

Accessibility in tourism environments and services – a label for high quality

By Timo Ekroos, Karelia University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

At present accessibility in tourism organizations, attractions and services has been taken into account variably. Basically it has been perceived as feature which will be needed for special customers and in special cases instead of indicator of high quality and design for all. Successful solutions of accessibility will provide added value in services and environments both for the customers and also for service providers themselves. It is often question about attitudes and skills to utilize accessibility positively as common benefit in tourism attractions. There can still be found also the fear to be stigmatized as a tourist resort just for people with special access needs. That is why it is very reasonable to act for the positive attitudes and utilization of accessibility in practice together with enterprises, organizations offering tourism services and the end users who have personal experience on utilizing the tourism services. The key to tapping into this expanding customer base is to provide mainstream services that are attractive and accessible for all.

Read more [here](#)



Accessible pier in Ruunaa hiking area, Finland
Photo by Keijo Penttinen



Accessible garden Kadyny, Poland
Photo by Timo Ekroos

Study visits in Poland and Slovakia

Elblag and Warmia-Mazury region, Poland

TOURage organized study visit in Elblag and Warmia-Mazury region (Poland) on 18th of September. During the visit eight places were evaluated by the team of TOURage to discuss whether or not they are transferable to other regions by project partners. Lots of interesting projects and activities raised huge interest between partners to transfer ideas to other regions. **Read more about the study visit [here](#).**



Boat taking lots of senior tourists to the Elblag Canal; an example of sentimental tourism

Prešov region, Slovakia

In the middle of November, another study visit was organized in Prešov region (Slovakia). Hosting partners presented good practices suitable to promote senior tourism in remote regions. Team noticed good ways to improve accessibility in tourism attractions, including solutions that make visits comfortable for seniors. Region has also challenges to promote religious tourism as it has become popular among tourists, also seniors. **Read more about the study visit [here](#).**



While reconstructing the tourism attraction, let's think about accessibility; Lubovna castle and museum

Planned activities in the next Project period

In spring 2014, TOURage project partners will meet in **Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County** in north-eastern Hungary, where they will familiarize themselves with the region's good practices in senior tourism. Following this event, the project will organize its 3rd Annual Conference in the **region of Podkarpackie**, Poland in May 2014. The project's last study visit takes place in the same region in May. After this,

TOURage partners will publish a good practice brochure that includes examples from each partner region. During the first six months of 2014, the partners continue to work on the regional implementation plans that ensure the durability of project results and develop joint policy recommendations for the regional, national and EU-level policy-makers.



Committee of the Regions

TOURage was introduced in the Committee of the Regions

On 1st October took place the NAT Commission meeting at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels where also social tourism was on the agenda. Dr. Pentti Hyttinen, Region Mayor of North Karelia, was invited to the meeting to discuss the regional aspects of social tourism. Hyttinen **introduced the TOURage project in the meeting as an example on senior tourism development**. He highlighted the demographic change in Finland as an example of ageing and noted that ageing is an ongoing trend in Europe. These changes in the demography have an effect on the needs of consumers and as seniors are constantly growing consumer group it is important to acknowledge them in the tourism sector.

He also pointed out two aspects that emphasize the possibilities relating to development of tourism offer for the youth, disabled, families and seniors. Relating to social point of view it was discussed that tourism targeted to the above mentioned groups promotes health and wellbeing, active ageing and offers equal opportunities for all, hence, it can reduce overall social and health care costs and decrease exclusion.

Relating to regional development aspects there is also a lot of opportunities. Social tourism promotes low and off-season tourism and consequently generates income for enterprises throughout the year, increases employment and decreases transfers of income. Importantly, it also offers possibility to attract more visitors to the less known tourism areas

and increases their visibility internationally. Senior tourism development also promotes the positive image of the "age friendly region".

