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Inclusive Destination Management Strategies

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Abstract

Destination management strategies with access and inclusion at their core ensure previously marginalised populations, such as people with disabilities, can actively participate in tourism. This chapter puts forward four key interrelated pillars pertinent to the development of an accessible and inclusive destination. The first pillar addresses the significant leadership role tourism destination management organisations have to play in terms of setting an accessible and inclusive vision, garnering buy-in from operators and related sectors, and considering how audits, or accessibility guides, may be used to determine what developments are needed. The second pillar identifies the need to consider who should be involved in planning and decision-making, who can coordinate and bring disparate groups and sectors together to share knowledge, and how all stakeholders involved can utilise best practice to work together, mitigate challenges, and co-create meaningful outcomes. This means the appropriate people are involved in the development and implementation of strategies, which is critical to ensure all aspects of development are considered. As the people who are directly affected by both inclusive and exclusive decisions, the involvement of people with disabilities is crucial. The third pillar identifies collaboration as an important means of sharing knowledge and enabling progress. Considering the impact and integration of assistive technologies may also enable tourism destinations to reach potential visitors with disabilities in innovative ways. Finally, the fourth pillar highlights how accurate and detailed information is critical for people with disabilities to be able to make informed choices about their travels and the activities they choose to engage in. The lack of appropriate and accurate information is a well-known barrier to tourism participation for people

with disabilities and should thus be prioritised in the marketing and promotion of any accessible and inclusive destination management strategy. Ultimately, it is crucial to recognise that unless the whole tourism system is accessible and inclusive, then individual efforts may not be sufficiently effective.

Keywords

Inclusive destinations, accessibility, key pillars of accessible tourism, tourism destination management, people with disabilities

Introduction

Destination management strategies with access and inclusion at their core ensure marginalised populations, such as people with disabilities, can actively participate in tourism. An estimated 1.3 billion people (16% of the global population) live with disability (World Health Organisation, 2023). The United Nations (2006) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) asserts that people with disabilities should be able to access, participate in, and enjoy leisure, recreation, and tourism experiences as a fundamental human right. Destinations and operators that meet the access requirements of people with disabilities, and those they travel with, open themselves up to a significant market that is known to be loyal, stay longer, and spend more (Avis et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2007). Accommodating this market can also help to make a destination more competitive (VisitEngland, n.d.b). It is therefore critical that destination managers make access and inclusion a key strategic focus, and partner with people with disabilities as a key stakeholder group (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2010), to achieve social sustainability outcomes. As will be highlighted in this chapter, collaboration with people with disabilities is essential at all stages of destination development because they will receive direct benefit from adaptations made for accessibility and inclusion. By drawing on their lived experience and sharing their views on how destinations can be exclusive spaces, people with disabilities can provide an incredibly valuable perspective to enhance destination developers' knowledge and understanding of issues of accessibility and inclusion that directly impact them. Previous research has shown that other stakeholder groups recognise the value in this co-creative process, and note

the potential for mutually beneficial relationships between destination developers and people with disabilities (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; McIntosh & Cockburn-Wootten, 2021).

Destination managers have opportunities to explore the requirements of diverse markets and understand those with access requirements. At each level (national, regional/state, local), those in leadership positions have the responsibility to set goals and enact strategies through destination management plans that provide a clear direction towards achieving a vision around inclusion. However, this does not always go further than meeting minimum requirements enshrined within legislative frameworks and building codes for access (Nyanjom et al., 2018). Much work still needs to be done by leaders and other tourism stakeholders (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). National governments and tourism boards are in a position to provide a vision for their country's tourism industry but can allow regions/states to determine how this vision will be implemented in practice, based on the unique characteristics of each region/state. Setting a vision for inclusion is as important as achieving goals around sustainability.

Adapting to meet the access requirements of visitors with disabilities is not only beneficial for economic sustainability, but also for the social sustainability of a community, at national, regional/state, and local levels, by putting into practice the values enshrined in the UNCRPD (United Nations [UN], 2006; Cockburn-Wootton & McIntosh, 2020). These values have created a social and political imperative to take disability and resulting issues, such as the inaccessibility of the tourism industry, seriously. Making inclusions for visitors with disabilities is also crucial for destinations wanting to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, n.d.). The SDGs "provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity" (UN, n.d.) and have been highlighted by members of the United Nations as significant goals for the creation of better opportunities for people all over the world. Central to discussions about access and inclusion in tourism, is SDG#10, Reduced Inequalities (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018), as a means of social sustainability (UN World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2018). Tourism will remain an exclusive environment if it is designed to suit and service only the largest portion of the population (i.e., people without disabilities) (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). However, as mentioned, people with disabilities are not an insignificant market; they can be found in every market, in every nation of

the world, and in every social group (VisitEngland, n.d.a). Attempts to improve access and inclusion in tourism can have significant impacts, not only for people with disabilities, but also for their family, friends, and the carers they travel with (Robinson et al., 2007). This makes the size of this market even greater. Therefore, providing strategic leadership, awareness, and education to tourism organisations about accessibility can encourage buy-in to increase their customer base, and deliver on an improved inclusive customer service beyond mere legislative accessibility requirements.

Finding ways to include this market in tourism helps to create better inclusion in wider society, because it reveals the difficulties faced by people with disabilities in aspects of life that those without disabilities may take for granted (UNWTO, 2018). Broadening tourism offerings to better include visitors with disabilities meets SDG#8, Decent Work and Economic Growth. Learning from other destination managers, tourism operators and providers within a destination, who have established the value of the access market (e.g., VisitEngland, n.d.a) can “help you demonstrate to your colleagues and business partners that travellers with mobility, hearing or visual impairments should be recognised for their economic impact rather than any perceived problems they may present” (VisitEngland, n.d.a, p. 8).

