



**Mapping and Performance Check of the Supply of  
Accessible Tourism Services  
(220/PP/ENT/PPA/12/6491)**

*Case Study 6*

**Paris Île-de-France**

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**European Commission**

**Enterprise and Industry Directorate General (DG  
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**Case study: Paris Île-de-France**

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## Executive Summary

Accessibility in France started to become recognised as an important issue by the end of the 1990s. At this point accessibility was rarely part of people's mind-set and certainly not taken into large consideration in the tourism sector. In February 2005 a national legislation was adopted in France promoting equal opportunities for everyone and aiming to increase the participation of disabled people in France. The legislation was the first measure taking into account the four main types of disabilities (motor, hearing and sight impairments, as well as learning difficulties). The legislation aims to make all establishments receiving public completely accessible by 2015. This legislation has resulted in significant progress even though the ultimate objective might be challenging to achieve in time.

The regional tourism board of Paris Ile-de-France has worked with accessible tourism since 2002. The initial objective was to render accessible the world's number one tourist destination. As part of this strategy, the regional board was involved in the work on the "tourism and handicap label". Introduced in 2001, this label has the aim of awarding the institutions and businesses that have made their businesses accessible. The label is divided into four categories, taking into account the main types of disability. Through the work with the label, the regional tourist board gained valuable knowledge and experience in the sector at an early stage and despite the fact that the board is no longer working with the label, it is assisting and encouraging businesses in becoming accessible, through a universal approach to accessibility which includes anyone with special needs, and highlights the economic importance that the market for accessible tourism implies.

The Ile-de-France region covers the whole tourism supply chain to some extent. The weak links seem to be accommodation and catering, where the will to invest resources and time in accessibility often is missing due to the limited size of businesses, with exceptions of larger hotel or restaurant chains. Another weak link is transports, and in regards to Paris particularly, the metro network. The very old structures would be extremely costly to make accessible. On the other hand, accessibility in museums and cultural institutions is better and improving further, and extensive work has been done in information and communication, e.g. through the launch of the Handistrict website providing a database on accessible tourism businesses.

The regional tourism board is cooperating significantly with associations representing people with disabilities in order to improve communication and to learn about the specific needs related to each disability. The board also works with businesses and support them in their efforts to improve accessibility through assistance, training and guidance documents. The business case of

accessible tourism is also highlighted by the board and one example of this is the Parisian tour operator Yoola which started its activity in 2009 with focus on accessible tourism and international sports events. The company has registered important growth in these years and an increasing clientele.

To conclude, it seems reasonable to say that the region has achieved a strong progress in accessible tourism, even though there are still numerous improvements to make, in particular regarding weak links in the tourism supply chain and incentives for smaller businesses.

## 1.0 Introduction

The region Paris Ile-de-France is the region receiving most visitors in France. The various monuments and attractions in the French capital have a strong attraction, as well as other popular tourist destinations in its vicinity. The destination is also frequently visited by business tourists. Despite the economic downturn, Paris Ile-de-France continues to be the world's number one tourist destination with 32.7 million visitors per year<sup>1</sup>.

This case study will aim at outlining the work performed and efforts carried out in terms of accessibility in the tourism sector in the region. The following pages will describe and explain the national context, the legislative framework and the increasing importance given to this policy. The regional tourism board has worked on these questions since 2002 and continues to play an important role in the area, through the provision of information, training and coordination to other stakeholders in the sector. The approach that has been adopted by the region focuses on accessibility as a means of providing high quality tourism designed for all and targeting everyone. This approach recognises that even various groups of people without disabilities may have special needs. New accessible services developed or existing ones that have been adapted should thus be offered to everyone to the extent this is possible, and not solely target tourists with disabilities. Finally, the region is aiming at including the entire holiday value chain in their work making it accessible to everyone in an inclusive way. Since Paris is the world's most visited tourist destination, it also accounts for an important market. This relates both to able-bodied and disabled tourists, and therefore implies a fairly unexploited economic market for the tourism businesses.

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<sup>1</sup> L'essentiel de l'activité touristique de la destination Paris Ile-de-France, 2013

## 2.0 Overview and background information

The French region Ile-de-France is the most visited region in France, followed by Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and Rhône-Alpes<sup>2</sup>. The region consists of 8 departments: Paris, Seine-et-Marne (Disneyland Resort Paris), Yvelines (Château de Versailles), Essonne (Milly la Forêt village), Haut-de-Seine (Sceaux Castle), Seine-Saint-Denis (Basilique Saint-Denis), Val-de-Marne (Bords de Marne and Guinguettes) and Val d'Oise (Auvers sur Oise) and provides a wide offer of tourist attractions. The location of Paris, right in the middle of the region is surely the main reason for its popularity, with world famous monuments such as the Eiffel Tower, the Notre-Dame Cathedral, Sacré-Cœur and various art museums and collections. Moreover, the attraction park Disneyland Resort Paris, situated just outside Paris, is the most popular tourist destination in Europe. In addition to leisure tourism, business tourism is an important factor, representing 45% of nights spent in hotels in Ile-de-France<sup>3</sup>.

