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Session 2. Information & Marketing on Accessibility

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(Numbers shown below refer to the slides of the PowerPoint presentation)

1 Europe for all

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the Tourism Unit of DG Enterprise and Industry for organising this conference on accessible tourism.

It is a great pleasure for us to present, today, our new accessibility information scheme for tourism, which we call ‘Europe for all’.

I will be telling you, in this introduction, about the origins of ‘Europe for all’ and the challenges it is seeking to meet; and then my colleague, Spyros Michailidis, will give you a demonstration of the system which will become europeforall.com

Before getting into the details, let me just say some words about the context of this conference:

I believe that the interest in accessible tourism – within the European tourism industry itself – has never been stronger than it is today, and this is a very promising situation. Of course, Europe’s 50 million disabled people have been waiting a very long time to have the chance to fully enjoy the wealth of tourism offers that can be found in European destinations. So it is very fitting that we are meeting at the beginning of 2007 which is “The European Year of Equal Opportunities for All”. Indeed, let us hope that this year will be **the year** when **the whole tourism industry really turns a corner**, and starts making its venues, its products and its services – **“accessible for all”**.

I do believe that the broad mainstream of the tourist industry is moving from **being interested** in accessible tourism **to taking up the challenge** of meeting the demands from all kinds of tourists who want better accessibility.

Accessible tourism should become the norm in the 21st Century, as old barriers and old ways of thinking are progressively and decisively overcome. So, equally, tourist destinations and venues need a 21st Century approach to marketing their accessibility – by bringing businesses and customers closer together, using the means that are offered by new technologies and new media.

This is one reason why we need the e-service, “Europe for All”.

2 Outline of the Presentation

- Accessibility information
 - The OSSATE partnership
 - Designing the 'Europe for all' e-service
 - Assessment of tourist venues
 - Collaboration and consultation
- > Then there will be preview of Europeforall.com by Mr. Spyros Michailidis

3 What is "Accessibility Information"?

Information about accessibility refers to any of the physical characteristics of destinations and available services 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, as well as service provisions that can affect their comfort, safety and ability to function well in their surroundings.

4 OSSATE and the eContent Programme

In 2005 we set up OSSATE, the "One-Stop-Shop for Accessible Tourism in Europe".

A large part of the funding for this initiative comes from the European Commission's eContent programme, which funds development work aimed at bringing high-quality European content onto the global digital networks.

With OSSATE we have set out to re-use and add value to public service information on accessibility – where it exists, by developing a pan-European e-service for the tourism sector.

I should point out that **OSSATE** is the acronym of the eContent project and the partnership. The name '**Europe for all**' refers to the **product** of the OSSATE partnership – an on-line accessibility information scheme.

5 The OSSATE Partners

The OSSATE Partnership is made up of the initial group of seven partners from three countries, Greece, the United Kingdom and Belgium; and four newcomers in 2006 from Austria, Denmark, Belgium and Sweden. The partners were chosen for their complementary skills and experience, and the fact that they can play different roles in building this new e-service which will deliver accessibility information to tourists within Europe - or tourists coming to Europe.

EWORX, the Coordinator, is a young, dynamic, Information Technology enterprise which specialises in producing accessible web sites and services for public and private sector clients in Greece and across Europe.

The Hellenic Ministry of Tourism (MINTOUR) is responsible for policies and actions in the field of tourism development in Greece - a country famed for its heritage and many tourist attractions, both ancient and modern. For MINTOUR, this project is of vital importance. A sizable proportion of its Greece's Gross National Product comes from tourism and many of its small enterprises and communities are highly dependent on revenues from in-bound and home-market tourists. Placing a focus on accessibility is a way of upgrading the quality of tourism offers and, at the same time, it meets the need for equal access to tourism for all citizens.

Disability Now is a major organisation of disabled people in Greece, an Internet pioneer, which has built its reputation and achieved a very large following by providing information on every aspect of living with a disability. It manages one of the world's largest Websites promoting disability culture and information for people with disabilities. Disability Now has brought its expertise to the project, especially by helping to identify users' access needs and information requirements, through research and by conducting surveys among its members.

VisitBritain is the UK's National Tourist Authority. It promotes the UK around the world as a tourist destination, and is recognised among its peers as a global leader in tourism marketing. VisitBritain also manages the "National Accessible Scheme" which covers accommodation establishments across the UK. You will hear more about VisitBritain from their e-Business Partnerships Manager, Andrew Daines, who will speak later in this session.

