

HOW CAN NATURE AREAS AND DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS TAKE ACTION FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE TOURISM TOWARDS DISADVANTAGED GROUPS ?



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I. Introduction

1.1 About the author



As a “regional nature park” officer in France, I am very interested in the role that tourism can play in raising awareness for better nature conservation.

After 10 years as a project manager for Destination Management Organizations in France and in Canada, I joined Montagne de Reims regional nature park’s team in 2020.

Located at the heart of the iconic Champagne region, this park is a combination of agricultural, wine-growing and forest landscapes, forming its “landscape triptych”. Since 1976, Montagne de Reims regional nature park has gathered 65 municipalities around a shared ambition: to preserve and enhance the rich cultural and natural heritage of the area.



My role for the park is to carry out sustainable tourism projects with local stakeholders, allowing visitors to have access to exceptional landscapes and fragile nature, while at the same time, reducing their impact on the environment.

It can be challenging at times, since bringing people to nature can also mean more pressure. However, I will explain further in this report how a better access to nature and to sustainable tourism for all, could help meet environmental challenges we are facing today.

1.2 Topic of research

In France, it is estimated that at least 1 person out of 3 never goes on a holiday¹. Last data shared by the Research Center for the Study and Observation of Living Conditions (CRÉDOC) even suggests that figure is actually 40% of the population. In addition, monitoring and studies show very little change in the vacation departure rate over the last 40 years, and statistics underline this persistent inequity in other European countries such as UK or Belgium².

While we could sometimes think that going on a holiday is now very common, this data shows that almost half of the people are still deprived of an opportunity to disconnect from everyday life by exploring new landscapes, and to reconnect with themselves or to strengthen their ties with their family within the beneficial framework of a vacation outside of home. Yet, destination management organizations (DMOs) seem to keep focusing their efforts on the “60%” who already have access to vacations, with projects or marketing mainly oriented towards these audiences. Too little is being done to create a more inclusive tourism and to reduce inequalities by addressing the share of people who, at the moment, do not go on vacation.



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My first research and enquiries sent to parks in Europe while preparing my application for the Alfred Toepfer Natural Heritage Scholarship seemed to show that, even among protected areas who are engaged in sustainable tourism for many years, we have not always paid enough attention on people with limited budget nor seen them as

¹ Here, “a holiday” refers to a stay of at least 4 nights away from home, for non-work-related reasons. This can mean a wide range of vacations, from a week visiting a relative to four weeks abroad.

² Source : Statista (UK) and Statbel (Belgium).

³ The environmental, economic and social components of sustainability (Alamy Image).

new potential visitors. There is a need for more attention to the « social » pillar of sustainable tourism, even among nature areas' strategies.

A more social and inclusive sustainable tourism should not be limited to better accessibility for people with disabilities - although it is just as important and also deserves more attention. It should also allow people with limited budgets, or people with other psychological or cultural barriers, to access protected areas for leisure and tourism in order to benefit from the well-being that it can bring. We know that vacations play an important role in maintaining optimal physical and mental balance. And we can also assume that by creating time and space for people to reconnect with their environment, their awareness of nature conservation will be heightened.

This is the theme I will explore in this report. **How can nature areas or DMOs participate in creating a more inclusive sustainable tourism, accessible to a wider range of population, such as people with small budgets and/or cultural barriers that prevent them from traveling ?** Can sustainable tourism and the discovery of protected areas become more accessible for all ? How can tourism professionals take action towards these goals ?



Very often in this report, the focus will be on local tourism and access to nature, rather than “travel and vacation” as it can be considered in the collective imagination. This does not suggest that people with limited budgets deserve less than people who travel farther, longer or more often. But developing new habits requires experimentation : therefore, “local tourism” or access to short outings and leisure activities in nature, can be seen as first steps towards a more inclusive tourism. This is why I included many examples of nature areas' projects focusing on the possibility for local underserved groups to “escape daily routine”, whether it is tourism in the strict sense of the word, or leisure and access to nature over short periods of time.

1.3 Research methodology and objectives



This research had been possible thanks to the support of the Alfred Toepfer Natural Heritage Scholarship, in partnership with EUROPARC. Since 2007, the Alfred Toepfer Foundation annually awards 3 young professionals working in nature areas across Europe, allowing them to take one or several study visits to learn more about a topic they proposed. In October 2023, I was lucky to be awarded with this scholarship in order to work on inclusive tourism in 2024.



The work carried out for this research about inclusive tourism consisted in the following steps :

- **Research for examples** of nature areas having done projects for a more inclusive tourism or access to nature towards underserved groups. This “call for initiatives”, sent by e-mail to 30-40 nature areas in 2023, led to 12 answers, of which 3 were initiatives shared. The rest were answers from Parks indicating that nothing had been done yet in their area, but that they were very interested in finding examples and sources of inspiration on such a topic.
- **Study visits and in-person meetings** have been planned in 2024 with people representing the 3 areas having answered positively. Out of these 3 visits initially planned, 2 were completed (the last visit having been cancelled for personal reasons) and I reached these destinations by train. The aim of these visits was to discover areas where projects are being carried out about inclusive tourism, with different realities and levels of progress. A study visit provides direct contact with professionals working in another region, and being on site brings a global and inspiring vision. It has been an important added value for this research.
- **Online meetings** with several people working for other nature areas, destination management organizations, or non-profit organizations, were also conducted (2023-2024). Since it was not possible to make a study visit for each initiative discovered, these online meetings were a solution to allow these projects to enrich my research.

- At the same time, work was carried out to challenge the sense and consistency of this project, in the light of major environmental issues and social changes. **Discussions with experts of “inclusive tourism”** helped me raise questions about some of my initial hypotheses, and allowed me to re-define certain terms used for this research. For example, I took part in a symposium “Everyone on vacation” organized in June 2024 by “Vacances Ouvertes” in Lens (France), which was very inspiring for this research, as I will explain later in this report.

This is not an academic research and my methodology was adapted to the context in which it was carried out. Indeed, being employed full-time by Montagne de Reims regional nature park (PNRMR) as a sustainable tourism project manager, my time is dedicated to the projects I have to carry out within this position. Thus, most of the work for this scholarship had been done on my personal time. However, one study visit took place during my working time for the park, whose management recognizes the value of this research through European cooperation.

The image below summarizes the geographical location of the initiatives studied and the discussions held.

