Accessible Heritage: innovations and best practices

Enhancing accessibility to protected Cultural Heritage

5th Conference on Accessible Tourism

December 5, 2025 / Zagreb, Croatia

Marco Pizzio

Board Member – ENAT

Head Accessible Tourism & MICE – AISM

National Expert Italy – Accessible EU

ENAT European Network for Accessible Tourism

SCLEROSI MULTIPLA associazione italiana

un mondo libero dalla SM

Accessible centre EU

European Commission

What is ENAT?

ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism) was established in January 2006 as a project-based initiative of nine sponsoring organisations in six EU Member States is a non-profit association bringing together organisations that aim to be *frontrunners* in the **study**, **promotion**, and **practice** of **accessible tourism**.

By sharing knowledge and experience within the network, members work to improve the accessibility of:

- tourist information
- transport
- infrastructure
- design and services

ENAT members provide **models of excellence in accessible tourism**, inspiring the entire tourism industry.

What is AccessibleEU?

AccessibleEU is a **resource center on accessibility** across sectors (built environment, transport, ICT, policies). It represents a flagship initiative of European Commission Strategy for Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

ONLINE ACCESSIBILITY ARCHIVE

Access to direct links, databases, information on standards, guides, studies, good practices and support materials on accessibility.

TRAINING ON ACCESSIBILITY

Participation in workshops, online training and events on various accessibility topics.

NETWORKING

Facilitating networking and collaboration between accessibility and disability experts.

MONITORING & CONTROL

Exploring compliance with EU accessibility laws in different sectors and countries of the EU.

Why cultural accessibility matters

The right of all to art, culture and education

The **right of all to art** and culture is set off by **international legislation**:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948:

Article 27 states: “Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share scientific advances and its benefits.”

- Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities of 2006:

Article 30 sets out the right to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport.

Why cultural accessibility matters

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (from UNESCO)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization · Sustainable Development Goals

UNESCO moving forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Adopted by the **United Nations General Assembly** in September **2015**, is a global initiative aimed at achieving **sustainable development** by 2030.

It includes **17 Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) that are universal and ambitious, created with active involvement from **UNESCO**.(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

The 17 fundamental goals are addressing major global priorities:
the right to and support for **healthy living** and **well-being**, **access to quality education**, the **creation of sustainable cities**, the **promotion of decent working conditions** and **economic growth**.

These goals are also **connected to arts and culture**, which serve as tools to enhance society's cultural capital and can **meaningfully contribute** to **resilience**, **equity**, **health**, and **well-being throughout the course of life**.

