Developing Sustainable Approaches to Accessible Accommodation Information Provision: A Foundation for Strategic Knowledge Management

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Abstract: The research consistently shows that the constraints to accessible accommodation identified by people with disability are firmly grounded in information provision. Information is the foundation on which people make their travel planning decisions and the provision of detailed and accurate accessible accommodation information is critical to the decision-making process for people with disability. To improve upon this current situation, this paper seeks to make the connection between accessible tourism, consumer needs, supply-side perspectives, government regulation/coordination, sustainability, accessible accommodation information provision and strategic knowledge management. First, demand research is examined to understand the specific constraints identified by consumers with disability and the specific accommodation criteria they seek when planning their trips. Second, the paper presents a summary of the supply-side research that presents the industry perspective on the consumer group and their accessible accommodation stock. Third, as with any tourism market development government regulation and coordination have very important roles to play brokering an industry-wide approach to accessible tourism. While tourism has been predominantly a market-driven sector with government support for infrastructure and marketing, an avenue to improve accessible accommodation information provision can be fostered through their coordination role to offer a more sustainable approach for consumers and the supply sector while progressing human rights outcomes. The paper concludes by presenting a case study of an Accessible Accommodation Assessment Template as a foundation to information provision on which to base a strategic knowledge management framework.

Keywords: accessible tourism; information provision; accommodation; lodgings; strategic knowledge management; sustainability; trust; disability.

Introduction

This paper seeks to make the connection between accessible tourism, consumer needs, supply-side perspectives, government regulation/coordination, sustainability, accessible tourism information provision and strategic knowledge management. In doing so, it uses the accommodation sector as a case study and draws on three key areas that involve enabling information provision for the accessible tourism market (Eichhorn et al. 2008), detailed information provision for accessible accommodation (Darcy 2010a; Europe for All 2007a, 2007b) and the economics of accessibility and sustainability (Lewis et al. 2010). The paper seeks to move beyond the research evidence to propose an accessible accommodation information foundation for the ideas presented.

First, the paper examines the background to the issue through the nomenclatures used to describe the conjunction of disability and tourism, provides an understanding of the size of the market and discusses the philosophical basis of the issue. Second, the paper presents the preferred definition for accessible tourism, which outlines the importance of understanding accessible tourism as a strategic process. Third, the paper reviews three key perspectives on accessible accommodation represented in the research literature. The perspectives are: consumer (demand); business (supply); and government (regulation/coordination). Fourth, the paper highlights connections between accessible accommodation information provision, sustainability and strategic knowledge management. Last, a framework for individual accessible accommodation information provision is presented, on which a foundation for a strategic knowledge management system could be based. The conclusion calls for collaborative approaches to market, promote and disseminate the accessible accommodation information to allow consumers to make an informed accessible accommodation choice.

Background

There are approximately 650 million people living with disability and by 2050 this number will increase to approximately 1.2 billion (World Health Organization 2007). It is important to quote these figures in order for authorities...
to understand the sheer size of the group under discussion. Through their socio-economic status, an increasing proportion of this group is gaining the economic capacity to travel; it has been estimated that in Europe, the US and Australia the accessible tourism market is worth €80 billion, US$ 13 billion and AUS$ 4.8 billion, respectively (Dwyer and Darcy 2011; Open Doors Organization 2005; Van Horn 2007). Approximately 11% of domestic tourism and 7% of inbound tourism is directly attributable to accessible tourism (Dwyer and Darcy 2008; Van Horn 2007). Of the total tourist spend for overnight stays, approximately 22% is attributable to the accommodation sector (Dwyer and Darcy 2008).

A part from the global number of people living with disability, throughout their lifespan all people experience multiple embodiments of the human condition, due for example to being an infant, medical conditions, temporary disability or the increasing rates of disability as people age (World Health Organization 2007). Darcy and Dickson (2009) suggest that 31% of the population benefit from universal design principles and inclusive organizational practice. Within this context, disability, ageing and accessible environments must be placed within mainstream government, business and the not-for-profit sector discourses to fully develop the complex strategic approaches required to service this group of consumers, clients and citizens. If it is not addressed within mainstream discourses, then disability, access and accessible tourism will always be overlooked or regarded as an add-on or “special”, rather than as a valued part of human diversity. To this end, disability advocacy groups have strongly identified that the entire process of inclusive practice needs to be framed on a philosophy of ‘nothing about us without us’ (Charlton 1998). This phrase signifies that such groups wish to be regarded as valued members of society and citizens in every sense – not just a market segment, not tolerated just because of human rights agendas, but understood as part of an interdependent social fabric that is richer for each other’s existence.

