

GREENTOUR – AN INNOVATIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP FOR PROMOTING GREEN TOURISM AND ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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***Abstract:** The GreenTour project highlights as extremely important the need to promote social inclusion and better access for people with disabilities to existing green tourism opportunities and to promote environmental sustainability in the tourism industry. The project has set itself the overall objective of promoting social inclusion and better access for people with disabilities to existing green tourism opportunities and promoting environmental sustainability in the tourism industry. Developing an interactive map to enable people with disabilities to plan, undertake and enjoy eco-tourism trips in a more sustainable and environmentally friendly way and explore all the eco-tourism offers that the country has to offer. Motivate people with disabilities to lead an active life, go on trips and become real agents of environmental change by developing and implementing new and specific teaching approaches. A desired outcome of completing the GreenTour project is to showcase the diversity of EU Member States, which affects and the different approaches, techniques and methods applied to green tourism and accessible tourism offers. Including disadvantaged people, giving them better access to existing green tourism opportunities, motivates active living and encourages environmental sustainability in the tourism industry. Each of the six partners from Romania, Bulgaria, Italy, Spain and Cyprus will contribute to all project activities. The GreenTour project work plan is organised in sets of activities linked to the respective intellectual outputs and led by different partners, balanced according to their experience and expertise.*

***Keywords:** green, opportunities, accessible tourism, project, Erasmus, future, disabilities*

TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Supportive materials are needed for tourism providers so they can develop touristic offers that are suitable for those with disabilities and emphasize green tourism or sustainable travel. It is essential that tourism providers are informed about the specific needs of people with disabilities, the work of working with people with disabilities. In order for tourism providers to see real-life examples of touristic offers for people with different disabilities, we should provide good examples. Describe the importance of sustainable tourism, explain why tourism providers should adopt sustainable practices, and introduce stakeholders to sustainable tourism, emphasizing the importance of preserving natural resources, supporting local communities, and minimizing environmental damage.

From this project, you will learn how to integrate sustainability principles into various aspects of tourism operations, such as accommodations, transportation, activities, and food services, by reducing the carbon footprint, conserving resources, promoting biodiversity, and respecting local cultures. When it comes to the implementation of green tourism and eco-friendly practices, the vast majority of respondents (95.56%) said they implement at least one eco-friendly practice. (fig.1)



Fig.1

Some policies on environmental protection and green tourism are applied. Most selected measures are the following: (fig.2)

2. Please choose all the policies/ practices that your company/ unit has in place for promoting green tourism:

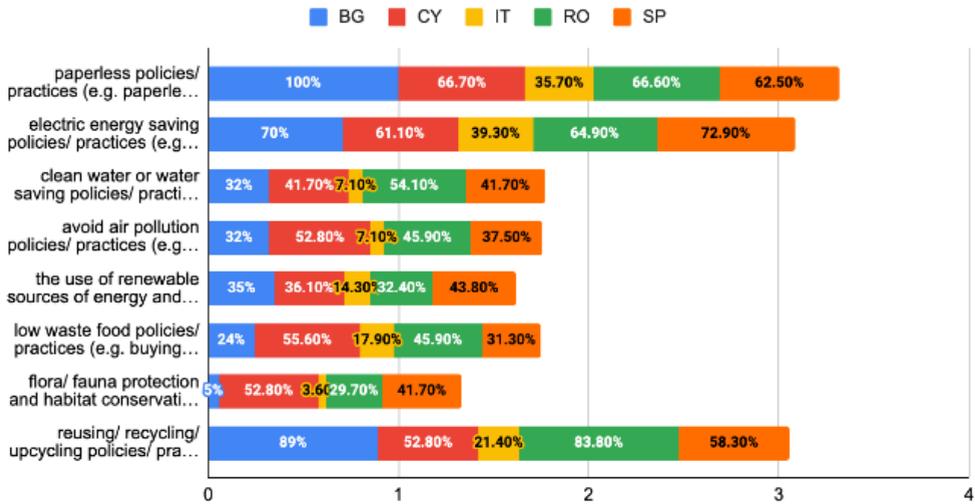


Fig.2

On average 83% of most establishments (from the countries Romania, Spain, Italy, Cyprus and Bulgaria) provide access for people with disabilities to their premises. (fig.3)

