



EDF's Vision on the EU Tourism of the Future

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35 square de Meeûs
1000 Brussels - Belgium

tel +32 2 282 46 00
fax +32 2 282 46 09

info@edf-feph.org
www.edf-feph.org



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The **European Disability Forum (EDF)** is the European umbrella organisation representing the interests of 80 million persons with disabilities in Europe. The mission of EDF is to ensure disabled people full access to fundamental and human rights through their active involvement in policy development and implementation in Europe. EDF is a member of the International Disability Alliance and works closely with the European institutions, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

1) The main challenges for the European tourism industry from the point of view of persons with disabilities

One of the main challenges for the European tourism industry will be the demographic change of the EU population, which means that the percentage of persons with disabilities will also rise in the coming years. This dictates a need for change in the field of tourism towards a more accessible “tourism for all” concept. But this does not only concern older people but all persons with disabilities who want to benefit from the principle of free movement in the EU and who are increasingly keen on travelling.

Furthermore, the tourism industry also has to adapt to quickly advancing changes in technology and to keep up with them. A focus on the entire “tourism chain” as a whole is necessary in order to tackle this challenge and to ensure accessibility even before the potential traveler books his trip. Information provision, booking procedure, communication, transport, accommodation, activities at the destination – everything has to be taken into account and made accessible for all.

Another challenge for businesses will be to find skilled professionals that are able to respond to the change of demographic structure and that are trained appropriately. As currently the “Design for All” concept, i.e. the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, is not yet mainstreamed in all areas and disability awareness training is not always compulsory, this will be a challenge that the tourism industry has to tackle.

Accessible tourism will be more attractive to all because it responds more to individual needs and accommodates different preferences. For example, installing a lift in a hotel will make it more comfortable to use for all guests e.g. when travelling with heavy luggage. But it will also benefit the employees of the delivery services that work with the hotel and increase the comfort and safety of the employees of the hotel itself.

2) The opportunities for the European tourism industry

Facing the challenges mentioned above, the positive news is that they also create new opportunities to be exploited at the same time. Demographic change also means the emergence of a new group of clients that take advantage of low-season offers and are more flexible. It also goes without saying that persons with disabilities rarely travel by themselves and friends and families constitute another addition to this group of consumers.

A prerequisite to take full advantage of those opportunities is that the tourism industry focuses more on accessibility and how to promote accessible tourism for everyone. In many cases, already small and simple adaptations can help to make destinations more accessible. For example a bench in front of the museum where people can rest when there are long queues does not cost much and is not complicated to install but can already make a difference.



On the other hand, if infrastructure is newly built it has to be kept in mind that planning for a fully accessible “tourism chain” will save a great deal of costs and effort compared to retro-fitting accessibility features later on. With a relatively small investment now, bigger opportunities can be seized in the future. It is thus advisable to mainstream the “Design for All” concept horizontally in all areas. An accessible bathroom in a hotel, for example, can be attractive to everyone because it is more spacious. However, it is important to keep in mind that “accessible” does not have to be synonymous with a sterile, hospital-like environment but that it can be used in a way that makes spaces more appealing to everybody.

Making websites, communication, transport, accommodation, leisure facilities and services accessible to all will mean a boost in competitiveness, also compared with other tourism destinations outside the EU. It will entail an improvement of quality as well as health and safety throughout all tourism services and benefit everyone. For example, a hotel will be much safer if a suitable fire alarm for deaf people is installed. Use can be made of existing know-how as well as research and innovation to provide solutions that are made-to-measure for different types of destinations.

3) How the EU tourism industry should exploit these opportunities

As mentioned under point 2), accessibility is the key to exploit the opportunities that the EU tourism industry has. In practice, EDF has some suggestions on how this can be done best.

Firstly, networking and communication have been identified as success factors in a study of the German Ministry of Economy and Technology¹. That means that e.g.

regional networks and the collaboration between different stakeholders is very important to make tourism accessible in a successful way. This also includes the involvement of non-tourism stakeholders such as Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) who can give feedback and expertise on planned projects. Communication as a success factor includes marketing and public relations work to promote accessible solutions to a broader audience – often it might be a lesser known destination that can gain popularity by becoming more accessible but this has to be advertised accordingly.

The concept of reasonable accommodation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) can also be used in order to exploit the opportunities that accessible tourism can offer. It means “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”.ⁱⁱ

Secondly, disability awareness training and the mainstreaming of the “Design for All” principle in all areas concerning tourism are important factors in this context. If this is respected, accessibility will also lead to increased sustainability, safety and a higher quality of the tourism opportunities on offer. Regarding the training it should also be kept in mind to give practical, hands-on training and not just instructions from a book. It is crucial that the designer, architect, engineer, construction worker or member of service staff understands the provisions and how they are applied. It has to be made clear that those provisions apply to the real lives of real people and are not just a list to be ticked off for the sake of fulfilling a requirement.



EDF supports stronger involvement of the EU-dimension and of the EU institutions in order to achieve a harmonized set of rules throughout the EU to facilitate freedom of movement of persons with disabilities and other travelers. The EU institutions could for example provide relevant tools of support to the tourism industry in order to tackle the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities named above. This could for example be incentives for SMEs to make their businesses accessible, promote accessible solutions for example with an “accessibility label”, standards, applications guides or similar.

4) Suggested EU priorities for the tourism of the future

EDF would like to underline the importance of strengthening the regulatory environment by setting quality standards on accessibility. It should also be invested in better infrastructure as well as training- and mobility schemes. This will in turn improve the competitiveness of EU-businesses and contribute to health and safety in the tourism industry, both for employees and customers alike.

Another priority should be to develop accessible tourism products that are at the same time affordable. Mainstreaming accessibility is a good solution to move towards “tourism for all” to give consumers more choice and flexibility. Specialized “disability tourism” might still cater for a certain range of customers but everybody should have the choice what kind of destination or what kind of trip to choose.

In the mid- to long term harmonization of standards and legislation on EU level is a goal to be envisaged.

5) References

- Study on accessible tourism in Germany (“Barrierefreier Tourismus für Alle in Deutschland – Erfolgsfaktoren und Maßnahmen zur Qualitätssteigerung”), Ministry of Economy and Technology, http://www.holicap.de/cms/upload/dokumente/BMWi-Studie_Barrierefreier_Tourismus.pdf
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), Article 2 (<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=262>)



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ⁱ Barrierefreier Tourismus für Alle in Deutschland – Erfolgsfaktoren und Maßnahmen zur Qualitätssteigerung (http://www.holicap.de/cms/upload/dokumente/BMWi-Studie_Barrierefreier_Tourismus.pdf), retrieved on 10 March 2014

ⁱⁱ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), Article 2 (<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=262>), retrieved on 11 March 2014