



Annual Report

One-Stop-Shop for Accessible Tourism in Europe (OSSATE)



www.ossate.org

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1 Project description

The OSSATE project aims to implement a prototype multi-platform, multi-lingual, digital information service providing national and regional content on *Accessible Tourist Venues, Sites and Accommodation*, initially from 2 EU Member States: Greece and the UK. The e-service will be offered to additional National Tourist Boards and other market players from 2007.

The service will deliver information via an accessible (WAI-compliant) Web portal. It will be demonstrated both as an independent service (at www.EuropeforAll.com) and as an integrated service which can be offered for use on third-party Web sites, in information kiosks, travel agents and tourist bureaus. It will also be possible to deliver information direct to tourists on their mobile phones, using smart phone technologies (e.g. WAP, MMS, LBS, GPRS) and standard text messaging services.

The service targets Europe's 50 million disabled citizens and their families, and the growing numbers older travellers who all can benefit from information about the accessibility of destinations and venues. Given the demographic ageing of populations in the world's industrialised countries, it is inevitable that the current demand for accessible venues and hotels is going to increase markedly over the next 30 years. Minor ailments, chronic health conditions and disabilities are often acquired later in life. But such difficulties need not stop older people from travelling and enjoying holidays in other countries and regions of Europe.

By building tourist venues and surroundings according to *design-for-all* principles, or adapting them, the environment need not be an insurmountable obstacle for those whose mobility, vision, hearing, or general functional abilities may be impaired. Also, families with small children will benefit from accessibility information when planning their travels.

OSSATE is being developed by seven key players in the European sectors dealing with tourism, IT and accessibility advisory services:



EWORX S.A., Greece (Coordinator)



University of Surrey



Assoc. Nat. De
Logement des
personnes Handicapées

Disability Now, Greece



Hellenic Ministry of
Tourism, Greece

VisitBritain, U.K.



Toegankelijkheidsbureau
vzw.

2 Summary of activities

2.1 Major achievements during the first year

In order to set up and launch the prototype e-service for accessibility information, the OSSATE Workplan specifies a series of activities, starting with analyses of user requirements and markets, and progressing through technical development work, assessment and awareness-raising, to dissemination and, finally, commercialisation.

Following the Workplan, the OSSATE team has made progress on all the objectives that were set for the first year:

- A study of “Accessible Tourism Information Schemes” in Europe has revealed over 40 regional and national systems, either in use or under development.
- A review of e-services in the European tourism sector has shown that few ‘mainstream’ commercial providers make reference to accessibility information or services for disabled people in their offerings.
- User needs for accessible tourism information services have been analysed by means of a survey on the requirements of disabled people and their families.
- The market for accessible tourism information has been analysed through literature studies and desk research.
- Technical platform specifications and requirements for the e-service were investigated and initial planning has taken place to define the relevant standards and criteria.
- Dissemination and outreach took place in two international OSSATE Workshops held in London (May 2005) and Athens (September 2005).
- The OSSATE partners have chosen the brand name “*EuropeforAll*” and *EuropeforAll.com* as the URL for the new e-service.
- Initial proposals for the organisation and management of the *EuropeforAll* e-service network have been drafted.
- A shortlist of possible new partners has been drawn up for the further assessment, refinement and eventual roll-out of *EuropeforAll*.

2.2 Important work areas

This section presents the “building blocks” of the project: the analyses that have been concluded, the creation of a stakeholder network and identification of project collaborators; initial development work concerning content and technologies; and the ongoing dissemination actions that can contribute to heightened awareness among decision makers, market players and customers about the importance of accessible tourism information.

2.2.1 Analysis of accessible tourism information schemes in Europe

A questionnaire survey of Accessible Tourism Information Schemes in Europe achieved responses from over 40 regional and national systems, either in use or under development. The schemes vary enormously: most focus on accommodation but there are over 70 types of venues represented within the

schemes. Most schemes focus on wheelchair access, while about 66% also include accessibility criteria for people with visual impairments. Databases range in size from 16 to over 30,000 registered venues.

What is “accessibility information”?

Information about accessibility refers to any of the physical characteristics of destinations that can impact on those users who are permanently or temporarily disabled, or persons who have any type of functional, sensory or cognitive impairments or restrictions, due to their age, body size, health condition or other factors. Accessibility information tells the customer about physical design features, layout, materials, technical infrastructure, signage, furniture, fittings and equipment that can affect their comfort, safety and ability to function well in their surroundings.

OSSATE publicity leaflet, 2005

Most of the schemes sampled provide information via a Website, but only a minority offer alternative languages. Even fewer sites are in accessible formats.¹ The majority of National Tourist Boards do **not** provide information about accessibility of destinations, venues or accommodation via their Websites, and where they do, the information is not offered in similar ways nor does it use similar standards.

Information about accessibility requires detailed recording of measurements and other factual information at the site of the venue itself. This is a skilled and labour-intensive process. In different countries, persons with different backgrounds collect accessibility information. 43% of the information is collected by the owner or by a professional. Less than half of the sampled schemes use specially trained personnel to collect the accessibility information.

One third of the schemes combine information from different sources/people. Some of them combine information from owners and professionals, others combine these two sources of information with user information. Most information is collected on a visit, based on a checklist.

Given the wide variation in the make-up of current accessibility information schemes, as shown by this study, the need for a harmonised cross-border information service, as proposed by OSSATE, is clearly confirmed.

2.2.2 Review of e-services and accessibility information in the European mainstream tourism sector

A review of e-services in the “mainstream” European tourism sector has shown that the provision of accessibility information or services for disabled people by large, commercial providers is relatively scarce and, where it is offered, it is often of poor or uncertain quality. The review focussed on accommodation, tourism intermediaries and attractions. Only 4 of the major hotel booking chains in Europe offer accessibility information. One of these is www.activehotels.com

¹ *Accessible* meaning here: compliant with Web Access Content Guidelines (W3C-WAI WCAG 1.0) which ensure that disabled Web users can navigate and read Web pages. OSSATE Annual Public Report, 2005

which, in 2005, began offering on-line “Accessibility Statements” for hotels in its listings.