Companies involved in the tourism sector in Ile-de-France employ more than 500 000 persons, representing 9.5% of the total number of employees in the region, compared to 6.8% in the rest of the country. The most important sectors in terms of employment are transports (35.4%), catering (31.6%), cultural activities and leisure (13.5%), and accommodation (11.9%)<sup>4</sup>.

The regional tourism board has been working with accessibility in various ways since 2002. The ambition of the tourist board is to make the destination Paris Ile-de-France accessible to all kinds of audience. To achieve this aim, the board works with, and encourages, actors in the tourism sector to adapt their structures to specific needs that tourists may have.

**Two initiatives have been particularly important for the development of accessible tourism in France over the past few years.**

- **The national legislation** from the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2005 promotes equal opportunities for everyone and aims to increase the participation of people with disabilities in France, as well as to change the perception of disabilities in the society. The legislation takes into account all different types of disabilities, i.e. motor, hearing and sight impairments, as well as learning difficulties. It also includes people with disabilities and with reduced mobility, and those with temporary disabilities. It is the first national legislation considering all disabilities and aims to make all establishments receiving public completely

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<sup>2</sup> L'essentiel de l'activité touristique de la destination Paris Ile-de-France, 2013

<sup>3</sup> L'essentiel de l'activité touristique de la destination Paris Ile-de-France, 2013

<sup>4</sup> L'essentiel de l'activité touristique de la destination Paris Ile-de-France, 2013

accessible. The 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2015 is the target for these conditions to be met<sup>5</sup>. There have been two previous legislations on solely motor impairment in 1975 and 1991, however, these were not respected.

- **The “tourism and handicap label”** was introduced in 2001 by the Ministry of Tourism and stands for quality in the reception of clients with disabilities. The label has as its objective to identify and reward the accessibility of an establishment, a tourist resort or a cultural sight, for people with special needs. The label is the result of a cooperation between the Ministry of Tourism, professionals from the tourism industry, and associations representing people with disabilities. The Tourism and Handicaps Association is responsible for the national coordination of the label<sup>6</sup>. The national legislation of 2005 obliges any actor in the tourism industry to take accessibility into account, and this label has the role of promoting and rewarding the measures taken.

Initially, the regional tourism board started working on accessibility through the tourism and handicap label. The board saw an opportunity to implement accessibility in order to sustain the competitiveness of this destination. At this point accessibility was rarely part of the tourism sector and even less in the mind-set of people in general. The board started to work on awareness raising and to carry out controls and verifications of the structures that applied for the labels. As a consequence of this work, the tourist board gained considerable awareness and knowledge regarding accessibility and is therefore currently working with these questions in a more global way, mostly in relation to support to businesses and communication of the existing offer of accessible tourism services. In this context, the database Handistrict, providing information and contacts to tourism suppliers to a variety of accessible services in France, has been set up. In parallel to the work of the tourist board, the legislation of 2005 came into force and further encouraged the work on accessibility. In regards to this legislation, the tourism board has developed different tools, methods and trainings for businesses in order to achieve conformity with this legislation. Regional funding is available for businesses in the tourism industry aiming to make their services accessible. Furthermore, a certain number of departments in France provide additional funding<sup>7</sup>.

Within the framework of the accessibility regional strategy, the tourist board also works to raise awareness, increase the respect for each person's

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/-L-essentiel-de-la-loi,2180-.html>

<sup>6</sup> Association Tourisme et Handicap, Label tourisme et handicap

<sup>7</sup> Fonds de développement touristique régionale, <http://pro.visitparisregion.com/Le-CRT-Paris-Ile-de-France/Presentation/Fonds-regional>

particular needs, to encourage people with disabilities to travel, and to create a positive image of disabilities in general as a means of encouraging businesses to invest in accessibility. Furthermore, the universal conception of accessibility is strongly promoted by the tourism board, i.e. the disability is at the centre of the tourism service, but it is not highlighted. This encourages adaptations that are destined to all. Accessibility is not solely about disability, but also about pregnant women, elderly people, obesity, a temporary illness or a broken leg. Everyone has, at different moments of life, special needs that require specific measures when travelling. Through this conception, the quality of use is put at the centre with the aim of improving the comfort for everyone. This also has an impact on esthetical solutions for the infrastructure and the structural adaptation of a tourist destination.

