

TECHNIQUES FOR WELCOMING CLIENTS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS & CUSTOMER CARE TECHNIQUES

By:

Chrissa Alyfanti
Monica De Santis
Laura Illuminati
Cataldo Maltese

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism for All concept:

"EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO TRAVEL TO THE COUNTRY, WITHIN THE COUNTRY AND TO WHATEVER PLACE, ATTRACTION OR EVENT THEY SHOULD WISH TO VISIT."

By now tourism has become a well-established habit for all, but unfortunately people with disabilities are often excluded from it, because the tourism system has not adapted to the specific needs of this type of clientele.

The travel experience, getting to know new realities and experiencing personal growth, is the right of all, but is often precluded to people with disabilities because of barriers, not just architectural but also cultural ones, to the acceptance of this type of client.

BACKGROUND

" All citizens have the same social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction by sex, race, language, religion, political views, or personal and social conditions.

It is the task of the Republic to remove obstacles of an economic and social nature, which, limiting in fact the liberty and equality of citizens, impede the full development of persons and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organisation of the nation". This appears in article 3 of the Italian Constitution from its origin in 1946.

Awareness of disabilities has been increasing since the 1980's, in fact 1981 was declared International Year of the Disabled by the General Assembly of the United Nations which has led to the subsequent inauguration of the decade 1983-1992 as the Decade of Disabled Persons.

Among the major results of the Decade, was the adoption of a resolution by the General Assembly of the United Nations: "Standard rules for equal opportunity for the disabled", which while not legally binding is a strong recommendation to Governments to emanate policies directed towards obtaining equal rights for disabled persons.

Following this initiative some European countries have promoted actions to increase awareness. Among these the most important are: in Spain, the Barcellona Declaration of 1995 and the Madrid declaration of 2002; the Norcia Declaration of 2003 and the Agrigento Manifesto the following year, in Italy.

EVOLUTION IN TERMINOLOGY

The word "handicap" derives from the English expression "Cap in Hand", a term used in horse-racing where exceptional riders were obliged to race with their hats in hand.

In time this term was also associated with begging, thus taking on a negative connotation.

In the 1980's the World Health Organisation (WHO) elaborated a classification instrument regarding the observation and analysis of organic, psychological and behavioural pathologies, called ICIDH (International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps) which analyses and evaluates the consequences of diseases according to three fundamental components: impairment (organic and/or functional damage), disability (loss of operational capability following the impairment), handicap (difficulty that the individual encounters in the surrounding environment because of his/her impairment).

The conceptual limits present in this classification lead the WHO to elaborate, in 1999, a subsequent instrument called ICIDH-2, which has laid the foundation for the preparation of the final classification, presented in 2001 and called ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health).

This last document is an instrument for the analysis of the state of health of individuals, relating health to the environment, and reaching a definition of disability as a health condition in an unfavourable environment.

ICF substitutes the terms present in the previous ICIDH classification (1980) "impairment, disability and handicap" with "functions, activities and participation".

In this way, the focus of the problem is shifted from the person's disability to his/her participation in social activities, therefore the limitation of his/her participation is induced by the environment which may present *barriers*, in this way creating a handicap, or *environmental facilitators* which, to the contrary, annul the limitation to social participation.

ECONOMIC IMPACT: THE MARKET

From WTTC (World Trade and Tourism Council) data it emerges that tourism is a fundamental factor of growth and development: the overall demand of the sector in 2002, estimated at over 4500 billion euros, has allowed the creation of over 190 million jobs and contributed to producing approximately 10% of global GNP. Tourism expenditure has an effect on the revenue of a region's businesses, to the immediate advantage of those who work in direct contact with tourists (hospitality and food service firms, travel agencies, etc.) and, indirectly, of all those who supply the former with intermediate goods and services. Moreover, since part of the revenue earned by businesses is paid in the form of family income (ex. in the form of wages for employees), the consumption of residents is added to the initial consumption of tourists thus creating amplified effects.

Having established the importance of the tourism industry for the economic development of a country, we must evaluate what the increase in tourism demand could be if the potential target of persons with disabilities (or, more generally, persons with specific needs), were to find suitable conditions for travelling.

A look at the results of the research conducted in 1999 by Iter for ENEA as part of the project STARe (*Servizi Turistici per l'Accessibilità e la Residenza confortevole*), will provide a better understanding of the real potential of the market under examination.

The study indicates that among Italians who travel (roughly 55% of the total population, or almost 33 million 200 thousand persons), the overall demand for accessible tourism is composed of:

- 889.300 persons with disabilities who already travel (which represent the so-called explicit demand) or 3% of Italian tourists;
- 2.140.785 elderly (over 64 years of age) who, while not considering themselves persons with disabilities, have similar needs, amounting to approximately 7% of Italian tourists;
- 500.000 persons who do not travel because of permanent health problems but who would do so if certain needs were satisfied (which represent the so-called potential demand).

In all, therefore, there are approximately 3,5 million persons in Italy who define the tourism for all phenomenon.

From this we can deduce that persons with disabilities and the elderly constitute a highly significant segment, and the frequency with which they travel can increase both in relation to a growth in the supply of accessible structures and because potential demand is in constant growth.

Tourism operators could direct themselves to this segment, to broaden their reference target.

Moreover, if the accessible services offered meet the demand, this would cause an increase in terms travel intensity, frequency and daily expenditure of

tourists with special needs and an increase in the level of quality for all the guests.

FROM MARKET TO INITIATIVES

After considering the sector in general terms, it would be opportune, in this introductory phase, to stigmatise certain important aspects.

From the numbers indicated above, one can perceive all the possibilities of economic spin-off from the development of tourism that is suited to the needs of all travellers, including those with disabilities. Therefore it is necessary to face the analysis of tourism for all from an economic viewpoint, taking into consideration all the key success factors in providing a service, and specifically, an accessible tourism service.

Attention toward the client, *customer care*, is one of such factors, as is *problem solving*. These two aspects should not be considered separately but together, since both contribute to client satisfaction and therefore to the establishment of a profitable relationship between the supply and the demand. Satisfying a client with special needs means first of all understanding what those needs are, trying to understand their specific nature in order to correctly respond to the client's requests and prepare an adequate product/service. But to interact in a correct way with these clients, to develop quality accessible proposals, tourism industry operators must be properly trained for relations with them, who have the professional skills to welcome them in the right way. In this context, in the pages that follow we will address the analysis of *customer care*, *problem solving* and *welcoming* techniques, aimed at supplying the necessary tools for establishing correct relations with the client with disabilities.

It should be noted, that customer care is a philosophy which generally inspires, or should inspire, all service activities and is not specific to this sector. Faced with a client with specific needs, one's behaviour should not be different from that normally inspired by the correct handling of customer relations. The only difference lies in the fact that the needs expressed by a person with a disability are more articulated and complex and therefore to be fully understood and adequately satisfied, require special skills and professionalism.

The expository reasoning that we shall follow in dealing with the topics that follow will, therefore, first be oriented towards an analysis of the problems in general terms; we will then pass on to their specific application to "tourism for all", in order to have at the same time a general and a particular view.

1. CUSTOMER CARE

1.1 EVOLUTION AND DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT

Providing an univocal definition of *Customer Care*, in the awareness that each dynamic concept adjusts to contingent phenomena which change over time and which are characterised by ulterior aspects and novelty, is quite complex. Nevertheless it can be identified, speaking generally and approximately, as the relationship between a business and its users for the satisfaction of the latter. From the overall concept of *Customer Care*, we are lead directly to the concept of CRM (*Customer Relationship Management*); establishing between the two a sequential relationship from container to contents.

The evolution of this simple yet fundamental concept leads us to define CRM as a business strategy which, based on a client-oriented business philosophy and company culture, aims at a style of customer relations management that would lead to competitive advantage and an increase in profitability for the company. It is a paradox that CRM is considered a new discipline yet at the same time has remote origins.

In fact, if it is true that a real attention to the clients, their needs, expectations and maximum satisfaction, has only been theorised in recent times, and considered an obligation for any company which intends to remain competitive, it is also true that customer relations management, whether effective or not, exists since the beginning of commerce.

In fact the example of the Phoenician merchants, who to better satisfy their clients travelled over land and sea in search of all kinds of products from precious oriental silks to the highly sought spices to tools, springs to mind.

The ancient merchants possessed an ethic of respect for and attention to the client which subsequently, in centuries of evolution in market dynamics, business are guilty of abandoning.

This ethic today imposes itself as a fundamental requirement: it must be embraced by businesses which must begin to think and act again like the good merchant of antiquity.

To "re-learn" the mentality of the client and of the relationship, nonetheless, is not a simple process; on the one hand the serious intention of a business to pursue added value through the management of customer relations is called for, and on the other the involvement of other companies which make CRM their *core-business* and which can help the business make more effective strategic choices.

At the same time a commitment is necessary from those doing everything in their power to spread an awareness of CRM, by fostering debate among the various *stakeholders* and contributing to the construction of a shared mentality of CRM which can profoundly improve the activity of the business and its productivity.

1.2 THE SITUATION IN ITALY AND ABROAD

CRM is a relatively young managerial practice, especially in Italy. There are still many open questions, which range from strategic choices, to a knowledge of human resource and work process management models, to the professionalism of *contact centre* workers, to service quality, to technology.

Despite the fact that the word economy seems to hesitate, CRM appears to still remain an absolute middle and long term priority for businesses.

A study conducted in the USA indicates that 91% of *managers* believe that greater attention to client services and to *customer loyalty* will be crucial for a better strategic positioning when the economy begins to grow again.

However foreign markets, especially the British and American market, seem to be profoundly different from the Italian one.

To uncritically change strategies and activities, reproducing them to adapt them to the Italian market could, as a consequence, represent a great limit.

To draw from these sources but develop an "*Italian style*" appears to be an irremissible maxim.

An equally important topic, and already in practice in the field of tourism, is represented by the outsourcing of customer care services.

Already in 2001 the figures were clear: an overwhelming majority of Italian firms made use of this system.

The motivations varied widely: cost reduction, lack of adequate skills, quality image toward the client.

It would be opportune to pay particular attention to one of the weaknesses listed above, regarding *customer care*, especially when the targets are clients with specific needs: the lack of adequate skills/competencies.

The concept of competencies is meant broadly here and not reduced to those competencies exclusive to *customer care*. The proven lack of awareness of behaviours, habits, needs and expectations of clients with disabilities constitutes a weakness for the business: the specific knowledge of topics related to the *target* client, in fact, is indispensable for planning profitable long-range strategies.

Therefore, continuous training of specialised personnel in business branches with these objectives appears to be opportune to reach increasingly elevated quality service standards.

1.3 TOWARD THE CLIENT

Each service-providing business must place the client at the centre of its choices.

Today clients are less inclined to be faithful to any particular company.

The reason lies in the fact that the possibility for choice for the consumer\client has increased exponentially.

The situation is quite different in the case of businesses and structures which offer tourism services for clients with disabilities: in fact, this type of tourist may evince a higher level of fidelity, connected more to the effective correspondence of the offer to his/her own needs than to a generalised freedom of choice.

Even if, thanks to Internet, but also to other more traditional information sources not unimportant for this type of market, disabled clients have access to much more information than in the past and, as a consequence, feel stronger and their choices are better thought out.

Information bases however present a highly accentuated particular weakness, that is the risk, in some cases, of scant credibility.

But who is the disabled client? Beyond the various specific quite complicated needs already simply being considered, based on what socio-economic characteristics do they act, what level of education do they possess? What is their spending power? How "educated" to enjoying a vacation are they? There are many variables to consider if one intends to personalise the offer to satisfy and to create fidelity in the client.

It is certain that the maturity of the client contributes to reducing the levels of satisfaction.

Fidelity and trust are obtained by considering each client as an individual with his/her own needs, desires, motivations and expectations. Therefore one must create an offer for the public in general, but personalised for each client.

Client orientation becomes a critical factor on which to base a strategy which contributes to the development of competitive advantage and an increase in profitability for the company.

The first step for setting in motion such a strategy is certainly that of understanding the client.

Understanding the client does not mean merely guaranteeing their overall level of satisfaction, but especially considering the perceived value in the use of the products and enjoyment of the services.

The value is a consequence of the use and, in the case of a vacation, is a consequence of its enjoyment. The value therefore lies in the experience. Nevertheless one must be aware that having satisfied clients does not necessarily mean having faithful clients, in fact, satisfaction measures the past, value is oriented toward the future.

A client, whether disabled or not, can be satisfied by a vacation yet may choose another operator for a future new experience, because at the same time s/he perceives something which reduces the value or because another service offered seems to offer a higher perceived value.

Beginning to understand the values that clients are seeking is the first step toward excellent results.

One must be close to the client with a constant, personalised dialogue to know the preferences, intentions, actions, type of life and therefore the value.

To change the business culture to reach a level of *customer care*, a process that must take place through the training of the available human resources, with an eye to values and understanding associated with the clientele.

The message to spread is that client satisfaction is the central point around which the entire organisation rotates and that each employee is responsible for satisfying the client's needs.

A fundamental role in creating a client oriented business culture is played by human resources and a company must invest in them in a focused and strategic way.

1.4 FROM CRM (*CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT*) TO CMR (*CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT of RELATIONSHIP*)

Relationship marketing is based on a concept of cooperation with known clients, based on trust; therefore businesses must learn to know their clients better than what usually happens.

In the case of a service business, such as tourism businesses, it is easier to treat each client individually than in the products market.

Modern information technology supplies businesses with ample opportunity to develop models to show a client that s/he is recognised and appreciated.

For example, one must create a data base containing files of information about the clients.

If the person involved in a particular interaction with a client has available information about that client and knows the person s/he is in contact with, the interaction can proceed in a positive manner.

Nevertheless, in many situations and for many professional figures, for example, the personnel that responds to telephone calls from clients, or who welcomes them at the reception, or responds to requests for maintenance, knowledge of individual clients, or of their needs, may not be complete or up-to-date: in the specific case of persons with disabilities this element becomes even more complex and problematical since it can lead to behaviour and solutions that are not in line with the client's expectations.

In such cases, it is necessary and desirable to set up an information file on the clientele that is well-prepared, up-dated, easily accessed and consulted, and interpreted and which allows a relationship oriented contact with the clientele to be established.

Also a good data base will be an effective support for cross selling and the offer of new products, that are preparatory to the problem solving phases

Beyond their primary purpose of aiding the management of relations with the clientele, data bases can be used for a wide range of marketing activities that are especially aimed at the effective satisfaction of the clients.

Such files should include, besides information about the personal conditions of the clients, his/her needs and expectations, also information about spending capability, in order to know the long-term profitability of the client inserted in the data base.

It is evident that the greater or lesser breadth of the data available will depend on the client's willingness to supply elements that concern him/her, that to not damage his/her right to *privacy* and that these can be used within limits that the client himself will define.

