

ASK-IT and you shall receive

Ivo Cré sets the scene for a major European mobility-enhancement demonstration

Over the period March to June 2008, nine European cities are acting as pilot sites for the ASK-IT programme, which aims at helping mobility-impaired people move around more independently. Using devices such as smartphones and personal digital assistants (PDAs), triallers will use around 50 volunteers per site with a variety of impairments (see panel). They will test ways of giving people easier access real-time travel and other information, eg by delivering it aurally to the visually impaired, and largely graphically to the illiterate.

The ASK-IT (Ambient Intelligence System of Agents for Knowledge-based and Integrated Services for Mobility Impaired users) project is the largest research initiative currently being co-funded by the EC in the e-Inclusion area. (e-Inclusion set out to support EU Information Society policy-making by creating a knowledge base resource on eAccessibility).

The plan is for each site to run the service for at least a year after project-end in November 2008. The sites are:

Athens/Thessaloniki, Greece

The site combines the country's two main cities, with Athens International Airport as the connecting point. It aims to connect a range of ASK-IT applications to existing services, including traffic and travel information, demand-responsive transport and personal assistance, for users with motor disabilities, hearing problems and dyslexia.

Bucharest, Romania

The ASK-IT@Bucharest project has been working on scenarios such as:

A blind traveller has received an ASK-IT device and is planning a trip to an ASK-IT-enabled city abroad: checking flight and hotel details from an ASK-IT site abroad; booking through an ASK-IT e-booking service; and arranging a taxi from the destination airport to the hotel; and

A wheelchair user decides to tour Bucharest by public transport using an ASK-IT device for route information.

Genoa, Italy

The site is focusing on improving access to and the use of content and services currently offered by the cooperatively-run Terre di Mare information point. This provides tourism and access information on the Italian Province of Genoa for people with special needs.



The main terminal at Athens International Airport, an ASK-IT site

Helsinki, Finland

The site is promoting independent mobility for people with functional limitations by providing improved accessibility to existing tourism and public transport services, using context-related and real-time information. Stakeholders include STAKES (the Finnish National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health), Helsinki City Transport and transport technical research centre VTT.

The Hague, The Netherlands (satellite site)

The Hague is trialling an electronic 'Smartline' guideline for the visually-impaired, people, using satellite-based positioning and RFID to navigate the along a route between The Hague Central Station and the city centre. This passes a series of points of interest including Government ministries, the Dutch Parliament, The Hague City Hall, the central library and several theatres. The system also delivers information for navigating inside the buildings and offers a text-to-speech module.

Madrid, Spain

The Madrid pilot is focusing mainly on the physically-disabled persons and senior citizens. Coordinated by the Fundación Movilidad, a recently-established public body within Madrid City Council, and with Public Transport Consortium CTRM as travel information provider, it aims is to improve access to existing internet services and integrate them into a single portable device.

Newcastle/Gateshead, UK

Managed by the Transport Operations Research Group (TORG) at Newcastle University, the site is demonstrating multi-modal travel and mobility information, point-of-interest (POI) search and information, and emergency support, using pervasive technolo-

gy based on pioneering, small-scale wireless sensor modules or 'motes'. One specific piece of research is investigating indoor positioning, route guidance and information delivery, focusing on the Discovery Museum of the history of, and life in, North-East England.

Nuremberg, Germany

The site, being run by the Nuremberg Association for Communications Technology (NIK), focuses on the visually-impaired, offering including guided tours with information on access to public transport and leisure destinations, electronic health services and integrated multimedia information.

It aims further to develop what NIK considers to be an already good infrastructure, which includes overall 3G coverage and detailed digital maps.

Ivo Cré is Project Manager at POLIS which is responsible for site selection and dissemination of ASK-IT.

www.ask-it.org
www.einclusion-eu.org
www.siemens.com
www.hit.certh.gr

ASK-IT

The four-year ASK-IT project started in October 2004. It involves 57 partners from industrial organisations (mobile phones manufacturers, software specialists and telecoms operators), universities, research organisations and associations for the elderly and disabled in eight countries,

It is being coordinated by Siemens (Spain) and the Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH) in Greece. ASK-IT aims specifically at tackling the needs of people with the following conditions:

- Wheelchair use;
- Lower and upper limb impairment;
- Upper body impairment;
- Physiological impairment;
- Communication impairment;
- Psychological impairment ;
- Cognitive impairment;
- Vision impairment; and
- Hearing impairment.