The regional tourist board also highlights the fact that accessible tourism provides for growth and economic opportunities for businesses involved, and works to provide information about these opportunities and encourage businesses. The market for disabled tourists represents today 50 million persons, 158 million hotel nights, and 47 million euros in Europe. In addition to this, the target group of elderly people will represent about 4 million people in 2050, and is the group spending the most. In many cases, elderly tourists require the same accessible services as tourists with disabilities.

As a way of reaching progress within and outside of the Paris region, the regional tourist board is involved in a European cooperation between regions aiming at strengthening the role of regions in European tourism policy, and developing a framework for cooperation and a research model of sustainable tourism management. Within this Network of European Regions (NECSTouR) an accessible tourism taskforce has been established where Paris Ile-de-France, together with the Italian Veneto region, is coordinator.

In terms of estimations, it is difficult to measure the impact and benefits of the investments and adaptations made due to French legislations that prevent the collection of data on disabilities because of equality considerations. However, an important increase in number of visitors has been observed in several tourist destinations following adaptations.

### 3.0 The integration of the supply chain

Accessibility regards all different steps of the travel, starting from the search for information while still at home, and ending with the return back home after the holidays. The cross-sectorial nature of the tourism sector is making it particularly important to adapt the various steps of the supply chain. The

regional tourism board is making significant efforts to coordinate cooperation between different stakeholders, both businesses and associations, at the various steps of the supply chain, in order to achieve this. The associations are regularly consulted on different issues and invited to review new services in order to check the accessibility and to assist the tourism stakeholders in their efforts to become accessible. One example is the collaborative work performed in the context of adaptations of the Victor Hugo museum and in particular the “easy to read, easy to understand” guide which was realised through a cooperation between the museum, the regional tourism board and the association UNAPEI which is focusing on learning difficulties.

This section will outline the different key phases of the travel, highlight what has been done within each phase, as well as what phases require further improvement, and potential barriers. Based on the interviews conducted in this case study, it seems reasonable to say that there has been a strong progress in the Paris region over the past few years in regards to accessibility, taking into account different steps of the supply chain. There are, however, gaps and weak links in the supply chain that can be improved. This could be illustrated by the work carried out by the tourism board in regards to the Tourism and Handicap label (2002-2011). Out of approximately 700 places applying for the label, only 200 got the approval. According to the regional tourist board, this may be due to the high criteria required, however, the Tourism and Handicap label has the purpose of guaranteeing a high quality in accessibility and thus the criteria needs to be high. In addition, the application process is cumbersome which *per se* may deter some catering and accommodation services from applying. These numbers indicate that a large number of businesses are not sufficiently accessible, while on the other hand it also shows that a large number is making an effort to adapt their services, since you need to apply for the Tourism and Handicap label in order to be awarded.

### **Information and communication**

Every holiday starts with an initial planning of the trip and search for information. At this stage it is crucial to being able to consult accessible websites and find information about accessible services available at the tourist destination. This is a central but difficult step. It is problematic for people with disabilities to find the information they need, and to be able to access it. Accessible information is made available through e.g. websites providing the possibility to change the size of characters and contrasts for people with sight impairments. In addition to this, it might also be difficult for tour operators and tourist destinations to communicate their tourist offer to people with disabilities, since they in many cases constitute an isolated

group<sup>8</sup>. Below are two examples of how the Paris region is working on this issue.

- The regional tourist board is cooperating with Kernix, a company working with web and mobile applications. Together with other business partners and associations representing people with disabilities, a database has been developed providing information on a variety of tourism destinations, services, and their accessibility throughout the French territory. The use of the database is free and it is open for everyone with the aim of enabling tourist suppliers to upload their information and contacts in a collaborative way. The database is called Handistrict and was launched in 2012 with the objective of providing exhaustive and up to date information. Standard information on each service is combined with detailed information and measures relating to the accessible structure and installations (size of doors, steps etc.). The website is made accessible to people with sight impairments with the possibility to change the contrast as well as size of the letters.

A related issue of this and similar information services is the accuracy of the information provided. The regional tourism board has had the role of checking services in the Ile-de-France region and awarding them with a “quality-check” marking on the website. Furthermore, the tourism board contacts every new touristic supplier in Ile-de-France that has registered their information on the data base with the objective of making the information as detailed and reliable as possible.

- Another communication issue is the ability to reach out to the target audience and communicate the accessible tourist offer available. Cooperation with associations and other structures receiving this type of public, is a key aspect in this context. One example of this is the Parisian tour operator Yoola, which opened in 2009, targeting disabled people. Being a specific market with a well-defined target, the regular communication channels are not sufficiently efficient. In order to address this problem, the tour operator concentrated its efforts on contacting and meeting with associations and similar structures in order to disseminate information about the provided services<sup>9</sup>. Finally, in order to reach out to the same public in other European, and non-European, countries, this requires even further work to identify the right channels and collaborators in other countries.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Malik Baldi, Yoola

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Malik Baldi, Yoola

## Transport

Accessible transport is crucial for anyone travelling with special needs. There has been progress in this area, in particular following the entry into force of the 2005 legislation. However, it is one of the areas with most challenges and Paris has encountered difficulties in terms of rendering the transports accessible to everyone due to the age of the city and its old infrastructures.