Therefore one must establish a relationship with the client which can be developed only when the contacts and interactions with are all or at least in large part oriented toward the clientele..

One way of verifying when a relationship was established is by measuring how often a certain client has made a purchase from a firm.

Certainly this method is a bit limiting if considered *a priori*: the reasons why a client turns to a certain company are varied and should be considered in all their complexity if one wishes to understand the level of a relationship..

Consider, for example, the case in which in certain tourist localities effective monopolies are created with only one structure able to respond to the specific needs of persons with disabilities.

This does not represent a condition of absolute certainty about the duration of the relationship; in fact, the creation of a new structure which responds to usability cannons to the complete satisfaction of a client with disabilities, will inevitably produce changes in the previously existing equilibrium.

A client/business relationship, therefore must be earned: the business does its part with adequate strategies and commitment, but it is the client who decides if the relationship will be lasting.

A relationship is created when a client perceives a common way of thinking among client and the service supplier which denotes a reciprocal commitment, or fidelity which consolidates the relationship and which stabilises it.

But all of this derives from the effective and positive practice of CRM techniques, even if clients do not always want to be pursued as prey, neither do they want to be "managed"; they just want the company they are interacting with to make their lives easier and less stressful.

We are witnessing a transformation, we would add in our opinion an expedient one, from CRM which aimed at improving the *business* of a company, to CMR which improves the *business* for the client.

CMR is not merely launching the umpteenth publicity campaign or thinking up another promotion.

It is much more than the sum of the marketing database, targeted publicity, collecting information on clients, and offering new services.

It means creating an experience, personalising interactions with individual clients in the ways established by the clients themselves and therefore developing relationships.

CMR is a process of leaving the control of the relationship in the hands of the client.

CMR improves the business for the client, understands his/her specific needs, treats the clients as individuals, Lets them tell us what is important for them, it is organised absolutely around the client and therefore is a tool at their service.

1.5 IMPLEMENTATION OF A CONTROL SYSTEM

Implementing a customer care control system requires a particular availability of resources, whether these be human or economic, but also cognitive and experiential.

It means adopting a business philosophy that is client-oriented.

One of the most frequently used methods, or better, instruments is *telemarketing* by which we mean the communications and marketing system through which specialised personnel use telecommunications and new computer technologies to conduct marketing and sales activity.

This can be separated into active and passive, or outbound and inbound. The former regards the calls directed towards clients or potential clients, with a high degree of selectivity, aimed at **target groups** that have been well-defined in the planning phases; the latter, instead, regards incoming calls usually handled with toll-free or customer assistance numbers.

Another tool used is that of direct mail, for gathering information by means of a letter, which requires a high level of involvement on the part of the client, who is often rewarded with prizes or special conditions.

The situation, or rather the evolutionary processes of the growth of call centres in Italy demonstrate that the majority of businesses implementing CRM/CMR are paying close attention to this information tool.

Businesses must then choose whether to create such structures within the firm or to outsource to specialised companies.

All of this depends on the size of the company itself, on the related costs and on the resources that must be committed.

An overview on how to implement these control instruments will be supplied through further explanatory materials.

We will merely affirm that new technologies make such systems increasingly accurate and precise with simplified *hardware* that facilitates tasks which only a few years ago seemed unreachable.

Certainly it seems evident that using these would mean facing high costs, especially in the “pioneer” stages, costs which, however, will decrease when the use of such systems becomes more common.

The human resource factor also appears not to be negligible. In fact staff has an active role in these processes and the success of the control structure depends on them.

In the area of control systems for *customer care* for disabled persons in the tourism sector, we realise the complexity of the topics and of the contingent situations which tourism operators are called upon to meet, recognise and decipher.

The specific behaviour to adopt when faced with the very vast number of types of disabilities, whether temporary or permanent, will be discussed in the following pages.

1.6 CUSTOMER CARE INITIATIVES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

All that has been said so far can be can be verified in the main customer care operational instruments present on the Italian scene in this area.

Among these, we mention *Sistema SuperAbile* of INAIL, which aims at filling a serious gap in the affirmation of the right to equal opportunity for persons with disabilities, that is the right to correct and dependable information.

In brief, *SuperAbile* is a call centre able to provide replies, often in real time, to the numerous questions of persons with disabilities, of their families and of the tourism operators; an *on line* newsletter (Portal) which deals with topics and news regarding disabilities with articles, coverage, interviews opinions and investigations, updated daily.

The *SuperAbile* call centre is the national reference point for information and consultation on disabilities.

Here work front office operators who are in continuous training and self-learning, although they already have specific experience and competencies; as a support to their work, they have an ample data base, continually up-dated based on the *feedback* of the clients of the service, but especially thanks to a tight network of collaboration with other local information desks and with the associations and organisations of the sector.

If necessary, the more complex questions are handed over to a group of experts who provide precise, accurate replies.

Therefore from this service one can receive replies personalised according to one’s specific needs and wishes, with respect to the founding principles of *customer care*.

The SuperAble call centre is also an important reference for operators in the sector, for the organisations which have sprung up in recent years to offer accessible travel to persons with disabilities, as well as services to facilitate their mobility.

The activity of the *call centre* evolves in parallel with that of the Portal which can respond to a different kind of need: in fact those who read SuperAble, do so to know what's happening in Italy and abroad, in this field, to better organise their own holidays, travel offers, accessible exhibits, the opening of a tactile museum, for example, all the novelties and initiatives that are created and perfected in Italy and abroad.

The portal is structured in sections, those most closely related to tourism are named "In Viaggio" and "Weekend", where a multitude of precise and detailed information to facilitate travel can be found.

Another practical example of what we mentioned previously about the general control tools for customer care is the toll free number VACANZE SERENE (800271027): the purpose of this service is to facilitate the vacations of persons with special needs through the spread of information on the accessibility of structures, services and sites of interest to tourists.

This service was set up by the Department of Social Affairs of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in collaboration with Telecom, as part of departmental initiatives related to the "Estate Serena 1998" programme and was managed by Associazione CO.IN.Onlus.

This was the first national information service on the mobility and tourism of persons with disabilities, which made possible the spread of dependable information on the accessibility of tourism structures and infrastructures.

The positive aspect of the initiative, today managed on commission of the Region of Lazio as part of the project "Presidio del Lazio", lies in the fact that all the information contained in the guidebooks and data bases of the local information desks, which generally have a limited territorial diffusion, have been made accessible to a broader public of clients, constituting in fact the first significant step for the tourism promotion of those structures and resorts that have supplied useful information for persons with disabilities.

Another conceptually interesting initiative was Project *Tourpass*, assistance to tourists and businesses.

The concept was to create in the territory an instrument able to supply all the information necessary to improve the accessibility and the real usability of tourism equipment and of public services. All information related to the dysfunctions that tourism consumers could meet up with were gathered, allowing tourism structures to supply their best assistance, and businesses to have a reference "yardstick" for improving the quality of their services.

These are some typical examples of assistance and quality services, even if it seems clear that for the purposes of our study, The existence of such control services is strategic especially in the post-sale phase.

In this case it is the private companies that are the most interested: a case worthy of note is the control system of the Tour Operator *Viaggi del Ventaglio* which will be examined in the final part of this document.

The existence of such attitudes is also perceived by the person with the disability.

During the international seminar on the tourism for all "Disability and freedom of movement", held in Rome in 1999, the following affirmations on the part of disabled participants emerged:

- ✓ disabled people are considered undesirable consumers;
- ✓ some tourism professionals are not interested in disabled clients because they often think that they are not rich enough;
- ✓ hotels are reluctant to welcome disabled people because this can disturb the other clients;

From this we have drawn the following recommendations, suggested by the disabled participants themselves:

- ✓ don't consider as disabled only persons in wheel chairs
- ✓ give the disabled people the right to be independent (for example allowing him to push himself instead of being pushed);
- ✓ consider the needs and desires of every individual.

In fact, some of the most common cultural barriers (prejudice, clichés) are the following:

✓ **A disabled person is a person in a wheelchair:**

It seems impossible, however the truth is that there is little information about this matter. We know little about persons with disabilities and about what concerns them. It seems that they live in a different world from ours and that they are so different from us that it seems difficult to understand them and to know them. For this reason we take a distance, we make faulty considerations and prejudices are born.

An idea by now consolidated for some of us is that when we hear to speak of disabled person the first thing that comes to mind is a wheelchair, taking for granted that we are dealing with a person with reduced mobility This makes us understand that for us it is as if only this type of disability exists.

It almost never passes our minds that it could be a blind person or a person with a mental disability.

✓ **A disability is an illness:**

The problem is that we are not well informed on these topics and that's why we think of disabled people as being sick; it would be interesting to ask ourselves: "Who is disabled? " In Italy 12% of the population are elderly, 9%

are obese, 10% are sight-impaired. Then there are people with allergies, parents with the small babies, pregnant women. Now let's ask again "Are they are all sick people?". One should also consider that sick people need medicines and treatments to get over their illness, while persons with disabilities simply use aids to facilitate daily life and not to get well (B. Colombo, 2003).

✓ **Disabled clients are poor:**

In our culture disabled people are people who need economic help, they are considered poor. But this idea is without foundation, often disabled people work and are able to lead a dignified life.

✓ **" A disabled person is an unlucky person:**

Let's remember the last time that a blind person or someone in a wheelchair passed near us: It is natural to think that this person is unlucky, but this is not necessarily the case or even what that person himself feels. It is a strong affirmation to say that a person is unlucky. It always depends from how that person considers his or her own life.

✓ **A disabled person needs our protection:**

Another natural instinct tied to our prejudices and our culture is that a person with disabilities needs our protection. Having a disability doesn't mean being unable to defend oneself, therefore trying to defend them at all cost will seem offensive and humiliating.

✓ **Having a disability makes a person different:**

There is also the prejudice according to which people with disabilities are different from others. Really the only difference lies in the way of doing certain things, even those that we take for granted such as walking or seeing. The needs and expectations of disabled persons are the same as those of people without disabilities. So in relations with a disabled person we must always remember that we are addressing a PERSON!

✓ **Being disabled means being mentally retarded:**

Disability is often associated with mental retardation. For example in the case of an educated adult person with a disability there is the tendency to treat him as if he were a child using gestures or totally inappropriate affirmations.

✓ **Disabled people are always good:**

Inexplicably people often think that a disabled person is always good, kind and nice, while it is possible to have a person with manners that are the exact opposite of those described above. Remember that they are not any different from other people.

2.3 PREMISES OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Interpersonal relations with a disabled person are strongly conditioned by the personal experience of each and by our cultural level. There are no precise rules to follow, it will be the experience gained to help us face such relations with greater serenity.

Some premises are:

1. Try to free our minds of various prejudices and stereotypes. Always remember that the disabled person (client) it is not any different from other people, but only requires more attention. What s/he wants is to be considered a person with the same rights and duties of all others and as a person must be treated with respect and dignity on the basis of a relationship of equality;
2. Always remember that disabled persons have the same needs as anybody else, only the way of satisfying these needs changes;
3. In a relationship with a disabled person remember that we don't have to assist him at all cost, this is a behaviour that robs him of his autonomy and the right to choose whether to be helped or not. Our good intentions will likely bother the person; it is important to offer our help only where it is needed or requested;
4. Disabled people do not necessarily need our protection, but should be treated according to their age and their personality and culture, leaving aside their condition of disability;
5. Attention should be focused on the person, not the disability.

2.4 PRINCIPLES OF A GOOD WELCOME

Generally relationships with disabled clients imply the same principles at the root of a relationship with any other person or client. So respect, a willingness to listen, and politeness are certainly necessary for a good relationship or communications with anyone.

Remember that no special attention is required but rather a professional, quality service to respond to the various needs of the client. So acting naturally will be the best thing.

In the case of embarrassment, don't worry about it, it is natural and wide-spread enough, it is enough to be calm for a few seconds and then proceed.

As far as the delicate and important moment of the direct interview with disabled people is concerned, there should be some small adroitness in the language used, avoiding expressions that are considered particularly irritating, if not offensive, for example the terms "handicapped" or "invalid". It is better to use other terms such as "person with disability" or with "specific needs" or with "particular requirements", or "person with reduced mobility" or in any case "disabled" PERSON.

In conversation you shouldn't feel uncomfortable using common expressions such as "see you later", if the client is a blind person, he very probably uses the same expression. A cordial relationship with the client is the best demonstration of the normal way to treat him.

In conversation it is necessary to focus the attention on the person and not on his aspect. The use of simple language is always desirable, for example avoiding acronyms, abbreviations, codes, expressions in dialect...

In relations and communication with disabled people it is important whenever possible to always speak directly to the person and not to the companions or family members.

Relations with disabled clients often require longer times for communicating or supplying a service; in this case it is important not to show impatience but to plan for this factor and to handle it in an appropriate way.

In relations with clients with specific needs, its important to learn from past experience but you shouldn't generalize or standardize your behaviour: it is necessary instead to be ready to modify it when faced with a new client, adopting any solutions that fit him better.

To offer help is always an act of courtesy and of attention toward the client and his needs. In any case it is necessary to ask the person with disability if he desires to be helped: "Can I help you? "

If the answer is positive, have the person explain how he prefers to be helped: "How can I help you? "

It is therefore important to listen, to understand and then to follow the indications furnished by the person himself or by the companion. If something is not clear it is better to ask for further explanations without being embarrassed. If instead the answer is negative and the client doesn't want to be helped, it is important not to insist; in fact, being too insistent in these cases can cause embarrassment or sometimes irritate the disabled person.

Generally, offering information on the services available inside the structure or on those specifically for people with disabilities allows him to face the real situation with more calm and awareness.

It is important to communicate any arrangements and emergency procedures predisposed for the safety of the disabled client; be natural, reassuring and conversational and point out to the client the person appointed to intervene in case of need.

In the case in which it is not possible to satisfy a client's demands you needn't be embarrassed: the important thing is to explain the reasons!

Generally, good sense and a certain flexibility in the application of procedures and in handling the relationship, the dialogue and especially in listening, allows one to handle different situations together with the people involved.

2.5 SUMMARY

- Availability and politeness are always appreciated;
- try to have a natural attitude, if you feel embarrassed remember that it is normal there is no reason to worry about this, in fact, in relations with disabled clients nothing special is required, just professionalism and quality in response to the various needs;
- speak directly to the person and not to any companions;
- in conversing avoid the use of codes at least in direct contact, for example in the case of an airline do not speak about chair type WCHC (Wheel Chair Cabin) but about a passenger in a type C wheelchair;
- try to use appropriate terms, avoiding irritating expressions such as: "handicapped", "invalid" that can be offensive, preferring "person with

- a disability", "person with specific needs", "disabled person". There is no need to feel embarrassed by the use of common expressions such as "see you later" when speaking with a blind person;
- when it is not possible to satisfy the demands of the disabled client explain the reasons without any embarrassment;
 - ask before helping; the person should be left to act autonomously as much as possible, if s/he needs help s/he will ask;
 - if help is requested, do not be afraid to ask what is the best way to help;
 - be patient, usually more time is required with the client;
 - don't treat adults as children;
 - try to eliminate any obstacles to communication, for example if the desk is too high and the client is in a wheelchair move to a sitting area or small table
 - make it possible for persons with impaired sight to explore the environment and objects by touch.

