travels. As one participant noted, "A vacation is synonymous with experience and emotion, shaped by how the destination is approached" [*Focus Group Notes, PP1*]. This highlights the importance of emotional support in creating a positive and inclusive travel experience.

Problem-solving is another important aspect of customer service and support. Being prepared to address and resolve any issues or challenges that may arise during the travel experience can enhance the overall experience for individuals with dementia.

Emergency management

Being prepared to manage emergencies and unexpected situations is crucial for ensuring the safety and well-being of travelers with dementia. This involves developing and implementing emergency plans that address the specific needs of individuals with dementia.

Emergency planning is essential for creating a safe and supportive environment for travelers with dementia. Developing emergency plans that address the specific needs of individuals with dementia can help ensure that tourism professionals are prepared to respond to emergencies effectively.

Training and preparedness are also crucial for managing emergencies effectively. Ensuring that tourism professionals are trained and prepared to respond to emergencies can enhance the safety and well-being of travelers with dementia.

Communication and coordination are essential for managing emergencies effectively. Establishing clear communication and coordination protocols can ensure a swift and effective response to emergencies, enhancing the safety and well-being of travelers with dementia.

Technological proficiency

Technological proficiency is increasingly important in providing inclusive tourism services. This includes being proficient in the use of assistive technologies that can support individuals with dementia, such as communication devices, navigation aids, and monitoring systems.

Digital literacy is also crucial for providing inclusive tourism services. Having the skills to use digital platforms and tools to enhance the travel experience for individuals with dementia can create a more supportive and inclusive environment.



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Innovation and adaptation are also important aspects of technological proficiency. Being open to innovating and adapting technologies to meet the evolving needs of travelers with dementia can enhance the travel experience and create a more supportive and inclusive environment.

By developing these specific skills and knowledge areas, tourism professionals can create more inclusive and supportive environments for travelers with dementia, ensuring that they have positive and enriching travel experiences.

6. How to create a training schedule

When and where can the training occur?

Some participants proposed some valuable opportunities to implement such teachings, one participant said “winter is an ideal time for training through webinars, as it is typically a less busy season for tourism professionals” [Focus Group Notes, LP] or another “it should be in the off-season” [Focus Group Notes, PP2]; someone also suggested who should be following such courses “It needs to be integrated into training programs and courses for teachers and professionals to ensure it [the inclusive approach] becomes a natural approach. [...] There are work plans or ministerial directives and this is particularly interesting, as it highlights a paradigm shift. Educational policies must become more inclusive, but they also need to be translated into daily practices, both in schools and in the work professionals carry out in the field” [Focus Group Notes, PP3-6]. Similarly, In the focus group held by PP2, participants emphasized that “it should not be extended education but also a short training can give key information and benefits in future contact with the patients” and again another participant “[I think] that the training could take place twice a year before and after the tourist season” [Focus Group Notes, PP2].

Nonetheless, it is important to still consider that all these options should be adapted to the national, or even regional level to better engage with the specific targets.

Collaboration with experts

A common belief between participants in all the workshops highlights the necessity to establish collaboration with experts (healthcare professionals, caregivers, educators, and more) and have them play an active part in both the creation of the training programs as much as in the active role of teaching and passing this knowledge to others.

Collaborating with experts in dementia care and inclusive tourism is crucial for enhancing training programs and ensuring that they are relevant and effective [Focus Group Notes, LP]. This collaboration can take several forms, including expert consultation, joint training initiatives, and guest lectures and workshops.



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Expert consultation involves engaging experts to provide input and feedback on curriculum development and training materials. Consulting with healthcare professionals, educators, and policymakers can ensure a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to training and education in inclusive tourism.

Joint training initiatives involve developing training programs in collaboration with healthcare providers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. Fostering partnerships that facilitate the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices can enhance the effectiveness of training programs and ensure that they are relevant and up-to-date.

Guest lectures and workshops involve inviting experts to deliver guest lectures and workshops as part of the training programs. Encouraging interactive sessions where professionals can ask questions, share experiences, and learn from experts can enhance the learning experience and provide valuable insights into best practices in inclusive tourism.

By implementing these recommendations, training programs can be enhanced to better prepare tourism professionals to provide inclusive and supportive services for travelers with dementia.

Call for standardization

The standardization of training and education on dementia is crucial to ensuring that tourism professionals have a common base of knowledge and preparation. The absence of specific training often leaves professionals unprepared to handle situations involving dementia, increasing the risk of providing inadequate experiences. Additionally, there is no clear system of standards and certifications for inclusive services, leading to inconsistencies in the quality of care and accessibility in the tourism sector.

As highlighted in the focus group discussions, "however, tailored programs could be developed. If the goal is to train operators, it is essential to start creating content, standardizing competencies, and then integrating them into a network" [*Focus Group Notes, LP*]. This suggests that rather than relying on fragmented or ad-hoc training initiatives, there needs to be a structured and standardized approach to ensure consistency in the skills and knowledge of tourism professionals. By doing so, inclusivity becomes an integral part of training curricula, enabling professionals to confidently and effectively support travelers with dementia.