The regional tourism board has cooperated with SNCF – the national railway company in their efforts on accessibility. SNCF is working to improve accessibility and to comply with legislation, however it is cumbersome work which requires investments and resources. In particular, investments of 1.4 million Euros have been made into the restructuring of the Saint-Lazare station. This is the second biggest station with several connecting lines in central Paris, it is also the starting point of the metro's line 14 which is exceptionally accessible. The investments made are part of the budget of 500 million Euros for a period of 10 years aiming at making stations and trains accessible.

In the city of Paris, RATPS is the company providing public transports. It has been concluded that most of the extensive metro network is almost impossible to render accessible due to the very old construction with the first line being inaugurated in 1900. The construction work would be cumbersome and the costs would be enormous. Line 14 is one of the few exceptions that is completely accessible since it was constructed rather recently in 1998. The Parisian metro clearly represents a gap in the supply chain. In compensation, RATP has made an effort to improve accessibility of all Paris buses following the 2005 legislation. Today, almost all bus lines and stops are accessible.

SNCF and RATP also initiated a service targeting people with disabilities already in 1993, called "*Les compagnons du voyage*", providing carers to accompany disabled tourists from departure to arrival<sup>10</sup>.

The tourism regional board is also cooperating with private companies such as taxi providers. One example is TAXIS G7 which has been focusing on accessibility since 2004.

## Accommodation and catering

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<sup>10</sup> *Les compagnons du voyage*,  
<http://www.compagnons.com/compagnons/association.html>

Based on information collected through interviews, accommodation and catering represent another area which has proven complex, indicating only slow progress and development of accessible services. This kind of activity, except from the larger hotel chains, is often driven by family businesses and smaller companies which may have limited resources and time to invest in making their activities accessible.

The tourism and handicap label as well as the 2005 legislation have been pushing the efforts made in this area over the past few years, however, the offer to date is not satisfactory. The regional tourist board is working to address this issue through further partnership with businesses in the sector, and will focus particularly on this type of services in 2014. The Handistrict website, presents 47 results when searching for an accessible hotel in the Ile-de-France region, out of which 21 are located in Paris, and only 15 restaurants, out of which 6 are located in Paris. However, the mentioned numbers also relate to the fact that the Handistrict website was recently launched and not all accessible businesses are yet registered in the database. Some of our interviewees have indicated that Paris is a difficult city to render accessible due to old structures and historical heritage. This is the case for many activities which are situated in old buildings.

Furthermore, an additional problem is that a hotel may be labelled as accessible when offering only a limited number of accessible rooms. This problem is reinforced when a larger group is travelling together, and the travellers of the group are not able to stay in the same hotels. In general, the organisation of group travels for disabled tourists has proven complicated due to this reason. Larger accommodations are currently under construction. One main problem in this regard, is the price of property in Paris, in particular since accessible rooms require more space than a standard hotel room. This issue was highlighted by the accessible tour operator Yoola, as one of the main challenges in the organisation of group travels for disabled people.

Several stakeholders have highlighted that accessibility can be achieved to a certain point without investing too much resources by adapting smaller details to the specific needs of the visitors. Picturegrammes, menus with pictures, and trained, informed staff are some important steps which can be achieved without major investments. Based on the interviews, another significant barrier is the negative image of disability which discourage tourist businesses from investing in accessibility. The regional tourism board is working on these issues through awareness raising, training and a universal approach.

### **Museums, attractions and guided tours**

The regional tourist board has a strong cooperation with a variety of cultural institutions and museums in Paris and other places in the region. Great improvement and investments have been made in the area and a number of accessible services are offered. The work on accessibility in this stage of the supply chain started already prior to the 2005 legislation in many cases, however, the legislation has resulted in further improvements. Except from the structures being made increasingly accessible, specific services have been developed aiming at providing disabled visitors with a valuable experience:

- Louvre museum – organisation of touch visits were made available in 1995 and has since then developed and changed over the years. Copies of original sculptures and objects have been created enabling visitors to touch the objects to get a feeling of its features. In addition to this, specific activities and guided tours adapted to different kinds of disability are organised. The museum has received the tourism and handicap label in three categories.
- Musée d'Orsay – organisation of touch visits as well as a video-guidance providing a guided tour of 27 pieces in sign language. The museum was awarded the tourism and handicap label in 2005.
- Maison de Victor Hugo, Place des Vosges. Since 2002, this museum has worked on rendering their structures and visits accessible for people with both physical and learning or mental disabilities. The efforts were increased following the 2005 legislation and the museum has now been awarded the tourism and handicap label in three categories (motor, hearing, and mental disabilities). The objective is to receive the fourth one before 2015. The adaptations made include e.g. structural changes, staff training (e.g. welcoming, sign language), audioguides and videoguides, development of “easy to read” documents and accessible signs and information.
- Guided tours are organised by a variety of organisations. Despite the fact that Paris is a city which due to its age, structure, pavements etc. is complex to make completely accessible, these tours depending on their objectives can be made accessible to tourists with disabilities. However, the organisation of these tours requires a certain amount of reflection and ability to find innovative solutions in regards to details which a tour for able-bodied people does not require (e.g. avoiding steep streets, pebbles etc.).
- Château de Versailles – this tourist destination located just outside Paris is organising trainings in accessible tourism for travel agencies, accessible guided tours, and have several special schemes for disabled visitors, such as free entrance and reduced tariffs to access light shows.

## Tourist information

From a more general perspective, tourist information is a step which is constantly present throughout the travel. For tourists with mental, visual or hearing disabilities this might be an important obstacle. The French Association for Learning Difficulties (UNAPEI) has developed picturegrammes to be used for this purpose. This work was initially carried out for the Tourism Office of Versailles outside Paris, but has been further developed by the regional tourist board and the Tourisme et Handicaps Association and the picturegrammes are now available for download on the website of the National Federation of Tourism Offices and are being applied throughout the national territory<sup>11</sup>.

In relation to this, texts and documents (e.g. guides, menus) following the “easy to read, easy to understand” method (*“facile à lire, facile à comprendre”*) is an important measure which can further easily address the problems encountered by people with visual impairments or learning difficulties. In this context, the size and font of the letters, colours, structure of sentence, are some examples to consider in adapting the text. However, the text and information in the “easy to read, easy to understand” documents is also available to a person without disabilities and might even be a preferred option for elderly people or for someone who does not speak the language fluently. A European project in 2009, which involved UNAPEI, worked to establish rules and guidelines in regards to the “easy to read, easy to understand” way of writing and producing documents<sup>12</sup>.

The above examples of the supply chain provide an overview which indicates that the Ile-de-France region, as a destination, is accessible to a certain extent, taking into consideration the various steps, and is working towards further progress. The 2005 legislation has raised awareness regarding this issue and encouraged businesses and tourist professionals to further invest in accessibility. There has been important progress, however, several interviewees underlined that the development is too slow and that having all tourism structures applying to the norms in 2015, as the legislation suggests, will be very challenging.

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<sup>11</sup> Offices de tourisme de France, <http://www.qualiteofficedetourisme.com/autres-demarches/label-tourisme-et-handicap/pictogrammes/>

<sup>12</sup> *Information pour tous*, DG EAC, UNAPEI, Nous aussi, 2009

## 4.0 Provisions for cross-impairments

A first point to make in the context of cross-impairments is the legislation of 2005 which was the first policy measure to include the four main types of disability. One of the objectives of the legislation is to make all places receiving public accessible. As a result, this will imply adaptations addressing the needs of the four different types of disability. Furthermore, the tourism and handicap label is divided into four different awards, each one relating to one type of disability. The label may therefore be awarded to a tourist attraction in two to four categories. To give two successful examples, Musée du Louvre and Maison Victor Hugo have received the label in three out of the four categories.

As described in the background section of this case study, the regional tourism board applies a universal approach to accessibility, which involves a variety of disabilities, including also pregnant women, allergies, obese and elderly people, as well as temporary disabilities. This universal approach implies that everyone is being included, but also that no one is stigmatised or discriminated against. In this way, every person with any handicap is taken into consideration, as well as every person without any disability. This approach has also been highlighted in the work carried out by SNCF in their restructuring of stations where they aim to apply a design for all.

The goal is therefore to provide accessible services to everyone. The cooperation with different associations has facilitated this work. The tourism board is regularly liaising with for example UNAPEI (Federation of associations representing the interest of people with learning difficulties) and FAF (French Federation for Blind People and People with Visual Impairments) in order to learn about specific needs relative to different disabilities and to get advice on how to improve related services.

Based on this cooperation and experience in the sector, the regional tourist board has developed trainings which have the objectives of supporting businesses in the adaptation of their structures and services. The trainings comprise different kinds of disabilities (visual, hearing, motor and learning difficulties) and aim at educating staff in terms of receiving public with disabilities and adapting their communication with this public, as well as at adapting the structures in order to comply with the legislative norms and enable access for everyone. The trainings available are in particular targeting businesses, and also aim at raising awareness in regards to accessibility and to the market that this public implies. As mentioned previously, the group of elderly people in Europe is an increasing group including people with special

needs<sup>13</sup>. As a consequence this group constitutes an important market for businesses engaging in accessible tourism. In addition to this group, accessible services for disabled people is another market segment to consider.

