



IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES

# Planning accessible experiences of nature

Nationale  
Naturlandschaften



# Contents

## 1

### **Why accessibility is worthwhile**

With a little effort, you can increase everyone's comfort.

Page 04 – 07

## 2

### **And what about you?**

Take a look around. You've got many possibilities.

Page 08 – 11

## 3

### **Recognising similarities**

Visitors are different – but have much in common. You can use that.

Page 12 – 21

## 4

### **Bringing nature closer**

Make it exciting for everyone – indoors and outdoors.

Page 22 – 27

## 5

### **Giving good information is half the battle**

With reliable and honest information you will gain a lot of sympathy.

Page 28 – 33

## 6

### **Relying on regional partnerships**

A functioning network makes many things easier. Link your threads.

Page 34 – 37

## 7

### **Learning from one another**

Why is it already working in the Eifel? Benefit from their experience.

Page 38 – 41

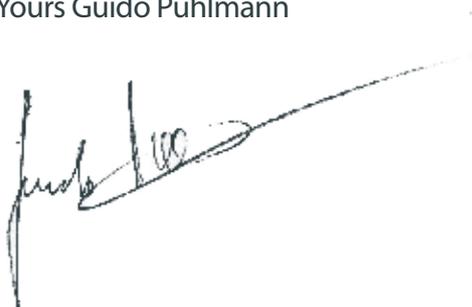
**D**ear Chief Executive,  
dear Planner,

Our National Natural Landscapes are very attractive for tourists. Careful design measures have already enabled a large number of visitors to gain access to nature: there are marked paths, secured viewpoints, well-attended exhibitions and popular guided tours. However, I am sure you will agree with me that there are still numerous barriers – by which I don't only mean steps.

Every planner will initially face a huge mountain of questions in view of the task of implementing accessibility. This brochure will not be able to answer all of these questions. That's not its target. The aim is to provide a brief guide, point out options for action and encourage action. It provides surprisingly simple answers to some questions. Accessibility is useful for everyone who loves convenience. We all benefit from accessible solutions: if we are temporarily out of shape, if our eyesight diminishes, if we make nature easily understandable to our children and visitors and help them experience nature with all senses.

EUROPARC Germany supports the implementation of accessibility and inclusion in the National Natural Landscapes, especially through knowledge transfer. It was possible to realise exemplary measures for those areas partly thanks to the financial support of 'Aktion Mensch'. Our goal is to continue along this path. Much remains to be done. Let's do it together.

Yours Guido Puhlmann



Guido Puhlmann  
Chairman of  
EUROPARC  
Deutschland e. V.

# 1

## Why accessibility is worthwhile

---

Creating more accessibility essentially means more service and convenience for all visitors. National Natural Landscapes can also benefit from this – both in terms of their image as well as economically.

---

The secret of success lies in the attention you pay to each and every service you provide. Through observation and personal contact with visitors, you can identify ways of improvement, which are often easy and inexpensive to implement.

**N**ot everywhere people are immediately enthusiastic.

**'I have hardly ever met a wheelchair user on our hiking trails before. Now everything is supposed to become accessible? Is it really worth the effort?'**



A staff member of a National Natural Landscape

Scepticism often sounds like this or similar. Yet, it would not be in nature's interest if we tamed its abundance and wildness to make everything accessible.

Nevertheless, it is important for many people to feel close to nature. People with physical disabilities, visual and hearing impairments and/or intellectual disabilities are no exception. Probably more disabled people would be out and about if they knew which outdoor activities are accessible to them and in which way. However, if we broaden our view beyond the most visible group of wheelchair users, it becomes clear that the number of people living with a disability – which is not always visible – is greater than we think. Besides, we're all getting older. We like to travel a lot and travel often, but we are not spared the limitations that old age brings.

Accessibility is not a special-purpose solution. A holistic approach also focuses on people of all ages who may only be limited temporarily – for instance after an accident. It also includes other large groups that are actively involved in nature: school classes and families with smaller children. Children love to touch everything – this is what blind people want too. Children love to explore their world on wheels – good paths are also important for prams, walking aids and wheelchairs. Children love it when the world is explained to them in a descriptive way without a lot of technical terms – this is something that many adults like too, especially those with learning difficulties.

### Added value for suppliers

The economic potential is huge: Families with small children and holidaymakers with disabilities clearly prefer to spend their holidays in their own country. The latter also like to travel in spring and autumn, thus extending the season for many travel and tourism-related services.

If they are satisfied with their holiday destination, many will gladly return. In addition, holidaymakers with disabilities rarely travel alone. Like other visitors, they travel with their families, with children, partners or friends and generate additional travel. Demographic change will further accelerate demand.

### Without damage to nature

Structural measures should not be contrary to conservation concerns. Creating accessibility does not mean levelling, widening or paving over in the natural environment. Anyone who concentrates on visitor facilities, plans with a view to preserving nature, who takes a close look at what offers are available will be able to achieve a high degree of accessibility. Staff awareness of visitor disability and sensitivity to location are also important.