With over one billion people living with disability globally, along with their families, friends, and carers, the potential for revenue is high. The rise in aging populations across the globe means that the number of people with disabilities will also rise (Robinson et al., 2007) as the likelihood of having a disability increases with age. Assessing the potential revenue against the perceived (but not necessarily) high costs of adapting for accessibility (Bowtell, 2015) may reveal a balance in favour of increased revenue. One study found that tourists with mobility disabilities are worth nearly USD60 billion per year (MMGY Global, 2022) and that their spending could increase by 34% if barriers were eliminated (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2021). As discussed later in this chapter, small changes can be made to provide greater access and inclusion, which may not cost very much. The financial investment required, depending on the destination, may be significantly less than the potential revenue. Equally, tourism organisations can strive to be inclusive in ways that do not require significant investment, such as through providing advanced

customer care/service. Here, we note the difference between ‘accessibility’ (often perceived as physical access/infrastructure) and ‘inclusion’ (an understanding and appreciation of diverse customers).

In this chapter we illustrate the key facets of accessible and inclusive destination management strategies, drawing on case studies to show examples of best practice. We adopt the definition of strategy as “the planning of a desirable future and the design of a suitable programme for achieving it” (Tribe, 2016, p. 7). By using this definition, we encompass the plans, policies, goals, and objectives that identify the set of actions needed to develop programmes that provide accessible and inclusive destinations for all. Further to this, while we primarily discuss tourism for people with disabilities, we acknowledge that real, holistic inclusion “can never be adequate if it only attends to one case or group” (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018, p. 593). A focus on accessibility and inclusion ultimately benefits everyone.

Definitions and terminology for accessible and inclusive destination management

It is important at the outset of this discussion to establish how we define disability, access, and inclusion in tourism. Rather than placing a restrictive definition around disability, we follow the WHO’s umbrella term, which covers “impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions” (WHO, 2011, p. 4) as it is suitably inclusive. The terms are further explained by the WHO (2011, p. 5) as:

- Impairments are problems in body function or alterations in body structure – for example, paralysis or blindness
- Activity limitations are difficulties in executing activities – for example, walking or eating
- Participation restrictions are problems with involvement in any area of life – for example, facing discrimination in employment or transportation

When considering terms to denote disability in accessible and inclusive destination management strategies, it is important to appreciate that disability is not a homogenous concept, but complex and multifaceted (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Darcy & Dickson, 2009). Every person will experience disability or impairment in their own way (Ambrose et al., 2012; WTTC, 2020). This

heterogeneity might understandably make some destination managers apprehensive about the wide number of different opinions they need to accommodate and how expensive this might be. Some providers may also feel they do not know where to begin, feel overwhelmed by the undertaking, hold misperceptions about this market, or not see the potential of the market and the benefits inclusion can bring to their destination. However, while this could be (mis)understood as a challenge, it is also a “golden opportunity” (UNWTO, 2013, p. 3) to learn more about the access market and discover the range of small changes that, while not necessarily a quick fix (Ambrose et al., 2012), can make a positive difference to visitors with disabilities’ experiences in a destination. A further consideration is the appreciation that not all disabilities are visible. Statistics from the United Kingdom in 2015 state that only eight percent of the population use wheelchairs (VisitEngland, n.d.a), which are one of the more obvious signs of a disability. Therefore, destination managers, from the start of their strategy preparation, must think beyond wheelchairs and physical access limitations (VisitEngland, n.d.b; WTTC, 2020).

Aspects of access and inclusion in tourism are commonly referred to as “accessible tourism”. For the purposes of this chapter, accessible tourism is considered as that which

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. This definition is inclusive of all people including those travelling with children in prams, people with disabilities and seniors (Darcy & Dickson, 2009, p. 34).

By using a broader definition than one which encompasses only those with disabilities and/or access requirements, accessible tourism acknowledges that we can encounter disability at any point and to any degree throughout our lives (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

A focus on access and inclusion in destination management strategies is crucial for accessible tourism, to ensure the participation of all people. We adopt Scheyvens and Biddulph’s understanding of inclusive tourism as “transformative tourism in which marginalised groups are engaged in ethical production or consumption of tourism and the sharing of its benefits” (2018,

p. 592). Inclusive tourism is not intended to be a buzzword for marketing purposes, but “a source of critical and innovative thinking” (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018, p. 605). It is an important concept for destinations to think carefully and holistically about in terms of who is included or excluded from the destination (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). In this definition, accessible tourism is concerned with both the consumption and production of tourism (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). For the purposes of this chapter, an accessible and inclusive destination management strategy is considered to be one that challenges existing assumptions around the barriers of access to participation in tourism, and replacing them with awareness and education, information, and the ability to deliver access and inclusion at all stages of the visitor (or customer) journey to create opportunities for all (UNWTO, 2018).

An inclusive destination should not be confused with a destination that offers all-inclusive packages (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). Instead, the UNWTO offers the following definition:

An inclusive tourism destination is a destination that offers a tourism experience based on its own, singular attributes, transforms the industry by boosting its competitiveness, creates decent employment and promotes equal opportunities for all – especially the most vulnerable groups – to participate in and benefit from tourism activity, all in line with the principles of sustainable development (2018, p. 26).