In the meeting, Hyttinen stated that North Karelia has plenty of development potential in this regard. He mentioned that seniors, persons with disabilities and allergic persons usually appreciate accessibility, safeness, tranquility, fresh air, and laid-back atmosphere. In North Karelia there are plenty of destinations which fulfill those criteria, so the region has a lot to offer for travelers from Finland and abroad. For the entrepreneurs it would offer possibility to improve business during low and off-season and, thus, enhance the sustainability of the tourism sector.

In addition to Pentti Hyttinen, Danny Silva from eCalypso initiative, Cinzia de Marzo from European Commission and Ana Fructuoso from Autonomous Community of Murcia presented aspects on social tourism in the meeting.



Warmia-Mazury Region, Poland



Photo: poland.pl



By Sebastian Magier, Association of Polish Communes of Euroregion Baltic (Poland)

The Warmia-Mazury region is one of the most beautiful regions of Poland. Thanks to its unique location, natural values, diverse tourist attractions and numerous historical monuments, the region for many years has been attracting thousands of tourists from both Poland and abroad. Natural values form the most important assets of the region. With thousands of lakes and vast forests, the region ranks as the top tourist destination for sailors, hikers and all those looking for peace in natural tranquil surroundings. The region's great tourist potential was further recognised internationally in 2009 when the **Masurian Lake District** was elected as one of the finalists of the prestigious New 7 Wonders of Nature contest. Another famous attraction, **the Elbląg Canal** is considered one of the most significant monuments related to the history of technology and was listed on the UNESCO world heritage list. Its unique system of inclined planes allows small cruise ships, pleasure boats or yachts to be transported more than 100 metres uphill thus connecting the Vistula Lagoon with the nearby Iława Lake District.

Taking into account all the natural riches of the region, it is hardly surprising that tourism ranks as one of the most important parts of the regional economy. Despite this, the region still faces significant socio-economic challenges, including peripheral location, inadequate infrastructure, significant unemployment and gradual ageing of the entire population. Overcoming these challenges, the region puts significant emphasis on those parts of the economy with the greatest potential for development. Tourism has been high on the agenda of the regional development policy and now is being also included in other policy instruments focusing also on the older population.

This new approach is clearly visible in the **Regional Programme for Seniors 2014-2020** which was drafted by the Centre for Social Policy in Olsztyn and the FOSa Federation of Social Organisations. The drafting process included various stakeholders such as regional politicians and civil servants, representatives of senior citizen organisations, NGOs, academia and law enforcement agencies. This joint cooperation resulted in the concept of senior tourism, along with other activities such as sports and recreation, becoming one of the key areas of intervention in the new regional programme, thus enabling the development of the existing senior tourism in the region already promoted on both local and regional level. The new programme aims at expanding and adapting the existing tourist infrastructure for the needs of seniors. It also advocates creating a year-round senior-friendly tourist offers and promotes active lifestyle among the senior communities in the region.

Another important event promoting senior tourism in the region is the biennial **Warmia-Mazury Senior Games**. The project responds to a growing demand from the senior communities in the region which seek different forms of leisure and recreation during their retirement. The aim of the Games is to integrate active people through sport and encourage them to participate in various sport disciplines, regardless of their age.

Read full text version [here](#)

Accessible forest tourism for seniors

By **Agnieszka Walczak**, *Tourism Without Barriers Association (Poland)*

Our beautiful city of Gdynia is located in the north of Poland on the shores of the Baltic Sea. To the east the city borders the waters of the Bay of Gdańsk while vast beech forests of the Tricity Landscape Park surround it from the west.

The tourist season in Poland usually comes to an end in August. With the departure of summer people often limit their outdoor activities. This year, however, taking advantage of the “beautiful golden autumn”, the Association of Tourism Without Barriers decided to extend the tourist season and together with seniors explore the natural surroundings of our city.

Since the beginning of September each weekend we have been organising forest hiking trips for all those interested in healthy lifestyle. The forest routes are carefully planned in order to be accessible by seniors and disabled persons. Each trip covers the distance of around 12 km of the forest. During the trips participants benefit not only from physical activities. They are also engaged in educational activities during which they learn more about the local flora and fauna. Seasonal mushroom picking makes these trips even more attractive for seniors.



