



A holiday for everyone

«The beautiful stories, that's why we do it. The difficult ones, we're working on.»

Marianne Schapmans, Holiday Participation Centre Flanders (Steunpunt Vakantieparticipatie) Coordinator.

A holiday for everyone

Despite the wealth and opportunities in our country, there are still many Flemish people who barely take a trip or vacation. They live with a disability or on a tight budget.

To help these groups on their way, two services were established: Accessible Travel Info Point (Infopunt Toegankelijk Reizen) and Holiday Participation Centre Flanders (Steunpunt Vakantieparticipatie). They urged the tourism sector to open their doors by offering discounts and adjusting their infrastructure.

The efforts were conveyed to their target audience. And with success! Meanwhile, more than 100,000 Flemish people take advantage of the social rate to take a trip or vacation every year. Hundreds of attractions and places to stay have been made more accessible and there are thousands of pages full of practical vacation tips for people with a disability. It was the new Tourism for All law of 2003 that made this all possible.

The two departments of Tourism Flanders have received much recognition. They have been commended by the United Nations and various agencies in Europe. Policy makers, academics and social organizations alike praise the groundbreaking work of the two Flemish pioneers.

In many countries, plans are being laid to follow the Holiday Participation Centre Flanders (Steunpunt Vakantieparticipatie) and Accessible Travel Info Point (Infopunt Toegankelijk Reizen) model and adjust it to local conditions. But to this day, these projects remain in a class of their own and unique in the world.

«Growth in the tourism sector can provide economic as well as social development. It is also an ideal way to promote **international understanding, peace and prosperity.**»

Secretary-General Taleb Rifai for the UNWTO World Tourism Organization. He called the group policy of World Tourism Flanders a successful model for the industry at the world summit in Korea.



Companies want to participate in a sustainable society

'In all industries, we see an increasing interest in corporate social responsibility. Companies want to contribute to a sustainable society if they can also come out ahead. It's a way for a company to show their true colors, reach more consumers, discover more opportunities, launch innovations and have a positive image. Tourism Flanders has created a platform with these services where the tourism industry can show its best side. It remains important that the government takes these types of initiatives. The market doesn't have the capability to organize and regulate itself on such a scale.'

Professor Céline Louche professor at Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School is an expert in the field of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and co-author of the influential book "Innovative CSR: From Risk Management to Value Creation".



Céline Louche

The investment is also a commercial success

'We welcome everyone, even people with limitations or a tight budget. We want to embrace as many people as possible in our society. It's a decision that has only brought compliments, positive reactions and extra bookings. In addition, other guests like that our vacation hotels are accessible for all, environmentally friendly and socially aware. For people who have hit financial rock bottom, a week vacationing on the coast can do wonders. I really enjoy seeing those people revived. The gratitude we receive from our guests with disabilities is tremendous. It wasn't that big of an effort to upgrade our hotel to accommodate to their needs, so we never gave it a second thought. In addition, the investment was also a commercial success.'

Lieselotte Cavyn benefits at De Zeekameel in Westende. The resort hotel for families, groups and seaside summer camps that offers discounts through the Holiday Participation Centre Flanders, is suitable for people with disabilities. They have also received the Green Key for their ecological efforts.



Lieselotte Cavyn

«Tourism opens a dialogue between people, cultures and countries. It is these encounters that foster **mutual understanding and respect.** That is why it is so important that people with disabilities have the capability to travel.»

Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.



Why do the players of the tourism industry participate?

I do it with pleasure, but I also want to be honest, it brings in money.

For the positive message and the advertising.

Personally, I think it would be terrible to always stand in front of a closed door.

It is the ideal way to keep us running in low season.

From time to time, everybody can use a day or a week off.

To give people courage again.

We saw that the tourism industry evolve in this direction. We don't want to be left behind.

Not everything revolves around capital gains and money. The reason why I work in tourism is because I like to make people happy.

Everyone should have the chance to remove their limitations and discover a small part of the world.

Against all the acidity and negativity in the community.

We have enough room.

We're attracting a completely new audience that previously we would not have reached. It's just extra.

We want to work together for a warm and inclusive society.

Later in life, people become less mobile. With the aging population, our target audience will only increase.

«We succeed in convincing the Tourism sector to find a more **ethical, social and accessible** way to operate. No other country in the world does this.»

Peter De Wilde, general manager of Tourism Flanders.



INNOVATION AWARD voor de doelgroepenwerking

Two departments of Tourism Flanders will be honored at the World Leisure Expo in Hangzhou, China. The focus group will be distinguished as an example to follow for the rest of the world in terms of social innovation. We will receive a certificate and ten minutes podium time to discuss our initiatives for the poor and for people with disabilities. We can only hope that our enthusiasm is contagious.



«The disabled tourist is once again invisible: previously because he stayed at home, now because his disability is no longer relevant.»

Miguel Gérez, Brussel voor Allen, Brussels for All, referring to the Visit Flanders center in Brussels.

There's a need for reliable labels

'Flanders is the only region in the world that has so much information online about the accessibility of its tourist attractions, hotels and interesting places. All thanks to the Accessible Travel Info Point. I use their website in Flanders, but I also check it when I go abroad. But then you have to be lucky. Travel diaries are always so useful. Especially when it's been a long time or when the people who wrote them have a different style of travel. Therefore it would be great if all countries launched an Accessible Travel Info Point. There is a huge demand for reliable labels and objective criteria. We are still faced with too many unpleasant surprises when we go abroad. The tourist sector is very eager to claim that they're accessible to people with disabilities. But that promise can be very disappointing when you reach your destination.'