Furthermore, the tourist board has also published a number of practical guides and information leaflets in regards to accessibility, which includes the four different main types of disability. These publications have different themes such as welcoming visitors, structures, organising meetings and conferences, all targeted to a public with disabilities. The universal approach of the tourist board also includes other disabilities such as asthma, allergies, obesity and temporary disabilities. As a result, the awareness raising and information provided by the tourist board also includes these special needs.

## 5.0 Business approach – building a business case for accessibility

Despite the fact that Paris is an old city which might be problematic to make accessible, there seems to be an increasing awareness of the importance of accessible tourism and of the impact that this unexploited market might have on the economy. The regional tourist board has produced a publication on the economic benefits of being accessible which was published in December 2013. The document highlights the potential of reaching out to a larger market including both people with disabilities, elderly people and other tourists with special needs, and as a consequence receiving increased economic benefits.

According to the regional tourist board, it is illegal to ask people about their disabilities and whether they do have any disabilities. This explains why it is difficult to find statistics relating to progress made and the impact of these measures in terms of increased demand. Some interviewees have reported an increased demand following the adaptations of structures and services, however no specific numbers are available. The successful example of the tour operator Yoola will highlight the potential benefits involved in the market.

Yoola started its activity in 2009 and specialises in accessible tourism with a specific focus on enabling group trips to sports events such as the Olympics or the World Cup in football. Despite its young age, the company has had an extensive and increasing activity in these years, being active not only in Ile-de-France, and other parts of the national territory, but also by organising travels abroad to international sports events. The company reports an

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<sup>13</sup> L'Accessibilité – une opportunité pour la destination Paris Ile-de-France, 2013

increasing demand in regards to interest and daily clients. Through this increase, the tour operator has been able to develop the offer of services available and to specialise and further tailor them to the specific needs of the tourists. The years in which major sports events are held, the demand is even stronger, for obvious reasons. Finally, the number of tourists that have used the tour operator once and come back again, is steadily increasing.

Yoola reported that it seems like increasing opportunities and services made available for people with disabilities further encourage the demand from this public when they realise what is actually possible to do and experience through these services<sup>14</sup>. This idea highlights the importance of providing an offer that initially attracts this public. Consequently, people with disabilities will be increasingly interested in using them.

It is also important to note that people with disabilities are rarely travelling on their own. It might not seem to be worth the investment for a hotel to adapt 2-3 rooms to make them accessible, when consequent benefits are not guaranteed. However, in most cases the carer that are travelling together with the disabled tourists are often a greater number of able-bodied persons and will rent standard rooms in addition to the accessible rooms. This is also true for restaurants, attractions and transports. As a result, accessible services will lead to an overall increase of the number of visitors.

As a consequence of the experience gained by Yoola in the sector during these years, the tour operator also provides consulting services aiming at raising awareness among other businesses and at assisting companies and professionals in their process to become accessible.

Interviews performed with both Yoola and the regional tourist board have stated that Paris is a rich city in terms of historical monuments, culture, and heritage that attract tourists from all over the world. Therefore, the destination also implies a strong potential on the market for accessible tourism. As a result of Paris's popularity as a tourist destination, Yoola has been able to create important collaborations with travel agencies in other countries to reach new clients. The tour operator is increasingly working with the organisation of travels from the US, the UK, Italy and Japan, which represents an important economic interest, in addition to the regional and national market.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Malik Baldi, Yoola

## 6.0 Evidence of impact

The region of Ile-de-France demonstrates a strong commitment to accessible tourism and related services. Having worked with, and promoted, accessibility for over 10 years, the region has gained considerable experience in the sector. It seems reasonable to say that the 2005 legislation has had an important impact on many tourist businesses. However, the regional tourism board has prioritised this issue since 2002. This can be seen by the services and assistance provided by the tourism board to tourism professionals:

- Training in accessible tourism for businesses;
- Provision of practical guides and information booklets on how to become more accessible;
- Personalised assistance to tourist suppliers in terms of making their structure and services accessible;
- The collaboration with the Handistrict website which provides information and contacts to accessible tourist suppliers;
- European cooperation through the network of regions NECSTouR;
- National and regional cooperation with associations representing people with disabilities (including all types of disabilities).

The regional tourist board is playing an important role in the cooperation on the Handistrict website, consisting in quality checks and verifications of the suppliers that have registered to the database. The brand of the tourist board has the effect of a quality label on the website, guaranteeing that the supplier has gone through a verification and been approved by the tourist board, thus ensuring a certain quality. The board also assisted in the establishment of the accessibility criteria that Handistrict is based upon. Furthermore, the tourist board is one of the two coordinators of the accessible tourism taskforce of the European network of regions (NECSTouR).