Photo: Agnieszka Walczak

Being in the forest is very beneficial to our organism. Fresh air, sounds of forest animals and possibility to touch some of the plants – all these aspects of a forest trip make us feel relaxed and refreshed. The healing qualities of the forest were known to our forefathers centuries ago and we just simply follow in their footsteps.

The hiking trips are extremely popular among our seniors as they make a perfect opportunity to meet new people with similar interests. While walking through the

forest we not only learn more about its flora and fauna, we also learn more about ourselves and have a chance to talk to our fellow hikers while forgetting about everyday problems or loneliness.

Forest hiking trips prompted us to prepare the second part of the Gdynia For Everyone guide book. Unlike the first part of the guide book which was published a year earlier and explored the urban neighbourhoods of Gdynia, the second part will focus on city's natural attractions. The publication of the guide book has already proved so successful and popular among the readers, that a second edition had to be commissioned.

Based on our experiences with organising trips for seniors and the disabled, the guide book offers a selection of 10 hiking routes through various parts of the city. And what makes this guide book different from other similar publications is the fact that apart the usual information about local attractions, history and biographies of famous citizen of our city, the book also contains practical information about accessibility of particular sites or facilities for seniors or persons with disabilities. As a result, the guide book allows everyone to find their favourite route or monument.

The Association of Tourism Without Barriers was established seven years ago by a group of young people passionate about tourism. Since its inception the Association has been actively engaging seniors and disabled persons. Our experience shows that tourism is a great tool for overcoming different barriers, not only physical but also mental. The world around us can be equally enchanting, no matter if we experience it on a wheelchair, crutches, or only by touching when we are unable to see. The purpose of the hiking trips is to socially, physically and mentally engage senior persons. Tourism is a great way to achieve all these goals in a single activity.

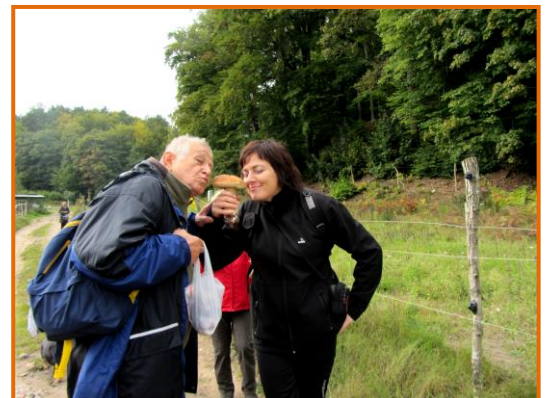


Photo: Agnieszka Walczak

Travel habits, barriers and motivations of North Karelian seniors



By Tiina Hyvärinen, Regional Council of North Karelia (Finland)

According to a survey exploring the travel habits, barriers and motivations of North Karelian pensioners aged 62 or over, North Karelian seniors rely strongly on their own experiences and friends' recommendations when they are choosing a destination for their holiday trip. They also travel throughout the year. The most popular season for travelling is autumn (61,6 %) and the least favorable summer (31,4 %). Around 45 percent of the respondents stated that they travel also in spring and winter.

When asked about the most recent holiday trips, over half of the pensioners (56,3 %) had travelled to an attraction in their home country (Finland), whereas 26,3 percent to Estonia and 19,7 percent to Spain. Despite the fact that the region of North Karelia is bordering Russia, only 8,4% of the seniors had recently travelled to Russia. The countries where North Karelian seniors have travelled during their latest holiday trips are indicated in the enclosed picture. The picture also shows what percentage of the holiday trips were made to Finland, Europe (excluding Finland), Asia, Africa, Russia, North America and South and Central America.