3 COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIP TECHNIQUES

3.1 NOTES ON THE BASIS OF COMMUNICATIONS AND REALTIONS

Before going in depth into the topic of relations and communications with a disabled person and before highlighting how important customer care is in tourism, it seems highly important to us to introduce certain concepts at the basis of communications and relations with any interlocutor.

Some of the basic axioms of communications techniques affirm:

- IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO NOT COMMUNICATE (our way of presenting ourselves or of behaving is already a communication to those around or facing us, even if not a word is spoken)
- EACH COMMUNICATION PRESENTS A CONTENT AND A RELATIONSHIP (and often the latter conditions and classifies the former)
- COMMUNICATION IS AN INTERACTIVE PROCESS. The interdependent nature of the relationship allows us to understand that an individual does not communicate but rather participates in a communication or becomes part of it.
-

Therefore: THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF NOT COMMUNICATING MAKES ALL INTERPERSONAL SITUATIONS THAT INVOLVE TWO OR MORE PERSONS COMUNICATIVE.

In two-way communications, that is, between 2 persons who conduct a communicative interaction, that are to be effective one must keep in mind, among other things, these main factors:

- 1) Communications must be AUTHENTIC.
 - Therefore one's OWN AUTHENTICITY comes into play.
 - For this reason one must be aware of oneself (respond to our own desires and not those of others and transform these into explicit intentions that can be realised).
 - Be sincere and coherent with yourself.
- 2) Communications are based on TRUST toward oneself and others.
- 3) Communications are based on RESPECT for oneself and others.
- 4) One must assume RESPONSABILITY for the communicative act.
- 5) One must possess the basic COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCIES to overcome defensive obstacles and barriers.
- 6) The ability of placing oneself in an INTIMATE relationship with another is essential.

In effective and authentic communications *"I embrace the person I am addressing"* in an act of trust and love that also implies the risk of refusal, of which one must have an awareness and responsibility.

But the communications act is highly complex and does not always coincide with the conscious intentions of the sender. The receiver, in fact, may qualify the in-coming message from the sender in a different way from what was intended.

It is already apparent that in the complex communications process, various actors and factors come into play: the sender, the receiver, the code used, the channel used, what the speaker wants to say, what the hearer thinks the other means

Communications are also an exchange of explicit and implicit messages that takes place between 2 or more persons on multiple communications channels: verbal, mimic-gestural, visual-graphic.

In this sense, it is wise to realise that communications are 7% CONSCIOUS (the verbal part) and 93% UNCONSCIOUS % (38% para-verbal and 55% non-verbal)

The awareness and control of the various communications skills above - verbal, para-verbal, non-verbal – added to personality, humour and enthusiasm will help one to not produce contradictory messages. We avoid, that is, for example, that our conscious verbal messages are contradicted by our tone of voice or by thoughtless body language or unconscious facial expressions.

In fact unconscious non-verbal communication is less liable to conscious falsification and unconscious censoring than conscious verbal communications. In fact, unconscious non-verbal communications have a special role in expressing in a most unpremeditated way the "plot" of emotional exchanges, emotions (ex: saying that one is clam and tranquil when instead one is blushing or drumming one's fingers on the table ...)

In non-verbal communications, which involve breathing, posture, movements, gestures, the eyes play an important part.

"To make people understand you, you must speak first to their eyes"
(Napoleon)

Visual contact is the most potent means of communications that we possess. Our eyes are windows both to the world and to the soul and reflect our emotions.

A good visual contact with our interlocutor is beneficial for communications because it transmits to him/her a sense of security and interest.

However, a glance is an offer of intimacy which can cause interest or embarrassment, pleasure or rejection. One must be aware of this and accept the responsibility for it..

"Think like a wise man, but speak like ordinary people"
(Aristotele)

SIMPLICITY of language is at the root of effective communication. Generally language should be simple, analogical, illustrative, synthetic.

During effective communications it is important to remove the obstacles which keep one from being spontaneous. Use your spontaneity and naturalness, bringing out your personality and enthusiasm, they are high cards in effective communications. (Unfortunately, tension and the complexity of people tend to inhibit at times their best traits, transforming open and unselfconscious people into closed and blocked persons.)

In this sense one must never lose sight of fact that ENTHUSIASM is the authentic force of communication:

"let us speak with our minds but communicate with our hearts"

Effective truly interactive and productive communications create a relationship and along with this the possibility of change, a new perspective, a new openness that often can become an improvement.

Entering in communications and relations with an interlocutor means trying to match the map of our own world with that of the person in front of us, it means following his or her way of reasoning. Applying an active listening relationship means just this. We must reach a knowledge of our interlocutor and calibrate ourselves by him or her.

It is clear that any knowledge of another presumes previous self awareness. But knowing another person does not happen merely through observation or passive listening. For communications to produce real and profound knowledge of one's interlocutor, one must empathise with him.

EMPATHETIC LISTENING is, in fact, a crucial factor of effective communications.

Effective communications are based on welcoming, on personal involvement, on the responsibility, empathy, trust.

LISTENING IS FUNDAMENTALLY IMPORTANT IN COMMUNICATIONS

"We have two ears and one tongue, to listen twice as much as we talk"
(saying)

"Listening very carefully is a significant way of helping"
(C.Roger)

Effective listening is authentic and, especially, welcoming. Friendly listening means :

- a willingness to make space within ourselves,
- the enhancement of our interlocutor, source of potential, talent and projects,
- the personalisation of his needs,
- an accurate response to any requests for help, growth, self-realisation.

The fundamental question, which should call us back to responsible communications and relations with others, therefore is: *"how much do I listen to others?"*

"Internal silence is an important strategy in listening to others, inviting them to enter into our souls, and listening to ourselves, perceiving our interior dialogue. If our minds are crowded, preoccupied, agitated we cannot hear anything or anyone"
(M.Polito)

ACTIVE LISTENING which, unlike mere passive listening, promotes the construction of reality, dynamism and the possibility of many new prospects, fosters the exploration of new possible worlds, puts the focus on our emotions.

LISTENING ACTIVELY means:

- *"Putting yourself in another's position",*
- *"Walking in his shoes",*
- *"Seeing the world with his eyes",*
- *"Getting in sympathy",*
- *"Feeling inside the way the other person does*
- *"*.

SEVEN RULES OF THE ART OF LISTENING to remember:

- 1) Don't be in a hurry to reach a conclusion.
- 2) What you see depends on your point of view (in order to see your point of view, you have to change viewpoint!).
- 3) If you want to understand what another person is saying, you must assume he is right and ask help seeing things and events from his perspective.

- 4) Emotions are fundamental cognitive instruments if you understand their language.
- 5) A good listener is an explorer of possible worlds.
- 6) A good listener accepts the paradoxes of thought and communications.
- 7) To be a good listener one must adopt a humoristic method (but when you learn to listen, a sense of humour comes by itself).

The greatest **OBSTACLES** to listening that is the basis of all communications and relations can be attributed to:

- Lack of time,
- Self-centredness,
- narcissism,
- presumption,
- prejudice,
- agitation,
- lack of interest,
- absence of a vision,
- dearth of empathy.

In communications and relations, therefore, listening is fundamental. It is half of the dialogue. Dialogue is a prerequisite of any communication and relationship. Dialogue has an enormous value in communications, training, growth and culture.

DIALOGUE presumes:

- 1) moral equality between the 2 interlocutors, thus, reciprocal respect.
- 2) That everyone can learn and everyone teach something; in other words, there are no unidirectional roles.
- 3) A willingness to learn through mutual research.
- 4) reciprocity: each party can ask questions, make observations and listen to the replies.

Effective communications must break down certain BARRIERS

OBSTACLES TO GOOD COMMUNICATIONS	PRATICAL EXAMPLES	IMPLICIT MESSAGGES
Not "tuning in". Not paying attention to <i>feedback</i> .		I keep my distance. I don't trust you. I don't value you. Your needs are not important.
Interrupting Placing oneself above.		I am in command. <i>one-up</i> attitude.
Following your own train of thought. Talking too much.		I'm not interested in dialogue with you. My ideas are more important.

Invading the other person's space. Doing a monologue.		You don't deserve attention.
<i>Pressing.</i>	Come to the point! Cut it short! Hurry up!	You're not important. I have no time for you. Your needs don't interest me.
Doubting	Yes, but ...How can you say that? But... I don't know...	I don't believe you. I don't trust you. You're wrong. Your word doesn't count.
Contradicting	No. It's not like that.	I know more than you. You're wrong..
Correcting	You don't understand ... It's not a question of A, but B... I'll explain...	I know more than you. You're incapable.
Criticising	You're always the same!	The way you are isn't good enough
Blaming Scolding	It's your fault ...you're the one who ... Look what you've done!	You're bad. You're at fault. You're no good.
Mind-reading.	You react that way because you're jealous ...	I know what you think and feel better than you do (dominance).
Labelling	You say that because you're left-wing You can't understand, you're a woman	Impoverish. Diminish Depersonalise.
Explaining. Interpreting.	I'll explain. I'll get you to understand. This happens to you because...	You're stupid, incapable, childish.
Giving (unasked) advice	You have to do this.	Predominance.
Belittling. Disparaging. Disqualifying.	All right, it's not so bad! What, didn't you know? You just found that out now? By the way ...(change of topic without logical connection).	Your feelings don't count. Your values don't interest me. You're worth less than you think. You don't exist!
Inhibition (white lies). Not saying what you really feel Not saying what you think.		Distance and mistrust. You're not able to understand. I'm not interested in communicating with you. Our relationship isn't important.
Sarcasm.		Power, sadism.

The person who receives barrier messages like the ones illustrated above is subjected to a *racket*. *Rackets* are meant to take away energy, to weaken the other and strengthen oneself and they certainly do not provide a good setting for effective and authentic communications

A conversation is productive in relation to its fluidity and bidirectional quality. The more open people are and the more willing to temporarily assume the point of view and the emotions of the other, the more constructive the conversation will be.

To achieve these results EMPATHETIC LISTENING is necessary, the total listening of which we have already spoken.

Instead the factors that support EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS are:

FACILITATORS OF GOOD COMMUNICATIONS OR DIALOGUE	IMPLICIT MESSAGGES
Showing signs of syntonisation. Reflection <i>Matching</i> <i>Pacing</i> Calibration Attention to <i>feedback</i> .	Liking and friendship. Trust and acceptance. Your needs and feelings are important. Our relationship is important.
Invitation	Availability and openness. I am ready to listen to you.
Giving signs of having received the message.	Attention. I'm interested in what you say.
Asking permission.	Consideration and respect
Empathetic comprehension	Unconditioned acceptance. Your values and feelings are important
Emphasising the positive aspects and the points in agreement.	Closeness and friendship. Respect and value.
Genuine transparent messages.	Self-involvement. Openness toward the other. Commitment to the relationship.
<i>Contributing</i> : offering new prospects from a position of equality.	Dedication and attention. Interest in the other person.

Final RECOMMENDATIONS for EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS:

In relations with an interlocutor:

- 1) DO NOT PREJUDGE, DO NOT JUDGE,
- 2) DO NOT PRE-CLASSIFY,
- 3) DO NOT BE AGGRESSIVE,
- 4) PUT YOURSELF IN HIS POSITION, IDENTIFY WITH THE PERSON,
- 5) LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN AND THEN LISTEN TOTALLY,
- 6) GATHER AND EXHALT THE POSITIVE POINTS,
- 7) BE TOLERANT AND OPEN TO CHANGE AND TOWARD ACCEPTING THE PERSON AND HIS OPINION,
- 8) ALLOW TIME FOR THE INERLOCUTOR ,
- 9) TAKE NOTHING FOR GRANTED,
- 10) INVEST ENERGY IN LISTENING. IT REQUIRES EFFORT BUT IS WELL WORTH IT.

3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATION IN TOURISM

In tourism, **traveller assistance** is generally recognised as a qualifying factor of the service offered.

In any *tour operator's* planning, for example, assistance to the client (individual or in a group) in the concrete enjoyment of the product acquired, from the moment of departure to the vacation site, plays a fundamental role in characterising the TO's image.

In a *tour operating* company, the assistance are becomes not only the division responsible for resolving operational problems, but also the one which characterises the service supplied by the company.

The assistance must be **communicative**, able to create quality for the client. To do this the *tour operator* can choose from among various alternatives:

- Presence in the site or the hotels themselves of company employees assigned to provide support to the clients, if necessary with the creation of real assistance centres;
- Entrusting the group for the entire duration of the *tour* to a tourist escort, usually a free-lance professional working with a certain amount of continuity for the same *tour operator*;
- The use, especially for planning abroad, of local agencies specialised in such services (incoming agencies or correspondents).

(O.N. Fiorucci, 2005)

TOURISM more than any other sector of the economy is based on **hospitality**, the same hospitality that historically is shown toward guests, to persons who

are far from their homes. Hotels and restaurants, for example, are places where ancient hospitality is reproduced, places where one tries to create, for payment, a situation of well-being for the guest.

The entire system is based on the wellbeing and satisfaction of the person who consumes the tourism product in all its parts. Communications with the person, therefore, listening, determining his needs and expectations in order to satisfy them is evidently the fulcrum of the entire system of tourism services.

Creating a successful quality product in tourism means offering a personalised service based on the satisfaction and well-being of the client in a stable, safe and continuous way, from transportation, to entertainment to food service ... When, for example, a client pays to have a hotel room, s/he becomes a guest who, on entering the hotel, wants to be welcomed with a smile, asks for hospitality and courtesy in a safe functionality, s/he wants well-being, guarantees, freedom ...

One of the main characteristics of a tourism service is that its consumption requires the active participation of the client, that is, the tourism service is activated at the same time as its enjoyment by the client. Unlike the production processes of other sectors, for example industry, consumers oversee the production, that is the guests are present when the services are provided, for example in food service or transportation, and with their presence they influence the rhythm of work (for example with their greater or lesser presence) and interact closely with the operators (for example hotels and restaurants present a *people intensive* organisation, or rather with a high labour density).

A system of services that rotates so closely around the persona of the client and his/her direct and immediate psycho-physical satisfaction is one which must assign a priority position to communications and relationship techniques. No system whether it be of *management* on the simple running of any structure that is part of the tourism system, (whether it be a *tour operator*, a travel agency or tourism promotion agency, or a hotel, a tourist village, a campground or a restaurant), no appropriate management can ignore personal relations among employees and, especially, between employees and the tourist-clients, absolute protagonists of the scene.

