



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

Case Study 7. Via Libre, Spain

“This document has been prepared for the European Commission; however it reflects the views only of its authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.”

**European Commission
Enterprise and Industry Directorate General (DG
ENTR)**

“Mapping skills and training needs to accessibility in tourism services”
(204/PP/ENT/PPA/12/6471)

**Case Study
Vía Libre, Spain**

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	6
2.0 OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION	7
3.0 CONTENT, TRAINING MATERIAL AND AVAILABILITY	10
4.0 TARGET AUDIENCE, COMMUNICATIONS AND BARRIERS	20
5.0 EVIDENCE OF IMPACT	23
6.0 CONCLUSIONS.....	25
7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	26
ANNEX I: CRITERIA AND JUSTIFICATION FOR BEST PRACTICE.....	27

Executive Summary

This case study focuses on Via Libre's efforts to develop and promote accessibility trainings in Spain, to the benefit of both the tourism sector and the Spanish society as a whole.

Via Libre is part of the Spanish umbrella organisation, ONCE Foundation, representing the interests of disabled persons. As a business unit, the company focuses on promoting accessibility and design for all through a range of different activities such as consultancy in strategic planning, technical assistance, audits and contributes to the preparation of accessibility standards and research studies. Training and awareness raising are also important parts of the company's work to enhance accessibility in Spain. The trainings given by Via Libre can be tailored made in accordance with the needs and wishes of the client. Due to the company's extensive experience and inclusion of people with disabilities among its staff, it has an excellent track-record of disseminating accessibility from a "first-person" perspective.

The training activities were initially developed due to demand from the public sector. However, increasing demand from other organisations and private companies has promoted the development of a catalogue encompassing mainly 7 training courses showcasing some possible trainings that can be offered and tailored.

It is important to note that Via Libre does not give specific tourism training. Instead, it promotes a holistic concept of accessibility by arguing that tourism is not an isolated sector, but part of everyday activities. Thus, improvements in the accessibility benefit both residents and tourists in a given city. However, due to the importance of tourism for the Spanish economy, there are mainly 3 courses that are more geared to and suitable for the tourism sector. These courses are described in more detail in the Section 3, of the case study. Via Libre has also promoted the increase of training for tourism related establishments as the cornerstone in achieving accessible tourism destinations.

As Via Libre is part of the ONCE Foundation, it has access to well-established communication channels that has helped the company to promote and disseminate awareness of its training activities. Via Libre has a solid reputation in Spain and its name carries quality assurance. However, the uptake of training by tourism businesses and tourism organisations has not been without obstacles. These relates mainly to the low awareness of accessibility within the industry, but also to other barriers that are inherent in the sector such as time constraints relating to low and high seasons and the lack of funding for trainings.

The impact of the trainings can be measured in the evaluations done by former participants and the feedback has generally been good. Secondly, the sustainability and longevity of the training courses themselves are also,

according to Via Libre representatives, a good indicator of the impact that the courses have on the tourism industry. Other achievements include training courses which have been included in the course catalogues of Spanish universities.

The case study concludes with a set of recommendations which provides valuable lessons for other training organisers in the field of accessible tourism.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This case study focuses on Via Libre's, part of ONCE Foundation's business unit Fundosa Accesibilidad, efforts to promote and deliver accessibility training and awareness in the Spanish tourism sector.

The ONCE Foundation for Cooperation and the Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities was created in 1988 as a result of a resolution of the ONCE General Council as an instrument to channel the cooperation and solidarity of the blind people towards other groups of people with disabilities and to help improve their day-to-day lives. The ONCE Foundation, through its Board of Trustees, incorporates the principal Spanish organizations for people with disabilities.

Via Libre being a part of the ONCE Foundation aims to promote and disseminate training in universal accessibility and design for all, in order to improve the quality of life of all people, regardless of their age or abilities.

Given that Spain is a major tourist destination, attracting millions of foreign tourists every year accessibility has become an important part of the company's training efforts. According to the 2011 report by the World Tourism Organization, Spain is the fourth country in the world in number of foreign tourists, reaching 52.7 million in 2010. Moreover tourism represents about 10% of the country's gross domestic product¹.