The importance of the underlying philosophies in the above paragraph are no better understood than the well-intentioned actions and practices that have been fraught with a history of poor outcomes due to a failure to understand these issues from the customer perspective and implementing solutions based on either a minimalist or token approach to legislated compliance (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2007; Preiser and Ostroff 2001). There is no doubt that in many areas of citizenship people with disability are now in a much better position than they were 50, 40, 30, 20 or even 10 years ago. Yet, disability is a dynamic construct that continually evolves to include new dimensions of access that were not considered previously or did not have as high a profile. For example, people with a variety of sensitivities such as nuts (anaphylaxis) or chemical sensitivities are a group that were virtually unheard of 10 years ago; however, within the hospitality and accommodation sector these groups can no longer be ignored due to the possibility of brand damage or litigious outcomes (Associated Press 2008). For tourism businesses, these evolving areas provide a market opportunity; in the US and Australia we have seen the accommodation sector respond to sensitivity issues, with individual sole operators providing niche market opportunities, collaborative marketing through green, organic and non-toxic certification processes and corporations providing market solutions for these access needs (Associated Press 2008; Green Seal 2011; Mohn 2011).

Given this brief introduction, the rest of this paper will provide a definition of accessible tourism, will examine contemporary practices from four major stakeholder perspectives and will present a discussion of an approach to strategic knowledge management for the accommodation sector.

Definition

Disability and tourism research interest has been labelled under various nomenclatures, including disability tourism, handicapped travel, special needs, inclusive tourism, barrier free and more recently accessible tourism (Darcy and Buhalis 2011). For the purposes of this paper, it will be argued that accessible tourism is a term that has developed a definitional approach that moves beyond access or special needs to understand that strategic destination management of accessible tourism is required, focusing on providing high-quality tourism experiences for people with different embodiments (Richards et al. 2010; Small and Darcy 2010). Definitional clarification is an important starting point for any emerging area of research.

Any field of study requires a definition; however, while tourism and disability have been developing as an area of academic study and industry practice, there has been relatively little discussion defining the field. Most study has focused on the experiences of people with disability while travelling, without articulating the defining elements of the field. Some papers drew definitional inspiration from the theoretical areas of disability studies (see Gleeson 1999; Oliver 1996), leisure constraints (see Daniels et al. 2005; Jackson and Scott 1999), tourism systems (see Leiper 2003; Leiper et al. 2008) and human rights approaches (see Darcy and Taylor 2009; United Nations 2006). However, while these theoretical areas influenced the approach to and types of research undertaken on disability and tourism, they did not...
Contribute towards conceptualizing accessible tourism in its own right. Based on a recent investigation of the literature and empirical research, the following definition was presented in Acessible Tourism: Concepts and Issues as a more fully developed definition on which to investigate the field (Buhalis and Darcy 2011: 10-11).

A accessible tourism is a form of tourism that involves collaborative processes between stakeholders that 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 adopts a whole of life approach where people through their lifespan benefit from accessible tourism provision. These include people with permanent and temporary disabilities, seniors, obese, families with young children and those working in safer and more socially sustainably designed environments. (adapted from Darcy and Dickson 2009: 34).

The major components of this definition include:

- **Accessible tourism as part of a collaborative process;**
- **Disability as a multi-dimensional construct including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions to access;**
- **Each individual’s embodiment and support levels are important considerations for the principles of equity, dignity and independence;**
- **Participation should support these underlying principles through inclusive practice;**
- **The benefits of accessible tourism are much broader than disability alone, where any member of the public will experience disability over their life-span;**
- **Accessible tourism environments by their design are safer and more sustainable; and**
- **As part of a process, stakeholder perspectives and collaboration are an important part of developing complex strategic responses.**

The major breakthrough in this definition is that accessible tourism needs to be part of strategically planned processes. It is argued by Buhalis and Darcy (2011) that accessible tourism will not occur through ad hoc, one-off inclusions, as accessible destination experiences require planned development and specific targeting of tourists requiring access provisions. In the same way that Leiper et al. (2008) convincingly argue that unless government and business consciously regard themselves as targeting tourists and collaboratively working together as an industry, they cannot regard themselves as being part of the tourism sector.