The results of the examination of the 14 biggest tourism intermediaries in Europe showed that *not even one* provides information on accessibility. There is no information on any of the package components, destination, accommodation, attractions, or transportation. Their common practice is to advise the enquirer to call the venues for specific requirements. It is also claimed that the reason there is no relevant information on display is that Tourism Aggregators or Operators deal with special needs individually with the customer.

The findings regarding 16 major European attractions are more encouraging. Most of the attractions provide some information on accessibility. Additionally, such information is not hard to retrieve. If we consider the home page as the landing page, it usually requires 3-4 clicks to get to the information. The best practice example in this area would be Disneyland Resort Paris.

Other sites have given different ideas for ways in which *EuropeforAll* might deliver search results or present accessibility information, although it has not been possible to gauge the effectiveness of the tools and methods that have been identified.

2.2.3 User needs survey

The user requirements for accessible tourism information services were well known to several of the OSSATE partners from previous studies and through their pre-existing knowledge, as they have already contributed to the design of accessibility information schemes in the UK and Belgium.

In addition, a detailed survey was carried out in Greece on the requirements of disabled people and their families. The survey identified the travel habits, accessibility requirements and information needs of the major groups of persons with disabilities, including groups of people with physical, sensory, motor, cognitive and chronic health problems. Some had long-term disabilities, and others had acquired a functional impairment later in life. From this survey of 153 people, conducted by means of personal interviews and written questionnaires, some conclusions are drawn relating to the type of information and level of detail needed for disabled travellers, and the design of the *EuropeforAll* e-service.

The Greek study showed that tourists with *physical* disabilities have more needs related to accessible tourism infrastructures, products and services than the rest of the groups of disabled people. This, of course, was predictable, since physically disabled people objectively face more difficulties in physical access and they generally meet more obstacles because of the nature of their disability. On the other hand, the respective needs of tourists with hearing impairments and visual impairments are many, especially if travelling alone, since both of these kinds of disability are quite restrictive when it comes to physical access and access to specific information, products and services.

When we examine the needs of people with other kinds of disability, such as mental retardation, autism, pernicious anaemia, epilepsy etc. where the limitations in access are minimum or do not even exist, the requirements

decrease remarkably and are limited to accessibility features, which are not directly related to physical access. In these cases, the requirements have to do with specific services and/or products, the availability of which guarantees the qualitative stay of the specific groups of tourists to the chosen destinations. However, the lack of those features does not affect their decision to visit these destinations. As this does not occur in the case of the physically disabled people, we detect an intense insecurity among the members of this group when it comes to travelling and mostly to destinations they haven't visited in the past. This means that the lack of the accessibility features, which are necessary for the physically disabled travellers, lead most of them to avoid visiting unknown places, whereas many prefer not to travel at all, because of their fear that wherever they go they will have to deal with serious problems. The presence of physical accessibility provisions and information can thus be regarded, to some extent, as a "signal" to other disability groups that they will find better conditions at these venues.

People with physical disabilities attach special importance to the availability of accessible means of transport and places of entertainment and in some cases they even reject destinations if they are not absolutely sure that they will be able to use the buses and/or the local taxis and to visit the local restaurants, bars, cafes etc. Furthermore, apart from people with physical disabilities, a great proportion of people with visual impairments are also strongly interested in the accessibility of places of entertainment. In this case, though, the accessibility is not related to the physical access, but it mainly concerns the availability of those accessibility features that secure the easy stay of a partially or totally blinded visitor to these places. However, those travellers do not seem to avoid specific destinations if they are not sure about the accessibility of places of entertainment, but they express their wish to know beforehand what problems they are likely to face, during their stay in the specific region.

Consequently, providing credible information on the accessibility of tourist facilities is of great importance for the preparation of a trip for people with physical disabilities, it plays an important role to travellers with visual and hearing impairments, while it does not particularly concern other disability groups, which have less restrictions in access compared to the previous 3 ones. Especially for travellers with physical disabilities, providing information relating to the accessibility of means of transportation and of places of entertainment is also necessary, something that also interests travellers with visual impairments, but without determining their decision to visit a destination.

Nevertheless, regardless of whether the information service serves or does not serve every disabled traveller, all disability groups seem to long for the creation of such a system, since they believe that, even if they don't use it themselves, it will certainly be useful to other disabled people who have absolute need of such information. The majority of disabled tourists consider the Internet to be the most effective means for the provision of this information, while they also prefer the classification and search of information according to the user's kind of disability.

2.2.4 Market studies

The market for accessible tourism information has been analysed by means of literature studies and desk research. In addition, a practical workshop exercise took place during the 1st International OSSATE Workshop in London in May 2005, where an international group of accessible tourism stakeholders was asked to assess a number of possible scenarios for the OSSATE e-service. As a result of this work, a report has been prepared providing comprehensive analyses of the market, stakeholders and value chains for accessible tourism. This report brings together information on both tourism demand and supply, elaborating a number of commercial scenarios for the future e-service.

After outlining the specific demands of disabled and elderly tourists, in particular, the report illustrates the needs for physical accessibility through the design and modification of facilities. It is also clear that access to suitable and accurate information using the Internet, designed according to accessibility guidelines, is crucial for users who demand accessible tourist products. From our analysis, the total potential “accessible” travel market in Europe alone exceeds 127 million people. This represents more than 27% of the European population that has some sort of access needs that affects their travel patterns and preferences. If friends, relatives and carers are included, this figure rises substantially, with estimated tourism revenues exceeding €80 billion. Worldwide, the number of disabled and elderly people with specific access needs accounts for some 600 to 900 million citizens. Added to this we should consider that all citizens need some degree of accessibility for their general comfort and quality when travelling.

