



Mapping of Skills and Training Needs to Improve Accessibility in Tourism Services in Europe

Case Study 18. Visit Flanders' Accessibility Training, Belgium

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**Case Study
Visit Flanders' Accessibility Training**

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Executive Summary

This case study focuses on the training efforts of Visit Flanders, the official tourism board of the Flemish region in Belgium.

There have been continuous efforts by Visit Flanders to create an accessible destination for all. In order to achieve this, training has been a crucial part of the tourism board's strategy over the past 12 years. The accessible travel action plan was introduced by Visit Flanders in 2001, outlining how to improve accessibility in the region's tourism products. The action plan was directed to benefit not only to people with disabilities, but also the elderly, young families with children and low income families.

One of the crucial points of the access plan is that tourists with access requirements should have access to the same facilities and services as other tourists, and not be exclusively relegated to specially adapted social holiday centres. In this way, any holiday destination should be accessible for anyone. This focus on inclusion is one of the cornerstones of the policy of Visit Flanders. It is important to highlight that the training provided by Visit Flanders has not been implemented in isolation, but as an integral part of this overall strategy to improve overall accessibility at different levels in the Flemish tourism sector.

Various trainings have taken place in the region in recent years, mainly of two different types. The first one concerns in particular accessibility in regards to the built environment. This training was directed to architects and other professions from the construction industry, and achieved important results concerning the training material developed. It has been re-used in other training context, and also contributed to the drafting of a new law addressing building permits in 2010, providing measurements and advice to base the building regulations on.

Another type of training focuses on reception and the "welcome for all" concept, meaning that it is not sufficient that the built environment is accessible and that the correct information is provided, if the staff relating with the tourists with disabilities are not prepared. Trainings of one day theoretical and practical courses together with trainers in accessible tourism and demonstrators (people with disabilities) have provided important insights for e.g. front desk staff and tour guides.

Finally, Visit Flanders also provides an indirect or informal type of training through their "fam tours". This concept involves introducing tour operators to specific sites or areas in order to familiarise them with the offerings of the

region. During such a tour accessibility and awareness raising in regarding these issues are also taken into consideration.

This case study demonstrates an important involvement and interest in accessible tourism by a region which provides different types of training aiming to render the region accessible to all. The main barrier encountered by Visit Flanders is reaching out to businesses and catching their interest. Thanks to the position of an influential tourism board with already existing channels and networks, this obstacle was surmounted, however, for smaller bodies this might be more problematic. The case study also underlines the importance of an initial awareness raising for businesses in terms of overall tourism accessibility, before any kind of training may actually be started.

Impact has been difficult to measure due to the regular changes of staff in the tourism sector and due to the specific skills involved. Often the trainings aim for awareness and an open mentality, which are not possible to estimate by traditional means. However, the evaluations made by Visit Flanders and the participants to the trainings have been overall very positive.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Flanders is situated in the northern part of Belgium, which is a federated state made up of 5 provinces with Brussels as its capital. Flanders includes a varied tourism offer with coastal areas, historical cities and the Flemish countryside attracting 13 million visitors annually¹. Tourism in and to the region generates about 28.3 million nights spent and about 5% of the total number of jobs².

Due to the division of powers within the Belgian state, the Flemish government is charged with formulating its own regional tourism policy. Its mission is to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism around Flanders with the view of increasing economic return, employment and welfare for its population. As for all destinations, tourism has substantial economic significance, but it also holds social importance.

Visit Flanders is the official tourism organisation for the region supported by the Flemish government. Its main activities revolve around promoting tourism to and in Flanders to foreign and domestic visitors. Moreover, Visit Flanders is also charged with the development of different tourism products within the region. This has been an important tool in order to improve the overall levels of accessibility in the sector and work towards increasing accessibility for those sectors, such as accommodation, where it has political powers.

