



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

Project title:

The development of the innovative educational method of  
ACCESSIBLE tourism in Central Europe

## **Good practices in Romanian accessible tourism**



**Sapientia University**

**Faculty of Economics, Socio-Human Sciences and Engineering,  
Miercurea-Ciuc**

Miercurea-Ciuc, 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2024.

„Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.”



## Introduction

In terms of accessible tourism, it is of paramount importance to sensitise society and develop an inclusive attitude, which will enable tourists with disabilities to benefit from the experience of tourism services. Many tourist destinations and the accommodation, restaurants and entertainment facilities within them are promoting themselves as accessible destinations for people with disabilities. In the vast majority of cases, although the services offered are advertised as accessible, the persons concerned still face various barriers due to inadequate facilities, lack of accurate assessment of needs and insufficient experience. Operators of facilities in different destinations often forget that each type of disability requires a specific approach, due to the different problems of the persons concerned. This means that people with disabilities continue to represent a new target group in tourism, requiring non-templary tourism services, and their growing role in the industry must be taken into account. The worldwide Covid-19 epidemic in 2020 has contributed to the effective use of modern technologies, as it has resulted in audio materials, various accessibility and smartphone apps that have made it possible for people with disabilities to navigate services. Increasing accessibility requires knowledge of the diverse needs of people with disabilities and the ability to apply this knowledge in practice (Eusébio et al., 2023).

In order to ensure that tourists with disabilities are included in the tourism experience and in tourism itself, various initiatives are needed to set an example for society and for the businesses that make up the tourism sector. To this end, the authors of the book have collected **13 good practices** (as shown in Table 1) aimed at the inclusion of tourists with disabilities in Romania, which contribute to the development of a significant segment of tourism. The good practices include initiatives that are specifically useful for visually impaired people, people with intellectual disabilities and people with reduced mobility, but there are also a number of good practices that are informative for all and can be widely used.

Table 1: Good practices collected by the authors for the social inclusion of people with disabilities in Romania

No.	Name of good practice	Primary target group	Location	Implementers, promoters
1.	The Terra Mirabilis project	Persons not able to see	Cluj Napoca and surroundings	Babilon Travel Association, Cluj-Napoca Town Hall, Cluj-Napoca Tourist Information Centre
2.	Square sculpture of Şumuleu	Persons not able to see and people with reduced mobility	Miercurea Ciuc, Şumuleu	Transylvanian Roads Association, Orbán László, Tövissi Zsolt, Berze Imre
3.	Original trail for disabled people in the Retezat Mountains	Persons not able to see and people with reduced mobility	Retezat National Park, Nucsoara Visitor Centre	Retezat Tourism Association
4.	Internet accessibility map	People with reduced mobility	Online platform	Motivation Foundation Romania
5.	Hiking guide for families with children and people with disabilities	People with reduced mobility	Mountains around Brasov	Marian Anghel, AECO Romania, Outdoor Education and Cultural Association
6.	Valea Fagilor Agropension	People with reduced mobility	Tulcea county, Luncaşeni municipality	Valea Fagilor Agropension
7.	Sea and beach for all	People with reduced mobility	Pupa Beach, Mamaia	M24Seven Europe, RAPTronic, RAP Development, RAP Instal, Petroterm SRL., Sorla and Dobra, AQUA Carpatica, Martin Eughenia, Gabriel Voitisi
8.	Peat bog	People with reduced mobility	Harghita county, Praid municipality	Korond-Parajd Nature Conservancy, Korond Tourist Association

9.	Nurture in nature. The movement is for everyone	People with reduced mobility	Harghita county, Harghita Madaras	Nurture in Nature
10.	We bring Accessible Romania to the world	People with reduced mobility and people with hearing impairment	More destinations (Brasov, Sibiu, Bucharest, etc.)	Accessible Romania by Santo Touring
11.	Skiing for people with mobility disabilities	People with reduced mobility	Mountains of Romania	CaiacSMile
12.	Special Olympics	People with intellectual disabilities	Sports competitions, school education, courses in Romania	Special Olympics Foundation
13.	AUDARA (Audit Accessibility Romania)	All people with disabilities	Online platform	CED Romanian Exceprience Center, Accessible Romania by Sano Touring, Accessible Romania