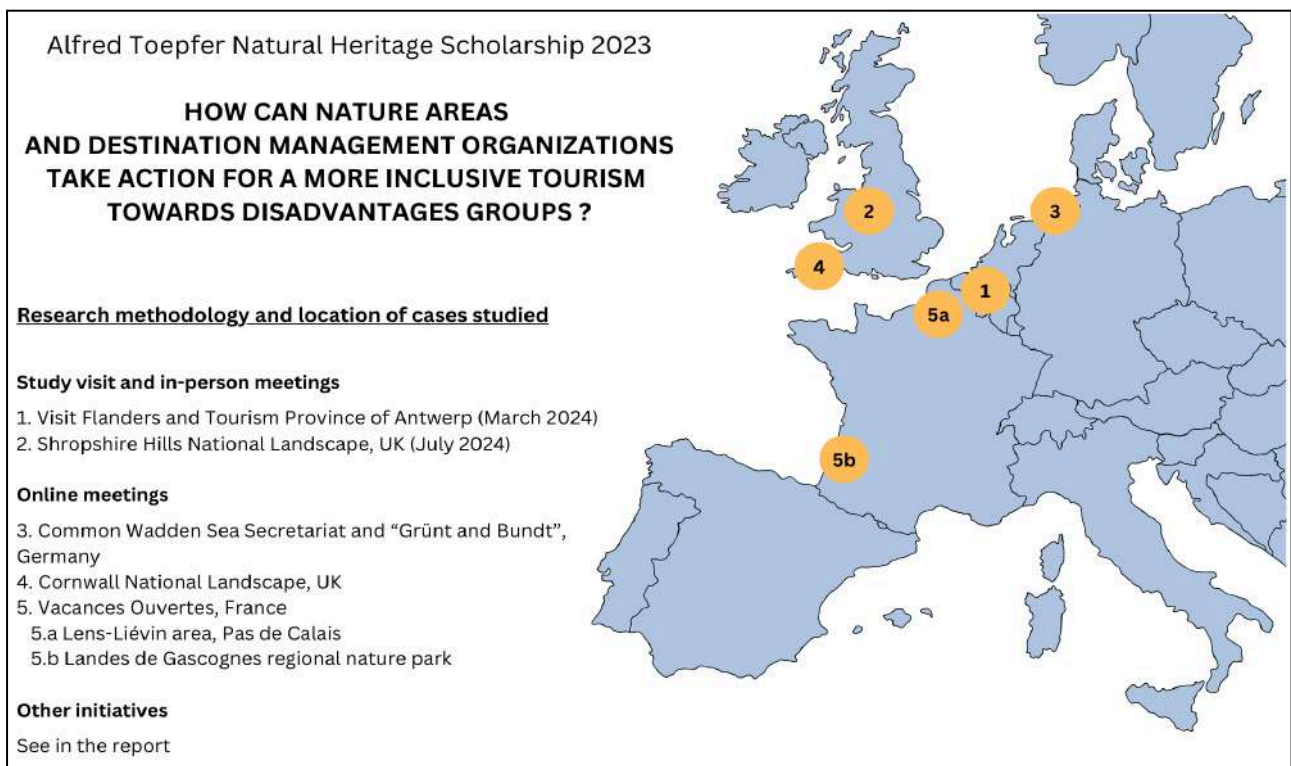


Figure 1. Location of cases studied for this research

With this project, my ambition is **to share inspirational initiatives** on how to develop a more inclusive tourism towards people with limited budgets or underserved groups in general. Because, as I noticed when looking for examples of projects carried out directly by nature areas or DMOs, very few examples exist. Yet it is necessary to show that these organizations can actually take action : sharing concrete examples and good practices can be a way to encourage the development of initiatives. **This is the aim of this report's part III (*Examples of actions carried out by nature areas and/or DMOs*).**

Finally, I have deliberately chosen to keep this report as simple and short as possible, in order to maximize its chances of being read by as many people as possible. **In this respect, section IV of this report (*Key elements for an inclusive tourism approach*) can also be read separately, for readers wishing to get to the point more quickly.**

II. Contextualisation and concept definitions

2.1 Access to holidays for all in a challenging environmental context : what consistency ?

The right to have access to rest and leisure has been recognized a long time ago. In 1948, in its article 24, the Universal Declaration for Human Rights stated that *“Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay”*. At the time, access to vacations as we know it today might not have been precisely what the United Nations intended to designate. However, in most of our vacations, “rest and leisure” are still central notions. In 2002, a group of researchers were indeed still defining tourism through *“3 main practices”* : rest, discovery, and play (Equipe MIT, 2002).

So how is it that I have been wondering, as soon as I started this research, if it was acceptable to wish for a better access to tourism for all ? Despite the evidence that a fairer society requires access to the same rights for all, more people traveling towards nature areas also raises questions about a possible increased pressure on the environment. Recreational development in protected areas can bring impacts such as more carbon footprint linked to transports, wildlife disturbance in nature, or impact on soils. These are just some examples of issues one can think of when working for a Park, so these were not surprising thoughts and it was important to address this topic.

There are actually very good reasons to support access to holidays and leisure in nature areas for everyone, even in a challenging environmental context. **First, it would be condescending to think that underserved groups should “compensate” for other individuals’ impact on the environment, by depriving themselves of the same tourism and leisure practices.** This has been a recurring theme in the media over the past few years: mass tourism is said to be responsible for all the problems encountered in touristic destinations, even though it might sometimes be the only form of tourism accessible to low-budget travellers (because mass tourism allows to reduce prices). While evidence is strong that the richest minority of society actually have a disproportionately larger environmental footprint.

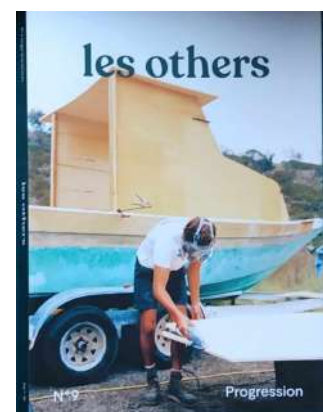
Secondly, social justice is a key aspect for a successful climate transition. As Greenpeace underlines, “climate justice and social justice are two sides of the same coin”. The climate crisis increases inequalities between individuals because of its impacts on the environment but also on people, economic and health issues. Therefore, climate change primarily affects underserved groups.



(Personal sketch - inspired from the real life)

As emphasized by the sociologist Rodolphe Christin, “*Tourism is the luxury of a minority whose impact affects a majority*” (Christin R, Anti-tourism manual, 2017). It would therefore be very unfair for holidays and tourism to stay a privilege restricted to certain social groups. Today, among the most leading tourism researchers, voices are being heard to advocate for an access to vacations for all. Renowned Emeritus Professor Rémy Knafou even thinks that “*Social tourism must become an objective of national interest*”. The french independent media for adventure seekers and outdoors lovers “*Les Others*” also remind us of the following :

“In his groundbreaking 2005 book, ‘Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder’, Richard Louv explores the fundamental role of nature in children's development. His research, endorsed by many of his colleagues, highlights the following results: nature stimulates imagination and creativity, improves health and cognitive abilities, and protects against stress and depression. In short, the benefits of outdoor education are



endless. Despite this evidence, too many children grow up between four walls, their eyes glued to screens. Three out of four spend less than five minutes a day outdoors. We call them the indoor generation. For parents living in cities, this is a distressing fact, but solutions are hard to find.” (Les Others, Vol.9 “Progression”, 2019)

This reminds us how disconnected from nature we can all be today. Children are no exception : our lifestyles are very indoorsy (maybe even more as adults). While we are facing a major challenge in preserving the environment, biodiversity and landscapes that surround us, we have never been as disconnected from nature as we are today. Yet, as Baba Dioum (Senegalese environmentalist) famously stated : ***“In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught”***. (Baba Dioum, 1968)

A more inclusive access to holidays for all could allow more people to connect with their environment, since vacations often imply discovering new landscapes and spending more time outdoors (even in nature areas sometimes). Of course, like all human activities, tourism has a carbon footprint. But more vacationers does not necessarily mean more “long-distance travels” or “flights”, because fortunately, being able to spend a vacation somewhere does not always require flying or going very far (it can, but it is not mandatory). **Like all climate issues, the challenge is not to treasure a privilege among a small number of people⁴ but to seek greater fairness between individuals, and more responsible and sustainable practices by everyone.** In this regard, the ball is in the court of those who already have access to vacations. Rémy Knafou calls this the “4th tourism revolution”, which, according to him, will depend on *“tourists’ ability to free themselves from the logic of a system that is incompatible with sustainability goals”*.

Now that we discussed how inclusive tourism could be beneficial in tackling environmental challenges by increasing environmental education and awareness, it is important to also emphasize the many other benefits that vacations can bring to individuals. Holidays can help break the isolation and loneliness of certain groups of individuals, or can contribute to the

⁴ It is estimated that only 10% of the world's population flies.

good state of mental health and well-being within a society, for example. From a more global point of view, I also particularly liked the following testimony shared by a social worker during the conference “Everyone on holidays, all in solidarity”, an event organized by local authorities and the non-profit organization “Vacances Ouvertes” which took place in Lens (France) in June 2024 :

“Interacting with people who are preparing their first vacation is a wonderful tool to work on the notion of citizenship. As social workers, it allows us to talk about health, insurances, family relationships, rights - and therefore helps us raise the awareness and use of social aids by people concerned... But above all, for underserved groups, it gives the right to dream. While focusing on this positive and enlightening project that creates dialogue, they can dream of something which is both nice - and possible !”.



“Everyone on holidays, all in solidarity” conference, Lens (France), June 2024

Several associations, non-profit organizations, and groups of people are taking action to improve access to vacations and leisure activities for all. For example, “Vacances Ouvertes”, the organizer of the conference mentioned above (which we are going to present later in this report), is very committed to help disadvantaged groups set off on their “first vacations project”. On another level, in England, a “Black Girls Hike” movement has formed, in order to promote better access to hiking for black girls who face social barriers or lack of acculturation towards exploring the outdoors through hiking. **I think that, as nature areas or Destination Management Organizations, it is now our responsibility to support these initiatives and to show that we also want to take action towards a more inclusive tourism and access to holidays for all, in order to reach all the benefits described here.**

2.2 Finding the right words to talk about inclusive tourism towards people with limited budget

Another challenge I encountered when starting this project was to find the right words to describe my topic and objectives.

First, to define this research's target groups, I started by talking about "economically disadvantaged people". I then noticed that various other terms were used by different players, such as "under-served groups" or "minorities". However, without meaning to, all these terms - including my initial terminology - can be stigmatizing for those who are concerned. For Marc Pili, official delegate for the non-profit organization "Vacances Ouvertes", the economic aspect is often "the tree that hides the forest". He rightly points out that if money was the only problem, holidays non-departure rate would probably be much lower. In France, the rate of the population living in extreme poverty is around 14%⁵, while as we saw earlier, around 40% never goes on a holiday.

