

INFORMATION AS A FACTOR OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACCESSIBLE TOURISM FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT: Article describes access to tourist information and the consistency of tourist offers with this kind of information for people with disabilities. The conception of accessible tourism was presented as well as the model of tourist information availability with the demonstration of technology applied to ensure objective information about all services so as people with disabilities could evaluate the scope of accessibility according to their personal needs. Based on the analysis of information systems found on Internet tourist portals what is presented is the scope of information availability from the point of view of people with disabilities. These information systems largely contribute to the development of accessible tourism. In Poland, the issue of implementing the assumption of accessible tourism, including the availability of a coherent information system is an important challenge that requires integrated systemic activities of many entities.

KEY WORDS: tourist information, accessible tourism, people with disabilities

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Introduction

Accessible tourism is a form of tourism which requires cooperation between many interested parties in order to enable persons with various needs related to mobility, sight, hearing and cognition to function independently. This process demands collaboration and commitment of many entities at all organisational levels and tourist management regarding universal design of tourist products, services and the environment (Buhalis, Darcy 2011). Tourism should be perceived in systemic terms, i.e. it should be provided with universal accessibility considering its all elements such as: the transport system, tourist and paratourist infrastructure, tourist attractions

and assets, tourist information. What is helpful is the development and application of technology to ensure objective information about all services regardless of their accessibility level so that tourists could individually evaluate the scope of accessibility according to their personal needs.

One of the elements of travelling for people with disabilities is accessibility which involves: a disability type, tourist information, tourism development, convenient location (Burnett, Baker 2001). Access to tourist information should be a crucial factor determining a disabled person's decision about travelling. It is also not less important at the next stages of the journey. This is so because disabled tourists have less flexibility in changing the course of travel, mainly due

to the fragmentary nature of the adjustment of the tourist offer to their needs (e.g. an accommodation facility is adapted but a tourist trail is not). A significant role of information about the possibility of using tourist services and their accessibility for the disabled and also the lack of it as well as negligence is noticeable and emphasised in many publications: Buhalis, Darcy, Ambrose (2012), Buhalis, Michopoulou (2013), Darcy (2011), Skalska (2010, 2011), Kołodziejczak (2014), Zajadacz (2014), Zajadacz et al. (2014), Michopoulou, Darcy, Ambrose, Buhalis (2016).

The research aims to present the importance of information for people with disabilities in the development of accessible tourism. The first part of the article demonstrates a geographical model of disability and a model of tourist information availability, whereas the second one shows the implications of using technology to ensure objective information about tourist services.

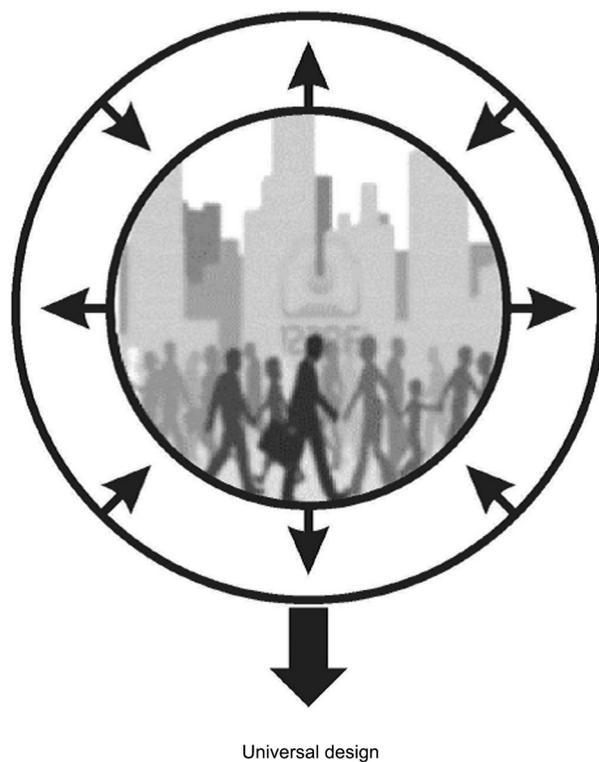
Tourist information in accessible tourism

