

Speaking Notes - Opening of the Conference

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“Europe for All – a Stakeholder Conference on Accessible Tourism”

The Charlemagne Building, Room S3

18th – 19th January 2007

- Thank you to OSSATE and Tourism Flanders for their technical support.
- First event in the “European year of equal opportunities for all” 2007.
- Main challenge of European year: to make Europe a place where equal opportunities are a reality for all - equal access – to education, employment, services, etc. AND tourism!
- Europe is the tourist destination No. 1 of the world and it should be also the tourist destination No. 1 accessible for everyone.
- With this conference we address the need to make tourism accessible for ALL tourists in Europe and in the world.
- Main objective of this conference: awareness raising of all stakeholders about the impact and the business opportunities of the forthcoming process of demographic ageing that will simultaneously lead to a growing share of tourists with needs for more accessibility and higher service quality.
- Accessibility is not only about disabled people but also about older people, families with small children, people with short-term or chronic ailments, etc.
- Number of people with accessibility needs in the EU: 127 mio:
 - 46 mio persons with disabilities in the age of 16 to 64 years and people older than 65.
 - 70 % of the disabled are physically and financially able to travel, but that in particular disabled tourists are accompanied by travel companions and that in the cases of families with disabled members

traveling together the whole group can only travel when their accessibility needs are met.

- Number of people requesting accessible products and services on the tourism market is much larger: 260 mio people corresponding to expected revenues of EUR 166 bn.
- Process of demographic aging: characterized by a growing share of people older than 65 which will be rising continuously from 17% in 2000 to 28 % in 2040.
 - Number of travelers with disabilities or activity limitations will rise as well, for about half of the people with disabilities are older than 65. Tourists aged 65+ continue traveling and do not reduce their travel expenditure severely.
 - This age group prefers domestic destinations - shift in the demand structure caused by demographic aging will open new markets in particular for the regionally oriented smaller tourism companies as long as they meet the higher requirements of this age group concerning service quality and accessibility.
- According to the Center for Tourism and Service Economics at the University of Innsbruck (Austria) the current situation of the tourism industry is characterized by lacking innovation, only “cosmetic changes in the product”, to meet the main future challenges such as demographic aging and recommends “... innovation-driven changes in production and marketing processes that reduce costs or product changes that offer more varied tourism experiences for quality conscious customers”. Therefore, the qualitative and quantitative impacts of changes on the demand side in the process of demographic aging should be considered.
- In contrast to the huge number of tourists demanding accessible tourism facilities the share of tourism facilities reported by Member States as being accessible – at least for wheelchair users - amounts to only 1.5 % of

restaurants & catering facilities, 6.5% of accommodation establishments and 11.3% of attractions.

- This very limited supply meeting accessibility needs makes evident that a large share of tourist demand and turnover remains unused. Other surveys revealed that many of those requesting accessibility do not travel because of too many obstacles along the tourist service chain.
- Therefore, the redesign of tourism establishments and services to this growing group of tourists will create opportunities and competition advantages as well as employment.
- With this conference the Commission is promoting accessibility by facilitating the exchange of existing practices and the involvement of all interested stakeholders. We will present best practices and engage the delegates in focused discussions about the future directions for accessible tourism.
- The four main themes of accessibility will be the topics of four sessions:
 - “Accessibility in Transport”: When speaking about accessible tourism one has to speak also about transport. Tourism and transport are irrevocably interconnected. This session examines new policy developments and explores transport modes where new initiatives are required to achieve transport for all.
 - “Information & Marketing on Accessibility”: This session presents the results of the OSSATE initiative ("One-Stop-Shop for Accessible Tourism in Europe"). The "Europe for All" accessible information portal is presented as a possible solution, and is discussed with some of key players in European destination marketing.
 - “Accessibility within Training and Employment”: For disadvantaged people a lack of access exists not only to services and facilities but also to the labour market. It is important to provide people with special needs with the training required to reach access to employment and job opportunities in the tourism sector. But skills training should also be

provided for employees in the tourism sector as the number of tourists with special needs is increasing.

- “Accessible Infrastructure in Destinations”: The destination is likely to be the main focus of the tourist experience. Drawing on the experience of the wide-ranging activities of the ONCE Foundation and enterprises, examples are presented of good practices in planning, design, renovations and management - all with the aim of making tourism "accessible for all", on equal terms.
- Welcome next speaker: Miguel Angel Cabra de Luna, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee