Eighth IRU European Bus and Coach Forum

We need to attract seniors outside of the high season

According to the International Road Transport Union (IRU), seniors are a very important potential target group for safeguarding the future of the coach tourism. During a European forum it became crystal clear that a specific approach is needed. Quality care and hospitality are of course extremely important, but above all, the travel-mad over 55 do not want to be stigmatized.

In his opening speech during the eighth IRU European Bus and Coach Forum IRU secretary-general Umberto da Pretto referred to the objectives of the Smart Move campaign in order to double the number of bus and coach travellers by 2023. He further mentioned the assets of buses and coaches with regard to safety, environment-friendliness and efficient mobility solutions. Furthermore he stated that travelling by train is twice – travelling by car even three times – as expensive as a trip by coach. On the basis of this simple fact he mentioned that coaches are an excellent means of transport for seniors. According to Umberto da Pretto increasing – preferably doubling – the number of seniors travelling outside of the high season could be one of the possibilities to realise the Smart Move objectives.

On behalf of the European Commission Oscar Almendros gave an overview of the initiatives that have been taken in order to let Europe blossom as the leading and most important destination world-wide. Examples of these initiatives include the e-Calypso Plus Project for social tourism and the e-Calypso Project for children and grandchildren. As to their time:

"We should not overestimate the senior market by saying that seniors have plenty of time and money. Strictly speaking, that is correct, but a lot of them use this money to financially support their children and grandchildren. As to their time: yes, they do have a lot of it, but they like to spend it on their family. Furthermore, they are very engaged in the socio-cultural world. They divide their time over a whole range of activities, and travelling is only one of those."

Seniors often take short or longer trips. People that travelled a lot before, keep on doing so once they go into retirement. But it goes the other way around as well: people who did not travel a lot before will not take more trips once they are retired. In other words, the prior travelling behaviour does not really change. Of course the physical condition plays a role in the travelling frequency, as well as the age and how old the people feel. They often suffer from minor, physical discomforts, but they do not want to be put in the same category as other seniors that have similar complaints. An individual approach of minor medical or physical disorders is therefore necessary, according to Jamil Benabdallah. The latter also mentioned that seniors often take trips during high season. "During the holidays they frequently travel along with their children or grandchildren or visit them at their holiday destinations."

No stigmatisation please

Jamil Benabdallah further stressed the fact that seniors are becoming increasingly fond of sports and want to cycle, walk or swim during their holiday as well. Furthermore, they are very sensitive to all kinds of aspects that have to do with the welcoming and the hospitality. "We need to inform the seniors, reinforce and sometimes even overturn them, but we should definitely not treat them as if they were idiots. An important fact here is that they do not want to be stigmatised and that their target group should not be considered a ghetto. On a promotional level they do not like to be addressed as ‘seniors’; they just want to be included in a society with different age groups. And finally they want to travel, discover and experience new things. Although they are attached to comfort, they do not necessarily require four- or five-star accommodations."

Benefitting from the weaknesses of the low-budget airlines

Thereafter, Jean-François Dufour (Voyages Ldon/Voyages Lentz) proclaimed that the coach companies should benefit from the weaknesses of the low-budget airlines and really stress the strengths of the coaches in comparison with airplanes. He denounced the luggage restrictions and surcharges, the not so user-friendly booking systems, the poor (after-sales) service and the limited seating comfort that the low-budget airlines offer. In addition he advised the coach companies to make themselves known on social media, such as Facebook. What was also remarkable was his appeal to the coach companies to pay more attention to the sale of their trips via travelling agencies instead of focusing on direct sales because travelling agencies are supposedly not or barely interested in coach trips. "Travelling agencies are losing a lot of revenues due to airlines and tour operators. Coach companies can really make a difference here. From a survey of the Belgian, French-speaking association of travelling agencies, LPRR, it appears that 51% of the seniors prefer booking a trip via a travelling agency, as opposed to 10% via the internet."

All-embracing experience and small groups

On behalf of the European Tour Operators Association (ETOA) Allan Edmondson stated that above all, coach companies need to create an all-embracing experience during their tours. Next to the attitude of the driver and travel guide – an aspect that was also emphasised by Paul Laurens, managing director of the Federation of Belgian Bus and Coach Companies – the accessibility of the cities and city centres to coaches is also very important.

Allan Edmondson further mentioned that travel-mad seniors like to take a trip in small groups, spend the night in small-scale hotels, enjoy a meal in local restaurants that is not too big and explore rural regions with a small coach or midi-bus. "Maybe we can promote the coach tourism by focusing on smaller coach groups of up to 16 people," Allan Edmondson suggested, "in any case it is one of the possibilities to further distinguish the coach tourism from its competitors."