A stakeholder analysis has demonstrated a wide range of potential players involved in the provision of accessible tourism products. These range from specialist operators that serve this market exclusively to mixed providers that offer both, mainstream as well as specialised tourism products, to purely mainstream providers that are not yet concerned with accessibility. An analysis of available information demonstrates that there is a very small percentage of the market that addresses the needs for accessible tourism. Even organisations that espouse inclusive design or have undertaken suitable modifications often fail to publicise this fact, failing to inform people with accessibility requirements and missing a huge market opportunity. The NGOs and other organisations that provide suitable information often address small parts of the market and rarely are able to provide a comprehensive one-stop-shop solution or to address the needs of people or facilities that are not in their local area. This demonstrates clearly the need for OSSATE as a value added mechanism.

The report also describes a number of value chain formations towards a sustainable strategy. OSSATE can be offered as a stand alone service and/ or can be delivered as part of or in collaboration with a number of players including, for example, disability organisations/ charities/ NGOs; Destination Management Organisations; Destination Management System Providers; the European Travel Commission Portal; part of Telecommunication company online 3G services; travel agents and eMediaries; municipalities and other public sector bodies; hotels and accommodation chains or aggregators. Following research with key stakeholders, two major value propositions could be identified: information and suppliers & industry formation. The assessment showed a clear tendency for adopting a network approach where each country is led by a leading authority

which is then coordinated by OSSATE at the EU level. The report emphasises that accessibility information should gradually be made available in all mainstream channels and therefore the service should aim to engage as many distributors as possible to the value system. This analysis contributes to the emerging business model and identifies key players, concerns and priorities for all stakeholders. Parts of the content of this report will be published separately in a public document in 2006.

2.2.5 Building the brand: EuropeforAll

A very important part of the work in developing the e-service concerns the creation of a unique “brand” which will communicate the purpose and character of the service to potential customers. It is vital that this brand reflects and conveys the values which the service stands for.

After a lengthy period of proposing, discussing, reflecting and finally, voting, the OSSATE partners have chosen the brand name *EuropeforAll* for the e-service. The Web address will be: www.EuropeforAll.com

The background story to this choice is worth repeating here, as it clarifies a number of important issues regarding the intended product – the e-service - and its characteristics.

First the UK partners, including marketing specialists at VisitBritain, examined a range of values related to accessible tourism and produced a list of four values which can be ascribed to the service. The brand values are:

- **Trust** ...of information;
- **Inclusiveness** ...a service that is offered to all - and designed to be attractive to all;
- **Diversity**...of tourism products and destinations;
- **Freedom**...to travel and enjoy Europe.

These values were then discussed and developed by all partners. A summary of the conclusions of these discussions is given here:

Trust of information: Attaining the trust of customers depends on a chain of trust from the providers of that information through to the end users. *Tourism information providers* must trust the service and feel comfortable about giving their information to an intermediary, for re-distribution. Providers can range from large public entities (e.g. National Tourist Boards) and global corporate players to the smallest tourism businesses such as “bed and breakfast” accommodation owners. For the service to be trusted by all providers, it must have a clear profile on two main questions: Who is running the service; and What is the service information going to be used for?

1. Who is behind the service (and what motives and competence do they have)?
 - a. Identity: Information about the e-service provider's identity must be available, clear and transparent;
 - b. Independence: The e-service is an independent information service, provided by a team of international experts, working to a professional *Code of Conduct*;

- c. Professional: In its interactions with providers and customers, the e-service must be professional in all respects;
 - d. The e-service team must show that it understand the needs of the providers (and the constraints they work under), and that it is acting in their best interests. References must be provided.
2. Which information is gathered (and what is it used for)?
Information about the accessibility characteristics of destinations is gathered systematically and objectively, following a standard set of information fields which the brand stands behind.
- a. A description of the accessibility information standards may be consulted on-line: (Level 1 and Level 2 information for selected types of destination). The information fields for each type of user requirement are fully transparent;
 - b. Procedures for registering destinations and for data-collection are described;
 - c. Destination providers may consult their data (and update the Level 1 self-assessment information in the database);.
3. Consumer trust:
- a. The e-service team must show that it understands the needs of the customers (all tourists with accessibility needs), and can provide the information they need, impartially and reliably (provide references);
 - b. Tourists can give feedback about their experiences, after visiting a destination, and see their comments on-line;
 - c. Individual tourists can register with the e-service and submit data about their access requirements. They will then be able to receive information that is tailored to their personal accessibility requirements;
 - d. Use of the e-service by providers and customers is subject to specific *Terms of Use*.

In addition to the points above, the provider's or customer's **trust** in the e-service will inevitably be affected by their actual experience of the service, both in terms of their overall interaction with the service provider, and the quality of the individual components of the service.

Inclusiveness: a service that is offered to all - and designed to be attractive to all

The e-service shall be available in "accessible" formats, corresponding to the internationally recognised Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines (especially for people with disabilities and those using alternative or Assistive Technologies). The service will operate via various new media channels, that is: Internet Web browsers and mobile telecommunications devices.

The content will be presented in a clear, attractive and user-friendly format, with many of the characteristics of leading European on-line public services. The language style will be simple and free of jargon, to help people who may have another mother tongue to understand and use the service. (Services will start to operate in English and Greek, with French and Dutch interfaces coming later). The information needs of an exceptionally diverse range of users shall be respected. The content must avoid giving offence to any prospective user and must project an inclusive image, for example portraying people of different ages,

gender, racial background and cultures – with and without visible disabilities - in the images.

Customers who register a few simple details about their accessibility requirements and preferences will be “recognised” when they log-in to the service. When looking for accessible venues, customer’s user profiles will be used as a “personal filter”, thus providing personalised and relevant information, both quickly and easily.