However, the number of people who have reduced mobility for reasons other than disability (elderly, pregnant women, those that carry baby strollers, crutches, canes, walkers) reach 39% of the total population. This is one reason why Spain continues to promote accessible tourism and accessible environments, infrastructure and services open to everyone. In addition, there are 20 million disabled people in Europe who have expressed their desire to visit Spain². Not only trying to remove barriers or build access ramps are in the fore of this work, but the implementation of appropriate technologies and services have become essential.

Bearing in mind that accessible tourism is an opportunity to achieve both social benefits for the end-users and economic benefits for providers, Via Libre has

¹ [Organización Mundial del Turismo. Panorama OMT del turismo internacional. Edition 2011](http://mkt.unwto.org/sites/all/files/docpdf/unwtohighlights11sphr_2.pdf)
http://mkt.unwto.org/sites/all/files/docpdf/unwtohighlights11sphr_2.pdf

² <http://marcaespana.es/es/economia-empresa/turismo/articulos/369/espanya-referencia-mundial-del-turismo-accesible>

developed accessibility consulting and training tools to meet the needs and improve the quality of the tourism industry.

2.0 OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This section provides a background on Via Libre and its training activities. It sets out the needs and gaps that the training aims to tackle to improve accessibility in the Spanish tourism industry. However, firstly Via Libre and its activities are introduced in more detail.

Via Libre

Via Libre is an accessibility consultancy company part of the business Fundosa group, belonging to ONCE Foundation. In the past 2 decades it has developed activities in universal accessibility and design for all.

Via Libre's team includes 200 high qualified experts and specialists ranging from architects and engineers to occupational therapists, sociologists, ortho-prosthetic technicians, as well as braille and subtitling transcribers. Over 80% of the staff have a disability, which allows the company to bring their knowledge, experience and understanding concerning disability and accessibility into the different projects. This has given the company a valuable insight into the importance of raising awareness and training for a diverse set of industries and sectors.

The main objectives of Via Libre it to provide consultancy services, support, training and guidance to public administrations, businesses and other organizations on "universal accessibility" and "design for all". It focuses on encouraging the development of accessible environments, products and services in the areas of urban and natural environments, buildings, transport, and product design though promoting studies, training, accessibility legislation and regulations.

As part of its consultancy services, Via Libre has developed more than 650 plans of accessibility for councils, municipalities, natural environments and universities. It has also been involved in over 6,000 projects contributing with its expertise on universal accessibility.

In the field of tourism, Vía Libre conducts technical assistance and strategic planning in accessibility aspects, drafting of projects building, development assistance, auditing, reports, provide assistance services for PRM (PwD and elderly), review and develop accessibility standards.

Thus, the company has extensive experience in accessible tourism development through different projects in cooperation with some of the most important companies in the field such as the World Tourism Organization (WTO), European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), the company for the Management of Innovation and Tourism Technologies (SEGITTUR), the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Energy and Tourism and the Secretary of the Spanish National Accessibility Commission (CERMI) amongst others. These projects and cooperation are always carried out under the umbrella support of the ONCE Foundation.

Regarding the work done in cooperation with ONCE Foundation and CERMI, Vía Libre is responsible for offering consultation regarding accessibility to these bodies. This consultation is done ensuring that the staff receive updated information on current legislation, guiding them in interpretation and understanding of European, state, regional and local regulations,.

Vía Libre also participates in Conferences, Workshops and Courses giving presentations, and graduate and post graduate lectures in accessibility.

Within the services offered by Vía Libre, one of the most important is training and awareness-raising. The company provides a catalogue of training activities: specialised training activities which include accessibility, which is addressed to public and private companies in any sector.

There is also a commitment to elaborate and publish different materials such as manuals, best practices guides and reports about accessibility³.

Overcoming training needs in the Spanish tourism sector

As part of the ONCE Foundation, Vía Libre participated in conferences and workshops on accessibility awareness. These conferences were usually held and promoted by entities representing people with disabilities to make the public

³ References are available on request.

and private sector more aware of accessibility needs. The initial sessions lasted for one or two hours in the form of lectures, however, there was an increasing demand to provide proper training courses.