Within this context, understanding the three dominant perspectives in the research literature of consumer (demand), business (supply) and regulation/coordination (government) perspectives needs to be set within a broad sustainability approach to the accommodation sector. Understanding the position of these perspectives and engaging with them will then build on the definitional elements of accessible tourism and information provision to provide a foundation for a strategic knowledge-management approach to accessible tourism.

**Accessible accommodation research: Major perspectives**

The literature on accessible accommodation has been developing over the last two decades and has been dominated by demand, supply and coordination/regulation perspectives. Table 1 provides a summary of the accessible accommodation research from these perspectives, together with human rights agencies and other government departments educating the sector. The content of Table 1 will now be briefly discussed from each of the perspectives.

**Demand**

As Table 1 identifies, people with disability encounter a series of well-documented constraints and problems with accessible tourism accommodation. These issues are a universal experience of people with disability who wish to travel. Based on international academic research, the major issues identified were that accessible accommodation information is poorly documented, not detailed enough, not room specific and lacks equal amenity to nondisabled rooms. Even when travel-planning information is available there is a significant lack of trust by travellers with disability regarding the accuracy of the information. People with access requirements are not catered for by the mainstream travel-planning sector and research carried out in Hong Kong conclusively showed that there were significant issues with travel agents’ approaches to servicing people with disability (McKercher et al. 2003). This work was supported by work in other parts of the world where people with disability have been told by travel agents that they are better off organizing their own trips (Darcy 1998; Turco et al. 1998). A major component of the issues on which travel agents could not provide information was the accommodation sector.

Travel agents were in a similar position to people with disability in that consumers were unable to find the information they required to make an informed decision about accommodation, due to the summary presented in Table 1. Darcy (2010a) sought to identify the specific room criteria components that people with disability sought from accommodation through using the Hotel Accessibility Scale. The Hotel Accessibility Scale identified 55 components of an
### Table 1. Summary of Disability/Accessible Tourism Research on the Accommodation Sector

|                         | Consumer Demand                                      | Business Supply                                      | Government Coordination/Regulation                     |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|=======================================================|
| Lack of accessible accommodation stock; | Small supply of rooms in overall accommodation stock | Disability discrimination cases involving accommodation |
| Accessible accommodation that did not comply to the access standards; | Lack of understanding of responsibilities of premises under legislative requirements; | Poor customer service attitudes of staff; |
| The importance of accommodation to trip satisfaction; | Limited organization experiences with people with disability; | Compliance problems with disability discrimination legislation |
| Problems locating accessible accommodation even when it did exist; | Disbelief that disability is a market segment; | Operational issues with heritage buildings |
| The poor level, detail and accuracy of information about accommodation | The lack of information, marketing and promotion of disability and access | Educational material on compliance; |
| The inaccessibility of the information formats | Discriminatory human resource management practices; | Short case studies on successful operations; |
| Importance of accommodation to trip satisfaction; | Importance/ success of staff disability awareness training. | Discriminatory employment practices |
| Lack of equality of accommodation offerings across all classes; | Poor return on investment for accessible rooms; | |

Accessible accommodation rooms are set down in international accessibility building codes and standards. Of these 55 items, a factor analysis provided six major components to these items for the purposes of understanding the accessible accommodation information needs of people with disabilities. These components were:

1. **Core mobility** – predominantly for people who use wheelchairs and scooters
2. **Hearing and Vision** – predominantly for people with hearing and vision disabilities who require alternative communication inclusions within rooms
3. **Ambulant and Safety** – predominantly for people with a mobility disability who do not require a wheelchair but do require other access features such as handrails and nonslip surfaces.
4. **Service and Security** – more general service and security features of hotels that were required by the above three groups.
5. **Amenity (comfort/recreation)** – specific recreation features of hotels such as pools, spas and gymnasiums, which were identified by people with disabilities with higher socio-economic status

6. **Supplementary Mobility** – more specialized mobility features identified by people with high support needs.

One of the significant outcomes of this study was that it clearly differentiated access needs based on the major dimensions of disability (mobility, hearing, vision, learning and sensitivity). However, even within mobility disability there are different needs based on whether a person is a manual wheelchair user, power wheelchair user or ambulant. Further, access needs were also affected by the level of support needs of the individual, with people of high support needs identifying more accessible room criteria that were critical to their travel planning. The study went on to test four different formats of information provision to identify which format people with disabilities preferred. The preferred format involved a combination of textual information based on the key room components technical measurements based on building codes/standards, photographs of key aspects and a floor plan of the accessible room. The major exception to this was that people who were blind or vision impaired did not require the photographs but required information presented in the photographs presented in a rich textual description.
If these are the travel-planning requirements for accessible information provision to consumers with disabilities, what are the supply-side industry perspectives on disability and accessible accommodation presented in the research?

