





# Chapter 59

## Accessible Tourism and Digitalization: Stakeholders Perspective in the City of Barcelos



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**Abstract** The present manuscript aims to understand and analyses the accessible tourism in the specific context of Barcelos, with a special focus on people with motor disabilities. From the perspective of accessible tourism, it is intended to ascertain whether the most emblematic tourist attractions of the city of Barcelos (e.g. cultural, religious, artistic and architectural heritage), provide the necessary conditions of accessibility for people with disabilities. This study assumes a qualitative character whose obtaining of the primary data was based on the realization of a semi-structured interview carried out with nine stakeholders, who, directly or indirectly, participate in the tourist activity in the city of Barcelos. Planning strengthens the compatibility

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between meeting economic and social needs and the need to preserve the environment and natural and cultural resources, in order to ensure the sustainability of the accessible destination as a tourism product. Preliminary results highlight the (increasing) importance of accessible tourism for the territories. However, there are many limitations that will have to be overcome and improved in the coming years. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the present study presents inputs for place marketing and accessible tourism.

## 59.1 Introduction

Portugal was awarded last year as the Best Accessible Touristic Destination of the World [1]. The city of Barcelos is located in the North of Portugal. Such a perception results from its different types of historical architecture and religious, archaeological and cultural heritage. It also can be added the hospitality from local inhabitants, its traditional cultural festivities, gastronomy and many other elements. [2] states that it may have been from 1948 that concern for the rights, freedom and equality of people began through the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights. However, the special focus on the rights of persons with disabilities appears only in the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 1975. Five years later, in 1980, the relationship between tourism and accessibility is associated for the first time through the Declaration of Manila elaborated by the World Tourism Organization.

The designation Accessible Tourism is referring to a complex process and its main objective is to allow anyone, independently from their condition and possibilities, to have access all the touristic services and destinations [3–6]. Nowadays cities face an evident need to adapt their functional and tourism infrastructures to new segments of the tourism market. As a result, it is essential to gain knowledge of real needs in order to promote the development of accessible tourism, a concept which must be understood from a broad perspective since it not only benefits people with special needs but also includes a set of desired and integrated facilities [7, 8]. In this sense, the present study reveals to be a good opportunity to draw the picture from a society than realizes (or not) such a problematic: conditioned accessibility. Accessible Tourism (when allied to Senior Tourism) shows massive potential, and it is curious to see that has been extremely disregarded for many years by the industry. Several other factors also reveal to be important to the development of its touristic activity, concretely, the planned policy to promote Barcelos nationally and internationally.

## 59.2 Accessible Tourism and Digitalization

According to [7], accessible tourism, for all, presupposes the concentration of accessibility conditions for all components of the functional tourism system—accommodation, restaurants, tourist attractions, entertainment, transport, information and services, among others—and its articulation, in a way to provide the tourist with that which contributes to your overall satisfaction at the destination. The number of tourists who need and value accessibility is increasing, which is why the commitment to Accessible Tourism is a challenge in transforming Lisbon into a “destination for All”, more competitive at the European level. Accessible tourism necessarily refers to social responsibility in the sustainable development of tourism, so for ethical and social reasons, it is essential to work in order to offer people with special needs (SN) the same conditions of tourist offer [9]. Darcy and Dickson [4], refer that there is still some resistance from the tourism industry, regarding the adoption of the principles of universal design and staff training on people with SN.

Accessible Tourism is understood as a quite versatile market, which motivates an equally multifaceted offer. Caldas et al. [5] considers some differences between Accessible Tourism and Tourism for All. The first is seen as an activity dealing with the elimination of barriers, while the latter is based on the concept of Universal Design. Universal Design is nothing more than the conception of products and services that pretend to serve the larger number of people without the need of adaptation or personalization [6]. According to [6], the data available by the World Health Organization (WHO) point to 15% of the world population as having some kind of disability, in many cases associated with the population aging. These results from the generalized quality of life improvement. Until 2050 is estimated that the population with more than 60 years will double from 11 to 22%. In this sense, seniors and disabled, corresponding to one-fifth of the world population will directly benefit from Accessible Tourism. Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights until the present that the developed evolution as allowing people with reduced mobility feeling their rights being supported and recognized by general society. In this sense, and as a propelling activity for general human welfare, Tourism was declared as a right of all citizens, stimulating the integration of people with reduced mobility in a global touristic system [5].