Source: own editing (2024)

**1. "The Terra Mirabilis project"** is an initiative for visually impaired people, created jointly by the Babilon Travel Association of Cluj Napoca, Cluj Town Hall and the Cluj Tourist Information Centre. The project is educational, mobility enhancing and aims to involve the people concerned in the tourism process. The relevance of the initiative lies in the documentation of itineraries in exchange for financial support, and in the training of eight volunteers able to accompany visually impaired people or groups of people with this problem along the routes developed. The financial support will finance various guides, maps, information and promotional materials to make Cluj Napoca accessible to visually impaired people, both national and foreign tourists. The itineraries will include plans of the most important sights, monuments and places of worship that can highlight the multicultural and multi-ethnic dimension of the city. The guides are in Romanian and English, in a format suitable for the visually impaired, i.e. audio guides in large print. These materials are also available in digital format as MP3 audio documents and PDF documents. The aim of the



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

project is to encourage the integration of visually impaired people into the community, access to tourist destinations and the development of interactions between visually impaired people, who in many cases have to step out of their comfort zone, which can be a difficulty. The innovative nature of the initiative lies in the fact that it offers visually impaired people the opportunity to discover the city's features, attractions and history. This good practice can be transferred without modification to other cities in the country, if the municipality and NGOs of the city concerned consider it important. The project is not harmful to the environment, and the production of more visible signage, maps for expansion, information and promotional material will be produced at a fixed financial cost.

**2. The "Space sculpture of Şumuleu"** is a joint initiative of the Transylvanian Roads Association, László Orbán, Zsolt Tövissi and Imre Berze, which is intended to sensitize society and to provide information to visually impaired people. The sculpture is specifically designed to make the Şumuleu Church of the Cross and other landmarks in the area tactile for visually impaired and visually impaired people, and informative for visitors in wheelchairs, due to the difficult accessibility of the area. Located in the car park next to the Church of Şumuleu, the sculpture models the relief of a circle 900 metres in diameter as the crow flies and the buildings on the site on a bronze relief (Figure 1). The innovative character of the initiative lies in its alternative way of presenting the area. From a sustainability point of view, the bronze relief can be expected to retain its function for a long time without any additional expenditure, and visitors to the area can access and learn about it free of charge. The initiative could be adapted to any destination using different sculptural techniques and 3D printing, which could showcase the major tourist attractions of the site, not only for the visually impaired but also for wheelchair users.



Figure 1.: The Space sculpture of Şumuleu

Source: <https://felvidek.ma>

**3. The initiative "Original trail for disabled people in the Retezat Mountains"** was created by the Retezat Tourism Association to provide information about the mountain area and the possibility to travel to the site, in addition to the visitation of the site by disabled people. The trail is open to all, but was created primarily to serve the disabled and the visually impaired. The trail is located at the foot of the Retezat Mountains, in the Retezat National Park, at the Nucsoara Visitor Centre, which offers an experience for adults with disabilities and children with disabilities. The trail is 36 metres long and is equipped with ramps and handrails. Along the trail, visitors can observe the footprints of animals living in the mountain range and information about the species has been placed. The trail has been designed to be wheelchair accessible. The area is easily accessible by car, is barrier-free and there is relatively little traffic in this zone. The initiative will bring nature closer to people with disabilities. The design of the area has sought to provide a well thought-out and detailed infrastructure network. The plant species on site are tactile and



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

the footprints of animals are visible from wheelchairs. The animal footprints, mainly of otter, deer, jackal, wild boar, wolf, bear and chamois, are placed on wooden panels in relief to allow visually impaired people to feel their way around and are an interesting sight for all visitors. The itinerary has been implemented by the Retezat Tourist Association in collaboration with the Romanian Wilderness Association and the Retezat National Park Directorate, with the support of the Romanian-American Foundation and the Partnership Foundation. The maintenance of the initiative does not entail any additional costs for the Retezat National Park Administration, so it can remain operational in the long term. The good practice can be adapted without modification in the visitor centres of the national parks in the country, but can also be developed and sustained in schools, kindergartens and educational institutions.

