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## ACCESSIBLE TOURISM SUPPLY SERVICES IN SPAIN

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## Abstract

In Spain, there are 43.564 supply services by type of disability, considering people with mobility impairments, people with hearing impairments, people with visual impairment, people with learning difficulties, people with asthma, allergies and food intolerance, people with long-term, people of very large or very small stature and small children, and people accompanied by a service animal (European Network for Accessible Tourism, 2015). The aim of this study is to investigate accessible tourism supply services in Spain. The research adopts qualitative approaches with an exploratory model to examine the accessible tourism supply services, also was conducted due to its relevance for using primary data. Firstly, it presents the review of literature. Secondly, the focus of this study was presented with the selection of travel agencies in Spain. Thirdly, a questionnaire was designed to evidence an overview of suppliers by type of service. Fourthly, the data were collected using a pilot survey. Fifthly, the analysis of the results was described using content analysis technique of 18 valid questionnaires to define categories in order to derive patterns in the analysis and reporting of information. After compiling information, this study reveals that the quality of information provided is not enough for tourists with disabilities. Among the most predominant deficits are lacks in detail, specialized services, distribution of information, and communication strategies. The research confirms that many people with disability do not travel because of the facilities and services are not suitable for their needs.

## Keywords

Accessible tourism, Spain, Supply services

## Resumo

Na Espanha existem 43.564 tipos de serviços de fornecimento para deficiência, considerando pessoas com deficiência de mobilidade, pessoas com deficiência auditiva, pessoas com deficiência visual, pessoas com dificuldades de aprendizado, pessoas com asma, alergias e intolerância alimentar, pessoas com longo prazo, pessoas de estatura muito grande ou muito pequena e crianças pequenas e pessoas acompanhadas por um animal em serviço (European Network for Accessible Tourism, 2015). O objetivo deste estudo é investigar serviços acessíveis de suprimento turístico na Espanha. A pesquisa adota abordagens qualitativas com um modelo exploratório para examinar os serviços de suprimento turístico acessíveis, também foi realizada devido à sua relevância no uso de dados primários. Primeiro, foi apresentado a revisão da literatura. Em segundo, o foi apresentado, como foco, a seleção de agências de viagens na Espanha. Em terceiro, foi elaborado um questionário para evidenciar uma visão geral dos fornecedores por tipo de serviço. Quarto, os dados foram coletados por meio de uma pesquisa piloto. Em quinto, a análise dos resultados foi descrita usando a técnica de análise de conteúdo de 18 questionários válidos para definir categorias, a fim de derivar padrões na análise e relato de informações. Após a compilação de informações, este estudo revela que a qualidade das informações fornecidas não é suficiente para turistas com deficiência. Entre os déficits mais predominantes estão à falta de detalhes, serviços especializados, distribuição de informações e estratégias de comunicação. A pesquisa confirma que muitas pessoas com deficiência não viajam por causa das instalações e serviços que não são adequados para suas necessidades.

## Palavras chave

Turismo acessível, Espanha, Fornecedores de serviço

## Introduction

The connection between tourism and accessibility began with Manila Declaration in 1980, when the World Tourism Organization recognized tourism as a fundamental right for human development and recommended that the members' states regulate tourist services by highlighting the important aspects of accessible tourism

The right to access, to holidays and the freedom of travel and tourism, a natural consequence of the right to work, is recognized as an aspect of the fulfilment of the human being by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as by the legislation of many states. It entails for society the duty of providing for its citizens the best practical, effective and non-discriminatory access to this type of activity. Such an effort must be in harmony with the priorities, institutions and traditions of each individual country (Manila Declaration, 1980).

Therefore, this issue has been discussed for tourism academic researchers and its professionals. Smith (1987) was one of the first who examined the barriers and obstacles that affect disabled tourists. He categorizes them as intrinsic barriers, resulting primarily from the tourist's own levels of cognitive, physical, and psychological function; environmental barriers, consisting of externally imposed limitations; and interactive barriers, relating to skill-challenge incongruities and communication barriers. This line of research has been expanded, in summary, to economic barriers, rules and regulations, attitudes of travel, and hospitality of industry workers and safety (Murray & Sproats, 1990; Patching, 1990; Kauffman, 1995; Darcy, 1998; Anon, 1997).

