

Empowering All People through Tourism

Two of the prestigious UNWTO Ulysses Awards for Innovation in Tourism have been bestowed this year to NGOs in Canada and Slovenia for their excellent work in accessible tourism

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21st century tourism is no longer a mere business activity seeking profits, but an activity involving actors from the public and private sectors, as well as civil society, that makes a major contribution to current strategic challenges, including (i) development; (ii) the mitigation of climate change and (iii) good macro-governance. As such, innovation in tourism has important implications for governance and society at large.

Against this background, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the UNWTO Knowledge Network annually award the UNWTO Ulysses Prize and Awards to highlight and showcase Innovation and Application of Knowledge in Tourism. In doing so, they seek to recognize and stimulate knowledge creation, dissemination and innovative applications in tourism and bring to light the latest advances in the field.

Two of this year's Awards have been bestowed on NGOs in Canada and Slovenia for their work in accessible tourism

The NGO Kéroul in Canada is committed to providing culture and tourism services to people with disabilities. Founded in 1979, the organization has made the Québec region of Canada an accessible tourism destination. This year, their programme *La Route Accessible* (The Accessible Road) - an innovative and informative travel tool specially designed to promote accessible tourism in Québec - was conferred a UNWTO Ulysses Award for innovation in non-governmental organizations.

The NGO SENT (Slovenian Association for Mental Health), the first organization specialised in accessible tourism in Slovenia, was also given a UNWTO Ulysses Award in recognition of its innovative programme PREMIKI, an institute promoting the development of accessible tourism and acting as a travel agency for people with disabilities.

Both organizations recognize tourism as an integration tool for people with disabilities and aim to empower them to experience tourism in an independent and equitable manner. They focus on advising, promoting and developing accessible tourism in their region and country and dedicate much of their time to researching new ways to improve accessible tourism.

Tourism policy shares a number of monetary and fiscal tools with other public policies, but it concentrates in the use of knowledge management instruments, from research, education and training, information, etc. to its applications in recommendations, best practices, voluntary standards, norms, codes and laws. It is in this context that accessible tourism is called to play an increasing role.

Tourism increases human capital and its productivity in organizations and enterprises. However, human capital is, of course, not only a means to development, but in fact the purpose of development itself. People with disabilities cannot be absent – and are much needed – in the enormous tasks our societies face in the 21st century. Tourism represents a powerful tool for increased knowledge, awareness and capabilities, and thus the full participation of people with disabilities in society.

Tourism should have an important role in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its implementation, and the 2011 UNWTO Ulysses Prize and Awards have aimed to contribute to such a goal.