The UNWTO also notes that including these vulnerable groups leads to a “healthier society” (2018, p. 27), and, as discussed later in the chapter, the option for marginalised groups to become suppliers, service providers, and employees within the tourism industry.

An important concept in discussions of inclusive destinations and accessible tourism is the shift from the medical model of disability to the social model. Each model serves as a way to perceive disability. The medical model perceived a person’s impairment as a medical problem, requiring professional medical solutions to mitigate it (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010a). The shift to the social model, in more recent decades, created a change to seeing an impairment as socially constructed by the world around us, and that a person with an impairment has been disabled by society (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010a). Thus, it is the complex attitudes, laws, policies, and societal norms that

create a disabling environment, requiring social solutions to what is primarily a social problem (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010a). This chapter is framed around the social model of disability, requiring destination managers to recognise that impairment is not the only cause of disability, and positive changes towards access and inclusion can be enacted through social solutions and practical applications delivered through accessible and inclusive destination management strategies.

To embrace a vision for social change towards more accessible and inclusive tourism, language matters (Gillovic et al., 2018). As such, we adopt person-first language in discussing people with disabilities. By linguistically placing the person before the disability or impairment, we acknowledge that the disability or impairment is only once aspect of who they are, and not the defining quality that the term “disabled person” suggests (Ray-Subramanian, 2021). We also acknowledge people with disabilities’ rights to self-determination in regard to how their disability or impairment affects them, and what it means in terms of their capacity to participate in all aspects of life and society. As such, destination managers could consider the way they communicate with visitors with disabilities and other groups they aim to include. Terminology can be influenced by the language used in a destination’s legislation. Equally, use of language in an accessible and inclusive destination management strategy may be aligned with the social model of disability or the language preferred by involved stakeholder groups. In the New Zealand context, for example, Gillovic and McIntosh state that despite their support of the social model of disability, the use of adjective-first language (i.e., “disabled people”) was widely adopted because of “the legislative terminology, context and geographic location of the researchers” (2015, p. 235).

A framework for accessible and inclusive destination management strategies

We posit that four key interrelated pillars underpin an accessible and inclusive destination management strategy to achieve accessible tourism (see Fig. 4.1).

Fig. 4.1 about here

Pillar 1: Knowledge

Knowledge of accessible tourism, best practice models, new data sets, disability awareness and education, and information, are all key to enabling destination management organisations to strategically embed access and inclusion in their vision and practice. Audits, or Accessibility Guides, in particular, are useful tools for destination managers and developers to use to assess the current state of accessibility within their destination and identify gaps or weaknesses where improvement is needed.

“The first step towards inclusion is [for a destination] to assess its main realities, especially the groups on which action is to be taken” (UNWTO, 2018, p. 30). Some destination managers may benefit from framing their assessments of these realities as audits. Audits can be undertaken at any level – national, regional/state, or local. Assessing the current situation and setting directions for future development and aims at a national level will demonstrate to the nation that access and inclusion are being taken seriously, and that the national tourism agency or board recognises the potential of the market. Filtering this serious attitude towards development and improvement down to regional/state levels offers the opportunity for regions/states to assess and adapt, according to their distinct geographical characteristics. Regions/states are well positioned to look holistically at infrastructure such as transport options, to help people with disabilities move from one location to another and create value within the tourism chain. A holistic view can also be taken locally, such as within cities or beach towns. Those in customer-facing processes and roles will likely need disability awareness training and accommodations, and be monitored for their effectiveness, as they will have the greatest effect on visitors with disabilities’ experiences, especially if concerns arise (WTTC, 2021, p. 5).

A notable example of this approach is evident in the work of VisitBritain. This national tourism agency has a very comprehensive website (<https://www.visitbritain.org>) with documents and useful links for many aspects of accessibility, aimed at destination managers and individual tourism businesses and operators. It highlights the importance of including people with disabilities in creating and carrying out audits, in both consulting and participatory roles (Accentuate, n.d.), because “inclusion means not only the possibility to travel and participate in

tourism as a consumer, but also the possibility for locals to take part in decision-making and tourism development” (Harju-Myllyaho & Jutila, 2021, p. 62). The website, documents, and case studies throughout make a point of recognising the challenges, questions, and concerns that stakeholders within a destination may have. A sentiment of reassurance runs throughout their resources, as VisitBritain shows businesses and operators that there are ways to mitigate accessibility challenges and, ultimately, that inclusion is achievable, even if only very small steps are taken at the beginning. For example, Bosworth Battlefield found that rearranging the tables and chairs in their restaurant meant that more wheelchairs and prams were able to navigate the space without reducing the number of customers they could accommodate (VisitEngland, n.d.a.).

The efforts of VisitBritain towards an accessible and inclusive destination are supported by data and a range of audits. Audits are suggested by VisitBritain as a starting place for both destinations and the businesses within them, to determine what the destination is already doing well, and what gaps in service or knowledge remain. Destination managers, using previous case studies as guides, can ask their providers and operators to assess the accessibility of their offerings against criteria that are known to be important to people with disabilities (VisitEngland, n.d.a). Knowing the state of a destination’s preparedness for visitors with disabilities, will reveal how much work needs to be done, and in which areas or aspects of the destination, as well as establishing an idea of the resources required (UNWTO, 2018). Although making a destination accessible and inclusive is considered a challenge (UNWTO, 2013) a destination may already be doing some things right to accommodate the requirements of its residents (VisitEngland, n.d.a). The case studies in VisitBritain’s (VisitEngland, n.d.a) documents show what is possible and manageable for smaller businesses and operators, as well as providing anecdotes from businesses who have engaged with the audit process.