This suggests that when diving into the topic of access to tourism and holidays for all, the financial aspect cannot be the only prism adopted. Behind financial difficulties, other aspects are also important bottlenecks to overcome, such as cultural and psychological barriers, and lack of acculturation and habit to prepare for a holiday.

On another level, Marc Pili also points out that using the terms above ("disadvantaged groups", "minorities",...) tends to systematically remind individuals of their social condition. **As a non-profit organization who helps people and destinations build inclusive tourism projects, "Vacances Ouvertes" likes to use the expression "vacanciers néophytes", which could be translated as "novice vacationers".** In another example, in Belgium, "Iedereen Verdient Vakanties" is a governmental program linked to Tourism Flanders, whose name means "**Everyone deserves holidays**". These are both nice and non-stigmatizing ways to express these two organizations' missions. I will therefore try to use these terms in my report sometimes, such as "**potential novice vacationers**" ("potential" because the target

⁵ INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies in France).

groups my research is focusing on are assumed not to be involved yet in tourism or leisure practices).

It is also important to note that looking for solutions for a more inclusive access to tourism and leisure can lead to an interest for various groups of individuals. For example, while the aim of my research was not to focus on physical barriers such as those related to disabilities (because my assumption was that these situations imply solutions of a different kind), my subject inevitably led me there in certain respects. It is indeed common for people suffering from one form of inequality to face other forms of inequalities. As an example, people with disabilities are more likely to be part of the individuals facing budgetary difficulties on a daily basis (this can be explained because of specific and costly needs in terms of equipment or housing, or because of more barriers to overcome to access certain jobs, etc). A study carried out in 2018 by the Office for National Statistics in England was highlighting significant pay disparities between disabled and non-disabled people living in the same areas, for example.⁶ **This illustrates well the concept of intersectionality, suggesting that inequalities are often overlapping and interconnected, and adding more discrimination or disadvantage for the individuals concerned.**

In a report⁷ commissioned by Shropshire Hills National Landscape (UK) and produced by the local consultant Curious Birds / Kate Garner, people known for - or believed to - having barriers for leisure or activities in nature are listed as :

- “• *People who are elderly*
- *People who are young*
- *People living with poor mental or physical health*
- *People living with complex disabilities*
- *People living with neurodiversity*
- *People from minority ethnic backgrounds*
- *People living on low incomes*



⁶ Office for National Statistics, 2018.

⁷ A report on the delivery of a brief for research and recommendations into improving engagement with under-served groups in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (2023)

- *People without access to a car or easy access to public transport*
- *People who are socially isolated*
- *People experiencing barriers because of their religion*
- *People experiencing barriers because of their sexuality*
- *People experiencing barriers because of their gender*
- *People experiencing barriers because of their body shape”*

This list may not be exhaustive but already gives a good overview of different situations in which people can face difficulties in accessing leisure, tourism and holidays. I had a chance to discuss this topic during my study visit in Shropshire Hills National Landscape with Rick Shaw, Environmental Community Liaison Officer, and Diana West, Health Improvement Practitioner for Healthy and Active Communities at Telford & Wrekin Council. For them, one challenge is to encourage all residents to use the 300 acres of open nature accessible in the city. Although Telford has been named “Tree City of the World” in 2023 by the United Nations, there are still inequalities in green spaces access and outdoor exercise between different groups of people.



Dothill Local Nature Reserve in Telford

The theme of leisure practices in nature according to different ethnic groups actually came up quite a few times in my discussions with Diana West and Rick Shaw, as well as with several other people I met during this study visit in Shropshire Hills National Landscape. It should be underlined here that such an approach is very interesting but could not be applied everywhere. For example, ethnic statistics are banned by law in France⁸. It is a topic of much

⁸ The law of January 6th 1978 stipulates that “it is forbidden to collect personal data revealing the racial or ethnic origins, political, philosophical or religious opinions or trade-union membership of individuals (...)”.

debate (some believe that such categorization could lead to dangerous aberrations, when others consider that this is equivalent to denying the existence of inequalities) ; but in any case, until now, the absence of statistics of this kind in France seems to make it difficult to tackle certain issues.

To conclude this section about the choice of words to best express the targets and objectives of this research, it is also important to note that different terms can be used to describe the approach and strategy one can adopt in order to develop a broader access to tourism and leisure. I personally like the term “inclusive tourism” because it seems to me that it pinpoints more clearly what is missing right now (thanks to the term “inclusive”). But whether we are talking about inclusive tourism, accessible tourism, or tourism for all, we all share the same goal.

III. Examples of actions carried out by (or with) nature areas and Destination Management Organizations

My work consisted in looking for strategies and projects which can be implemented for a more inclusive tourism towards potential new visitors. As shown with the map in part 1.3, I explored this topic through several examples located in different areas in Europe. The cases presented below are the result of this research and exchange.

3.1 Shropshire Hills National Landscape

Shropshire Hills National Landscape is part of the formerly known “Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty” network in the UK. Located close to the Welsh borders and covering a quarter of Shropshire (802 square kilometers), this National Landscape is a - mostly - rural area. Its landscapes are composed of hills and valleys with “varied geology, wildlife of uplands and lowlands, and heritage of ancient hillforts and villages to mining relics”⁹.



Shropshire Hills National Landscape in England. Map from national-landscapes.org.uk

Shropshire Hills National Landscape is awarded with the “European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas” (the renewal process had been completed in 2024). Walking and cycling are part of the most popular outdoor activities possible (among many others),

⁹ Source : national-landscapes.org.uk

and several popular walks allow easy access to beautiful views over rolling landscapes in quiet and uncrowded surroundings.



During my study visit in this area, I had the chance to meet and spend time with several people representing different organizations and projects. This part presents an overview of projects implemented in this area, in relation with the topic of inclusive tourism.

Projects carried out by Shropshire Hills National Landscape

1. Shropshire Hills National Landscape commissioned a report on “*Recommendations into improving engagement with under-served groups in the Shropshire Hills National Landscape*”¹⁰. The goal of this report was for Shropshire Hills National Landscape’s team to get relevant recommendations on what could be their role, and the role of other players in the area, for the development of more inclusive engagement and activities. This report aimed to raise their understanding of under-served groups, to improve their skills and confidence to talk about this topic, and to increase participation and diversity within the projects carried out. Shropshire Hills National Landscape’s manager Phil Holden sees the theme of inclusivity as a cross-cutting topic, which should be included in all projects runned by the team, no matter who the colleague in charge is. According to him, “actions for

¹⁰ Improving engagement in the Shropshire Hills AONB, Curious Birds, April 2023

inclusion in any area will support more inclusivity in other projects, which makes inclusive tourism a topic where a holistic approach is needed”.

2. Shropshire Hills National Landscape runs a shuttle service every year during 30 to 40 days during summer. A bus leaves from Church Stretton train station and makes several stops which allow people to get to some main spots of Shropshire Hills. The National Landscape is the direct provider of this service which requires a lot of work from the team to organize. The service is well used but most passengers are residents who seem to use this shuttle service for logistical reasons rather than for tourism and leisure. However, it could be a good opportunity to support better and easier access to tourism and leisure for “potential new vacationers” in this area.

3. Shropshire Hills National Landscape coordinates a “Young Rangers” program, which offers young people (aged 12-16) opportunities for conservation, learning and adventure in the great outdoors. A monthly activity is possible, as well as additional sessions during school holidays. As described on Shropshire Hills National Landscape’s website, *“Projects are themed on nature restoration, looking after heritage sites, wildlife surveys, rights of way work and outdoor skills like navigation and bushcraft”*. All activities are free and do not require expertise, since they are supervised by qualified and experienced people. Joe Penfold, **Engagement Ranger** for Shropshire Hills National Landscape, explains that for some of the teenagers involved, this program is sometimes the only (or one of the few) opportunities they have to spend time outdoors. In my opinion, it makes it a good example of how a protected area can take action for a more inclusive tourism and leisure in the outdoors: allowing young people to spend time together in nature, for meaningful activities, prepares them to become adults who are better connected to their environment, and who will be able or inclined to plan recreational outings in the future.