The first entities interested in training were regional governments and city councils. They were demanding accessibility training for their technicians, mainly architects and engineers, to develop accessible urban plans.

During the initial phases of the training projects initiated by Via Libre, the tourism sector was not specifically addressed. Instead it was included in other activities such as transport and urban planning.

Training specifically related to tourism started in 2000 when the Ministry of Tourism launched a call for training in accessible tourism for hotels, tourist offices and tourism businesses. At that time, the main barrier to promote accessibility training was that accessibility was seen as a minor issue. This assumption held true for most sectors, and in particular tourism. At that time, tourism for people with disabilities was considered an activity organized by entities representing people with disabilities as a “relief” activity for families, but one which did not provide a viable market opportunity for more mainstream tourism operators.

In 2007, Via Libre developed a strategy to address training specifically for the tourism sector. It was first suggested by the consultancy projects coordinator, Pilar Soret, who had extensive experience in accessible tourism projects. In particular, she argued that the tourism market have very specific needs different from regular residents in a given city. Given the importance of the tourism sector in Spain, a tailored training was thought imperative. In addition, Via Libre set out to argue that training is the cornerstone of growth, development and quality in the field of tourism and it is key in order to achieve accessible tourism destinations.

Several general factors influenced this change:

- In 2003, ONCE Foundation showed a need to work towards a common goal though from specific areas, such as, access to the physical environment, new technologies and access to culture and leisure (which includes tourism). This created three departments to develop plans in coordination of work to implement the concepts of accessibility and design for all.
- In January 2006, the ENAT project started, with ONCE Foundation as a core partner, aiming to create a Network of Tourism for All in Europe, fostering knowledge sharing,

dissemination of the actions in the field, the impulse of improvements in infrastructure and services provision and the dissemination of good practices.

- Via Libre wanted to reinforce the need of “change of mentality” that is also reflected in changes in corporate culture and facilitate the evolution at the level of management and organization. This change of mentality should come before structural changes can take place.

In this regard, the training was made like a full catalogue of services but it was also thought to answer the needs of different sectors, including tourism. Tourism was, and still is not, understood as an isolated sector, but as one encompassing many areas and one industry which is impacted by the overall accessibility of a place.

3.0 CONTENT, TRAINING MATERIAL AND AVAILABILITY

This section takes an in-depth look at the content, training material and the availability of Via Libre’s accessibility courses for the tourism sector. In particular, 3 courses will be discussed in greater depth to illustrate the training activities that are being carried out.

Course content

Via Libre started giving training courses based on the three main activities that were carried out in the company;

- Customer care for people with specific access needs;
- Universal accessibility and design for all,
- Accessible tourism and accessible natural environments.

Every year Via Libre received new training demands that were made ad-hoc basis to meet the needs of the companies, but through the years this demand turned to a formal offer of training services that Via Libre could provide.

As a result of this evolution, Via Libre developed a series of content divided in 7 training courses to provide professional knowledge and skills regarding customer care and to ensure access to appropriate services and facilities.

In 2012, Via Libre established a formal catalogue of training that explains the different activities regarding the training that is offered. This catalogue turned out to be very useful to orientate the clients on what kind of training they could be interested in. It is updated every year to keep the trainings and their content as relevant as possible.

The underlying rationale for the creation of this catalogue comes from the knowledge and experience accumulated in the past 20 years. It has empowered the employees of Via Libre, to become specialists in Universal Accessibility Training, having participated as speakers in a large number of national and international congresses, conferences, forums, seminars and having taught a variety of courses specializing in accessibility and design for all.

In addition to the 7 established training courses, other activities or awareness workshop can be tailored to a specific company or sector who needs specific knowledge in accessibility.

The formal catalogue of training activities encompasses the following courses:

- Customer care for people with specific access needs
- Universal accessibility and design for all
- Basketball on wheels
- Support for people with disabilities in emergencies and evacuation
- Colleagues with disabilities. accessibility in work environment
- Open doors in special employment center (Vía Libre)
- Overcoming barriers tour

The tourism training has been included in the main training activities. In this vein, there are no specific tourism trainings. This was a strategic decision in order to tailor each course to the clients and participants.