**4. The "Internet accessibility map"**, an initiative of Motivation Foundation Romania, located in the municipality of Buda, Ilfov County. The map was created for information and mobility of tourists. It is mainly aimed at people with disabilities who use wheelchairs for transport. The accessibility map is a tool that provides a useful source of information and centralises data on accessible sites in Romania. Motivation's accessibility trademark is registered at the State Trademark and Design Office under registration number M2012 02770. Accessibility to accommodation, museums and cultural sites is essential for people with reduced mobility, as for all travellers, when planning their trip. The aim of the initiative is to provide wheelchair users with information on the accessibility of accommodation, city spaces and tourist attractions. Today, access to information on the web is increasingly important, so it is also an important factor that people with disabilities are informed at home before visiting a destination or an establishment they wish to visit. This is the purpose and innovative role of the website. In terms of the financial sustainability of good practice, it is worth noting that resources are needed to continuously survey the sites and facilities and to update the database on a regular basis. The initiative could be adapted to other countries if they have the necessary information.

**5. The initiative "Hiking guide for families with children and people with disabilities"** is a hiking guide available in Romanian and English, written by Marian Anghel with the support of AECO Romania and the Outdoor Education and Cultural Association. The guide is designed to sensitise and inform. The project is





Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

aimed at a specific target group, first of all people with reduced mobility, wheelchair users, and mainly at the routes available in Brasov County. The guidebook contains descriptions of almost 60 routes in six mountain ranges in the Brasov area, classified according to difficulty. The routes are accompanied by explanatory maps, pictures and useful information, as well as a wealth of information on what mountain hiking is all about. The book also describes the trails of Postăvaru (Christian Mountain), along with the routes of Piatra Mare (Big Stone Mountain), Piatra Craiului (King Stone), Bucegi, Ciucas (Fallen Mountain) and Baiului (Baiului). The guide is a very useful tool for people with disabilities, but also for families with children, teachers, associations, NGOs, to help them find their way around the mountains around Brasov. The information contained in the guide will help adults to choose the right routes for their children, depending on their age, equipment and experience. The development is justified by the need to provide information on the safety of the routes for people with disabilities, families and children. Provide safe and comfortable access to some mountain attractions for people with disabilities. The publication is sustainable and does not have a significant environmental impact. It is sent free of charge by post to people with disabilities. The guide can be adapted to mountain attractions in other counties or countries, in different languages, but it is advisable to assess the origin of visitors beforehand.

**6. The "Valea Fagilor Agropension"** is an agrotourism pension in the municipality of Luncavita, Tulcea County, which has been developed with the support of the National Rural Development Programme. It operates as a certified accommodation and can accommodate tourists in three bedrooms. The initiative has a sensitisation, mobility improvement and tourist attraction character. The guest house is designed with special attention to people with disabilities. The manager of the pension is a wheelchair-bound disabled person, which adds to the good atmosphere and special charm of the pension. The pension therefore caters for this special target group, with well thought-out equipment, elimination of thresholds, special bathrooms, comfortable and spacious spaces. The accommodation is adapted to the characteristics of the area, with the cultural traditions of Dobrudza in addition to the recipes of the Danube Delta. The traditional environment, the natural attractions, the leisure activities (hiking, fishing, cycling, astronomy, participation in agricultural work) nourish the soul and offer unforgettable experiences to those who come here. Visitors are welcome to discover the local cultural heritage and participate in local events and festivities. The guesthouse's rooms, bathrooms and dining room are





adapted to specific needs, in addition to being easily accessible by car. The special feature of the agritourism guesthouse is the special design of the space and an orchard where visitors can discover different varieties of apples, apricots, cherries and plums, and take part in the work around the farm. The pension's own income ensures its financial sustainability, and the administration provides funds to improve the quality of its services. The good practice can be adapted to other destinations, taking into account local possibilities.

