

Creating Accessible Tourism Services

David Coste

This session introduces the fundamentals of creating accessible tourism services — from key vocabulary and data tools to field-tested methodology and practical recommendations. David Coste (Mission Tourisme) shares lessons from real destinations, structured around one core conviction: accessible tourism succeeds when it is led by the tourism office, backed by strong political commitment, and built as a transversal project from the ground up.

Presentation script (introduction, objectives...conclusion)

Introduction

Accessible tourism goes by many names depending on the perspective and era: *social tourism*, *tourism for all*, *inclusive tourism*, and more recently *caring tourism* — a term that captures both sustainability and inclusion in a single concept. These labels reflect the evolution of how the sector has approached the subject, from a charity-based mindset to a transversal, rights-based, and economically relevant approach.

Mission Tourisme is a consultancy specialising in sustainable and inclusive tourism development, supporting territories, tourism offices, and businesses in designing and implementing accessibility strategies.

2. Key Vocabulary

Before going further, here are the essential terms to know:

- **Mobility chain** — the continuity of accessible movement from one point to another. If one link breaks (a broken lift, a missing dropped kerb), the entire journey becomes impossible.
- **Walkability** — the pedestrian-friendliness of an urban environment.
- **G.I.S** — Geographic Information System: maps and spatial data layers for territories.
- **S.I.T.I** — Tourism Information System: the digital infrastructure used to manage and share tourism data.
- **P.O.I** — Point of Interest: any location worth signalling on a map or in a guide.
- **PAVE** — Accessibility master plan for public roads and spaces (French regulatory tool).
- **Local Accessibility Commission** — a consultative body established by French law to monitor and advise on accessibility compliance.
- **RGAA** — National framework for digital accessibility compliance in France.

- **C.N.I.G Standard** — a new regulatory framework for collecting accessibility data in public spaces, aiming to harmonise data collection across territories.

Key concept to visualise: The mobility chain illustration (slide 7) shows a traveller moving through a sequence of environments — street, transport, hotel, beach, services. Accessibility must be guaranteed at every single step, not just some of them.

3. Data Infrastructure — How Information is Organised

Accessible tourism relies heavily on data. Two systems feed into a **central data compilation layer**:

- The **S.I.T.I** (Tourism Information System) aggregates tourism-specific data — accommodation, attractions, services — with their accessibility features.
- The **G.I.S** (Geographic Information System) maps all of this geographically across the territory.

A key open-data resource in France is **aceslibre.beta.gouv.fr**, a government platform that allows anyone — businesses, local authorities, citizens — to contribute and consult accessibility information about any public-facing establishment. The goal: make accessibility data freely available, standardised, and actionable.

4. The "Destination for All" French Label

Destination pour Tous / Destination for All is an official French label awarded to territories that demonstrate a comprehensive commitment to accessibility. It goes beyond individual buildings and covers:

- Transportation and roads
- Public spaces and built environment
- Services and shops
- Personal services — including access to swimming, leisure activities, and daily life

Hérault Tourisme in southern France is a leading example of a territory that has pursued and obtained this label, implementing a holistic approach across the entire destination.

5. Methodology and Stakeholders

Making a destination accessible is not a one-department job. It requires **mobilising a wide ecosystem of partners**, including:

- Town halls and local institutions
- Tourism offices
- Shopkeepers and tourism professionals
- Transport operators (taxi, buses, trains...)
- Press and communication channels
- Disability associations

The methodology follows a structured project cycle: **Meeting → Mobilisation of partners → Toolbox → Innovation**. Each phase builds on the previous one, ensuring that accessibility improvements are co-constructed, locally owned, and sustainable.

6. Key Findings from Field Experience

Based on years of practical work on the ground, several **recurring challenges** consistently emerge:

- Limited awareness of accessible tourism offerings among both visitors and providers
- Fragmented information scattered across multiple databases
- Complex regulatory frameworks, especially in older, pre-existing environments
- Conflicts between accessibility requirements, safety regulations, and urban planning rules
- Accessibility managed in silos rather than through a transversal approach
- Higher costs when accessibility is retrofitted rather than built in from the start
- Disruptions in the mobility chain undermining otherwise good efforts
- Insufficient involvement of people with disabilities in the design process
- A strong demand for guidance and support throughout implementation

Two major conclusions stand out:

1. **Political commitment is the most critical factor.** Without strong, legitimate leadership at the top, accessible tourism projects stall or fail.
2. **Accessibility progresses faster when led by the tourism office,** which has the cross-sector relationships and legitimacy to drive a transversal approach.

7. A Project-Based Methodology: 14 Key Success Factors

A structured, project-based approach is essential. Here are the 14 success factors identified from field experience:

1. Establish governance
2. Ensure legitimate leadership
3. Adopt a project-based approach
4. Ensure a transversal approach
5. Engage the tourism office as the lead coordinator
6. Work on the ground — visit, observe, listen
7. Mobilise professional networks
8. Involve the disability sector at every stage
9. Appoint a local "champion" or ambassador
10. Target both tourists and residents
11. Conduct an inventory of existing accessible assets
12. Start with exemplary public facilities to demonstrate what is possible
13. Ensure overall coherence across the destination
14. Standardise accessibility across all types of disability

8. Final Recommendations

Practical actions to implement:

- Develop a practical toolkit for businesses and local operators
- Support businesses both technically and financially
- Enhance data collection and contribute to open platforms (e.g. acceslibre)
- Communicate effectively — highlight what already works

Three essential realities to accept:

- **Plan for more time than expected.** As Hofstadter's Law reminds us: it always takes longer than you think, even when you account for that.
- **Set realistic targets.** Accessibility projects can quickly become complex and costly — phased approaches are more sustainable than trying to do everything at once.

- **Surround yourself with expertise.** Engaging specialised consultancy firms significantly improves the chances of success.

9. Practical Tool — Hérault Mobility App

www.herault-mobility.fr is a concrete example of a digital tool built to serve accessible tourism at destination scale. The platform provides:

- Tourist and mobility information tailored to different types of disability
- An interactive map of accessible points of interest across the Hérault territory
- Filtering by type of accessibility need
- A user-friendly interface designed for both visitors and residents

It illustrates how the right combination of G.I.S, S.I.T.I, and open data can produce a genuinely useful tool for travellers with disabilities.