

Chapter 11

The Accessibility of Museum Websites: The Case of Barcelona

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ABSTRACT

Tourism accessibility has emerged as a topic to be discussed and studied by both academics and professionals. In this line, museums have started to adapt their offer to their diverse audience, including people with disabilities and people with special needs. In this regard, museum websites, as a powerful information channel to promote visitation, must also be adapted to make its information accessible. Therefore, this chapter aims at exploring accessibility and accessible information of museums' websites using a holistic approach. As a case study, 45 museums in the city of Barcelona are considered and accessibility of tourism websites is assessed by means of content analysis, taking as reference four categories and 36 items that have emerged from previous literature review. Findings reveal that museums websites are still far from being considered accessible, and improvements in several areas are required.

INTRODUCTION

The analysis of accessibility of tourism activities was first focused on the experiences of people with disabilities while travelling and the functional elements linked to these experiences. Nowadays, due to the recent research on the area, this definition goes far beyond this first idea and accessible tourism is considered 'a form of tourism that enables people with access requirements to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services, and environments' (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011).

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People's behavior when using tourism information has shifted dramatically following the ubiquitous access to the Internet and there is diversity of behavioral tendencies that determine the level of usage and interaction with information sources (Chang & Caneday, 2011). For example, previous studies (Gronflaten, 2009) state that socio-demographic characteristics condition information search behavior. Due to the diversity of patterns when using the Internet and the information sources, it is important to evaluate and compare how people search for information, select information sources, among other informational behaviors, to fully meet their needs.

People with disabilities have the same needs and desires for tourism as others (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011). Because of accessibility needs, they may behave differently when searching and selecting information and information sources. For instance, access requirements, differences in skills and other characteristics may lead to longer searches, different selected sources, etc. In order to analyze these behavioral patterns, and when ensuring a good provision of information for all, two concepts must be addressed. First, the information accessibility, based on its format or design. Second, the information on accessible products and services in terms of accuracy or credibility.

Cultural tourism offer is important to develop destinations all over the world, and particularly in Europe. There is an increasing number of people travelling for cultural motivations and they are particularly interested in cultural heritage (Velasco, 2009). Museums can be defined as one of these cultural attractions for the consumption and delight of cultural tourists. Museums should be prepared to meet the needs of cultural tourists while they ensure its social function (Vacas, 2005). In this context, this type of offer must be accessible to all groups of the population.

During the pre-trip planning process, in order to ensure museums accessibility to people with special access needs, the information process must be addressed. As it is stated above, Internet has become one of the most important information channels and includes different information sources, such as websites (Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015). Thus, the main aim of the book chapter is to explore accessibility and accessible information of museums' websites.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, literature review is given, where the main concepts related to the objective of the chapter are defined –i.e. accessible tourism and museums, and information search–; second, methodological design and steps are described; third, main results are given; fourth, main conclusions are provided.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Accessible Tourism and Museums

Accessible tourism research has recently become an area of interest in the tourism field. In the last decades, studies addressing different types and degrees of disability and the tourism activity have helped in broadening the diversity of the field, by including 10-20 per cent of the population who had previously been excluded from our understanding (Darcy, Mckercher, & Schweinsberg, 2020). We have moved from to separate concepts, i.e. tourism and accessibility, to an integrative concept, accessible tourism, which facilitates the emergence of the collaborative processes when defining and managing tourism destinations around the world (Darcy et al., 2020)

It is well-known that this market segment does not only include people with disabilities, but any person with special access needs. Many tourism subsectors (e.g. accommodation services, restaurants,

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