Herman Janssens, experienced traveler who uses a wheelchair.

Unlimited enjoyment also with a disability.

'In the beginning, they thought we were just naive. Did we paint too pretty of a picture? Even the target audience didn't believe in it. Ten years ago, there were hardly any accessible places in Flanders where you could go on a carefree holiday. Today, there are hundreds of addresses to choose from. So you see, you can really dream up the world you want to live in.

Our vacation tips are not just about spectacular trips to exotic destinations. We've recently received a travel account about a successful trip to the shopping mall. For some people with a disability, that's already a victory.

It takes courage and preparation to explore unknown territory with a disability. Some people spent over four years preparing before they even leave to their destination. They have the confidence only once all the small details are arranged.

Besides the big issues like housing, education and work, leisure seems a bit secondary. Of course, it's important that people with disabilities have a nice place to live and develop themselves. However, the feeling of

freedom and new opportunities that you get after a successful vacation is priceless.

Until ten years ago, the aviation industry required a medical certificate stating that the patient was not disturbing in terms of appearance, behavior and scent. This kind of derogatory practice is now a thing of the past. The mentality has changed. These days, the response to people with disabilities is much less awkward and hostile. Rather, accessibility is now an asset.

The strength of Accessible Travel Info Point is that it's a government initiative. We are not a small association, club or organization. We are part of the team in Tourism Flanders. This allows us work towards the long term and the sector listens to us.'

Pieter Ghijsels, employee Accessible Travel Info Point.

'When we talk about the role that tourism can play in fighting poverty, we first think about developing countries and the jobs that tourists create. But there's an extra dimension. In all countries around the world, even those with the strongest economies, there are people living in poverty who cannot afford to go on holiday.

Flanders, pioneer in making local tourism possible for everyone

The Flemish government believes that every citizen should have the opportunity to take a vacation if they so choose. We have undertaken a few campaigns so that the most vulnerable groups in our society can take a vacation. This is not just about people in poverty, but also about people with disabilities or illness, the elderly, young people and families with children. We negotiate lower rates and ensure that the facilities are adapted. Our people have already been able to convince hundreds of players in the tourism industry to cooperate. There are more than one thousand social organizations that make use of the services.

«The longer the commercial partners are collaborating with us, the more they believe our story. They feel gratitude and warm-hearted towards our vacation-goers. They notice that their efforts make a difference in the lives of many people.»

Ingrid Van Hoorebeke, staff member at Holiday Participation Centre Flanders (Steunpunt Vakantieparticipatie).

Flanders can call itself an international pioneer in regards to tourism for everyone. It is my hope that our work will inspire you. Tourism can help us achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals. Tourism has a special capacity to create economic development, human development, social integration and international understanding. That's what makes our sector so exciting and unique.'

From the speech* of Geert Bourgeois, Flemish Minister for Tourism

**Given at the annual conference of the UNWTO World Tourism Organization in October 2011 in Gyeongju, Korea for tourism ministers from over 250 countries.*

«Ten years ago, we had to reinvent social tourism in Flanders. Today we know for sure: we are the right path.»

Luc Gobin, Head of Tourism for All department, Tourism Flanders.

Get rid of that inferior feeling

'People in poverty usually believe they are not entitled to a vacation. That's what they get to hear from their environment as well. Holidays, that's a reward for people who work all year round. Leisure and fun are not basic needs. But it's so important that people in poverty have positive experiences. Those who live in difficult financial situations, have as much stress as those who go to work every day. And how else are they going to find the courage to get out of their misery? The Holiday Participation Centre requires understanding for their situation and ensures they get opportunities.'

Toon De Rijck, employee Flemish Network where the poor can have their say.

«Tourism is one of the sectors that can help us in the struggle against poverty and to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals.»

Economics professor and UN adviser Jeffrey Sachs. He congratulated Minister Geert Bourgeois with the initiatives taken in Flanders.



Who are we?

Holiday Participation Centre Flanders

The Holiday Participation Centre Flanders offers social rates to the tourism industry for people who live in poverty. About 450 attractions, places to stay and holiday providers in Flanders and Brussels lower their prices. The Holiday Participation Centre Flanders combines these groups every year into two vacation guides. The offer includes discounted rates for day trips and weeks away with family or friends, but also organized camping trips and work group holidays.

The targetgroup consists of 800,000 Flemings, given that 14.5 percent of the population can't afford a week vacation. In addition to negotiating promotional holiday offers, the Centre also organizes training. A learning network has been established along with a few projects with domestic and foreign partners. To reinforce the story, a range of support materials was also developed.

www.holidayparticipation.be
www.vakantieparticipatie.be

Accessible Travel Info Point

Accessible Travel Info Point is a service that tries to make tourism as accessible as possible to people with disabilities. They advise tourists as well as business owners about the possibilities. Accessible Travel Info Point has gathered information and travel reports, written by and for people with a disability. The Info Point has a lot of in-house knowledge, information and expertise. Not only to get people with a disability to their national and international destination, but also to assist the tourism industry with advice about regulations and funds. They present accessibility awards to accommodations where people with disabilities can stay comfortably. Twenty percent of the surveyed accommodations in Flanders have obtained this award.

www.toegankelijkreizen.be

«Vacations are important to our development. They allow us to plan, organize and practice our languages. They give us the opportunity to build a network and no longer fear the unknown. If we expect people to keep up in our society, we need to offer them the same opportunities to develop.»

Dr. Lynn Minnaert, an expert in social tourism.