Diversity of tourism products and destinations

The service will provide information about a wide range of tourism products and destinations, initially in UK and Greece. One of the basic assumptions of the service is that *all kinds of people with all kinds of interests may require some accessibility information to make their trip enjoyable and complete*. So the service will gather information from a variety of destination providers – it will not be restricted to certain types of places or offers.

Accommodation provision will be the first priority area, since this is the foundation for all tourism experiences that require an overnight stay. Other priority areas will include tourist information centres, retail shops, restaurants and cafés, and, possibly, beaches. Potentially, each and every destination and product can be part of the service. Access information can be gathered for marinas, ski-sports centres, football stadiums and many, many other destinations and activities. There is no limit.

Freedom...to travel and enjoy Europe

“Freedom to travel and enjoy Europe” is the ultimate purpose of the e-service. Information about the accessibility of European destinations is seen as the key which will make the difference. It unlocks holiday and travel experiences for people who have any kind of access needs. Accessibility information, quite simply, brings tourism experiences within everyone’s reach.

Component elements of the *EuropeforAll* identity system:

Visual identity

Colour: printed and on-line material should use few, bold, “high contrast” colours, partly for clarity and visual accessibility but also to indicate energy, dynamism and strength of purpose.

Typography: uses plain, no nonsense *sans serif* typeface (e.g. Helvetica, Arial) which is clear and easy to read, both on screen and on the printed page (preferably 12 point font size, like this).

Photography: should be used as a general communication tool to make the Website/printed materials more attractive and interesting. Photos of destinations and their key areas and facilities will also be delivered to customers – providing a rich and specialised content which actually helps customers make decisions about the accessibility offered.

Logo: The bird which is currently used in the logo of the OSSATE project is the SWIFT (*Apus apus*), a migratory bird and a superb flyer, which travels back and

from between Africa and Northern Europe. In the summer months it can be found throughout almost the whole of Europe. It symbolises the *freedom to travel*, and *accessibility* across Europe, as it overcomes the biggest obstacle of all – gravity – with such apparent ease and spectacular grace. Finally the shape of its dark outline, often seen against the blue summer sky, is itself like an *arrow*, a *pointer* or a *dart*, showing the way forward. So, it is a strong and dynamic symbol for an e-service which gives a traveller or tourist the information they need to *go and discover Europe!* For the *EuropeforAll* logo, the design team proposes a variation on the OSSATE 'swift' logo, thus acknowledging the original project's role in developing the new service, and taking the brand name to a new level.

Signature (the name)

EuropeforAll was the final choice of signature for the e-service, on the basis of several rounds of voting by the partners, taking into account the intentions of the service and the brand values outlined above.

The Internet domain name www.EuropeforAll.com has been reserved for use by the OSSATE team. Editorial and content guidelines for the preparation and delivery of Web-based content by contributors to *EuropeforAll* have been written.

A full-scale branding and marketing plan will be developed around this name, in order to project the e-service to both tourism providers and customers. The plan will be completed as an internal project document in 2006.

2.2.6 A three-level scheme for accessibility data collection

The design of the *EuropeforAll* accessibility information scheme has required a fresh assessment of the main features of such a scheme, taking into account the user needs, market forces and stakeholder interests.

An overview of some of the main objectives of the intended scheme is given in the following:

- Provide reliable, accurate and detailed accessibility information to customers;
- Provide a database and a tool to screen the accessibility of facilities in countries with no accessibility schemes;
- Integrate accessibility data from existing schemes and 'new schemes' within a single database;
- Take the requirements of different interested parties (customers with a disability, older people, destination owners/managers, tourism industry, accessibility advisors, ...) into account;
- Include a rather large number of facilities in the database;
- Motivate destination owners to provide information about their premises and services and raise their awareness about the need for *accessibility for all*.

On the basis of our research investigations and the pre-existing know-how which the partners brought to the project, the OSSATE team concludes that it is technically and organisationally quite impossible to fulfil all the above objectives with one level of information using one method of data collection. Furthermore, since there is no precedence anywhere in Europe for mandatory registration of accessibility information for tourist venues – nor is there likely to be – a *voluntary*

system must be developed, taking into account what is feasible for the actors who are operating in the tourism sector. Hence, three levels of information will be used in the *EuropeforAll* e-service.

Figure 1 gives an overview of these three levels and the relations between them. Each level has its own important aspects.

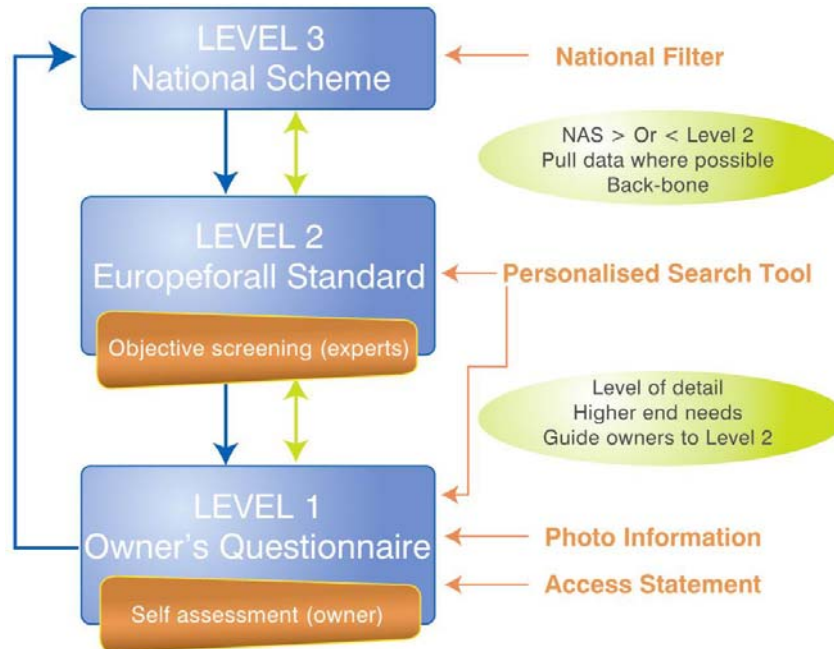


Figure 1. Diagram representing the 3 levels of accessibility information in the *EuropeforAll* scheme, and their key differences.