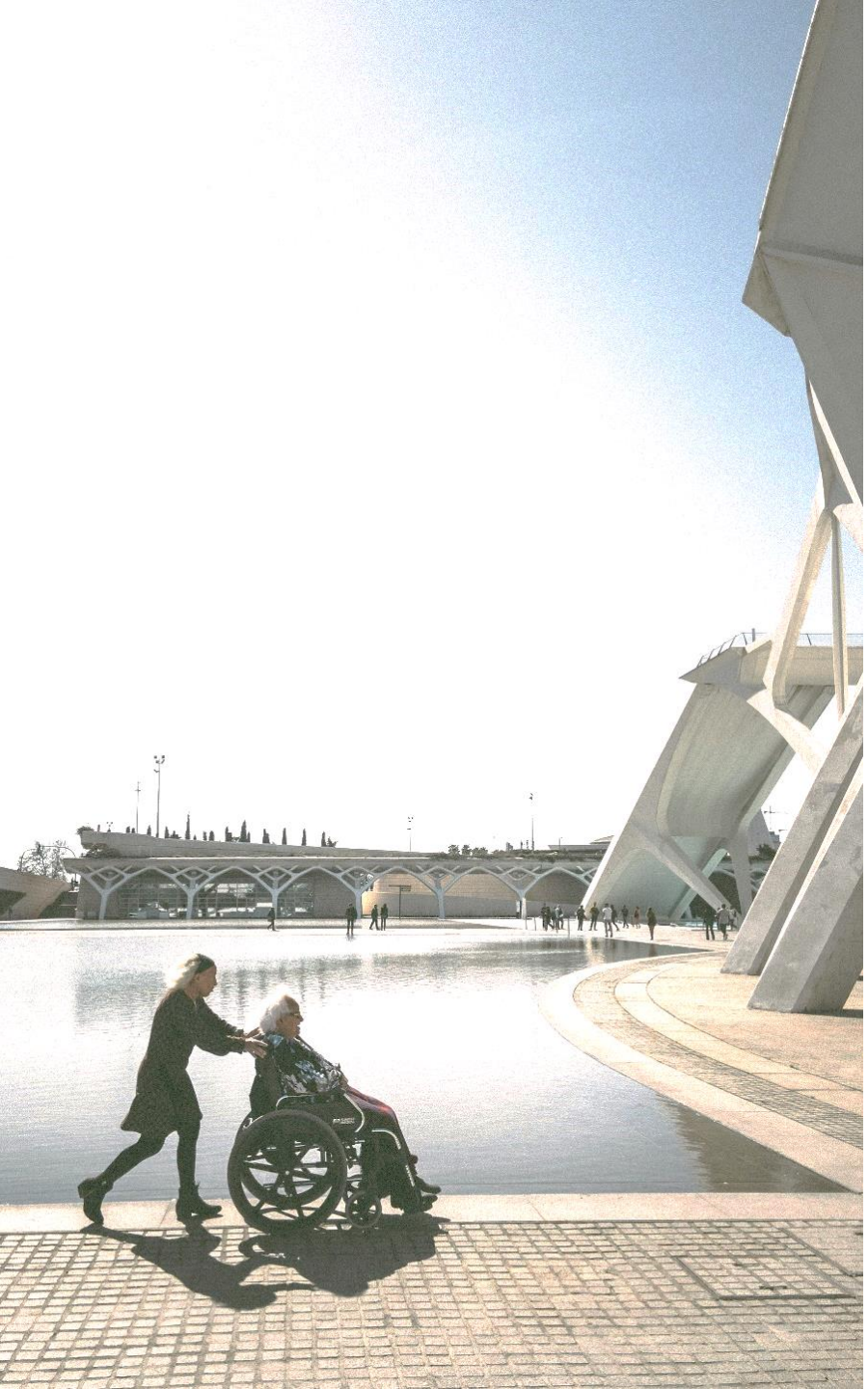
Why cultural accessibility matters

Art, artistic education, health

In **2019**, the **World Health Organization (WHO)** published the Health Evidence Synthesis Report on the **Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-being**.

The WHO defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and **not merely the absence of disease or infirmity**,” rooting the **concept of health in society and culture.**

Art activities can involve **aesthetic engagement**, an effort of imagination, **sensory activation**, evocation of **emotions** and **cognitive stimulation** and, depending on its nature, an art activity can involve social interaction as well.



Why cultural accessibility matters

The desire of people to enjoy

- The need to make cultural heritage sites, monuments and buildings accessible, has grown as more **people** travel and **want to take part in cultural activities**, especially older people and people with disabilities who often face challenges due to several barriers.
- It is time for **accessibility** to become a **cultural value**, to be seen as an opportunity for every person to improve their life.

Not only museums…

Immovable cultural heritage consists of monuments, buildings, groups of buildings and sites.

Accessibility for persons with disabilities and others to immovable cultural heritage is particularly relevant in today's society. Many immovable cultural **heritage objects continue to be used** in daily life, for example, religious buildings, transportation buildings, buildings for education and administration, social and medical facilities and institutions for museum use, events and much more.

Accessibility of immovable cultural heritage

The key challenges for heritage site managers in improving accessibility are:

