

DIADA – InfoNews 2007

special edition

Report on the Conference `Training Accessible Tourism for All` -Trends and Tools-

on the ITB Berlin



Saturday, 10 March 2007

International Conference on Accessible Tourism on the ITB 2007

The International Conference about Training Accessible Tourism for All on March, 10th, 2007 was organized by the three EU-projects DIADA, EU.FOR.ME and EQUAL-Fairway and highly demanded, parallel to the International Tourism Fair Berlin (ITB).

The Conference had the assignment on the background of the demographic change to point out that accessible Tourism for All has a demand for new products and services with a specific expertise for decision-making units and employees.

On the one hand this needs new approaches to training-programmes and offers on the other hand new perspectives for the labour market.

During the event new training approaches supported by the EU for the creation of teaching-modules for universities and universities of applied science (EU.FOR.ME) and for the training of Accessibility – Auditors via e-learning (DIADA) were introduced. Furthermore a project for the creation of jobs through Accessibility and for people with disabilities (EQUAL-Fairway) was introduced.

Approximately 100 participants from 10 different European countries were represented.

A survey among the participants proves that Accessible Tourism for All is of great importance and highly rated in education and advanced training.

Insofar this conference, parallel to one of the biggest tourism fairs worldwide was highly rated and of Europe-wide importance with top-class staffed participants and speakers.

Among the participants were representatives of the World Tourism Organisation, the EU-Commission and of the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology.

Represented speakers were important decision-making units of Sol Melia, the third biggest hotel chain of Europe, the Tourism region Skåne, the Institute for Tourism Warsaw, the tourism association Brandenburg, the Universities of Surrey and of



Münster, NeumannConsult as well as from the National Coordination Board 'Tourism for All' (NatKo) in Germany. The partners of the EU-projects DIADA, EU.FOR.ME and Equal-Fairway came from organisations of Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Spain and the Federal State of Brandenburg.

For the ITB 2008, the next conference on Accessible Tourism for All is planned due to the great success of the last year's conferences.

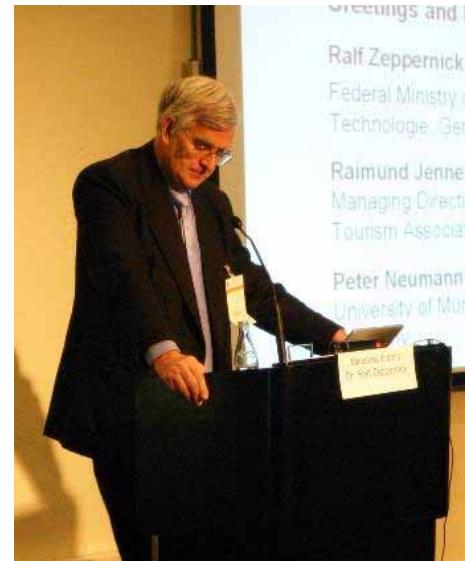


Greetings

Dr. Ralf Zeppernick (Deputy Director General, Questions of SME Policy and the Services Sector, Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, Germany)

Ralf Zeppernick pointed out that the Germany's Act on Equal Opportunities for Disabled Persons has set the legal framework for providing accessible tourism. Still a lot of work and communication has to be done to fill this legal frame. The Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology supports a lot of actions for creating an accessible tourism in the fields of training, skilling, and research. In 2003, the European year of People with Disabilities – a study was completed on the Economic Impulses of a Barrier-Free Tourism for All. The short version of the study was in such demand that two reprints were necessary. The English version was distributed through the EU Commission to all of the EU Member States and is now the working basis for further EU projects. The Ministry of Economics and Technology currently supports a direct follow up of the Study. It focuses on an Analysis of the Success Factors and Development of Measures to Enhance Quality in Accessible Tourism. The project is scheduled to be completed in June 2008.

Furthermore he pointed out that "Accessible tourism for all is a topic that is part-and-parcel of today's tourism policy."