Accessible tourism allows easy access to the tourist space, facilities and tourist services and their independent use by the disabled. The needs of people with disabilities are not treated as special but as one of those occurring in society, which should be reflected in universal design. The basic task of accessible tourism is to stop focusing on the features of disability and to concentrate on various social needs and adjusting the conditions of geographical (social and physical) space to them. In tourism, the condition which must be fulfilled is that of accessibility, i.e. a product must be accessible. Accessibility for people with disabilities means a possibility of using the physical environment, transport, technology and communication-information systems and other facilities and services on equal terms with others (European Disability Strategy 2010–2020; Renewed commitment to a barrier-free Europe: COM.2010. 636, Brussels: 7). The greater availability of tourist information is useful for both those who want to travel but encounter various difficulties and people involved in the service of the tourist industry.

Buhalis and Darcy (2011: 10–11) offer the following definition: “Accessible tourism is a form

of tourism that involves collaborative processes between stakeholders that enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments. This definition adopts a whole of life approach where people through their lifespan benefit from accessible tourism provision. These include people with permanent and temporary disabilities, seniors, obese, families with young children and those working in safer and more socially sustainably designed environments”.

The development of the conception of accessible tourism is based on the geographical model of disability whose main postulate is to concentrate on diversified social needs and adapt



Accessibility of: space, services, spheres of social life

Fig. 1. Geographical model of disability.

Arrows symbolise the main directions of activities related to: the desire to help people with disabilities, the elimination of barriers and limitations in the physical and social environment, the use of the individual potential of each person and the development of a universal design that respects the needs of as many people as possible including the disabled, not recognising any group of these needs as special.

Source: Zajadacz, Śniadek (2014: 211).

the conditions of the geographical environment to them, rather than focusing on a disability. In practice, this leads to the concentration of activities primarily on the development of social inclusion where disability-related traits are not treated as special, but as one of many occurring in society which should be taken into account in universal design and in the provision of information (Fig. 1).

In practical terms, research concerning this model contributed to the recognition of the nature of barriers in the geographical environment for people with various kinds of disabilities in different spatial scales. Their results served to create tools to facilitate movement (e.g. the use of mental maps, navigation systems, supplementing the tourist information system with data on the accessibility of space, facilities, tourist services).

Tourist information is defined as a system comprising an organised set of data for organisers and consumers of tourist services, a network of tourist information centres and points and the methodology for gathering, processing, verifying and sharing data (Bucholz 2010: 10). Professional tourist information is necessary at each stage of tourist consumption, but its type, scope and form should be different. Eichhorn et al. (2008) stated that information should comprise five interrelated components: information richness and reliability, appropriate sources, communication, and customer-oriented services (Fig. 2).

Most often, the participants of tourist activity expect to obtain practical and up-to-date information which will help them choose their leisure destination, provide knowledge about the time, price and other conditions of a tourist event, allow completing information about tourist reception areas, etc.

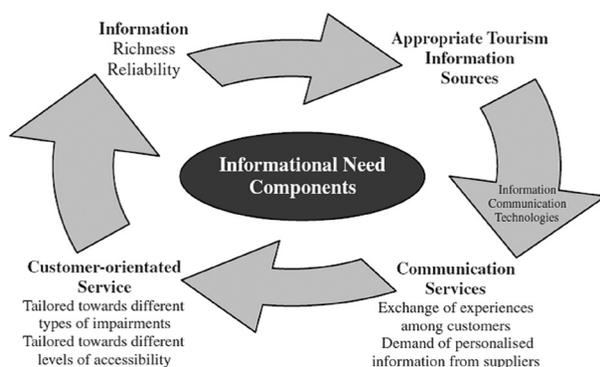


Fig. 2. Components of interrelated needs. Source: Eichhorn et al. (2008: 192).

Due to the character of tourist information, it can be distinguished as follows (Kruczek, Walas 2004):

- functional, concerning the basic aspects of travel, such as time, place, transport means, duration, type of accommodation, number of nights, etc.,
- reminding, the purpose of which is to remind about the facts contained in functional information in order to provide participants with the best knowledge of the course of events,
- sightseeing, giving knowledge about the tourist values of a destination area and places situated along the travel route.