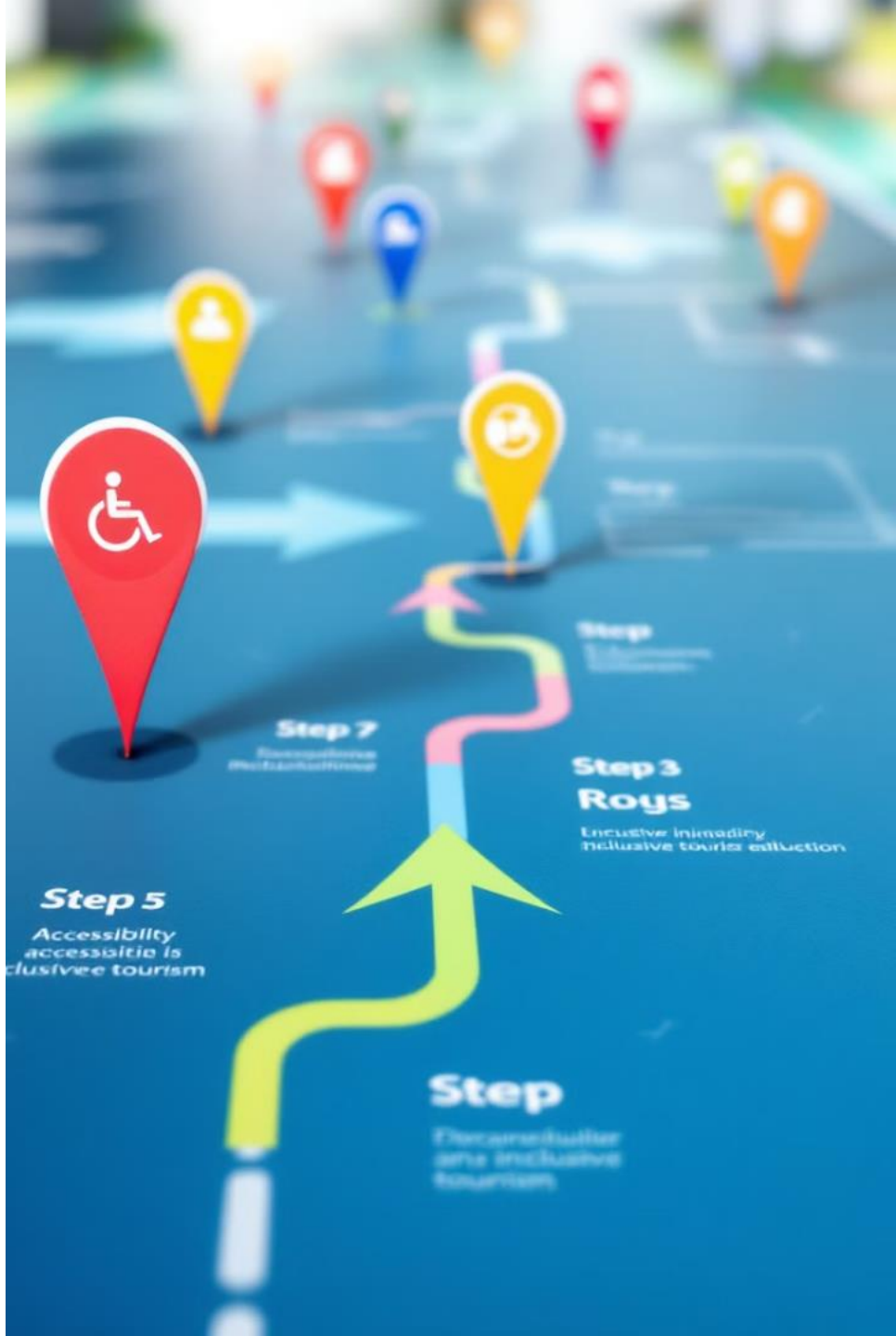
- Reducing access barriers so that cultural heritage can be experienced and enjoyed by as many people as possible.
- Ensuring that accessibility measures do not compromise or degrade the cultural and historical values of the site.

How to make cultural sites and museums accessible?

Accessibility is **not only about removing architectural barriers** — it's about creating inclusive experiences for everyone.

Alongside physical accessibility, cultural institutions should ensure:

- **Clear signage and adaptable communication tools** (e.g., tactile maps, captions, audio guides, easy-to-read texts).
- **Digital accessibility** on websites and online resources.
- **Staff training** to promote awareness, empathy, and the ability to assist visitors with different needs effectively.
- Accessibility is a **shared responsibility** — it enhances participation, diversity, and the cultural value of every institution.



Guidance document

ISO 21902:2021

Tourism and related services

— **Accessible tourism for all** —

Requirements and recommendations.

https://www.iso.org/standard/72126.html

Publication date: 07 / 2021

ISO standard 21902:2021 Tourism and related services - Accessible tourism for all - Requirements and recommendations - Principles:

This document defines the requirements and guidelines needed to ensure that tourism is accessible to everyone - people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities - so that they can enjoy travel experiences on an equal basis.

- It provides guidance on policies, strategies, infrastructures, products, and services that must be designed to meet diverse needs.
- The recommendations target all public and private stakeholders in the tourism supply chain and apply at local, regional, national, and international levels.

How to apply ISO Standard 21902

- Inclusive policies drive accessible tourism: Adopting “design for all” approaches **improves service quality and strengthens** the **market position** of tourism providers.
- A global reference standard: ISO 21902 offers a **unified framework to guide destinations and businesses** in making infrastructures, products, and services accessible—filling the gap left by the absence of international benchmarking tools.
- **People-centered cultural tourism**: Cultural destinations should foster human connections with **heritage, encourage intercultural dialogue**, and ensure access to culture for everyone, including people with disabilities. Managers and staff can use ISO guidelines to assess and improve the accessibility of cultural tourism experiences.

ISO standard 21902:2021 Tourism and related services - Accessible tourism for all - Requirements and recommendations -

UN Tourism (the UN World Tourism Organisation) offers **6 free guidelines** for accessible travel, containing recommendations for key players in the tourism sector. The guidelines put the International ISO 21902:2021 Standard on Accessible Tourism in the spotlight and target these key sub-sectors:

1. National tourism administrations and destination management organizations
2. Accommodation, food & beverage and MICE companies
3. Travel agencies and tour operators
4. Transport sector
5. **Heritage sites and cultural institution**
6. Organizations and companies working in protected nature areas

All these guidelines offer strategic and actionable recommendations to provide accessible tourism experiences, so **every person can enjoy travel and tourism on equal terms**.