It should be noted that even if the Young rangers program exists since 2020 in Shropshire Hills National Landscape, it’s only since January 2024 that Joe Penfold’s position has evolved into **“Engagement Ranger”**. He continues to coordinate this program but now also works more closely with local partners in order to provide greater physical and intellectual access to the Shropshire Hills. In addition, a third area he is now in charge of is **to develop new**

outreach and engagement work with underserved communities. Joe Penfold works in collaboration with local organizations such as Telford Sight Loss, Shropshire Supports Refugees, and Parkinson's UK. Initiatives are being carried out for a more inclusive access to the Shropshire Hills to these communities through activities including walks, talks, and crafts. During the first year at this new position, Joe Penfold organized or helped set up 20 events which were attended by 185 people in total.

This work has helped implement recommendations from the report mentioned above (in point 1) in order to improve equality, diversity, and inclusion in the Shropshire Hills National Landscape. Although engagement activities were just part of the many avenues explored in the report, these are concrete actions which allow more collaboration between local partners about inclusivity in the outdoors. It also provides valuable insights into the needs of different groups with which links are being developed.

4. Shropshire Hills National Landscape is committed to the development of inclusive tourism for people with disabilities. For example, as an Engagement Ranger, Joe Penfold sometimes works with groups from “Shropshire Wild Teams”, a Shropshire Council volunteering project which allows adults with mental illnesses to take part in nature restoration activities. On another level, Shropshire Hills National Landscape’s team is sometimes asked to share their expertise on the development of inclusive trails or infrastructures, through Nigel McDonald, Sustainable Tourism Officer, and Joe Penfold, Engagement Ranger. Their understanding of people’s needs, and their knowledge of successful projects and infrastructures developed in the region, allow them to be of good advice for these topics.



Picture 1. Shropshire Hills National Landscape’s team exchanging ideas with farmers willing to make some improvements to a plot of land they own, in order to make the path more accessible for all.

Pictures 2&3. The Striperstones National Nature Reserve All-ability Trail offers a short route along a flat tarmac path suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs. There are resting places approximately every 50 metres. Paved

areas indicate the presence of these resting and interpretation stops, for visitors with impaired vision to notice when they're near one of these places.

Through these examples, Shropshire Hills National Landscape's team generously shared with me a wide variety of themes that could be related to inclusive tourism in one way or another. It allowed me to see how an addition of projects, dealing with various themes not always directly related to tourism, could play a role in facilitating access to nature and outdoor recreational activities for different target groups. It can be a consistent vision and efficient approach for a protected area to play a role in "tourism access for all".

Projects carried out by local partners

My study visit was also an opportunity for the National Landscape's team to connect with local stakeholders involved in inclusive access to tourism and leisure in nature. In this regard, I also had the opportunity to visit and know more about the following projects located in Shropshire Hills National Landscape

1. Telford and Wrekin Council



Telford and Wrekin Council covers the town of Telford and surrounding countryside, including a small part of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape at the Wrekin. The Council has developed an inspiring strategy to improve the access and use of nature, among all communities who live in the area.

As already mentioned in a previous part of this report, I met with Rick Shaw, **Environmental Community Liaison Officer**, and Diana West, **"Healthy and active communities" Officer**. Two volunteers from the Dothill Local Nature Reserve were also present to show their work in the reserve, a beautiful and accessible nature area located at the heart of the city. As part of the aspects shown to highlight the inclusive approach of this nature reserve's management plan, the volunteers underlined that a very simple signage and a "bench to bench" logic were important when creating trails (to help people find their way around

easily and rest regularly along the way - important aspects when dealing with communities who are not used to do recreational outdoor activities).

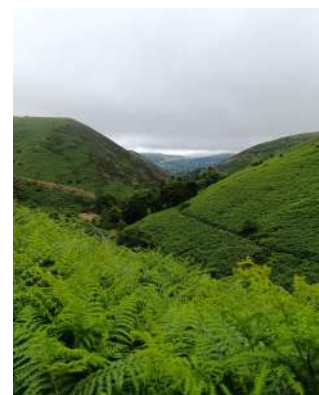


Dothill Local Nature Reserve

Telford and Wrekin Council is engaged in reducing inequalities in access to nature, through activities with groups of volunteers or schools. Working with schools allows the Council to reach many different social and ethnic groups, and helps children develop a sense of belonging and attachment to their environment from an early age. In the long-term, this may also reduce the risk of vandalism in these spaces designed for their own well-being. Finally, the city is keenly aware of the benefits that nature can bring in terms of well-being, and sees this as a public health topic.

2. Carding Mill Valley

National Trust's¹¹ site **Carding Mill Valley** is one of Shropshire Hills National Landscape's tourism "honeypots". On National Trust's website, it is described with the following words: *"Covering as much as 2,000 hectares (4,942 acres) of heather-covered hills with*



¹¹ National Trust is a very popular British non-profit association, founded to preserve and enhance monuments and nature sites of great interest.

stunning views of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape and the Welsh hills, this is an important place for wildlife, geology and archaeology.

There are paths for walking, cycling and horse riding, you can even drive to the top of the hill to take in the views. In Carding Mill Valley there are excellent visitor facilities including a tea-room, toilets and car parking.

In Carding Mill Valley you can play in the stream, watch birds from the hide, pond dip and relax with a picnic; or you can simply use the Valley as your base for the day and head on up the hill for an adventure. You don't have to venture far out of the Valley to find your own piece of solitude on the Long Mynd.”¹²



Carding Mill Valley on The Long Mynd

Tom Blackwell, **Visitor Operations & Experience Manager**, explains that Carding Mill Valley is the most important National Trust’s site in terms of number of schoolchildren attracted. Schools bring 45 000 children to Carding Mill Valley every year. Two people in the team are in charge of these activities, through the coordination of 40 volunteers involved. It is interesting to note that thanks to a sponsorship from Starling Bank, 14 days are offered to host groups of children from 8 public schools of the Birmingham area, where children come from various social groups and communities (including under-served groups).

Carding Mill Valley offers **facilities** such as an information desk, a tea room, an ice cream shop, toilets,... These are important aspects to reassure people who are not used to visiting nature areas. Parking is charged, but is much cheaper than in other National Trust’s sites.

In 2023, The National Trust carried out a **research called “Everyone welcomed in the outdoors”**, based on six nature sites across the Midlands (including Carding Mill Valley). It

¹² www.nationaltrust.org.uk

allowed site managers to better understand the motivations and needs of different communities, including under-served groups. **A working group** has been created after this study, and **a training plan** has been developed for National Trust’s teams to better adapt to different audiences. Yet, Tom Blackwell underlines that if we want to take everyone's needs into consideration, a variety of profiles are also needed in the teams that manage nature areas.

To conclude, the strategy adopted at Carding Mill Valley in order to be as inclusive as possible, is also to simplify everything that can be simplified. For example, Tom Blackwell cites trails signage, or even map simplification (even if it means restricting printed maps to a small and specific area of the site).

3. Long Mynd Adventure Camp

Also located in Shropshire Hills National Landscape, **Long Mynd Adventure Camp** is a charity run campsite for youth groups. It was created in the 1950s by Bill and Hetty Williams, in order to give “city boys” their first experience of the countryside. The aim of the Camp is described as the following :

“The objects of the Charitable Incorporated Organisation (the CIO) are to provide or assist in the provision of facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation or other leisure time occupation of young people who have the need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disability, financial hardship or social circumstances with the object of improving their conditions of life.”¹³



Long Mynd Adventure Camp and his co-founder Bill Williams

¹³ Long Mynd Adventure Camp Aims document.

Thanks to a grassy field where tents can be put up, a main building where groups can cook and share time, and small cabins offering 39 beds, this camp now hosts about 40 groups of young people each year from March to October. Local schools or communities use the Camp for overnight or longer stays, offering a privileged contact in the heart of nature thanks to the site's very simple facilities. The Camp is run by volunteers, and only charges groups who can afford it (in which case the price remains low : £10 per person per night).

During my visit, we were able to meet a teacher from a class of students with mental illnesses, who organizes a stay at this camp every year. He told us how much this trip means to the students, both in preparation, during and after the trip. The simple act of “preparing a picnic”, or “packing to sleep away from home”, is a source of learning for some students who rarely leave home.

Conclusions to my study visit in Shropshire Hills National Landscape

In addition to these visits and interviews with inspiring people, I also had the chance to discover other areas which are important parts of local tourism in Shropshire. Some of these places are free to visit, such as **“The Wrekin”** (of which this picture was taken from the summit), or the **Shropshire Hills Discovery Center** in Craven Arms (partly free, except for the exhibition). Not all places I visited can be listed here, but all were of great interest to better understand local tourism and the aspects that the National Landscape’s team identifies as opportunities to promote and develop a more inclusive tourism.