According to Burnett and Baker (2001), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), in 1991, was the first to step toward implementing guidelines for hotels, travel agencies, and other businesses to make facilities more accessible for disabled persons, therefore regarding them as consumer. Another significant event was the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), in 1995, in the United Kingdom. The DDA has brought attention to political and economic need for people with disabilities, especially from service providers and the tourism industry (Shaw & Coles, 2004).

In general, there are several models of disability; however two main models have dominated disability studies: the medical and social models (Dominguez et al., 2003; Paar & Butler, 1999; Darcy & Buhalis, 2011), and as in comparison of two other models show an evolution in perception toward disability.

According to Zajadacz (2015), each model of disability was based on a different paradigm which also determined the action connected to accessibility to public spaces, buildings or tourism services for people with disabilities. The models, paradigms and concepts of disability are not homogenous constructed and changed according to country and society (Vila et al., 2015).

The medical models derive from the WHO (1980) classification system for impairment, disability and core activity restriction (previously handicap). The medical approach to disability is featured by two components: the first locates the problem of disability within the individual as a personal tragedy; and the second, sees the cause of

disability as the product of the abnormal body brought by the disease, illness or trauma (Oliver, 1990).

The social perspective defines disability as a product of the socially constructed disabling environmental and prevailing hostile social attitudes that oppresses, excludes and marginalizes disabled people from social participation (Oliver, 1990, 1996). In this view, there is a focus on services providers and the removal of social and environmental barriers to enable full social, physical and leisure participation (Aitchison, 2003).

People with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment. Others who may be included in this group, due to problems in accessing tourism products and services, are people with temporary disabilities, people with crutches, elderlies, people carrying luggage, small children or people who are big or small in size or stature (UNWTO, 2005). Also, studies carried out by Darcy & Dickson (2009) concern about 30% of the population will have access requirements at any point in time and most people will have a disability at some stage during their life. In this approach, are included ageing population, parents with young children who use prams, and their employees.

According to Buhalis & Darcy (2010), 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 functions of access, to function independently, and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed products, services and environments. This definition adopts a whole of life approach where people through their lifespan benefit from accessible tourism provisions. 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.

A significant amount of research has focused on the barriers to tourists with disabilities and in their experiences (Burnett & Baker, 2001; McKercher et al., 2003; Shaw & Coles, 2004; Yau et al., 2004; Card et al., 2006; Chang & Cheng, 2011, 2012). According to Eichhorn & Buhalis (2011), the major barriers encountered by TWD are physical access, attitudinal barriers and lack of information.

According to Hoyo & Valiente (2010), the difficulties experienced by TWD, when considered in the context of developing a comprehensive tourist experience, includes, above all, the general lack of information and knowledge about their actual needs. Unlike other tourists, the attributes of tourists with disabilities are not being catered because of erroneous or incomplete information.

McKercher et al. (2003) examines the relationship between the travel trade and TWD in Hong Kong. The study had concentrated in four specifically issues: attitudes, products offering, quality of information provided, and communication.

The results are described as first, the negative attitudes and discrimination toward tourist with disabilities by travel agencies. Second, the tour packages are inflexible and the itinerary usually involves multiple short stops during the day, hence, the majority of tourist with disabilities could not participate fully in all activities. Third, the quality of information provided was perceived as inaccurate and incomplete due to difficulties in

obtaining all TWD related information decisive for trip planning. Fourth and finally, personality, assertiveness and so or not, the disabled tourist has the right to participate fully in travel influence of the communication process.

The process of becoming a TWD active is a challenge; it is not an automatic process for such people. The travel agency sector is an inhibitor to travel, rather than a facilitator. People with disabilities have more things to consider and more challenges to face before and during a trip than those without it. Indeed, it is sometimes a challenging personal journey (Yau et al., 2004). Further, being a TWD is more than just removing physical barriers, the process of re-entry into tourism involves personal initiative, accurate evaluation of one's own capabilities, the ability to collect accurate information, managing the trip, manage oneself, and reflect on experiences (Yau, et al., 2004).

By consider attitudinal barriers issues, Daruwalla and Darcy (2005), argue that operators and service providers need to be moved from the mindset of just wanting to meet their legislated human rights obligations to an exemplary service provision. As they do when focus on any market segment, service providers need to internalize a more holistic vision of an attitudinal modification to accommodate the accessible tourism experience.