Notably, these three levels differ in the amount of detail and the method that is used to collect information. Yet each of the levels will focus on the information requirements of people with so-called “higher” and “lower” access needs. This differentiated approach, we believe, makes it possible to integrate all the objectives of the OSSATE-project as well as the requirements and interests of all the different user-groups within one service.

Level 1 – self assessment of venues and facilities

The first level in the *EuropeforAll* data collection will be information gathered via a simple self-assessment questionnaire that can be filled in by the destination owner or manager. This questionnaire will be accompanied by an information leaflet which informs the owner about the advantages of including accessibility information in tourism marketing, and the presentation of their data to customers. The Level 1-questionnaire will:

- Provide data that is an ‘indicator’ to customers of the accessibility of the premises and services, covering basic information;
- Contain information the owner/manager can give quickly and easily: that is, it requires little or no detailed checking (e.g. availability of special meals, disability awareness training of the staff, ...);
- Focus on all target groups that have need of accessibility information to

make a confident choice of destination (people with a disability, people with chronic health conditions, frail elderly people, families with small children, etc.);

- Get owners involved and interested in publicising the accessibility of their destination as a marketing tool and, possibly, considering making accessibility improvements to their premises and customer services.

The advantages and disadvantages of self-assessment questionnaires have been thoroughly discussed in the OSSATE Deliverable 2.2. On balance, the OSSATE partners agreed to pursue the route of self-assessment by owners/managers under strict limitations, and with a *clear indication of the data source to users*, in order to have as many destinations as possible in the *EuropeforAll* scheme at this lower “entry level”. This method will produce a “critical mass” of venues, which will give customers greater choice of destinations. It will also, hopefully, set destination owners and managers on the path to a Level 2 assessment and continual improvement of accessibility of their facilities.

Level 2 – Professionally audited venues and facilities

The second level of data collection used by *EuropeforAll* will be information gathered via an objective and detailed accessibility audit procedure, conducted at the tourism destination by a person with accessibility audit training/expertise. This implies that level 2 will provide reliable and valid information.

Level 2 will provide:

- An independent, authoritative assessment of the accessibility features of the tourism venue/premises and services, conducted by an external expert who is working under the authority of an accessibility information scheme;
- Detailed information that is based on systematic observations and measurements, using specially developed checklists with a large number of measurements;
- Detailed information that corresponds to the “higher” level of access requirements for people with moderate to severe levels of sensory/cognitive/functional impairments, (e.g. dimensional information about the layout and floor plans of guestrooms, which may be required for electric wheelchair users);
- A label related to the checking scheme – which may be used by tourism providers to indicate to potential customers that they can obtain a **guaranteed quality of descriptive access information**, once the premises have been audited. (The accessibility description is guaranteed). This approach is not to be confused with labels in other access schemes, which are used to indicate that the premises are accessible for certain categories of users);
- A set of checked data fields that correspond to some of the checkpoints in existing national accessible schemes (level 3), where these exist.

The level 2 information is more detailed and more extensive compared with the checklist for the owner (level 1). For users with more extensive access needs, the level 1 questionnaire will give not enough information or sufficient confidence

for them to select a destination. They need to have level 2 information which has been checked by professionals.

Owners who go to level 2 (or level 3, see below) will have added marketing advantages as well as the potential to obtain detailed reports on the accessibility improvements which they could make in order to satisfy the needs for a wider range of customers.

For customers, being able to search level 2 information provides more detail, which increases the chance of finding a satisfactory, accessible destination.

Level 3 – data obtained from national and regional accessibility information schemes

The third level in the *EuropeforAll* system will provide information about accessibility as defined by the respective national accessibility scheme in a country (or a city or regional equivalent, if no country-wide scheme exists). Our investigations of Accessible Tourism Information Schemes showed that, where they do exist, such schemes are likely to have the most reliable and detailed information. However, given that *EuropeforAll* is taking in a wide set of accessibility modules and criteria, the level 2 criteria employed by *EuropeforAll* may even be more detailed than those found in some (especially, older) national schemes.

We would argue that linking the *EuropeforAll* e-service, which is pan-European in scope, to national (or regional) accessible tourism information schemes is a desirable goal, both for the *EuropeforAll* service and for the existing schemes. National schemes will gain access to customers beyond their regional or national boundaries and language areas, while *EuropeforAll* will be able to extend its range of potential tourist destinations to additional territories. The biggest advantage is, of course, given to the travelling customer, who would be offered a wider range of destinations to choose from and a guaranteed quality of accessibility information on which to base his or her choice.

Insofar as level 3 data is already collected and held in third party databases, *EuropeforAll* is not strictly concerned with the exact ways in which this data is collected in level 3 (national/regional) schemes. However, level 3 data must always be collected systematically by trained persons in on-site visits, and it shall be guaranteed by the independent organisation which runs the scheme in order to be accepted as suitable for inclusion in *EuropeforAll*.

To achieve consistency and reliability of accessibility information for the user, *the framework for interoperability* between *EuropeforAll's* database and third party databases is hereby one of the crucial aspects for delivering level 3 information. Development of interoperability mechanisms is a major objective for the work of the OSSATE team in 2006.