Without a doubt, there will and also should always be uneven and rough paths. For fit hikers, they hold the fascination of experiencing nature at first hand. Consider accessibility as just one piece of many in a big jigsaw puzzle of possibilities to experience nature.

### The cost-benefit ratio in proportion

Naturally, you will ask yourself if what you are planning to do will pay off in terms of input and benefit. You prevent escalating production and follow-up costs if you plan your product with foresight and care so that it can be used by as many people as possible for as long as possible.

### Step by step and not always expensive

The good thing is that even small changes can create more accessibility. No matter where and with what you start, every step, however small, is a step in the right direction. You don't have to wait for the top offer to be created. The secret of success lies rather in the attention you pay to your range of services. Through observation and personal contact with visitors, you can identify opportunities for improvement, which are often easy and inexpensive to implement.

You will find a lot of ideas in this brochure.



The number of people who live with a disability – which is not always visible – is larger than we generally think.

# 2

## And what about you?

---

It may well be that some of your services and places of interest are already accessible. Be aware of your target groups: What's already working – what's not working and for whom?

---

A small step-by-step approach is especially helpful for small administrations with limited resources. No matter where you start, every detail benefits people with disabilities.

---

Take advantage of the opportunity to involve your target groups at the initial stage of surveying and planning.

**P**robably not a single visitor will seriously expect that everything is accessible in nature. However, every visitor wants to experience the uniqueness of your region. So begin with the most appealing places of interest. This is exactly where you should enable people with disabilities to participate – gradually and as far as this is possible. Sometimes that's easier than it seems at first glance. Also, consult with those affected. They will sharpen your awareness and you will see opportunities that you would not have thought of alone.

### **Inspecting and surveying**

The checklists from this brochure can be used for the 'very first' check. On the basis of a few important points, it guides you through all essential areas of accessible nature experiences. This allows you relatively quickly to determine which actions might need to be taken. You may even be amazed at the points where your services and places of interest are already accessible. A more accurate and complete inventory will then help you to further develop your products. This may be possible at a reasonable price in cooperation with a university or university of applied sciences, which for example supervises project reports or final theses. The scope of an analysis should primarily be based on your capabilities, but in any case, it is recommended to look at the following four areas within a team together:

#### **1. Your organisation:**

Who are the responsible parties/contact persons? Which self-image and how much sensitivity do all employees have? Is there any need for training?

#### **2. Your products:**

Which places of interest are particularly appealing? For which target groups are they (already) suitable? What obstacles make accessibility more difficult?

### 3. Information and public relations

Which group of guests requires which detailed information in order to participate?

### 4. Tourism supply chain

Where are the main gaps in your supply chain? Who are your local contacts and are there any connecting factors?

It may well be that some of your services and products are already accessible. Be aware of your target groups: What is and what is not yet possible and for whom? If you know the strengths and weaknesses of your nature experiences, you can provide specific information to your visitors.

### Planning and setting priorities

A self-check and a survey are the basis: it is now necessary to define feasible goals and measures, to consider realistic time horizons and the requirements of nature conservation. Well-equipped administrative offices may be able to think in detail about the distribution of tasks and resources to be used over the next few years in a combined process.

However, a step-by-step approach helps small administrations with limited resources. No matter where you begin, every detail will benefit people with disabilities. From now on, if any repairs or changes to your visitor facilities are due, become aware of them. In the course of such improvements, plan measures to increase the convenience for everyone.

Try to make use of current funding opportunities. With increasing practical experience, you will become more confident in planning and realisation and will develop a feeling that you can achieve a lot with comparatively little effort.

**‘We wanted to do something special for blind people.**

**Now a lot of sighted people also enjoy it.**

When we were planning the nature trail at the Auenhaus, we didn't think of creating a nature experience for everyone from the beginning. We planned it for blind visitors. Details include several wood-carved animal tracks of native species and explanations in a large wooden book in Braille. In addition, it is possible to experience a woodpecker's den in a tree, tree bark and various forest plants by touch. With the increasing number of enthusiastic visitors, we quickly realised that we now have an informative highlight for all visitors, especially for children who also love to touch and understand everything.’

Uwe Brückner, Middle Elbe Biosphere Reserve



### **Gaining new perspectives and advocates**

Use the opportunity to involve your target groups at the stage of surveying and planning. Get in touch with the local advisory board for senior citizens, self-help organisations or the district's representative for the disabled. You can also find contact persons in charitable institutions or in schools for children who have physical or learning problems. These facilities often also organise recreational activities. As a rule, you will meet great openness. With the support of those who are affected by accessibility needs themselves, you will gain new ideas on what is possible. Additionally, they are also your potential visitors who already know your services and places of interest and will be keen to visit. The opposite can happen when people feel that they are excluded from participating and experiencing because of their impairment.

# 3

## Recognising similarities

---

In spite of the diversity of visitors regarding their expectations and needs, they also have a lot in common. As important as it is to know their specific needs, a holistic approach also encourages you to start with the realisation right away, since you are also able to reach a large number of visitors with just a few well-planned measures.

