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"SOCIALTOURISM: Research for the improvement of knowledge in accessible social tourism for all in Spain"

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ABSTRACT

Recently, national and international organisms have declared their vocation to favor the tourism access for all. However, and due to the existing limitations, the situation of the Spanish tourism sector does not cover the needs of dependent older and disabled people. In response to this situation, Polibienestar is executing an investigation to improve the Accessible Social Tourism in Spain (SOCIALTOURISM) with the aim of increasing the sustainability and competitiveness of Spanish tourism sector. During the project execution, Polibienestar is developing tools based on universal design that will allow the tourism for all and increase the quality of life and welfare of citizens.

KEYWORDS

Accessible social tourism, universal design, dependent older, disabled people.

1. Introduction

The European institutions are displaying a growing interest in social tourism, as illustrated by various studies, opinions, reports and conferences being organized, promoted or coordinated by the Parliament, the Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC, 2006). Nowadays, this interest is addressing by national and international organisms to favor the Accessible Social Tourism, which is focused on elderly, disabled and dependent people. Thus, there are some initiatives that try to make tourism accessible for these groups, such as Europe Senior Tourism program and the IMSERSO social tourism in Spain with international recognition. In this sense, it is important to highlight the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (European Commission, 2010) which try that people with disabilities can enjoy their fully rights and participate in society. These rights include the right to free movement and to have full access to cultural and recreational activities.

In fact, the access to tourism and leisure activities is a right recognize by Universal Declaration of Human Right (United Nations, 1948), by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2008) and by General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in their statutes (WTO, 2009).

In this sense, the promotion of the social tourism accessible for all is, for the market share that it represents and for the recognition of the rights of disabled people, the most interesting type of social tourism. Moreover, it provides economic benefits because it contributes to employment and regional development, in particular combating tourism's seasonality that improves the quality and stability of employment in tourist sector (EESC, 2006).

In addition, some studies have linked holidaying with positive effects on health and welfare (Gilbert and Abdullah, 2003; Quinn et al, 2008; Minnaert et al, 2009; McCabe, 2009; McCabe et al, 2010). For this reason, tourism and leisure activities could be considered in sustainability social policies that link social and health policies and try to reduce the human, social and economic cost caused by the separate organization of social and health systems (Garcés, 2000; Garcés et al, 2011).

However, the existence of barriers related to the lack of attention by the tourism sector to the needs of resources accessibility for people with disabilities, is limiting its development. Thus, the current situation of accessible social tourism shows that tourism sector does not take the advantage of the mentioned economic and social benefits of accessible social tourism because the tourist agents do not respond to the needs and demand of dependent older and disabled people. In this sense, some studies had revealed that:

- The disabled tourists rely almost exclusively on information from friends, relatives or associations (Darcy, 2006). This reveals that there is a lack of reliable information about accessible tourism.

- The tourist spaces do not obey the currently accessibility normative, sometimes because they were built before the normative and sometimes because businessman and businesswoman do not see the benefits to make the investment in adapting their facilities or activities (Fernández, 2007). In Spain, only obey the accessibility ideal standards the 0.7% of the 3 and 4 stars hotels, the 5% of first and second category of camping and the 7% of rural cottages (Alonso et al, 2002; Consumer-Grupo Eroski, 2002; Cayo, 2005; Fernández, 2007).

- The accessibility laws are different between regions (Fernández, 2007). This lack of homogeneity implies different standards for each region and, moreover, the standards are not based on universal accessibility criteria (Carretero et al, 2010).

- The tourism industry does not have general knowledge about disability matters (Darcy, 2002) and there is a lack of training about accessibility for tourism employees (Fernández, 2007).

In response to this situation, members of the Polibienestar Research Centre at the Universitat de València, expert group in social tourism accessible for all that compose the research team and the technical secretariat of Thinktur and the founders of the Technological Network of Accessible Tourism (TourismAll), are executing a research to improve the accessible social tourism in Spain (SOCIALTOURISM). The aim of this research is to increase the sustainability

and competitiveness of Spanish tourism sector through the improvement of knowledge in social tourism accessible for all.

During the project execution, Polibienestar is developing tools for public and private entities related to tourism industry that will allow the tourism for all and increase the quality of life and welfare of citizens. This project tries to alleviate the current mentioned lacks creating a universal tourism accessibility model, a model of good practices, a model of accessible tourism training that will be included in the official master of Tourism Management and Planning of Valencia University and releasing and transferring to the scientific community, authorities and business the knowledge in accessible social tourism. In this sense, with the development of this project it is pretended that the social exclusion for belonging to a specific group will be avoided in the access to tourism.