3 Interoperability between databases and requirements for the e-service

Interoperability between third party and the *EuropeforAll* databases can be achieved at various levels as follows:

Off-line, one-way

This is the simplest case of interoperability which involves exporting data from the third party database and importing it to the *EuropeforAll* database. It can be a repetitive procedure at regular time intervals to enable the *EuropeforAll* database to stay up-to-date with changes in the originating database. It is anticipated that this 'loose-coupling' will provide a somewhat limited level of functionality to the end-users and will enable them to perform basic queries to the 'hosted' data. The approach will be most appropriate in the cases where the third party database owners may not wish to reveal the intrinsic structure of their database or the third party database structure is highly different and incompatible to the *EuropeforAll* database, thus rendering the coupling task extremely difficult to achieve at a high level. When a user query in the *EuropeforAll* database produces results from the third-party database, the system will provide a clear indication that the results originate from a 'hosted' database. A 'nice to have' feature will be to provide a direct link (url) to the originating database, thus enabling users to retrieve further details that will be available online. The availability of this feature, however, is highly dependent on the data that will be provided by the third-party database and on whether the third-party database is available online. The Ossate partners are in the process of exploring the tentative business perspectives of such a cross-linking facility (in terms of tentative revenue generation and promotion of the *EuropeforAll* e-services).

Off-line, two-way:

This interoperability level requires a more extensive agreement with the third-party database owner and involves exporting the full data from the originating database and importing and hosting it to the *EuropeforAll* database. This procedure will be one-off in most cases as the *EuropeforAll* administrative tools may become available to the third-party database owners in order to be able to maintain and update their data online. This is basically a full transition from the previous database to the *EuropeforAll* database which may prove mutually beneficial for both ends. In this scenario, content ownership will remain with the original third-party database owner and *EuropeforAll* will act as the host that will add value to it and provide visibility and enhanced marketing and promotion services.

On-line, one-way:

This level involves direct electronic access to the third-party database using an online interfacing mechanism that will enable *EuropeforAll* users to perform remote queries and retrieve and display data in a uniform manner. In this case, the third-party database owner will either have to provide the interface to access their database online (e.g. a high-level Application Programming Interface that will enable the *EuropeforAll* query engine to perform remote user queries) or they will need to make available to the *EuropeforAll* team detailed table-level information and provide read-access rights to the database.

On-line, two-way:

This level of online coupling is more extensive and may enable users of both databases to perform queries and retrieve information from the respective remote database. *EuropeforAll* may be able to provide all or parts of the data it has collected to third-party service providers such as online travel intermediaries, booking meta-engines and so forth. It may also provide its services in a 'white-labelling' scheme. Partners are in the process of exploring the business aspects of such possibilities towards providing more leverage and enhancing the marketability of the *EuropeforAll* e-services.

The introduction of third-party level 3 data in the *EuropeforAll* database involves investigations and development work, which is proceeding in the following steps:

- Ontological analysis of third-party accessible tourism databases;
- Examination of ontological matches and incompatibilities with the *EuropeforAll* Level 2 criteria;
- Definition of an appropriate high-level model for interoperability between data sets;
- Identification of appropriate compatible data subsets from the databases under examination;
- Development of data search and transfer protocols to allow *EuropeforAll* to retrieve data from third party data stores;
- Development of data search and transfer protocols to allow *EuropeforAll* to send data to third party data stores and/or service providers.

A visual portrayal of the main stakeholder groups of the *EuropeforAll* (OSSATE) e-service is shown in the following diagram:

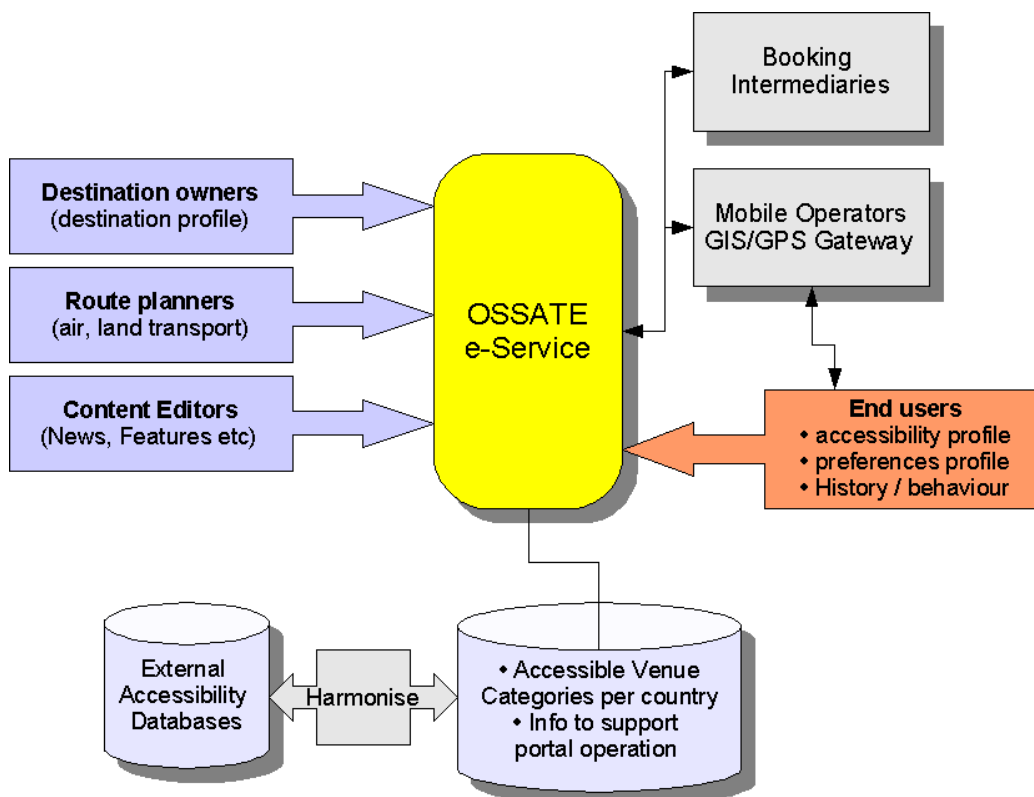


Figure 2. Stakeholder groups of the OSSATE (*EuropeforAll*) e-service

The above figure exemplifies the various levels of interoperability that should be achieved to enable a fully-fledged electronic service that will provide unique added-value services to its users.