Going on to specifically analyse tourism for all, we would add that in the progress toward a fully integrated participation in social activities on the part of all citizens, the proposal of a tourism offer that is adequate for the specific needs of persons with disabilities must be accompanied by high quality in the welcoming from a human and professional point of view.

Specific training in awareness of the needs and expectations of this clientele target therefore is necessary to guarantee a level of excellence in the tourism product. (A. Laura and A. Petrangeli, 2003)

For those who propose accessible tourism today (the Ventaglio group, for example) attention to special needs developed as a natural consequence of their attention to the client. In fact, beyond any evaluations of an ethical-moral nature, that of listening to one's own users and understanding their needs constitutes the first rule for any correct marketing action. (B. Colombo, 2003)

3.3 COMMUNICATION AND THE CLIENT'S NEEDS

The Ventaglio group, and Italian tour operator which as we will see prepares offers accessible even to people with disabilities, to gather the requests of their clients and especially of the disabled client simply amplified in a systematic way, its system of LISTENING to clients, which remains the best practice for those wishing to promote a successful product.

In particular the group:

- Appointed a person specifically for the line of products for clients with specific needs, thus reinforcing the *call center* system;
- Trained the operators of the booking telephone lines on the topics of disability and specific needs;
- Formed and strengthened collaborations with local distribution points, such as the agencies, training personnel to identify and satisfy the specific needs of the clients;
- Moreover they apply the traditional systems of client evaluation and of the request for client *feed-back*, to measure the degree of satisfaction of their needs and to improve their quality tourism offer.

Generally speaking it is still true that, for a tourism operator, acquiring knowledge about the needs of clients with disabilities is quite difficult if one is not strongly motivated. A tourism operator wishing to open up to this slice of the market must search for information about the *target* using channels that are not the ordinary ones.

Strong desire and motivation would lead the tourism operator to seek out the specialised associations, with experience in the research and diffusion of information on the accessibility of structures and tourism services for persons with specific needs, or the organisations representing reference points such as, for example, SuperAbile of INAIL.

In such organisations, besides in those directly interested, we can in fact identify the only truly dependable sources, as the expressions of the real

specific needs, knowledge of which is essential in planning a tourism for all offer..

In fact, the request for information and communications coming from tourism operators or the tourism system in general and going toward the client with specific needs is without doubt very limited.

The greatest demand for communications and information comes from the opposite side. Therefore it is the persons with specific needs themselves and the associations which represent them in the majority of cases that seek a way, a communications channel with the tourism system, in order to realise their long-desired satisfying holidays. In doing so, unfortunately, they inevitably meet up with a wilderness of difficulties.

In fact to date the demand for tourism for all is taken up and satisfied essentially by associations of disabled persons, social private agencies, voluntary associations public services and social tourism, generating a strong imbalance between the demand and the supply, not to mention between needs and resources.

A situation to be hoped for, instead, would envision the demand for tourism for all satisfied by the entrepreneurs of the industry and by professionals, who offer a product of a quality that would ensure the fidelity of clients with specific needs as much as any other client.

3.4 THE LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION IN INTERNET SITES, GUIDE BOOKS, TRAVEL AGENCIES AND CATALOGUES...

The means of communications must create and strengthen collaboration with the associations of disabled persons, to improve the image of disabled persons offered by mass media. Information about persons with disabilities should be strengthened to recognise the existence of diversity among human beings. When dealing with topics of disability, the media should avoid a sanctimonious or humiliating attitude, and speak more of the obstacles encountered by disabled persons and of the positive contribution that disabled persons can give once these obstacles are removed. (The Declaration of Barcelona, 1995)

The majority of the communications and distribution channels of the tourism product, from internet sites, to guidebooks, to catalogues, to the agencies themselves, present large gaps as far as communications for and consideration of the *target* of clients with specific needs.

The standard of the typical tourist client to which these generally refer, has produced information and publicity material which is often completely devoid of the information necessary for a person with special needs.

- Internet sites, for example, often have graphics or page layouts that are in themselves difficult to consult, because of the use of small or moving or distorted type, confused and easily mistaken information and references, difficult to decipher and understand sometimes even for persons without any particular problem, never mind for those who could, for example, have sight problems or orientation difficulties.
- it is unlikely that a person with a certain type of disability succeed in finding specific information aimed at his or her own type of need in the majority of catalogues.
- the same holds for tourism guidebooks.

When we consider the communications and information products specialised in the Tourism for All sector, once again we run into paper or multi-media materials which often present inaccuracies or errors or vague information, which makes the communications a failure, causing misinformation if not problems or incidents. For example tourism guidebooks or catalogues which use symbols or evaluations of accessibility made however on the basis of criteria which are not clear or which do not correspond to the truth.

In fact, the traditional sources of tourism information, such as Tourism Bureaus, APT, Pro loco, increasingly include in their publications the symbol of accessibility for disabled persons, but often the symbol identifies a general availability of the structure to accept disabled visitors rather than an accurate and documented verification of the actual situation.

In this context we should always remember that for a disabled persons to meet up with a condition of discomfort due to the fact that the real conditions of the structure do not correspond with those indicated in the information phase can mean the total failure of the holiday.

Therefore defects in communications regarding Tourism for All can be:

- first of all, a lack of knowledge of the real needs of persons with various types of specific needs,
- impropriety of language,
- failure to update information,
- vagueness in terms and inaccuracy regarding references,
- non-homogeneous, sporadic and uncoordinated communications and information initiatives, which often produce a great deal of confusion.

3.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING TOURISM INDUSTRY OPERATORS

In organising a tourism for all system, it should be remembered that according to numerous studies conducted, among the needs expressed by disabled tourists (not to mention by any type of tourist) the most important is related to the availability and courtesy of personnel: from the *call centre* operators to travel agents, transportation staff, hotel staff (from *receptionists* to bellhops, security and housekeeping staff), entertainers, waiters and cooks in the restaurants, and so on.

These people, in the majority of cases, determine the success of a vacation or trip for a person with specific needs.

In fact, the potential for change and the minimum openness necessary to meet the specific needs of this broad target of clients lies in the training and availability of all these persons.

The different categories of tourism professionals enter into contact with disabled persons for a limited period of time, during which they should be able to understand with what type of disability they are dealing, what are the residual skills that the disabled person in front of them is able to express, focus the needs and act as a consequence. In some cases there will be more than one contact (for example: a travel agent who meets with the client several times to finalise the transaction), while in other cases the contact ends in a few hours, nevertheless influencing the quality and success of the service as a whole.

Certainly, to have available an accessible environment equipped with every comfort facilitates the relationship with the disabled client; this could mean higher initial costs but, once realised, will prove an excellent investment, since it will reduce the involvement of personnel assisting the client, considerably increase the user pool and transform itself into an image *plus* for all.

Therefore the possibility of developing accessible tourism proposals, of offering quality in welcoming disabled clients, of interacting correctly with this clientele target is directly connected to the professionalism of the operators and workers of the sector.

Many of the deficiencies of the tourism supply today are due to the scant knowledge of the problems that a tourist with disabilities must face when s/he decides to travel and to the reduced experience in the systematic management of technical situations. Even more serious if added to the presumption of "knowing" and "knowing how" which many operators affect to acquire disabled clients.

A highly indicative fact has emerged from a survey realised as part of the project "Italia per tutti (Italy for All)" (www.italiapertutti.it), which revealed

that not one manager of any hospitality or alternative lodging structure in Italy (of 4321 surveyed) had realised or foreseen the participation of employees in training courses on the topics of tourism for all.

It would be wise, nevertheless, to distinguish between the technical aspects of the organisation of a trip (a) and the aspects connected to behaviour (b). Both must be the object of training activity, to reach a level of professional quality that offers the clientele sufficient guarantees of obtaining an adequate product.

(a) The technical aspects regard all the aspects connected to the planning of a tourism package, from reservations and management of the trip and therefore presume a knowledge of the client and his/her needs in relation to the various types of disabilities. The person in charge of choosing a hotel structure, the itinerary of the visit, a theatre or concert hall, a discothèque or a restaurant must have a clear idea of what accessibility means: s/he must, in other words, know how to correctly and critically interpret the information available, evaluate the real dependability, know the right questions to ask both the client and the service supplier.

(b) The way of behaving when one enters in contact with disabled persons regards the rules to follow when relating with persons who express different needs and, because of its particular importance, will be dealt with in depth later in this document.

In the prospective of organising a training intervention, the presence of disabled trainers, able to respond professionally to the doubts, perplexities and prejudices often connected to the clientele target being examined, would be very important.

It would also be desirable that any training keep in mind the different professional categories involved, since for example counter staff in a tourist information office must more than anything be instructed in how to obtain correct information and to evaluate its dependability, while hotel staff must be specifically trained in the topics of correct behaviour and attitudes towards persons with disabilities. In the same way a tour guide, who could be asked to accompany a disabled person on a guided visit and must identify his/her needs in order to supply adequate responses practically in real time.

In this regard, as part of the most authoritative initiatives in Tourism for All in Italy, that is the project "ITALIA PER TUTTI", a manual: *Qualità nell'accoglienza turistica di clienti con bisogni speciali* (Quality in welcoming clients with special needs), was written and published on-line at www.italiapertutti.it.

This manual is organised in such a way to allow each tourism operator to acquire the knowledge necessary to carry out his role to the best of his ability, in relation to the needs presented by the client. It includes: basic behavioural rules and principles of good welcoming, suggestions for the staff of hospitality structures, food service structures, bathing stations, for the personnel of

information, cultural and leisure time service structures, so that each tourism operator can find the information most suitable for his or her own case regarding the behaviour to follow and the correct management of the relationship with the client with specific needs.

Taking into consideration only a few of the priorities that can be identified, we will limit ourselves to highlighting, for example, how important it is:

For counter staff of travel agencies:

- to contact transportation companies (air carriers, trains), hotels, tourism offices.
- to evaluate the quality and dependability of information, in collaboration with the organisations of disabled persons.
- to refer to the information centres suggested by these or by credential organisations (such as CO.IN. Onlus and INAIL in Italy), to check on how the data was obtained and whether or not the structure has been checked by expert controllers.
- if one is organising, for example, air travel for a person with reduced mobility, don't be afraid to ask questions such as the weight of the wheelchair, especially if this is electric (while it is better never to ask the weight of the person or question about the use of toilettes).

It is important to explain the reason for the question and especially that the way of asking the questions be natural and respectful.

• **For personnel of transportation companies:**

- to know one's own company and the services it offers.
- to be aware of the rules regarding the transportation of disabled passengers in one's own company.

• **For hotel personnel:**

- to know the accessibility features of the hotel.
- to maintain continuous contact with the tourism offices to obtain information on accessible monuments, museums, etc.
- to know that it is of vital importance that deaf and hearing-impaired persons (clients more frequent than is imagined) are informed and assisted in case of a fire alarm. If specific equipment and devices are not available the hotel staff must know which rooms are occupied by these clients.
- to know that disabled persons generally may need special attention in case of an emergency; therefore it is important to provide a list of the rooms occupied by disabled persons for the staff of the structure.
- To be trained for emergency situations.

- **For the operators of Tourism Bureaus and Tour Guides:**

- To know your own city and the tourism structures and know to what degree they are equipped for persons with special needs.
- to know if structures have been controlled on site.
- to know about possible alternative routes (ex. bicycle paths ...).
- to know the interesting places and the possibilities they offer for a broader use (accessible museums, monuments suitable for blind persons, gardens with aromatic plants, etc.).
- to be aware of the leisure time offerings: (water sports, skiing, excursions, etc.), restaurants, beaches, technical aids and the possibility of renting for example a manual bicycle or a tandem.
- to be aware of the existence of specialised guides of the city or the area.
- to co-operate with the organisations of disabled persons and exchange information with them.

3.6 RULES OF BEHAVIOUR IN RELATIONS WITH CLIENTS WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF DISABILITIES

To describe the needs and correct way of relating with a client with specific needs, we have referred to the manual: "*Qualità nell'accoglienza turistica di clienti con bisogni speciali*" which can be found at the web site www.italiapertutti.it; first we will describe the different types of disabilities and for each of these we will pinpoint the needs and the subsequent ways of behaving to facilitate communications.

I PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Physical disabilities entail increased fatigue and a reduction in the ability to move, such as walking or making certain actions, or a reduction in autonomy. According to the type of need, they can be divided into "person with reduced mobility" and "persons in wheelchairs". In the more evident cases there can also be difficulty or the impossibility of using the upper limbs, sight, hearing or vocal disorders. In other situations, the problems do not regard getting around but determine the inability to act autonomously. Generally a physical disability does not alter the intellectual ability of a person.

PERSONS WITH REDUCED MOBILITY

Many people have difficulty walking or making certain motions, although they do not use a wheelchair. Generally they use aids such as a cane, crutches, sometimes *electric scooters*, for brief periods or permanently.

Some may have reduced strength in their arms and hands, or difficulty coordinating their movements or reduction in their sense of feel, or reduced autonomy in standing up or walking.

They need

- Precise and accurate information about the level of accessibility of the place they intend visiting, to decide autonomously if it is suitable for their specific needs.
- complete access to a structure and to its use.
- technical aids to compensate various problems.
- willingness of personnel to follow his/her rhythm.
- to be helped, if necessary, going up stairs, to sit and stand up, to carry luggage or packages.
- to receive particular attention in case of an emergency.
- pavements with anti-slip surfaces, to avoid falls.

How to behave to facilitate communications

- have no prejudices about the appearance of a persons with disabilities.
- Identify, with the help of the person himself, what his personal needs are.
- Leave sufficient time for the person to express what he wishes.
- address the person directly, not his companion.
- Let the person express his own needs, don't presume them.
- To help the person face the "real situation", give information about the destination and, if possible, suggest solutions (technical aids, etc.).
- give accurate information on the level of accessibility (hotel, tourist site, infrastructures, museums, transportation...) and, if possible, check that the information is dependable.
- Offer help if it is asked and in the terms requested (for example that the person does not tire going long distances, standing up for long periods or keeping his balance ...).
- Dedicate particular attention in emergency situations.

PERSONS IN WHEELCHAIRS

These persons can have different levels of autonomy and very different needs. There can be situations in which the person is not able to stand up and others in which he can do so for a limited period and can walk only a few steps. Some only use the wheelchair for a part of the day, others permanently. Some persons can have considerable strength in their arms and be able to move themselves and do many actions without any assistance, others have a lesser degree of autonomy and need to be accompanied.

How to behave to facilitate communications

- Talk with the client and ask him what his needs are so that you can offer valid assistance.
- It is important to be ready to identify obstacles and to intervene (by freeing a passage or tract of removable obstacles).
- Offer your help, even if the client already has a companion.
- Before helping it is always a good idea to ask, out of respect for the natural desire for autonomy of every person.
- In the presence of barriers such as steps, or for more difficult operations, let yourself be guided by the client, who will suggest how to best carry out the manoeuvre.
- A wheelchair should be pushed gently without brusque movements and at a reasonable speed. To lift it, do not grab it anywhere, but ask the client; in this way you will avoid involuntarily damaging it!
- Be discreet in helping and if you are in the middle of a group of persons, be careful not to bump into them with the wheelchair, since this would embarrass the client.