According to the results, the most significant factors that have prevented North Karelian pensioners from travelling were financial reasons (34,2 %) and lack of interesting supply (27,9 %). [Read more here](#)



Vidzeme Planning Region involves seniors to improve senior tourism

On 12th of September the seminar - workshop in senior tourism was organized by Vidzeme Planning Region. Apart of disseminating idea about TOURage Project and main targets, it was an opportunity to update knowledge in senior tourism marketing as well as participate in parallel workshops and help creating ideas for an implementation plan to improve senior tourism in the region. The event was attended by large number of representatives of local municipalities, tourism information managers, also representatives of senior unions and entrepreneurs.

In the beginning the overview about tourism marketing was given to discuss whether the large target group has been taken into account in tourism in Latvia. Later on all the participants were divided into 3 teams working hard

to brainstorm and find new opportunities and define tasks to be done to improve supply for senior tourists. Generally discussions were held to promote senior tourism in local and regional level, to create new products or services or to define changes which should be done in regional and national level appointing to the main problems in field of senior tourism.





EU Summit on Active and Healthy Ageing: An Action Agenda for European Cities and Communities

On June 13th to 14th 2013, the West Regional Authority attended and promoted the TOURage project at the EU Summit on Active and Healthy Ageing in Dublin. This summit was held in association with the EU Presidency, jointly organised by the Ageing Well Network and the Global Coalition on Ageing. The primary aim of the summit was to assemble the most influential European and global leaders on this topic to pave a path for economic growth and social development through the 21st century's age-related demographic transformation.

Approximately 600 participants, delegates and experts attended the summit over the two days and it was recognised by all that lives are extending, and older adults are struggling to stay socially, politically, and economically relevant. A quarter of all Europeans will be over 60 by 2020, and the status quo will no longer be acceptable.

For that reason, the Summit brought together a multitude of stakeholders to discover practical, implementable solutions to enable healthy, active paths of ageing in Europe's communities, cities and regions. A key element for the West Regional Authority and the TOURage project was to nurture and strengthen collaboration with the key stakeholders that may lead to significant

development at local/regional levels across areas such as health, work, education, financial security, and social development.

The successful result from the summit was the promotion of outputs from the TOURage project so far with the updated newsletter and marketing leaflets disseminated. This led to the creation of an active international network which can assist to inform policy, promote greater innovation and drive the implementation of age-friendly solutions within Ireland and across EU cities and regions.

For any further information on the summit programme, expert speakers and presentations can be accessed at <http://www.ahaconference2013.ie/>.



TOURage presented during the 4th Annual Forum of ERB Stakeholders in Kalmar, Sweden

During 4th September 2013 representatives of the Association of the Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic promoted the TOURage project at the 4th Annual Forum of Euroregion Baltic Stakeholders held in Kalmar, Sweden.

Themed 'Connecting local actors', the Forum gathered representatives of local and regional authorities as well as experts and practitioners from the tourism sector and labour mobility networks from the cooperation area.

Showcasing several tourism projects with active involvement of the ERB partners, one of the Forum's panels focused on tourism as the third largest socioeconomic activity in the EU with a positive effect on economic growth and employment. The Association's Ms Małgorzata Samusjew and Mr Sebastian Magier presented main objectives of the

TOURage project and also talked about the project's most important achievements to-date, emphasising the role of senior tourism in the development of sustainable regional economies. Later on Ms Samusjew also took part in the panel on sustainable tourism where she talked about the growing role of senior tourism in overcoming future challenges posed by the rapidly ageing societies in the Baltic Sea Region.





July –December 2013

Talking with senior civil organisations

The Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Environmental Management and County Development Agency organized a workshop for the NGO's of the county. The aim of the meeting was to present the TOURage INTERREG IVC project, raise attention on demographic changes in the EU and share the experiences of the project. Nearly 30 organization took part on the workshop and they started a discussion in the field of senior tourism development in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. Mr. Zoltán Balogh presented the results of the local senior survey. He raised the attention on the special needs of senior tourists, what they are searching for when they plans their holidays. Mr. Attila Deák presented the „Route of medieval churches” as a good practice offered for TOURage project and its connection to the civil sector. Mr. Deák stressed that the future

developments need a strong support from these organizations. The workshop was a good chance to build a network of NGOs for the future development in the field of senior tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county.



