

SELF-DETERMINED NATURE EXPERIENCE

Evaluation-tool for self-determined nature experience –
the Decision matrix



Introduction

Every person wants and should be able to experience nature independently. For many environmental education centres and nature parks, this raises the question of how to adapt the infrastructure for this through concrete measures. We address these and other topics in the guideline on self-determined nature experience. The guide was developed as part of the European project „Ensuring access to environmental education and nature experience for people with disabilities“ – in short: Nature without Barriers.

This matrix complements the guide. It is a comprehensive tool for self-evaluation on the topic of self-determined nature experience and is intended to encourage people to deal with the topic of accessibility. The matrix presents criteria according to the different needs of people with disabilities. These criteria are based on various national and European recommendations and can be used by nature conservation institutions to assess the adaptation of existing offers. Thus, the actual state can be assessed and possible measures for adaptation can be derived.

The matrix is structured according to the service chain, whereby the individual points are subdivided into sub-points – the so-called criteria. The third column provides information about the target status or examples of good implementation options. The next columns show for which of the individual impairments an appropriate implementation of the various criteria is advisable or even necessary.

The exclamation marks indicate the need for adaptation for the respective user groups: one exclamation mark shows that the measure is advisable or helpful for this specific group, two exclamation marks indicate the urgent need for implementation when addressing the specific target group. The criteria concern the paths, the provision of information as well as the equipment of the paths and points of interest. The guide makes it possible to assess the aspects of accessibility to which a path can be adapted. The preparation of information is particularly important - it should be optimised for people with disabilities.

The matrix is not a checklist with “wrong” or “right” as a result. Just print it out and try it on your nature trail! You can find the guideline on self-determined nature experience as well as the matrix on our project website:

www.nature-without-barriers.eu/en/self-determined-nature-experience.

Matrix: Evaluation-tool for self-determined nature experience

Service-chain	Criteria	Examples and/or desired situation	Reduced mobility	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Learning impairments	Possible improvements
1. Information and communication	1.1 Information on the website	All information about the options and offers of the inclusive nature experience, but also about the area and its condition and limitations, should be accessible on a barrier-free website in advance. The given information makes it possible for interested people to decide for themselves whether they want to explore the site on their own or with an accompanying person. Ideally, there are different offers for different requirements. In general, it should be possible to get information about anything mentioned in this check-list prior to arriving.	!!	!!	!!	!!	
	1.2 Available Information material on site	Leaflets, brochures etc. in Braille, with pictures, easy-to-read or simple language, large print, high contrast; audioguides... Positioned in reach for wheelchair users and people of small stature.	!!	!	!	!	
	1.3 Getting there and away	Information about the arrival and departure should be available online and on site.	!!	!!	!!	!!	
	1.4 Orientation on site	Written information and signs, but also audio-information and/or tactile maps for orientation should be available on site.	!!	!!	!!	!	
	1.5 Informed staff	Informed staff can give information about special services and offers by telephone and can assist and answer questions on site. The staff should be sensitized for interaction with people with different disabilities.	!!	!!	!!	!!	

Matrix: Evaluation-tool for self-determined nature experience

Service-chain	Criteria	Examples and/or desired situation	Reduced mobility	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Learning impairments	Possible improvements
2. Getting there and away	2.1 Parking spaces for people with disabilities	There is a certain required number of parking spaces for people with disabilities. This number varies from country to country. A sign with the international symbol of accessibility and/or ground marking show(s) the location of the parking spaces. There should be parking spaces for buses or minivans. People with disabilities often travel in groups.	!!	!		!	
	2.2 Distance from the parking lot or public bus stop to the nature trail or the barrier-free entrance of the building	The barrier-free parking space must be within reasonable distance to the entrance of the nature trail area. The path to and from the entrance should not be too steep. If necessary, a pick-up service can be offered from the car park or from the bus stop to the entrance.	!!	!!	!	!!	
	2.3 Location of the parking lot	The country-specific minimum width of barrier-free parking spaces must be taken into account. The parking space should be located on a level surface and is not supposed to consist of gravel or large-format cobblestones.	!!				
	2.4 Guidance system from the public ground to the first point of contact	A written, visual, auditive, tactile and/or constructional guidance system should lead to the first point of contact.	!!	!!	!	!!	
	2.5 Barrier-free means of public transportation	Buses and other public vehicles should be barrier-free. The arrival by public transport should be described on the website in detail.	!!	!	!	!	