Operators within a destination may be concerned about the time, effort, human resources, and cost involved in embarking on and completing an audit. Ensuring the scale and scope of an audit is appropriate to the level for which it is being undertaken (i.e., destination, group, aspect [e.g., transportation], or individual), may alleviate some of these concerns. Therefore, “the DO (destination organisation) as the ‘owner’ of the visitor experience, can be an important catalyst

in establishing an access working group and joint objectives” (VisitEngland, n.d.a, p. 21), as well as promoting agreement on why and how the audit should be undertaken.

At a basic level, an audit may merely involve asking what visitors with disabilities think about a destination, what aspects of the destination they engaged with (e.g., accommodation or attractions), and what major barriers they encountered in transportation or elsewhere in public spaces (VisitEngland, n.d.a). A more complex assessment of a destination would require a wide and holistic examination of the visitor journey (Darcy et al., 2010). Drawing on examples and using checklists from other destinations with similar attractions, or visitors who have completed audits already, may provide insights as to what is appropriate to assess for the destination. It is important that any questions put to visitors with disabilities about their preferences or activities in a destination are constructed to elicit the reasons for certain choices or decisions to be made.

Ongoing audits are important for maintaining a quality of service and experience. As part of the audit process, paying attention to feedback given by people with disabilities will provide guidance on what works and what does not (Accentuate, 2012; VisitEngland, n.d.a). This feedback is crucial, as it comes from a loyal market that destination managers will want to attract and expand on. Word-of-mouth recommendations among family and friends, and being able to provide feedback about their experiences, are vital within disability networks (Özogul & Baran, 2016). Monitoring trends in the market is also crucial for determining how the access market (or others who may benefit from adaptations for the access market) is travelling, and which destinations are receiving positive feedback and high visitor volumes.

An important aspect of auditing and monitoring is ensuring consistency throughout the tourism chain (WTTC, 2021). This is where destination managers can look at the system holistically, with the advice and consultation of people with disabilities, to evaluate where barriers remain that might hinder the experiences of visitors with disabilities. Setting clear standards and expectations at a national or regional/state level will help individual tourism businesses and operators understand what is required, not only of them, but of all businesses and operators within the nation or region/state, and why this is important for visitors with disabilities. This can be achieved

by encouraging tourism businesses to establish an Accessibility Guide as a minimum requirement for accessibility and inclusion. Ensuring standards and expectations are measurable for analysing outcomes will help to make results clear and useful for the stakeholders and groups involved (UNWTO, 2018). If necessary, collaboration between businesses should be considered to strengthen the accessible and inclusive tourism system. Such collaboration may even lead to innovation and new ideas that benefit all visitors.

Adapting destination visitor surveys is important for building knowledge, and measuring and evaluating inclusiveness within a destination. Destination visitor surveys (at national, regional/state, or local levels) can be used to gauge visitor numbers of people with disabilities to provide an initial indication of the market size. At the national level, visitor surveys in Australia, for example, found that visitors with disabilities account for around 17 per cent of all tourism spending, among other useful insights (Pavkovic et al., 2017). This sort of data is often not readily collected, however. For example, New Zealand's International Visitor Survey data does not currently include questions about disability. Additional questions could be added, about (for example) specific types of impairments or barriers, to deepen understandings of how people with disabilities are engaging with businesses, services, and experiences within the destination. Adding a disability module, or even a simple question, to national or regional/state visitor surveys would enable destination managers to examine the situation at a wider and more holistic level (VisitEngland, n.d.a). This would help national or regional/state tourism managers to understand the bigger picture and inform decisions that affect a wide range and number of tourism businesses and operations across the whole visitor journey, both to and within destinations.

When designing an accessible and inclusive destination management strategy, people with disabilities should be meaningfully involved in the conception and execution of strategies (Ambrose et al., 2012) because "by involving disabled people in the auditing process you can gain a more accurate picture of existing access, which strategists, providers and service deliverers can then develop and expand upon" (Accentuate, n.d., p. 7). Involving people with disabilities as a priority also shows a meaningful commitment to access and inclusion, and recognition that their lived experiences and knowledge are important to issues that impact them. Their involvement

also means that destination managers will be able to see the destination from the perspective of those who engage with it (or not) every day, and how they see their needs can be best served (Accentuate, n.d.).

Understanding the principles behind universal design may provide further insights for destination managers of the requirements of visitors with disabilities and other access requirements. Incorporating this into thinking at the beginning of the strategic process will help destination planners and managers recognise opportunities for universal design, as the destination further develops its accessible and inclusive vision. Universal design is often touted as the fundamental approach to take if a destination wants to become accessible to visitors with disabilities (Ambrose et al., 2012). Universal design is “design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability” (Center for Universal Design, 2009). As such, universal design also holds benefits for local residents and people with other mobility issues, such as parents with prams or those with temporary injuries (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

Universal design goes hand-in-hand with thinking about the “chain of accessibility” (Darcy et al., 2010, p. 309), or the accessible visitor journey. It should be implemented at the beginning of the design or audit process and is likely to fall under the purview of destination managers. Universal design comes from thinking holistically about a destination and how the accessible visitor journey links to create a continuous pathway for those with disabilities (Darcy et al., 2010). Ideally, universal design should be enshrined in policy at the national government level (Darcy et al., 2010), so that it becomes an imperative for all industries and sectors, not just those relevant to tourism, so it can be implemented whenever and where-ever possible.

