

The Impacts of Destination pour tous certification on the development of inclusive environments

Presentation abstract

With the adoption of its universal accessibility policy and development of numerous measures promoting accessible services for all, the City of Victoriaville has been at the forefront of urban inclusivity in Quebec since 1999.

Taking inspiration from international accessibility best practices, the municipality and the organization K roul have jointly developed the new Destination pour tous tourism certification, a Quebec adaptation of a project created by the French association Tourisme et Handicaps. This partnership aims to ensure that the certification is aligned with the municipality's reality, limits, and responsibilities. With a population of 46,300, the City of Victoriaville is the first municipality in Quebec to be awarded this certification.

Aside from the indisputable advantages for tourists with disabilities, the project also has a very significant social and economic impact on the local stage. It goes beyond simple labels: implementing this project has allowed all the community's members to adopt and apply tangible measures. Throughout the process, four major impacts have proven to be particularly interesting for our region.

1. Mobilizing and increasing awareness of local players

Prior to its implementation, the project was presented within the scope of a local forum focussing on accessibility. The huge potential of the Destination pour tous project immediately sparked the interest of players in economic, community, municipal, and tourism circles. The partnerships and alliances forged with these different players allowed the City to adopt a collaborative leadership role with shared responsibility.

Several indicators prove that the certification serves as motivation to take more action. An increasing number of businesses that took part in the first round of certification are undertaking accessibility projects for their facilities, participating in customer service training, and building awareness, which translates into improved reactivity to requests for better accessibility.

2. Modifying and enhancing practices

Destination pour tous has allowed the municipality to solidify and structure several measures integrated into its strategic planning and accessibility action plan. Furthermore, the municipality has adjusted its approach to guiding its partners with the goal of minimizing constraints on businesses by, for example, distributing signage, offering free consultations and personalized recommendations, subsidizing building accessibility projects for their facilities, and offering free training on how to serve customers with disabilities.

Moreover, as an example to our partners, the municipality's involvement in the project has promoted the inclusion of a specific exercise in assisting and welcoming people with disabilities in its municipal employee training program.

Another significant impact is that the program has allowed the City Council to take political ownership of the issue. Its members now feel more legitimized to act on accessibility issues thanks to the support garnered by mobilized businesses and satisfied citizens. The impacts of this political ambition have even affected our municipal construction by-laws, which now include specific provisions on universal accessibility that are even stricter than those in the Quebec Construction Code.

3. Improving physical and social environments

The City already offered subsidies supporting business and services with accessibility projects. However, with the new Destination pour tous certification, there has been a significant surge in demand, requiring a substantial increase in the budget reserved for the subsidy program.

The improvements in the accessibility of public institutions over the last two years have been tangible: more than 24 establishments —14 in the downtown core alone—are better able to welcome and serve people with disabilities. More than 59% of downtown businesses are currently accessible, which contributes to better physical and social environments for our citizens and visitors.

4. Promotion

Promotion of the municipality—or more specifically, of the accessibility of its businesses, services, and tourist attractions—has had a significant impact. Information is mainly shared through the communication tools used by Kéroul, including their Le Québec pour tous platform.

In addition, the project has gained a certain visibility through several media interviews with its players and through recognition by other municipalities who wish to tap into our expertise to prepare their own local Destination pour tous programs.

In closing, certification is not a destination. It is a journey, an ever-evolving path toward inclusivity. It is an interactive process that serves as an extraordinary catalyst for communities that wish to use their ability to take action and tangibly improve their members' quality of life and accessibility to their tourist facilities.

Lead speaker : Nathalie Roussel

Organisation : Ville de Victoriaville

City (Country) : Victoriaville(Canada)

Biography : A project manager with training in psychoeducation, teaching, and local community mobilization and development, Nathalie has been responsible for the City of Victoriaville's universal accessibility program since 1999. Cofounder and member of the coordinating committee of the Réseau Municipalités accessibles, she sits on several provincial cross-sectorial committees involved in important matters of accessibility and is a lecturer and collaborator at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. Her work in the municipal, associative, and institutional sectors has allowed her to become an expert in universal accessibility by creating several innovative projects of significant importance on a provincial level.

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Organisation :

City (Country) : ()

Biography :