**A**dmittedly, we as humans tend to 'think in stereotypes' in many situations. We classify groups and sub-groups that all have their specific characteristics and needs. Exaggerated stereotyped thinking, however, prevents us from keeping an eye on everything and everyone.

### Small effort – large impact

Don't rely on 'stereotype' solutions. Many accessible attractions work for all types of groups. For example, non-slip and level paths leading to your attractions meet the needs of people with visual impairments and visitors with limited mobility. Signposts which are easily recognised and understood help everyone to orientate themselves.

A pram takes up roughly as much space as a wheelchair to easily get through a door. Also, a ramp with handrail offers many advantages for a wide variety of needs at once:



Despite many similarities, there are of course also differences between various groups of visitors and their individual needs. On the following pages, we will introduce you to the most important ones in more detail. Yet, once again it is possible to make some generalisations: Experience has shown that it is important for everyone to be able to reach their destination comfortably and safely and to cope indoors and outdoors. And what about you? Why not do a first check for your visitor information centre or one of your popular places of interest? You can probably already score some points with one or two accessible services.



### Self-check 1: Safety and comfort in the outdoor area

For example:

- We have parking spaces that disabled visitors can use easily: the surface is non-slip and level. There is plenty of room for changing from a car to a wheelchair.
- We have marked the disabled parking space(s) as such so that they are not misused by other visitors.
- There are many seats along popular paths (ideally one every 100 to 150 metres).
- Important and popular paths are at least 1.5 metres wide so that there is enough space for everyone.
- The paths are easy to walk and drive on (no slippery areas and tripping hazards).
- It is easy for blind visitors with a white cane to orientate (often slightly higher vegetation at the path edge is sufficient).
- Tactile signing marks potential hazard areas (for example wooden 'crash barriers').

## Self-check 2: Safety and comfort in the inside area



For example:

- Access without steps to all floors is possible (ramp/lift).
- Entrance doors are wide enough for prams and wheelchairs.
- Stairs have a handrail.
- Visible or tactile step edge markings are used to improve stair safety.
- A counter is at least partially lowered and accessible so that it is easier for wheelchair users and staff to interact.
- At the counter there is a stick holder so that a walking stick, white cane or hiking pole does not fall over during the conversation.
- There is an accessible toilet.



## Visiting families, senior citizens, ... What do you have to offer?

### Families with young children

Families with children are one of the most important target groups in German tourism. Not only parents but also grandparents enjoy being outside in nature with their grandchildren. Prams, runner bikes, scooters or bobby cars are often part of the fun. To ensure that children and adults can use their 'vehicle fleet', well-maintained paths and short (circular) routes are ideal. Of course, many children also like to seek adventure off the beaten track and love to climb over rough and smooth. However, if relatives with disabilities are present during the trip, the focus lies on easy walking. Child-oriented activities along the path ensure that children don't get bored quickly.

### Older visitors

This constantly growing group of visitors is economically very interesting. They remain active even in old age. Nevertheless, hearing and vision as well as stamina decrease over time. Some of their requirements are therefore not dissimilar to those of disabled people. Older visitors usually have a lot of travel experience. They compare the things they come across to previous positive experiences. If their expectations are not met, the potential for disappointment is high. In addition, there is an increased need for security. For example, well recognisable and clear signage is helpful. Many elderly people also appreciate a personal discussion with knowledgeable staff and are pleased about friendly and pleasant manners.

### Visitors with walking difficulties

It is not only elderly people who are in some cases dependent on walking sticks or walking frames. People with injuries, heart disease or asthma are also – at least temporarily – restricted in their mobility. Transport service is particularly convenient for them. Accesses with a minimum of steps and good handrails are important.

In nature short (circular) walks without any notable climbs are preferred. If paths are convenient and offer unique outdoor nature experiences, many people enjoy using them.

### Visitors using a wheelchair

There are significant differences: some visitors using a wheelchair are severely restricted in their mobility, others are able to move around very independently. However, thresholds, steps and heavy doors are an obstacle for everyone. With sufficient door widths and enough space for manoeuvre, these visitors will also enjoy wheelchair accessible tables in cafés and lowered information desks. Interactive or educational learning stations should be easy to view, reach and use from a seated position.



A weekend trip to the countryside or a long planned family holiday – often young and old, wheels and feet travel together.

### Visually impaired and blind visitors

Although it might come as a surprise, this may well be the largest group. Poor lighting conditions, small letters or low visual contrast cause visual difficulties for everyone. Many elderly people in the prime of life need reading glasses and are glad if they can read information without having to change their glasses.

Blind visitors, on the other hand, must obtain information through other senses. Braille should only be used for short texts. Besides not all blind people can read Braille. It makes more sense to provide detailed information on a professionally designed website. Then a blind person can use special software called a screen reader to read the information out aloud. At the same time, the contents are also available to sighted users. Some blind visitors travel with a guide dog, which should be allowed wherever possible. Audio guides are helpful for blind people and interesting for everyone. Guided tours leading away from the main paths are possible with careful preparation and support by staff and offer an authentic experience of nature.