For the past 13 years there has been a strong focus on tourism for all. The notion of accessibility has come from above, as an integral element of Flemish tourism policy. But, at the same time, it has emanated from below with passionate individuals working within the organisation of Visit Flanders who strongly believe in the importance of driving accessibility forward. Not only as a means of improving accessibility in the tourism sector, but as a lever to improve accessibility in society overall.

The subsequent sections explore how training efforts have been introduced and achieved by the Flemish tourism board, as well as providing an analysis and discussion on the impact and effects resulting from these activities.

¹ <http://www.vlaanderen.be/int/en/tourism-0>

² <http://www.vlaanderen.be/int/en/tourism-0>

2.0 OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This section aims to provide an overview and background of the overall accessibility work of Visit Flanders which has influenced and prompted past and current training efforts.

Accessible Travel Action Plan

In 2001, Visit Flanders put forward an Accessible Travel Action Plan in order to improve accessibility in its tourism products. This plan envisages that all Flemish citizens should be able to participate in tourism activities – including low income families, the young, young families with children, the elderly and the disabled.

In respect to travelling for tourists with access requirements, the Action Plan sets out the principle that all tourists irrespective of disability and impairments should have access to the same facilities and services as other tourists. Practically this means that a disabled traveller should be able to stay in a hotel, apartment or holiday residence as any other tourist and not be exclusively relegated to specially adapted social holiday centres.

Particularly two main points were emphasised in the plan as measures to improve levels of accessibility:

- Improvement of physical accessibility of tourism products in Flanders through an extensive system of subsidies.
- The need to obtain reliable information on the accessibility of current products. The lack of reliable information, which is not unique to Flanders, had proven to be a major obstacle to people with disabilities taking a holiday in the region.

It was recognised that the key measure to achieving these objectives were awareness raising and training and to convince businesses that there was an attractive market opportunity to increase focus on accessibility.

In the initial phases of the Action Plan, there was an apparent need to improve physical accessibility within the Flemish tourism industry. External evaluation agencies were commissioned to assess over 100 hotels in Flanders. The evidence pointed to a serious lack of accessible infrastructure. Moreover, there was also a tendency within the industry to shy away from the issue and people

employed in the industry showed little experience of receiving people with disabilities.

Accessibility was considered a very vague concept for tourism suppliers. The main fears expressed by businesses concerned creating an institutional or clinical atmosphere in their facilities and thereby chasing away other “mainstream” customers. Other perceived obstacles for businesses concerned costs and an unwillingness to spend money on the necessary works.

Due to this reluctance, the first step towards improving the overall situation was to raise awareness of the potential business case and couple this with subsidies and grants for improving the infrastructure building works. This measure gave the sector the needed boost to start investing and take accessibility into consideration.

As pointed out by one of the Visit Flanders accessibility experts:

“Training can only start when people are aware...”

In these early phases of the action plan, efforts related to how to increase the uptake of accessibility in general. It was believed that the key was to create a buzz around the concept of accessibility. This was done by promotion in the form of articles and awards on accessibility. However, an important factor was the backing of the Ministry of Tourism who also actively promoted the notion of accessibility.

In 2008, Visit Flanders implemented its own accessibility label indicating which hotels were accessible and to what level. This scheme has now been extended to other tourism facilities such as information centres and museums. However, it was an important first lever to increase overall interest in accessibility from the industry. In this vein, it is already important to point out that training efforts have not been implemented and promoted in isolation, but as an integral part of an overall strategy to improve overall accessibility levels in the Flemish tourism sector.

Accessibility as an integrated part of Visit Flanders

Accessibility has become an integrated part of new product development and with this comes the need for increasing information and training. One of the

major projects currently being implemented by Visit Flanders is the Great War Century project, commemorating the First World War. It is projected that thousands of people from all over the world will be attracted to the region for its history, but also to find more information and commemorate relatives who participated in the war. In this vein, it is expected that many elderly tourists will visit the war sites making accessibility a key point in the promotion and development of the project. In line with this project, the goal of Visit Flanders is to – by 2020 – have the same staff levels in regards to accessibility skills and awareness around the whole Flanders.