One of the most striking questions that were asked during the IRU forum, maybe even the most important question, came from the audience. "How on earth are you going to get the over-55 in a coach if you take into account the fact that they have never stepped foot in a coach since their last school trip a quarter of a century ago? This is a question that will need to be answered in the future. Travelling comfort and technology are probably the most important assets and resources that will need to be made use of in that light. Due to lack of time, a satisfying answer was not provided. Quite a pity though, because this is a question that will definitely be playing a crucial role in the future of the coach tourism."
Luxembourg is the test arena for sustainable public transport

Sales-Lentz buys 12 Volvo buses

Van Hool off to a successful start

For the Belgian company Van Hool the start of Busworld 2013 was very successful. On the first day of the fair Van Hool sold several two-axle, three-axle and double decker buses to a Swiss company, the group GEBO-Betuwe from the Netherlands and the bus company Maconixon from Rhône-Alpes. Most of the vehicles sold were follow-up orders. In the picture you can see Peter Van Lil, sales manager, Willy Mincke, sales representative for Switzerland and Frank Thevissen, sales representative for France and Italy.

Omnibus Trading is specialised in midibus sport for the daily newspapers. It offers a very extensive product range. A selection of it can be admired at the stand itself. Two years ago, during the Busworld exhibition, the company presented a unique midibus as convertible, fitted with a sliding roof. This unique open-topped bus is displayed at Busworld again this year. It is a very successful product and quite a number of buses have already been sold. But even more fascinating than this original cabrio model is the minusbus, this year. For them, the Minibus has been displayed right next to the midibus. For the creation of this convertible, a minusbus with an integral workboy was adjusted. This requires more insight and expertise, especially if you need to restore the solid structure again. However, Omnibus Trading delivered a brilliant result in the form of a unique convertible that adds a whole new dimension to travelling in small groups.

First Tourismo Euro 6 for the Netherlands

The Dutch coach company South West Tours has ordered the first Mercedes-Benz Euro 6 Tourismo 16 RHD in the Netherlands. It was a very special happening at the stand of Mercedes-Benz at Busworld, where South West Tours finalized the order of the first Euro 6 Tourismo for the Netherlands under the approving eye of Mike Görreus, manager of Busworld.

With this order Robbert Zwiip and Ron Veenhuis of South West Tours will be extending their vehicle fleet, currently consisting of more than twenty buses, with a very clean Euro 6 coach with many special features. They are already anticipating to the legal requirement which is to come in force as from 1 January 2014, stipulating that newly delivered vehicles should be equipped with a clean Euro 6 engine. Mercedes-Benz is, together with Setra, the first supplier that already delivers Euro 6 buses and coaches at the moment.

The new Tourismo 16 RHD is a very good-looking Tourismo with Dura-Bright aluminium wheels, one of the typical characteristics of South West Tours. It can accommodate 55 (+1) passengers, who – next to spacious, luxurious seats – also dispose of a toilet and even a kitchen. On two monitors the passengers can follow the route via the navigational system of Bosch. South West Tours will also build in a digitenne (digital antenna) so the passengers can kill time by watching TV. Furthermore, the Tourismo is equipped with ten D.C. sockets on board, which the travellers can connect their laptops and other devices to. Ron and Robbert mainly based their choice for the Tourismo on the good experiences that they had with it. “It is a very nice coach which is also good for the environment”, Ron concluded.

Innovation labels for components

During this edition of Busworld a new award was distributed for the first time: the Innovation Label. This label is given to innovative products that are entered by manufacturers or importers of components and accessories with a clear innovative character. Every manufacturer or supplier displaying his or her products during Busworld can participate. This year, more than two dozen products entered the competition.

All the products were screened by a jury of experts. They made a first selection on the basis of the information that was given by the participants. After the second round, consisting of an actual visit to the stands in question, the final selection of the candidates was announced. In a third phase, after long and detailed discussions, the jury revealed the winners.

One of the products that won is a new air-conditioning system for buses, developed by Konvekta. In this new system CO2 is used as coolant. This coolant, better known as carbonic acid, is a purely natural product. It is extracted from the atmosphere as a by-product of artificial fertiliser production. CO2 is completely harmless to people – it is used in Spar-fertiliser production. CO2 is completely harmless to people – it is used in Spar-fertiliser production. CO2 is completely harmless to people – it is used in Spar-fertiliser production.

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The first six Volvo Plug-in hybrids will be delivered in 2015. The aim is to supply another set of six vehicles in 2016.

Sales-Lentz, one of the biggest public transport companies in Luxembourg, is a real trendsetter with regard to the introduction of alternative drive technologies. Sales-Lentz is constantly striving for a reduction of its carbon footprint and wants to be a market leader concerning the implementation of new and clean technologies. Sales-Lentz was the first company in Europe to buy the Volvo Hybrid – already in 2009. At the moment their fleet includes 15 Volvo Hybrids.

For components

The gearshift in the Euro 6 Tourismo is placed on the floor, and in fact, the floor itself is lower than the Euro 5. This results in a much better accessibility. The Dutch coach company South West Tours has ordered the first Mercedes-Benz Euro 6 Tourismo 16 RHD in the Netherlands. It was a very special happening at the stand of Mercedes-Benz at Busworld, where South West Tours finalized the order of the first Euro 6 Tourismo for the Netherlands under the approving eye of Mike Görreus, manager of Busworld.

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