Accessibility measures bring improvements in **comfort**, **service** and the **quality** of **life** of visitors and host communities alike.

How to apply ISO Standard 21902
Accessible tourism for all [1]

Recommendations for key players in the cultural tourism ecosystem

UNWTO World Tourism Organization · UNE Normalización Española · Fundación ONCE

UN Tourism

ENAT European Network for Accessible Tourism

As a manager or an employee of a historical or cultural site, cultural institution, organization or company, integrated into the cultural tourism offer.

According to ISO 21902 should act in 11 different areas

According to ISO 21902: act in 11 different areas

ENAT
European Network for Accessible Tourism

UN Tourism

1) ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT

Analyzing the accessibility demand; acquiring knowledge on the behaviour, speciÿc access requirements, as well as the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of our audience; providing information on accessibility of a particular cultural element.

2) AWARENESS-RAISING AND TRAINING

Ensuring that the decision-making personnel, cultural heritage managers and professionals, and support services sta°, understand the widest possible array of accessibility requirements; Acquiring skills to provide assistance and support to visitors.

3) REMOVAL OF BARRIERS

Improvement of of accessibility features and infrastructure as a core operational element of cultural sites, organizations and companies; Ensuring a permanent, ongoing dialogue engaging di°erent stakeholders, institutions and competent professionals to agree on feasible

4) COMMONS SPACES

Provision of spaces for common-use and routes that visitors need to transit or spend their time in, in order to be able to access and enjoy all the facilities which are meant for public use; Ensuring service excellence in common spaces for all audiences, with or without disability.

According to ISO 21902: act in 11 different areas

ENAT
European Network for Accessible Tourism

UN Tourism

5) HERITAGE SITES, MONUMENTS AND HISTORIC AREAS

These elements are often the core of the cultural landscape of a destination and accessibility improves their operational features; A wide spectrum of accessibility solutions can be considered, while applying heritage conservation principles.

6) MUSEUMS AND EXHIBIT SPACES

Concerts, theatre, opera, dance performances, cinema and a wide range of cultural events can also be made accessible; The challenge is how to enhance accessibility of the physi-cal environments (tangible aspects) and the speciÿc programme content (intangible aspects).

7) CULTURAL EVENTS AND STAGING ENVIRONMENTS

Concerts, theatre, opera, dance performances, cinema and a wide range of cultural events can also be made accessible; The challenge is how to enhance accessibility of the physi-cal environments (tangible aspects) and the speciÿc programme content (intangible aspects).

8) DESIGNING CULTURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCES

Provision of high quality, authentic, engaging andinclusive cultural tourism experiences for all, while observing the Universal Design principles; Partnering with cultural tourism specialists, guides and agencies to familiarize them with new accessible experiences.

According to ISO 21902: act in 11 different areas

ENAT
European Network for Accessible Tourism

UN Tourism

9) INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND INTERPRETATION

Development of channels and media platforms providing information about the accessibility features, target audiences and the content; Designing an innovative interpretative content in collaboration with end-users, other cultural institutions and professionals.

10) INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

Creation of a corporate or institutional vision and public commitment to enable access to culture for all people; Formalizing political support for a systemic action to improve accessibility; Developing a set of actions based on agreed objectives.

11) LABOUR INCLUSION

Establishment of decent working conditions, economic independence, and self-realisation through employment in the cultural tourism ecosystem; Labour inclusion seen as a right and a proÿtable advantage, instead of a charitable action and legal obligation.

Focus on 5) Heritage sites, monuments and historic areas

Heritage sites, monuments and historic districts often form the **cultural core** of a destination. A wide range of accessibility solutions can be implemented while fully respecting heritage conservation principles.

- Assess both the current and the **potential visitor experience** from the perspective of people with disabilities, focusing on how they view and access the site.
- Draw on training resources and examples of historic buildings where **universal accessibility** has been successfully integrated.
- Ensure that any **accessibility intervention is reversible**, allowing the monument or cultural asset to be restored to its original state if needed.
- Explore **innovative solutions** that enhance the cultural value of the site and enrich the experience for all visitors.
- Carefully **consider materials**, forms, textures, sounds and scents when **designing accessibility** features, adapting them to diverse user needs and climatic conditions.
- Offer slow-paced, interactive and personalized tours that engage students with **intellectual disabilities**—as well as their teachers and families—with cultural heritage.