Finally, the cooperation with a number of associations is a valuable tool that has been highlighted by many interviewees as a key recommendation in order to improve accessibility in Europe. Any adaptation should start with a dialogue with associations, as well as with disabled people, as a means of gaining an understanding for their specific needs. This is being done by the regional tourist board on a regular basis and enables a cross-impairment approach and high quality. In addition, there is also a strong and on-going collaboration with businesses and other tourist institutions in different sector involving all steps of the tourism supply chain. One example of this is Maison de Victor Hugo, which is a museum run by the city of Paris municipality. Since they started a focused work on accessibility in 2005 with the aim receiving the Tourism and Handicap label in all four categories by 2015, the number of disabled visitors has increased importantly. Before the introduction of these

measures, they would see about 10-20 visitors in a wheelchair per year, whereas today it is common to have 6-7 visitors each day. In terms of motor impairment, these persons will actively look for information and therefore take part of an increased accessible offer swiftly. The development in terms of hearing impairments and learning difficulties, tends to be slower. In the case of Maison de Victor Hugo, the museum has also gained publicity through the media for being one of the more accessible museums in Paris, which has also resulted in a communication and marketing of the service and an increased number of visitors.

## 7.0 Conclusions

This case study has had the objective of presenting the region of Paris Ile-de-France as an accessible tourist destination and of describing its work performed in this area. Paris is the most popular tourist destination in the world, and its vicinities equally provide an extensive tourist offer. It has been highlighted throughout the case study that a city which has such a rich offer in terms of tourist attractions, also represents an important market opportunity in terms of accessible tourism.

Accessible tourism offers are slowly growing. Important measures such as the 2005 legislation which states that all places receiving public need to be made accessible for the four main types of disability at the latest in 2015, and the Tourism and Handicap label awarded to tourist businesses providing accessible services, have played an important role. Furthermore, the regional tourist board is working extensively with these questions since 2002, when they were appointed to work on the verification of quality of the structures that received the Tourism and Handicap label. This led to an increased awareness and important experience in the area, which make the regional tourism board a strong actor. Through collaboration with associations and businesses, as well as through the provision of training to tourism professionals, the regional board is aiming to raise awareness and assist stakeholders in the process of becoming accessible. Furthermore, the regional tourist board adapts a universal approach of accessible tourism, i.e. including anyone which may have specific needs, without limiting the word "accessibility" to people with disabilities.

The case study has looked at the tourism supply chain and discussed different steps that are crucial to any tourist but that might be far more problematic for disabled tourists. Different steps have been discussed, concluding that the totality of the supply chain in the Paris region is covered to a certain extent, however, while cultural institutions and museums have a

strong cooperation with the tourist board and have worked extensively with accessibility since the 1990s, hotels and restaurants seem to be the weaker link, often due to the lack of resources and will to invest when benefits are not guaranteed. Transports also constitute an obstacle because of difficulties regarding infrastructure and construction. For example, most of the very old Parisian metro network is considered problematic and too costly to make accessible. Another crucial step is the stage of information and communication, where progress is under way.

The provision of cross-impairments has been discussed, underlining the wide scope of accessibility adapted by the regional tourist board. The cooperation with different associations representing people with disabilities is extremely important in order to cover the needs of all different disabilities. The inclusion of cross-impairments in the work of the regional tourist board is shown by the trainings provided by the board which comprise a variety of types (welcoming, infrastructure, organisation of meetings) including the four main types of disability (visual, hearing, motor, mental). In addition to this, the scope of the 2005 legislation includes these four main types, and the Handicap and Tourism label is divided into four different awards each one relating to each type.

The promotion of accessible tourism as a business case was underlined as important by some interviewees. The Paris region is attracting a great amount of tourists each year, and therefore represents a potentially important market for accessible tourism. The regional tourism board is working to highlight this and recently published a booklet on the issue.

Finally, the example of the Parisian tour operator Yoola has been highlighted to demonstrate a successful business case and the positive impact following the investments made by a business in accessible tourism. Starting its activity only in 2009, the company has grown and provides accessible travels on a regional, national, European and international level. The start of the activity and the creation of an offer which can be adapted to the special needs of every person, have resulted in an important increase of the demand. The provision of services seems to have further encouraged this disabled public to travel.

Taking into account the information collected through desk research and a number of interviews with public authorities, associations and businesses active in the field of accessible tourism in the Paris region, it seems reasonable to say that there is a growing awareness and interest for, and work on these issues in the sector. All interviewees have stated that the improvements made in the past few years have been important, especially following the 2005 legislation. However, the progress is reported to be too

slow and there is still a significant work to be done in terms of accessible structures, awareness raising and creating a positive image of disability.

To conclude this case study, next section will suggest recommendations on how to improve the accessible services available and on how to further encourage the progress towards a completely accessible tourism offer. These recommendations are based on information collected throughout the data collection phase of this case study, and also integrates recommendations suggested by the different stakeholders that have been interviewed.