Touching makes nature easy to grasp for the visually impaired. Children and a lot of other visitors enjoy this too.

**‘We’ll never stop learning, never be perfect. But every step is a step in the right direction.**

The outdoor area of our nature park visitor centre is steadily growing more attractive. A barefoot path, wind chimes, tactile models, a scented garden and more make exploring with all senses possible.

The accessible circular walk can also be used independently by blind visitors with white canes due to the wooden plank boundary.

However, interesting things to the left and right of the path remain mostly hidden. This is why we have developed a tactile map together with the regional association of blind and visually impaired people.

You can take the map with you wherever you go: each learning station as well as special features of the landscape, e.g. our pond, are tactile. At special attention points on the site, visitors can tap the corresponding point on the map with an audio pen.

We programmed the pen accordingly. Site plan, audio pen and tactile brochures can be borrowed from the nature park visitor centre.

After receiving special training, our staff at the customer service desk is now also qualified to help blind and visually impaired visitors.’

Uwe Müller, Eichsfeld-Hainich-Werratal Nature Park



### **Deaf and hearing-impaired visitors**

It is important to look at hearing impaired or deaf people during conversations. Facial expression supports what has been said, and some deaf visitors can gather some speech information from the sight of the moving mouth. Written information even if it's only through a notepad and pen can make communication a lot easier. Quiet areas where there is little noise preventing conversation are helpful and comfortable for everyone. When you are preparing guided tours, try out whether it is possible to transmit spoken words directly to the visitor's hearing aid using an FM system.

Many deaf visitors communicate in German sign language. This is an independent language that is officially recognised in Germany and is difficult to learn. Sign language interpreters can be used for the production of documentary films or for special guided tours. For example, the German Deaf Association (Deutscher Gehörlosenbund) provides an extensive database of sign language interpreters and communication professionals on its website.

It might well be possible that you meet deaf visitors sooner than you think. We would like to encourage you to learn some basic words in sign language. You will immediately have all their sympathy on your side. You can't? We think you can!



#### **'It is easy to learn 'welcome' in sign language**

with the help of our video tutorials for guided tours into nature. The idea emerged while we were teaching our rangers and nature & landscape guides. We especially wanted to increase their awareness towards deaf and hearing impaired visitors. With the help of a local branch of the charity Caritas, we were able to win an experienced professional who became deaf as an adult before the implantation of a hearing aid helped her to regain partial hearing. So she knows both sides – the hearing and the not hearing – and had important tips and hints at hand. We thought to ourselves: This is interesting for all German-speaking providers of nature experiences. In front of the screen, first words in sign language can be practised until everyone is satisfied with themselves. Don't worry, it's not as hard as it might seem at first glance. And the greatest reward is seeing the happy faces of our visitors whom we can now welcome personally.'

Torsten Raab, Rhön Biosphere Reserve (Hessian part)

There's a short video about this online (in German):

<https://youtu.be/lwN1o-2BRcl>

### Visitors with intellectual disabilities

People with intellectual disabilities usually need a little more time and calm to understand information. They benefit greatly from short, simple sentences. This does not only apply to written information. It is also good to know that metaphors and irony are often taken literally and can easily lead to misunderstandings in a conversation. Adults with intellectual disabilities do not want to be treated like children. Addressing them respectfully should go without saying. Easy-to-read, clear signage makes indoor and outdoor navigation easy. Illustrations help to understand and underpin simple texts in brochures, on signs and exhibition boards. This is also helpful for visitors for whom the national language is a second language.

#### **'Does it have to be that scientific?**

#### **Most of our visitors are not biologists.**

How do you actually explain what biosphere reserves are? Very few people are familiar with this term. Like other biosphere reserves, we use a short film on our website to explain this difficult word in a simple and clear way. Sometimes, however, and especially in writing, language must be even easier. Many people with intellectual disabilities work on an organic farm run by our business partner Lebenshilfe, a charitable association for people with intellectual disabilities, their families, experts and friends. They are very happy that there are now large interpretation signs in simple language with pretty pictures on the farm. For many, it is a wonderful new experience to be able to learn about the biosphere reserve and ecological farming on their own. It's also fun because games have been included in the signs which also appeal to other visitors to the farm and especially children. After all, school classes are becoming increasingly inclusive. We must – and we intend to – take greater account of the diversity of our young and old visitors in the future.'

Anita Naumann, Bliesgau Biosphere Reserve



# 4

## Bringing nature closer

---

In nature, experiences without restrictions are not possible everywhere. Nevertheless, you can still offer guided tours and events at specific locations that allow visitors with access requirements to experience nature. Enable everyone to access the most popular visitor facilities. Train yourself and your staff on how to interact with different groups of visitors.

**O**f course, there are some strictly protected areas in National Natural Landscapes that are not open to the public. In addition, the natural features of a landscape sometimes prevent access for certain groups of visitors – for example where there are very steep paths. In order to enable all interested visitors to experience nature closely, indoor exhibitions or guided tours and events in selected outdoor areas are of particular importance.

