



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 2025. 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-Calypto Project for social tourism and the e-Calypto Plus Project for seniors. A while ago the European Commission asked to send in possible projects to promote senior tourism, and in the meantime it has already received 57 suggestions. One model project will



be selected out of these files, and it will be financed as well.

Time and money for family and travelling

On the basis of a French study Jamil Benabdallah (Détente Consultants SRL) stated that the group of seniors can be divided into three categories: the 'boomers' (55-70 years old), the retired (70-85 years old) and the retired of an advanced age (+85 years old). The 'boomers' and the retired could indeed be very interesting for the coach tourism, but according to Benabdallah the whole image should be put into perspective.

"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 overinform 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 Léonard/Sales-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, UPAV, it appears that 55% 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 Laeremans, 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 restaurant that is not too big and explore rural regions with a small coach or midi-bus. "Maybe we can promote the coach tourism by focussing 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.

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Luxembourg is the test arena for sustainable public transport

Sales-Lentz buys 12 Volvo buses

Volvo Buses, Sales-Lentz and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg have signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the use of Luxembourg as test arena for a sustainable public transport system.

Håkan Agnevall, president of the Volvo Bus Corporation, Wolfgang Schroeder, managing director of Sales-Lentz, and important representatives of the Luxembourg authorities ratified the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during the Busworld Exhibition in Kortrijk, Belgium.

The MoU formalises the intention of a long-term cooperation between the Luxembourg Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade and the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure, Sales-Lentz and Volvo Buses. The sustainable mobility sector has been identified as one of the most promising sectors in the Luxembourg strategy for diversification and greening the economy.

The MoU is based on tests with Volvo's Plug-in hybrid system. The core of the agreement consists of 12 Volvo Plug-in hybrid buses, which will all be bought and used by Sales-Lentz. The buses will be deployed in the existing bus lines in Luxembourg and the Greater Region and as from 2015 they will be completely integrated in the regular timetable. The



Representatives of Volvo, Sales-Lentz and the Luxembourg authorities signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

agreement also includes the development of a charging infrastructure.

Furthermore, the MoU also requires the set-up of a Training and Control Centre in Luxembourg. The Training and Control Centre will be responsible for many competences, including training the bus drivers, the maintenance and safety staff and the emergency services. This centre will act as an R&D centre and will serve as a platform for the development of new services at the level of vehicle, fleet and traffic management. The platform is also open to other parties that want to be involved.

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 13 Volvo Hybrids.

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 sec-

ond 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 sparkling water and sodas, amongst others.

The coolant CO₂ replaces chemical alternatives such as R134 and R1234, which



Konvekta received a label for a new air-conditioning for buses.

are categorised as greenhouse gases. CO₂ is a recyclable product. It extracted from the atmosphere and released again without changing the CO₂ level at all. Konvekta worked on the development of this product for several years.

Other Busworld Innovation Labels were granted to Voith, for the secondary water retarder, to E-Traction and Ziehl Abegg for their mutual development of The Wheel, and to Komtelsys and QStraint.

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 Maisonneuve 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.



Original convertible

Omnibus Trading is specialised in midi- and minibuses. For these segments 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 minibus in the convertible version, displayed right next to the midibus. For the creation of this convertible, a minibus with an integral bodywork 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 Turismo Euro 6 for the Netherlands

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

With this order Robbert Zwiep 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 Turismo 16 RHD is a very good-looking Turismo with Dura-Bright aluminium wheels, one of the typical characteristics of South West Tours. It can accommodate 55 (+1+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 Turismo is equipped with ten 220 volt sockets on board, which the travellers can connect their laptop and other devices to. Ron and Robbert mainly based their choice for the Turismo on the good experiences that they had with it. "It is a very nice coach which is also good for the environment", Ron concluded.



Teun van de Wekke (Mercedes-Benz), Ron Veenhuis, Mieke Glorieux and Robbert Zwiep.

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