II SENSORY DISABILITIES

These are characterised in general by a reduction in visual and/or hearing capacity, on various possible levels of gravity.

BLIND AND SIGHT-IMPAIRED PERSONS

This includes both blind persons and those with very reduced residual visual capacity.

Only a small percentage of persons with sight limitations are totally blind. In all the other cases the way of perceiving space, although limited, can vary greatly from individual to individual. Besides, the perception of the world around us also takes place through the other senses (touch, sounds, smells).

A very low residual visual capacity and blindness cause serious mobility and orientation problems.

They need:

- Contact with people, based on a continuous exchange of verbal information.
- to have the possibility of touching objects and even persons in order to identify them adequately.
- special illumination, contrast, (for persons with limited vision), reference points to reach a greater degree of independence.
- clear explanations and description of the environment, to identify routes and obstacles and to be able to go around these.
- to have particular attention in case of emergencies.

How to behave to facilitate communications

- If the blind person is accompanied, address the blind person when speaking and not his/her companion.
- The client will not be able to read the expression on his interlocutor's face or to catch gestures, therefore you must make yourself understood mainly using words.
- In introducing yourself to the client, attract his attention by calling his name or by touching him lightly on the arm.
- If the client asks to be guided, offer your arm and proceed slightly ahead of him.
- Always warn about the presence of one or more steps and indicate if they go up or down. Proceed in the same way with escalators. Ask the client if s/he prefers your arm or the handrail, and if the latter, place his/her hand on the handrail.
- To indicate where the client can sit down, tell him/her where the seat is located and place his/her hand on the back of the chair.
- Always let the client know if you are leaving or if you have come back.
- To describe the position of objects, give spatial references in relation to the client's position.
- If you are asked to accompany the client to the toilets, if you are of the same sex, enter with the person describing the type of bathroom, the position of the sanitary fixtures and equipment, such as the toilet paper holder and the towel. Let him/her know about the cleanliness of the environment. If you are not of the same sex, have someone who is help.
- Punctuality is a very important aspect in particular for these clients: long waits cause discomfort and stress.

- Remember that only 10-15% of persons with sight limitations are familiar with the Braille alphabet, therefore try to foresee alternative forms of communications.
- Generally persons with sight impairment demonstrate considerable ability to adapt and autonomy: keep in mind with good sense even this possibility.
- If the person is accompanied by a guide dog, the animal must be allowed into the structure.
- As necessary, if audio material or material printed in Braille is not available, read descriptions, menus and indications in a normal tone of voice ...
- A description of the environments and situations is always to be hoped for.
- It is a good rule to refrain from moving the personal objects or furniture in the room of a blind or sight-impaired client.
- If you are in a means of transportation, it is wise to say aloud the names of the stops reached and anything else necessary.
- Abandoning any prejudices tied to the person with disabilities, and focusing your attention and interest on the person and not the disability, remains the prerequisite for good communications.

DEAF AND HEARING-IMPAIRED PERSONS

This form of disability is not immediately recognisable, unless the person himself declares it. We must distinguish between deaf persons and those with hearing limitations. Persons with hearing limitations are in greater difficulty in very noisy environments. People who have been deaf since birth may also have difficulty speaking. Many persons with hearing limitations use sign language to communicate and are able to read lips of the people they are speaking with. Some use hearing aids to improve their ability to hear.

They need:

- Visual contact with the interlocutor.
- Good lighting to be able to read lips.
- If in a group, they must receive information at the same time as the rest of the group.
- to receive particular attention in case of emergencies.
- to be able to use alternative means of communications, if they cannot make themselves understood.

How to behave to facilitate communications

- In speaking, always place yourself in front of the client, establishing visual contact.

- Check your position and never stand with the light behind you, nor with your hands in front of your mouth, in order to allow the deaf or hearing-impaired person to read your lips.
- Always introduce yourself to the person and explain your role.
- Keep in mind the need for additional time to communicate.
- Lip-reading does not allow easy communications among more than 2 persons.
- Ask the person how you should speak. Some prefer that you raise your voice slightly, but generally a loud tone of voice is irritating.
- Speak neither too quickly nor too slowly and use short sentences.
- Don't mouth your words; use facial expressions; using simple gestures along with your words can be helpful.
- Always be ready to repeat what you have said or to write it, always have paper and pen available.
- It is essential to make sure that the information of communication has been understood correctly (for example, elderly people often do not show that they have this type of problem and even if they have not understood generally will not ask you to repeat).
- Always make sure that the deaf person is involved in the group conversation so s/he will not feel isolated.
- If necessary, to attract the person's attention it is advisable to do so with a motion of the hand in the person's direction or by touching him/her on the arm.
- If you must explain a mechanism or a particular service, remember that the deaf person cannot read your lips and follow a demonstration at the same time so it is better to speak first and then demonstrate.
- If there is an interpreter, nonetheless address the client first.
- Many hearing-impaired persons use hearing aids. These amplify all sounds in the same way, including background or surrounding noises which should be reduced as much as possible by choosing a quiet place for communicating.
- It would be useful to avoid using terms in dialect, complicated words or words that are very similar to each other, truncated words. It's better to avoid using words like: hèm...mhmm... because they disorient lip-reading the flow of words.

DEAF AND BLIND PERSONS

These persons have serious limitation of both sight and hearing. This creates problems for carrying out day-to-day activities, social relations and access to

information. Some individuals are totally blind and deaf, others have residual sight and hearing capacity.

You must keep in mind that the sense of touch and as a consequence physical contact is the most important means of communications. With this in mind, specific languages have been elaborated based on the use of the hands.

Such persons, although in some cases autonomous, often depend on others for access to information, for communications and for mobility. Keep in mind that they usually travel with a companion.

How to behave to facilitate communications

- Many are able to converse and use the verbal-vocal system to communicate, while to receive communications they use a system of gestures or of hand communications (Molossi Alphabet) for which the deaf-blind person is equipped with a special communications instrument (glove).
- Residual sight or hearing capacity, if present, can be useful in communications.
- To attract the attention of a deaf-blind client, you can touch him/her lightly on the arm.
- If the client is accompanied, when you give information to the companion, leave enough time for him/her to repeat the information to the interested person.
- Always keep in mind that these persons need more time to carry out ordinary tasks.
- Punctuality is very important, long waits cause discomfort and stress.
- It would be opportune, wherever possible, to allow tactile exploration of environments and/or objects.
- Overcoming your embarrassment, and focusing on the person rather than the disability, is always the best practice.

III MENTAL AND PSYCHIC DISABILITIES

MENTAL DISABILITIES

Manifestations of this type of problem are highly diversified, ranging from extremely slight and imperceptible disorders, to situations in which help and assistance to the person on various levels is required.

Generally persons with mental disabilities react to situation in ways that are not always proportionate to their age; they often have difficulty orienting themselves, understanding and making decisions, and for this the usually travel with a companion or family member.

They need

- Personal relations.
- Friendly and un-prejudiced behaviour and way of communicating.
- to be treated naturally, without useless sanctimony.
- to be accepted and to participate fully in recreation and fun activities that are organised.
- easily understood reference points (pictograms ...).
- to receive particular attention in case of emergencies.

How to behave to facilitate communications

- Don't have prejudices about the appearance of a person with disabilities. Be relaxed.
- Greater availability and more time dedicated to the client, respecting their reaction and comprehension times.
- If there are communications problems, such as language or listening difficulty, we advise you to be more patient in listening or repeating the messages.
- Express yourself in a clear and simple manner, using affirmative forms, and avoiding long and confusing explanations.
- It is important to communicate with a mentally retarded person in a simple but not childish manner, then take special care with the intelligibility of information and indications, simplifying as much as possible (which will also be useful for all the foreigners who do not understand our language well).

PSYCHIC DISABILITIES

These conditions can have highly complex and differentiated manifestations, such as anxiety, irrational fears, depression, disorientation, obsessions, excessive happiness, etc. ...

Other problems are often of a temporary nature (controlled by drugs ...).

How to behave to facilitate communications

- It is highly unlikely that you will be able to identify a client with psychic problems unless there are manifest reactions, since the sufferers usually do not mention their mental health problems.
- Assume an open and reassuring attitude to calm them, because persons with psychic disabilities are more sensitive to situations of discomfort.
- Openness, flexibility, courtesy and attention are always the key to a good welcoming.

IV OTHER SPECIFIC DISABILITIES

There are situations that cannot be attributed to a specific group of disabilities, but which, according to the level at which they appear may or may not be of interest in welcoming. Here are some examples.

PERSONS WITH ORIENTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS

Some people have difficulty communicating, both in comprehending and expressing language. According to the cause at the root, these problems can be associated with orientation problems, mobility limitations, fatigue and slow reactions.

Generally such persons need more time to carry out the normal activities of daily life.

How to behave to facilitate communications

- Try to be available and adapt to slower reaction times.
- Use clear signage to help orientation.

PERSONS WITH NUTRITIONAL PROBLEMS

Many people for various reasons have special diets, or need special attention in the choice of food, in its preparation, and in the scheduling of meals.

These needs can be very different. There can be, for example, case of intolerance to food containing gluten (in the case of celiac disease), a need for a diet rich in calcium (in the case of osteoporosis), etc.

How to behave to facilitate communications

- In this case as well, the willingness to listen to the client will facilitate satisfaction in the relation and of his/her needs.
- Essentially one must allow the client to follow his/her own diet and/or personalised meal schedule.
- A good dose of flexibility is opportune.

PERSONS WITH EPILEPSY

Epilepsy is a neurological problem which can usually be controlled well using medication. It presents various forms and can produce seizures of different intensity.

Epileptic attacks can be separated into two different types according to their intensity and symptoms: generalised seizures, during which the person may fall to the ground and have convulsions, or partial seizures, with very slight effects, in which the person may have a moment of absence and slight behaviour disorders.

How to behave

- Epileptic seizures, which involve the sudden loss of consciousness, can provoke mishaps because the person can hurt himself when s/he loses consciousness, by falling badly or hitting an object. The best solution would be to prevent the fall, but this is almost never possible.

Once the person is on the ground, one should try to position a pillow or similar soft object (use your hand if there isn't anything else available) behind his head, to avoid repeated head traumas caused by the convulsions.

Also you should try to turn the person onto his side, to allow saliva to flow out of his mouth to keep the respiratory tract open: there is nothing else to do.

- In any case one must keep calm because, although a seizure may be frightening to watch, in most cases it ends without after-effects and is almost never in itself life-threatening. Generally convulsions last a few minutes and end spontaneously.

- When the person regains consciousness, s/he may be confused, have difficulty speaking, or s/he may be lucid and not realise what happened. It could be useful to stay near the person during the seizure and be present when s/he regains consciousness to reassure him, especially when the person is disoriented and confused.

- Should a seizure last more than 5-10 minutes or should there be repeated seizures without interruption, it would be best to call a doctor or an ambulance to bring the person to the nearest emergency room.

PERSONS WITH DIABETES

In ordinary situations this dysfunction does not require particular attention, except regarding the diet, which in some cases must be very accurate. However in such cases the clients themselves will communicate their precise needs.

How to behave for good communications

- Ordinary professional availability, flexibility and openness to listening remain the prerequisites of all relations and communications.
- It could be useful to offer the client the possibility of conserving his medication in the refrigerator.
- In case of indisposition it would be opportune to check with the client about the type of assistance that can be given. If the client is unable to communicate call a doctor.

PERSONS WITH KIDNEY FAILURE

Persons with this dysfunction need to know in advance the location and availability of dialysis centres in relation to the place where they intend staying.

- As far as communications and relationship behaviour is concerned no particular attention is required and in any event needs would vary greatly from person to person.

PERSONS WITH ALLERGIES

This type of manifestation is increasingly widespread and can assume very different character. In many cases allergies are connected with particular environmental factors. Some allergies are caused by dust, animal hair (or dander), by feathers or upholstery.

One of the most common causes of rhinitis and allergic asthma is the acarus, tiny organisms which prefer humid temperate environments (dust mites). These can be found in pillows, mattresses, blankets, upholstered armchairs and couches, rugs and carpeting. It is impossible to totally eliminate these organisms however one can try to reduce their numbers as much as possible, with results that are useful for guaranteeing the quality of reception for all types of clientele.

How to behave

- It would be opportune to make environments, especially the bedroom, available to the client, specially prepared for their needs and which take into consideration certain prerequisites of environmental cleanliness.
- Let the client know in advance of the continuous presence of pets (especially cats).
- Regularly clean air conditioning and heating filters.

4 **PROBLEM SOLVING TECHNIQUES**

4.1 **DEFINITION AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Generally speaking *Problem Solving* can be defined as the art of solving problems, whether these be personal, interpersonal or of organisations (companies, agencies, communities, etc.), through the use of tactics and techniques to obtain the maximum effectiveness and efficiency (time and effort expended) and thus resolve the problem.

Therefore one can think of *problem solving*, referring to the general ability to find solutions in any area and not so much to the ability of a person to resolve situations in a specific subject.

A *problem solver* then is a person who, regardless of the resources and of the situation finds a way out of a problem.

*"The problems
we face today
cannot be solved
at the level of thinking
we were at
when we created them*

(Albert Einstein)

This concept is of extraordinary importance. Faced with a problem we cannot solve, continuing to use the same thought framework that generated the problem is obviously unproductive.

To solve a problem we must identify something that we have not yet considered, open our minds to possibilities that we have not yet explored, evolving our thinking from a level in which it is not able to solve the problem to a higher level in which we are able to understand the situation. We can represent our personal growth, our mental, emotional and spiritual evolution as a series of superimposed come rings. During our evolution we learn from our experiences, we develop greater awareness, we expand out thinking, we gain access to higher levels or rings, from which we have a different view of the situations.

Sometimes it happens that people stop growing, and stick stubbornly to their old thought patterns, convictions and habits.

Instead life requires continual personal evolution and sooner or later these persons will have to deal with a situation that requires a different, higher level

of thinking to deal with and overcome the situation. These could be relationship (with children mates, etc.), work, or financial problems. At this point one is either willing to re-examine one's own "model" of the world or one can find oneself caught for years in an unchanging situation, generating conflicts which in turn cause stress and frustration.

A good example of this are all the people who tend to complain because others, situations and the entire world are against them, without considering that changing themselves is probably the solution to the problems that afflict them.

Therefore, following A. Einstein's advice, if we wish to come out of a problem we have to **shift our point of view to a higher level of thinking**, as if the problem weren't ours or as we see it.

The basic suggestion is to **shift the focus, change the point of view**.

- The best tools to do this are **questions**.

However, these must be **productive questions** because they must help solve the problem. A good question to ask oneself is always:

"how can I resolve this situation?"