Matrix: Evaluation-tool for self-determined nature experience

Service-chain	Criteria	Examples and/or desired situation	Reduced mobility	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Learning impairments	Possible improvements
3. Infrastructure	3.1 Entrance	At least 90 cm wide, without threshold, easy-to-grip handle and photocell door. It should be clearly visible, the design should be in contrast with the environment. If there are large glass surfaces, signs should be inserted to make the glass surface visible.	!!	!!	!	!	
	3.2 Barrier-free toilets	The distance and accessibility of the toilet facilities should be checked. Barrier-free toilets should be available in the information center and approximately every two hours on the paths. Check function and cleanliness on a regular basis.	!!	!			
	3.3 Reception / cash-desk	Wheelchair users should be able to get close to the reception and there should be a low area (according to national regulations) allowing wheelchair users or people of a smaller stature to easily communicate with the staff easily. It should be possible to identify the reception area at once, which can be supported by strong contrasts. An induction loop amplifier for hearing aids should be available and marked as such.	!!	!	!	!	
	3.4 In case of emergency	It should be possible to leave the building quickly and get to the emergency assembly point immediately. The escape route and the assembly point must be clearly visible. An emergency and also the emergency exits should be indicated by light and sound signals.	!!	!!	!!	!!	
	3.5 Eating and drinking	It should be possible to approach the tables in the restaurants or shops with a wheelchair. A menu in large print is helpful for a range of visitors, braille is appreciated as well. Menus can be equipped with QR-codes and thus be scanned and read via smartphone. Information about gastronomic offers including the menu could be presented on the website as well.	!!	!!	!!	!!	

Matrix: Evaluation-tool for self-determined nature experience

Service-chain	Criteria	Examples and/or desired situation	Reduced mobility	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Learning impairments	Possible improvements
4. Condition of the nature paths and quality of the experience	4.1 Seats	Seats along the hiking trails should be set up at regular intervals. It is important to take into account the height and add arm rests as raising support. Seating facilities should also be provided in the information building.	!!	!	!	!	
	4.2 Width of the paths	The paths should have a width of more than 150 cm, ideally 180 cm, in order to be easily accessible for wheelchair users. In general: the wider, the better! However, a narrowing of 120 cm on short sections is possible. There should be wider parts for areas where larger crowds are expected. This is also regulated in standards.	!!	!	!	!	
	4.3 Possible hazards	Hazards can be hanging branches or very uneven paths. Objects lying on the paths can also pose a risk. For people with reduced mobility, edges can become an obstacle. There should be handrails or fences on slopes or bridges. Obstacles and hazards along the way have to be eliminated or secured.	!!	!!	!!	!	
	4.4 Route under difficult weather conditions	If the roads are impassable under difficult weather conditions (rain, ice snow), this must be indicated and communicated accordingly.	!!	!!	!!	!!	
	4.5 Ground surface	Substrates with gravel, roots, dents or large holes and cracks are difficult or impossible to access with wheelchairs. Also, very steep ascents or descents are unsuitable for wheelchair users, starting from 4% it can already be hard to handle. This can also be relevant for people with other impairments or people with baby carriages.	!!	!!	!!	!!	
	4.6 Guidance systems	Optimally, easily understandable acoustic, tactile and optical guidance systems exist.	!	!	!	!	
	4.7 Position of information boards etc.	Objects on eye level can be difficult for blind people. For wheelchair users, it is important to attach information boards, switches etc. at a reachable height.	!	!	!	!	