3.0 CONTENT, TRAINING MATERIAL AND AVAILABILITY

This section describes the different training courses developed and provided by Visit Flanders, both informal training measures and formal training programmes are described. Their respective strength and weaknesses will be discussed further in section 4.

As described earlier, training is an integrated part of the accessibility vision and action plan of Visit Flanders. The Action Plan outlines three core issues in creating an accessible destination:

- Universal Design principles;
- The importance of obtaining accurate information; and
- Awareness raising and training

The training efforts and the development of courses for specific professions have therefore focused on those occupations that can facilitate considerable improvements in the accessible tourism chain and where there have been noticeable gaps in the skills levels or in the mainstream educational curriculum. In this context, Visit Flanders has developed training courses for the following professional groups:

- Architects;
- Frontline staff such as receptionists;
- Tour and travel Guides; and
- Internal Visit Flanders staff.

These trainings, which for simplicity has been divided in 2 groups in relation to their content, are described more in detail below.

3.1 Training for architects

The Action Plan and its emphasis on infrastructural improvements prompted a training specifically designed for architects and to a lesser extent contractors and construction workers. This training was developed to make sure that the grants and subsidies in accessibility improvements were implemented correctly. The aim was to equip architects with the knowledge and skills to make the built environment accessible for all. These sessions were, particularly, important during the initial phase of the Accessibility Action Plan (2002-2008).

At this time, there was also a clear gap in training in universal design principles for architects. This type of training was not included in the school curriculum. In addition, there was only an outdated law addressing building regulations and accessibility which could not provide sufficient information on how to make the built environment increasingly accessible. Moreover, this law was not properly enforced and there were no sanctions attached when buildings did not comply with legislation. Therefore, it was essential to give architects advice and guidelines of measurements. The sessions were given by a specialized architect and mainly went into topics that were suggested by the audience. The training sessions took place in the evening in order to make it available to working/active architects and more attractive in terms of time commitment. The trainings were limited to one session ie. one evening course of a few of hours.

Specific course material was developed by specialized architects providing detailed guidelines of different essential elements of the built environment. As the legal framework did not help to facilitate accessibility in the built environment, this course material went beyond the then current legal requirements.

The material provided the necessary measurements and advice on how to adapt, design and build spaces related to:

- Rooms such as kitchen, bedrooms and bathrooms.
- Common spaces such as receptions, lifts and corridors.
- Recreational outdoor spaces such as parks, leisure centres and parking spaces.
- Tourism facilities such as restaurants.

These first course packs focused on how to overcome architectural barriers. However, an important part of the material also included important guidelines going beyond the mere physical requirements for wheelchair users and people with motor impairments.

Advice on how to create an enjoyable environment for all is also emphasised in order not to stigmatise and exclude tourists with accessibility requirements from “mainstream” facilities or similarly in order not to make facilities too clinical. The focus of Visit Flanders have been to communicate that universal design is not only about making specific adjustments for certain impairments, but to make it accessible and inclusive for all.

After the introduction of course material catering to motor impairments, other specific leaflets were developed. These outlined and advised on the needs of:

- Partially sighted/blind people.
- Hard of hearing people; and
- People with asthma/allergies.

Today the training situation for architects in Belgium has somewhat improved. Universal design is now figuring as an optional course in some architectural schools³. As such, this particular training is no longer available. However, the legacy of the architect training course is the course material which is freely available online⁴. This course material is still actively being used and consulted by architects when planning for accessibility.

3.2 Training related to reception and welcome all

Accessibility is, however, not only about bricks and mortar, but relates to the mentality of those working in the hospitality industry. The ability of staff to make guests with disabilities feel welcome is at least as important as the physical aspects of being able to enter a building, outdoor space or a venue. In particular, the experience of the tourist and the accessibility of a destination depend to a large extent on how they are first being greeted and assisted by

³ Data gathered from interviews and expert input

⁴ http://www.accessinfo.be/fileadmin/bestanden/docs/fiches_tr.pdf

frontline staff. This section provides an overview of the “welcome all” courses⁵ and is followed by a more in-depth discussion on the training for tour guides.