### **Environmental education indoors and outdoors**

How do your visitors discover the 'world of nature'? Basically, there are only two possible options: Either they do it on their own (for this, people with disabilities need detailed information) or they take part in a guided tour or an environmental education programme. Why not take a look at checklists 3 and 4 to see to what extent your range of environmental education programmes is already accessible.



Lowered sections of paths or raised surfaces allow a sitting person to discover plants and animals close to the ground.

When examining or redesigning your services and offers, it is worth considering if and in which way visitors with disabilities can participate without having to rely on assistance.

Just like most people they wish to be as independent as possible.



### **Self-check 3:** Are your indoor and outdoor services and products accessible to all?

For example:

- Our exhibits are well lit.
- There are multisensory exhibits. These are especially suitable for visitors with visual impairment and children.
- Exhibits to touch are positioned at a height that can be reached by all visitors.
- The signage in the outdoor area is easy to spot and follow, rich in contrast and non-reflecting.
- Our signs are placed at a height that is easy to read for all (ideally lecterns).
- There are accessible public toilets nearby.
- Our bird hides are accessible at ground level.
- The bird hides have viewing slots at different levels and leg/knee clearance space (see picture page 25).
- Wooden boardwalks feature a toeboard with a minimum height of 10 cm preventing wheelchairs from rolling off. Visitors with visual impairments can also use this edge to find their way with a white cane.

**Self-check 4:** Do you impart environmental education content in an accessible way?



For example:

- Our exhibitions make use of more than one sense. There are, for example, sound experiences or tactile models.
- We tend to keep information short and use simple texts without technical terms.
- Audio guides are available free of charge and enable visitors to explore our exhibition at their own pace.
- We offer audios and videos for different target audiences.
- Our rangers can use a hearing induction loop to transmit the voice directly to a hearing aid or similar technology.
- If required, we are prepared for deaf visitors (for example: booking a sign language interpreter).
- Our staff for environmental education and visitor service is familiar with the primary needs of particular groups of visitors.



### Raising staff awareness – It pays off for everyone

Visitors with disabilities who wish to take part in guided walks, environmental education programmes or museum activities depend on the staff to ensure the necessary accessibility. Even if school classes frequently visit you, you should keep in mind that due to the increased number of inclusive school concepts, more and more children with disabilities will participate in school trips. By raising the awareness of your full-time and volunteer staff towards visitors with disabilities you are tackling a task that is worthwhile. The same rules that apply to the design of pathways and exhibitions are also valid here: **you don't need expensive special solutions but rather sensitivity, attention and good concepts.**

If a guided tour or event is well prepared, it can offer many convenient features that benefit several groups of visitors: This starts with selecting suitable paths and venues with seating options but also includes the choice of language you use. After all, apart from vocational study trips, there is hardly anything to be said against guided tours held in easy language. It's presumably not only people with intellectual disabilities who enjoy simple explanations without technical terms. Probably most visitors taking part in a guided tour would also like to try out their sense of touch. Just like blind or visually impaired people they can have fun experiencing leaves, flowers, seeds or other things by touch or to fully concentrate on their hearing.

For all those who come into direct contact with visitors – the service staff in the information centres and in partner businesses, your rangers and tour guides – special training is helpful. An overall positive contact increases the well-being of the visitors and thus the positive image of your natural landscape. In addition, well-trained staff can better understand the essential wishes and expectations of visitors – which is important for the planning and evaluation of your services and products.

### Three starting points with benefits

- 1 Make the most popular visitor facilities accessible to everyone.
- 2 Offer guided tours and events that take the diversity of your visitors into consideration and allow visitors with disabilities to enjoy an accessible nature experience.
- 3 Train yourself and your staff in handling different groups of visitors.



With a little sensitivity on both sides communication generally works very well.

# 5

## Giving good information is half the battle

---

Give information as specifically as you can – about what is possible but also about what is not (yet) possible. With honest information you can avoid disappointments on the ground.

---

Accessibility is not a means of travel in itself. Talk to your visitors about their themes of interest or holiday habits. Inform about accessibility as a feature of convenience that reaches far beyond the narrow target group of visitors with disabilities.

In order to enjoy their leisure time and holiday, visitors with disabilities have to answer two questions with 'yes'. Not only, 'Do I want to visit this destination?' but also 'Am I able to visit this destination at all?' That's why they like to choose destinations where they are not likely to run any risks. In order to make such a decision visitors with disabilities require information. The better founded the information is, the better founded is their basis for decision-making.

### **'Do you know what I want better than me?**

I've been in a wheelchair since a sports injury. But that doesn't mean that I want to give up physical exercise. I am aware that many, often elderly, wheelchair users like good and easy paths. However, I have nothing against a challenge. For me, a truly authentic experience of nature only begins beyond tarmacked paths. Nevertheless, I have to know in advance exactly what to expect on site. Whether or not I dare to do something is a decision that I have to make on my own. That is only possible if I can find detailed information about the trails' condition and gradient, for example, on the Internet or if someone who knows the area can give me advice on possible tours. Photos are a great help. Without a lot of text they often enable me to judge the situation. It is essential for many active visitors like me to know where it's possible to take breaks along the way and where to find accessible toilets.'