One of the specificities I've noticed in England is **the important role played by charities and groups of volunteers to finance and manage sites which provide access to vacations for all.** In addition, despite a complicated economic context, **mental health issues seem to be well taken into consideration in British public policy,** which creates a favorable context to address the need for everyone to be connected to nature.

3.2 Cornwall National Landscape

Cornwall National Landscape is located on the south west coast of England, and composed of 12 different sections which include 10 coastal areas. It is a very popular destination for tourism and secondary residences. Around 5 million tourists visit Cornwall each year, and the tourism industry supports one in five jobs in the region. It creates an important challenge for the National Landscape and the Destination Management Organization, to manage visitor flows for a more sustainable tourism.



Cornwall National Landscape: map from national-landscapes.org.uk and screenshot from cornwall-landscape.org

A few years ago, Cornwall National Landscape commissioned a **research development project** to identify solutions for a more inclusive access to its landscapes. The vision for this report was to take a closer look at “under-served groups” : for example individuals with low income backgrounds, different ethnic groups, or people with disabilities. The study examined the obstacles which can be encountered by these individuals, be they economic, cultural or physical.

Indeed, **the low-budget issue almost never stands alone**, and even when it does, it might not be the only reason why people would not have access to tourism and leisure. As an example of that, Melodie Manners, Business Development Officer for Cornwall National Landscape, shares that some of Cornwall’s residents have never been to the sea while they only live a few kilometers away from the coast. It confirms that for people who never had the chance to go on a holiday or do recreational activities, **the economic barrier is not the only one** - even when they live on a small budget. Other physical barriers can prevent them

from traveling, and psychological brakes or lack of habit and acculturation (which are soft barriers) also seem to be very important aspects among some social groups.

From this study, Cornwall National Landscape is now developing an **“inclusive toolkit”** sharing guidelines and advice on how to manage more inclusive projects. It aims at being a practical tool and “checklist” for the National Landscape’s team for everything they work on, from nature preservation projects to the organization of events. At least 20 local partners that Cornwall National Landscape is used to work with, are now willing to adopt this more inclusive vision in their projects.

Here are a few ideas Melodie Manners shared with me, from her experience of being involved in discussions around this research project and the creation of an inclusive toolkit:

- It is important to associate partners and local organizations who are already working with and talking to “disadvantaged groups”, in order to use their experience and expertise, and to include them in any project seeking more inclusivity.
- We should pay more attention to the “5 senses” inside of projects we develop in protected areas or other destinations. To offer multisensory activities (during an event or on a discovery trail, for example) helps being more inclusive.
- When aiming at a more inclusive tourism, transport is a very important “hard barrier” which must be addressed.

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Besides committing to a more inclusive access to landscapes, another reason why Cornwall National Landscape developed this research project and toolkit is that getting engagement from people is a challenge today. By developing this



vision where local organizations pay more attention to being inclusive towards everyone, the

¹⁴ Picture from project’s website : cornwall-landscape.org/project/a-monumental-improvement

National Landscape's team is also looking for more engagement from a greater number and diversity of people, for important causes and projects in the region. This is also why **Cornwall National Landscape launched a five years project called "Monumental Improvement"**, which started in 2020. This initiative involves 40 Scheduled Monuments across Cornwall, classified as vulnerable. The project aims to tackle the current limited understanding of these monuments as sites of national significance.

In this context, engagement activities have been organized around these monuments, such as wellbeing sessions (yoga, forest bathing, active cycling and more), in the hope that a wider variety of people would therefore participate. **The "Monumental Improvement" project's goal is to ensure that Scheduled Monuments in Cornwall are "better identified, supported and enjoyed by a wide range of people"**, as described on the project's website.

3.3 Tourism Flanders and Tourism Province of Antwerp

In Belgium, the Flanders region has a long history with social tourism. Carine Geboers, Network Officer for a governmental program called “Iedereen Verdient Vakantie” (Everyone Deserves Holidays) at Tourism Flanders, explains that the topic of access to holidays emerged in the 1930s when paid holidays became widespread but people had nowhere to go on vacation. Today, she coordinates a **network of offices called “Rap op Stap”¹⁵** across Flanders.



“Iedereen Verdient Vakantie” logo, and an example of Rap op Stap agency’s logo

Rap op Stap offices’ role is to help people with limited budgets to organize their holidays or leisure activities. This network seems to be a one-of-a-kind example in Europe. These travel agencies are specially dedicated to low-income people, and exist in many municipalities across Flanders. There are now 142 “Rap op Stap” offices who give access to leisure and tourism, mostly through help and time that they share to “make things easy” for people who are not used to preparing a holiday. No appointment is needed, and the people helping in these offices are often volunteers.

Most Rap op Stap agencies are located within social services’ offices, because at the beginning of the project, it proved to be the best way to attract the target audience for this new service. To encourage their development, Rap op Stap agencies receive a small annual subsidy (2000€). They must be open at least one day a week, and they also commit to offer a group excursion at least once a year (the reason for this rule is that it is easier for holiday “first timers” to fit in with a group outing than to plan their first vacation as a single person or single family).

¹⁵ Rap op Stap can be translated as “Fast on the move” but also means “on holidays” in Flemish.

When being asked about the reasons she identifies for Flanders to support such a committed policy for tourism access towards potential new vacationers, Carine Geboers shares the historical background mentioned above, but also talks about **serendipity**.¹⁶ She thinks that encouraging holidays and leisure access for all has proven



to be beneficial in many ways. Allowing everyone to go on a holiday is **empowering for individuals, good for mental and physical health, self-confidence, self-image, and engagement in society**. It could, for example, have a very positive effect on “getting back to work” - a theme to which politicians are often very sensitive. Carine Geboers also talks about “learning loss” - which is what happens if children have no activity at all during summer school holidays -, versus “**learning gain**” - in this case being what one can learn from a first holiday experience.¹⁷

Therefore, the topic of “holidays for all” quickly goes beyond the prism of tourism, and can allow a region to work on many different aspects for a healthier society. Once measures are taken to support a more inclusive access to tourism and recreational activities, most of the time, no one wants to take them back.

Other projects have been developed by Tourism Flanders and “Iedereen Verdient Vakantie”. For example, a card called “Skilled to go on a holiday” has been created, which sums up tips on how to prepare for a vacation. Also, having a network of tourism stakeholders and Rap op Stap agencies involved allows to share experience and good practices between partners. An annual congress is organized and is often an opportunity to get interesting feedback on projects done. Recent testimonials from “first-time vacationers”, for example, have provided a better understanding of **stress management** and **expectations management** for individuals who are going on a holiday for the first time. Some expectations might be very different from the reality (for example, when families are expecting to be able to cook

¹⁶ According to Wikipedia, “Serendipity is the act of making an unexpected discovery by chance, of greater importance or interest than the object of one's initial research, which then proves fruitful.”

¹⁷ Picture : Meeting with Carine Geboers (on the right) and Larisa Idiatulina (on the left).

exactly as they do at home). Likewise, some unexpected situations can create stress, such as not having budgeted enough for certain daily “extras” during a vacation (for example buying the kids an ice cream they ask for). **It is not guaranteed that a “first holiday” will always be a source of complete satisfaction for new vacationers.**

Tourism Flanders collaborates closely with the Province of Antwerp, whose Destination Management Organization is also involved in inclusive tourism. Larisa Idiatulina is in charge of a “Threshold-free tourism project” at **Tourism Province of Antwerp (ATP)**. In 2022, ATP organized a solidarity campaign linked to “De Warmste week”, a national annual campaign collecting donations for a good cause.



Being in the front line for working with stakeholders and businesses on a daily basis, ATP staff collected vouchers for tourism and leisure activities (it could be “big or small”, from an ice-cream to a one-night stay in a tepee or a hike with alpacas). A webshop has then been launched to allow people to pay the equivalent of these vouchers’ prices as a donation for the campaign. As a result, both vouchers for activities (about a hundred) and money (10 000€) were collected and given to the Rap op Stap network.

Larisa Idiatulina explains that this campaign was interesting but maybe not completely successful : while all vouchers were distributed to people in need through Rap op Stap, not all were actually used afterwards. One important learning from this experience is that **to seek for a complete free of charge might not always be a good idea, even when it comes to inclusive tourism.** To receive “free vouchers” is not very particularly fulfilling ; what most

low-income people want is to be able to pay like everyone else. So it can be a good thing to keep at least a small and symbolic fee in any case.