The University of Surrey School of Management (UNIS) has a long track record of excellence in the e-Tourism area. For 'Europe for all', its staff have made a thorough analysis of the market for accessible tourism in Europe, and they have examined the performance of market players who are currently delivering accessibility information via the Web. From their research, and working with the other partners, the UNIS team have examined models for the commercial exploitation of 'Europe for all', which is now under development.

Toegankelijkheidsbureau (TGB) is the Flemish Centre of Expertise on Accessibility, based in Hasselt, Belgium. TGB has worked for more than 10 years at regional, national and EU level on accessibility policy, planning and the implementation of actions ranging from access auditing to education, training, employment and consultancy. TGB has helped Tourism Flanders to set up an accessibility information system for its tourist accommodation and other venues – which you will hear more about from Greet Vandenrijt.

L'Association Nationale pour le Logements des Personnes Handicapées (ANLH) is based in Brussels, where it has built housing and runs services for disabled people. ANLH is another of Europe for all's "e-enabled" disability organisations which offers a wide range of information on its website about access to the city, to assistive technology, to housing and service for disabled people. ANLH works closely with the Wallonian and Brussels governments, by screening the public building plans and advising on accessibility planning.

The four 'new' partners have joined OSSATE to help validate and deploy the product, by examining and testing the technical, managerial and commercial viability of the e-service.

Tourism for All in Sweden (TFAS) promotes accessible tourism among Swedish tourism enterprises, with accessibility auditing, quality labelling and training for the tourist industry.

The **Infoplattform Barrier-Free Tourism (IBFT)** provides on-line accessibility information on tourist accommodation in Austria.

The **Danish Accessibility Association (FTA)** is a unique national body, formed in 2003 to promote accessibility in the tourism sector, by the National Association of Disability Organisations, the Danish Tourist Board (Visit Denmark) and HORESTA, the employers' organisation for hotel, restaurant and tourist businesses. FTA runs a dedicated website presenting accessibility information on a wide variety of Danish tourist venues and attractions.

VisitOSLO is the destination management organisation which promotes the Norwegian capital to the world as a tourism destination. On its website it maintains content on the accessibility of venues for disabled people, side-by-side with other information. It is one of the foremost pioneers of city tourism in Europe, and takes special care of those tourists who need accessible venues and services.

6 Designing the 'Europe for all' e-service.

We did not start 'Europe for all' from scratch. Previous to this work, our partners: VisitBritain, TGB and ANLH had all developed information systems about the accessibility of tourist venues in their own countries and regions.

Other areas of Europe have also set up their own regional or national accessibility assessment systems and databases. TGB made a comprehensive review of more than 40 such schemes, receiving detailed questionnaires from many of them. (Some schemes, it must be said, covered only one venue or a handful of venues and not all provided on-line services). We looked at their strengths and weaknesses, their organisational and technical features.

Our e-tourism specialists at the University of Surrey conducted an extensive investigation of the Web, identifying the "mainstream" players in Europe who are offering on-line accessibility information for tourists:

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 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 accessibility information in 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 'Europe for all' 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.

It was clear from this research that most mainstream players are hardly moving forward as regards accessible tourism information on accessibility. Despite some good examples the availability of anything beyond minimal information is generally lacking. As a result the would-be tourist is very much left guessing.

- Is the hotel accessible for me? (or another member of the family).
- Will we be able to
 - o park the car?
 - o get into the museum)?
 - o use the toilets?
 - o dine in the cafeteria?
 - o find our way? etc.

7 Diversity and Complexity

Why is it so difficult to set up a system that works for everyone who wants to find out about accessibility of tourist venues in Europe ?

Diversity of Europe:

- Number one is the language barrier. It is costly and complicated to provide multi-lingual search tools that are of real value. Web-tools are available for automatic translation but the kind of detailed information people want needs to be translated carefully and systematically.
- Legal framework: (subsidiarity principle): Building regulations are under national jurisdiction – not EU. So Accessibility information schemes which fit the norms of one country will almost invariably not match the norms of another country;
- There is no single, legislated European standard for physical accessibility, so schemes that follow a given standard are also restricted to the country in which that standard applies;

- There is a multitude of accessibility guidelines, which leaves the non-expert uncertain. Then the option of doing nothing becomes the more attractive choice – “Then at least we don’t mess up”.

Fragmented interests and responsibilities

- Among those organisations that have created accessibility information schemes there is a variety of different players. Organisations usually work alone or just with part of the tourism sector and its stakeholders. Some think that they will do better on their own than they would by collaborating. Others would like to cooperate across borders but they just haven’t had the opportunity or the right business model to make it happen.

Practical issues

- Implementation of accessibility information schemes is very slow. It is quite labour intensive to register the accessibility features of a single venue. So it takes a long time to build a scheme which contains the “critical mass” of venues that will give customers a real choice.
- Of course, not all customers want the same information – accessibility means different things to different people, depending on their abilities or disabilities. This is something we will come back to.