All questions beginning with "HOW CAN I...?" are very positive.

Absolutely to avoid instead are phrases like *"Why does everything happen to me?"* since these have the extraordinary ability of pushing us right back into the centre of the problem.

— A second, very important aspect is that of **language**. In Italian the word *problem* has a strongly negative connotation. It is probably much more productive and motivating to speak of a **situation to resolve or of a challenge**.

— A third essential aspect for *problem solving* is **FLEXIBILITY**.

It is important to know how to adapt to the available resources (material resources, human resources, time, etc...).

It is useful to be able in changing strategies with changing external situations (a good *problem solver*, for example in a company, is one who knows how to change strategies with market fluctuations).

Problem Solving therefore doesn't mean having a standard method for resolving problems, as much as **being able to create a different solution suited to the situation every time**.

— An ulterior aspect is that which regards **Identity**. It is important to have an awareness of oneself, a perception of one's own characteristics, know how to describe oneself. All of this is then placed in relationship with a modelling, that is, we must develop the capacity to replicate or reproduce the strategies, convictions and attitudes of persons whom we consider a model to follow regarding a specific topic.

To consider ourselves good *problem solvers* allows us to face each challenge with a productive attitude, as does thinking how a person we believe to be an excellent problem solver might act in a certain circumstance.

"What would Mc Gyver do in my place?"

4.2 APPLICATIONS

As we mentioned, a first fundamental step in the *problem solving* process is asking oneself adequate, that is, constructive questions. Therefore it is important to start with good ***PROBLEM SETTING*** or *PROBLEM FINDING*.

In this first phase one must make a **DIAGNOSIS OF THE SITUATION**, define the problem of work or of any other nature: technical-operational, relationship, organisational.

In this phase it is important to:

- Diagnose the fundamental characteristics of an organisational or work context,
- Diagnose any errors in procedures and strategies,
- Identify and consult direct information sources, literature and regulations, written or oral observations ...,
- Gather, classify and interpret information to construct a definite and effective representation of the problem,
- Read researches and studies,
- monitor, identify interferences, control distortions,
- identify errors,
- recognise and reconstruct new diagnostic strategies evaluating the effectiveness.

These are some of the fundamental operations a good *problem solver* must perform in the *problem setting* phase, which according to some is the most important phase, because once the problem is identified, analysed, delimited, it will be consequential to take the most adequate countermeasures. (It's a bit like knowing who you're dealing with so that you know how to behave).

In the executive phase of **PROBLEM SOLVING** other skills, attitudes and techniques enter into play.

The *problem solver* therefore is called upon to plan strategies of actions to face situations or solve problems of various nature: technical-operational, relationship, organisational.

The *problem solver* will:

- Decide to face a problematical situation, to commit to a strategy of action and to assume the responsibility for it.
- Prepare an action plan with the related objective, restrictions and resources, alternative actions.
- Monitor the action plan and evaluate its effectiveness.

Therefore the *problem solver* must be able to:

- Manage the relationship between the requirements of the problematical context and the goals and abilities of the subject.
- Evaluate and explicate the motivating and participation factors.
- Evaluate one's own degree of investment of direct implication and responsibility.
- Set in motion a decision-making process.
- Understand and apply processes of delegation of responsibility and action to others.
- Define action strategies and objectives.
- Propose (to others and to oneself) mediation processes to deal with conflicts and processes for the transmission of motivation.
- Monitor and evacuate strategic action projects.
- Predict possible outcomes, evaluate the consequences, consider alternatives.

4.3 **PROBLEM SOLVING IN TOURISM FOR ALL**

Clients with special needs correspond to a broad range of cases (from the obese, to pregnant women, the elderly, diabetics, disoriented persons, those suffering from depression, those with communications problems, relationship difficulties, nutritional problems, allergies, kidney failure, epilepsy, etc...) with a practically infinite series of different needs which, considered outside of what is defined as "normal", are qualified as "special".

These clients require particular treatment, identifiable by experience, but always and especially with special attention to avoid generalising, the willingness to modify one's own behaviour and to always adopt *ad hoc* solutions.

Each person is an individual, for their culture, their habits, their level of autonomy and communications and they must be treated accordingly.(B. Colombo, 2003)

Therefore there are no standard formulas to solve the various situations that can occur in one's job, in tourism or in any other specific sector.

The fundamental premises at the basis of good tourism service that aims for satisfying relations with each client, in general can only be:

- show a positive attitude which facilitates meeting all kinds of public,
- enter into relations with the clientele in a professional and natural manner,
- always provide precise up-dated information,
- forestall difficulties by improving service, seeking higher levels of possible quality,
- elaborate and foster a pertinent system of dialogue with the client.

4.4 EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMATICAL SITUATIONS RELATED TO THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF DISABILITIES

A minimum of flexibility accompanied by lucidity and courtesy should be the key to the good management of many complex situations that can occur with a person with specific needs.

With mobility disabilities, problems are often connected with the accessibility of the structure and correct information.

- The first example could simply be the *reception desk*, generally too high for a person in a wheelchair.

How great is the likelihood of good communications, based on the equal exchange of courteous dialogue, taking place when there are structural difficulties (perhaps that fine piece of marble of the front desk) which prevents being able to speak face to face?

One solution, rapid and without cost, which reaches the objective of eliminating the obstacle and of optimising the environment of the relationship and the dialogue with the client, would be to simply set up an alternative in the hall, such as another table where hotel personnel and the client can sit and speak comfortably.

- A simulation could stage the meeting between a hotel manager and the leader of a group of tourists who requested a means of transportation between

the airport and the hotel, considering that in the group there were persons in wheelchairs.

The means of transport made available has no accessibility provisions except the robust driver's assistant ready if necessary to use his arms.

Result: One of the wheelchairs breaks

Factors in play:

- Clarity in describing the needs of tourists in wheelchairs on the part of the group leader at the moment of contacting the hotel manager,
- Expressed request and search for information on the part of the latter, to prevent and avoid the more serious problems,
- Not being superficial (despite the good intentions of the driver and assistant), even if the intention is that of overcoming obstacles,
- Dedicating attention to the care of the aids which represent for those who use them the possibility of being autonomous.

[Support material. Reading and comment of some dialogues brought to show telephone or direct contact of clients with mobility disabilities. Documented from the news articles of Fiammetta Traghetti at the site www.disabili.com]

As far as **sensory disabilities** are concerned critical situations are often connected to the slight aptitude for flexibility, to the absence of aids and facilitators (acoustical and luminous signals, simple and evident graphic signage) and to not being prepared to use and exalt residual capacity.

- An example would be a guide accompanying a group to visit the monuments of a city who is faced with a sight-impaired person in the group who asks for explanations and further descriptions.
 - The guide's flexibility enters into play and s/he needs to vary the explanation usually used to illustrate and explain things to tourists, adding where possible more complete exhaustive descriptions.
- Or a situation in which a blind or sight-impaired person complains about the difficulty he had taking a shower, because the cleaning staff moved his shampoo, comb and terry robe from where he had memorised leaving them. To make things worse he stubbed his foot against the bathroom storage chest which had also been moved from its original position.
 - Here the need for a good network of communications among the various operational sectors of a structure enters into play. Because the management person at the *reception* who knew the procedure to follow in a blind person's room should have warned and instructed the housekeeping staff.
 - Once again the importance of dialogue must be stressed. If the client had expressed his or her needs and the hotel employee in charge of

organisation in turn had found out about the needs of that type of clientele, probably the problem and the complaint could have been avoided.

As far as **mental and psychic disabilities** are concerned, because of the difficulty in identifying and recognising them, the resolution of their criticalness is connected especially to an adequate management of personal relations and dialogue.

- An exemplary situation might be that of a person in a confused state of mind and with orientation difficulties, caused by agitation about the flight, who is unable to find the airport *gate* and hears his or her name announced as a late passenger who must board immediately (which, of course, causes ulterior agitation).

Let us suppose that the person in question asks a person at the exchange desk to accompany him/her to the gate which s/he cannot find, showing his/her check-in stub.

- In this case the way of handling the dialogue on the part of the person at the exchange desk is very important.
- Politeness, understanding and a manner that is as reassuring as possible, are critical factors.
- In the same way the immediate use of the internal communications network of the airport, to immediately assign a security or passenger assistance employee to escort the disoriented person, while attempting to transmit confidence and calm, can resolve the problem.

As far as the various **other types of disabilities** are concerned, the management, and possibly the prevention, of critical situations is based on correct information about the different specific needs which each person expresses. Good communications are fundamental.

- One example is the typical situation in which a client makes the specific request regarding the menu in a restaurant checking that a specific ingredient is not present in a dish.
- Or a person affected with celiac disease who asks, in a hotel, that a dish be prepared separately, using the raw materials brought with him/her.
- It is important that you do not underestimate the physiological reactions, even life-threatening ones, which certain subjects such as persons with allergies can have.

- The good sense of the tourism operator (whoever he may be) is essential; the operator must be willing to listen and properly understand the needs of the client in order to be able to satisfy them.
- In the same way it is important that the client be clear in explaining these needs.

5. AIDS: USE AND MAINTENANCE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The desire to travel is part of each of us, but to give satisfaction a desire must come true.

Many disabled people have problems realizing their desire to travel.

But what gives value to a trip?

The typical feature of a trip is the welcoming, in fact a correct relation with customers and the quality of this relationship are conclusive elements. In the case of accessible tourism, quality is also represented by the aids that a structure can offer or from the attention dedicated to the client's aids.

While we must begin by saying that in appraising aids and accessibility, there are three keywords:

arrive, enter and enjoy

the purpose of the analysis that follows is to clarify the following aspects:

1. the identification of the aid with the person is the greatest error that a tourism operator can make. The PERSON is our interlocutor, our client, and not the aid;
2. the price of the aid is not correlated with its efficiency. It is not true that the more expensive the aid, the more suitable it is for the client.

The purpose of the pages that follow is to give an overview of the most frequently used aids are, able to respond to the needs of tourists with disabilities.

5.2 DEFINITION OF AIDS

To be able to analyze the aids that a disabled tourist has or that a structure is able to provide its clients, it is important to understand what the aids and their purposes are.

The international standard ISO 9999 approved in 1998 defines an aid as :

“any product, tool, equipment or technological system of specialized production or common commerce used by a disabled person to prevent, compensate, alleviate or eliminate an impairment, disability or handicap”

ISO standards divide aids into 10 classes, each of which is further subdivided into 3 levels. These classes are:

- Aids for therapy and training
- Protheses and aids
- Aids for personal care and protection
- Aids for personal mobility
- Aids for the care of the house
- Furniture and adaptations for the house or other buildings
- Communications, information and signalling aids
- Aids for manoeuvring objects and devices
- Aids for environmental improvement, utensils and machines
- Aids for leisure activities

Aids should not be confused with protheses or orthoses; by prothesis we mean: "remedial devises that entirely replace lacking parts of the body"

Instead orthoses are "remedial devises that partially increase, improve or control the functionality of present but compromised parts of the body."

Unlike aids, these are worn directly on the body (example orthopaedic shoes).

As a consequence, an aid is a tool that

"allows the disabled person (or the person assisting him) to conduct daily activities that they otherwise could not do or to do them in a surer, fast and acceptable way"

(R. Andrich - Aids for autonomy).

Behind every aid there are evaluations: clinical, technical-environmental, family, social and health care, psychological.

The aid is adapted not only to the disability of the person but also to the environment in which it is used.

Therefore the aid is used as a tool managed by the disabled person outside of a clinical environment while the prothesis and the orthoses are indicated instead for rehabilitation.

As we have said the aid is a means, with it the person is not identified, it is not the person.

In fact we need to realise that an aid, while used to improve the autonomy of the disabled person, also emphasises a disability in the eyes of the subject himself and of the people around him. For this reason, to properly welcome a disabled client it is important to be natural and to not emphasise the presence of the aid.

For this reason, studying aids mainly means analysing some equipment that serves as a medium between one person and another. In fact it is important to understand that behind that stick or on that wheelchair there is a PERSON.

An aid is efficient when:

- it is effective in relation to the person's need
- from the point of view of the client, the aid can be found and used easily

- from the point of view of the operator, the service is organized in such a way that it allows information and training, (being familiar with the aids and knowing where they are and how to get them)
- from the business point of view the aid allows correct integration and organization among services and operators

Knowing that there are innumerable types of aids and that these range from the common wheelchair to systems for the transmission of sound, our objective will not be to become technicians with detailed knowledge of each of these, but rather to understand what they are and how a tourism structure can best exploit these tools to create added value for the business.

Aids can generally be classified as:

MOBILITY AIDS

- folding wheelchairs
- transit wheelchairs
- electric wheelchair
- elevators (lifts), lifters
- stair lifts
- crutches
- tri-and quad- canes
- blind sensing sticks
- bicycles, tricycles
- electric scooters
- special adaptations on vehicles
- ramps

COMMUNICATIONS AIDS

- Telephone devices
- Computer systems
- Tactile maps
- Writing in Braille
- Sound transmission systems

HEALTH AIDS

- mattresses
- pillows
- ante mite pillowcases
- ante mite mattress covers

5.3 AIDS: RELATING TO THE OBJECT OR THE PERSON?

Once aids have been defined it remains only to understand how one should behave in relation to the client using these, In fact it is not as important to know the technical characteristics of all the aids as it is to know the methods for correctly welcoming a disabled client with an aid to avoid being disoriented at the moment of his arrival or embarrassed and nervous without knowing what to do, forgetting that the basic rule for approaching a disabled client about his or her aid is:

**ALWAYS ASK THE CLIENT
BEFORE ACTING**

While wanting to be familiar with all the aids, it is important to remember that these belong to a PERSON, who can have varying degrees of ability in their use.

We will list only some of the most important aids; it will always be essential that utilisation by the client be verified.

- AIDS FOR THE MOBILITY OF THE CLIENT

The aid that can be considered the most common and which has also become the symbol of disability is the WHEELCHAIR.

It is the aid normally used as a reference especially in design and space evaluation because its longitudinal dimension is equal to 120 cm - greater therefore in comparison to a person walking with the aid of a crutch (70 cm.) or with 2 crutches (100 cm.).

Knowing the needs and knowing that obstacles of a physical nature (gradients, narrow spaces) create uneasiness or barriers, it is important to understand that to properly welcome a client in a wheelchair one must:

- obtain the greatest amount of information to personalise the service
- provide the greatest amount of information to avoid ugly surprises for our client.

It mustn't become a problem to ask a client, at the moment of booking

- if s/he uses a wheelchair
- if this is manual or motorised
- if s/he uses it always or only for brief periods

All of this information is important to decide the right room and to plan the client's holidays.

But above all it is important guarantee the client the maximum independence and autonomy. For this reason it will be important to ask client if s/he will need help moving about or for excursions and how this help can be provided.

