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Enabling a 'good life' through leisure travel for people with intellectual disabilities

Brielle Gillovic, Alison McIntosh, Cheryl Cockburn-Wootten, and Simon Darcy

Introduction

- Tourism scholarship has increasingly granted attention to the tourist experience yet has been remiss of its inclusion of individuals/groups at the margins of society (Humberstone, 2004).
- Critical tourism scholarship is exploring such perspectives (Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011; Schwarzin, 2012), which is significant to people with disabilities as a marginalised societal group (Kitchin, 1998; Morris, 2001).
- Accessible tourism, for instance, *“enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments”* (Darcy & Dickson, 2009, p. 34).
- Still, representations of the access tourist/accessible tourism experience, are mostly from the perspectives of people with mobility (for example Daniels, Rodgers, & Wiggins, 2005; Ray & Ryder, 2003) or vision impairments (for example Richards, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010; Small, Darcy, & Packer, 2012), and that of people with intellectual disabilities remain neglected.

Methods

- An interpretive phenomenological approach (Heidegger, 1927, 2008) was applied in this study, which explored the significance of the leisure travel experience from the perspectives of people with intellectual disabilities.
- Nine people with intellectual disabilities were recruited through purposeful and professional criterion sampling (Patton, 2002), with the assistance of disability service and support organisations.
- Data was collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviewing (Johnson, 2002; Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003), and offered a person-centred (Morgan, Pritchard, & Sedgley, 2015), strengths- and abilities-based approach to inclusive tourism research (see Gillovic, McIntosh, Cockburn-Wootten, & Darcy, 2018).
- Data was analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), through an inductive, iterative and recursive process (Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe, 2011), and the emergent themes represent but one possible interpretation (van Manen, 1990):
 1. Travel promotes dignity and wellbeing.
 2. Travel affords a sense of living and learning.
 3. Travel strengthens relational connections.

Findings and discussion

- People with intellectual disabilities are motivated to travel for reasons comparable with that of other disabled and non-disabled people; that is, to have a break and relax, or to engage in new and novel experiences (Dominguez, Fraiz, & Alen, 2013; Packer, Small, & Darcy, 2008).
 - *“You can have a good rest; just relax and have a break.”*
 - *“I am excited in my holidays; I am very happy.”*
- People with intellectual disabilities derive considerable joy from these experiences, and express a desire to travel again and more frequently in the future (Dominguez et al., 2013).
 - *“I did love it, and I want to go on another trip; go to other places I haven’t seen.”*
 - *“I really love going to holidays; I love travelling a lot in the world. It’s my big thing; I’ve realised I love going so much.”*
 - *“To be honest, it was so much fun. I love travelling and wish I could go back. So far I am thinking about travelling overseas. America - the stars in Hollywood, Disney, Orlando, Universal... And, just a side-trip to Australia if I can.”*



1. Travel promotes dignity and wellbeing

- The travel experience positively enhances people with disabilities quality of life and life satisfaction (Luo, 2014; Modell & Imwold, 1998), and brings about health and happiness (Figueiredo, Eusebio, & Kastenholz, 2012; McCabe & Diekmann, 2015).
 - *I'm not just 'the poor disabled person'; I'm somebody who has done some of these things and valued them as equally awesome."*
 - *"I think travel should be considered not so much as a luxury item but as a fundamental aspect of expanding your horizons; the ability to do it enhances your sense of psychology and wellness."*
- Not only is travel representative of an unparalleled life experience, it is a positive antithesis to the everyday lives (Innes, Page, & Cutler, 2016) of people with intellectual disabilities, that affords participation and reaffirms self-identity (Eichhorn, Miller, & Tribe, 2013; Shelton & Tucker, 2005).
 - *"It's a bit of a change and a bit of a highlight."*
 - *"It's a good thing for me to do it; to do all these things I've never done before."*
 - *"Your ability to realise that you can exist as an adult in the world. Travel is the best way to learn a new language of confidence."*



2. Travel affords a sense of living and learning

- The travel experience uniquely affords people with intellectual disabilities an effective medium through which learning moments can take place (Lehto, Luo, Miao, & Ghiselli, 2017).
 - *“I love travelling because I love history a lot; new culture, new people, and new, different ways.”*
 - *“When you go through the borders you need to tip water out of your bottle because they think it’s a firearm or something. The people know that if the sniffer dog sits down next to me, I’m smuggling something.”*
- The travel experience is conducive to personal growth and renders a sense of independence, accomplishment and fulfillment (Kim & Lehto, 2013; Luo, 2014).
 - *“I tried on my own, some snails. The frogs legs, they’re the ones that everyone says tastes like chicken. The snails are more like mushrooms.”*
 - *“When I first started going to Australia, I couldn’t do the Giant Drop, but I did it anyway. And then the second time I went, I couldn’t do the Bustle, but I did it anyway. I’m scared to get over my fear of heights, but I’m actually going to go bungee jumping off the bridges.”*
 - *“I love Sea World - I think it’s the dolphins - it just inspires me to do a bit of biology to do with the marine life. How they adapt when they get caught in the nets and stuff, and how I could, as a biologist, prevent that. I think I would really love to study them.”*



3. Travel strengthens relational connections

- The travel experience can facilitate social inclusion and enhance social skills and effectiveness (Kim & Lehto, 2013).
 - *“Now I can have a dialogue with my friends that is on par with them - that’s a dialogue I wouldn’t have been able to have if I hadn’t travelled.”*
- Reflecting on and sharing memories of the photographed travel experience (Lehto et al., 2017), often becomes a predominant element in the narrative of a person’s life (Baerenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004), and renders connection and feelings of belonging (Lloyd, King, Lampe, & McDougall, 2001; Lord, 1997).
 - *“Sometimes I do take pictures on my phone. I love sharing stories with my friends in my life.”*
- A positive and enjoyable travel experience stems from the sociality of being together (Carr, 2011; Larsen, 2008), and it enables friendship and deepens relational bonds (Lehto, Soojin, Yi-Chin, & MacDermid, 2009; Luo, 2014).
 - *“Of course it’s very special for me. I love my memories. I think it was an amazing experience for me.”*
 - *“It was nice for her to come with me; she was happy to do it and she’s actually fun. If I go on more holidays, I’ll take her.”*



Conclusion and implications

- The presentation contributes preliminary insights into the significance of leisure travel to people with intellectual disabilities, and suggests that it is perceived as an experience through which a 'good life' can be enabled (Hermsen, Embregts, Hendriks, & Frielink, 2014).
- This lens of intellectual disability addresses a scarcity of representation in existing scholarship, and augments and advances current understandings of the accessible tourist experience, for this group of travellers.
- There is need for increased acknowledgement of and awareness around, this group of travellers (Gladwell & Bedini, 2004; Small, 2015), and industry and inquiry alike, could seek to facilitate more positive and fulfilling travel experiences, and thereby promote social inclusion (Innes et al., 2016; Richards et al., 2010).





Thank you 😊

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