Supply

Based on Table 1’s supply column, from a supply perspective, owners and managers do not recognize disability as a market and, hence, do not promote their establishments or accessible rooms in an appropriate manner for people with disability to make an informed choice about their accommodation access needs. The limitation of these studies is that they all focused on mainstream providers. In specific industry-based studies, accommodation association research reported low occupancy of accessible rooms, low yield from the stock and the fact that non-disabled customers do not like using accessible rooms (Australian Hotels Association 1998; Healey 2008). As suggested by Packer et al. (2007), there is a complex interplay between the individual, the tourism context, and the environment, where, in this case, little is understood about the criteria consumers regard as being important to their choice of accessible accommodation.

One indicator of the industry’s engagement with accessible tourism is the level of marketing and promotion the industry directs at people with disability as a group. As identified in the research, information provision, marketing, promotion and dissemination to people with disability is almost non-existent from mainstream providers. The limited work that has been completed on mainstream providers shows that the sector does not believe people with disability are a market for their business, with the exception of providers in Turkey (Ozturk et al. 2008). One consistent bugbear of the supply sector is the evidence of return on investment (ROI) for access provisions (Healey 2008). While this in itself does not recognize the human rights imperative of international agreements and national signatories, there is no doubt that an evidence-based approach to showing a business case for accessible tourism is required. For too long there has been a mantra regarding the economic potential of disability and accessible tourism as a market segment but little evidence of this from the supply perspective.

As identified, the limitation to these studies is that they focused on mainstream providers rather than niche providers found in the small- to medium-sized enterprise sector. Some recent research and government case studies have started to provide an evidence-based business case for accessible tourism that identifies aspects of best practice provision predominantly across the small- to medium-enterprise operators but with some exceptions from the large chain providers (Darcy et al. 2010; Employers Forum on Disability 2007; Robinson and Dechant 2005; UK Department for Culture Media and Sport 2010; UK Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) 2007). These case studies identify best case examples and innovative approaches to product development, information provision, marketing and distribution channels that will hopefully gain traction with mainstream providers.

The extension of individual business activity arises from some industry associations which have sought to provide access information schemes across geographic areas or facility types (Eichhorn et al. 2008). Eichhorn et al. (2008) examined access information schemes across Europe using a combination of consumer focus groups and management information system reviews of the schemes themselves. A high proportion of these schemes involved accessible accommodation. Their results noted the following deficiencies, which reinforced the consumer demand findings. First, the reliability of the information while the schemes were identified as more reliable than traditional suppliers, the schemes were problematic due to the nature of the data collection, the dichotomous or continuous nature of the information provision and the lack of inclusion of feedback from consumers. Yet, the major deficiency related to the way in which the information was collected and reported, particularly where third-party objective collection systems were not used. Second, the richness of the information was regarded as deficient because it lacked the depth and breadth to the degree required. This included the geographic scope and the number of facilities included, together with the depth of information provision within each of the facilities reported. While some provided links to other sources of information, these were not verified and did not reduce the information search process for people with disability. Third, the customer orientation of information lacked differentiation based on the access needs of the customer. People with different access needs (mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive and others) require different types of information. Most schemes only provided information for people with mobility disabilities. The conclusion of the study was that while these access information schemes had the best intentions, they have failed to have a sound foundation for an information strategy to satisfy consumer needs. They called for a Europe-wide approach to accessible information communication strategies, which this author contends would provide a strategic approach to knowledge management for accessible tourism. Europe for All have taken up this challenge and form part of the case study presented later (Darcy 2010a; Europe for All 2007a, 2007b).
Government

Hall (2007) identifies six major reasons for government intervening in tourism: coordination; planning; legislation and regulation; government as entrepreneur; stimulation; and social tourism. The economic imperative of stimulation is a consistent feature of national tourism policies across nations (Baum 1994; Elliott 1997). However, the strategies for achieving the economic imperative have changed from pure marketing to product development through market segmentation to maintain competitiveness. Goeldner and Richie (2009) suggest the success of tourism destinations and, hence, tourism policies involve both competitive and sustainability. Yet, while national and regional tourism offices (NRTO) embrace competitiveness, triple bottom line approaches to sustainability remain relatively marginalized (Dwyer 2005). The two most pertinent roles of government in regard to accessible tourism accommodation, regulation and coordination, will now be discussed.