Taking into consideration the airlines companies and its services, TWD and their needs, Cheng and Chen (2012), examine this in two studies, first, air transportation services procedures, and second, the supply-side perspective focused on aviation industries that have experience in serving impaired air passengers in Taiwan. In the case of air passengers, barrier-free ramps are critical to the tourist with disability, therefor, is extremely important to ensure that accesses to the ramps are not blocked. To make further improvements, airport authorities might consider placing wheelchairs or other equipment near the entrances or exits of such ramps for the customers to use. Such value-added services would enhance the mobility of the TWD (Chang and Chen, 2011).

Having all these in mind, in the European Union (EU), there is a legal obligation for airline companies to accept a reservation and to board passengers with disabilities since 2007. Some exceptions to these rules to meet non-discriminatory safety requirements established by international community, or national law, or in order to meet safety requirements established by the authority that issued the air operator's certificate to an air carrier. By this time, airline companies and their agents, must make available information in accessible formats on these safety rules, and this information also must be available in the same language as the nondisabled passengers (Regulation (EC) No. 1107-2006).

The economic perspective of current and future demand of accessible tourism in Europe and beyond was investigated by the GFK (2015) and partners. This study has shown that the market size for accessible tourism in Europe amounts to over 740 million trips a year (day trips and overnight trips combined) based on an analysis of the travel tendency of disabled and elderly people in the EU Member States. The direct economic contribution, in terms of gross turnover (output), of the EU's accessible tourism by people with access needs within the EU was estimated as €351,936 million in 2012.

Particularly in Spain, tourists with disabilities can generate considerable profit for the tourism sector. Their average expense is higher than non-disabled European tourists (all holiday trips with a cost of 76.86 US\$/day, domestic trips with a cost of 54.18 US\$/day, and outbound trips with a cost of 97.02 US\$/day, in 2008) (Eurostat, 2010).

Having these studies in mind, the aim of this paper is to study the products and services supply in the segment of accessible tourism, taking into consideration the case of Spain.

## Study Method

This research was conducted due to its relevance for using primary data of accessible tourism products and services offered in Spain. Content analyses was conducted according to Bardin (1994), organized in three phases: 1) Pre-analysis (floating reading, choice of documents, preparation of the material, reference of the indices, and the elaboration of indicators); 2) Exploitation of material, and; 3) Treatment of results, inference and interpretation. Thus, five steps and associated data source were required to perform on this task as listed hereafter.

Firstly, a literature survey was carried out, as this search made use of a brief history of tourism and accessibility since Manila Declaration (1980). Articles that focused on the barriers to tourists with disabilities in the market, disabilities models, and data compilation of the challenge to become an active TWD were presented. All of the selected journals were accessible electronically, and a search was conducted using the keyword “accessible tourism in Spain”. The documents European Commission (2010), European Network for Accessible Tourism (2015), European Commission (2013) were consulted.

Secondly, the focus of this study was presented with the selection of travel agencies in Spain (key informants). The collection of data came from members of state tourism organizations, non-profit association, and government disability representatives from Spain, such as Governmental Representative Platform for People with Physical Disabilities (PREDIF) and National Organization of Spanish Blind People (ONCE).

Thirdly, a questionnaire was designed and questions were derived from four categories: types of disabilities, group of costumers, product/services, and regions.

Fourthly, the data collected were taken in two moments, as follows. One, a pilot survey was carried out to investigate the clarity of the questionnaire structure. Therefore, it was sent to some different accessible tourism travel agencies in Spain, during April and May of 2016. And two, a final questionnaire was sent to 32 accessible travel tourism agencies from Spain by Google Documents, during May and July of 2016. Also, phone calls had to be made to achieve the final feedback. Additionally, data was collected from websites of services providers for more details, focusing in forth category.

Fifthly, the analysis of the results was described and interpretation takes into four categories: 1. types of disabilities; 2. group of costumers; 3. product/ services, and; 4. regions.



## Study Results

The results regarding category one reveal five types of disabilities works by accessible travel agencies in Spain: mobility, intellectual, sensory, visual, and organic. Mobility disabilities are covered by 17 travel agencies; intellectual and/or mental disabilities by 13; sensory (people with hearing impairments, deaf, and people using sign language) by 12; visual disabilities by 10, and organic (allergies and food intolerance) by one travel agencies. No one of travel agents reported services providers for of very large or very small statute and small children; and people accompanied by a service animal.

