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PRESS RELEASE

Accessible Tourism: Accessibility for visitors with mobility problems presented and discussed at the 3rd Thematic Workshop of DESTI-SMART Interreg Europe project through Video Conference

"Accessible Tourism: Accessibility for visitors with mobility problems" was the topic of the 3rd Thematic Workshop of the Interreg Europe DESTI-SMART project, which took place on March 10, 2020 through Videoconference. The Workshop was organised by the Environment Department of the Mallorca Island Council, Spain with the contribution of the DESTI-SMART Project Management & Coordination Unit (MCU).. Representatives and stakeholders of all ten project partners participated.

"'Accessible Tourism' requires a holistic approach, ensuring overall accessibility at the destination, and not only of individual services. It also requires coordination of transport planning and creation of synergies between transport and tourism stakeholders", said Dr Derek Robbins, representative of the University of Bournemouth, UK, advisory partner of the DESTI-SMART project. "Integrating accessibility in planning at tourist destinations is necessary not only for legal and ethical reasons, but also to attract investments and create business opportunities", Dr Robbins also added.

The Project Coordinator, Mr. Manos Vougioukas, presented the purpose of the Workshop and stated that through DESTI-SMART, partners and their stakeholders should review the State of the Art, examine available solutions and their relative advantages and disadvantages regarding accessibility in tourist destinations. He also stated that Good practices might be adopted by projects such as DESTINATIONS (Horizon 2020) and other organisations' activities such as the European Network for Accessible Tourism, the HANDISPORT Foundation in Mallorca and the Mallorca Transport Consortium.

Mr Vougioukas also highlighted that 'Accessibility' is already a main component of Smart Destinations and is also one of the four (4) criteria for the European Capital of Smart Tourism and a key feature in Tourism Manifesto for Jobs and Growth. Thus, he urged partners to set their local/regional issues and priorities towards accessibility by

introducing their plans on accessibility for visitors at tourist destinations, potentially to be included in their Action Plans.

It is quite difficult to approach the concept of 'accessibility', as there are different groups of disabled people whose needs are different. Experiences and good practices were transferred among all partner destinations, including low-floor technology in buses and improvements in the bus stops, audio passenger information, tactile flooring and lift for wheelchairs in train stations, tourist information applications, automatic validation operations, even accessible ships, as well as good practices from the European Network for Accessible Tourism and the HANDISPORT Foundation, which supports accessible tourism in the island of Mallorca.

The improvement of public transport network along with the general improvement of tourism destinations in terms of accessibility is profitable for everyone. In particular, "by addressing disabled people and offering more barrier-free programmes, there is a positive effect, not only to the disabled visitors, but also to the other visitors", said Ms. Claudioa Harms, representative of the Bremerhaven Tourism Marketing and Events Company Ltd, DE. The making of services accessible to everyone will lead to a big economic impact to every country. "People with disabilities are considered to be a big market, as they are approximately 1 billion people with visible or not visible disabilities" said Mr. Emiliano Deferrari, representative of the European Network for Accessible Tourism, BXL.

Despite, the abovementioned fact, there is still lack of offers for accessible tourism. Furthermore, although, reliable and timely data on the accessibility conditions at the destination is essential for trip planning for the disabled people there is still a lot of work to be done.

Unfortunately, the term accessibility and in many cases tourism is not presented in the last EU policies, which resulted to the strong opposition of tourism stakeholders and the creation of lobbies in order to fill up this policy gap.

The Workshop ended with identifying potential solutions for visitors with mobility problems for sustainable and accessible tourism, in terms of proposed actions, and in improving the respective policy instruments towards smart mobility destinations.

The project partnership aims to incorporate accessibility solutions in the smart destinations concept.

DESTI-SMART's overall objective is to improve the transport and tourism policies of EU destinations, by integrating strategies for sustainable mobility, accessibility and responsible travel with efficient & sustainable tourism development. DESTI-SMART promotes the transition to a low-carbon economy, through efficiency, resilience, multimodality, novel low-carbon transport systems and the promotion of cycling & walking.



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