“Welcome all” training

Taking into account this importance of training for frontline staff and others who are in direct contact with disabled tourists, Visit Flanders has developed a number of courses relating to receiving and welcoming people with disabilities.

The courses were directed towards different target occupations who would benefit and help to improve accessibility levels in Flanders. These courses included:

- Client friendly reception of people with disabilities for frontline staff (receptionists, personnel in the hospitality sector, restaurants, pubs amongst others)
- Guiding visitors with disabilities (tour guides)
- Internal Visit Flanders staff training, both in the head office and those working in tourist information centres, including the focus on inspections, grants, communication, desk and call center. (However, due to the internal nature of this course, it will not be described in-detail).

In general the courses followed a particular model similar to the one of a conference with lectures, including both theoretical and practical sections. The sessions lasted for a whole day (Saturday) and were structured as follows:

Morning session: Introduction and theoretical aspects of accessibility, the introduction of different types of disabilities and outlining the business case for accessibility.

Lunch: Participants would eat together with the trainers and demonstrators and the training would continue informally.

Afternoon session: Practical session which included simulations guided by informants with disabilities where the participants could freely ask questions on how to best assist and welcome disabled guests.

⁵ This is not an official name given by Visit Flanders, but it follows a common theme in emphasising importance of mentality of those in the tourism industry.

During the sessions, people with different disabilities would be present in order to help demonstrate practical problems and how they could be solved without causing embarrassment or injury. In general, most sessions included one person with motor impairment, one person with vision impairment, one person experiencing learning difficulties and one person with speech impairments in order to ensure that different types of access requirements were being communicated. Participants were also encouraged to ask any questions they would be curious to know in smaller groups of 4-6 people. For example, questions such as, should I speak slower or what words should I use when talking to someone with a learning disability? How do I best assist someone who is blind, do I take their arm or should I give my own?

The meeting and interaction with tourists who have disability requirements is a cornerstone in the training developed by Visit Flanders. The focus on practical experiences and breaking down barriers and taboos in dealing with customers with access needs are considered imperative in order to make those working in the tourism industry comfortable and increasingly aware on how to behave around disabled guests. In this vein, health and safety and legal issues have been less of a focus in the course curriculum.

The emphasis on the interaction with disabled people, is one of the reasons why no online training has been developed. Online training is believed to be the most cost and time efficient way to engage in training for a large number of people. Due to importance of small groups when providing hands-on training the number of spaces available per course have been limited to 20-25 people. This is an important consideration when factoring in the impact on the tourism environment and the potential reach of target audience of the client-friendly training efforts.

In order to be able to train a greater volume of people, Visit Flanders will start a shorter version of their "client-friendly reception" course in order to reach their goal of increased staff skills by 2020 in relation to the Great War project as mentioned in the overview section of the case study.

Training for tour guides

A training for tour guides was developed in 2009 in order to provide this occupational group with the necessary skills in guiding tourists with accessibility needs. The course was targeted to tour guides working in museums, walking tours or tour guides travelling around Flanders.

The implementation of this particular course was prompted by the lack of corresponding courses in the “regular” guide education. Moreover, tour guides in Flanders are required to continuously take courses in order to keep their guide license. This presented Visit Flanders with the opportunity to develop an optional course that could be selected by guides throughout the career and further improve the skills level of this occupational group.

The tour guide course was structured as the “Welcome all” training described above, with a morning, lunch and afternoon session and lasted for one whole day. The below discussion concentrates on the course content and training methods delivered in this training.

A central element in the overall training efforts of Visit Flanders is universality and inclusion. In this context, the training did not concentrate on how to guide people with specific disabilities, but rather how to make everyone’s experience interesting and enjoyable taking into account their unique characteristics. In the same vein as the architectural training emphasised the importance of designing the physical environment in a manner that does not lead the tourist to become aware of his/her own disability, the guide training focused on how to include everyone on an equal basis in the group.