A notable case study of inclusive design is that of Hotel Brooklyn, Manchester, United Kingdom (UK). The hotel underwent a renovation prior to 2022 that allowed management to consider how accessibility could be improved in the hotel (Motionspot, n.d.). By working with Motionspot, a design company committed to inclusion, they were able to incorporate features such as wardrobes with adjustable wardrobe rails, curtains controlled by a panel next to the bed, fold-up

shower seats, and slip-resistant surfaces (see Figs. 4.2 and 4.3). What is significant about this case study, are the “first-of-their-kind” (Motionspot, n.d.) ceiling track hoists positioned within recessed lighting features which can be hidden away when not in use (see Fig. 4.4). Improvements also extended to communal spaces within the hotel, with a lowered reception desk (see Fig. 5) and wheelchair accessible public toilets, and, notably, staff underwent accessibility training to understand how the modifications could be used by guests (Motionspot, n.d.). The hotel retained its image and reputation as luxury accommodation, and significantly increased its bookings and revenue.

Fig. 4.2 about here

Fig. 4.3 about here

Fig. 4.4 about here

Fig. 4.5 about here

As well as understanding the principles of universal design, both tourism destination managers and individual operators should ensure staff recognise their part in creating positive experiences for visitors with disabilities. The social model holds that negative attitudes towards disability and a lack of knowledge and understanding can create or contribute to a disabling environment. Because “good access is as much about inclusive service delivery and customer care as it is about the built environment” (Accentuate, 2012, p. 7), it is vitally important for destinations to ensure that staff are trained in understanding disability issues and how to provide services for people with disabilities at the destination level. Feedback about tourism experiences and services will spread through disability networks, and great feedback will foster positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Compulsory disability awareness training during paid working hours, at least for all customer-facing staff, is essential to achieve an understanding of disability and how to deliver advanced levels of customer care.

Knowledge of various invisible and hidden disabilities is important, as well as knowing how to help visitors with disabilities practically (VisitEngland, n.d.a). The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower (2023) scheme has been adopted in many destinations globally, as a way for people with hidden

disabilities to signal that they may require extra assistance by wearing a lanyard and card around their neck with clearly visible sunflower motifs. Providers who have adopted the scheme can then notice the people that may require extra support and discreetly provide it. The Sunflower scheme began in the UK as a tool to help people with hidden disabilities navigate airports, which can be stressful for any passenger, especially those unfamiliar with their layouts and processes (Losekoot & Small, 2022) and has been adopted by over 200 airports across the world (Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme Limited, n.d.). Poor treatment by staff can sometimes make or break an experience for people with disabilities (Darcy & Dickson, 2009) and adopting the Sunflower scheme provides businesses with an imperative to ensure staff receive training in recognising the needs of people with hidden disabilities. One option for businesses to consider is that of employing people with disabilities “to bring experience in-house” (VisitEngland, n.d.a, p. 16), rather than remain without the benefit of a lived experience. Asking partner businesses with responsibilities along the visitor journey to also give their staff disability training, will ensure consistency for visitors with disabilities, as they can be assured of good customer service at each stage (WTTTC, 2021). VisitEngland recommends looking for national training programmes, as well as disability advocacy and advice groups, and placing statements on destination websites that staff have received training, so potential customers can see that staff have learned how to provide advanced customer service to people with disabilities.

Perceptions about the high costs of staff training can create challenges (Bowtell, 2015). However, some local community organisations provide free disability training, and any costs should be considered as an investment and sign of a commitment to learning and growing as an accessible and inclusive destination. The results will no doubt be warmly received by visitors with disabilities, as their experiences of customer-facing staff will be more positive. Training will also help staff within a destination feel more at ease when serving visitors with disabilities. A director at Thanet District Council, England, stated that after receiving training, “I now feel much more confident in communicating with people who have access needs” (VisitEngland, n.d.a, p. 13). An important aspect of this example was that they participated as a director so their teams could see their leader taking up the training as well.

A further challenge is to ensure that staff training is enshrined within strategies and on-boarding (i.e., orientation training and organisational socialisation) in the event that those who receive training move on to other roles or go on leave (Accentuate, 2012). Ensuring continuity within a business so that people with disabilities receive a consistent quality of service and experience is key to retaining loyalty and thereby securing repeat visitors. Both destinations and individual operators could consider how they could employ people with disabilities. Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) assert that marginalised people can act not only as consumers of tourism, but also as producers of it, by being included in decision-making and ownership roles. This aligns with the UNWTO's definition of an inclusive tourism destination, as well as SDG#10, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG#11, Sustainable Cities and Communities. The benefits of inclusive tourism reach beyond those consuming tourism products and into the wider community and society, by helping create jobs or hiring people that may have been impacted by an exclusive job market. In the case of tourism, this requires providing training that enables operators to upskill and form connections with tourists that can result in repeat visits (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Pillar 2: Coordination

An accessible and inclusive destination management strategy requires leadership and coordination of a shared inspirational vision, enablers for recovery and transformation, synergy in knowledge and resources for adaptation and resilience, and delivering a quality standard accessible tourism information platform.