Several authors [4, 6–11] have been asking for the collaboration of stakeholders to develop Accessible Tourism. Tourism in General, and Accessible Tourism in particular, is a shattered industry depending on diverse elements. Accessible Tourism includes a sequence of ideas regarding accessibility and should be actively produced by the intervenient. Therefore, it is important to recognize the features from the demand, especially in relation to the adopted behaviour of the accessible tourist, for which observation and analysis are fundamental [5]. Accessible tourism has been recognized worldwide, not only for its social importance but also for the associated economic potential. It is also an important strategy to ensure the sustainability of tourism [9] and the qualification of destinations. When a destination allies itself with accessible tourism, identity is built around social responsibility and concern for the

general well-being of the population. In fact, although there can be accessible tourism without the dimensions of sustainability, there is no sustainability without accessible tourism [12].

At the same time, accessible tourism has also accompanied some progress in terms of digitization and innovation in tourism products and services. Digitization can be used in favor of more accessible tourism and respond positively to the specific needs of consumers. For instance, according to [9], the TUR4all platform is being developed and operated by Accessible Portugal, a non-profit association at the service of Tourism Supply and Demand Qualification, with the support of Turismo de Portugal and the Vodafone Portugal Foundation, being based in the homologous TUR4All Spain. TUR4all is a resource for tourists, private companies and the public sector, with the purpose of promoting accessible tourism in Portugal. It consists of an informative tool available on a webpage and mobile application. Its main objective is to provide information and disseminate the accessible tourism offer in Portugal and Spain. This tool, pioneer in Portugal, allows the interaction with the end-user, dynamized in a model of social networks. Specifically, it seeks to provide objective information about the destinations' accommodation, restaurants and tourist activities and their accessibility. The platform is available in several languages: Portuguese, Spanish, Basque, Valencian, Galician, Catalan, French, English, German, Italian and Mandarin. As a basic tool, the TUR4all platform provides questionnaires that are used to analyse the accessibility conditions of the resources, which contain a sequence of information on the access conditions, from outdoor and indoor spaces, adapted bathrooms, furniture and car parks for disabled people, among others. In addition to the conditions, specifics on the characteristics of the spaces are analysed, such as the height of the staircase, signage, door width and size of the manoeuvring spaces [9]. To improve the technological aspect associated with the special information and communication requirements, innovative improvements were made in terms of Information and Communication Technologies. Technology ended up becoming something common and accepted by all, able to support and respond to the needs felt by people. According to [13], the more ICT and Assistive Technologies increase their potential to enable people with disabilities to actively participate in society, the more inclusion and accessibility become a common responsibility in the tourism industry. The Assistive Technology Act (ATA) was introduced in the United States in 1998, being the first act in the US to declare the importance of technology in the inclusion of people with disabilities in society [14]. At the same time, the authors say that this act recognizes the failure of information systems designers and telecommunications service providers to respond to the needs of people with special requirements in terms of design, manufacture and procurement of telecommunications and information technologies [14].

### **59.3 Managing an Accessible Tourism Destination**

Accessible destinations should strongly invest in communicating next to stakeholders and the general public. In fact, and since presently much of them have the capacity to receive special necessities for tourists, efficient and quality services and equipment can be offered [5]. However, destinations must be conscious and avoid making accessibility its main attraction [6]. As noted in the Accessible Tourism Guide, quoting Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary-General, accessibility is a central element of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. It is both a human rights imperative and an exceptional business opportunity. Above all, we have to begin to realize that accessible tourism does not just benefit people with disabilities or special needs, it benefits us all [7]. Thus, developing Accessible Tourism is (re)adapting the existing tourist offer, making it accessible to all citizens, regardless of their age and motor, sensory or cognitive condition. To this end, it is necessary to eliminate existing obstacles and prevent the emergence of new barriers. In the implementation of measures that benefit accessibility, a systemic vision is underlying, which is transversal to the entire tourism chain [15]. In this sense, it is important that Accessible Tourism is not envisaged and idealized as a tourist product, a specific offer for a single market or a watertight and isolated action, but rather as a set of facilities that allow all people to enjoy tourist experiences and, consequently, contribute for the affirmation of tourist destinations, thus increasing their potential demand [7]. The commitment to Accessible Tourism also contributes to improving the quality of life of the local population. Furthermore, it allows higher levels of motivation for tourists with special needs to be higher, thus building a relationship of trust between tourist demand and supply, which consequently contributes to retaining and expanding the tourist market. Touristic destinations should take special attention to the kind of image that is communicating. On the one hand, being accessibility a competitive advantage in the present market context, on the other, not being long-term sustainable could compromise all the efforts applied to promote a destination [16]. The best results are achieved when accessibility and social tourism are conjointly promoted with other actions that contribute to certify the quality of spaces, in opposition to actions that simply design accessible paths [17]. Therefore, accessible tourism requires the mobilization of all the actors in the territory, who must build a culture of accessibility and apply it to the entire tourist chain and process. In order to favor an inclusive and transparent attitude towards all stakeholders and a spirit of continuous learning that provides the necessary knowledge to serve the public that values accessibility.