However, accessible tourism is very relevant and has been included in two main activities: customer care for people with specific access needs addressing the staff-client relation and universal accessibility addressing the environment.

For the purpose of this case study, we will discuss the contents of the two activities mainly related to accessible tourism and the “overcoming barriers tour” activity that has been shown as a very effective tool on disability awareness for manager for services which tourists may use, but also benefit local inhabitants with accessibility requirements.

Customer care for people with specific access needs

These training sessions were created to master the strategies and skills to understand clients with specific accessibility needs. The emphasis is placed on giving staff the confidence necessary to meet and greet customers with disabilities in an appropriate way. In addition, the training aims to disseminate the importance and value of the accessibility market.

The overall objective of the course is to make tourism for people with disabilities a part of mainstream tourism, rather than as a subset. It aims to raise awareness and overcome the traditional and outdated stereotypes of what disabilities entail. It discusses the stigmatization of disability and the consequences of commonly used terms to enable proper care and communication.

A comprehensive content is transmitted as well as correct action guidelines to address customers with disabilities. This is done by working in groups exemplifying real-life situations and solutions.

Audiovisual media is also used to facilitate the correct understanding and assimilation of the topics addressed.

The most important part of this kind of training is conducted by role playing activities in which participants will be both in the place of the disabled person as in the place of the professional performing a specific service for example at the information desk, in needs of transfers etc.

The below general outline of the training is adapted to specific companies and their demand, needs, location and context. The role playing and examples are specifically designed to be relevant to the field in which the company operates, making them easier to understand as the participants can relate and reflect on situations that may already have occurred in their professional lives.

For example, the customer care training for hotels include examples of reception desk information, hotel bedrooms description for blind people and so on.

As there is no record of the numbers of participants, it is estimated that this training course has reached over 5.000 students from a wide range of businesses active in tourism related sectors.

The course is structured around the following topics:

1. Introduction to the world of disability.

This introductory section focuses on general disability awareness and gives a basic overview of different disabilities.

2. Serving customers with physical disabilities

This section gives the participants some basic knowledge regarding physical disabilities and motor impairments, how to manage wheelchairs and assistive technology, effective techniques for safety in climbing stairs, protocol for emergency situations and give an indication on what to avoid when dealing with customers with accessibility needs.

Part of this session also includes role playing where the participants will be in the role of both the customer and the service professional. It includes the following practical learning activities:

- Tour inside a building in a wheelchair
- Tour outdoors in a wheelchair
- Climbing steps
- Handling of chairs and assistive products
- Aids to access cars and other vehicles.

3. Serving customer with vision impairments

The third sessions as indicated gives special attention to visually impaired customers. It includes a basic overview and effective tips on how to help a visually impaired customer, guide techniques for a blind person and the proper treatment of guide dogs. The session also include role play:

- Tour inside a building with white cane and masks
- Tour around streets with white cane and masks
- Climbing up and down stairs
- Tips to describe environments
- Skills to communicate with blind people
 - Performance and emergency protocol

- Practice with sighted guide

4. Serving customers with hearing impairments

The session focuses on hearing impaired customers and provides basic tips on what to think about before and during conversation, basic knowledge of lip-reading, and introduction to sign language, how to accompany a deaf client in an emergency situation, general emergency protocol for customers with hearing disabilities and how to convey information to this customer base.

These practical sessions include:

- Communication roleplaying
- Use of natural gestures, signs and lip reading.

5. Serving clients with intellectual disabilities

This session provides the participants with information on how to effectively convey information, general understanding of intellectual disabilities and the need for a dignified approach, how to ensure safety and how to proceed in emergencies.

6. Seniors and other specific access needs

This session focuses on the elderly and the most common risks and problems associated with age.

Universal accessibility and design for all

This training is delivered with the aim to provide tools to professionals for diagnosing the accessibility of tourism facilities as well as facilitating improvements of the built environment. The key of this training is to understand why accessibility is important in tourism facilities and why different actions improve their business or entities.

This course is addressed to professionals of the tourism sector, the local government and managers of local tourism businesses.