Leadership is not just getting buy-in at the beginning, but continued coordination of the efforts and vision for an accessible and inclusive destination. Pushing tourism businesses and operators to continuously update their information, (re)train staff, and seek guidance for further development, are all important to maintain quality of service. The WTTC states that “effective change needs to be actioned at a systemic level” (2021, p. 3). Those at the top are in a significant position to be able to create and drive systemic change by instilling a vision of an accessible and inclusive destination within the reach of its people. A leader or champion with the right intentions and position, can gather the appropriate resources and inspire tourism businesses and operators to climb on board, buy into the vision, and navigate the market (WTTC, 2021). Stigmas around

people with disabilities and their abilities create a significant barrier that strong leadership can help mitigate. Stating that “this is what we value and what we want for this destination,” accompanied by a compelling business and social rationale, and targeted staff training, can all inspire and lead to systemic change.

VisitBritain (www.visitbritain.org) provides an example of leadership, by gathering information about not only the access market, but also for those who will benefit from the infrastructure and information put in place to support it. The vast amount of data and resources pulled together by this national tourism agency shows that there is no shortage of information available for destination managers and developers to use to support the growth of their own accessible and inclusive destinations. While each destination will be different in terms of markets and offerings, case studies, such as those presented by VisitBritain, show the types of data and information that are required to understand what is possible.

The challenge of improving access and inclusion at a destination may seem daunting given that disability is heterogeneous and can affect people at any time, thus leading to evolving challenges and needs, but having the right leadership will help staff adjust as required (WTTC, 2021). Having the right person or people in a position to lead, coordinate, and demonstrate the vision, and proactively seek feedback, will help businesses, operators, and their staff to maintain momentum through the challenges ahead. These leaders will need knowledge of accessible and inclusive practices, and the requirements of the targeted markets informed by the voices of the people within those markets, as it is especially important that their voices are heard (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). They will also need the passion and commitment to inspire confidence and belief in the vision of access and inclusion and be able to drive change. In particular, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups will have the personal lived experience of the destination and should be encouraged to be present when decisions that impact them are made (WTTC, 2020).

Leadership is essential in making change happen, and in continuing inspiration and connection with the vision set out for the destination. A problem may arise if an established leader at the destination moves into a role that does not involve access or inclusion, or is outside the

destination (Accentuate, 2012). Critical momentum can be lost if the vision and commitment is not securely ingrained in management's goals for the destination, or if a suitable replacement champion cannot be found. Leadership for inclusion cannot be undertaken lightly, as it requires longevity to create effective and meaningful change. Resources and case studies on accessible and inclusive tourism suggest that destination managers are those best placed to assess the current state of accessibility within their destination and discover ways that smaller businesses and operators can come together and/or discover where gaps or weaknesses exist (VisitEngland, n.d.a).

Getting buy-in from operators can be a challenge if they cannot initially grasp the value of the access market or consider the cost (economic, time, effort, etc.) of becoming accessible to be too great to be viable. Encouraging the associations or national/regional/state/local groups that businesses work with to look into accessibility as a requirement, will help individual businesses see that there is a commitment to this from more than just tourism boards and destination managers (VisitEngland, n.d.a). This should be seen as an opportunity to further the cause of access and inclusion. Bringing together diverse stakeholders to co-ordinate collaborative efforts for an accessible and inclusive destination management strategy is important, and ways to ensure the effectiveness of this collaboration need to be considered (McIntosh & Cockburn-Wootton, 2021).

Pillar 3: Enablers

Collaboration with disability organisations and the wider access sector to problem solve and remove barriers are foundational for enabling meaningful participation and an assured quality of accessible and inclusive tourism. Particular enablers can also include accessibility champions who can be involved throughout the change process and share the learnings from their successes. Innovations also unlock potential across the wider visitor journey.

When discussing enablers for accessible and inclusive tourism, it is pertinent to discuss why 'enabling' is a significant word. There is a considerable amount of research on the disabling environments that people with disabilities face in engaging with tourism (for example Avis et al.,

2005; Kaganek et al., 2017; McKercher & Darcy, 2018; Orakani et al., 2021; Smith, 1987). These environments are often discussed in terms of barriers to participation and may be termed as intrinsic, environmental, and interactive (Smith, 1987), or structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Despite being termed in a variety of ways, there are recurring barriers among the literature which may be found (and hopefully countered) within tourism destinations, such as lack of information (Blitchfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011; Daniels et al, 2005; Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Rhodda, 2012; Yau et al., 2004) and untrained or ill-equipped staff (Avis et al, 2005; Bedini, 2000; Smith, 1987). To address these barriers and other aspects requiring problem solving, improving collaboration between stakeholders within and between destinations can help providers to discover solutions (McIntosh & Cockburn-Wooten, 2021). Managers, operators, and businesses at any development level should be encouraged to come together to share successes and uncover new opportunities to *enable* development at their destination.

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the importance of accessibility and inclusion is enshrined in global human rights frameworks. However, advocating for additions or amendments to legislative and regulatory frameworks will have further significant impact in creating a legal and social case for enabling the development of accessible and inclusive destinations (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b; Veitch & Shaw, 2010). By making accessibility and inclusion a key priority or requirement in development, destinations will be obligated to meet the challenge. Any work done to alter these frameworks must be done in consultation with disability groups to ensure the voices of people with disabilities are heard, in alignment with the social model of disability (Oliver & Barnes, 2010).