Raimund Jennert (Chief Executive Officer of the Brandenburg Tourism Association, Germany)

Raimund Jennert represented that the development of accessible tourism can only be achieved when all people being involved get rid of "barriers in their heads". Training accessible tourism is a very important, necessary step in doing so. The Federal State of Brandenburg has discovered "Accessible Tourism for All" as an important market segment with many unexploited potentials. A rise of awareness for accessible tourism could be reached among tourist providers, tourism organisations, people



working in administration through different projects. Achieving an accessible tourism for all needs qualified experts and employees along the whole tourist chain, starting from the strategic planning at a higher level all the way down to the basis, where hotel owners, bus drivers, chefs de cuisine or canoe-hires need to know the details. A big campaign called INNOPunkt aimed at training tourist entrepreneurs in Brandenburg in the field of accessible tourism. 40 small companies were intensively trained and learned a lot about new target groups and their demands, about adapting their offers to those needs and about specific marketing. The Brandenburg Tourism Association also participates in the EQUAL-project Fairway (see description below).

Dr. Peter Neumann (Project Manager at the University of Münster / Director of NeumannConsult)

As representative of the organisers and project partner of each EU-project, Peter Neumann stressed that an accessible environment is not only essential from a social point of view and combating social exclusion but affects a high number of other areas and all activities of everyday life. "An accessible environment is a crucial requirement for around 10 % of the population, a necessity for approx. 30 to 40 % and comfortable for 100 %". Regarding the field of tourism – travel and tourism facilities will benefit from accessibility along the entire tourism chain. The study "economic impulses of accessible tourism in Germany", commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Economics has proven that accessibility is not only an important economic factor but also an important employment creator in tourism. Peter Neumann emphasized that there is an urgent need to promote accessibility and Design for All issues by national and federal legislation, in public procurement and by improved training facilities within education and training to use the chances given by accessible tourism.



Introduction of the EU Projects:



Katarzyna Swiezawska-Ambroziak from ASM, Poland introduced the EC - project DIADA. DIADA is the acronym for "Developing and introducing a new training approach in the tourism sector – tourism for all - with DIADA trained consultants". Creating accessible tourism starts with the provision of information. The EU-Project DIADA aims at creating and implementing a new training system for the whole tourism industry with the involvement of persons with disabilities. In this system employees of tourism facilities and disabled people will be trained to become professional providers of information on tourist facilities, so called "Accessibility-Auditors".



For more information visit: <http://apintech.com/diada>



Maria Stella Minuti from CST Assisi in Italy and Lucilla Morelli, student at the University of Perugia in Italy introduced the EC-project EU.FOR.ME.

The EU-Project "EU.FOR.ME Tourist training for a wider target" aims at filling a gap that schools, universities and training centres offering programmes on tourism have in many European countries: there are practically no examples that accessibility issues are taken into consideration in the organisation of tourism training modules. EU.FOR.ME main objective is the realisation of a training course for "Trainers



Specialised in the Topics of Accessible Tourism" who will use the competencies acquired during the course to develop and deliver training modules on "tourism for all" in the teaching activities on tourism conducted by public and private institutions.

For more information visit: <http://www.euforme.net/>

Dr. Wolfgang Fritsch of the Technology Center Neuruppin in Germany introduced the Equal-project Fairway.

EQUAL is a collaborative initiative of the EU, which pursues the elimination of discrimination and inequality in all fields of the labour market by developing new and innovative approaches, concepts, methods and instruments. Moreover EQUAL aims at facilitating employment and the starting-off of businesses, mainly by offering training courses. The EQUAL development partnership of Brandenburg, called FAIRWAY is dedicated to make the Federal State of Brandenburg a good example in the field of accessible tourism for other regions of Europe.