This training has been structured in two parts. The first part, around the concept of universal accessibility and encompasses the following objectives:

- Providing an understanding of the concept of Universal Design as a strategic factor in the design of new products.
- Providing an understanding of the human factors that influence the strategic use of accessibility design.
- Providing some basic notions about the value of ergonomics as a key factor to ensure the comfort and satisfaction of the customer.
- Providing an understanding of the principles that underpin the concept of Design for All, and analyse the effects produced on the traditional design methodology.
- Identifying those areas of application where universal design has gained special significance through actual case studies.

A second part of the course, consists of teachings on national regulations relating to buildings. The purpose of this section is to convey the necessary knowledge to enable participants to comply with existing accessibility regulations.

The theoretical content relating to Universal Design and Accessibility is explained in small groups exemplifying situations and aiming at giving comprehensive solutions. Audio-visual media is also used to facilitate correct understanding and assimilation of the topics.

It is difficult to calculate how many people has done this training over the last 20 years, but, as an example, every accessible urban planning project in Spain is attached to Universal Accessibility training, and Via Libre has done over 700 urban plans. There have been also lectures and awareness activities that were equal to the training and, as they were open sessions, the exact number of participants cannot be estimated.

Overcoming barriers tour

This is dynamic training course focused on accessibility awareness with more practical content and is less focused on theory. It is a compliment to the other training activities offered by Via Libre, but it can be also be taken separately.

This is a highly dynamic course to facilitate improvements in the tourism sector through different practical and challenging activities. These activities are targeted to a wide range of audiences such as CEO's of shopping centres, big companies, hotels and many others. It is a training that is, at times, given prior to overall staff training as it is imperative that management first understand the importance of accessibility. It aims to raise awareness in an easy way and approach and to be a first contact in a company with accessibility.

A key focus of this training is that people with disabilities should not be viewed differently from other able-bodied individuals. As such the training focuses on encouraging the participants to develop positive attitudes by teaching them about the different disabilities. It also aims to help management understand which situations and where in the environment pose a challenge for persons with accessibility needs.

The expected outcome of the training is to give students the understanding of potential barriers and give them the confidence to interact properly with people with disabilities.

The essence of the training is group work. Tour routes are taken encouraging students to analyse the situation and give proposals to the problems and barriers identified.

It also includes the use and management of everyday items and assistive products that may be essential to a disabled person (wheelchair, white cane simulation blindness masks, etc.). At all times, the training emphasizes to participants the need to grasp the understanding and lived experience of what a disability entails.

The course usually includes:

- A city tour: which includes the analysis of a square or of streets.
- A building tour: which includes understanding the barriers within a building.
- Experience accessing transportation

The strength of this training is that the participants will walk around different environments in the shoes of a person with disabilities. They will experience first-hand the accessibility barriers from a first person perspective. In order to achieve this, Via Libre uses different assistive devices and other materials to simulate disabilities with the result that it makes the participants more aware on how to adapt different situations to different disabilities.

The participants are also encouraged to add personal experiences and information to these activities which makes it more interactive.

The most difficult part of this training is to make sure to use all materials available. Sometimes there is the need to use 20 wheelchairs and there is a great need of logistics and transport.

Training material

In order to provide a full and comprehensive educational methodology, Vía Libre has developed a series of materials that are used in the training.

- Specific manuals on “Customer care for People with disabilities”.
- Information in digital format (slides or videos) related to the contents (legislation, good and bad practices, concepts, diagrams, pictures, etc...) and practical exercises.
- Assistive devices in role-playing to improve awareness (White canes, masks, simulation glasses, canes, wheelchairs, earplugs and headphones, etc...)
- Medical equipment and assistive products to explain some of the needs of people with disabilities, but this is only used if there is an explanation about transfers or other specific assistance.

These materials have been developed over the years answering the needs of previous students and improving the training materials through the experience gained in other trainings.

Some of the materials are bought specifically for the training, like canes, mask, earplugs, while other materials are shared with other departments. Other materials are made in the office; the manuals are written by experts in the consultancy department.