There is a place for technology to play a role as an enabler of accessible tourism, as it can help provide equitable access to and inclusion in tourism experiences (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b). An increase in virtual experiences and virtual reality could have (but is not limited to) two effects: to show people with disabilities places and experiences they cannot access for whatever reason, and to show people with disabilities what the destination they are planning to visit is like. As artificial intelligence (AI) grows around the world and within the tourism industry, destination

managers could investigate its applications for access and inclusion, as well as for other uses in tourism. Significantly, AI can learn about user preferences and collate information about how visitors with disabilities travel and use technology (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). However, while technology can be useful for helping groups like visitors with disabilities participate in tourism, and as a tool for destination managers to understand the market for access and inclusion, it can also be a factor of exclusion (UNWTO, 2018). If visitors with disabilities cannot find information about available technologies, or if it is challenging to access, they may not be able to decide if it is suitable for them and/or if it meets their needs, and thus be excluded further. It is important that any adaptive equipment or assistive technology offered by a tourism operator is appropriately and accurately advertised so that it can be found and used by a person with a disability or their travelling companion.

A case study example of a tourist attraction that applied virtual reality (VR) for an accessible and inclusive visitor experience is that of The Geevor Tin Mine in Cornwall, UK, (a World Heritage site, see Fig. 4.6). The attraction found that utilising VR made it possible for people with mobility issues to experience parts of the mine that their disability or impairments made it impossible to access (Sound View Media, 2019). Importantly, they asked for consultation from members of the community with lived experiences of disability to help test out the VR device. The implementation of this technology garnered significant media coverage and positive feedback from visitors.

Fig. 4.6 about here

Pillar 4: Platform

An accessible and inclusive destination management strategy should aim to bring together vital information for accessible trip planning. All tourists rely on information to make decisions about their travels, and at all stages of their trips. For people with disabilities, this reliance may be more significant, as information can have positive and negative consequences on their participation in and experience of tourism (Ambrose et al., 2012; Packer et al., 2007; Robinson et al., 2007).

Access to, and availability of relevant information is cited as the “single greatest barrier” (VisitEngland, n.d.b, p. 3) that people with disabilities face in planning a trip. A UK survey in 2015 (VisitEngland, n.d.a, p. 13) found that 54% of disabled travellers avoided going to new places if they could not find relevant access information. Visit England (n.d.b) warn that if adequate information is not provided, a destination may lose visits, and therefore revenue, not just from those with disabilities, but also, their travelling companions.

Websites with accessible design are the main resources used by people with or without disabilities to gather information for their travels (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). Having a dedicated page(s) on a destination’s website with pertinent information for the access community as well as useful links to other providers, will make it much easier for people with disabilities to find information that is relevant to them. Making this a one-stop-shop, and not just add-ons to other pages, also shows an inclusive mind-set. To increase understandings of different needs, information should also be made user-friendly and available in a variety of formats due to the heterogeneity of disability (Darcy et al., 2010; VisitEngland, n.d.b). For example, larger fonts or an audio component may be needed for people with vision impairments (World Wide Web Consortium, 2019). These kinds of support can also be employed by tourism businesses and operators, for example, by providing large font menus in hospitality settings. Asking people with disabilities to consult on the design of websites and their contents will help ensure they really do become one-stop-shops. Following international standards set by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (World Wide Web Consortium, 2023) and W3C (<https://www.w3.org>) will help operators understand what is needed and sought out by people with disabilities when they access websites. People with disabilities can also be asked to comment on websites in their finished form to check usability (VisitEngland, n.d.b).

Information about accessibility may be compiled in a specific Accessibility Guide for consistency within a destination. It is important that information is provided (on websites, in guidebooks, brochures etc.) in detail and depth, such as on the level of accessibility at a destination (UNWTO, 2013), and in unambiguous language (VisitEngland, n.d.b). For example, in relation to a hotel room, information about it should not just state that it is accessible for wheelchairs, but rather

what *specifically* within that room is accessible. A room may have space to manoeuvre wheelchairs only up to a certain size, which means it may not be accessible for all wheelchair users. Wheelchair users have been noted as having “the highest need for detailed information” (VisitEngland, n.d.a, p. 22). Qualifying information like this empowers visitors with disabilities to retain their autonomy when making choices that suit them (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Darcy & Dickson, 2009; WTTC, 2021). Thus, they will not be frustrated when arriving to find that their room does not actually accommodate them and that they need to find a different room, or even a different hotel. Key words used in reports on information are “describe,” “details,” and “signpost” to show people with disabilities what information is provided for them. The use of photographs, virtual tours, and short videos is also helpful. An accessible hotel room may benefit from having a diagram on a website indicating the measurements between and around furniture in the bedroom and bathroom (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). A short video and audio description of the main tourist areas of a destination (at local, regional/state, and/or national levels) will help visitors with disabilities visualise the geography of the destination and consider potential limitations or barriers.

A directory of available services should also be offered, covering all stages of the visitor journey (UNWTO, 2013). It is important to consider not only the tourism activities and experiences that are accessible, but also the support services that may be required for their particular disability, for example, transport and access to medical services, veterinarians for guide dogs, and repairers of essential equipment and tools (UNWTO, 2013). However, a person with no lived experience of disability (or experience with a family member or friend) may not be aware of all of the day-to-day needs of a tourist with disability. It is important to consult with people with disabilities to ensure that all necessary support services are included.

Information must also be kept up-to-date, especially if new or pertinent information emerges that may affect visitors’ plans or experiences. The planning/booking stage is an ideal time to inform visitors with disabilities if alternations or adjustments can be made to accommodate specific needs (VisitEngland, n.d.b). Being open to enquiries about altering plans and being prepared to investigate options will show visitors with disabilities that they are being heard and

that a business is open to adapting, or at least exploring other options. This extra touch could go a long way towards earning loyal customers and repeat visitors. Customer service and communication options to ensure visitors with disabilities can enquire about their particular access requirements, and provide feedback about their experiences, are critical in enabling accessible and inclusive tourism.