It would be opportune besides to annotate the needs of our client on the hotel's "card client"; it is recommended avoid making the client wait in line. Be ready to remove obstacles, show your willingness to help and remember to ask before intervening. This is effective for all disabled clients regardless of the type of aid used.

We know that wheelchairs can be manual or motorised and that they can belong to the client or be offered by a tourism structure.

While there is no need to attempt to become technicians or social assistants, it is true that one must be familiar with the fundamental characteristics of the aids in order to supply adequate assistance to the clients.

For this reason one should be aware if a motorised wheelchair is operated by a joystick or another control and should our assistance be necessary, for example, in getting out of the wheelchair, this should be done with the motor turned off, avoiding using the motor box and the platforms as a fulcrum, However in this case indications will be given by the disabled person himself for this reason one should never forget the initial rule.....

The electric wheelchair is a machine not a vehicle, for this reason it must be used in the pedestrian areas and for greater safety should be equipped with illumination, acoustic speaker and safety belts.

As we have mentioned the wheelchair may be given in custody to the "hotel keeper" when the client does other activities such as going to the beach, using other aids. The deposit agreement between the hotel keeper and client includes the obligation of the hotel keeper's custody and restitution of the aid, therefore care of the goods. For this reason it cannot be left unattended. It should be said that generally speaking correct safeguarding falls under the normal behaviour of any operator of good sense.

Should the structure have its own electric wheelchairs, these should not be left unused for long periods (over 15days) because the batteries will discharge and wear out; they also must not be left out in the rain or in damp places.

Care is also needed in the case of specially equipped AUTOMOBILES that only the disabled person can drive. Should use by third parties become necessary, for urgent reasons and for short transfers, always ask for indications from the owner.

GUIDE DOGS for many sight impaired persons are certainly a form of aid to mobility. For this reason, in the case of hotel reservations, it must be understood that the dogs must be allowed in the rooms and in all the common areas. These are animals trained to be calm and silent. It should also be considered that acceptance of guide dogs is not good for another type of disability, for example, person with allergy problems, for which it is preferable

not to introduce animals in the structure. Therefore it would be wise to appraise each situation as it arises.

• MOBILITY AIDS OFFERED BY THE STRUCTURE

But what mobility aids can a hotel keeper or tourist operator offer to clients with motor disabilities?

The most common are elevators, platform elevators, stair lifts, ramps as well as elements that can be considered a service extra such as electric scooter or electric scooters or aids for leisure time.

Before describing the various types of aids, it would be useful to emphasise that for a tourism operator making aids available represents an added value and not just a cost.

First of all it should be clarified that to make a service accessible interventions that implicate costly or extensive modifications that are incompatible with the characteristics of the structure are often not necessary. In fact the aid should be considered as a service element useful not only for the disabled client but for all the others as well (the presence of a ramp, in place of steps, is appreciated by all especially when transporting luggage). Aids which guarantee accessibility, therefore, should not be viewed only as mandatory accessories to be adopted in compliance with the law, but should be considered together with the other elements of the service, as tools for the operator to obtain greater client satisfaction and therefore greater success in the marketplace.

Specific needs are more widespread than what is generally thought (just think of expectant mothers, families with small children, obese persons, the elderly), so succeeding in satisfying them certainly implies a competitive advantage.

A determining element is the ability to think and operate in a flexible way. We can cite the example of a hotel in Verona that periodically entertained a basketball team (people more than 2 meters tall); to resolve the problem of the size of the bed, they used a sofa as an extension. This solution, besides responding to the needs of the basketball players, proved to be appreciated by the rest of the clientele because it offered an additional element of comfort.

The mobility aids offered by a structure can be:

ELEVATOR

The elevator is surely the best system, which can be also used by those without (or who hasn't mentioned having) disabilities. The advantages are:

- speed
- autonomy
- generalized accessibility
- safety
- social integration

On a technical level it is often possible to install (or to modify) one in existing buildings based on various situations.

Elevators should be well illuminated and equipped with buttons with numbering in relief and in Braille. It would be very useful to have acoustical devices as well.

Differences in level on arrival at the floors and ashtrays placed near the push buttons should be avoided; glass walls are preferable to avoid a claustrophobic effect.

VERTICAL PLATFORM ELEVATOR

The platform elevator is a substitute for an elevator, but with limits in the dimensions and in the distance covered. On a technical level it is often possible to install one in existing buildings, but it requires technical evaluation and rather consistent construction/installation work.

The platform can also be situated on the outside of the building in an easily reached point, if possible next to a door at the arrival level.

There are various models that vary in relationship to the gradient to be overcome and based on the internal or external position of the platform. There can be a simple side protection with handrails and gate or it can be totally enclosed.

STAIR LIFT

This type of stair lift is a load-bearing device opportunely equipped for the transport of people with reduced motor ability; it is installed along the side of a staircase or a tilted plan and it moves in two directions, by means of an electric motor, along a track or runner.

It is an option when it is impossible to insert (or to modify) an elevator or a platform elevator. This system can be installed with a special track on the same staircase itself if certain conditions exist: sufficient width and the presence of landings.

Obviously the track must not obstruct doors or passages.

It should be stressed that this type of device should only be installed when other solutions are not possible, since disabled people are reluctant to use it.

MOBILE STAIR CLIMBER

This aid is used by clients in wheelchairs or those with a motor disability which keeps them from going up or down stairs. The stair lift can be:

- on wheels and equipped with a seat
- on tracks but in this case a folding wheelchair is necessary

The stair climber can be defined as a "stratagem" to enjoy a structure although it is very slow. The majority of mobile stair climbers require the presence of a companion, who is at least 18 years of age, and has good self-control, physical strength and eyesight, to operate the lift..

It can be used by a disabled person able to sustain himself in an upright position when sitting in a wheelchair with support; for autonomous use the person must have the use of at least one upper limb and good eyesight.

Suggestions for use and maintenance:

- always respect the safety norms indicated in the instructions manual
- avoid waxing the floors of staircases
- eliminate possible obstacles such as carpets, runners, etc
- keep the roller guide clean
- have the mechanical and electrical components checked periodically.

RAMP

The ramp is a discontinuous inclined plain that allows one to also move easily from one level to another, it is used by people in wheelchairs or those who have difficulty moving (the elderly, people carrying loads or children).

It does not always definitely resolve the problems of access, in fact, the greater the gradient the longer the ramp must be and it can itself become an obstacle. In the presence of steps, flights of stairs and ramps it would be opportune to install a handrail on both sides. In case of wide staircase it would be opportune to provide two central handrails.

In conclusion of this review, it can be affirmed that the elevator is the best solution because it can be used by all the clients including those without disabilities and it answers the need for full integration of persons with special needs.

● AIDS FOR LEISURE TIME

The aids listed above are those required by law, but there are also others that if offered by a tourist operator are an additional service. One example is the electric scooter.

The **electric scooter** is a *"one-seat electrical means, on 3 or 4 wheels, of dimensions analogous to those of a wheelchair, but structurally and aesthetically different from this, with speed compatible to that of the pedestrian. It is suitable for decreasing fatigue of people with ambulatory problems, and for whom it constitutes a "technical aid for overcoming distances both level and not."*

(F. Vescovo, 2002)

As with electric wheel chairs, the electric scooter is an aid, not a vehicle, therefore it cannot circulate on the road but only in pedestrian or commercial areas.

The *electric scooter* is an example of how an aid, if well used, transforms into service "added value". An example of this is the English *Shopmobility* experience.

SHOPMOBILITY is a service for people with problems of mobility – the elderly, people with temporary or permanent motor disabilities, etc.

They are given a small single seat 3 or 4 wheels electric device – an electric scooter - to allow easy access to spaces, services and equipment in urban pedestrian zones and in the shopping centres.

Gli aspetti positivi del servizio che si può definire di mobilità alternativa, secondo una concezione di *universal design*, si possono riassumere in 8 punti: The positive aspects of this service that can be defined "alternative mobility", according to a concept of "universal design", can be summarised in 8 points:

1. **overcoming of the barrier of distance**
2. **enjoyment of pedestrian areas for people with reduced mobility**
3. **greater use of services and equipment provided for citizens.**
4. **expansion of activities of a social nature,**
5. **increase in the related economic activity,**
6. **guarantee of greater autonomy,**
7. **guarantee of maximum integration thanks to a broad user base,**
8. **environmental sustainability**

Brief history

The Service originates in Great Britain in 1979 in the shopping centre of New Milton Keynes.

After 8 years, in 1978, 20 such services have been created and the National Federation of Shopmobility is officially constituted. In 1995 the services exceed a hundred units. The last data report around 200 services disseminated throughout the entire Country and coordinated by the National Federation. A web site has recently been created listing the centres, separated by regions, introduced in all of Great Britain.

Publications and guidelines

The activity of diffusion and communication of the service has taken advantage of different initiatives of an editorial nature such as the publication of a magazine, of a guide listing the centres and of a series of guidelines for the implementation of new services. The synergies that are created among the different centres of Service, harmonized by the National Federation, led to a gradual and non-stop expansion of this winning concept of "alternative mobility". The most difficult step was the initial one, the rest has almost come by itself thanks to the recognition of the undoubted usefulness of the service.

The features of the service

The different Shopmobility services scattered throughout the British territory present some common features whilst attempting to adapt as much as possible to demands of a local character. These concern a series of requisites regarding spaces and services such as location, parking lots, accessible toilets, training areas, storage areas, schedule, adaptability and flexibility.

The *Shopmobility* experience can be an inspiration for planning analogous services. Extensions to other sectors could involve:

- ◆ spaces connected to the enjoyment of cultural wealth and leisure time,
- ◆ archaeological sites,
- ◆ museums,
- ◆ fairs,
- ◆ temporary exhibit spaces,
- ◆ green areas: parks, protected natural areas, oases, etc.

The service could also be implemented where other mobility services are already present.

The Shopmobility example shows us, yet again, how an aid does not just represent a cost but can become (with adequate information, practicality and good maintenance) an element which enhances and qualifies an offer.

An other example of a leisure time aid is the **J.O.B.**, a chair for the transport of persons with motor disabilities produced by the Neapolitan company Neatech and whose name is an acronym for "*Jamm o' bagn*".

This is a seat which can be used on the beach, on ski trails or for off-road trekking. In fact, the device has a couple of wheels studied for easy transport on all the main types of natural surfaces (sand, pebbles, snow).

Its main characteristic is that it allows the client to enter water comfortably seated since it is made of a salt-resistant alloy. It can also be completely disassembled for transport even in vehicles of small dimensions.

It is easy and fun to use and is the ideal solution for bathing establishments, skiing stations and camps not otherwise equipped for persons with temporary or permanent mobility problems.

These are only a few examples of how aids are being created nowadays that do not have an unpleasant hospital look which is often not appreciated by "normal" persons, but rather an aesthetically pleasing appearance: in this way they become elements of the service that can be provided to all the clientele, disabled or not, and which can be appreciated by all.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN has contributed greatly to this new tendency, that is universal planning which, in meeting the needs of disabled persons, is also functional for the rest of the community.

One must also remember that uncoordinated occasional interventions on the part of the operators to make their structures accessible do not create a positive and reassuring image. To not fall into this trap, operators should consult the professionals or companies that furnish specific services and that are therefore experts in the choice of the most suitable aid.

The operators should also be in contact with organisations where they can rent, acquire, or adjust, if necessary, their own aids or those of the clients as well as associations/structures that can furnish assistance on the spot.

5.4 COMMUNICATIONS AIDS

In the field of communications technology is producing more and more sophisticated and efficient products. Thanks in fact to continuous experimentation and research in the field of computer science and telecommunications, excellent results have been attained in resolving some of the problems that disabled people face daily.

FOR BLIND OR SIGHT-IMPAIRED PERSONS

If sight is missing, different channels such as touch or hearing must be exploited to transmit or to receive information. Keeping this in mind the personnel of a tourism structure has to be available to accompany the client with visual limitations to their rooms and in the main functional areas, describing these in detail to enable him or her to memorise the spaces. It would be opportune to provide an audio cassette with a description of the structure and services or to give the client information brochures printed in large type or in Braille¹.

And it would also be useful to have Braille menus in the restaurant, bar and rooms (for room service) remembering that it is always preferable to ask to the client whether he wishes to use these or prefers that the hotel employee read the menu aloud for him.

The client must also be able to memorise the position and the functions of the telephone in the room because this represents an important means of communication in case of need or to request services.

It would be also opportune whenever possible to prepare a tactile (or relief) map which reproduces, in scale, the overall layout of the structure and the services.

¹ Braille is an alpha-numerical code whose characters present fixed dimensions and proportions. The inventor of this code (Louis Braille in 1825) realised that tactile perception is much less detailed than visual perception, thus he understood the need for relief characters much larger than characters for visual reading of persons with normal vision.

This is generally done using a smooth plate (brass, aluminium, plastic, cardboard, etc.), bearing information that helps the blind or sight-impaired person to move about autonomously in unfamiliar places; such information can consist in brief indications of the direction to take to reach a determined point (for example a platform or exit of a railway station etc.). The dimensions of the tactile map vary according to the quantity of information that is included.

Tactile maps may contain:

- Writing in Braille.
- Large-type and embossed characters for the visually impaired.
- Symbols that point out the location of architectural elements and/or of urban furnishings.
- Schematisation of routes or places.

The schematic representation of routes reproduces reality but also deforms it and simplifies it to make comprehension through the sense of touch possible. We can separate such maps into two typologies, according to what they represent. They are called:

- route maps if in the real places routes are indicated on the floor for the sight-impaired, which are also included in the representation;
- place maps when the map represents the natural reference points necessary for getting around such as walls, roads, sidewalks, or green areas.

In general, a tactile map is composed of a heading, a legend and of a representation that is the design of the place.

Routes should be characterised by floor colouring or composition that differs from that of the rest of the environment to give clear reference points for orientation; and the illumination and coloration of the elements of furnishings is equally important.

Written messages for clients with reduced vision, should be presented using large type.

We remind you that for a blind or visually-impaired person the memorization of the places and the position of the objects in his/her own room are fundamental, for this reason in reordering a room objects must be replaced in the original positions and in case of any changes the client must be informed.

FOR DEAF OR HEARING-IMPAIRED PEOPLE

Deaf or hearing-impaired people must be made able to communicate both with the outside and with the other zones of the structure by means of suitable devices and relatively inexpensive mobile technological systems.

Among the technological aids which can be installed there are:

- Channelled wave systems that can turn any alarm into an optical warning signal, suitable for fire alarms
- infrared systems for TV and radio

To facilitate communications with deaf persons it is always opportune to have a notebook and a pen to transmit in written form any messages that concern them.

Other useful tools that can be made available to client with hearing disabilities are:

- sonorous or vibrating paging systems for telephones
- amplifiers for telephones (useful for hearing-impaired persons)
- phone keys (DTS) that can be used for external phone calls, or to call the reception for information. DTS phones can be requested from the telephone companies.
- phones with fax
- writing material
- wake up calls with visual and vibrating alarm
- television with televideo service

At least one room should be equipped with a bell or acoustic pager for the person who knocks at the door.