Regarding allergies and food intolerance travels, one of interviewed commented about the Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE) guide. It provides helpful tips while traveling to Spain as well as more information on understanding food labels and dining out at restaurants. The guide advises to tourist with allergies reading food labels on packaged food is an important part of managing food allergies and avoiding the allergen. Communication between restaurants and customers with food allergies is essential to a safe dining experience.

There are basically three groups of costumers divided in accessible tour groups, individual users, and associations for the disabled tourist. Organized accessible tour groups are covered by 15 agencies; individual users by 18 and associations for disabled by 16 accessible travel agencies. In Spain, there are some important associations that work for disable people and travel agencies: Governmental Representative Platform for People with Physical Disabilities (PREDIF); National Organization of Spanish Blind People (ONCE); ONCE Foundation for the Cooperation and social Inclusion of Disabled People; for the attention of Deaf Blind People (FOAPS) and Association for People with Medullary Injury and Severe Physical Disabilities (AYSPAM). At this point, it is interesting to underline that since 2002, PREDIF, is developing to the accessible tourism market a program for those groups of tourists with disabilities and their right to autonomy and standardization. Their activities are aimed at the public and private tourism sector, tourists with disabilities and their companions.

In 2007, a technical advisor service of accessibility was created to assemble several organizations, public and private, from different fields, such as urban planning, construction, transport, health, tourism, culture, education, and sports. These organizations are the Association for People with Medullary Injury and Severe Physical Disabilities (ASPAYM) and the Federation of Coordinators and Associations of People with Disabilities from Spanish Autonomous Communities (COAMIFICOA). All this evidence thus suggests that, with these services, PREDIF has been an advisory agency on accessibility, supported by its knowledge and experience in accessible tourism. PREDIF supports the increasing demands of people with disabilities and international market supply. Moreover, PREDIF was created, with the support of the Vodafone Spain Foundation, an innovative service: the first mobile app accessible tourism worldwide: TUR4all. Nowadays this application has the support of the Ministry of Tourism.

Regarding the kinds of products and services provided for TWD, Spanish accessible travel agencies were required to present different possibilities for disabled consumers,

such as: package accessible tours (13); accommodation (17); tours groups (18); travel assistance (6); accessible hot air balloon flights (1); plane tickets (8); shuttle transportation (1); cultural entertainment (1); outdoor and adventure activities (1); and the Route of Santiago de Compostela (1).

It is important to highlight the innovative service in the Catalonia region to physical disabilities or reduced mobility with the adaptation of hot air balloon flight. Due to its special seats and wheelchair systems configuration this kind of product is a classic example of universal design based on seven principles to facilitate equitable access across the lifespan that are equitable use, flexibility use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, size, and space for approach and use.

Moreover, the accessible travel agency above mentioned offer services and installations totally adapted in Catalonia region, as well as the possibility to fly over La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park.

Spain has tourists regions and the next steps are improving the quality of accessible provision through adopting a universal design approach and accessible information provision.

In Sierra Nevada, Granada services were found that are suitable to all potential users and incorporates the accessibility requirements of people with the widest possible range of abilities. It concerns about classes of skiing for people with all types of physical and developmental disabilities with special equipment and instructions like visual impairments, physical and developmental disabilities for people with amputation, including paraplegic and tetraplegic. Participants were asked in which regions of Spain they operated. The answer ranged among twelve touristic regions.

After identifying and analysing the data provided about regions of Spain, it is important to highlight four regions: Catalonia, Basque Country, Canary Islands and Madrid.

In Catalan region (figure 1) Barcelona is the main tourism destination with more attractive qualities for TWD. Barcelona has achieved an elevated level of provisions in terms of general accessibility of the built environment, accessibility information and itineraries for visitors, a well-planned and accessible public transport system and adapted services for TWD. These services justify the presence of the majority accessible travel agencies. Indeed, the Catalan region has a well-developed range of accessible and inclusive destinations with activities and venues for TWD.

There are accessible travel options from the port into Barcelona city center for cruise ship tourists from Spain, Europe and overseas. Barcelona as an accessible cruise destination, explores the extent to which people with disabilities and other specific access requirements are catered for within the growing cruise passenger market and the quality of the shore-side experiences in the city and surroundings, disabled cruise tourist do not need to make any advanced reservations to use fully accessible routes into the city center.