In addition to the course material developed for the specific courses, Via Libre has also produced manuals relating to disabilities and accessibility. The company has also contributed to the design of studies and project methodology for example:

- Study of training needs in relation to customers with disabilities and design of accessible tourism services. Regional Level (2012)

- Study on accessibility requirements in the standards of quality in the European Tourism Sector (Dec. 2008).
- Transport and accessibility observatories (2005-Curent)
- Good practices in accessibility in different fields (natural parks, restaurants,hotels, tourist buses....)
- Accessibility tourism guides

Currently, Via Libre is working towards launching a specific manual for “safety and evacuation protocol for people with disabilities” training before the end of 2013.

The “customer care training” students are provided with the manual if the course is over 5 hours. This means that in awareness workshops or conferences with less time, the manual is not included.

All the simulation materials are used in almost all the training, because there is always the aim of making the training practical as this is an appreciated aspect.

Regarding the certification of the training, Vía Libre offers the possibility to certify the training under formal education for companies.

Availability

Making a summary of training done during the last ten years, it was possible to extract the duration of training for different groups attending in the tourism sector.

Field	Target audience	Training concepts	Duration (hours)
Airports	Assistive service employees	Customer care for people with disabilities+ transfers and wheelchair handling	14
Road transport	Assistive service employees	Customer care for people with disabilities (including handling assistive devices	12

		and lift platforms)	
Maritime transportation	Customer care employees	Customer care for people with disabilities + transfers and wheelchair handling	13
Sightseeing Bus	Customer care employees	Customer care for people with disabilities	10
Museums	Customer care employees	Customer care for people with disabilities	5-10
Museums	Customer care employees + departments responsible	Accessibility	5
Tourism offices	Customer care employees	Customer care for people with disabilities	10
Restaurants	Customer care employees+ managers	Customer care for people with disabilities	5
Hotels	Customer care employees+ managers	Customer care for people with disabilities	5
Hotels	Customer care employees+ managers	Accessibility	5
Natural Parks	Customer care employees+ managers	Customer care for people with disabilities + Accessibility	20

4.0 TARGET AUDIENCE, COMMUNICATIONS AND BARRIERS

This section discusses whether the target audience of the training is being effectively reached and what barriers and communications channels Via Libre has encountered.

Target audience

The training catalogue is open for any target people that are interested. The current target audience of the Via Libre trainings can be divided into three main groups:

- Entrepreneurs;
- Technicians; and
- Customer service workers.

The target group has evolved from the very start at the training initiative. As described above, Via Libre began by providing accessibility training for the public sector, in particular for city councils and governmental regions. It was mainly architects and engineers who develop urban plans, who took the training courses.

However, Via Libre also started to train the companies that they were hired to carry out consultancy work for as most of the time training was deemed necessary in order to compliment consultancy.

The training regarding customer care for people with disabilities was developed in accordance with the perceived need after general accessibility training. Tourism businesses started to realize that achieving full accessibility was a challenge and a long term project. Thus, training in customer care was seen as a reasonable measure to immediately allow people with access needs to enjoy their environments and services.

The accessibility training is believed, by the interviewees from Via Libre, to be one of the most successful activities the company engages in. As the training is often demanded by the companies themselves and Via Libre has noticed a growing interest from both public and private sector in regards to accessibility training. The uptake and the marketing of training have been facilitated by Via Libre's affiliation with the ONCE foundation. This is discussed further below.

Communication

Vía Libre is already a known company in Spain for its relation and focus on people with disabilities. This is a distinct advantage when communicating the needs for accessibility training to SMEs and other entities.

In general, all the means of communication to promote the training are included in the general system of promoting Via Libre's services and products.

This includes:

- Direct communication with potential clients through email, meetings and presentations. The training catalogue is offered to companies.
- Having ONCE Foundation as the company lead. As Via Libre is a Fundosa Group company belonging to ONCE Foundation, the service is a guarantee of quality in accessibility. The ONCE Foundation also have special agreements with companies to carry out accessibility training, which is then provided by Via Libre.
- Training is a service included within other accessibility projects (ie: development of an accessible touristic itinerary will have a training in accessible tourism included)

There are also evaluation questionnaires that assure the quality of the training over the years and have allowed the company to improve its contents.