**7. The "Sea and beach for all"** initiative is a set of activities for sensitization, education and mobility improvement on the Romanian coast, the result of a joint collaboration between M24Seven Europe, RAPTronic, RAP Development, RAP Instal, Petroterm SRL, Sorla and Dobra from Constanta, AQUA Carpatica, Martin Eughenia and Gabriel Voitisi. The event is accessible to all disabled people, but they are trying to provide a special beach experience for disabled travellers. The "Sea and Beach for All" initiative took place in August 2017 and August 2021, when the first disabled beach in Romania opened in Mamaia. With the agreement of the tourism operator that owns the "Pupa Beach" part of the beach, a part of the beach was built right next to the lifeguard tower, for safety and to ensure easy access for people with disabilities. The "Pupa Beach" section is located directly at the entrance to the Mamaia resort, which is properly signposted and accessible from the street by a ramp for disabled persons. A wooden access road leads to the accessible part of the beach, where three floating Mobi-chairs are available for disabled bathers to enjoy the bathing experience. The beach is equipped with six special sunbeds with umbrellas, special toilets and changing rooms adapted to the needs of the disabled. Mobi-chairs (Figure 2.). float in the sea and provide safe bathing for people with reduced mobility. Smaller chairs have a maximum weight limit of 115 kg, while larger chairs can support up to 136 kg. Special sun loungers for disabled people are provided free of charge by the association. The initiative had a budget of €7000, provided by Romanian businesses, organisations and individuals. The good practice can be adapted without modification to other coastal beach locations or resorts with lakes. The mobility of the floating chairs will facilitate bathing in places with easy access to the waterfront.



Figure 2.: The floathing chair in the "Sea and beach for all" project

Source: <https://www.romania-insider.com>

**8. The “Peat bog” in Fântâna Brazilor** is Romania's first disabled-friendly trail, created jointly by the Korond-Parajd Nature Conservancy and the Korond Tourist Association for education and information, while facilitating mobility and making the attraction accessible. The initiative is designed to serve all people with disabilities. The trail was opened in 2013 in the area's nature reserve to attract wheelchair visitors. The Korond-Parajd Nature Reserve inaugurated the Peat Bog Trail in the Pine Mountains, which has been designed to allow disabled people to move around unhindered. The trail is part of a Natura 2000 nature reserve. Visitors can gain an insight into the typical flora and fauna of the taiga and the threats they face. The trail was built with grant funding and generous donations from the local community, and was renovated again in 2022. Nearly 85% of the timber needed to build the trail system was donated by individuals in the area. The peat bog in the village of Corund is accessible by bicycle and can be visited free



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

of charge, but only by local student volunteers. The trail is interactive, with educational and interactive panels along the trail providing information about the plants and animals that live there. The information panels are available in three languages, Hungarian, Romanian and English, and inform visitors about the characteristics of the peat bog. The initiative could provide a special educational and learning experience for people with disabilities, in addition to the attraction of hiking in nature. The innovative nature of the trail lies in the fact that it offers a unique opportunity for people with disabilities to learn about the plant species in the area by making it accessible. In addition, the different species of moss, which offer a unique spectacle, deserve special mention. In terms of the financial sustainability of the initiative, maintaining the trail at an adequate level of quality requires regular monitoring to ensure safe use, which is a cost factor. The primary objective of the tourist destination is environmental education and awareness-raising. Interactive signage in the peat bogs here will play this role. This is a key element in promoting environmental protection. The good practice can be adapted to other parts of the country with minor or major modifications according to local conditions.