Another project in which **Iedereen Verdient Vakantie** and **Tourism Province of Antwerp** are both involved is called **“Wereld reizigers” (“World travelers”)**¹⁸. This project aims to “map” holiday habits, wishes and thresholds of families with a migrant background. Over the course of six meetings, a number of Antwerp-based associations - the project's ambassadors - will be investigating the obstacles that prevent people from going on holiday close to home.

Does the offer meet expectations? Are there administrative or other difficulties? Is it affordable and easily accessible? Do people from a migrant background know enough about local tourism possibilities? Are they comfortable booking a holiday in the province? Thanks to the information collected through this process, it will be possible to adapt the current holiday offer to better meet the needs of people from a migrant background. Several families will be the ambassadors of this project, participating in these meetings but also experimenting with holidays and sharing their experiences afterwards.

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I found it very interesting to notice that both Tourism Flanders and Tourism Province of Antwerp have in their teams people dedicated to inclusive tourism projects. Also, among the many interesting facts that Larisa Idiatulina and Carine Geboers shared with me during our meeting, the following reinforces the idea that protected areas have great legitimacy to get



involved for a more inclusive access to tourism and leisure in the outdoors : ***“In these projects with under-served groups, nature is a very important aspect. In nature, there is peace and quiet, and no distraction. Never under-estimate the effects of a simple tree on a kid, especially if they come from the city!”***

¹⁸ More information on : www.fmdo.be/wereldreizigers

¹⁹ Personal picture of Grenspark Kalmthoutse Heide, a diverse nature reserve lying on both sides of the Belgian-Dutch border (and partly located in the Province of Antwerp).

3.4 A collaboration between Common Wadden Sea Secretariat and grün&bunt” (Germany)

The **Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS)** is the coordinating body for the Wadden Sea region, a coastal area shared by Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands.



The CWSS was established to facilitate cooperation among the three countries to protect and manage the Wadden Sea, a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its rich biodiversity and importance to migratory birds. Main activities of the CWSS include environmental protection, cooperation, policy development, and education in order to raise awareness about the Wadden Sea’s environmental significance through communication and public engagement.

Thanks to a sponsorship from Oris (a Swiss Watchmaker), the CWSS was able to set up a camp for 15 young people, aged 8-13, coming from under-served groups. During this camp, several topics - such as litter reduction or biodiversity - were covered through activities. Another goal was to allow these young people from the area to better discover their own region. This camp has been organized in collaboration with local social services, in order to identify potential participants, and also with a local organization called **grün&bunt**.

Grün&bunt (g&b) is an organization that offers nature education programs for schools or other communities. Its name can be translated as “Green and Colourful”, suggesting a link with the environment but also diversity and inclusion. They organize day activities (for adults and/or children) as well as camps for the youth. G&b sometimes has opportunities to propose activities for family centers. In Germany, family centers (Familienzentren) are community-based facilities that provide a wide range of services and support to families. These centers are designed to offer a welcoming and supportive environment for parents and children, aiming to strengthen family life and promote social integration. These centers are usually funded by



local governments and are part of a broader effort to support families and enhance quality of life in communities. They aim to create a more inclusive and resilient society.

Whether it is for family centers or for the CWSS in the case of the camp mentioned above, collaborating with g&b allows to reach children from different communities. Conny Perschmann, founder of grün&bunt, explains that the main idea is to make children play in nature, so that they can learn about it and take part in nature conservation. ***“Children often remember very small details (and sometimes very few information!) from these experiences in nature; but all these tiny things and moments - observing birds, being able to recognize a plant,... - end up creating a mosaic that can change them, as well as their relationship with nature”.***

Grün&bunt is well established in its community, having links with local schools, family centers, or even church (although the organization is non religious). This is how g&b succeeds in reaching all kinds of people and communities. It can be kids from wealthy families, as well as children from other communities who face different issues.

For Anja Domnick, project officer for CWSS, collaboration with such an organization is very valuable and necessary when setting up a project of inclusive access to nature for children who are not used to it. In the case of the camp organized by CWSS and g&b, there was of course a need to set up and manage daily activities with children ; but what she also noticed was the **important support** required in order **to help the families and children getting prepared beforehand, and also during the camp**. For example, backpacks had to be bought for every participant since not all of them owned one at home. Conny Perchmann also insists on this aspect: g&b used to borrow a lot of things at the beginning of its existence, but is now well equipped in order to make things simple for participants who do now own the equipment needed (e.g : tents, cooking equipments, backpacks...). Besides, children who are not used to going camping or going on a holiday outside of their usual environment, sometimes appear to need more help with everyday tasks in these “unusual” contexts for them.

These needs for support are not to be taken lightly, and having a specialized organisation involved in such a project of “inclusive tourism” can be a key aspect.

3.5 Vacances Ouvertes : collaboration with nature areas and Destination Management Organizations



My research led me to learn more about a french non-profit organization called “**Vacances Ouvertes**”²⁰ (VO). VO is committed to providing access to holidays for all. Its vision is to use holidays as an area of positive development for individuals. For Marc Pili, VO’s general delegate, “By developing holidays access for all, we are not aiming at ‘teaching people how to live’; but we actively create time and space for them to enjoy simple things that they might never do the rest of the year. For some parents, holidays can be the only occasion they have to spend time playing with their kids. We are committed to this vision of holidays as a tool for personal development, strengthening social links between individuals.”

In Gironde (a French region), the local Destination Management Organization worked in collaboration with Vacances Ouvertes in 2021-2022. **Gironde Tourisme** has been running an experiment to bring together players in the tourism industry and social workers from the region. A partnership has made it possible to support holiday projects monitored by the Department's social workers. Vacances Ouvertes designed the content of training sessions which they provided to tourism stakeholders involved in the project, in order for them to be more welcoming to people who are not acculturated to holidays.



Vacances Ouvertes’ youtube video about the project : www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAWHjL4X9nc

²⁰ Vacances Ouvertes can be translated as “Open holidays”.



This partnership also involved the **Landes de Gascogne regional nature park**. In order to carry out a “first holiday” project for new vacationers, the park’s role was to put Gironde Tourism in touch with tourism stakeholders who were sensitive to this idea. Not all tourist businesses want to adopt this kind of philanthropic approach, but luckily some do want to get involved. The Park, through its network of ecotourism stakeholders, has been able to identify two accommodations who were willing to participate by hosting these ‘first holiday’ projects.

On VO’s youtube video about it, families who benefited from this project report the positive impact their vacation had for them. Again, **nature appears to be an important part of the experience**, as we understand when a woman shares that *“In nature there was no noise, no cars, no stress”*. An interesting fact to be noticed, when Marilyn Woehrel, head of the tourism department at Landes de Gascognes regional nature park, shares that *“To deconstruct the ideal picture of a holiday has been an important step in the project between us and social workers. They were mostly expecting us to propose ‘beachside holidays’, while as a regional nature park, we proposed accommodations such as tree houses, or leisure activities in the forests”*.

In this kind of partnership, VO helps DMOs and stakeholders develop the skills they need to set up “first holiday” projects towards potential new vacationers. Marc Pili is convinced that this is key to develop a more inclusive tourism. For him, ***“There is inclusivity only if there is a strategy for it. Free access, that is not an inclusive strategy. The challenge is for Destination Management Organizations to develop a real strategy to support ‘first holiday’ projects, and to enable service providers to offer the best service possible to people for whom tourism is all new. Booking a holiday, checkin-in, taking the train, renting a bike... All of this can be new for people having a first-ever holiday experience”***.

It should also be underlined that these holidays were not “given for free” to the families involved, in line with VO’s vision. Smaller prices were negotiated, but social workers preparing this project had to help families find ways to finance their holidays.

A more recent initiative has been carried out in another french region, associating **Lens-Liévin urban area**²¹ (CALL) and **Vacances Ouvertes**. Based on a similar model to the one described above, CALL launched a **‘10 000 holiday departures’ project** in 2024. Through this project, social services of 26 participating municipalities were able to support families in their project for a first holiday.

An extra financial boost of 100€ per family was possible, but the most important were the skills learning activities which were developed to involve families beforehand. During the conference **“Everyone on holidays, all in solidarity”**, which was organized in June after several months during which social services worked with families, some examples of these activities were shared. Social workers explained how they organized small events such as “learn how to set up a tent”, or “cooking classes in order to be able to cook when not at home”, or “what to pack in my bag to go on a holiday”. Some also proposed small group visits to second-hand shops, in order to help families make necessary purchases they needed (for things such as camping or swimming equipment).