Regulation

The tourism industry works within international human rights agreements, national building codes and standards of service practice. As such, most strategically planned accessible environments have been brought about through a combination of international human rights agreements (United Nations 2006), national signatories to those agreements (United Nations 2008), a regulation sector that provides mechanisms to redress inequity when it occurs and a vigilant disability advocacy sector (Kelly 2010) to lobby on the behalf of people with disability. If any one of these considerations is absent then the paper on which the human rights provisions are provided is all but useless. The implementation of these agreements varies significantly between nation states.

With regard to the built environment regulations and considerations for disability and access, these are all linked to human rights agreements. Where nation states have national disability discrimination legislation with strong legislative enforcement measures, there follows substantial disability and access inclusion within built environment regulations. The most well-known example globally is the United States’ Americans With Disabilities Act 1990 whereby the USA access Board develops and maintains design criteria for access provision (US Department of Justice 2010a, 2010b). This includes accessible accommodation by commercial providers (US Department of Justice 2009). In many parts of the world these types of provisions do not exist. As already identified in the demand and supply section, while governments with these national systems have effectively promoted the need for access and inclusion, there are significant issues with the number and distribution of rooms, the relative occupancy and perceptions of return on investment, in relation to which the government could take a far more active role, as will now be discussed.

Coordination

The role of the NRTO has had an emphasis on marketing and market segmentation through the collective marketing of destinations and conducting market research (Hall 2007). Within these roles, NRTO are dominated by the private-sector market ideology of yield, where markets are segmented and chosen for the level of profit provided to the state per tourist captured. While economists may argue over methodologies and the best ways of strategically planning to maximize yield, little else is considered by NRTO in their decision-making criteria. As research about market segments has been undertaken, perceptions of yield have changed over time. Only after two significant research studies on the backpacker market (Pearce 1990; Loker 1993) did perception change to recognize the value of backpackers worldwide. Disability and accessible tourism have largely been omitted by NRTO, as evidenced by studies on website accessibility (Foggin et al. 2003; Mills et al. 2008; Shi 2006; Williams et al. 2006; Williams and Rattray 2005). As in the development of other market segments, accessible tourism must be strategically “owned” by government coordinating roles. The tourism industry is notorious for its fragmentation and governments across the Asia-Pacific, including the recent developments in the US, now recognize this and provide significant funding to promote to inbound tourism markets. In the same way, the fragmentation of the industry does a dis-service to the accessible tourism market, where individual operators with good-quality accessible tourism services have no way to benefit from the collaborative marketing power of the NRTO. Quite simply, accessible tourism is not on their agendas. NRTO must work in collaboration to take responsibility for accessible tourism within a sustainability framework where in the first-instance human rights and equity considerations could be used to justify social sustainability to tourism, while the business case for the economic imperative and yield becomes more powerful through new research studies.

Sustainability

Accessibility, disability and sustainability are inextricably linked (Henriques and Richardson 2004; Lovlie et al. 2008). Disability access provision generally and accessible tourism specifically have significant contributions to make to the economic, environmental and social metrics of sustainability (Darcy et al. 2010; Lewis et al. 2010). Many tourism businesses now seek to transform themselves into
more efficient and effective operations, while others seek to improve their corporate social responsibility (Cole and Morgan 2010). Issues relating to governance, long-term sustainability and effective strategic management are critical factors for business success, yet they are addressed in a piecemeal fashion by the majority of operators. Most businesses change their service and product offerings only to achieve basic revenue-driven targets, whether they are related to the concepts of total quality management, organizational change or restructuring (Kotter 1998). Too few tourism operators have yet to give any real attention to the broader concept of the sustainability; business activities that are considered socially and environmentally sustainable rather than their financial bottom line (Dwyer 2005). Many approaches to tourism development that do not include accessible tourism dimensions cannot hope to meet the social sustainability requirements brought about by the ageing of the population and the increasing disability rates. By excluding the beneficiaries of the accessible design of accommodation, including people with disability, those who are ageing and families with young children, it has been estimated that they are excluding 31% of the population (Darcy and Dickson 2009).