We might add that the database interoperability issue is not trivial at all. On the contrary, it is highly dependent on the complexity of the database structures and also on the vocabulary used. Last but not least, the language used to store the information may prove a crucial factor to determine its re-usability and promotion via the *EuropeforAll* e-service.

The OSSATE partners are exploring alternative methods for database interoperability, including the outcomes of the IST project 'Harmonise', now deployed under the eTen project 'Harmo-TEN' (further details about Harmonise can be found at the url <http://www.harmo-ten.org>).

4 Dissemination and awareness-raising

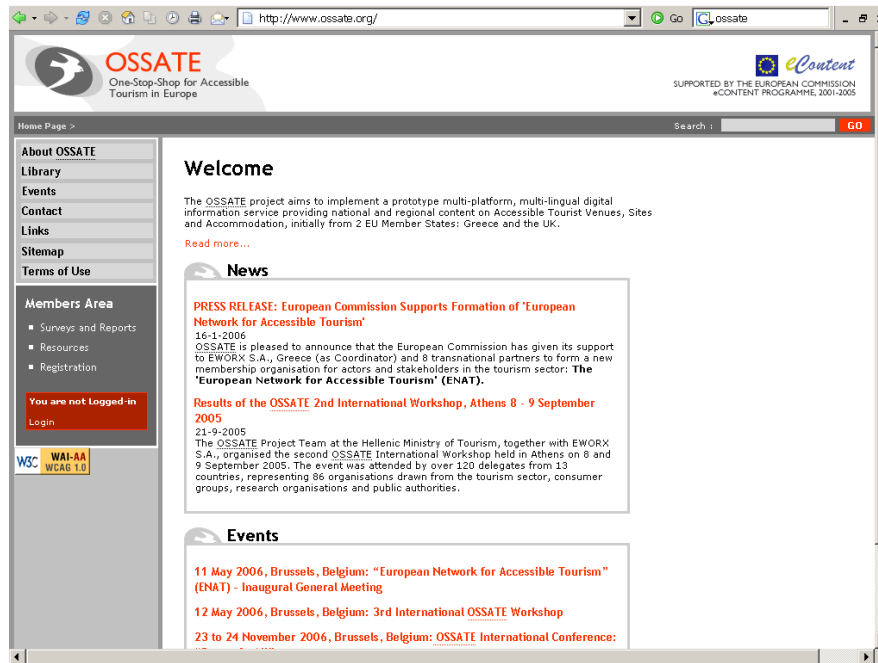
Dissemination of the outputs of the OSSATE project is coupled with an “awareness-raising” programme about the value of accessible tourism, targeting both providers and consumers. These activities are organised within a single dedicated work package, ensuring that the best use is made of all possible synergies.

The OSSATE Awareness-raising & Dissemination Plan (ARDP) is a dynamic document (Deliverable 7.3), to which partners add new communication opportunities as they arise. The ARDP, first produced in the sixth month of the project, provides a range of:

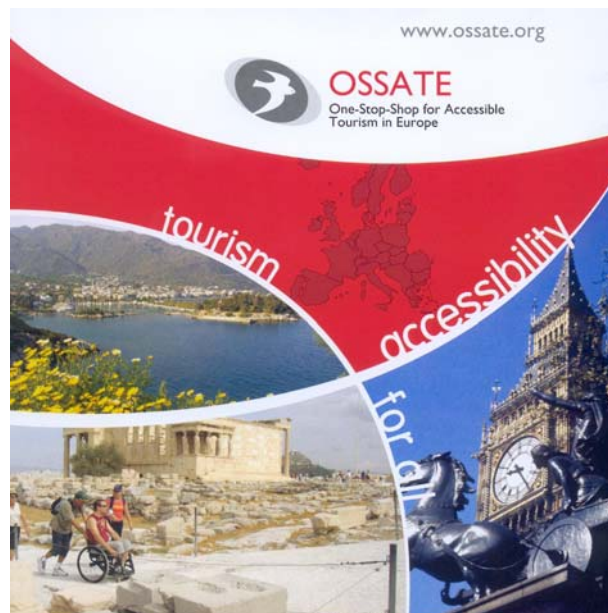
1. Key messages to be communicated
2. Target audiences
3. Media of communication
4. Formats of communication
5. Events providing effective platforms for communication, and
6. A list of published articles and presentations, with an indication of the size of the target audience/readership.

Following the ARDP, the OSSATE project has actively disseminated its outputs and has engaged a wide range of stakeholders in the project activities. The following activities are listed:

- The OSSATE Website was launched 12 days after the project starting date at www.ossate.org;



- The site is continually being populated with content for public viewing and resources for the project team;
- A short presentation about OSSATE in everyday language can be downloaded from the Website at: http://www.ossate.org/about_downloads.jsp;
- Information and contact details for all the project partners is also on-line at: http://www.ossate.org/about_partners.jsp ;
- A project 'flyer' or leaflet, (A4, 2 pages, illustrated in colour) was produced in April 2005 for dissemination purposes. It may be downloaded at: http://www.ossate.org/about_downloads.jsp (English and Greek versions);
- A second project brochure (square format, 6 pages, illustrated in colour) has been produced in 2,000 copies (English and Greek versions, Dutch and French will follow).