Veit Riffer, Saxon-Bohemian Switzerland National Park Region



### **Avoiding visitor disappointment through honesty**

Give information as specifically as possible – about what is possible but also about what is not (yet) possible. Maybe you are hesitating because you would prefer to promote your natural landscape in a more positive light? Or because some visitors may find out this way that an attractive destination is not suitable for them? Nevertheless, honest information is better than none at all. You can thus prevent disappointments that are often impossible to make up for once the visitors have arrived.

### **Every nature experience begins in the mind**

Visitors want an impression of what they can expect before they go. They read on the Internet, order brochures, turn to someone for advice or get inspired by media reports. They also listen to reliable recommendations. That's how convenient and accessible offers spread fairly quickly among those who depend on them or appreciate them. Many people with disabilities are connected through web forums and use platforms with offers for their special needs. These offer good opportunities for your marketing and public relations work. However, be aware of the following rule:

### **Accessibility is not a means of travel in itself**

The main focus usually lies on thematic interests, such as 'experiencing the wilderness' or 'tracing history'. That's why you should address all visitors thematically and regardless of their disability. Inform them about the services and the convenience you offer. Accessibility is a feature of convenience that goes far beyond the narrow target group of disabled visitors. Of course, special information on accessibility is also important for some visitors. Despite the necessity of accessible design, don't forget that these visitors are primarily looking for pleasure, fun and excitement as well.

## Self-check 5: Information and Public Relations



For example:

- Visitors can find detailed information on our website and in our brochures (wheelchair access, accessible toilets, path conditions ...).
- Our **website** has its own menu option for accessible nature experiences.
- Our website is always up-to-date and reliable.
- The navigation of the website is straightforward and easy to understand.
- On the website, you can enlarge the writing and increase the contrast.
- It is possible for blind users to have on-screen information read aloud to them with a special program (screen reader).
- There is an alternative text on our website for each picture, which can be read aloud by a screen reader.
- We have a **brochure** with accessible offers.
- The information in the brochure is easy to understand and clearly structured.
- The writing in the brochure is not smaller than 11 pt (ideal would be 12 pt and larger).
- The typeface in the brochure is plain (without serifs).
- There is sufficient contrast between the writing and background colour.
- Accentuation is not italic or underlined but bold.
- The writing does not run over pictures or graphics.

### Finding offers on the Internet easily

If checklist 5 showed that your website has room for improvement: Talk to your agency about programming an accessible website at the next convenient opportunity. Accessibility requires similar standards as search engine optimisation (SEO). So you kill two birds with one stone: search engines will find your website more easily and you can offer a special service for visitors with special needs.

Inspiring pictures and films also work well on the Internet. For Internet users who cannot see pictures, informative image descriptions are a useful alternative – service and marketing all in one.



#### **‘Have there ever been films like this before?’**

Two deaf people living in a region of great natural beauty with an interesting cultural history show and explain a part of their home area – naturally in their own language. The films are made ‘from the Rhön for the Rhön’: In our information centres, listeners look at the ‘talking hands’ of the two actors in the film with fascination. Two ‘borrowed’ off-screen voices enable hearing people to understand the information. Not all people with hearing impairments can follow sign language without problems. These include especially many post-lingually deaf persons. For them the contents are available as subtitles. So the approximately ten-minute films can be enjoyed in many different ways both seeing and hearing. We are delighted that two local Rhön fans show how beautiful and interesting the Rhön is to such a broad audience.’

Martin Kremer, Rhön Biosphere Reserve (Hessian part)

You can watch the films here (in German):

Rotes Moor: <https://youtu.be/fJ7NjW6mcJQ>

### Making a mark for accessibility: 'Travel for all' (Reisen für Alle)

The German labelling system 'travel for all' (Reisen für Alle) is a reliable resource to aid visitors with disabilities in their decision-making. With the help of a search screen, they can look for specific offers on the website [www.reisen-fuer-alle.de](http://www.reisen-fuer-alle.de) as well as on the websites of their partners (for example regional tourist boards).

In order to ensure that the detailed information is reliable, products and services are put to the acid test. This



kind of examination is not only helpful for visitors but also for suppliers: they then have it in black and white and know what is already working and where there is room for improvement.



The labelling system provides seven different groups of visitors with detailed and tested information on the accessibility and usability of

services and offers such as arrival, path conditions, parking facilities, natural beauty, things to do, gastronomy and/or accommodation.

Those responsible for the services receive special training.

It can also be worthwhile for natural landscapes to participate in 'travel for all'. A joint approach is currently being examined by the umbrella organisation of the National Natural Landscapes. A cooperation with your local tourist board may also be an option.

