

## **INNOVATIVE PROJECTS THAT MAKE TOURISM MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR DISABLED PEOPLE: CASE STUDY OF KRAKOW**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*People with access requirements are often frustrated with the lack of facilities and also of information that would make travel planning and hence whole act of travelling, easier. They are also sometimes critical of tourism sector for not understanding their needs and for not willing to invest in facilities that can improve accessibility. Such attitudes are mainly caused by the unfavorable image of the private tourism sector, where entrepreneurs often care only about earnings. Fortunately - on the other hand - there are also local governments that recognize the problem and want to help disabled tourists by introducing innovative good practices In reference to above the main goal of this article is to describe two innovative projects in the city of Krakow that allow disabled tourists to feel more independent while traveling through the city centre and finally have equal opportunities.*

### **KEY WORDS**

*Tourism. Accessibilit. Disability. Sustainability. Innovation.*

### **JEL CLASSIFICATION**

*L83.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to data presented by the United Nations there are approximately 650-700 million people with disabilities all over the world (Midgley, Conley, 2010, World Health Organization, 2011). That is not all. Handicapped people often are travelling with their relatives, friends because of the nature of disability and limitations that cause specific needs. This means that approximately 2 billion people – a third of the global population – are a potential clients of accessible tourism and they are seeking for adjusted and personalized infrastructure and services.

Many people have access needs. Mostly they are related (but not limited) to a physical barriers. Group of people that need to have adjusted products and services are for example

wheelchair users, people with visual or hearing impairments, people with mobility problems, with emotional disorders, etc. Access needs and sustainability can become a huge obstacle when taking a trip or travelling, sightseeing in general. For those people, travelling can be a real challenge.

The interest in disability issues nowadays is starting to grow. It can be visible through creation of many legal documents, projects which aim is to help disabled. Local governments are talking more often about the rights and needs of people with disabilities. Particular emphasis is placed on the fact that they have the same fundamental rights as all citizens, and therefore the right to education, employment, health care, the development of own personality, hobbies and interests, as well as leisure, tourism and recreation. However, not always, people with disabilities are able to exercise their rights independently. That is why additional legal and organizational solutions, product innovations or other requirements are becoming necessary.

Krakow is a popular tourist destination in Europe for all tourists but also - what is important - for those with disabilities. Krakow has made, in comparison to the other Polish cities, the greatest progress in introducing the barrier free improvements for persons with impairments. Mostly it is because of the success of the Krakow without Barriers Project, carried out consistently since 1997 (Ostrowska-Tryzno, Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2016). Besides that success Krakow is not giving up in putting more effort to create even more accessible and disabled-friendly city. That is why one projects were launched.

The aim of this article is to show two innovative projects in the city of Krakow that help disabled people to feel more independent while traveling through the city centre and finally have equal opportunities. Finding information on accessible services, booking a room with special access needs, gathering information for people with different visible and hearing abilities often proves to be difficult, costly, and time consuming. Through the presentation of selected examples of adjusting public space and tourist attractions and information in Krakow, the aim of this article is to promote best practices that are implemented for the benefit of people with disabilities.

## 1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to the World Health Organization, which has adopted and announced the International Classification of Damage, Disabilities and Handicaps, disability is a biological concept which can have three dimensions:

- damage (impairment) - means any lack or abnormality of organs, their anatomical structure and also lack or dysfunction of the body's physical or psychological functions,
- functional disability (disability) - means any restriction or lack, resulting from damage of the ability to perform activities in the manner and the range considered as a normal for a human being,
- social impairment or disability (handicap) - means less privileged or less favorable situation of a person, resulting from damage and functional disability that limits or prevents the fulfillment of roles related to age, gender or social and cultural situation.

Possibilities and limitations of people with disabilities with various types and degrees of disability define for example types of tourism and level of access that they can have. These conditions depend on disability, which can be divided into four types.

- people with sensory disabilities,
- people with physical disabilities,
- people with mental disabilities,
- people with disabilities complex, affected by more than one type of disability.

Limitations of people with disabilities are varied depending on the type and degree of disability. So they are different for example for people with vision, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, hearing, mental health or even social relationships type of disability. Therefore, each of these groups has specific type of capabilities and limitations in their lives or tourism activity. However, awareness of their presence and their needs allows to adapt their daily environment and also tourism products and services that disability will no longer be an obstacle in tourism activity and fulfilling their social roles.

Accessibility depends on the kind of disability and definitely exceeds the physical type. According to Darcy (1998) accessibility can be characterized by three main measures:

- physical accessibility, which applies to people with physical disability, frequently requiring the use of wheelchairs or walking aids and often demanding other conveniences such as railings, ramps, lifts, etc,
- sensory accessibility, which applies to people with impaired sight or hearing or other similar impairments. Such people require special services such as tactile signs, visual signs, labels, audio-visual systems, warning sounds for lifts and crossings, etc,
- communication accessibility, which applies to people with communication impairments, e.g. having difficulties to read, write, hear or speak, as well as people coming from different cultural backgrounds who require some explanation or additional information.

## 2 OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this article is a cognitive one, mostly the presentation of the efforts of the city of Krakow in promoting and allowing the participation of people with impairments in tourism. The general, additional purpose is to provide information on accessible tourism and how to address the tourism needs of people with a physical disability. Below article based on case study of Krakow provides information about innovative and inspiring best practices in the field of leisure and tourism sector without barriers.