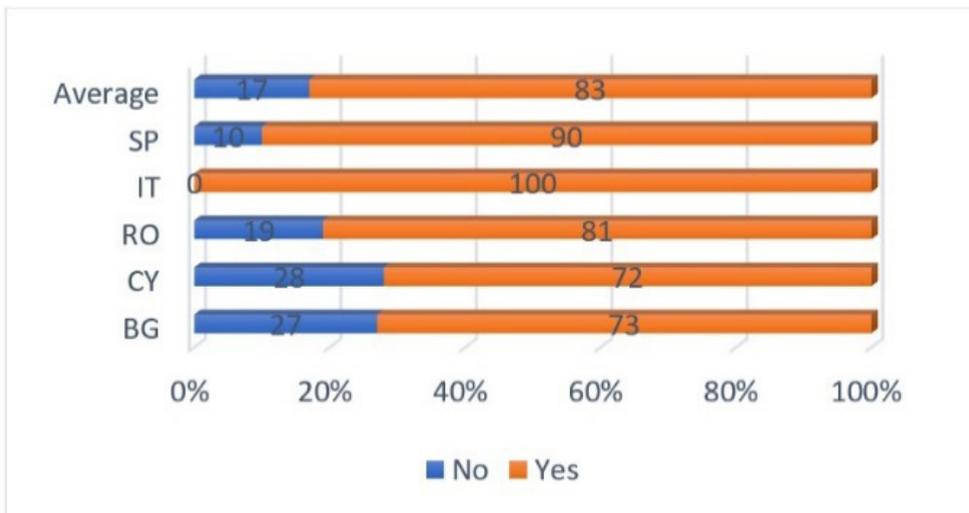


Fig. 3

Unfortunately, only a few Green Tour partner countries promote green tourism services directly to people with disabilities, mostly in Spain, Cyprus and Italy. (Fig.4)

8. Does your company/ unit promote green tourism services to people with disabilities?

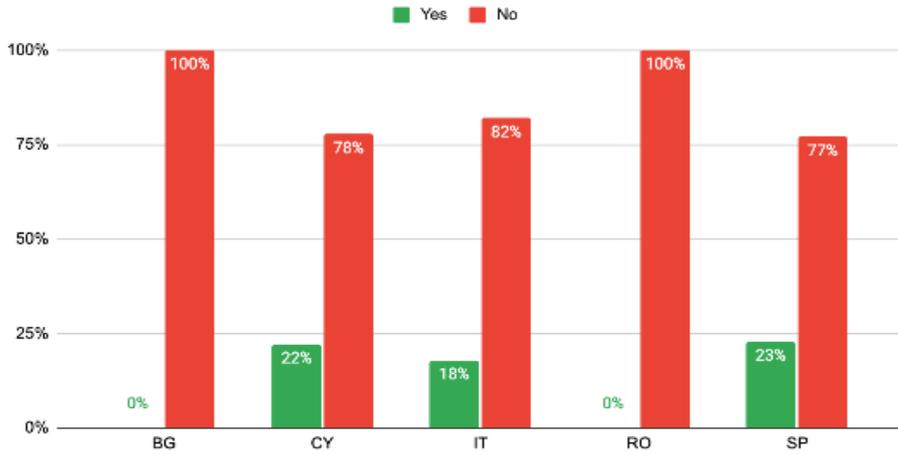


Fig.4

In Bulgaria, very few respondents responded that they have partnerships with other similar companies/entities and stated that they have good relationships with other hotels and restaurants in the area and with some that offer various tours/offers Travel agency partnerships. In Italy, stakeholders have launched local partnerships with accessible hotels and have received support from the community. In Romania, they used mutual aid to raise awareness in different regions of Romania, established a number of partnerships with water treatment systems company Nazzuro Aqua, and organized various events locally. Some of these also collaborate with other offices and organizations to promote new economic models based on sustainable and responsible tourism. (Fig.5)

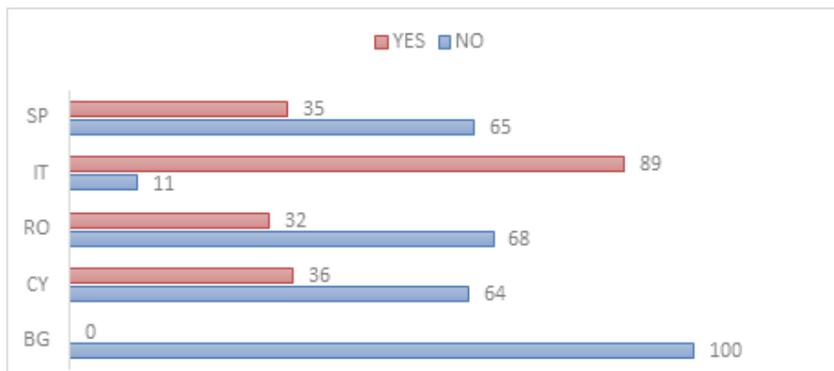


Fig.5

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND POLLUTION

Helping disadvantaged groups, supporting start-ups and raising awareness of the importance of the environment. Conservation with a focus on the green and blue economy.