### **59.4 Methodology**

The collection of primary data was taken by the use of semi-structured interviews performed with nine stakeholders that more or less directly are active participants in the touristic activity of Barcelos. The preliminary results of the study concern the city

of Barcelos and the use of the Access Monitor software in an attempt to understand the level of preparation of the websites of the city of Barcelos (digitization) for accessible tourism. [12] state that Access Monitor corresponds to a tool that “monitors the application of accessibility guidelines in HTML content” of a web page with reference to “version 2.0 of the accessibility guidelines for web content, WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) of the W3C—WCAG 2.0”. According to Unidade Acesso (2017), this tool is integrated into the Fundação da Ciência e Tecnologia and can be easily used without the need to download or use any specific system or platform. The instrument is accessed through the following URL <http://accessmonitor.aceessibilidade.gov.pt/amp/>, then three possibilities arise to assess web accessibility. The first one is where you put the URL of the web page you want to evaluate, another where you insert the HTML code and still one where you load an HTML file. In this case, the first possibility will be used. By entering the URL, the page is evaluated and a score from 1 to 10 is displayed, as well as a small summary of what is included in that URL, such as the page size. Next, the page accessibility practices are evaluated, here it is evaluated by levels of accessibility between A, AA and AAA, with the last one being the most accessible. In the page accessibility practices, processes that need to be evaluated manually are still indicated. Finally, each practice found on the page is presented, allowing us to observe in detail what each one consists of. In a first analysis, the results obtained through the automatic evaluation carried out on the websites of hotel groups/management entities allow us to conclude that they have some accessibility conditions, however, they are far from what is essential to have full compliance with WCAG 2.0 standards. All are inaccessible and have high numbers of “Errors” and “Warnings” at checkpoints for compliance levels.

Barcelos is a city and a municipality in Braga District in the Minho Province, in the north of Portugal. The population in 2011 was 120,391, in an area of 378.90 km<sup>2</sup>. With 60 parishes, it is the municipality with the highest number of parishes in the country. It is one of the growing municipalities in the country and is well known for its textile and adobe industries, as well as its horseback riding events and “figurado” style of pottery, which are comical figurines with accentuated features of farmers, folk musicians and nativity scene characters [18]. Considering the growing importance of digital platforms in the promotion and dissemination of tourist products/services, this study aims to understand how organizations approach digital marketing, more specifically, with regard to marketing used in tourism for people with special needs (i.e. Barcelos in 2021). According to Cidades Portuguesas (2018), Barcelos is a city with legend, tradition and history. He adds that “it is also an important industrial center (...) with important companies in the ceramic sector and in the manufacture of artificial silk and cotton knitwear”. The city borders other important cities in the north, namely Braga, Viana do Castelo, Ponte de Lima, Famalicão, Póvoa de Varzim and Esposende. According to Pordata (2017), in 2016 Barcelos had 118,144 inhabitants, of which 16.1% corresponded to the elderly population (over 65 years old) and 13.8% to the young population (under 15 years old). The Municipality considers the inclusion and accessibility of the entire community to educational and sociocultural activities and equipment [8]. The same indicates that he has worked on the construction of the city, giving the example of the RAMPA project—Accessible Barcelos.

The City Council (2019a) aims to promote “equal opportunities and citizenship for people with disabilities, reducing the impact of social, cultural, behavioral or physical barriers” in order to contribute to the inclusion and “participation of people with disabilities”. In 2014, Barcelos received the first prize “Most Accessible Municipality” in the area of Leisure, Heritage and Tourism. This award, developed by the National Institute for Rehabilitation, was awarded for the transformation carried out in the Medieval Tower [8].

## 59.5 Preliminary Results

Using the Access Monitor tool, the website of the Barcelos Pottery Museum was evaluated, which has the following URL: <http://www.museuolaria.pt/>. The museum scored 6.8 on a scale of 1 to 10 and has a size of 28,842 bytes. If a score is higher than the midpoint of the scale, it is assumed that it meets some of the minimum points recommended by the web accessibility guidelines. In total, 14 practices were found in the Museum URL, 6 of them were considered acceptable, 4 were not acceptable and another 4 needed to be manually evaluated. Regarding the level of accessibility, there are two of high accessibility and 10 of minimum accessibility. One of the practices that need to be observed manually is high accessibility.