Focus on 6) Museums and exhibit spaces

Museums, galleries and exhibition venues attract significant numbers of both local residents and tourists. A broad range of measures can be implemented to enhance the accessibility of their buildings, services and content, ensuring more engaging and inclusive visitor experiences:

- Distinguish the feasibility of accessibility improvements in modern facilities from those in **historic buildings and sites,** since their functionality and conservation criteria vary.
- Establish and adequately communicate a protocol on previous booking, or, first-come first-served basis, to borrow **wheelchairs and mobility scooters.**
- In case of extensive buildings, try to ensure **accessible toilets** on every floor and install **seats and benches** throughout the exhibit spaces.
- Generate discussion-based experiences for the **elderly** and people with memory loss Provide hand-held **magnifying lenses** that can be borrowed from the front desk.
- Consider **introducing, displaying and interpreting** different disabilities in the content of the exhibits, showcasing human diversity.

The development of the **user guides** represents an important step toward making the Standard **more practical** and accessible for tourism operators.

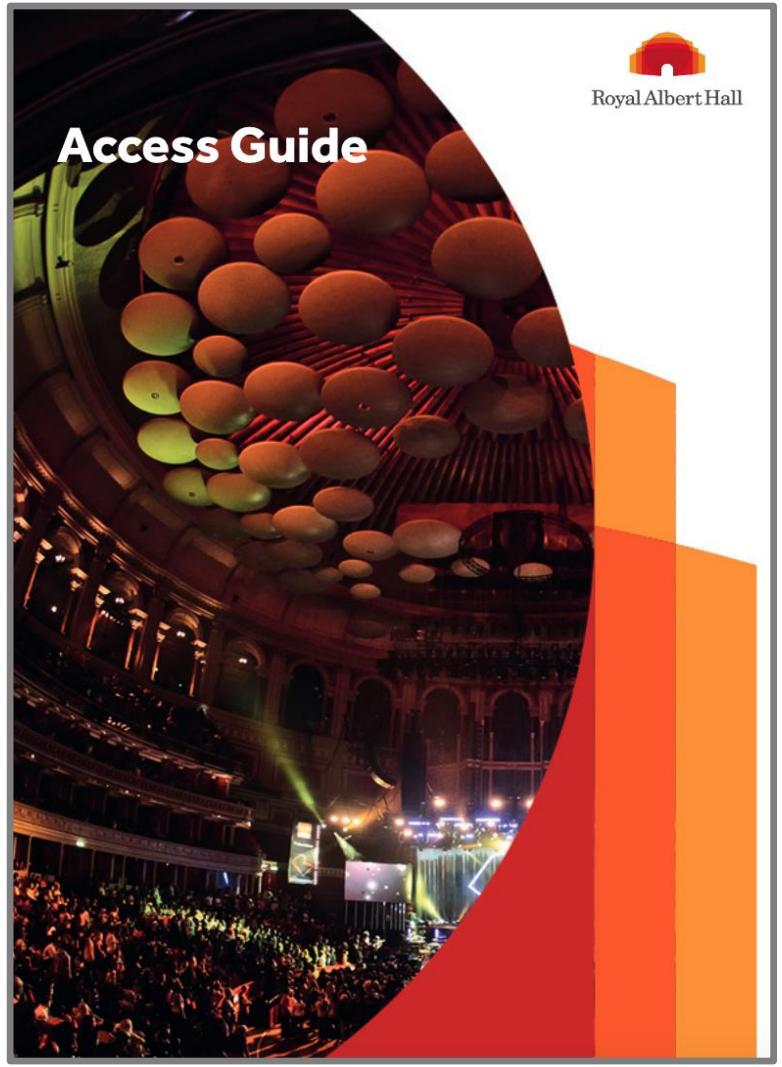
UN Tourism recognized the **need to provide guidance in a more user-friendly format**, aware that many stakeholders in the sector might not acquire the full Standard. Translating the user guides into additional languages could further enhance their usefulness.

The importance of information!