**9. The initiative "Nurture in nature. The movement is for everyone"** is an educational and mobility development tool for active recreation for people with disabilities. The team implementing the exercise is composed of ski instructors, mountain guides and a number of active and mobile people, mainly active in the Harghita Madaras, Harghita county. The initiative provides accessible outdoor activities for disabled people. During the summer, they organise tours using specially designed bicycles that can be used by people with disabilities. These bicycles are designed for off-road use, with the disabled person sitting in the front seat and a person behind him/her who controls the equipment and assists the disabled person in getting on and off the bicycle. In winter, disabled people can learn to ski using special ski chairs (Figure 3.). Depending on the type of chair, they offer different degrees of independence for disabled people. Again, a guide is needed, but people with minor disabilities can use the equipment with a more moderate level of independence, which provides different levels of difficulty for those interested. The aim of the activity is to make active recreation available to disabled people and all nature lovers, both in winter and summer. The initiative is innovative in that it uses special equipment to provide a physical activity experience that a certain segment of society cannot otherwise experience. The services provided are sustainable and do not require significant energy or other material inputs and have a negligible ecological

footprint. The main prerequisite for sustainability is the involvement of a sufficient number of paying customers and support staff in the organisation and ongoing operation. The good practice can be applied in all locations where ski slopes, hiking trails and other outdoor activities are available, with varying terrain conditions. The provider of the activity currently only sees the possibility of extending it to certain locations in the Romanian county of Harghita, possibly in the surrounding counties.



Figure 3.: The special ski chairs is the "Nurture in nature. The movement is for everyone" project

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/NiNadventuresWorld/>

**10. The project "We bring Accessible Romania to the world"** has been created by the travel agency Accessible Romania by Sano Touring to make it easier to visit the different attractions. The travel agency targets a variety of disabled target groups, such as people with reduced mobility or hearing impairments, but not all services are clear about whether or not they are accessible to wheelchair users or other people with disabilities. The service provider promotes various tourism products and destinations in Romania, mostly in English. Thematic tours include accessible Transylvania tours, wine and gastronomy tours in Romania. City visits are organised to Brasov, Constanta, Sibiu and Bucharest. Bathing holidays are offered in Băile Felix, Covasna and Sovata. Personal transport is provided in Romania, using a special vehicle called Crafty. The innovative nature of the initiative lies in the fact that, with the help of special equipment, all



people with disabilities can participate in different tourist programmes like any other person in society. With the aim of putting Romania on the map of tourism for people with disabilities, the Accessible Romania by Sano Touring travel agency has been created to make adventure and discovery accessible to all. From an adaptability point of view, it can be used in other countries and in other cities and destinations in Romania where special infrastructure is available for wheelchair users to access certain attractions.

**11. The "Skiing for people with mobility disabilities"** is an initiative to improve mobility that can be tried by all people with disabilities. The activity has been launched by the CaiacSMile organisation in Cluj-Napoca, as they believe that sport does not discriminate, so that everyone can enjoy active recreation. For the winter period 2021-2022, CaiacSMile launched the project "Skiing for people with mobility disabilities", where special equipment was purchased to make the ski slopes accessible for people with mobility disabilities (Figure 4.). Events have been organised on the ski slopes and supervisors and mountain guides have been trained to use the equipment. Accessible ski slopes offer disabled people the opportunity to practise independently. The association has already taken a big step in this direction with the support of Euroski Vatra Dornei - National Training Centre for Instructors. Three of the CaiacSMile club's flagship members became accredited ski instructors in the winter of 2022. The organisation provided skiing opportunities for 1000 people during the winter of 2022-2023. During the 2022-2023 ski season, eight camps, each lasting six days, were organised at different times and in different locations on accessible ski slopes in the previous season, where disabled people skied together with members of the club. More than 50 disabled people learned to ski independently using the Monoski device. They were joined by hundreds of people with various disabilities who enjoyed the skiing experience. In Romania, natural conditions allow the practice of winter sports, but disabled people will not be able to try these activities before 2021. Exercise therapy is one of the most effective ways to overcome anxiety and improve quality of life, both physically and mentally. People with disabilities should be the first to have access to these forms of therapy, yet they are the first to be denied this right because they do not participate in traditional or adapted competitive sports. In terms of the financial sustainability of the project, the basic cost of the lift chairs is approximately €6,500, but these lifts can be transported to different ski resorts around the country, so that they can be used in several locations on a cyclical basis. The activity is not harmful to the environment and relies on the use of the ski slopes that have been