## 8.0 Recommendations

Building on the information collected through interviews, desk research and the resulting analysis throughout this case study, we would suggest the following recommendations:

- Consulting, and working together with people with disabilities is crucial in order to gain an understanding for the specific needs they require. This also applies to the verifications and check of structures that are said to be accessible. An able-bodied person performing these checks will only to a certain extent be capable of providing an accurate estimation.
- Regular cooperation with associations representing different kinds of disabilities is central to enable the provision of services adapted to the different needs relative to each type of disability. In addition, the adaptations need to be examined and tested by a person with the specific disability. Testimonials from the Maison de Victor Hugo highlights the importance of this, where 40-50% of the “easy to read” guide of the museum had to be revised after having been tested by two persons with learning difficulties.
- Tourism is a cross-sectorial area which is why collaboration between different sectors involved (e.g. transports, accommodation, catering, guided tours) is important. Such collaboration enables exchange of best practice and ensures an accessible supply chain without any gaps.
- Training provided to businesses is crucial, in particular regarding the welcoming of guests and visitors with disabilities. However, it is also important to train disabled people in how to use, and make the most of the services available and to inform them about the offer.
- Awareness raising continues to be an important factor. Accessibility leads to a better quality and this needs to be highlighted. This regards both smaller tourism businesses as well as larger events such as the

Euro Cup in football or the Olympics. These organisers may not take this part of the tourism market into account, and therefore further collaboration with specialised tour operators is required. An example of this is the tour operator Yoola, which mentioned the awareness of international event organisers as one of the main barriers encountered since the start of the business.

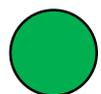
- Promotion and communication of accessible tourism and the available offer. This will lead to a growing number of customers if communicated accurately through accessible channels.
- Importance of image – according to some interviews the negative image of disability is one of the main reasons for tourism businesses not investing in making their structures accessible. In Paris compared to other cities like New York or London, it is rare to see disabled people in the streets. Disability remains hardly understood in France, and this as a consequence is an important barrier to further accessibility in the tourism sector.
- Common regulations throughout the European Union would facilitate the work in this area. This would enable an enhanced cooperation and exchange of best practice between countries.
- Provision of information in terms on how to improve accessibility. It does not have to be expensive to enhance accessibility. One example of this is the “easy to read” documents or publishing guides and information sheets with large letters.
- Recruitment of disabled persons in the tourism sector has a positive impact on the adaptations and automatically involves a different mind-set, both in terms of structures and tools, but also in terms of a mentality change.
- Involvement of the totality of staff within a structure is important to raise awareness for each type of position. Also, accessibility is often about being innovative and finding new solutions, therefore the involvement of the whole staff might be useful for increasing the possibility of new constructive ideas.

## Annex I: Criteria and justification for best practices

Table x: Criteria and justification for best practice

Criteria	Justification	On track/off track
Relevance	Significant efforts are being made in this area and the regional tourist board is working on cross-	

	<p>impairment and universal design principles. Furthermore, the 2005 legislation is also having a positive impact. Paris, being the most popular tourist destination in the world is working to correspond to both national and international demand. The recently launched Handistrict website demonstrates efforts made in the communication of available services. Various measures are being implemented, however, the objectives have not yet been reached, i.e. the city is not yet accessible for everyone, the Handistrict website does not yet contain sufficient numbers of services etc.</p>	
<b>Transferability</b>	<p>Awareness raising, information and training, as well as cooperation with different associations seem to have been crucial in the development of accessibility services in the Paris region. These factors are transferable to other destinations. Furthermore, the legislative measures at the national level have been helpful.</p>	
<b>Efficient &amp; Effectiveness</b>	<p>The impacts are not measurable in a tangible way. Progress and increased numbers of visitors have been reported by stakeholders interviewed. However, national legislation prohibits to survey and ask people about their disabilities.</p>	
<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>The stakeholders interviewed have reported sustainability in terms of costs. It has been highlighted that in many cases, not so much resources is needed in order to improve accessibility. Regarding the more costly measures, these are only required once, whereas the audience increases in a consistent way. Furthermore, regional funding is available for businesses in the tourism sector aiming to improve their accessibility.</p> <p>In terms of the supply chain, the various phases seem to be covered to some extent. However, there are important gaps in the transport sector, particularly regarding the Parisian metro, and in the catering and accommodation sector.</p>	



<b>Innovation</b>	The tour operator Yoola, has won innovation awards following its entry on the market, providing solely accessible services and group travels. This tour operator, like the regional tourist board, focus importantly on the cooperation with association and between suppliers at different levels of the supply chain. An additional example is the “easy to read” documents developed in cooperation with UNAPEI.	
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