Training consisted in through innovative ways on how to make the best and most interesting experience for everyone in the group. An example mentioned by one interviewee was how to practically make a guided tour of a church interesting for people with vision impairments. Due to the sensitivity of the old objects, touching would not be an appropriate way for these tourists to experience the church. Instead the idea was born to let the tourists walk barefoot in order to make them feel and experience what old Franciscan monks would have felt. The interviewee stated that this has since proved to be a popular experience for all, not only for those with vision impairments.

The lunch break was also used as an interactive session and helped to conceptualise the theoretical parts of the training. It made it possible for participants to interact with the trainers or demonstrators in a relaxed atmosphere, while also informally continuing the training. One trainer interviewed revealed that demonstrators were asked to play along at the table. For example, a blind demonstrator would pretend that he could not find his cup in order to show the participants in practice the correct and best way to assist a blind person.

One interviewee argued that these important interactions cannot be learnt or replaced by reading course material or follow an e-learning course, but must be

experienced. Hence the inaptness of e-learning to break down some of the most fundamental barriers in guiding those with access needs.

The practical session also included a walk tour, which the tour guide had to make together with small groups and one of the trainers or demonstrators. This opportunity also encouraged practical experience in how to implement what had been learnt.

Although the overall focus of the trainings seem to have been on discussion, lived experiences and testing out practical skills, the participants also received course material to take home which could be used as a reference material for future reference.

3.3 The fam tour concept – informal training and awareness raising

The fam tour concept involves showing tour operators, who may potentially be selling tours, around specific area in order to make them familiar with the offerings of the region. During a few days, tour operators are shown around the area, visiting some places of interest as well as meeting with potential suppliers arranged by the tourism board.

The fam tour concept has been used as an informal training and awareness raising methods that Visit Flanders has been practicing for years. The subsequent observations and analysis are derived from the project team joining a fam tour in order to observe and better understand how this type of “informal” training can improve the situation on skills and training in accessible tourism.

The main purpose of the fam tour is to encourage the uptake of the region's tourism products. It is an opportunity for travel agents to experience the product they are, or will be, selling. Although the main focus is evidently on attracting more business to Flanders, it is also a way to make the journey from abroad increasingly accessible for foreign visitors and informally train and equip travel agents to facilitate their awareness and skills in selling tourism products from the region. For this specific fam tour, the excursions and the area focused on the Great War Centenary project taking place in West Flanders in the areas of Ypres.

All participants interviewed said it is a very valuable method to understand what sort of challenges a client would potentially face when visiting a particular location or staying at a specific hotel. Travel agents often get questions on whether certain activities or locations are suitable for people with accessibility

needs. For instance, how much walking is involved between different points of interests or whether a city (in particular historical cities) is accessible by wheelchair. In addition to experience the levels of accessibility for themselves, the fam tour participants were given additional information in printed format on what and how certain places are accessible informed by the Visit Flanders accessibility label.

An important point to make is that the tourism industry encompasses people with wide ranges of educational levels and skills. Most participants came from very varied educational and professional backgrounds. Few had acquired formal skills in tourism such as vocational training. Only one of the participants revealed to have had formal tourism school training, but had not been receiving any education in accessibility issues. Instead it seemed that the travel agents' skills in dealing with customers with disabilities would come from experience and "trial and error" in accommodating different access requirements.

As stated earlier, the fam tour does not encompass any formal training, but coupled with accessibility information it is an important way to raise awareness about a destination to those key in selling and communicating accessible tourism products.

4.0 TARGET AUDIENCE, COMMUNICATIONS AND BARRIERS

This section discusses some of the key lessons in overcoming common barriers experienced by Visit Flanders specifically in regards reaching the target audience of the training, communication channels and the uptake of training.