Project events, where the team meets European stakeholders, play a major role both in the e-service development work and dissemination and awareness-raising. In 2005 two international events took place:

- The 1st OSSATE International Workshop, organised by OSSATE partners VisitBritain, was held in London on 12 to 13 May 2005. Plenary presentations and a report are published on the OSSATE Website at: http://www.ossate.org/library_news_001.jsp
- The 2nd OSSATE International Workshop, organised by EWORX and the Hellenic Ministry of Tourism, was held in Athens on 11 to 12 September 2005. Plenary and workshop presentations are published on the OSSATE Website at: http://www.ossate.org/library_news_002.jsp

At these two events, over 30 speakers and almost 200 delegates from 13 countries gave presentations and engaged in discussions on a number of key themes regarding accessible tourism information. Following the Greek workshop several delegates joined a visit to the Acropolis of Athens, with guides from the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Several wheelchair users were able to visit this World Heritage Site by taking the recently installed lift on the north wall, which carries visitors directly to the top of the Acropolis. A fine example of 'tourism for all' at an ancient monument!

- The OSSATE project was also presented at other events including:
 - The e-2005 eChallenges Conference, Ljubljana, 18 – 21 October.
 - 4th eTourism Futures Forum, School of Management, University of Surrey, 21- 22 March.
 - International "Blue Flag National Operator Meeting", Ventspils, Latvia, 22 September.
- The project has developed a database of contacts with details of over 700 actors and stakeholders in the field of "accessible tourism information" in Europe. This database has been used for dissemination purposes (e.g. announcements of the 1st and 2nd International OSSATE Workshops), and for the identification of survey and evaluation panels for assessment and evaluation of the e-service prototype.

5 Future work and exploitation prospects

Work in 2006 focuses on two main objectives: firstly, to pilot, test and develop the *EuropeforAll* e-service and, secondly, to plan and hold two major collaboration and dissemination events, where the tourism sector, decision makers, consumers and content providers will be invited to engage with OSSATE.

5.1 Live run

2006 is the year of the "Live Run" where OSSATE will test and develop data collection tools in the United Kingdom and Greece.

- VisitBritain will integrate *EuropeforAll* "self-assessment" criteria in their Spring 2006 data-gathering sweep of hotels in selected regions of the UK;
- The Hellenic Ministry of Tourism will request the completed self assessment forms from Greek licensed hotels;

- Level 2 auditing procedures will be carried out at hotels and data will be uploaded to the *EuropeforAll* database;
- Trial data collection exercises will be conducted in other types of venues, including tourist information centres and self-catering accommodation.

Development of the *EuropeforAll* database and interoperability protocols will take place in parallel with the Live Run data collection. In this work, the Belgian partners, TGB and ANLH will collaborate with EWORX on interoperability investigations. Additional partners may also be asked to join in this activity.

5.2 Collaboration with external organisations and additional partners

The OSSATE contract allows for additional partners to join the project to participate in testing and the eventual roll-out of the e-service. A shortlist of possible new partners from EU Member States has been drawn up for the *EuropeforAll* assessment and evaluation work. The list of possible new partners includes organisations that have national or regional accessibility information databases already in place, and/or they have a significant standing as representatives of European industry or consumers. All of the short listed organisations have participated in one or other of the OSSATE International Workshops. These organisations will be offered possibilities to collaborate, from April 2006, in the assessment of plans for the organisation and commercialisation of the *EuropeforAll* service, as well as discussing the technical parameters for database interoperability.

Other organisations, for example, content providers, may collaborate with OSSATE on an *ad hoc* and trial basis, where mutually acceptable terms can be arranged. By engaging collaborators in formal or *ad hoc* arrangements, scenarios for commercial exploitation of the *EuropeforAll* e- service can be more realistically modelled and tested in an “incubation” period, as part of the OSSATE project.

5.3 Events in 2006

The **3rd International OSSATE Workshop** will take place in Brussels on 12 May 2006. This Workshop will focus on the organisational and technical aspects of setting up OSSATE's cross-border accessibility e-service for the tourism sector. Concrete proposals for inter-organisational networking and data exchange will be discussed with future partners and other interested organisations.

This workshop will take place just one day after the **Inaugural General Meeting** of the **European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT)**. ENAT is an initiative to create a membership organisation in Europe for all actors and stakeholders who are interested in promoting accessible tourism. This two-year action, started in January 2005, is also led by EWORX S.A. and is co-funded by the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Gender Equality, under the open call for “pilot actions to promote mainstreaming of disability policies”. While ENAT and OSSATE are coordinated by the same organisation, the two projects remain completely separate, each pursuing their own objectives. There are, however, many organisations which could benefit from collaboration with both projects and, where possible, synergies will be exploited for mutual benefit. This is the case on 11-12 May 2006, where two European events on accessible tourism occur “back-to-back”, allowing participants to attend both

meetings.

The **OSSATE International Conference: “EuropeforAll”** will take place on 23 to 24 November 2006 in Brussels, Belgium. This event is supported by the European Commission’s eContent Programme and the Flemish Tourist Board, “Tourism Flanders”. The conference will present the “*EuropeforAll*” e-service for accessible tourism information in Europe, developed by the OSSATE consortium. The programme will include an overview of the e-service organisation and components, examples of the system in use and presentations of the advantages of the e-service for both providers and customers. The main target group for this conference is the mainstream tourism industry, which is encouraged to start using the *EuropeforAll* service as part of its marketing efforts towards tourists who need accessibility information. Tourism providers who have specialised ‘accessible’ offers will also be specially invited, as will consumer groups, public authorities, researchers, political decision makers and the European Commission.

5.4 Dissemination and marketing preparations

During 2006, the OSSATE partners will prepare a popular-style publication reflecting the results of studies which have been conducted in the framework of the project, and describing the benefits which the planned *EuropeforAll* e-service can bring to tourism providers in Europe and their customers. The publication will be provided with examples of good practices, a description of the new service and illustrations of some of the many venues, activities and types of offers which will be included in *EuropeforAll*.

The *EuropeforAll* brand will continue to be developed throughout the year and preparations will be made for the market launch, when the project period ends.

6 Further information

Further information about the project can be found at the Website www.ossate.org



Information about access to the sea for wheelchair users and people with walking difficulties is one of the areas where OSSATE is making investigations.