Regarding the Canary Islands, the European Commission considered the city of Arona as one of the first and leading examples of accessible tourism in Spain. In 2003,

Arona, situated in Tenerife Island, started the Accessibility Plan of adaptation improving accessibility of its beaches.

The European Commission (2010), related the keys factors that transformed Arona in a success of accessible tourist destination to its technical support provided by the Municipal Board of Tourism with a department with technicians and professionals working full-time that deal specifically with accessible tourism; the collaboration of the tourists themselves, the Board of Tourism has established a close and ongoing relationship with a group of tourists with reduced mobility who visit often and who give feedback on the problems of accessibility; bench marketing learned through the experience and mistakes of other tourist regions regarding accessibility, and also the technicians who visited and analysed other destinations like Autonomous Region of Valencia and the City of Glasgow, Arona's Board of Tourism has organized and training people with courses at raising awareness, and others specific for hotels, restaurants at businessmen and customer care staff, municipal technicians and architects; information and promotion of important trade fairs and international congresses such as FITUR, IBT, and WTM.

Arona was planned an Integral Accessibility Scheme providing urban planning barrier-free, accessible buses, adapted taxis, sensorial communication (accessible website, mobile phone adapted), accessible beaches with promenades and public roads, beachfront nearby parking with reserved parking spots, crutches and amphibian wheelchairs, wooden fixed pathways, adapt showers, and among others. One point that must be highlighted here is how cooperation between the different stakeholders from public and private sector had increased accessible tourism offer in Arona, such as Los Cristianos and Las Vistas beaches. Both are completely handicapped adapted beaches because they achieved a cooperation initiative between Arona Town Council and SIMPROMI (Insular Society to Promote People with Disabilities).

Regarding the capital of Spain, Madrid, it is among the most popular city destinations in Europe. By overnight stays 15.2 million of TWD per year (European Commission, 2014). Madrid and Barcelona are Spain's main cities and also its most accessible destinations. Regarding that, Accessible Tour Operator of Madrid won a Tour Operator of the Year - European Awards 2017 (Enat, 2016).

Concerning Madrid, the city had trained and register professions to this kind of service called personal assistance to assist the TWD since 2013. This professional has been trained to be able to do all kind of services such as shopping, personal care, transferring, preparing and taking medications, skin care, positioning, bathing, dressing, grooming, toilet assistance, transportation by pushing a wheelchair, guiding, assisting with transitions and transfers, and driving. On the other hand, although often tourism agencies are struggling to focus on emerging and growing market niche, there is a need to consider further discussing attitudinal barriers. As argue operators and service providers need to be moved from the mindset of just wanting to meet their legislated human rights obligation to exemplary service provision.

## Conclusions

The market of disable tourism merely provides general statistics, thus, it is not possible to verify accurate data of specific segments in Spain. For instance, literature review is usually based on online sources and it does not consider equipment and tourist facilities for the demand. Furthermore, it is challenging to collected data from government institutions as they are not concerned about standard information.

The design of accessible tourism products and services need a specialization for each kind of disabilities, which requires planning and deep knowledge of the difficulties, and restrictions of all the disabilities (mobility, sensory, communication, and cognitive).

This paper highlights some innovative products and specialized services providers. Both confirm that the search of specialized services will change the way global communication between accessible travel agencies and consumers, TWD, are established and how the relationship with service providers is built and promote loyalty.

When exploring the future of accessible tourism in this field, planning and designing integrated accessible itinerary between Spanish clusters of accessible destinations is a key factor to improve accessibility to facilities, to transportation, and to attractions, with the aim of connecting touristic regions to increase its competitiveness.

Strengthening inter-institutional partnership of Spanish and European touristic regions with focus on segmented demand, for each kind of disability, is an important methodological tool. Hence, there must be a series of integrated strategies connecting Spanish accessible tourist regions with other countries in the future. This cooperation will enhance the qualification, diversification and design of new accessible tourism products within The European Union.

Finally, the study raises several challenges to further investigation. Travel trade was the focus of this study. Clearly, an additional study is necessary to examine this issue from the perspective of the demand. Business people are only concern about profitability.

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Source: <http://turismeperatothom.catalunya.com/en/destinacions.php>

Figure 1. Catalonia region Accessible Tourism Map