Target audience

Due to the integration of training efforts into an overall strategy on how to improve accessibility in the tourism sector, Visit Flanders already disposed of a number of channels and tools through which training could be promoted.

These channels included the Visit Flanders' accessibility label for the accommodation sector which provided a direct link to those businesses already incorporating accessibility into their business strategies. Secondly, the possibility to provide an optional course for tour guides was an effective way to reach out to guides/museums/sightseeing companies.

It is important to note, however, that Visit Flanders never made any training efforts mandatory. But training has always been presented as an attractive

freely available option highlighting the market potential of the accessibility sector. In this context, the legal aspects of non-discrimination and tourism as a social right have been less emphasised, although they are important aspects to accessibility. As described in section 2, the main challenge for Tourism Flanders have consisted in convincing businesses that a focus on accessibility is needed. In this vein, the business case for accessibility training could only come after the business case for overall accessibility had been made. However, due to its size and industry clout it has been relatively easy for Visit Flanders to communicate with businesses, as they have well-established channels of communication through which they have been able to spread information and create a “buzz” around accessibility.

The strategy of Visit Flanders has been to make businesses aware of the potential material benefits which could emanate from accessibility training, and through this, convince them of investing time and effort in the training. However, this is evidently a situation that is or has been unique to Visit Flanders due to its government funding and backing. Thus, this method of overcoming the reluctance of businesses in engaging in accessibility may not be pertinent to other smaller training providers without the same industry clout as a regional tourism board.

A positive sign is that demand for training has so far exceeded supply. There are currently no official figures available on the number of participants who have completed the courses, but there is potential for a greater audience to be reached given the interest generated by Visit Flanders in accessibility.

Communication and uptake barriers

As Visit Flanders enjoys government backing and funding as well as carries considerable clout in the Flemish tourism industry, communication barriers have been less of a problem. Also as described above, the integration of accessibility in overall activities have led to businesses being reached effectively.

In regards to uptake barriers, the selected method of delivering training may work to inhibit further training being given. The focus on interactive and practical session whereby disabled trainers/demonstrators were present, seem to have worked as to prevent more people from partaking in the training session. For example, the tour guide groups were limited to groups of maximum 25 people as otherwise the practical parts would be too difficult to manage and also become less effective. So rather than a barrier to uptake there seems that the training methods selected are not sufficient to ensure that a larger audience can be reached.

5.0 EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

It is a difficult task to show the impact of certain training initiatives on the tourism industry as a whole, or even for sub-sections targeted by the training. This is because there are constantly new people being recruited into the industry. This is particularly true for a sector such as tourism where employment is often low-skilled or where employees are transient.

Concerning the training for architects that was technical in nature, the training and the legacy of its course material have been long-lasting, despite that the training itself is no longer available. The course material is still used as a comprehensive guide for architects and the material is still actively being downloaded⁶. In addition, the training has made a positive impact on the legislative environment concerning the built environment. A new law addressing building permits in 2010, used the Visit Flanders' measurements and advice to base the building regulations on. This is a good indication of the impact of the training efforts for architects. However, it is important to point out that the Visit Flanders course material still goes beyond the legal requirements and also includes other issues such as how to place furniture in the most accessible manner.

As pointed out throughout this case study, Visit Flanders training efforts are not merely directed to architects, but also involves changing the mentality of hospitality staff and breaking down barriers between tourism professionals and disabled customers. In this case, the impact in regards to mentality changes is difficult to measure.

Other key measurements of improvements of accessibility skills consist in a survey conducted by Visit Flanders, showing that (domestic) visitors with disabilities have experienced an improvement in travelling in Flanders overall, however, there is still room for considerable progress⁷.

The impact can also be gauged when businesses are actively demanding more training. In a survey conducted in 2013 on businesses who are using the Visit

⁶ Exact figure is not available

⁷ http://www.toegankelijkreizen.be/fileadmin/bestanden/docs/Survey_travellers_with_disability_2013.pdf

Flanders' accessibility label, some qualitative comments collected enquired about whether new training courses to be given⁸.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The training efforts provided by Visit Flanders to improve accessibility levels in the Flemish tourism sector incorporates good lessons from which other national or regional tourism organisations can draw from.