As a result of their basic diversity and complexity, the current information schemes do not “talk” to each other. There is no common language, no common definitions to work with, and no commonly accepted way of doing things across Europe. This situation is illustrated by the plethora of accessibility labels and logos which can be found. Each one has a design and a meaning that is specific to a particular information system. But how many systems must the user learn to cope with?

The result, then, is **a general lack of transparency and consistency** for the tourist who needs accessibility information.

This situation is not only a problem of accessibility, *per se*. And the lack of transparency is certainly not deliberate. It is partly a reflection of how we have always done things in each country, region or city in Europe. In each place people are working arduously and conscientiously from their own perspective, striving to make the perfect solution and, (it might be added), to beat the competition.

In the field of tourism, where people clearly want to travel across geo-political and language boundaries – it can only make sense to provide information about your destination, your offers and your services in ways which can be understood by everyone. That means, we can only hope to manage all this diversity and complexity if we plan for it.

That is the fundamental idea behind ‘Europe for all’.

8 Market Analysis

From analysis conducted by UNIS, 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.

9 Network Approach for the ‘Europe for all’ e-Service

How can the pan-European accessibility information service pay for itself? We have identified a number of value chain formations that can make ‘Europe for all’ a sustainable e-service. It can be offered as a stand alone service and/ or can be delivered as part of or in collaboration with a number of players. These could include, for example, Destination Management Organisations; Destination Management System Providers; the European Travel Commission Portal; disability organisations/ charities/ NGOs; part of Telecommunication company online 3G services; travel agents and eMediaries; municipalities and other public sector bodies; hotels and accommodation chains or aggregators.

Our research with key stakeholders showed a clear tendency for adopting a network approach, where each country has a coordinator, or a coordination group, which is linked to the ‘Europe for all’ system administrator. 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.

10 Brand Values: 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.

What does the “Europe for all” brand stand for?

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?

In addition to these points, 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. 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, Greece, Belgium and Norway. 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.

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.

11 Europe for all Parameters

The design of the ‘Europe for all’ accessibility information scheme has required a fresh assessment of the features needed for such a scheme, taking into account the user needs, market forces and stakeholder interests.

An overview of the main aims of the scheme follows:

- Provide reliable, accurate and detailed accessibility information to customers;
- Information must be objective and descriptive rather than norm-based. This avoids the difficulty of applying varying norms and standards and allows users to make their own assessment of a venue’s suitability;
- Provide a database and a tool to audit 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 different disabilities, ages, health conditions; 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*.

12 A three-level scheme for accessibility data

On the basis of our research investigations and the pre-existing know-how which the partners brought to the project, we concluded 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.

Three levels of information will be used in the ‘Europe for all’ e-service. The Figure (1) shows these three levels and the relations between them. Each level has its own important aspects.

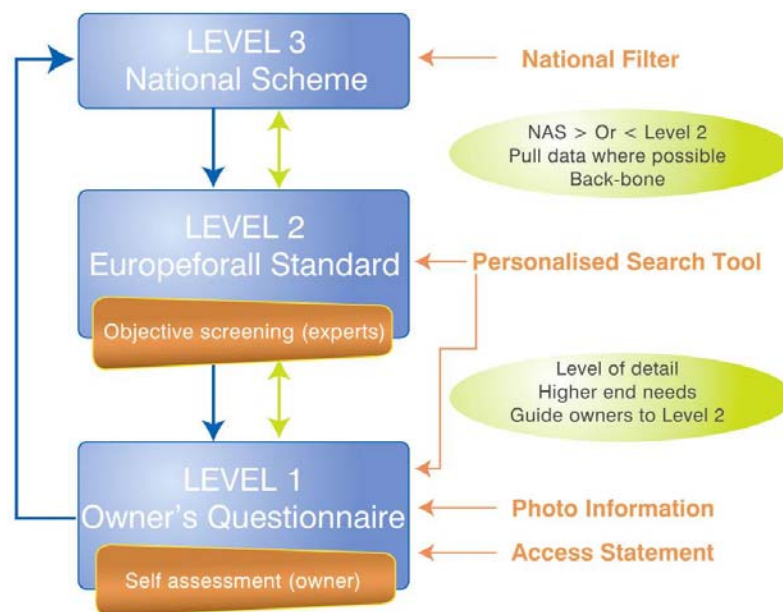


Figure 1. Diagram representing the 3 levels of accessibility information in the EuropeforAll scheme, and their key differences.