Most of the respondents implement certain environmental protection and green tourism policies. The most frequently chosen measures are paperless policies/practices (e.g. paperless registration, etc.); policies/practices to save electricity (e.g. low-power washing)

equipment/entertainment automatic sensor lighting in public places, etc.); reuse/recycle/upcycle policies/practices (e.g., collect hazardous waste and send it for recycling) (Fig.6)

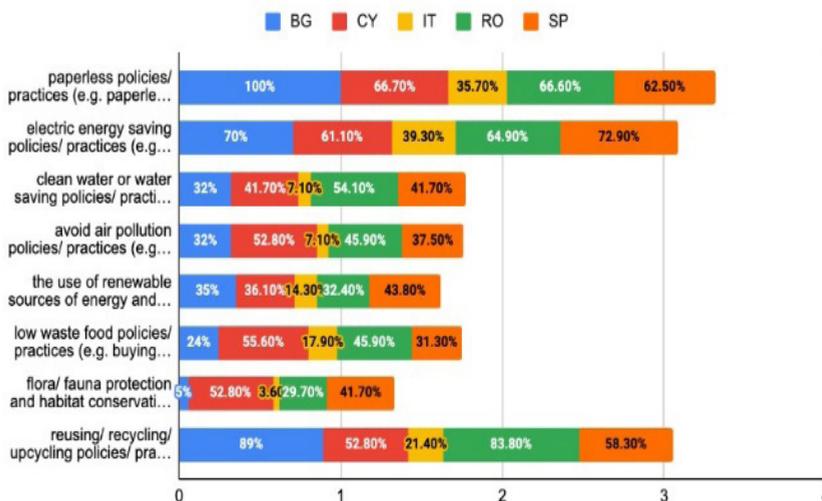


Fig.6

The bar graph shows the evolution of the six most important air pollutants between 1990 and 2021: PM10, PM2.5, ammonia, sulfur oxides, volatile organic compounds (except methane) and nitrogen oxides. Emissions of all these pollutants have fallen significantly, from a total of nearly 65 million tons in 1990 to about 20 million tons in 2021. Among them, sulfur oxide emissions fell the most, falling by more than 93%. Ammonia emissions showed the smallest decline, falling by only 32%. So we are on the right path. (Fig.7)

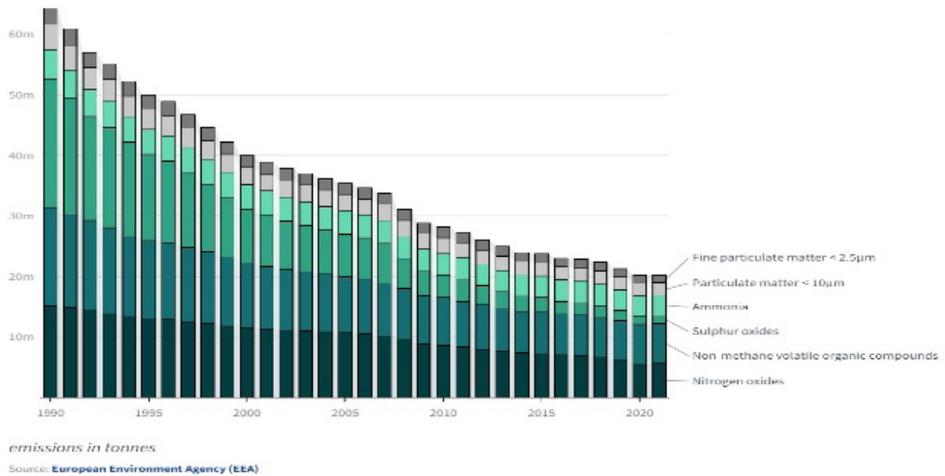


Fig.7

MANAGEMENT

The scope of a project management plan, costs, schedule and risks as well as project progress will be ensured through budget and time control. The smooth progress of the project will be ensured through effective control of the budget and schedule. Time management is also crucial for the success of the project and the distribution of intellectual results. The following tasks will therefore be carried out: Main activities will be broken down establishing tasks with their estimated duration and defining interdependencies, in line with project qualitative and quantitative expected impact enablers. The detailed project schedule will be used to track activities. The detailed project schedule will be used to track activities. Regular reviews of the project schedule, as defined in the project management plan will be carried out. In case that project tasks are behind the schedule, time plan will be updated with ongoing changes by ATFCT who will monitor all activities are performed in high quality and in due time at macro level; Each partner will monitor their tasks at micro level; any delay in performing will be further compensated, or project prolongation will be requested to the RO NA.