David Bartok presenting TOURage



Motril Conference – Spain

Inclusion of the senior citizen perspective in future strategies for tourism in the province of Granada

On Wednesday 6 November the annual conference of the Interreg IVC CesR project was held in the municipality of Motril in Granada (Spain). Over 70 people attended the conference, amongst which were representatives of the tourism sector and tourism technicians from the local entities of Granada province. The purpose was to deepen knowledge of innovative experiences in the tourism sector with the capacity to be implemented in our provinces and to contribute, from knowledge of the demand towards this sector in the province, to improvement and competitiveness of the provincial strategies being designed for the tourism sector for the new European stage of 2014-2020.

In this regard, in the setting of the Conference, the results of the survey carried out at provincial level on major national and international visitors, within the framework of the Interreg IVC TOURage project, were

presented. These results are the departure point for the programming of tourism development strategies which include opportunities for the economic development of this sector at provincial level, in order to offer tourism aimed at senior citizens.

Throughout the conference various key aspects from the results of the surveys were looked at in detail, such as the profile of visiting senior citizens, their demands, needs, motives and preferences, when coming to our province. Furthermore, particular emphasis was put on the relevance of this type of assessment for the design and articulation of strategies for provincial tourism development which include the perspective from this group.



Participation of TOURage in the Panhellenic Trade Fair of East Macedonia - Thrace

Region of East Macedonia and Thrace (REMTH) seized the opportunity to participate in the 2013 Panhellenic Trade Fair of East Macedonia – Thrace in order to promote Project TOURage. The fair is being annually organized by Thessaloniki International Fair at the International Exhibition Centre of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (Industrial Area of Komotini-Greece) between the 14 and 17 of November 2013. The Fair attracted more than 100 exhibitors from Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey and approximately 10.000 visitors.

Exhibitors comprise Greek and foreign enterprises (including tourism), representatives from Greek and international firms, Greek state and international organizations as well as local administration and development bodies. On the other hand, the visitors were all kind of interested parties, stakeholders, traders, businessmen, students and general public.

REMTH as a parallel event also organized a round table conversation of touristic and regional development stakeholders presenting its tourism projects (including TOURage) in order to actively involve the relevant bodies in the process of drafting its implementation policies.

Finally, REMTH used all possible communication tools to promote TOURage project by dissemination materials as well as presentation about project itself.



"Christmas is not a time nor a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas. Christmas... is not an external event at all, but a piece of one's home that one carries in one's heart."

**TOURage team wishes you
Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year!**

About TOURage

The project has grown out from the idea that although Demographic Change brings many challenges it can also bring opportunities to the regions. Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the Europe and relatively remote regions have both a lot of unexploited and unknown development potential in this regard. The project seeks to identify good practices on developing tourism possibilities for growing segment of elderly travelers. More about the project find [here](#)

- ❖ [Regional Council of North Karelia](#) Lead Partner **Finland**
- ❖ [Bourgas Regional Tourist Association](#) **Bulgaria**
- ❖ [Region of East Macedonia & Thrace](#) **Greece**
- ❖ [Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency](#)
Hungary
- ❖ [Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Regional
Development
and Environmental Management Agency](#) **Hungary**
- ❖ [West Regional Authority](#) **Ireland**
- ❖ [Vidzeme Planning Region](#) **Latvia**
- ❖ [Association of Polish Communes of Euroregion Baltic](#)
Poland
- ❖ [Podkarpackie Region](#) **Poland**
- ❖ [County Council of Granada](#) **Spain**
- ❖ [Regional Development Agency
of the Prešov Self-Governing Region](#) **Slovakia**



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- ❖ **April 2014:** Study visit in Szabolcs –Szatmar-Bereg County (Hungary)
- ❖ **May 2014:** TOURage Annual Conference in Podkarpackie Region, Poland
- ❖ **September 2014:** TOURage Final Conference in Brussels

TOURage
Every age is tour age

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