Universal Design of Tourist Information

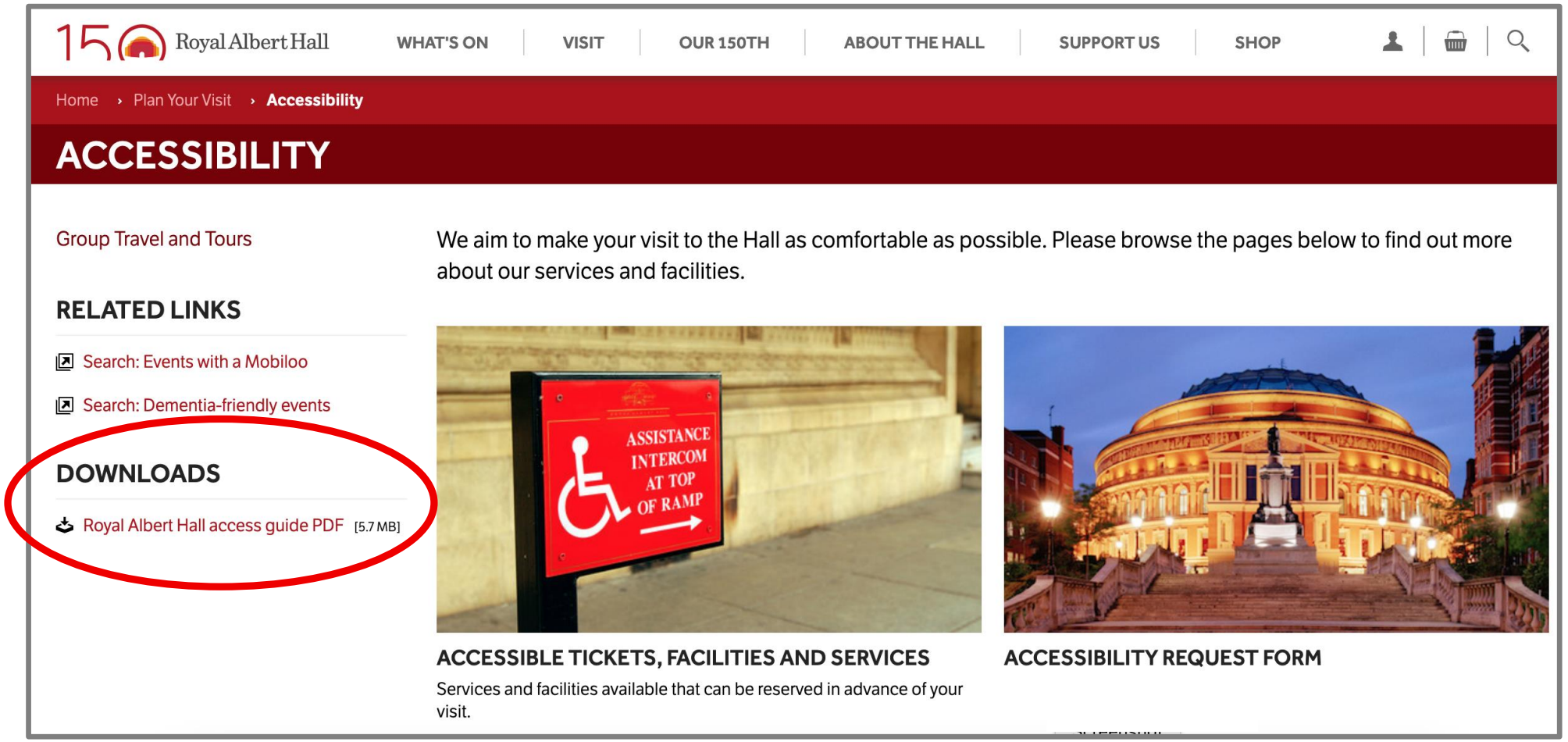
After improving the **accessibility** visitors need to **know about it**.

Cultural venues must provide **accessible information** about the accessibility of the venue.



Royal Albert Hall, Accessible Website with accessibility information

Accessibility section with an Access Guide to be downloaded



https://www.royalalberthall.com/visit/accessibility-at-the-hall/

Tallinn Accessibility Information Systems LIPS

The **Tallinn Accessibility Information System**, recognised by the Interreg Europe programme, consolidates all a**ccessibility-related information for public spaces** in Tallinn into a single, user-friendly platform to enhance accessibility.