**From Information Provision to Strategic Knowledge Management**

As has been noted in discussions on supply and demand perspectives of accessible tourism, a great number of the issues identified have an information foundation. Others have already demonstrated the importance of information systems for accessible tourism information (Eichhorn et al. 2008) and the consumer need for the provision of appropriate, detailed and accurate accessible accommodation information in an easy to locate and accessible format (Darcy 2010a). Yet, the provision of this type of information by businesses on an individual basis does not constitute a strategic approach to accessible tourism that needs to extend beyond current approaches. Knowledge management may provide a means to bridging the gaps between consumer needs, supply-side organizational objectives and/or government coordination roles within NRTO activities.

Knowledge management has been defined as ‘the process of sharing, acquiring and creating knowledge and the cultural and technical foundations that support them. Its goal is to align knowledge processes, [as defined by relevant stakeholders] with organizational objectives’ (Andrews 2002: 1 in Carson et al. 2005:2). Leaving mainstream information and knowledge-management systems to one side, consumers have recognized the importance of the fact that sharing, acquiring and creating valid and reliable accessible tourism information must extend beyond individual operators, facilities, geographic regions and industry sectors and have sought social media outlets for the sharing of this information (e.g., the Rolling Rains Report http://www.rollingrains.com/). These social media outlets recognize that accessible tourism has its own cultural context (dimensions of disability, levels of support needs, underlying values, national approaches, semiotics, cultural representation and differences between major language groups) and technical context (e.g., building codes and web accessibility compliance) that require a knowledge-management system rather than just accessible accommodation information provision for individual businesses.

Cooper (2006: 51), in examining definitions of knowledge management for tourism, suggests a straightforward definition by Davidson and Voss (2002), to which the additional tourism emphasis can be added: “knowledge management is about applying the knowledge assets available to [a tourism] organization to create competitive advantage” (Davidson and Voss: 32). As identified in the supply literature, convincing mainstream businesses that accessible tourism may provide a competitive advantage has not been successful to date. Generally, multinational tourism accommodation providers (e.g., Hilton) and third-party accommodation booking systems (e.g., Wotif, Expedia and Kayak) already have accommodation knowledge-management systems in place but research in this area lags behind practice (Hallin and Marnburg 2008). No research has reviewed these mainstream accommodation knowledge-management systems from an accessible accommodation information perspective. Yet, the consumer perspective identifies that these commercial accommodation knowledge management systems had significant deficiencies from an accessible tourism perspective, which has been evidenced through human rights cases in the UK, US and Australia.

A starting point is to take the research findings of the Hotel Accessibility Scale, accessible accommodation information preferences and ‘Europe for All’ (Darcy 2010a; Europe for All 2007a, 2007b) and develop an information-management approach to accessible accommodation that can improve the information collection, collation, presentation and dissemination for individual properties. This would then be combined with improving the access scheme deficiencies outlined in Eichhorn et al. (2008) as the foundation for a knowledge-management approach to accessible tourism. The outcome would provide the requirements identified by consumers (demand) and provide businesses (supply) with improved occupancy and yield. It must ensure that the system is as comprehensive as identified.
by Eichhorn et al. (2008), so as to ensure that human rights provisions of government (regulation) are improved through government (coordination) taking an initiative to collaboratively market individual accessible accommodation businesses. Many NRTOs already have systems in place to promote mainstream providers (e.g., Australian Tourism Data Warehouse 2006) but do not incorporate access provisions beyond a basic dichotomous response, "Yes or No".

Lewis et al. (2010) notes, there are benefits that accrue to businesses in implementing legislative access systems. Consumers with disability also benefit through their individual use of the business services, which then creates a much broader set of economic, social and environmental benefits through strategic change. Lewis et al. (2010) refer to this in Figure 1 as the ‘virtuous circle of self-sustaining accessibility’. The best global example of this concept with tourism implications was the introduction of low-floor accessible buses, whereas prior to legislative change there was a 15% cost differential. Once the legislation was passed for 100% of public buses to be low-floor accessible within specified timeframes, investment and cultural change started to occur. This triggered capital investment to improve low-floor bus technology, which brought about economies of scale in low-floor bus production. The result is that cost differentials have fallen to under 1%.