As a rule, tourist information is free, its purpose being reliable information and popularisation of specific tourist products or their elements.

The accessibility of a tourist offer for people with disabilities is determined by: tourist information in field conditions (facilities, trails) as well as in tourist guides, booklets, on webpages, physical adjustment of buildings and surrounding space, and competent service.

Accessibility is associated with such features as: usefulness, functionality and universality. Zajadacz (2014) indicates that accessibility traits relate to location (when one can get somewhere), information (something is understandable, clear, up-to-date), social relations (when someone is communicative) and the purpose of activity (which can be easily obtained due to the price and a difficulty level). The concept of accessible tourism constituted the basis for creating a model of tourist information availability (Fig. 3). Tourist information is based on environmental, social, economic and institutional resources. The preparation of available tourist information requires understanding that people obtain it in a variety of ways. It should take into account both the needs of people with disabilities and those who, in a given moment, have difficult access to it, e.g. situations in which visual or sound information is difficult to perceive (Skalska 2010). From the point of view of every tourist, also a disabled one, precise tourist information must fulfil a number of crucial conditions.

Kruczek and Walas (2004) claim that accurate tourist information should be communicative, available, up-to-date, thorough and honest. Information ought to be communicative in a sense that a message does not require additional

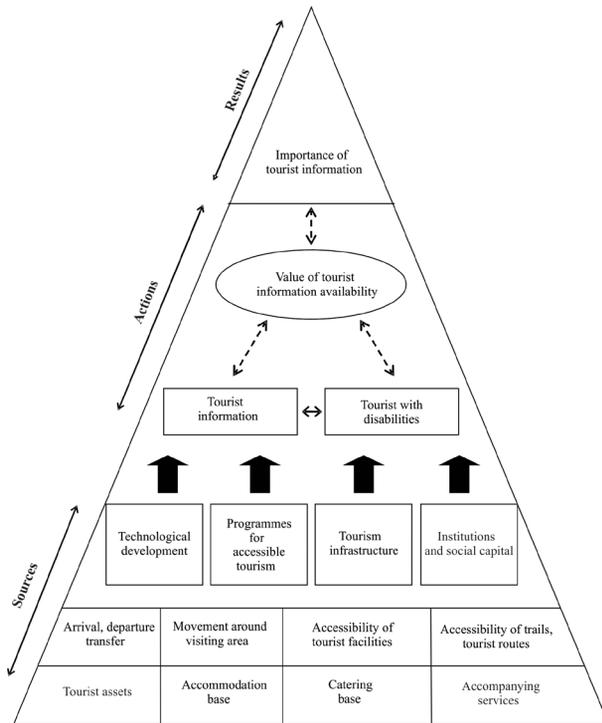


Fig. 3. Model of tourist information availability.
Source: own study.

improvements in order to understand and use it; it is easy to perceive. It should be available to the widest possible audience, hence its content needs to be written in plain language, clear and additionally supplemented (explained) with sound. From the point of view of special needs of people with disabilities, a clear communication sign system is important. The attribute of up-to-date information is related to the flow rate from the source to the recipient. Current news become outdated ever faster, therefore more attention is paid to the flow and processing of data and a continual update. The obsolete information is just as useless as the wrong information. Reliability and authenticity are important features of information because people with disabilities have great difficulties in verifying it. Inconsistency of information with the actual data can result from both intentional action caused by bad will or by the carelessness of those providing it (Kruczek, Walas 2004). The information features mentioned should contain both categories:

- information about assets, facilities, routes, tourist trails, the source of which is the Internet (available on stationary and mobile devices), tourist information points and tourist publications (guides, leaflets, maps);

- information in the field - marked facilities, routes and tourist attractions.

