



Module 1 Learning Unit 2

Accessible Tourism History and Business Case



Games Without Barriers

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In recent decades, the tendency to consider the problems of people with disabilities from a rights-based perspective has matured and has become widely established at international level.

Attention to disability issues in public policy-making began to grow significantly in the 1980s.

In 1981 "The International Year of Disabled People" was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly aimed at increasing awareness of the needs, abilities and aspirations of disabled people and their participation, equality and integration.

In 1983 the UN decided to proclaim worldwide the "Decade of the Disabled" (1983-1992).

Initiatives at international level have been followed by initiatives at EU level the most important of which were:

In 1994, a White Paper entitled 'Action for the future' addressed social integration and independence of disabled people, and the 'European guide of good practice: towards equal opportunities for disabled people' was released in December 1996.

In 1996, the European Commission published a communication entitled 'Equality of Opportunity for People with Disabilities - A New Community Disability Strategy 1996'. It is based, above all, on the UN's 'Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities of 1993', which emphasise the removal of environmental barriers over individuals' functional limitations, with a view to equal participation of disabled people in society.

In November 2000, the European Council adopted a directive, which created a general framework to promote equal treatment of persons with disabilities in employment and work. It recognised that the failure to provide 'reasonable accommodation' in the workplace could constitute discrimination.

An EU action programme to combat discrimination against persons with disabilities (2001-2006) was adopted to stimulate the introduction of specific measures to tackle discrimination and was designed to complement the work of the EU and its Member States, particularly their legislative work.

The year 2003 was named 'European Year of People with Disabilities' to highlight and raise public awareness of the situation faced by disabled people. To this end, the EU launched an action plan entitled Equal opportunities for people with disabilities: a European Action Plan (2004-2010). It sought to ensure that disability issues were incorporated into all EU policies that may affect the lives of people with disabilities.

Along with the attention to the rights of people with disabilities, attention has developed over the years with regard to the usability of tourism services by people with disabilities or more generally by people with specific access requirements.

In 1989 a group of British experts, including the English Tourist Board and Holiday Care Service (Europe's first national information and advice service for tourism for people with disabilities), published a report entitled "Tourism For All" at the end of a Congress organised in the UK. This Report contained 63 recommendations for the tourism industry, which urged operators to take into account the needs of all visitors, and in particular disadvantaged groups

of people, when drawing up their programmes, so that they could be integrated into tourism policies.

Subsequently, the approach taken by the United Kingdom was followed by various European and American organisations working in the same field. In this way the term "Tourism for All" soon took on an international declination: "Tourisme pour Tous", "Tourismus für Alle", "Turismo per Tutti" and "Turismo para Todos" and identified, in each country, all the organisations and bodies involved in promoting the development of accessible tourism, as autonomously as possible, also to people with disabilities.

The two conferences organised in London on this subject in 1989 and 1993 were considered to be the most influential initiatives of the time. The second conference, "Tourism 2000" in October 1993, was the occasion to present the first European study "Profiting from opportunities" carried out by Touche Ross on the potential economic impact of people with disabilities on the tourism market. Its results showed that there were 30 million disabled people interested in travelling but for various reasons they were still excluded from the official tourism circuits.

These historical data have been confirmed by more recent studies, both at European and international level, despite the objective difficulty of evaluating the market on the basis of statistical data, due to the lack of a standardised system of classifications used to define people expressing specific needs. Among these, the study "Economic Impact and travel patterns of accessible tourism in Europe" commissioned in 2014 by the European Commission provides a coherent picture of the current and future potential demand of accessible tourism in Europe and estimates its economic impact. According to this study, in 2011 there were 138.6 million people with access needs in the EU, of which 35.9% were people with disabilities aged 15-64, and 64.1% were the older population aged 65 or above. In 2012, people with access needs in the EU took approximately 783 million trips, thus generating a total gross value added contribution of about €356 billion and a total employment of about 8.7 million persons.

However, the overall potential is far greater: if it would be possible to increase the accessibility of tourism-related facilities significantly, then up to 1.231 million trips per year could be realized. If accessibility is significantly improved, the total economic contribution generated by the EU tourists with specific access needs is expected to increase against the current contribution by roughly 36%.

Moreover, like most of the people, persons with disabilities or long-term health conditions rarely travel alone; on the contrary, they usually prefer or need to travel with relatives or friends. According to the previous EU study, on average, these visitors travel with about 1.9 companions, on average. Therefore the economic contribution of Accessible Tourism will be multiplied by a similar factor if the travel companion effect is taken into account. From the above it is evident that making tourism services accessible can have an important, positive impact on the tourism sector.

But what is the situation of the supply of accessible tourism services? According to another study commissioned by the European Commission in 2015 – "Mapping and Performance Check of the Supply of Accessible Tourism

Services” - it is estimated that only 9.2% of the existing supply of tourism facilities and services have at least some level of provision for travellers with disabilities or other specific access requirements. This means that over 3 million tourism businesses are not prepared to adequately cater to the accessibility market, with an estimated gap of 27.8% between the current offer and the demand for accessible tourist services.

Three key barriers prevent businesses from becoming increasingly accessible: infrastructure and physical barriers, financial barriers including the lack of a strong business case and knowledge and information barriers. Many public and private enterprises don't know the needs of customers with specific access requirements or often misinterpret them. They also underestimate the value of investments in breaking down architectural barriers and often exaggerate such costs. Accessibility is very often seen as a "problem" related to compliance with legal requirements rather than a "business opportunity".

Instead, accessible tourism represents a great opportunity. If supply meets the demand of tourists with specific access requirements, the tourism industry benefits from many advantages: increase in tourist flows and expenditure, reduction of seasonality, average longer stays, competitive advantage, better overall image and quality of its services since accessible services are better services for all customers.

But it is important to remember that in order for these benefits to fully achieve their potential, attention to accessibility issues should cover the whole chain of tourism services, that comprises all the services a tourist uses before, during and after his/her trip, from the planning stage up until the return back home.

This means involving a large number of actors in the tourism industry: not only the accommodation facilities, but also restaurants, transport, museums, monuments, sport facilities, events, information and welcoming services, guide and accompanying services and so on.

It's necessary to understand that each element of the tourism chain influences and depends on the others: if one of the elements is weak, in terms of quality and visitor satisfaction, the holiday can be strongly compromised as a whole.

A hotel without access barriers, but located in a site where the recreational and cultural facilities are not accessible to people with specific access requirements, would be less attractive to these visitors. The same would apply to an accessible museum or monument that can't be reached by suitable means of transport or hasn't adequate hospitality facilities nearby to accommodate customers with specific access requirements.

Destinations should therefore create a comprehensive supply of Tourism for All products and services in which all the elements of the supply chain (reservation systems, accommodation, transport, etc.) are easily accessed.