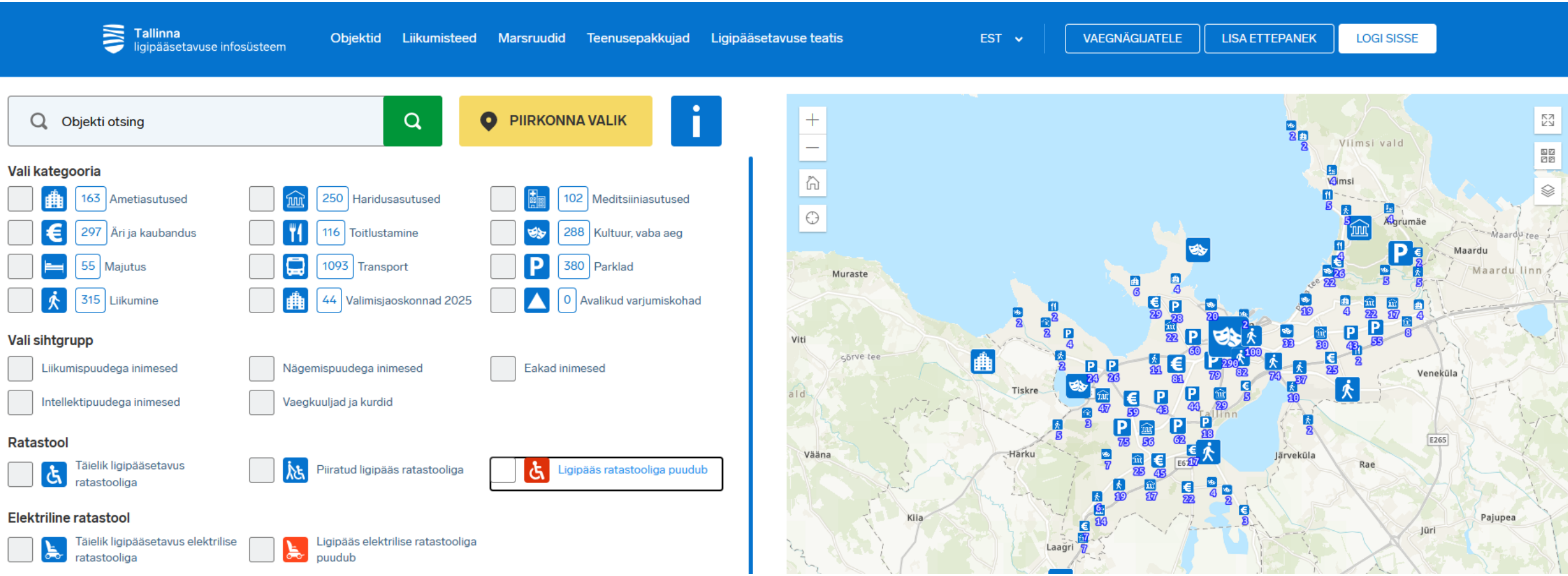
The Interreg Europe programme has recognised the Tallinn Accessibility Information System LIPS, which was developed with the support of the European Regional Fund and commissioned by the Tallinn Social and Health Board.

Launched on 17 August 2020, LIPS aims to enhance the **accessibility of public spaces** in Tallinn by centralising all accessibility-related information into one platform.

The system supports the improvement of **accessibility for transport infrastructure**, public **facilities**, and **buildings** used by the public by offering tools to manage relevant information, with **daily updates** to the dataset and input from property owners on current accessibility.

Interreg Europe

Co-funded by the European Union



What It Provides: accessibility information for **Tallinn** shown in a clear, systematic way.

Data displayed as **objects, movement paths, and mobility obstacles**.

Map with filters by **category** and **target group**.

Includes **photos and video tours** of routes and potential barriers.

ENAT
European Network for Accessible Tourism

Pompei per Tutti – Pompei for All

- The Archaeological Park of Pompei offers a **3.5 km** "**Pompei for All**" route, **reducing architectural barriers where possible**, accessible from Piazza Anfiteatro and reaching important buildings and domus. On the website, it is possible to download the route map and find all the essential information about accessibility.

- **Pompei SitesTactile 3D models & Braille**: in some areas (e.g. a stable, the tannery) visitors can feel a horse skeleton model and leather-processing tools accompanied by Braille explanations.

- **Pompei Sites Inclusive cognitive-sensory programs**: projects like "Campania tra le Mani" and "I Ragazzi di Plinio" offer guided experiences, internships, and social-agriculture activities for people with cognitive disabilities.

Sensory, Communication & Spec Support

- **Museo per Tutti guides:** downloadable guides for people with cognitive disabilities, in Easy-to-Read format and with AAC symbols.
- **Silent visits / LIS tours**: trained Italian Sign Language (LIS) guides are available in collaboration with ENS (National Deaf Agency).
- **Simplified video stories** to support visitors with sensory disabilities.
  The videos are produced with the supervision of FIADDA Campania, and the audio is recorded by the National Center for Audiobooks for the Blind.
  A narrator guides visitors through places, rooms, and frescoes using clear audio and visuals designed to be immediately accessible to everyone.

https://pompeiisites.org/info-per-la-visita/pompei-per-tutti/accessibilita-pompei/