Analyzing the results obtained in the different instruments selected to understand the accessibility of the tourist destination Barcelos, it is concluded that the city is partially accessible. In many of the spaces evaluated through the accessibility criteria, different elements already practiced were noted that correspond to some of the access requirements felt by people with special needs. Most of the requirements met meet the needs felt by people with reduced mobility, namely through ramps and grab bars. According to the answers obtained from the lady from the Medieval Tower, the Tourist Office also includes documents about the city in Braille, and even though Barcelos has an application that allows you to listen to audio-description and audio-guides about some points of the city, including the one exposed in Medieval Tower. This implies that the person has, in a way, assistive technology available for use as a visually impaired person. Of all the spaces analyzed, the Pottery Museum appears to be the most accessible, framing aspects that cover a greater number of people in its design.

In the study of its website, it can be seen that it complies with a large number of acceptable practices, obtaining an evaluation above the average point of 5 values. Coming to the conclusion that in terms of the web world the Pottery Museum still has aspects to improve. Even so, it is assumed that the space makes efforts to become accessible. However, as most of the points chosen, the information is not available in other formats and many of the aspects that make the spaces accessible to any type of person are not considered. In general, all have accessibility requirements that are not met. Therefore, everyone should invest in the use of universal design, accessible web design and information in comprehensive formats. It is intended to include as

many people as possible and it is guaranteed that following these terms will satisfy not only tourists but even residents themselves.

Barcelos is not a fully accessible city, but it is a city that perhaps, slowly, is making changes to meet the needs felt by its visitors and the residents themselves. Awareness-raising activities should be carried out both for companies in the city and for people from Barcelona so that the importance of accessibility in today's world is known. Thus, we would allow people to participate actively in society, to live independently, with or without the use of assistive technology, and we would contribute to the non-discrimination of people due to their disability or disability. It would be left to understand them, not exclude them. And that will be the most important factor—understanding. Especially because only those who deal with discrimination and exclusion on a daily basis are aware of the pain, suffering and difficulty they feel. For that reason, these will be the best people to explain what changes need to be made in today's world.

## **59.6 Final Considerations and Next Steps**

The present study tried to understand if the city of Barcelos, regarding the point of view of stakeholders, gathers Accessible Tourism conditions. Although the city of Barcelos presents some weaknesses in terms of accessibility, the interviewed recognize some potential for the practice of Accessible Tourism. Therefore, it is considered that it is essential that this segment must be carefully considered. People with disabilities have the same motivations at the moment of relaxing, leisure time and quality, since they prefer to invest in reliable tourism services. Comparatively to people with disability that contacts daily with barriers, people external to this problem has an extremely percolate view about this issue. So, it is easy to understand that disabled people have a privileged view about this phenomena. Many of the authors analysed use the social model to verify the problem. And, in fact, it seems to be the most correct perspective to adopt, as it does not see the individual as the problem. It is society that constantly excludes these people from actively participating. Well, we do not include them in our planning and we end up developing spaces, products and services that cannot satisfy them and form an obstacle that does not allow the person to enjoy their rights. For this reason, the barriers and needs they feel must be identified in order to be able to respond. And to do that, you need to establish links with people with disabilities and disabilities. They are the ones who are aware of the difficulties felt and, therefore, they are the ones who must be present in the investigation of their needs. It is important that society, stakeholders, companies and destinations come together to apply concepts such as universal design and frame accessibility. However, the universal design must at the same time be adapted because applying this principle does not exactly mean that everything becomes accessible. Hence it is necessary to know the needs that people feel. It may be necessary to apply stricter legislation in order to bring about this change. There will always be spaces that will respond to more needs of a certain type, but they must become capable of creating



environments adapted to all types of needs. Technology will be crucial to support the creation of responses, as a single object may be able to respond to more than one access need. The challenge lies in knowing how to develop this technology in the right way so that its use and benefits are maximized. Therefore, the interaction with people with disabilities is important to know the aspects to improve. This would be a good opportunity to collect information related to the main needs and factors that inhibit the touristic practice. It is considered that it would be interesting to extend this study to local communities' points of view, and, of course, the tourists with and without disabilities [5].

The present manuscript aimed to understand and analyse the accessible tourism in the specific context of Barcelos, with a special focus on people with motor disabilities. Preliminary results highlight the (increasing) importance of accessible tourism for the territories. However, there are many limitations that will have to be overcome and improved in the coming years. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the present study presents inputs for place marketing and accessible tourism.

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