You can watch the films here (in German):

Milseburg: <https://youtu.be/emAc9IBGLI0>

# 6

## Relying on regional partnerships

---

Your range of nature experiences is part of a so-called tourism supply chain. Only a well-functioning chain enables visitors with access needs to travel, to look after themselves and to gather information comfortably. It also makes sense to establish a network with other local travel suppliers.

---

Do you know any dedicated individuals, societies or organisations committed to supporting accessibility in your region? Team up to create regional impulses. Over time other parties will join you.

**V**isitors usually rave about a great holiday experience when they were completely satisfied with all aspects of their trip: this begins with the information beforehand, the accommodation and activities during their stay and ends with their departure. In most cases visiting nature is 'only' one a part of the tourism supply chain. The links in this supply chain are basically the same for all customers. Nevertheless, visitors with impaired physical mobility or who are limited in their activities usually have special service requirements.

### **Networking within the field of tourism**

It is simply not possible to achieve unrestricted accessibility in a natural landscape and moreover no one will demand it. However, you can build networks with other suppliers. A collaboration with local and regional tourist boards is particularly useful. Usually, they are grateful for products that help to increase the variety of accessible holiday experiences



It's great to see when a joint effort creates an unforgettable experience for all visitors.

## The links in the tourism supply chain



---

### Preparing, informing, booking

For example:

- accessible websites & brochures
- detailed information on accessibility



---

### Arrival and orientation

For example:

- accessible parking spaces
- accessible public transport
- on-site transport services



---

### Living and sleeping

For example:

- accessible rooms and bathrooms
- attentive, customer-oriented staff



---

### Food and drink

For example:

- step-free access
- wheelchair accessible tables
- accessible restaurant menu
- food for guests with food intolerances



---

### Nature experience

For example:

- use of all senses to present information
- accessible paths and entrances
- accessible toilets

**‘Our visitors are as diverse as our events.**

Since 2009 the annual Migratory Bird Days in the Wadden Sea National Park of Lower Saxony have been taking place every autumn. The series of events thrive on the cooperation with the tourism providers who naturally play an important role for us on the coast. During nine days 250 public events revolve around migratory birds. For each activity our partners give us an accessibility statement. The public events are entertaining, playful, thoughtful, artistic or culinary – and therefore appeal to everyone in one way or the other! We have a number of different visitors, many of whom need access details beforehand in order to decide whether or not they can participate. Of course, not all of our events are accessible. However, more and more suppliers try to make their events and activities easy to reach and convenient. Even if the occasional event takes place on a lighthouse, it doesn't matter. Visitors just need to know what awaits them in advance.'

Petra Potel, Wadden Sea National Park of Lower Saxony



# 7

## Learning from one another

---

A person who 'cares' is of particular importance. In addition to their personal commitment the person also requires the necessary time. This means having secure human and financial resources that are available for questions and processes as well as taking care of regional networking.

**T**he Eifel National Park region is known as a pioneer for the accessible experience of a natural landscape. The realisation began in 2003 through the Nordeifel Nature Park which also encompasses the Eifel National Park established in 2004. What are the success factors? Which are transferable? Which can work for you? A study commissioned by EUROPARC Germany in the year 2015 answers all these questions. The link to the detailed report can be found on page 42. Below we summarise the most important aspects for you.

### **Commitment and continuity**

Amongst others, tourism service providers and experts 'on their own behalf', who especially benefit from accessible products, took part in guided interviews. The participants agree: Both national park and nature park are committed to their cause and have already motivated many others to join in. In particular, the gentle, long-term approach keeps the motivation high and gives all regional stakeholders enough time to grow together. In the Eifel, the 'doers' were and are aware that the implementation of accessible products is a long and difficult path that can only be achieved successfully with a lot of perseverance.

A person who 'cares' is of particular importance. In addition to their personal commitment the person also needs the necessary time. This means having secure human and financial resources that are available for questions and processes on this topic. That doesn't mean that this person has to do everything by themselves. But he or she can focus on building a network in the region. In the Eifel the decision to establish a special position in the national park turned out to be one of the most important success factors for regional tourism development in which the interests of nature conservation and inclusion are compatible with each other.



**'We are particularly proud of our network.'**

The two National Natural Landscapes are important protagonists for tourism as well as for the region's accessible nature experience. The Eifel National Park and the Nordeifel Nature Park have set themselves the common goal of making the Eifel accessible to all people with and without disabilities. This goal has also been laid down in the National Park plan. Of course, we can't do this alone. Without the tourism providers offering accommodation, catering and transport and without further sights and regional attractions a natural landscape cannot become accessible. There's still a lot to be done, it's simply a long-term process. We work closely with different associations focusing on people with disabilities and especially with our visitors, who can help us through their own experiences. To promote our products we cooperate with the regional tourist board. Additionally, we have our own pamphlets and a website with detailed access information. We approach the local schools for the blind and visually impaired and special schools directly and arrange appointments for guided tours and other nature experiences. Thanks to our network, we do not have to repeat the mistakes that others have already made in our region. We learn from each other and exchange information. Of course, we are also happy to pass these on to our visitors. They are the ones who should benefit from our recommendations about accessible places of interest in the Eifel. We at the National Park and Nature Park, too, benefit from recommendations from other tourism providers who know us.'