POMPEII
PARCO ARCHEOLOGICO DI POMPEI

MUSEO PER TUTTI IDEATO E REALIZZATO DA
CON IL SOSTEGNO DI

ETT Solutions –
Design for All: Making Museums Truly Inclusive

What they do

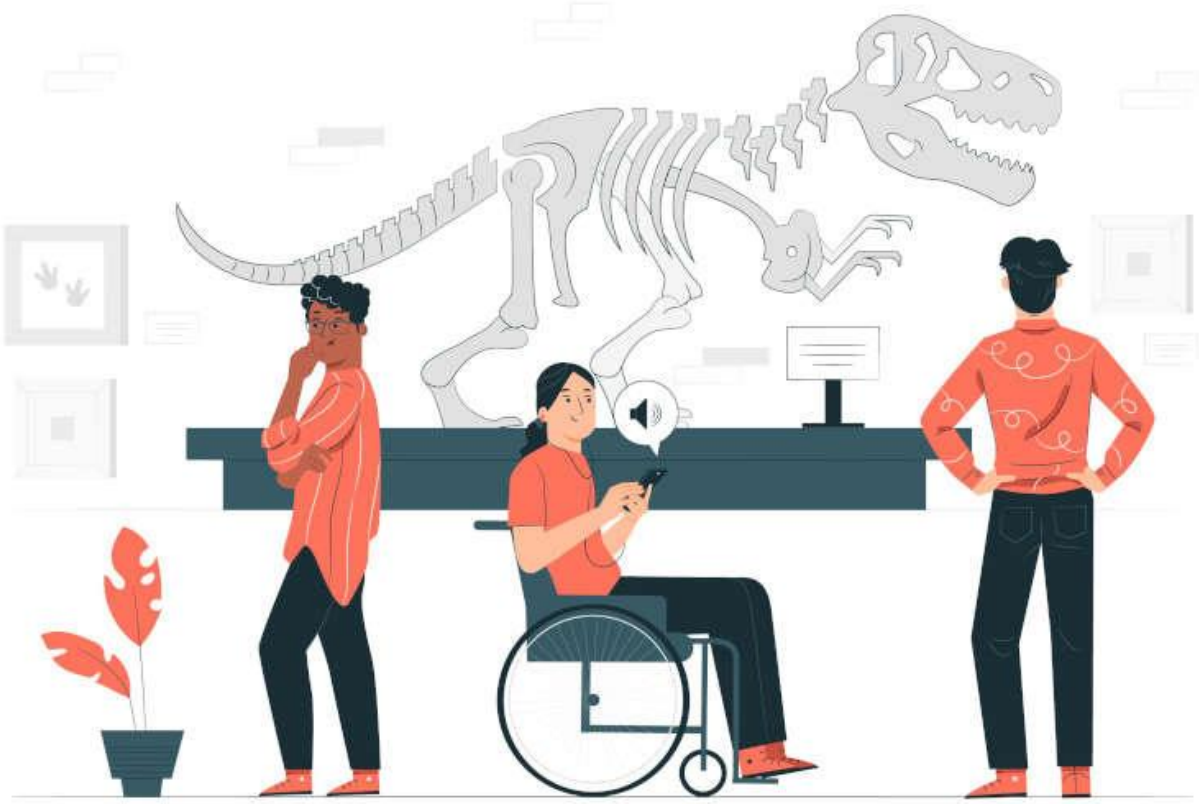
- Develop **innovative, multi-sensory and interactive experiences** for cultural spaces.
- Use a variety of technologies: apps, VR, 3D reproductions, tactile surfaces, immersive rooms, and mixed reality.
- Design from the beginning with **accessibility in mind**, to address physical, sensory, and cognitive needs.

Museum accessibility projects

- **Palazzo Pretorio Accessibility** (Prato)A 3D-printed scale model of the palace, equipped with touch sensors. When touched, it activates audio descriptions. Includes guides in LIS (Italian Sign Language) and other multimedia tools.
- **Parco archeologico di Morgantina, il Museo di Aidone e la Villa romana del Casale:** two apps: one with LIS and international sign language for deaf visitors, and one with audio-descriptions for visually impaired users. Also uses beacons for orientation and tactile bas-reliefs of mosaics.
- The **Santa Giulia Museum** reveals two areas normally inaccessible to visitors with disabilities: the Lower Hall of Santa Maria in Solario and the Crypt of San Salvatore.
  Through 360° technology, users can explore these spaces using a simple cardboard **VR viewer** and a QR code.
  They remain in place but can **virtually enter** and interact with the environments, choosing what to look at and experiencing the feeling of truly being there.

Summary: Why cultural accessibility matters

- Accessibility in cultural field is essential to ensuring that everyone—regardless of ability—can fully enjoy and participate in cultural life.
- By removing physical, sensory, and cognitive barriers, cultural institutions open their doors to a wider and more diverse audience. Inclusive spaces enrich communities, strengthen social participation, and uphold the belief that culture is a universal right.
- Investing in accessibility means creating places where every visitor feels welcome, respected, and empowered to experience culture without limitations.



Marco Pizzio
marco.pizzio@aism.it

ENAT
European Network for Accessible Tourism

SCLEROSI MULTIPLA APS/ETS
associazione italiana
un mondo libero dalla SM

Accessible centre EU