Since 1982, the LISMI (Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities) obliges companies with more than 50 employees to include 2% of people with disabilities amongst its staff. In case of non-compliance, a company may be eligible to perform so called "Alternative Measures". This involves purchasing goods or services of Special Employment Centre, making a donation or sponsor employment activities in favour of people with disabilities. As Via Libre is a Special Employment Centre, some companies choose accessibility training to comply with these special alternative measures, which has helped to promote Via Libre's courses and spurred an uptake of courses, however, this uptake has not been free from challenges.

Barriers

The Spanish tourism sector has been less affected by the global recession. Nonetheless, tourists businesses are reluctant to spend money on specific

training. Via Libre's trainings are not free and the price depends on the length of the course, the number of participants, the material used and in which context the training is given (for example, if it is given as part of a project).

There is also the belief that accessibility is mainly a cost burden and it is not yet seen as an investment. Although there is legislation regarding accessibility and training, sometimes this topic is not a major concern for the tourism sector, especially for the SME's that are seeking to maintain their business instead of expanding their services the accessibility market.

In this vein, there is still a lack of awareness about the market opportunity that addressing accessibility needs can bring. In particular, there is often an assumption that the focus on "mainstream" tourists will be enough to cover economic and service expectations. In this regard, tourists with access needs are assumed to represent a minor part of a business.

An example includes Via Libre approaching a hotel on the Spanish coast to offer trainings. However, this specific hotel had a high occupation rate throughout the year and was not interested in attracting new clients. Moreover, from experience interviewees at Via Libre argue that some tourism businesses make a conscious decision not to cater to tourists with disabilities, thus hampering the demand for training.

Specific barriers also relates to the seasonal nature of the tourism industry. For example, hotels will hire new people to start work in the high season. They are not interested at this point in spending time on extra training. Instead, they rely on the existing skills of their staff to cater to all tourists. In low season, hotels may be closed or have a much lower number of staff employed thus excluding high season staff from benefitting from training.

In order to overcome some of these barriers, such as costs and time constraints, online training will be part of Via Libre's services from 2014. However, the company has been reluctant to include distance learning methods into their training activities. The philosophy of the ONCE foundation relies on face-to-face training in order to practically transmit the importance of accessibility from a "first person perspective". The interviewees from Via Libre, have argued that it is not the same to see a video of someone in wheelchair getting on a bus than having the same experience yourself. In this vein, the online training will complement the face-to-face training to overcome some of the most pertinent barriers experienced by the tourism industry.

5.0 EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

The training done by Vía Libre can be measured and evaluated with the questionnaires that the company asks the clients to fulfil.

All the students have the opportunity to express their opinion at the end of the training. Hereby there are some of the opinions from the questionnaires and interviews:

- *I have learnt things that I didn't think about (their existence) before.*
- *I wish the training had been longer.*
- *We should know more about these topics and have better awareness on how to help a person with a disability.*
- *Legislation should be taken more into account because it affects the life of people.*
- *You learn how to deal with a person with disabilities.*
- *I've learnt techniques that are useful for my workplace but also for everyday life.*
- *It has clarified some doubts I have about disabilities.*
- *There is a historical lack in disability awareness that it is being mitigated with normalization. These activities help this normalization.*

Quality assessments of the courses show the high degree of acceptance of the content among students. The results of the works (implementing customer care) show the high level of student understanding the concepts presented.

The impact on the training can be also measured in the sustainability of the training courses that Vía Libre has carried out over the years. Extensive references on what has been done during three years (2009-2011) regarding accessibility, training and/or tourism can be given on request.

Another impact to highlight regarding accessible tourism is the assistance provided in the organization and participation from Vía Libre in ONCE Foundation International Congresses in Tourism for all⁴, other conferences and lectures in this topic.

⁴ International Congress on Tourism for all website

Furthermore, the training activities have been introduced in course catalogues of institutions (e.g. the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and in universities). In this regard, the accessibility courses have been among the most valued training activities in these institutions.

Other evidence of the success of the Via Libre training is the development of a training programme for “Strategic Planning in Accessible Tourism” for the Ministry of Tourism in Uruguay carried out in 2013.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Vía Libre has brought forward and promoted actions in the fields of Universal Accessibility and Design for All, edging towards the accomplishment one of the main objectives of ONCE Foundation, equal rights and improving the quality of life for all people.