Beyond training, standardizing tourism spaces and services is equally important. Often, accessibility measures are seen as adaptations or accommodations for people with disabilities rather than as fundamental components of inclusive design. This perspective can create environments that feel exclusionary rather than welcoming. As noted in the focus group discussions, "In the long run, this approach helps shift the mindset from seeing inclusivity as an additional effort to making it a standard part of how spaces and services are designed and delivered. This way, people are not just 'accommodating' those with disabilities but actively creating environments where everyone, regardless of their condition, can feel welcome." [*Focus Group Notes, PP3-6*]. This matter should be taught in the participant's opinion



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in training courses, enabling structures and services to shift toward a more intrinsically inclusive approach that could one day become the new standard.

By embedding inclusivity into the foundational principles of tourism planning, training, and service design, the sector can move beyond temporary solutions toward lasting, meaningful change. Establishing standardized training programs and clear certification systems for inclusive tourism services will not only improve the overall experience for travelers with dementia but also promote a cultural shift toward universal accessibility and hospitality.

Successful initiatives

On the one hand, in one of the Italian focus groups arose that NGOs are organizing inclusive vacations for people with dementia, and they have a standardized approach and a solid network with which they are already collaborating to allow these initiatives to take place. On the other hand, the Croatian focus groups tend to report minor and sporadic experiences and a lack of a network for the organization of such initiatives.

Nonetheless, they all show a degree of expertise and they all state that such experience could be translated into best practices useful in the context of training workers for inclusive tourism by providing actionable knowledge useful in a practical context.

The creation of a network for NGOs and other actors could provide a meeting ground where it would be possible to ask for help to more experience realities and get aid in organizing inclusive vacations for the first time; furthermore, it would be possible to share reviews/indications on touristic locations and structure and share other useful pieces of knowledge useful in creating a standardized methodology in organizing and managing inclusive tourism experiences in the Italian-Croatian Interreg Region.

7. Conclusion

Summary of findings

The Adrinclusive project's "D.1.2.1 Tourism Competencies Report" represents a significant stride towards fostering a more inclusive tourism landscape for individuals with dementia. Through meticulous focus group sessions conducted across Italy and Croatia, the report has gathered insights from a diverse array of stakeholders, including tourism operators, healthcare professionals, educators, and policymakers. These insights have illuminated the critical competencies and skills necessary for tourism professionals to create supportive and accessible travel experiences.

At the heart of this report lies the recognition that inclusive tourism is not merely an option but a necessity. The voices of participants have collectively emphasized the importance of empathetic communication, practical training, and cultural sensitivity. Effective communication, characterized by active listening, clear



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language, and awareness of non-verbal cues, is fundamental in creating a welcoming environment for travelers with dementia. This competency, coupled with a deep understanding of dementia, enables tourism professionals to respond sensitively to the unique needs and challenges faced by these individuals.

Training for tourism workers is paramount in achieving this inclusive vision. By equipping professionals with the right tools and knowledge, they can better understand and address the specific needs of travelers with dementia. Focusing on communication skills is particularly crucial, as it allows professionals to interact empathetically and effectively, ensuring that travelers feel valued and supported. This training should be comprehensive, incorporating practical techniques such as role-playing and simulations, to prepare workers for real-life scenarios. By investing in such training, the tourism sector can significantly enhance the quality of service and create more inclusive environments.

The report underscores the need for collaboration and standardization in training and education. Engaging experts from various fields to develop comprehensive training programs ensures that tourism professionals are well-prepared to handle the complexities of inclusive tourism. Standardizing these programs promotes consistency in skills and knowledge, making inclusivity an integral part of the tourism sector.

Infrastructure and policy play pivotal roles in supporting inclusive tourism practices. Creating accessible infrastructure, including clear signage and quiet spaces, and developing policies that encourage and incentivize inclusive practices, are crucial steps towards a more welcoming environment. The report highlights successful initiatives and best practices that serve as inspiring models for future development. These examples demonstrate that inclusive tourism is not only feasible but also beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

The Adrinclusive project's ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of life for individuals with dementia by ensuring they have access to meaningful and enjoyable travel experiences tailored to their unique needs. By addressing the competencies, skills, and knowledge areas identified in this report, we can work towards creating a tourism landscape that is welcoming and supportive for all travelers. This endeavor is not just about enhancing travel experiences but also about improving the quality of life for individuals with dementia, ensuring they feel valued and supported in their travel pursuits. Together, we can foster a more inclusive and compassionate society, where every traveler feels valued and supported.

Future directions

In its next steps, Adrinclusive aims to enhance inclusive tourism by creating training initiatives and strengthening collaborative networks. Policy advocacy and community engagement will be crucial in promoting such training courses and providing the necessary support to disseminate them. By advocating for supportive policies and involving local communities, we can create more welcoming environments for all travelers.



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Continuous research and evaluation will guide future developments, ensuring that inclusive tourism practices remain effective and responsive to evolving needs. Through these efforts, the Adrinclusive project will work towards a future where every individual can enjoy meaningful travel experiences.

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