Tobias Wiesen, Eifel National Park

For Tobias Wiesen, member of staff responsible for mainstreaming accessibility at the Eifel National Park, networking and learning from other people's experience is one of the keys to enabling all interested people to participate in experiencing nature.

Of course, other National Natural Landscapes, too, have already gained experience and some of their employees are willing to share their stories of success and failure. For this, the umbrella organisation of the National Natural Landscapes will continue to offer opportunities to exchange ideas and to bring joint efforts together.

### **Go on reading and learning**

Numerous publications on accessible tourism are now available, including special information on building standards. Most of it can be found on the Internet. We can only give you a short overview below and on the following page and point out those publications whose focus lies on experiencing nature. Although some of the mentioned publications are older most of the contents remain up to date. Currently accessibility is a highly topical subject in the tourism sector, not only in Germany but also in Austria and other European countries. That's why you should be able to find further reading from the larger tourist boards and on the websites of the ministries responsible for economic affairs. As far as we know, there is no relevant publication on the compatibility of accessible building and nature conservation. However, the Eifel National Park can refer to its own experience and give some insight.

**The following publications are only available in German.**

The **evaluation of selected aspects of accessible nature experiences in the Eifel National Park region** (see page 39) shows success factors and recommendations that can generally be applied to other National Natural Landscapes.

[www.europarc-deutschland.de/endbericht\\_eval\\_eifel\\_final](http://www.europarc-deutschland.de/endbericht_eval_eifel_final)

A **model management plan on the topic 'Accessibility'** was published by the Berchtesgaden National Park in 2006. The model shows what is possible when accessibility is understood as a cross-sectional task.

[www.barrierefrei-plan-natur.de](http://www.barrierefrei-plan-natur.de)

The seven **planning aids**, which were developed in the Regional Environmental Centre of Schortens in 2002, still offer good practical advice.

[www.ruz-schortens.de/natur-fuer-alle.html](http://www.ruz-schortens.de/natur-fuer-alle.html)

The Federal Competence Centre for Accessibility (Bundeskompetenzzentrum Barrierefreiheit - BKB) published **minimum requirements for accessible nature experiences** in 2010 as the basis for agreements on objectives with national parks, nature parks and biosphere reserves. The BKB no longer exists but the paper is still available. The detailed version is available upon request.

[www.barrierefreiheit.de/veroeffentlichung\\_barrierefreies\\_naturerleben.html](http://www.barrierefreiheit.de/veroeffentlichung_barrierefreies_naturerleben.html)

A **manual for rangers and nature guides** titled 'Barrierefrei Natur erleben' (Experiencing nature without barriers) was created in 2006 in the Schaalsee Biosphere Reserve. It contains many practical ideas for games and activities.

<http://www.schaalsee.de/inhalte/download/Schaalsee-low.pdf>

You will find further information on the Internet if you search for the following keywords or a combination of these: 'accessible', 'tourism for all', 'accessible tourism', 'accessible nature' and so on. One of our plans for the future is to facilitate the search through an extensive knowledge base on the topic 'Accessibility and Inclusion in National Natural Landscapes'. We are trying to find funding for this project.

## Publisher Information

Publisher: **EUROPARC Deutschland e. V.**  
Pfalzburger Straße 43/44  
10717 Berlin  
Phone: +49 (0)30 2887882-0  
fax: +49 (0)30 2887882-16  
info@europarc-deutschland.de  
www.europarc-deutschland.de



Editorial team: Kerstin Emonds, EUROPARC Germany,  
in collaboration with Dr Kai Pagenkopf and  
Birgit Schlepütz, NeumannConsult.  
Special thanks to Tobias Wiesen, Eifel National Park.

Design: artistil DESIGNAGENTUR | artistil.de

Translation: Sandra Hamer

Photo credits: U. Giesen: front cover;  
H.-D. Budde - Deutsche Bahn AG: pages 7 and 8;  
G. Priske: pages 15 and 27;  
famveldman - Fotolia: page 17;  
K. Emonds: pages 18 and 23;  
K. Pagenkopf: page 25;  
T. Wiesen: page 29;  
K. Kammer: page 37;

Editorial deadline: 12/2016 (English version 01/2018)

The expressed views and opinions of the beneficiary do not have to be the same as those of the grantor.

The English translation of the brochure has been financed by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) with funds of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB).



Bundesministerium  
für Umwelt, Naturschutz,  
Bau und Reaktorsicherheit

This German version of the brochure has been generously supported by Aktion Mensch.





EUROPARC Deutschland is a registered charity and the umbrella organisation for National Parks, Biosphere Reserves, Nature Parks and Wilderness Areas in Germany. The charity is the bearer of the trademark 'Nationale Naturlandschaften' (National Natural Landscapes).  
[www.europarc-deutschland.de](http://www.europarc-deutschland.de) | [www.nationale-naturlandschaften.de](http://www.nationale-naturlandschaften.de)