For more information visit: <http://www.equal-fairway.de>



Panel Discussion (summary by Victoria Eichhorn)

An important aspect of the conference 'Training Accessible Tourism for All' has been the panel discussion, which endeavoured to make a transition from projects to the implementation of accessibility in organisations.

Victoria Eichhorn from the University of Surrey, UK was chairing the session with the aims to raise awareness of accessibility issues, improve the general understanding of the subject and move towards a holistic approach of accessibility. Of significant

importance hereby was the establishment of clear objectives with regards to the future of 'Accessible Tourism for All' to be extrapolated at the end of the discussion.



Participants of the panel discussion came from leading organisations and institutions, including Marina Diotallevi from the World Tourism Organization, responsible for the UNWTO instrument 'Accessible Tourism for All'; Federico Martínez-Carrasco de Santiago, Community Involvement Manager of the 3rd biggest hotel chain in Europe 'Sol Melía'; Ulf Kyrling from the department of Economic Development and Innovation of the organisation 'Region Skåne'; Teresa Skalska, Professor at the University of Hotel Management, Gastronomy and Tourism in Warsaw, Poland as well as Hartmut Smikac, advisor for the National Coordination Board 'Tourism for All' (NatKo) in Germany.

During the first round of questions, all panel members were asked to report on how they deal with accessibility in general or training for accessible 'Tourism for All' in their respective organisations. As all participants work for different types of tourist organisations, they consequently pursue different objectives and put into practice diverse strategies which best suit their organisational nature and capabilities. This clearly highlighted the variety and multitude of possible approaches to deal with accessibility.



From an accessibility office's point of view, Hartmut Smikac elaborated on NatKo's main objective to integrate accessibility into all spheres of life. Important hereby is the focus on training aspects for tourism suppliers to be able to achieve this goal.

Ulf Kyrling from the organisation 'Region Skåne' acknowledged the need to work with regional accessibility offices, such as 'Turism för Alla' in Sweden, to develop accessibility plans for an entire region. Explicit accessibility strategies are not only essential for regional development structures but also for international institutions operating at the global level such as the World Tourism Organization.

Marina Diotallevi from the UNWTO informed the audience about the instrument 'Accessible Tourism for All' developed by the UNWTO that delineates accessibility recommendations for actors in the tourism industry. Accessibility requirements have been seriously taken into account by 'Sol Melía'.

Federico Martínez-Carrasco de Santiago stressed that for 'Sol Melía', as a major tourism supplier, accessibility receives a high weighting and is addressed by modifying existing hotels and implementing 'Design for All' as a prerequisite into all new facilities.

The right approach to training was emphasised by all participants and Teresa Skalska from the University of Hotel Management, Gastronomy and Tourism outlined specific actions taken by the tourism department in Warsaw to embrace accessibility into educational instances.

From these stated key objectives and actions, the discussion moved on to illuminate in greater detail the challenges, or on the contrary, the opportunities for pursuing these different approaches.

Apart from complying with the social responsibility, major opportunities include reaching a huge market by addressing the needs of persons with accessibility requirements, as outlined by Federico Martínez-Carrasco de Santiago from 'Sol Melía'. This in turn is highly profitable, with economic benefits to be accrued for those who adequately address this market. As an international body, the UNWTO has the strengths and communication instruments in place to disseminate this potential, raise awareness and make accessibility requirements known to all tourism players. Training at universities was also mentioned as a great opportunity. Educating students during their higher education ensures that they will have the social responsibility and consciousness as well as the knowledge about accessibility when entering the practical world of tourism to appropriately operationalise accessibility. Given that accessibility offices have worked for many years with people with all types of impairments, these organisations offer excellent opportunities for all kinds of tourism companies by providing advice and guidance. Knowledge, experience and training aspects are hence regarded as the key to address accessibility in practice.