2. Methodology

The methodology that Polibienestar uses is based on its previous experience in accessibility evaluations and projects like the *Study for the improvement of Canarian tourism: generation of accessible tourist itineraries* funded by the Canarian Government and the *Study of the accessibility in tourist places and monumental net of Menorca* funded by Island Council of Menorca. And also, their researchers are revising the existing bibliography about accessibility, universal design, disabled people, elderly, architect barriers and other issues related with accessible social tourism that are able in studies, laws, European normative, publications and standards. The main publications that Polibienestar is using are:

- The Accessibility guide for companies (Rovira-Beleta, 2010).
- The DALCO criteria to facilitate accessibility to the environment through universal accessibility (AENOR, 2007).
- European and Spanish normative about transports.

3. Results

The main part of the project is the design of a universal tourism accessibility model suitable for each tourism resource that could be used by private and public entities for evaluating their grade of accessibility, providing reliable information about their accessibility and knowing the keys to implement the increases in accessibility. For designing this universal model, all the elements to evaluate have been classified for type of tourism resource considering all the resources that form part of the tourism supply chain. Thus, it is consider all the spaces and elements that interact with tourists, from the trip beginning when they start the trip at their home until they finish the trip coming back to their home (Figure 1). In this sense, it is important to emphasize that if only one of these resources do not be accessible the whole tourist destination would be not accessible.
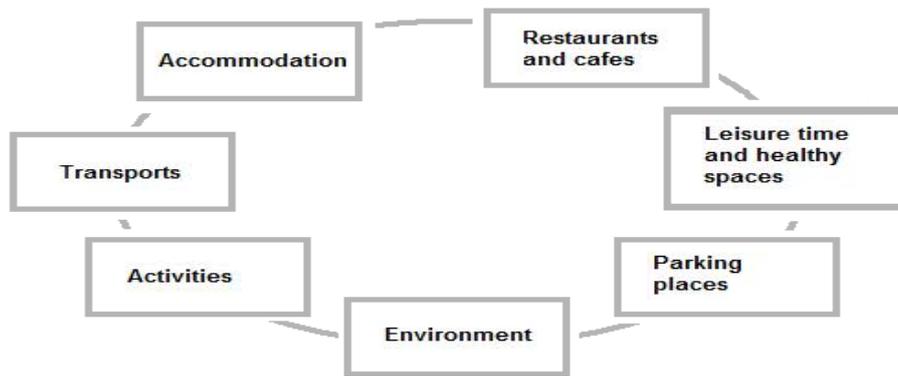
Figure 1: tourism supply chain

The different areas and elements that are being considered in each resource are represented in the following table (Table 1). In this sense, it is important to mention that this list is not definitive and could be extended during the project execution as the knowledge in accessible tourism develops.

Common aspects	
Management	Integration accessibility in entity organization chart
	Action protocol
	Accessibility system revision
	Maintenance service
Personal	Training
	Clients' treatment
	Time availability
Communication and information	Information reliability
	External communication
Immediate environment	Public transport nearness
	Surface
	Itinerary
	Urban furniture
	Obstacles
	Lighting
	Crosswalk
	Signaling
	Stairs
	Ramps

Access	Doors
	Lighting
	Signaling
	Surface
	Itinerary
	Obstacles
Communication	Vertical communications
	Horizontal communications
Common toilets	Dimensions and distribution
	Furniture
Hall and Waiting area	Dimensions and distribution
	Furniture
Parking	
Emergency/evacuation system	
Specific aspects for:	Transport
	Accommodation
	Restaurants and cafes
	Cultural, leisure and health spaces
	Environment
	Activities

Table 1: relation of areas and elements

Once all of the tourism resources and their areas and elements had been identified, the universal criterions for each of them have been established. For this task, Polibienestar has considered the universal design that implies that products and environments can be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without the necessity of adaptations or specialized design (The Center for Universal Design, 1995). Thus, it does not consist on creating special situations and products designed just for the elderly, disabled or dependent person, but to ensure that products, services and tourist areas have been created and designed to satisfy the greatest number of customers. Specifically, this design allows that all people use the product and avoid the discrimination.

