

Chapter 41

Holistic Technical Solutions to Enhance Accessible Tourism in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to present current accessibility to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites on the example of Cracow and Warsaw, the most popular historical cities in Poland. The disabled represent a significant proportion of the cultural tourism group and might have considerable importance to the development of tourist industry. However, their needs are not always met. Especially in Warsaw specific problems for tourists with disabilities include: poor information, inaccessible streets and sidewalks, only partly accessible public transport, hotels or dining places, museums and architectural relics. In Poland tourism development in the heritage sites could be a positive force for generating revenue, enhancing cultural education and helping to preserve the historic values. However, it might be done under condition of re-examining current trends of planning and introducing a universal, holistic design philosophy, innovative technologies enhancing accessibility to all tourist infrastructure, facilities and services.

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INTRODUCTION

Responsible Planning of Tourist Space

Today tourist activities are becoming more competitive, extensive and demanding of infrastructure and services than ever before. In order to respond to these growing needs positively, it is necessary to practice tourism planning in the host destination areas to answer these challenges, avoid damage or permanent alteration of natural features, social values or historical valuable resources (Buhalis et al., 2012; Dallen et al., 2003; Hall, 2000; Lovelock et al., 2013; Page et al., 2003; Shaw et al., 2004).

The UN WTO resolutions and declarations recognize good management and rational spatial planning as key factors to sustainable development of reception areas. Principles of integrated planning are considered as an effective approach, especially when protective areas are in question (of natural, social and/ or cultural values). An integrated planning, understood as holistic activity, is a planning approach that ensures participation of all stakeholders and affected departments. The objective of integrated planning is to examine all economic, social and environmental costs and benefits in order to select and implement the best possible option and to plan a suitable course of action. In the area of tourism planning an integrated planning approach is highly recommended, as being responsive not only to the various tourist groups' expectations, but also the local community desires and needs (Inskeep, 1991; Newman, 2011; Shelton 2005; Smith, 2006; Sigala, 2003). Moreover, the heritage sites need special attention and planning rules, tourism policy and spatial planning there should be developed in the innovative ways. Therefore, integrated planning approach seems to be ideal to respond the needs of sustainable planning at the UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Buhalis et al., 2012; Dallen et al., 2003). Accordingly to its theoretical basis, contemporary integrated tourism planning include: economic planning, human resources planning, social and community planning, environmental planning, business planning, public administration, infrastructure planning and design (Hall, 2000; Inskeep, 1991; Newman, 2011). As integral planning encompasses a very wide range of issues, in this chapter the authors decided to focus on the tourist infrastructure planning questions (urban and architectural design) with the aim to obtain accessibility for disabled tourists at destinations of high cultural values.

The future vision of tourism is a 'mobile tourism' imperative and the governments are obliged to provide the non – discriminatory access to the tourist destinations. Today about 15% of the world population is estimated to have some form of disability and one can observe the growing number of tourists with special requirements (ENAT, 2015; UN WHO, 2011; UN WTO, 2015). Studies carried in many countries have shown that tourists with disabilities are becoming an important part of tourism market (Australia – 11%, UK – 12%) and for example American adults with disabilities or reduced mobility spend on average 13.6 billion USD annually on travelling (UN WTO, 2013). Therefore, accessible tourism market presents a challenge to the global travel industry in terms of providing barrier – free reception areas, improvement of services, accommodation and transport (Darcy, 2010; Shaw et al., 2004).

Destinations Accessibility in Poland

Accessible tourist destination depends on a variety of determinants. All over the world, in Australia, Canada, US and most of the European countries,

- UK,

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