Thanks to this project, it is estimated that **8 000 to 12 000 people from the area have been able to enjoy a “first holiday” in different french regions this summer**. Before departures for these vacations, on June 29th afternoon, a **“holiday festival”** was even organized at Lens football stadium, in order to share a festive and friendly time with all the people involved in this project (families, social workers, and every players in this project). A great way to celebrate a project bringing happiness for people, and many other positive things we already discussed in this report’s part II.

²¹ Lens-Liévin area gathers 36 municipalities.

3.6 A few other initiatives

Because I spent several months working on the topic of inclusive tourism and discussing with knowledgeable people, I was also able to collect a few other examples of interesting French initiatives I would like to share here.

Essentiem



This endowment fund is run by a community of philanthropists committed to serving inclusive tourism. It enables projects of general interest in terms of inclusive tourism to be carried out, by collecting donations from private players. Essentiem connects three types of players: project initiators, sponsors and members of Essentiem, and the beneficiaries of the actions carried out. More recently, Essentiem has

created an innovative scheme called 'Jour Pour Jour', offering companies and their employees the possibility to donate paid leave days in order to transform them into money donation, to finance "first holidays" projects for potential new vacationers. Vacances Ouvertes is also a partner in this project.

A practical and inspirational guide for inclusive tourism



"Acteurs du Tourisme Durable" is a french network bringing together DMOs and tourism stakeholders who are eager to exchange ideas and best practices in terms of sustainable tourism. In order to develop a shared vision and to inspire its members, this organization occasionally publishes reports on specific themes. In this context, a specific report about inclusive tourism has been published in 2023, sharing information about the main definitions, important players and networks in this field, and some examples of projects carried out.

Solikend

Solikend is an online platform. Its main objective is to put companies, charities and individuals in touch with each other to promote solidarity actions.

SOLIKEND



On Solikend, hotel owners can give away overnight stays for charities. It looks like a traditional booking site but when booking, customers select a cause they wish to support and the hotel undertakes to donate 100% of their payment to the selected organization.

In order to participate, hotels give away a few overnight stays a year (up to 20-60 depending on the size of the company, and only in the low season). It enhances their commitment to solidarity. This initiative differs slightly from the theme of this report, as it does not necessarily lead to “holidays for all”. However, it is interesting because it demonstrates that it is possible for tourism businesses to actively support good causes and to show their commitment.

IV. Key elements for an inclusive tourism approach

4.1 How to build an inclusive tourism strategy

Here's a summarized **list of considerations to have in mind for developing an inclusive strategy**, based on what I learned from my study visits, interviews and research.

Before sharing those, I would like to emphasize the fact that even though this report has mostly been written towards protected areas and DMOs, it could be shared to other players. Therefore, **I have not limited this list only to things that nature areas or DMOs are in charge of ; I deliberately included things that are beyond these organizations' scope**. There are two reasons for that : first, it is important that anybody involved in an inclusive tourism approach adopts a global vision of this topic. They should be aware of all challenges and potential partners concerned (especially when "working together" is key to an inclusive tourism strategy). Secondly, protected areas or DMOs' role as "coordinators" between different local partners in their regions, can enable them to be key players in triggering certain dynamics, even when these actions do not depend directly on them. **Protected areas or DMOs can - and should - advocate and support projects or activities which are beyond their scope, as long as the outcomes are in line with their own goals.**

Therefore, we should seek to :

1. Understand the needs :

- "Free Services" aren't enough: financial challenges need to be addressed, but financial support alone won't guarantee inclusivity (e.g., VO/CALL examples in this report).
- Hard and Soft Barriers: we need to better understand the different obstacles and work on both tangible and intangible barriers. Hard barriers would refer to things such as small budget or transport issues; while soft barriers could designate a lack of habit or confidence needed to go on a holiday.



- Adaptation to local needs: tailor actions to local realities, considering regional differences and working with local services.

2. Build awareness & confidence among DMOs and Protected Areas :

- Raising awareness: we need to better understand underserved groups, local realities, and get to know better the social services and organizations involved towards these people in our areas.
- Involvement of local communities: work with local experts to understand communities instead of assuming knowledge.
- Intersectionality: be aware of this concept and address different inequalities or social factors.
- Team-wide inclusivity inside our organizations (DMOs, Protected areas) : encourage confidence to discuss inclusivity ; seek for more diversity in teams ; ensure inclusivity is embraced by every member of the team, integrated into each project through tools, training, and a shift in mindset ; avoid imposter syndrome (believe in our ability to implement inclusive tourism projects and accept the idea that we might make mistakes sometimes).
- Patience and Progress: Take small, manageable steps, and learn from mistakes. Progress is key, not perfection.



3. Collaborate in partnerships :

- Work with diverse players : break down silos between social services, tourism, and other sectors. Work in collaborative project modes.
- Incorporate multiple sectors: link tourism initiatives to broader goals such as health, well-being, social inclusion, education, and environmental sustainability.
- Volunteer engagement: engage local youth or communities in volunteering roles, offering opportunities like youth rangers or youth camps.
- Cross-sector action plans: align tourism strategies with wider national initiatives on climate change, social inclusion, and health.



- Create creative connections: design projects that link urban areas with natural spaces, possibly through art and culture, to bridge gaps and enhance inclusion.

4. Develop an inclusive tourism design in all development projects :

- Clear and simple information: provide easy-to-understand, well-illustrated information (avoid technical jargon).
- Efficient signage: ensure signage is frequent, clear, and not overly reliant on written language.
- Sensory engagement: develop interpretive materials that stimulate the five senses, accommodating various access needs.
- Public amenities: ensure accessible toilets, benches along paths, and so on.



5. Develop required infrastructure and transports :

- Affordable accommodation: provide lower-cost accommodation options (e.g., campsites) to facilitate inclusive tourism.
- Transport accessibility: ensure public transport connections are convenient for underserved groups. Consider mobility studies to improve transport access. Keep in mind that public transport can also represent a challenge for people who are not used to them.



6. Offer personalized support :

- One-on-one support: work closely with individuals or families to overcome concerns related to tourism experiences.
- Be available & flexible: provide flexible support for families or individuals, ensuring their needs and anxieties are addressed throughout the tourism experience.
- Dedicated people in teams : more organizations should consider having staff specifically dedicated to working on inclusive tourism.
- Co-production with local communities: ensure that services are not merely "provided" but co-produced with the people involved and concerned.



7. Evaluate impact & long-term engagement:

- Encourage repeated participation: empower people to renew their new leisure and tourism experiences independently. Provide the necessary tools and support for continuity.
- Impact assessment: evaluate the long-term effects of inclusive tourism on individuals and communities. Use findings to amplify the benefits and learn from experience (e.g., VO's focus on study and feedback after “first holidays” experiences).
- Capitalizing on positive effects: use positive outcomes (e.g., improved family bonds, social integration) to further promote inclusivity. Think about serendipity !




This list of considerations outlines key strategies to develop a successful and sustainable inclusive tourism approach, focusing on collaboration, accessibility, personalized support, and continuous learning.

I would like to highlight that this list aims to bring together many thoughts and ideas after more than a year of several interviews, meetings and study visits. During my research, I was also greatly inspired by the report that Shropshire Hills National Landscape commissioned, and without meaning to copy it, there is a risk that similar ideas will be found here.

4.2 A mind map to visualize key outcomes of this research



 This symbol represents things that protected areas and DMOs can be directly in charge of. For other ideas, their role as “coordinators” between different local partners in their regions should still encourage them to be key players since they have the capacity to advocate and support projects which are beyond their scope.

Conclusion

This report and its outcomes suggest that **concrete actions can be undertaken by protected areas and Destination Management Organization to develop a more inclusive tourism.** They can take action in a number of ways : **even when they are not directly in charge of some aspects which can have an important role in the development of an inclusive tourism strategy, they can set up partnerships and advocate for actions which are beyond their scope.** In addition, protected areas and DMOs can also act directly on a wide range of aspects, as has been highlighted in the report.

It is not only social services' responsibility to care about inclusivity towards under-served groups. We all need to take part in this transition towards a more inclusive society. When it comes to tourism, the idea for DMOs and stakeholders is not to adopt an opportunistic approach aiming at acquiring more visitors or clients. **The goal is to act for more social justice, and to use tourism and leisure as a way to connect people to landscapes and nature, in a holistic approach.** This can enable to increase environmental awareness among individuals, in order to tackle important environmental challenges.