A full awareness of barriers which can be encountered in a tourist facility, or during a tourist event allows making conscious choice and avoiding many unexpected, too often disappointing experiences. A person with limited mobility receives many times information about the general accessibility of a facility which practically appears to be wrong; sometimes "accessibility" understood incorrectly is limited to the entrance to a building. Tourist information is expected to be integrated, i.e. it should involve not only single tourist facilities but the entire base in a given place (access to historical treasures, accommodation sites, catering, beaches etc.) and included in central information systems, information bases controlled by travel agencies. A proper information distribution channel ought to be selected (the Internet, specialist magazines, TV, radio, social media) (Skalska 2004).

Tourist information system for people with disabilities: A case study

According to Skalska (2011), when preparing information for people with disabilities, attention should be paid to several rules:

1. Information should be available to the widest possible audience, i.e. clear, understandable and unambiguous, supplemented (explained) additionally by sound, graphics, animation. What is also useful is short, simple summaries of information. This is significant not only for people with a lower intellectual level or those having difficulties in reading, but also for persons who use sign language. In turn, summaries (short descriptions) of the visual context convey the information better to visually impaired and blind persons.
2. It is important that extensive information be divided into short fragments, and recipients could decide about the time they will use it (e.g. so that the information would not disappear before a user can read it and react to it, except when it is necessary due to the specificity of the information).
3. The visually impaired and blind as well as people with hearing impairments should be provided with alternative ways of receiving

information. However, its scope ought to be the same as for other users.

4. If the information is given by the Internet, an easy navigation system is necessary; with the blind person in mind, graphics and animation should be removed or limited, or be made easily avoided, or replaced by an appropriate text (description). A suitable navigation system allows the recipient to find what is needed at the moment.
5. In multimedia presentations, available via the Internet, all relevant visual information should be provided with an audio description. It is essential to use appropriate technologies that synchronise the text with multimedia techniques.
6. One ought to make sure that the text and graphics used for providing information are equally clear and have the same content in both colour and black and white version. To emphasise a specific type of information it is worth using not only a relevant colour but also, e.g. the right typeface or font size. Moreover, a proper contrast between the background and the text should be provided in order to provide access to information for the visually impaired and people who have difficulty distinguishing colours. In terms of appropriate background and text contrasting, it is worth using expert advice.
7. Recipients of Internet information should be able to stop shiny, moving, flashing elements with a rapidly changing intensity of light. What should be taken care of is websites (windows) which ought not to disappear or change suddenly and automatically without the knowledge and decision of users because this could lead to a loss of control, disorientation, disinformation and, as a result, to disconnection. It is also necessary to properly prepare the system for redirecting users to other websites.

International symbols of accessibility are important and generally accepted, although not always widespread, elements of accurate information. In Poland, the most popular is a pictogram illustrating a person sitting in a wheelchair; it is difficult, however, to encounter signs indicating accessibility for the blind and visually impaired, enlarged print, sign language translations, hearing aids, devices with the TTY system (*teletype*

*writer*¹, or *Closed Captions*²). The source literature deals ever more often with the need to develop these symbols, to give them certain gradation that would show the degree of service accessibility (Darcy 2010).

The Tourist Information System in Poland includes a set of measures which provide tourists and organisers of tourist services with an easy and full access to tourist information, i.e. a well-ordered data set in any place or any time. The basis for the system is created by:

- centres and tourist information points (CIT, IT) constituting an integrated network;
- the Internet Tourist Information System (the National Tourist Portal) as well as regional and local tourist information.

The greater availability of the Tourist Information System for the disabled is associated with measures of the following nature:

- informative - the creation of a continually updated data bank about conveniences in the tourist offer - significant for a particular kind of disability; and
- technical - the adaptation of the communication form to the perception ability of recipients (Zajadacz et al. 2014).

At present, we have ever greater access to the Internet, therefore tourist information for people with disabilities should appear in an electronic version, posted on the websites of particular cities, towns, regional tourist organisations with the possibility of downloading it to a smartphone or tablet. Tourist guides should be available in two versions; people with physical disabilities and those with hearing impairments could read it in PDF and the blind and physically disabled could listen to it in mp3.

These conditions are not fulfilled in the bookmark "Plan your trip" on the website of the Polish Tourist Organisation³. Indeed, we can find databases without accessibility signs concerning: tourist attractions, accommodation, gastronomy,

¹ The TTY system (*teletype writer*) is used by the deaf and hard of hearing to communicate by writing and reading texts; most often applied in phones.