For a destination to be accessible for and inclusive of visitors with disabilities, it is crucial that tourism destination managers adopt a mindset that considers the full tourism system and what “any tourists would regard as a quintessential experience” (Darcy & Dickson, 2009, p. 39). The travel experience begins with a planning stage, so tourism destination managers must be ready to share information and attract visitors with disabilities from the outset. Access and inclusion must be present for visitors with disabilities throughout their journey and experiences, from the planning stage through to leaving feedback at the end or after their trip. It is also crucial that all aspects of the trip (e.g., transport, accommodation, hospitality, and medical services), not just the experience or product they travelled for, work together to create a seamless experience (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). It is possible that individual operators may not have the means or leverage to convince other operators to adjust their services, but tourism destination managers are likely in the position to do so. This may be especially true in the planning stages of destinations still under development or may be implemented as a requirement of new operators in a destination. As a section of the population which is often marginalised in tourism offerings (Robinson et al., 2007), people with disabilities will appreciate destinations that spend the time, effort, and money to ensure an accessible and inclusive visitor journey is enabled; this helps improve the destination’s image not just for this market, but for everyone.

The UNWTO (2013, p. 6) lists elements of the tourism chain that need to be made accessible and inclusive for visitors with disabilities. They include:

- tourism destination management
- tourism information and advertising (preparation, information and booking)
- urban and architectural environments

- modes of transport and stations
- accommodation, food services, and conventions
- cultural activities (museums, theatres, and cinemas)
- other tourism activities and events

A feedback process must also be enabled at the end of the tourism chain. Visitors with disabilities should be able to review their experiences and provide feedback on how accessible and inclusive their travel, trip or experience was, so that in the event of a negative experience, tourism operators and managers can make the necessary changes to improve experiences for future tourists. This is particularly important because visitors with disabilities use their networks to gather information on whether, for example, an activity, accommodation provider, or restaurant meets their needs. Word-of-mouth is a useful communication tool for visitors with disabilities, and one that tourism operators and managers need to be aware of as important to this group of travellers (Robinson et al., 2007). Accounts of the experiences of others are considered to be the most reliable source of information for visitors with disabilities (Packer et al., 2007). Any feedback given should be acted upon, and the person who provided such feedback advised of this, so they know that their views were taken seriously (VisitEngland, n.d.b). The feedback process also enables tourism destination managers to make informed decisions about future stages of improving access and inclusion (WTTC, 2021).

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated four key pillars of an accessible and inclusive destination management strategy. Firstly, there is a need for leadership and a clear vision to drive a focus on accessibility guides, audits, and change. Secondly, ensuring the appropriate people are involved in the development and implementation of strategies is critical to ensure all aspects of development are considered. As the people who are directly affected by both inclusive and exclusive decisions, the involvement of people with disabilities is crucial. Thirdly, collaboration is specified as an important means of sharing knowledge and enabling progress. Considering the impact and integration of assistive technologies may also enable tourism destinations to reach potential visitors with disabilities in innovative ways. Finally, accurate and detailed information is critical

for people with disabilities to be able to make informed choices about their travels and the activities they choose to engage with. Providing clear information will benefit all tourists as it will provide more depth and understanding of the destination.

Accessible and inclusive destination management strategies will consider access and inclusion holistically, assess which groups are excluded from their tourism product or offering, and construct a vision with a considered and comprehensive plan for implementation. Considering how the destination is working to meet the SDGs will also help guide destination managers and find examples from other destinations to emulate or share ideas with. Thinking about how marginalised groups that are currently excluded can be involved as producers of tourism will also help to meet the SDGs and show a commitment to accessible and inclusive thinking and practices. In this way, tourism destinations will be able to think about how “tourism can, and should, participate in the construction of a more prosperous, equal and sustainable society” (UNWTO, 2018, p. 80). By enshrining inclusion and accessibility within destination management strategies, both managers and operators will discover that the changes they make will increase their visitor base, bring people with disabilities and other marginalised communities into previously unreachable tourism spaces, and ultimately observe that the benefits inclusive tourism brings go beyond mere experiences.

Authors’ explanation of the relevance of inclusive and accessible destination development

As a human right enshrined in frameworks like the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), people with disabilities should be able to enjoy the same tourism opportunities and experiences as people without disabilities. Over one billion people live with disability globally, and this number may well rise as more countries experience ageing of their populations. Tourism is known to bring benefits such as quality time with friends and family, confidence in being able to step out of one’s comfort zone, interaction with different cultures and people, and providing a break from regular routines and obligations. These benefits should be within reach of all people. People with disabilities feel the same desire to travel as people without but face a greater array of barriers and constraints.

Because of this, we assert the need to advocate for greater access and inclusion within tourism destinations. Beyond a social imperative, there is also a business rationale for making tourism destinations more accessible and inclusive given the significance and increasing size of the access market. The chapter puts forward four key pillars pertinent to the development of an accessible and inclusive destination drawing upon burgeoning efforts to make destinations accessible and inclusive and poses important suggestions for other destinations to consider in the future. These pillars will help tourism managers to consider the social sustainability of their destinations and to understand ways in which they can work towards meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG#10 Reduced Inequalities.

Note

The authors received no funding for their contribution to this book and have no conflict of interest.

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