Matrix: Evaluation-tool for self-determined nature experience

Service-chain	Criteria	Examples and/or desired situation	Reduced mobility	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Learning impairments	Possible improvements
5. Educational offers	5.1 Development of offers	To develop and provide offers for people with disabilities, the educators have to be trained and informed adequately.	!!	!!	!!	!!	
	5.2 Methods	Such offers can be signage, tactile information boards, audio guides, guidance systems or smartphone apps. The offers should be designed for different senses. All the Information has to be given with the two-senses-principle. It is necessary to check which creative offers and movement offers are suitable for which target group.	!!	!!	!!	!!	
	5.3 Information material on the offers	Content-related information can be given in a written way (also in easy-to-read, braille and large print). In addition, it can be provided by multimedia-guides and apps. Those can contain additional descriptions for blind people, videos with sign language and information in easy-to-read.	!	!	!	!	

Matrix: Evaluation-tool for self-determined nature experience

Service-chain	Criteria	Examples and/or desired situation	Reduced mobility	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Learning impairments	Possible improvements
6. Environment	6.1 Background noise	If the background noises are particularly loud, it is questionable whether the use of audio guides makes sense. People with hearing disabilities can have understanding difficulties. It can make it harder to concentrate, especially for people with learning disabilities.	!	!	!!	!	
	6.2 Level of traffic volume	A high volume of traffic can make it difficult to cross roads. Ideally, the route should not lead through areas with heavy traffic.	!!	!!	!!	!	
	6.3 Rails or roads crossing the path and bridges	They should be secured, clearly identified and tactilely marked at crossings.	!!	!!	!!	!	

Matrix: Evaluation-tool for self-determined nature experience

Service-chain	Criteria	Examples and/or desired situation	Reduced mobility	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Learning impairments	Possible improvements
7. Securing Sustainability	7.1 Frequently offered accessible services	Barrier-free offers should be a fixed element of the nature center / area.	!!	!!	!!	!!	
	7.2 Staff training	It is desirable to give employees access to good training in the field of accessibility and the work with people with disabilities and to give them the opportunity to improve their knowledge continuously.	!	!	!	!	
	7.3 Expertise from people with impairments	People with disabilities can provide valuable tips and advice for the implementation and quality assurance of barrier-free or inclusive offers.	!	!	!	!	
	7.4 Responsible people concerning accessibility	At least 1-2 people should be trained sufficiently and continuously.	!	!	!	!	
	7.5 Creation of networks	In the spirit of mutual learning, it is important to seek exchange with other nature centers with similar barrier-free offers in order to promote synergies and find role models based on best practice examples.	!	!	!	!	

Matrix: Evaluation-tool for self-determined nature experience

Service-chain	Criteria	Examples and/or desired situation	Reduced mobility	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Learning impairments	Possible improvements
8. Additional services	8.1 Offer of technical aids	Walking sticks make it much easier to explore nature for many visitors and (off-road) motor assistance for wheelchairs allows wheelchair users to go to locations otherwise out of reach. Health care supply stores can offer further aids and can be contacted. Virtual Reality (VR) offers can be helpful.	!	!	!	!	
	8.2 Sign language translators	People trained in e.g. sign language can assist with the offered experiences. Contact details of local translators can be forwarded.			!		
	8.3 Medical services in the area	It is useful to have a list of medical services in the area in case of emergency.	!	!	!	!	

Imprint

This publication was realised within the project „Assuring the access to nature education and nature experience for impaired people“ (acronym: Nature without barriers). This project was funded with support from the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use, which may be made of the information contained therein.



Projectcode: 2018-1-DE02-KA204-005222

Authors / Project partners

Michael Schöppl (UWD), Eva Mayer (UWD), Samira Weiss-Bousslama (UWD), Claudia Böhme (DBSV), Hilke Groenewold (DBSV), Katja Weickmann (GNF), Thomas Schaefer (GNF), Geletáné Varga Éva (LBDCA), Roman Guziak (Etna), Ewa Zuber (Etna), Renata Hebda (Etna), Joanna Guziak (Etna).

Global Nature Fund (GNF)

International Foundation for Environment and Nature
Fritz-Reichle-Ring 4 · 78315 Radolfzell, Germany
Phone: +49 7732 9995-80
www.globalnature.org

Further Information:

www.nature-without-barriers.eu/en/

Layout: Annette Maucher www.maucherdesign.de

March 2021

Cover image: C. Böhme.

Legal Notice:



This work by Nature without barriers is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

www.nature-without-barriers.eu



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Projectcode: 2018-1-DE02-KA204-005222