Regarding the challenges, participants mentioned actual practical implementation difficulties in terms of overcoming barriers for successful public-private sector cooperation structures. Alongside with resistance by tourism suppliers, panel members emphasised the need to increase acceptance and compliance levels. It became obvious that there is still a lack of understanding of disability issues in general and also a deficient amount of trainers for accessibility, as mentioned by Teresa Skalska. Further, Hartmut Smikac from NatKo draw attention to the obstacles in managing different perceptions and needs: those of people with impairments and those of tourism suppliers.

The discussion on challenges and opportunities clearly highlighted several objectives with regards to the future of accessible 'Tourism for All'. First of all, the understanding of accessibility issues still needs to be improved. Important hereby is ongoing research into different needs of people with different accessibility requirements. Anticipated are individual or region-specific approaches, as the example of 'Region Skåne' showed. For all approaches, it is further essential to cooperate with consumers in the development process to ensure that all tourist products and services match the needs of individuals. Enhancing reliability in the information provision of tourist information, as emphasized by Hartmut Smikac from NatKo, is also vital for this market. Together with finding easy and feasible ways for tourism suppliers to implement guidelines and follow accessibility recommendations, this would lead to an increase in acceptance levels. Further, acceptance levels can also be enhanced by providing training courses for tourism suppliers and students. The final objective, actually embracing all previous mentioned aspects, refers to developing accessibility strategies that are socially as well as economically sustainable.

Accessibility represents a key issue for tourism in the 21st century and only through the implementation of these objectives, coupled with a strong focus on training aspects, will Europe have the chance to become a barrier-free tourism destination for all.

The panel discussion was concluded with the words of Sir Bert Massie, Chairman of the Disability Rights Commission:

"But there is one club you will all join at some point: you will all become disabled. Don't just think of wheel-chair users, think of your hearing going in your early 50s (...). Suddenly, you have a heart attack; you can't breathe as easily. You are involved in an accident. Or that job that you had done for years is suddenly painful because of a thing called arthritis.

It is an inclusive club. You are all going to come and join us. We welcome you. We are very friendly. But when you come and join us, we want you to enjoy life. Now is your chance. Design [accessibility (by VE); orig.: tomorrow's technology] so it is there for you tomorrow. So it is there for me today (Massie, 2007)".¹

The quote strongly emphasises that society needs to stop thinking of accessibility as an issue for a minority of people or a niche market. Accessibility is important whether or not someone has an impairment. It is essential for increasing the general comfort in life, necessary for individuals with temporary limitations as well as required by the elderly population and parents with young children. Accessibility is important to everyone!

Conclusions by Maria Aigner

In her conclusional speech Mrs. Maria Aigner from the EU Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, Tourism Unit outlined the actions of the European Union, the European Commission and the Enterprise & Industry, Tourism Unit.

The European Union has declared the year 2007 as the "European Year of Equal Opportunities for All" and is financing

projects and best practices through the diverse EU funded initiatives. The European Commission also recognises the need to mainstream disability and accessibility into all relevant policy areas. The report of the Tourism Sustainability Group (TSG) of the Tourism Unit of DG Enterprise and Industry demands `Fair access to tourism for all`.

Accessibility is a rights issue. Conferences and discussions on Accessible Tourism for All are important to raise awareness and for a better understanding of accessibility issues, equal opportunities for all as well as combating social exclusion.

The main barrier for tourism development is a lack of information to the demands of people with disabilities and a demographic aging society.

The introduced projects (DIADA, EU.FOR.ME, Equal-Fairway) contribute challenges into opportunities. Accessibility has to be seen in a holistic approach and has to be a Design for All.

"Europe is the tourist destination No 1 of the world! – I wish us all great success in our effort to make Europe the tourist destination No 1 accessible for everyone!"



¹ Massie, B. (2007) "Opening Speech" IN Proceedings of 'Extending Horizons - Accessibility to Next Generation Networks', Conference organised by COST 219ter, BT Centre, London, UK, 16th of January 2007, <http://www.tiresias.org/cost219ter/extending_horizons/index.htm> (accessed 5th of March 2007)

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