² The *Closed Caption* system consists in transcribing spoken text and displaying it on TV screens, video media, cinema screens; usually applied by the hard of hearing.

³ <https://polska.travel/pl> (accessed: 25 November 2018).

health resorts and spa, and certified tourist information. Only the information on the internet portal is adapted to the perception of the visually impaired through enlarged and contrasting print.

A good example of an up-to-date, comprehensive and convenient tourist information bank based on the principles of universal design used in accessible tourism is the official tourist website of Spain⁴. Its recipients are all tourists and also the tourist industry which can present its offer. On this portal, translated also into Polish, we can find the contact to the Counsellor's Office for Tourism of the Spanish Embassy in Poland which deals with the promotion of tourism in Spain and helps to establish cooperation within the tourist sector addressed to tour operators, travel agencies, public administration and individuals.

The fact is that a great effort has been taken in Spain in order to accommodate the needs of the disabled by removing barriers, providing access to cultural and nature-related propositions, creating regulations in the field of transport, construction and urban planning. The website contains databases in the PDF format with detailed and useful information for people with disabilities. These are: 1) historical treasures, museums, tourist attractions, 2) restaurants, 3) accommodation, 4) sites and natural events, and 5) sites as well as entertainment and recreation activities. In addition, there are other PDF documents on the portal providing practical information on accessibility for people with disabilities in particular regions and cities in Spain. Apart from these databases there are links to Internet websites: green tracks accessible for the disabled (concerns tourist trails) and accessible heritage cities. Databases are in Spanish. Each description of a facility or place consists of a photo and five segments of information with the international system of accessibility signs (Fig. 4): 1) contact details, 2) general information, 3) physical accessibility: access, hall, reception desk, walking and trip routes, adapted toilet, 4) visual accessibility: access, a route around a facility, stairs, 5) auditory accessibility: information and tips, toilets.

The internet portal is available in terms of technical requirements for people with various disabilities and created in accordance with the WCAG

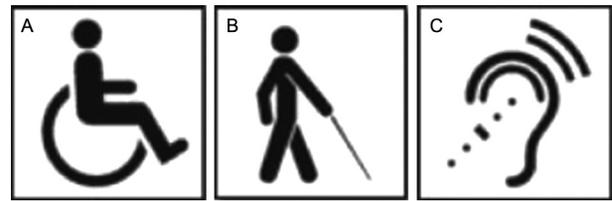


Fig. 4. International symbols of accessibility. A - international symbol of accessibility for the disabled; B - accessibility for the blind and visually impaired; C - available hearing aids.

Source: Skalska (2010: 38).

2.0 specification (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines in the 2.0 version). Mobile applications can be downloaded: Parkible, Accessibility, APPScesibles. The website was created as part of the ATP4SME project and was financed with the support of the Erasmus + programme of the EU.

Conclusion

Visibility, reliability and up-to-date facts are the basic features of tourist information. An increasing number of publications and internet websites are created for tourists with disabilities. However, due to the principles of both universal design and costs of publication it is advisable to include information on the accessibility of facilities and services in all publications intended for tourists. It ought to be emphasised that tourists, as main subjects of all activities aimed at enabling them to relax in the way they dream, need information at all stages of their journey. To this end, they use various databases of tourist information which, despite having many recipients, have also many creators. Only consistent and systematic cooperation of all information providers and the ability to react quickly to the needs of tourists can make the system work efficiently and the desired results will be achieved.

Contemporary tourism cannot function effectively in a competitive environment and meet various needs and preferences of tourists, variable over time and space, without the use of modern, integrated, network information systems at a regional, national and global scale. These information systems significantly contribute to the development of accessible tourism. In Poland, the issue of implementing the assumptions of accessible tourism, including the availability of

⁴ <https://www.spain.info/pl/informacion-practica/turismo-accesible/> [accessed: 25 November 2018].

a coherent information system so that people have a free choice of convenient tourist routes and walking trips, tailored to individual expectations, is an important challenge that requires integrated systemic actions of numerous entities.

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