As identified in the demand-side research, in most cases people with disability do not trust information provided by the mainstream tourism industry. With a strategic knowledge-management system in place, the expectation of consumers can be managed, as there is no more serious a management issue than failure to meet customer expectation. Now, travellers with disability are regularly disappointed – not by the destination they are visiting, but by the information provided failing to meet their access needs for the accessible accommodation. This becomes a major issue where a disgruntled customer becomes an issue for the manager of the accommodation, but more importantly the disgruntled customer will communicate their poor experiences through negative word-of-mouth. While this is a problem with all customers, travellers with disability can attract more media attention than the average customer and this can result in reputational or brand damage for the company (Air Canada 2009; Butson 2009). If people have a good experience, the research suggests they will tell two to three people but if they have a bad experience the research suggests that they will tell significantly more people (Trusov et al. 2009). Yet, this is a far more significant issue for industry in the age of Web 2.0, where social media provides an instantaneous means for people to communicate their displeasure globally and with accompanying images. However, for the accessible tourism market and for the tourism industry providing good-quality products, services and experiences, it also provides an instantaneous means for people to communicate their satisfaction with good-quality accessible accommodation information and service (Brown et al. 2007).

A Way Forward...

Strategic knowledge management of accessible accommodation information provides a way forward for the tourism industry and destination-management systems to begin to develop responses for accessible tourism (Eichhorn et al. 2008). What is required from an accessible accommodation perspective is remarkably similar in approach from two sources and provides the foundation to developing the system (Darcy 2010a; Europe for All 2007a, 2007b). As a starting point, this requires no new infrastructure, as most businesses and tourism-marketing authorities already have Web-based approaches to accommodation information provision. What is required is a decision to provide honest, detailed and accurate information about accessible accommodation to the accessible tourism market. The research suggests that if systems are in place, the information that is needed to make access choices is available and it is in a format that is accessible, there will be an increase in use by people with access needs. There are some wonderful examples of approaches from different parts of the world, including South

Figure 1. Virtuous Circle of Self-Sustaining Accessibility
Sustainable Approaches to Accessible Accommodation: Darcy

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Given copyright and intellectual property considerations, the system developed from the Hotel Accessibility Scale (Darcy 2010a) to evaluate the criteria that people with disability determined as ‘important’ in selecting their accessible accommodation is used as a foundation for the case study example. The advantage of using the 55-item Hotel Accessibility Scale was that it was then tested for a preferred presentation format through three industry-standard accessible tourism information formats and a fourth innovative accessible information format to ascertain their information format preference. The results identified that while socio-demographic variables offered some insight into criteria selection, the most significant explanation for criteria selection and information format preference was the dimensions of disability and level of support needs. The preferred format of accessible accommodation information provision was based on a combination of textual, floor-plan and digital photography.

The remainder of the paper presents a case study example of the Accessible Accommodation Assessment Template (AAAT) (Darcy and Cameron 2008a, 2008b). Further research is being formulated to test the effect of the AAAT on accommodation providers. This research will contribute towards developing a business case for accessible tourism accommodation by testing a system of information collection, marketing and promotion that will contribute towards a more effective management of accessible accommodation stock and improvements in occupancy rates, stock yield and management perceptions towards their accessible accommodation stock. Figure 2 presents the six-stage approach to accessible accommodation market use required to implement the AAAT through the strategic knowledge-management process and continual improvement.

Conclusion

The discussion identified the major perspectives on accessible accommodation identified in the research literature. Most identified that there are significant issues to be addressed in mainstream provision, while some important lessons can be learnt from small- to medium-size enterprise examples of niche provision. From a supply side, the relative occupancy rates and return on investment need to be improved. From a demand perspective, the relative occupancy rates and return on investment need to be improved. From a demand perspective, the relative occupancy rates and return on investment need to be improved.

The outcomes of changing the access culture of the organization and implementing the strategic approach to accessible accommodation information provision system should be six fold:

1. a heightened awareness of accessible tourism service provision within the organization;
2. improved service provision for the accessible tourism market through immediate provision of appropriate, detailed and accurate information meeting their specific needs;

3. target marketing of a group which previously had not been target marketed;

4. low/no-cost marketing through established distribution via the disability advocacy sector;

5. improved occupancy of accessible rooms; and

6. strategy to improve yield of accessible rooms.

Case Example - Accessible Accommodation Assessment Template

Introduction

The Accessible Accommodation Assessment Template (AAAT) is designed to assist the owners or managers of tourism accommodation to present the accessible features of their facilities. The AAAT provides a strategic approach to the auditing, presentation and dissemination of information about accessible accommodation. Research shows that this type and details of information forms a critical component in the decision-making process for people with access needs who require accessible accommodation. The information helps travellers with disability make informed decisions about premises. In turn, businesses should see in return an improved number of enquiries and bookings for their accessible accommodation.