Some projects described in this report can seem slightly off-topic at first glance. Indeed, the initial project was to see what can be done to provide access to holidays for all. In the end, some of the protected areas' initiatives presented here are actually much more about getting nearby communities access to local nature (sometimes even through engagement or leisure activities) than allowing people to go on a first holiday experience. However, we can assume that **creating time and space for people to reconnect with their local environment heightens their ability to become future visitors of other destinations through tourism and leisure.** As a protected area manager committed to the development of engagement activities with local communities and under-served groups, Phil Holden (Shropshire Hills

National Landscape) is hoping that “some of the good countryside skills acquired through these activities - such as camping - might open up the possibilities of quite cheap holidays.”

This project I carried out thanks to the ATS Scholarship is not scientific research, and my final report has several weaknesses. One of these is that people from under-served groups were not interviewed for this purpose. Indeed, I initially found it difficult to consider approaching the people concerned by this topic (how to identify them? what questions to ask them so as not to appear stigmatising?). Besides, in the course of my research, I came to realise that there are many testimonies and reports available online, particularly from experiments and research carried out by Vacances Ouvertes, or sometimes also from other organizations. I sometimes drew on these elements to reflect the reality of the people concerned.

I hope that this report will be a source of motivation and inspiration for protected areas and DMOs. In my case, in the nature area I work for (Montagne de Reims regional nature park), **I now see more clearly what can be done.** First, I think there is an opportunity for a closer collaboration between the Park’s Tourism Department and Education&Engagement



Department, in order to initiate a similar dynamic to what is being done in Shropshire Hills National Landscape thanks to their Engagement Ranger.

On a more long-term scale, I also think that we should develop partnerships with organizations like Vacances Ouvertes in order to get a better understanding of our local eco-system to work towards “potential new vacationers”. Such collaboration could also offer the possibility to develop training activities for tourism stakeholders, and to create more collaboration between different local players towards a more inclusive tourism.

To date, some very concrete ideas that have been presented to me as part of this research have also enabled me to improve the support I provide to stakeholders in my Park for some projects. For example, a collaboration which was already underway between the Park and a municipality for the development of a discovery trail, has evolved into an inclusive tourism

project for a variety of audiences. In this particular case, having a better vision of what 'inclusive outdoor leisure' can mean has fuelled the ideas developed as part of this project. This inclusive discovery trail should see the light of day by the end of 2025.

This research will continue to inspire my day-to-day work in the months and years to come, and I hope it can also give some useful ideas to other protected areas or Destination Management Organizations.

Aknowledgements

After more than a year's work on this topic through various meetings and discussions, it's a complicated task to make sure I am not leaving anyone out in my acknowledgements but I will do my best.

I would first like to thank the **Alfred Toepfer Foundation** and **EUROPARC** who awarded me with the Alfred Toepfer Natural Heritage Scholarship in October 2023, in order to allow me carry out this project in 2024 through European cooperation.

When working on a busy full-time job for a dynamic protected area, there are few opportunities and very little time to look at a subject outside the urgency of day-to-day projects. This scholarship was a great opportunity for me to look into a subject that is close to my heart and that I've been wondering about for some time : what can we do to better take action for the social pillar of sustainable tourism ?

Thanks also for being understanding when I had to change some of my study visit plans.

One of the other main “thank you” will obviously go to **Phil Holden**, manager of **Shropshire Hills National Landscape**. His help was key to bringing this project to reality. While my project was only at the application stage for the ATS Scholarship, he gave me a lot of very consistent information about his own protected area, and also shared contacts of other colleagues of his from the National Landscape network in the UK.

My main study trip took place in Shropshire Hills National Landscape and Phil took a lot of time to prepare a rich study visit, packed with meetings with passionate people and visits to beautiful landscapes of the area.

It was really satisfying to see that my study visit there was also being used by the National Landscape's **team** as an opportunity to take their thinking forward in terms of inclusive tourism. I would like to thank all of them, whom I had the great pleasure of meeting. I would particularly like to thank **Nigel McDonald** and **Joe Penfold** who also took time to show me some of the places and projects implemented in the region.

Thanks to **all the people I met in Shropshire** who spent time presenting their organizations, projects and vision about inclusive tourism : **Rick Shaw**, **Diana West** (Telford and Wrekin Council), **Tom Blackwell** (Carding Mill Valley And The Long Mynd), **Jim Bunce** (Long Mynd

Adventure Camp), **Simon Brown** (Shropshire Wild Teams - Shropshire Council) and all the volunteers (e.g Dothill Nature Reserve Friends), workers and other people I met during this visit.

I tried to limit my report to its main topic, but much more could have been said about all the interesting projects and places I discovered in Shropshire.

A very special thanks also to **Phil and Brenda** for their warm hospitality during this study trip. It allowed a real immersion in another culture (or sometimes a mix of two cultures - during some "Tour de France" TV viewing sessions !).

My project also allowed me to meet in person **Carine Geboers** and **Larisa Idiatulina** from Tourism Flanders and Tourism Province of Antwerp, right after a seminar I attended in the Province of Antwerp. I would like to thank them both for taking time to meet with me in Antwerp and to present their projects. Thanks also to Larisa's colleagues **Koenraad Pierre and Tine Saerens** - with whom I am collaborating through the Interreg Projet MONA -, who told me about these inclusive tourism projects in the first place.

Although my visit to Cornwall was finally last-minute cancelled for personal reasons, I would like to thank **Melodie Manners, Coralie Barrow and Amy McElhinney** from the National Landscape's team who took time for an online meeting and who initially accepted and prepared a possible study visit in their area. I still tried to include as much as I could in this report, hoping I have not misrepresented their projects.

As far as I'm concerned, a trip to Cornwall with my family is now one of my personal plans for 2025.

Thanks to all the people and organizations who took time for online interviews and for sharing documents, references and links with me to enrich my research : **Anja Domnick** from The Common Wadden Sea Secretariat; **Conny Perschmann**, founder of grün&bunt ; **Marc Pili**, from Vacances Ouvertes; **Marylin Woerhel**, from Landes de Gascogne regional nature park.

Thanks to Lens-Liévin urban area and Vacances Ouvertes for allowing people external to their "10 000 departures on holidays" project to attend the conference "Everyone on

holidays, all in solidarity”. Every speech and testimonial shared during the event have contributed a lot to my research, especially because it allowed me to collect points of view from **social workers** working with “potential new vacationers”.

Other people or organizations also took some of their time to share ideas and initiatives with me at the very beginning of my research : **Naomie Ruijtenberg** and **Jeroen Heemsbergen** from Nationaal Park Utrechtse Heuvelrug ; **Géraldine Lansiaux**, tourism consultant in The Eastern Townships (Québec Province, Canada) ; **Catherine Bradley** from Kent Downs National Landscape in England (another region I am now planning to visit soon).

They all shared interesting examples that I could not include in my report (sometimes because these initiatives were not developed enough yet, and sometimes because I simply did not have enough time to look into these examples). But these discussions have all been of great value when I started exploring the topic of inclusivity.

Because my research focuses on the topic of holidays, I would like to thank **my parents** because it is thanks to them that I have been able to go on holiday since I was a child, even though they did not develop these kinds of habits and practices themselves when they were young. I was very lucky not to have to overcome any barrier to discover the joys of a change of scenery and new horizons through tourism, from an early age to the present day. I am grateful for what it has brought me, and I would like everyone to have access to that.

A heartfelt thank you also to **my husband and daughter** who support me in my projects - these same projects that I sometimes regret having undertaken when they end up requiring long hours of writing at night. Thank you for never reproaching me for the hours I spend on some work-related crazy ideas, nor blaming me for sometimes being away on work-related travels.

Thanks to Montagne de Reims regional nature park’s management and elected representatives who allowed me to carry out my study visit in Shropshire Hills National Landscapes on my working time.

I would like to conclude this section by sharing a few more photos on the next page.

**EUROPARC Conference and 50th anniversary in The Netherlands,
and Alfred Toepfer Natural Heritage Scholarship Award Ceremony (October 2023)**



Study visit in Shropshire : 1. meeting with the National Landscape’s team 2. Visit of the Dothill Nature Reserve in Telford 3. Long Mynd Adventure Camp 4. Cycling in Shropshire with Phil Holden



On a final note, I would like to share about an organization called **Branching Out** which offers high-quality Forest School and Social Forestry services (including green woodworking, campfire skills, outdoor cooking, free play in nature...) in South Shropshire. Their activities are tailored to meet the needs of specific groups.

Because I ended up having to cancel one of my study visits, I decided to use the money left for a modest donation to Branching Out. It will be used to complete the amount needed to build a permanent shelter over their communal fire area in January 2025.

References

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When not specified in the report's note, pictures are mine or Phil Holden's. Thanks to him for taking pictures during my study visit in Shropshire Hills National Landscapes.