In order to fulfill described above aim of article, a multi-methodological approach has been introduced. One of the used research tools was a literature review, primary and secondary data research. The source was a series of books, guides, maps and a variety of brochures and catalogues. Additionally websites review has been made which allowed to have a complex knowledge and be able to see the topic from different angle and perspective.

## 3 ACCESSIBLE KRAKOW

Krakow is Poland's second largest city. It is also one of the oldest cities of the country. It was founded in 7th century. Krakow is also one of the most popular tourist destinations in Poland for tourists from all over the world. In the past the city used to be the capital of Poland and also the residence of Polish kings. Architectural and urban complex of Krakow is among the most important group of heritage sites and that is why the historical city centre has been signed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Krakow is not involved in the League of Historical and Accessible Cities project, but despite this fact Krakow has raised a number of projects in order to make this town more accessible and disabled friendly. Krakow raised a challenge of accessible heritage and introduced two innovative projects that for the first time were launched in Krakow, as a first city in Poland.

### 3.1 Royal Route for Disabled Tourists

Krakow has found a solution which allows disabled people even those using wheelchairs, the blind and the people with any other disability to get to know the attractions of the city. The Municipality of Krakow create an initiative called Royal Route for Disabled Tourists. The main goal of this project is to allow everyone that are living in or just visiting Krakow to access its cultural heritage and the main attractions. This route is fully accessible to the disabled, blind and visually impaired. Twelve places in the city center contain touchable

bronze statues of various sights found in these places (Fig.1). Those standing mock-ups are placed along Krakow's Royal Route which is the most known walking route in the city. It is the first undertaking of this kind in Poland. It came to being thanks to the EU funding within the Lesser Poland Regional Operations Programme.



Figure 1 Standing bronze mock-up

Source: author's private photo

The standing mock-ups consist of the model of the attraction, a description in Braille, a description in flat print, the pedestal and its foot. Due to the way the pedestal is made, it is possible to approach it in a wheel chair and read the text and examine the model. The hanging models also include two types of description, they are placed on a suitable height and have the forms of low-reliefs. The models present the following attractions:

- Barbican,
- area of the old town with the Royal route,
- portrait of Jan Matejko on the facade of the House of the artist,
- St. Mary's Basilica,
- Cloth Hall,
- Town Hall Tower,
- The Franciscans monastery,

- Wyspiański stained glass-"God the father, stand up!",
- Churches. St. Peter and St. Paul and St. George. Andrew,
- Romanesque window,
- the Palace of the Bishop Ciolek,
- Wawel Hill.

Creating tactile models is of great interest to the blind and visually impaired. The models have highlighted an otherwise neglected sector of the tourism market. As a result of the statues, new services and tourist offers were created to cater for this section of the market. For example, several restaurants now provide menus in Braille and tour companies are now creating blind-friendly packages.

### **3.2 Krakow for the Disabled - guide and mobile application**

Another innovative project that was introduced in Krakow is Krakow for the Disabled. This project contains a comprehensive and useful guide to the most interesting places in Krakow, with information on the availability of facilities for people on wheelchairs, and facilities offered for persons with vision or hearing impairment. People with a mobility dysfunction can benefit from information about wheelchair rental, taxis for the disabled, or about the location of toilets, pharmacies, or groceries with facilities for the disabled. All tourists in Krakow can certainly make use of information on means of transport, flea markets, guarded car parks, cruise boats, and lots more. The guide also includes a map of Krakow with major points marked. This was the first part of this initiative.

As the first part was very successful Krakow introduced second stage which was creation of mobile application. This mobile app perfectly supplements the printed content (Fig. 2). The application operates offline but some elements, including data update, require an Internet connection. Everyone who is visiting Krakow can download this app from the most popular web stores for different Smartphone operation systems. This makes this app even more helpful and user-friendly. Printed guide is only available at tourism information points and mobile app can be downloaded anytime and anywhere. Krakow is the first city which launched this kind of innovative project. City was awarded in 2016 for the best project for disabled in Poland.



Figure 2 Krakow for the Disabled - guide (left), mobile application (right)

Source: author's private photo

## CONCLUSION

"For a society based on equal rights, a barrier-free environment is a key to providing its citizens with autonomy, freedom of choice and the means to pursue an active social and economic life. For people with disabilities, elderly people, and those with reduced mobility or other types of temporary impairments, environmental barriers result in a high risk of marginalization, exclusion and discrimination. Accessibility is therefore essential for them to exercise their fundamental rights and to fully participate in society" (European Union, 2011, p. 4).

The development of accessible tourism and universal design approach is bringing a lot of positive changes. Tourism products, urban space and elements which are tailored to the needs of disabled people are providing them many new opportunities for diverse leisure activities. The process of adaptation of products and services for people with disabilities is often very cost and time consuming, but with the basic principles of their creation, awareness of the barriers and limitations of people with disabilities of varying degrees and types of diseases, they have a chance for a decent and independent and equal participation in the act of traveling and in society. Many innovative projects and technologies can be a solution, which will help

in this process of customization of tourism destinations. This way of thinking is now a normal reality in Krakow as this city is making a lot of efforts to make it more accessible for disabled.

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