How to Use the Accommodation Assessment Template

The AAAT comprises 13 pages divided into two sections,

Section 1. Key Information Requirements (Pages 2 – 7)

Section 2. Guide to Completing the Key Information Requirement's (Pages 8 – 13)

Section 1: Key Information Requirements (KIR)

This section identifies the main information needs and asks specific questions about the access within the premises. The questions follow the Continuous Accessible Path of Travel concept (see Australian Standards for Access and Mobility AS 1428). The detail in this section reflects the Australian Standards and accessible tourism research.

This document is divided into 8 parts:

Part A Name and contact details.
Part B Transport and Parking
Part C Main entry and foyer
Part D Signage, Toilets, Telephones, Lifts and Corridors
Part E The Accessible Room(s)
Part F Bathroom
Part G Respiratory and Other Sensitivities
Part H Other Features

Section 2: Guide to Completing the KIRs

Section 2 provides an illustrated guide for completing the Accessible Accommodation Assessment Template for building owners and managers. These are the key measurements that users with various accessibility requirements need to know to make an informed decision about the suitability of the accommodation for their access needs. Due to copyright and intellectual property considerations, the AAAT cannot be replicated within the journal. However, an abbreviated completed template for a Sydney-based accommodation is provided.

Please note that the case presented focuses on mobility disability.

BreakFree on George

653 George St
Sydney 2000

Located close to Chinatown and the Darling Harbour entertainment precinct.

Number of Access Rooms: 10
Star Rating: 4.5
Freecall: Nil
Phone: 61 2 9284 4500
TTY Phone: Nil
Web: www.breakfree.com.au
Email: George.res@breakfree.com.au
Sustainable Approaches to Accessible Accommodation: Darcy

### Transport and Parking

- Close to bus and rail public transport
- No accessible parking on site
- Commercial car parking located in the Campbell St Capitol Square Carpark. Call to arrange a suitable accessible parking space.
- [carpark@capitolsquare.com.au](mailto:carpark@capitolsquare.com.au)

Source: Darcy and Cameron

### Main Entry and Foyer

- The main entry is from George St through auto doors. However, there are steps down to Reception so a stair/platform lift is provided. Level access is from Sussex St through auto doors.
- A compact reception area with seating provided
- Floor surface is tiled.
- Height of the reception desk is 1170mm.

Source: Darcy and Cameron
The Accessible Room(s)

Key Measurements: Access Rooms not rectangular shaped room (see floorplan) but approx 9m x 4m

- Door width 750mm.
- Lever handle height from floor 920mm.
- Swipe card entry.
- Automatic door return.
- Internal corridor width at its narrowest point 1200mm.
- One Queen sized bed.
- Height of main bed from top of mattress to floor 580mm.
- Space underneath main bed 100mm.
- Distance from the foot of the bed to the furniture or wall 650mm.
- Distance either side of the bed to wall or to other bed – shows circulation space 850mm.
- Furniture can easily be moved or removed.
- The lights, telephone, TV (remote) can be operated from bed.
- The tea/coffee-making facilities can be reached from a seated position.
- View from the room is city buildings.

Source: Darcy and Cameron

Photo 3. Room Entry into Corridor, Bathroom and Kitchenette

Photo 4. Room Showing Bed and Furniture – the bed is on Castors and can be Moved to Open Space at the Foot.
Bathroom

**Bathroom measures approx 2m x 2.9m but is irregular in shape.**

- Door width 790mm
- The door opens beyond 90 degrees into the shower space.
- Door furniture:
  - Lever handle at 1000mm.
- Light switch height 1000mm

**The Shower**

- Wheel-in-shower.
- Hand-held shower rose.
- Shower grab rails height 775mm
- Lever taps at 1200mm
- Fold down shower seat is available, but no end-on access.
- Dimensions are approx 1000mm wide, 400 mm deep and 435 mm high

**The Toilet**

- Height (top of pan) 450 mm
- Front of bowl to back wall 720 mm.
- Centreline of bowl to side wall 425 mm
- Toilet grab rails height 775 mm.

**The Basin**

- Basin height front edge to floor 820 mm
- Ample underside clearance
- Lever taps.

Source: Darcy and Cameron
Acknowledgement

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References


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