The case highlights the importance of not solely focus on training efforts, but to contextualize training and situate it within an overall framework and strategy of accessibility.

The training efforts have been targeted in order to ensure that gaps within accessibility levels overall are addressed. This has led to a focus on architects who are crucial in order to implement universal design principles and facilitate accessibility in practice. However, without a proper welcome and without staff experienced in providing services to tourists with access requirements, accessibility cannot be considered achieved. Moreover, accessibility is not only about allowing tourists to stay in the same facilities or using the same services, but it is about including them in the same tourism offers and on an equal footing as other guests. These two key points have been the target of the training provisions implemented by the region.

A valuable lesson learnt from the Flemish case is that the business case for accessibility cannot be achieved before or without a business case for accessibility in general. In particular, the industry clout and the links of Visit Flanders with the tourism sector has enabled the organization to overcome barriers believed to be experienced by smaller training providers. In this vein, this case highlights the role that a national tourism organization can play in the promotion and support of training for accessibility.

There are, however, some inherent weaknesses in this case, which mainly relates to the sustainability of the initiative as it seems to be costly (although no exact figures were given during the data collection). It was, thus, made possible by the financial support of the Ministry of Tourism. Given the current economic conditions and budget cutbacks, it might be necessary for other tourism boards following the example of Visit Flanders to look at other ways of delivering and financing training efforts.

⁸ This survey has not yet been made publicly available.






7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

A set of recommendations are being presented drawn out from the analysis made on the Visit Flanders case which can provide transferable lessons to other organisations, and in particular, for other tourism boards as well provide the basis for future action on accessible tourism training by the European Commission.

- **The business case for overall accessibility in the tourism industry must be made before or in parallel to the business case for training.** Training efforts cannot be promoted in isolation from other accessible activities it is attached to. For organisation with considerable industry clout, such as Visit Flanders, accessibility training should not be an isolated activity, but must be part of the overall strategy to improve accessibility within the tourism industry. This ensures that the training efforts are not wasted.
- **Training should not solely focus on accessibility, but should be coupled with the notion of inclusion.** Tourism professionals should be taught to ensure that tourists with disabilities do not feel stigmatised and become aware of their own access requirements. Professionals should strive to offer the exactly the same experience to tourists with access requirements as other tourists. This is an important focus of the training.

8.0 ANNEX I

Table 1: Best practice criteria and justification

Criteria	Justification	On track/off track
Innovative	Visit Flanders training follows a traditional class-room based method of training. However, it has developed an innovative approach in facilitating the interaction between disabled and tourism professionals.	
Relevant	The training courses developed have clearly addressed a gap in the skills level. The training has been integrated in the overall training efforts of the organisation.	
Transferable	The initiative can be replicated to other Member States and for other target groups. However, it is doubtful if it can be scaled up due to the restriction in the number of participants.	
Efficient & Effectiveness	The training is neither time- nor cost- efficient. Due to the structure of the sessions, there is limited availability of space as groups are restricted to 20-25 participants per session. However, the training is thought to be highly efficient in achieving its objectives of breaking down communication barriers between tourism professionals and disabled tourists. Therefore, it is imperative to find a balance between efficiency and effectiveness in this case.	
Impact	The impact of the training programmes as a whole cannot be evaluated. The course for architects seem to have been more successful in establishing a long-lasting impact, than the	

	welcome all courses.	
Sustainable	As pointed out throughout the case study, the traditional class-room based training methods implies limited spaces available per session, the additional cost of trainers together with the focus on interaction between disabled persons and tourism professionals have made the initiative expensive. The training efforts have been fortunate to be financed by the Ministry of Tourism, but this approach may not be viable in the long-term, especially considering the worsening economic climate and budget cutbacks.	