

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

many thanks for the invitation to present our project IBFT (Infoplattform Barrierefreier Tourismus, Infoplattform for accessible tourism in Austria).

Let me tell you a few words about the history of our project which started in 2003.

It was initialised by a NPO named ÖHTB (Österreichisches Hilfswerk für Taubblinde und hochgradig Hör- und Sehbehinderte) - an Austrian Welfare Organization for deafblind and severely visually and hearing impaired people. This Organisation, founded by parents of deafblind children in 1981 has started with the care for disabled children and is now engaged in caring for disabled people from children up to elderly people. It keeps institutions for working and living, for therapeutic care in early age as well as occupational therapy. Within these 25 years a wide range of needs had been covered by the ÖHTB. And there was a part left - leisure time and recreation. It became necessary to meet this problem - and it was found out, that just few information exists on the facilities, where impaired people could spend their holidays in Austria.

One the other hand - with the intention to train, teach and educate disabled people a sub-organisation was founded: Pro Worker, a limited liability non-profit company, in which disabled people are trained in all fields of gastronomy and catering. For this purpose this institution runs a special restaurant and a cafe/buffet within a secondary school in Vienna.

And this Pro-Worker Organisation now started to keep an hotel in 2002, where there should be taken care for special needs of diasbled people - the hotel was renovated and made accessible. During this time we started to concern ourselves in the ideas and concepts of accessible tourism. We asked the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Labour, section for Tourism, to help us in propagating these ideas. The project is supported with 80% of the costs.

In September 2003 a workshop was held in Heiligenkreuz, Burgenland, where this former mentioned hotel was situated. We had had very great expectations in this event - but we got very desillusioned one the reactions. Just a few of the hotels and restaurants, of the local and regional politicians and even social organisations who all had been invited at last visited this workshop.

Nevertheless, these, who had come where very interested and we got a good output for further work. A special result of this workshop was, that the missing training of the employees in tourism to handle guests with special needs was responsible for many "barriers in mind". But one of the most important conclusions was that there is missing a central information point on all behalfts on accessible tourism in Austria.

Based on these conclusions we submitted a new plan to the Ministry to

continue our work on propagating accessible tourism. After the acceptance through the ministry we started to develop a database complying with the standards of accessibility for websites.

In this database accessible businesses and facilities are registered. Also included is information about relevant internet links, existing literature and research projects. We want to identify not only service-providers for wheelchair users, but also for other mobility-impaired guests as blind or deaf people. Anyone, who wants to find e.g. an accessible hotel is able to use the database free of charge. After many discussions we decided, that the entries of the providers are free of charge as well. Many of the owners of hotels, restaurants etc. do not even realise which large economical chances accessible tourism for all holds in future. Therefore a project, which forces firms to pay for an entry in such a database won't work at the moment.

By the way, a manager of a world-wide hotel-chain told us, that they have the instruction, not to pay for services like that because of the possibility of consequential costs.

In summer 2004 we organised two presentations of the structure of the database and a number of smaller presentations on special fairs. The database was put online in November 2004. A lot of activities, most of all mail-campaigns were started to get informations on accessible offers. It took us quite a lot of work - but now the access to the database ist increasing.

Our philosophy of getting the information is to offer special questionnaires to the providers. They have been developed from other patterns as e.g. from Denmark und Germany. We do not have either the money nor the amount of people for measuring all the offers. We think, that each provider knows what he has to offer - and the needs of e.g. wheelchair users are so different, that it is hardly possible to benefit them all. Without contacting the provider normally it won't work .....

We're aware, that this is controversial to other opinions - but as a matter of fact we are not able to find money for such a project anyway - times are getting harder, especially in Austria. On the other side, there is an attempt of building a database containing information on accessible locations which a wheelchair user in Styria has all visited by himself - but the offers are not tested for other impaired guests than wheelchair-users. We cooperate with him and will link to his database when it is online.

Before my son, who is the programmer and administrator of the ibft-database will demonstrate its functionality and features I want to say something about the ongoing actions. According to our aim to communicate the ideas of accessible tourism we're organizing a conference with the title: Strategies and

Implementation of the Accessible Tourism in Europe – Reports of Experiences and Know How from Experts. It will take place on the 18th of May 2006 in Austria: Stadl/Mur - Styria, Conference-language is German. Experts from Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Austria are coming together in order to discuss experiences and possible ways of networking.

Our small-budget project runs till the end of September, the further financing is not yet sure as there are general elections in Austria in autumn and nothing will be decided in the ministry before they are over. But we're still hoping that our work will go on, anyway...

My son will now demonstrate the database - at the moment it is only intended for German speaking users, but within the next three month the content will be available in English.