MARKETING

Broad dissemination: creating general public awareness of the project through information published on partners websites; leaflets distributed at various events attended by the partners, creating awareness among the wider public the project that can reach unidentified number of stakeholders. All partners commits to create a specific project space on their website or social media platforms and ensure that are consistently updating these platforms. Articles will be written for interested newspapers, magazines and bloggers and of course active social media presence.

SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Encouraging people with disabilities to lead an active life is not just a social responsibility: it is a compelling business case because it can boost the competitiveness and capacity of businesses and European society. GreenTour project set as general objective to promote the social inclusion and better access of the people with disabilities to existing green tourism possibilities and foster environmental sustainability in tourism industry. Project has set the overall goal to promote the social inclusion and better access of the people with disabilities to existing green tourism possibilities and foster environmental sustainability in tourism industry. In order to accomplish this goal, the project will fulfil five specific pre-defined activities leading to the results realisation: Activity for development, for realisation, for creation, for realisation and activities for enabling. Travellers with special needs will directly benefit from an enriching and meaningful tourism experience, which could have positive rehabilitation influence and highly improve their overall wellbeing and social inclusion. This improved social inclusion will naturally lead to endemic growth of the local and regional economies in turn bringing heightened wellbeing of disabled people from the region. GreenTour plans to instigate a much wider discussion on the rights of people to unhindered access to all spheres of social life. The open educational resources Manuals, Guide for tourist providers, a Green booklet which will also be delivered by the project, will help end-users to develop and successfully expose new accessible tourism products and/or services. The project will provide educational resources and business support manuals, handbook, booklet which will help tourism enterprises to initiate a similar process of improving their accessibility performance through studying their own tourism product and engaging with key stakeholders.

The GreenTour educational resources and tools will be relevant to representatives of all these sub-sectors (green, environmentally friendly and

accessible attractions), because the approach used assesses performance in terms of accessibility and the universal design principles applied to product development are also for all types of businesses and tourism providers.

In Europe it is estimated that 10% of the population have some type of disability, this means around 50 million people. And this number will continue to grow due to the inevitable process of demographic change as half of them are over 65. It can be then stated and deduced that accessibility is essential for 10% of the population, necessary for 40% and convenient for 100% of the population.

LAWS AND REGULATIONS IN TOURISM

The most widely available facilities are parking spots reserved for people with disabilities, ramps/ lifts for wheelchair users, and adapted toilets for wheelchair users, the options that are required by law in European countries.

There are many pieces of sectorial legislation that can have an impact on businesses in the tourism industry. Some important examples are: **Land use planning** (you must meet the urban requirements and apply for the appropriate planning permission), **Health and food safety** (If your tourism business serves food and drink– such as a hotel - then you must carefully review food safety standards. These apply to where you source your products from, as well as the hygiene and cleanliness of the premises and your employees.), **Labour** (each country has its own rules for the regulation of how much, where and when employees can work, as well as on topics such as job security mechanisms), **Environment** (Establish measures to prevent or minimise possible negative effects on your surroundings), **Consumers** (Tourism regulations have always been closely linked to the protection of the consumer. The EU has specific legislation to make sure tourists are not left defenceless when faced with problems. This regulation is of great interest if your company is a travel agency or any type of intermediary agency). In recent years the rights of disabled people to travel and to participate in tourism, leisure, sport and other activities away from home have been strengthened in a number of areas by legislation and regulations at international, European and national levels. In the year 1993 at the United Nations 85th plenary meeting A/RES/48/96, some Standard Rules on Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities were adopted. As an example, four of these rules directly related to the tourism sector are quoted below: The four regulations are:

Rule 1. Awareness-raising. Countries will increase their awareness and sensitization of society (e.g. Potential tourists, tourism entrepreneurs, etc..) on

the rights and obligations, needs and the contribution that people with disabilities can make to society in general through campaigns, advertisements in the media, distribution of information, public training programmes, and so on.

Rule 5. Accessibility. Countries will introduce action programmes to ensure accessible physical environments, like the development of mandatory standards and guidelines in all spheres of society and that these measures reach people responsible for implementing them (e.g. Buildings or means of both public and private transport for public use) and to take measures to provide access to information and communication in all possible formats for people with disabilities. *Rule 10. Culture.* Countries will ensure that persons are integrated and participate in the different cultural activities that take place in each country on an equal basis.

Rule 11. Recreation and Sports. Countries will take steps to make beaches, hotels, sports, gyms, etc. accessible to people with disabilities. All travel and leisure activities organizers should organize services thinking of the needs of people with disabilities, for which it is necessary to train people.

In general, European laws reflect the rights of tourists with disabilities in Europe.

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