In recent years, some products have been developed considering disabled and dependent people, such as remote controls and low-floor buses, whose use are widespread and have been very useful for most people. Thus, the products, services and facilities that are produced considering universal design satisfy better and longer the users. It produces the life lengthening of the product,

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service or facility (Design of all foundation) that allows achieving a return on investments made by businessman and business woman in the creation or adaptation of their tourism offer.

In this sense, universal accessibility is a key element for any organization that wants to ensure equal opportunities for its customers by offering the same access to any part of the built environment and the use and enjoyment of the services provided. Moreover, it gives a competitive advantage over others because it provides a component differentiator from the competition not accessible and, therefore, a greater possibility of maintenance and growth in the tourism sector.

Also, Polibienestar has considered different grades of accessibility which give more information about the characteristics of the tourist space. In this sense, it has differentiated between:

- Accessible: element that can be used and enjoyed for anyone in safety and autonomy.

- Practicable: element that does not obey all the requirements to be accessible but it allows its autonomous use by people with reduced mobility or other functional limitation.

- Not accessible: element that cannot be used by all the population because does not present a universal design.

And finally, for the universal tourism accessibility model, Polibienestar has as well as considered three types of disabilities that could be affected by the tourism resources (physical, mental and sensorial) taking into account the different needs of each of them.

All of this information is collecting for each tourism resource from Polibienestar previous experience and the existing related bibliography, as said in the methodology section, and it is reflecting in tables like as follows (Table 2):

Element		Accessibility grade or level	Physical accessibility
Space without seats in the bus transport	**Length**	Accessible	> or = 1.300mm
		Not accessible	< 1.300mm
	Width	Accessible	> or = 750 mm
		Not accessible	< 750 mm

Table 2: Space without seats in the bus transport

One of the next steps of Polibienestar research is the elaboration an evaluation questionnaire of universal tourism accessibility for each resource. This questionnaire would be used for Administrations and tourist companies in order to know their grade of accessibility. The questionnaire would be elaborated in card form in order to make it practical. Each card will consider a resource area, taking into account do not consider redundant elements. The provisional card

distribution is the following (Table 3), but once more, it is important to mention that this distribution is not definitive and could be extended during the project execution as the knowledge in accessible tourism develops.

CARDS	Leisure time, health and cultural	Shops	Environment	Parking places	Public buildings	Accommodation	Transport
Management	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Personal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Communication and information	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Environment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Access	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Toilet	X	X		X	X	X	X
Hall	X	X		X	X	X	X
Waiting area	X						
Parking place	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Emergency and evacuation system	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Transport							
Features							X
Vehicles:							X
common aspects							X
train							X
bus							X
underground and tram							X
sea transport							X
taxi							X
plane							X
Accommodation						X	
Restaurant and cafes	X				X	X	X
Leisure spaces	X	X				X	
Activities	X	X			X	X	
TOTAL OF CARDS	14	12	8	10	12	14	20

Table 3: Card questionnaire distribution

Furthermore, Administrations and tourist companies could use our future guide of accessibility improvement implementation and our future protocol of use of universal tourism accessibility design in order to implement the accessibility increases in their facilities, products or services.

Subsequently, results will be captured in a computer system for using online the universal tourism model in which be able all the results of Polibienestar research. The computer system will diagnose the accessibility grade of each resource through the designed questionnaire as a percentage of resource accessibility. Moreover, it will detect the elements to change and will give the keys to implement these changes and transform the tourist resources in accessible according the universal design criterions established. Additionally, the system could be used in a potential study of universal design monitoring in Spain and, if the computer system is extended to other languages, in other countries or in Europe.

4. Conclusions

Along Polibienestar research it has revealed the lack of various relevant factors in accessible social tourism, such as reliable information of the offer supply, normative or criterion standardization, sensitivity about accessibility by the companies and scientific knowledge about the benefits and the impact of the social tourism, that are mentioned in the introduction section. With this project, Polibienestar is trying to alleviate these lacks increasing the knowledge in accessible social tourism and sharing it with public and private entities and scientific community.

On the other hand, the diagnosis of the adaptation to universal criterions is very useful to tourist entities but it does not give them the keys to know how to become accessible. In this sense, Polibienestar developed tools will detect the elements to change or improve and the keys to make the suitable changes to the resource to become accessible.

And finally, the quality is a relevant factor in tourism spaces due the currently competence of the sector and the necessity to adapt them to the change of tourists needs. Polibienestar has realized that the quality is achieved through the universal design because it guarantees that products, services and environments are appropriate for the greatest number of people without adaptations and avoiding discrimination and social exclusion for belonging to a specific group.

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