As we can see, many aids are no other than common tools already in use, such as the fax, that allow the transmission of written messages on normal telephone lines, allowing one to bypass the auditory channel and to communicate in a simple and sure way albeit not simultaneously.

The same rule holds for Internet or for cellular GSMs that makes it possible to send and to receive brief text messages representing a way to communicate with the client to inform him about variations in schedules or other.

The most expensive solutions are not always the best ones: while they generally offer more functions they are often more complex to operate.

5.5 HEALTH AIDS

Health aids include those suitable for other disabilities such as allergies or food intolerances.

In these cases the personnel of a hospitality structure must be informed to provide the most suitable room or the best menu.

In the case of allergies, the most common aids are anti-mite pillows, mattresses or mattress covers.

Some rooms should also feature anti-allergy requisites, in which that is non-toxic paints and/or glues have been used, the level of humidity is checked and maintained between 25 and 50%, dust-catching coverings and materials are eliminated, mattresses and pillows are covered with mite-proof cases and attention is paid to cleanliness and the washing of bed linens.

Smoking and the presence of animals should be avoided in these rooms.

All of these stratagems will certainly also be appreciated by people without disabilities.

5.6 SAFETY

The topic of safety should also be mentioned here. In fact, many aids must be designed to ensure the safety of the disabled client, keeping in mind possible dangerous situations.

Obviously the limitations the environment poses for persons with disabilities are magnified in emergencies or situations of danger.

A lot of people with reduced mobility become particularly vulnerable in situations of danger since they cannot use escape routes such as, for instance, fireproof safety staircases, escape routes with steps or excessive distances because of their limited capacity for movement.

People with sight impairments have difficulties that affect their mobility in terms of orientation, finding escape routes, obstacles, and of anything else not indicated with tactile information or part of a general strategy of information for clients with this type of difficulty.

Fire alarms cannot be perceived by deaf/blind people. Even hearing-impaired people can have difficulty since alarm devices are usually based on acoustic signals and only in some cases also visual ones. These last would not have effect in a night time emergency if the client is sleeping .

Therefore, it becomes particularly important to foresee procedures that also keep the needs of persons with disabilities in mind.

The solution is not complex, nor does it mean additional costs; it can be found in the preparation of a general strategy that keeps different aspects in mind , in compliance with the safety regulations in vigour on the elimination of architectural barriers and in the use of additional means in specific cases. All supported by the preparation of personnel to respond and to intervene in case of necessity. In a word, sense of responsibility without needless alarm.

Basic behavioural norms :

- At the client's arrival explain (and, wherever possible provide, a pamphlet) the evacuation procedures in case of fire, with reference to the room where s/he will be lodged and to the services, pointing out the exact location of "static safe places" or of accessible escape routes. In doing this you must keep in mind what we have explained about the needs of the different types of disability.
- The information posted or distributed must be "legible" in various way: in ordinary printed characters, in large type, in embossed characters, in Braille, recorded on tape, etc..
- Hotel employees, particularly those of the night shift, of reception and of room service, must be aware of the presence of clients with disabilities and must know the exact location of their rooms.
- In assigning rooms or suites the safety aspect must be kept in mind and, based on personal needs, the safest rooms possible must be assigned, that is, located on ground floor, or close to accessible escape routes or accessible static safe places. Even in other structures, such as campgrounds, in assigning space to the disabled client you must keep these needs in mind.
- In case of danger the staff have to contribute to the evacuation of all the occupants of the structure. Particularly they have to keep in mind clients with motor, sensorial or other difficulties and be ready to provide the necessary assistance.

Signage

- Signage is very important to guarantee safety and to decrease uneasiness. Signs must be clearly visible in terms of dimension, form, colour, contrast and position. They must also be situated so that they do not confuse the client..

Requisites of the rooms

Floor plans indicating location of emergency exits (usually posted on the doors of hotel rooms) must indicate the positions of the "static safe places" and they must also be posted at suitable height for wheelchair users.

It would be opportune if some rooms were equipped with :

- automatic opening of the door in case of emergency
- room doors with instant manual unblocking of latches from the inside to facilitate exiting in case of danger
- alarm systems that vibrate as well as having flashing lights and high-intensity sound for those with difficulty hearing.

Other

- Mirrors must not be installed that can deceive the sight-impaired client about the location of the static safe places, of the calm spaces or about exits. You will remember that the calm space is a static safe place adjacent to and communicating with a vertical exit route (for instance staircases). Such space is particularly important because it guarantees the permanence of people with disabilities, or however in difficulty, while waiting to be rescued.
- Revolving doors are uncomfortable for people with reduced mobility and impracticable for wheelchair users.
- An alternative accessible exit must always be provided.

Specific provisions

- Safety procedures for blind or sight-impaired people (particularly those of the room) should also be printed in large type, embossed and in Braille. A tape with recorded instructions is also useful. Other provisions can be the automatic opening of the door in case of emergency and the provision of sonorous and luminous alarm systems.
- in the case of deaf or hearing-impaired guests, the personnel of the reception has to know the exact location of the room and has to be ready to intervene in person to inform the guest in case of emergency. Other provisions can be to provide specific alarm systems to integrate those already in use:
 - acoustic alarms of strong intensity
 - flashing visual which alarms can also be used to call the deaf person for urgent necessity
 - vibrating alarms.

6. GOOD WELCOMING & CUSTOMER CARE ROUTINES IN ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Today it is believed that a correct welcoming is an increasingly determinant factor for the development of the tourism sector. In fact the "reception image" of a city or of a tourism area assumes a strategic importance both as the principal tool of promotion available to operators, and as a deciding element in fostering the fidelity of tourists, representing the principal strength of a quality tourism proposal. This is because the role attributed by the visitor, to the way s/he is received in the chosen place assumes ever increasing importance up to becoming the true "added value" of the destination.

But what exactly is meant by the term welcoming?

Generally, the welcoming picture includes everything which contributes to really putting the tourist at ease, to making her fully experience her stay, to making her wish to return, to making her an "ambassador" with friends and acquaintances of the values and the merits of the destination.

In the case of accessible tourism the reception doubles its value and an operator should have a thorough knowledge of the level of accessibility of the structure in all its parts.

Improving the culture of hospitality in the community is the operator's first objective because it directly affects the tourist, adding to the factors of attraction that led him/her to choose that particular destination, but it also indirectly operates on the social environment in which the tourist lives and to which he relates each day, thus also influencing it.

6.2 ELEMENTS OF GOOD ROUTINE IN THE HOTEL SECTOR

In the case of the hotel sector we can cite some internal characteristics of service firms that have obtained excellence.

1. They have elaborated a vision. That is, they have a clearly formulated and as clearly communicated service strategy.
2. They practise visibility management.
3. They speak about service every day.
4. They created and maintained service systems in the clients' favour.
5. They created and succeed in maintaining a good balance between technological development and "emotional factors", moderating the rigor of the systems and of work methods with human aspects, with interpersonal relationships
6. They recruit, hire, train and promote the personnel in relation to service.

7. They market the service and commercialize it to the clientele.
8. They market the service and commercialize it internally, that is, among their own personnel.
9. They appraise the service through continuous control-monitoring and they inform their own personnel of the evaluations.

In the area of good routines one needs to consider the quality function of a firm, whose role is to articulate and to detail a good routine in a measurable objective standard.

When one speaks of quality in the service sector, one makes reference to a series of factors that generally range from reliability (correspondence between performance and trust) to competence, from ease of access to courtesy, from communications to understanding the client.

6.3 GOOD ROUTINES OR WINNING IDEAS?

To have a clear vision of the matter, one must clarify some terms, that is, understand whether it is better to speak of good routines or of winning ideas.

With the term good routines, used in the area of projects that include activities of gathering, analysing and diffusing exemplary experiences, we intend those experiences that can be paradigmatic, transferable and repeatable in analogous contexts.

But within accessible tourism where the approach of the so-called "cases of excellence" indicated as good examples for attaining certain results is more wide-spread, it appears better to speak of "winning ideas" because they refer to positive experiences, to ways of constructing projects or enterprises that contain some elements of novelty and change on what is still for many new ground.

By winning idea we mean a positive experience, transferable (therefore somehow measurable and analysable), that allows experimentation of a strategy that is able us to make an impression on business interlocutors' culture, on the contexts in which they operate, and that helps to produce some changes.

An organic system of winning ideas that allows the creation of a network that works with the same quality system constantly inciting us not to lower our guard would be desirable.

For the time being, however, we can only report a few winning ideas in the area of accessible tourism since there is still much to be done in this area.

6.4 VIAGGI DEL VENTAGLIO

In '99 Viaggi del Ventaglio started to deal with a clientele with special needs and currently it is the only Tour Operator with offers that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

What clients do they address?

They are persons who use wheelchairs, sight-impaired people, deaf clients, people with special dietary needs, people with psychic disabilities, with cognitive problems, obese clients or exceptionally tall persons, those with respiratory problems who need to transport oxygen, those who must transport vials of blood for transfusions, etc. They are people with various disabilities but who nevertheless decide to spend two weeks in the Maldives. Usually they are not very simple situations to handle but Viaggi del Ventaglio succeeds. How?

On the basis of information.

"we have the duty and the responsibility of being precise and scrupulous in furnishing information and therefore showing that we are reliable. What we say, whatever we write in the catalogue is absolutely true and it is really this way"

(Monica Corbellini head of the sector)

People with disabilities need certain and reliable information about the accessibility of the structures (measurements and technical details), for this reason in this Tour Operator's catalogues door widths, the height of toilet seats and main distances, etc. are meticulously described.

But beyond the physical and structural accessibility, they don't forget the extraordinary importance of the quality of the service, of the reception and of interpersonal relationships.

Realising that in each person's vacation the relationship that is established with personnel is fundamental, that a pleasant relationship with the reception staff, for example, or the resort staff is one of the main sources of satisfaction during the vacation; Viaggi del Ventaglio provide staff training and updating, and offer their clients custom, personalized solutions.

The training and updating is aimed at all sales personnel, (and therefore also the ones who work in the nearly 6000 travel agencies throughout Italy which commercialised their products); bookings staff, the commercial office, passenger agencies, call centres, in short of all those who relate with the clientele.

Viaggi del Ventaglio has a network of faithful agencies, called VENTAPOINTS, that have chosen to sell mainly the group's products: the Tour Operator helps them with their training with periodic training seminars at the headquarters in Milan.

Employees are trained on the characteristics and needs of disabled clients on the type of questions to ask them, and the way of asking them, how to welcome them in the agency, etc.

Training briefings both direct and at-a-distance, are also arranged for the staff of the resort villages, the VentaClubs.

In the VentaClub villages the staff is very numerous (the Italian staff alone numbers around 900 people) with a 70-80% turn over at the end of each season; this makes it necessary to train new people at the start of each season (approximately every 6 months).

Training internships are aimed particularly at the staff with the greatest contact with the client, that is the recreation staff, the hotel staff, the reception heads, those responsible for excursions.

Some solutions customised for disabled clients are offered in the villages:

- a guided "reconnaissance" tour of the village is organised on the arrival of clients in wheelchairs or for the sight-impaired; this gives them an opportunity of orienting themselves, of finding the briefest, easiest and most comfortable routes, allowing them to memorize the obstacles and to get to know the staff.
- the disabled client is followed personally from his/her arrival when he gets off airplane, where he finds Ventaglio staff already familiar with his needs to welcome him, who call him by name, accompany him to the village, take the guest around the structure to familiarise himself, point out all reference points and who where and how to call for any needs.
- Personalised informative briefings are scheduled , especially for deaf clients.
- For sight-impaired people rooms Braille directories, greatly appreciated, have been prepared.
- At the beach umbrellas are reserved for sight-impaired guests or guests in wheelchairs, something that is not possible for the other clients, and if desired, they can reserve an umbrella at the swimming pool as well.
- In the same way, it is possible to reserve a table at the restaurant, if desired.
- Support is provided for participation in recreational and sports activities (sailing, canoeing, archery, etc.), to try to help the guests have unforgettable experiences

The VentaClubs were among the first to have adopted the J.O.B seat. ("Jamm' Or' Bath"), able to transport a person with motor disabilities on the sand and even into the sea, thanks to its lightness and its large wheels that don't sink into the sand. Where the structure is accessible, bathing attendants help the person to move from the wheelchair to the JOB chair and vice versa or to bathe in sea.

In 7 of the villages, special lifters have been installed for entry into the swimming pool; these are discreet manual lifters that can be operated by anyone.

All of this thanks to an intelligent way of thinking, that considers the word "disabled" an adjective which qualifies a characteristic of the person and not the person himself.

6.5 METHA HOTEL GROUP

The Metha hotel group is a hotel company in Rimini with a multi-brand management (Mercure, Ramada, Express by Holiday Inn) of 3 and 4 star hotels with a average occupation rate of 79,7%.

"The success of the group is based on some managers that direct our philosophy: a tradition of hospitality, personalization and attention towards the client, excellent quality-price ratio."

(Orazio Tancini, managing director of the company in 2004)

The group can be cited as an example of best practice in their attention to the client thanks to a project, conducted in 2004, related to their *anti-allergy room* or *room with a bow*.

This project of the Metha Hotel Group has lead to the preparation of *special rooms for persons with respiratory problems*.

These rooms have been prepared following Federasma guidelines:

- use of specific cleaning products;
- special accessories (mattresses, mattress covers, pillows and pillow cases), that is covered with special high-thread-count "barrier" fabric which simultaneously allows transpiration yet hinders the passage of allergens;
- periodic checks of ventilation equipment;
- daily dust removal;
- use of instruments, such as vacuum cleaners with documented high efficiency and anti-mite cleaning products.

The *room with a bow* is the result of a series of precise procedures, regulations, methods and products to which the room is subject before the arrival of the client. *Avant-garde* sanitation of instruments and equipment, *ad hoc* linens, such as duvets with duvet covers (which are traditional in Northern European countries) washed daily in place of bedspreads. An accurate and precise procedures manual for professional cleaning, composed of instructions and guidelines which must be followed scrupulously was also prepared for the

housekeeping, staff and the training of such staff members was intensified, so that they are periodically trained and up-dated on the methods to guarantee a high standard of cleanliness of all the environments.

In the same way, to guarantee the maximum hygiene and cleanliness some recently renovated rooms in the structure will not have carpeting.

The group's attention to cleanliness and hygiene, however, would not be sufficient if human resources were not placed at the centre of the project: worker are therefore constantly involved in the identification of processes and in the verification of results.

The *bow* is the visual symbol chosen by the Metha Hotel Group for its extremely innovative project, as a guarantee of total control of the cleanliness of the room. A large white bow is placed on the bed and on objects which are particularly subject to heavy use, such as the toilet, telephone and remote control cover.

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