

BEST PRACTICE: KATERINI, GREECE



Key Challenge

Accessibility and inclusivity of services and facilities.

Type of Solution

Adoption of a tourism strategy and monitoring framework; Stakeholder participation and management; Capacity building; Investments in infrastructure and product development.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Coastal

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 684.04 km²

Population | ~ 85,000

Type of Tourism | Mountain; Coastal, maritime and inland water; Cultural; Health and wellness.

Tourism organisation | Municipality of Katerini.

Main Stakeholders Affected | Local authorities/ government, Local residents, Tourists, Technology providers.

Additional Challenges Covered | Dependence of the local economy on tourism; Changing consumer preferences towards more sustainability; Lack of community participation in tourism activities.

Context & Background

Katerini, located in the Piera region, has attracted huge investments over the last 20 years and experienced rapid tourism development, with a total of around 20,000 beds in 2023. This resulted in 1,345,595 tourist arrivals with 8,333,927 overnight stays (6.1 days average length of stay) in 2023, with the seasonal focus being in summer. Tourism is therefore the most important economic sector, accounting for 24% of GDP in Piera (GDP for Katerini not available).

Key Challenge

Statistics show that a large part of the population suffers from some form of physical or mental disability (in Greece, 18.2% of the population, 50% of whom are over 65 years old; in Europe, in total 80 million people). With this in mind, Katerini is focusing on promoting accessible tourism in order to meet the increasing demand and become more competitive.

Implementation of Solutions: To promote accessibility and inclusivity, Katerini has adopted universal design principles in tourism products, supported by the use of available new technologies to improve social sustainability.

SOLUTIONS

- Katerini has installed five [Seatracs](#), an innovative solar-powered technical system that allows people with disabilities and mobility impairments to access the sea independently. In addition to the Seatracs, Katerini has also installed barrier-free infrastructure such as showers, toilets and a changing room for people with disabilities. Two hotels that focus on people with mobility problems are under construction. Plans are in place to expand the service for blind and visually impaired people.
- In 2021, the DMO has initiated the "[Citizens for the Seatracs Volunteer Team](#)", which is a self-governing body that informs visitors and solves any mechanical problems. The volunteer group, with over 100 active members, communicates via social media (Facebook), which serves as a forum for exchanges between volunteers, which also takes place through regular events.
- In order to put the issue of accessibility more clearly into the context of its importance for tourism (as the region's main source of income) among local tourism businesses, local residents and tourists, the DMO has promoted this innovative offer through intensive marketing campaigns, including project brochures, [videos](#) and radio spots on the topic of accessible tourism.

Replicability potential: High (requires political will and stakeholder cooperation).

Cost & funding source: 60,000 euros purchase costs for each Seatracs, 10,000 euros annual maintenance costs of for all Seatracs; 100,000 euros for each rail of the four additional Seatracs planned for blind people. Around 1,000 euros annually for T-shirts and agreements with public buses for the "Citizen for the Seatracs volunteer team".

Success Factors & Barriers Regarding the Implementation

Success factors: The strong involvement of the local population (volunteer group); The clear commitment of the municipality to accessible and inclusive tourism; The use of different means of communication to achieve greater visibility; The latest technological innovations (Seatrac) to integrate people with disabilities.

Barriers: Insufficient financial and human resources contributions from tourism companies.

Results and Impacts

- The project was the winner of the 2022 Greek Tourism Award in the category of Accessible Tourism.
- Awareness of accessibility issues has increased in the local community and a sense of community has developed through the project.
- Increased use of Seatrac (695 times in 2021, 1062 times in 2022, 1619 times in 2023).
- So far, the volunteer group includes more than 100 volunteers.

Takeaways

- The growing demand for accessible tourism represents a great opportunity and is a prerequisite for any sustainable tourism policy and strategy.
- By taking accessibility into account when designing a facility or by making small adjustments to it, significant improvements in accessibility can be achieved, which can also lead to larger market shares.
- A barrier-free offer increases competitiveness and promotes customer loyalty.
- Especially in coastal areas, Seatrac (or similar infrastructure) should be standard because the demand for them exists.
- The right theme, well communicated, gets people to contribute with time and capacity. It is very important to use a bottom-up (almost self-organized) approach to volunteering with the locals (voluntourists as volunteers may not work well as they are not part of the community and are only temporarily in the destination).

Useful Links

- [Seatrac Katerini](#) | Katerini municipality

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