constructed. The good practice can be adapted to the country's ski slopes without modification, provided that they are equipped with appropriate equipment and trained staff.



Figure 4.: The The "Skiing for people with mobility disabilities" project

Source: <https://www.caiacsmile.ro>

**12. The "Special Olympics"** initiative was created by the Special Olympics Foundation, a foundation based in the town of Bragadiru in Ilfov County. The good practice is aimed at sensitising and educating society, while contributing to the mobility of the tourists concerned. The Special Olympics (Figure 5.) is a movement that helps people with intellectual disabilities to be accepted and included in society as active members of their communities, but is accessible to all people with disabilities. The movement seeks to challenge passivity, injustice and intolerance. In Romania, since 2003, Special Olympics has helped more than 27,000 children, young people and adults with intellectual disabilities to become active members of their communities. The Foundation's goal is to enable people with disabilities and their families to participate in various sports competitions, educational activities in schools, training, condition assessments and sustainable solutions to increase the employability of adults with disabilities. The innovative character of the project lies in its ability to increase the employability of adults with intellectual disabilities, their participation in competitions and training courses. As regards the financial sustainability

of the activity, it can be concluded that the Foundation needs permanent funding, which is provided from foreign sources. The good practice could be adapted to other cities, provided that there are sufficient financial and human resources available to organise events, competitions and training courses.



Figure 5.: The "Special Olympics"

Source: <https://specialolympics.ro>

**13. The "AUDARA (Audit Accessibility Romania)"** project is a joint initiative of the CED Romanian Experience Center, Accessible Romania by Sano Touring and Accessible Romania. The information service software, which is basically intended for the transmission of barrier-free institutions and events, provides assistance to all persons with disabilities, which contributes to the sensitization of society, education and information of the affected persons. The creators of the software developed the application for people living with a wide range of disabilities, who can choose the locations, facilities and events they want to





visit based on various information, as well as find out about the accessibility of each program. According to the estimates of the World Health Organization, 16% of the world's population has some type of disability, the proportion of which increases in parallel with the aging of the population. From November 2022, different information will be available in the application for people with disabilities. AUDARA allows the preparation of accessibility reports for institutions where cultural activities are taking place throughout Romania at the time of the visit. These reports provide an opportunity to become transparent about how to improve the access and participation of people with various special needs in each event. As a result, cultural institutions will be more inclusive for the relevant target group of the population. The innovative nature of the software lies in the fact that it facilitates the creation of an online database of cultural destinations in Romania, where accessibility-related information is presented in a structured way. AUDARA develops around 300 parameters based on accessibility criteria provided by the Romanian legal framework, analysis of good practices from around the world, and theoretical and practical experience of accessibility and accessible tourism experts.

Recognizing the importance of accessible tourism and the empowerment of disabled individuals, Romania has started taking steps to improve the situation. Efforts include the development of accessible accommodations, transportation services, and the promotion of inclusive travel experiences. Various organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, are working to raise awareness, provide training, and advocate for policy changes that support the rights and needs of disabled travelers.

The accessibility of travel and tourism services for disabled individuals in Romania remains a work in progress. By addressing the challenges and investing in accessible infrastructure, Romania has the potential to become a more inclusive and welcoming destination for travelers of all abilities. This exploration of accessible good practices in Romania sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the current situation and the ongoing efforts to ensure that disabled individuals can explore and enjoy the country's treasures with ease and dignity.