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 meet the brand values of ‘Europe for all’, as well as the requirements and interests of all the different user-groups within one service.

13 Level 1 Self-Assessment (1)

The first level in the 'Europe for all' data collection is a simple self-assessment questionnaire that can be filled in by the destination owner or manager. This questionnaire is 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.

14 Level 1 (2)

15 Level 2 – Professionally audited venues and facilities (1)

The second level of data collection used by 'Europe for all' 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. 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.

16 Level 2 (2)

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.

17 Level 3 – Integration of Data from National Schemes (1)

The third level in the 'Europe for all' 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).

18 Level 3 (2)

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 'Europe for all' is taking in a wide set of accessibility modules and criteria, the level 2 criteria employed by 'Europe for all' may even be more detailed than those found in some (especially, older) national schemes.

To achieve consistency and reliability of accessibility information for the user, *the framework for interoperability* between the database of 'Europe for all' and third party databases is hereby one of the crucial aspects for delivering level 3 information.

Development of interoperability mechanisms is now ongoing with partners in UK, Belgium and VisitOslo.

19 'Europe for All' Live Run

Now and in the next 3 months, 'Europe for all' is in its "Live Run" phase. This involves gathering data in the United Kingdom, Greece, Belgium and Oslo, and testing the database and user interface with consumer groups.

- VisitBritain have included 'Europe for all' "self-assessment" criteria in their 2006 data-gathering sweep of hotels, self-catering establishments, attractions and Tourist Information Offices in 3 selected regions of the UK;
- The Hellenic Ministry of Tourism has made a survey of all licensed Greek hotel and self-catering apartment businesses and has so far registered 625 establishments using the level 1 self-assessment questionnaire
- Level 2 auditing by trained assessors will also be carried out in Belgium and Oslo, Norway, and this data will be uploaded to the 'Europe for all' database;
- Trial data collection exercises are being conducted in other types of venues, including tourist information centres and attractions accommodation.

Further development of interoperability protocols bringing "Level 3" data from national accessible information schemes with 'Europe for all' will take place in parallel with the Live Run data collection during the coming 3 months.

20 Example data from Greece (1) Level 1

21 Example data from Greece (2) Level 1

22 Picture of Website Home page (Demo version)

23 Widening the 'Europe for all' Collaboration

From May 2007 'Europe for all' will be open to additional partners from across Europe. We envisage possibilities for collaboration through contracts and licensing agreements that are tailored for different players.

For example:

- National 'Europe for all' coordinators will manage data-collection, database interoperability and level 2 auditing services in their own country;
- The travel and tourism press may deliver content for the Website, targetted to 'Europe for all' customers;
- 'Europe for all' will offer its database services to the European Travel Commission;

- National Tourist Boards that desire to have their own national accessibility information scheme can link up with 'Europe for all';
- Destination Management Organisations, hotel chains and others;
- Booking agents will be able to team up with 'Europe for all' to provide on-line bookings for site users;
- Providers of services and products will be able advertise on 'Europe for all' to travellers who value accessibility;
- Publishers of Travel Guides will be able to collaborate on joint projects to develop publications incorporating venues that are registered with 'Europe for all'.

Looking at the current landscape of accessible tourism, we believe that 'first-mover advantage' is possible for tourism providers and destinations in every country and region. As we have said, there is a large market potential for accessible tourism and there is room for considerable business innovation in this area.

24 Consultation, feedback and continuing improvement

Today, at this conference, we are presenting 'Europe for all' as a fledgling accessibility information system for the European tourist industry and its customers.

We are also inviting you, (the stakeholders in accessible tourism) who are actors in the tourism sector, consumers, decision makers and NGOs - to give us your feedback on the system we have developed.

We are placing our data-collection tools on the Web – starting with the accessibility assessment forms and checklists for accommodation and attractions. These will be available for anyone who wants to, to examine and give their comments. All the stakeholders in this conference will be offered the possibility to participate in this process.

We will also be conducting tests of the accessibility, usability and usefulness of the web site itself, with on-line feedback forms and 'live' usability testing by user representatives.

One of the key features of the service is that tourists who register on the site will be able to give us their feedback on the quality of the venues that they visit. This information will be verified and passed to the venue owners / managers where it can be used in their service development activities. We will also discuss with tourism providers ways to make registration of their establishments more efficient and more accurate.

So this is an invitation for stakeholders to be involved in the validation and development of 'Europe for all'. With your feedback we will update and improve the system continuously. In this way we hope to make 'Europe for all' a trusted and reliable partner for all stakeholders in Europe.

25 DEMO

Now I hand over to Spyros Michailidis, who will give a demonstration of the 'Europe for all' features.