In this sense the approach that has been made in training has been through a holistic concept that included all sectors related to daily life (Universities, hospitals, shopping centres, public administrations, museums, transports, and so on). Universal Design and training, is applicable to all fields, including tourism.

There is a general lack of accessibility awareness that is being somewhat overcome with training activities; however, there is still much work to be done. This is because Via Libre's training are mainly related to vocational training, not to formal education.

Many tourism entrepreneurs have realized that accessibility is an important business niche and disabled people traveling in family and with friends, although there is still a lack of access to training due to different reasons.






There is a clear commitment by Vía Libre regarding the impact of the training activity as part of the company services. When the company offers consultancy services on "Checking and monitoring to implement accessibility improvements in the company service", there are some indicators that have to be followed to ensure a continuity of the quality of the service, training plays a large part of this.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is sufficient legislation that requires introducing training in the different educational levels that are related to the field of architects and construction in Spain. However, it would be necessary to extend this training in the formal education of the tourism sector.
- The main characteristics of a successful training initiative are good content and finding the balance between theory and practice. Regarding the contents it is very important that they are updated and focused in the client needs. In this regard, when formal education hasn't been fully developed, it is important to engage the topic of accessibility with the tourism sector interests. About the practice, understanding the consequences of the barriers is the key. This is achieved by letting the students get in contact with people with disabilities and their experiences, doing role-playing activities in where they can experience the barriers in first person.
- It is fundamental to emphasize the idea of Universal design and the barriers come with the lack of accessibility in the training, not with the lack of abilities. This is the only way the feeling of pity or commiseration can be taken away and focus on the rights every person has to participate in society and tourism.
- Based on Via Libre's experience, there are three priorities that the EC could adopt in developing its strategy to encourage more SMEs to carry out this type of training in accessible tourism.
 - Raise awareness the sector
 - Promote training programs in universal accessibility
 - Harmonise criteria and concepts among member countries.
- It is highly recommendable the existence of training certificates for the tourism sector, issued by professional entities, (or formal education in the near future) that allows the companies to prove their accessibility commitment and give them a plus in their quality strategy.

ANNEX I: CRITERIA AND JUSTIFICATION FOR BEST PRACTICE

Table 2: Criteria and justification for best practice

Criteria	Justification	On track/off track
Innovative	<p>Via Libre delivers the training in various innovative ways. The company talks about disability and accessibility from a “first person” perspective as over 80% of the workers are people with disability.</p> <p>The training is delivered in conjunction with a multidisciplinary work team including accessibility experts, architects, physiotherapists, tourism experts, and so on. Finally, the activities carried out include practices as dynamic as wheelchair basketball matches, sensory itineraries and workshops in accessibility data collecting.</p>	
Relevant	<p>There is an increasing demand for making environments and services accessible for all. The company, as they represent the target group (persons with disabilities), knows the importance of this kind of training and understands how to correct gaps in skills levels.</p>	
Transferable	<p>The training is made from a global perspective in accessibility and disability; therefore it can be tailored to clients’ needs and the model can also be transferred to other fields and countries.</p>	
Efficiency & Effectiveness	<p>All training courses are delivered with a number of students that guarantees an efficient and effective result. They are all face-to face (at the moment) because the interaction is a key factor in the training. However, as of 2014 Via Libre has plans to introduce e-learning trainings to compliment the more traditional forms of learning methods.</p>	
Impact	<p>The company, following the ONCE foundation philosophy, seeks to make a change in the social attitude regarding the integration of people with disabilities. In this regard several measures are taken, mainly based on labour integration and training.</p> <p>This spreading of normalization has had a great</p>	

	<p>impact in the results of training, awards received by the company and the foundation and the dissemination of integration in social media.</p> <p>It can be said that impact goes beyond the training, but regarding training, all the results are positive and has increased awareness levels.</p>	
Sustainable	<p>Via Libre as a private company that offers training as one of the services (along with accessibility consulting, accessibility to audio-visual materials, braille, assistive products and so on). This means that accessibility is their core and work philosophy based. Training is fundamental to achieve this. The quality and the demand of the services is what guarantees the continuity of the training in the company.</p>	