

2018

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Recommended Citation

Muñoz de Dios, M.D. & De la Fuente Robles, Y. (2018) Universal Design in the Education System: Training of Professionals as a key to the Success of a Tourism Without Exclusion, Universal Design & Higher Education in Transformation Congress, 30th October -2nd November 2018, Dublin Castle

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Universal design in the education system: Training of professionals as a key to the success of a tourism without exclusion

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Abstract. Abstract, The World Tourism Organization promotes Accessible Tourism with aiming at developing the tourist industry through accessibility, sustainability and technology from a social innovation perspective, thus making it crucial for education institutions to take interest in all relevant changes brought about by the changing needs of society.

Tourism is a key driving force regarding socioeconomic progress, as well as an activity that has comprehensive impact in all service areas. Therefore, taking into consideration that universal accessibility and design for all individuals makes life more comfortable, it is essential to provide certain guarantees so individuals can live with full rights and take part in economic, social and cultural matters equally.

Training professionals is one of these guarantees and it is at the same time a challenge, a need and an opportunity for tourism to contribute to the fulfilment of those individuals who take part in it. Population diversity must be recognised by improving the access of disabled individuals to products and services, as well as by setting common accessibility standards in accordance to the European Accessibility Act.

In conclusion, the aim is to achieve Inclusive Tourism that will enable the creation of a convergence of interests for the sake of our society. This implies developing accessibility training plans for professionals in the tourist sector so they become the key success of a fully inclusive tourism. Hence achieving a tourist industry that complies with the Official University Education System, in which study programmes will take into account the fact that every professional activity must embed transversal competences in Universal Accessibility and Design for All.

Keywords. Keywords, Universal Accessibility, Training, Inclusion, Tourism, University

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1. Introduction

The interest of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) towards Accessible Tourism is nothing new. After the World Tourism Declaration in 1980 at the General Assembly of the UNWTO, the terms 'tourism' and 'accessibility' were linked for the first time. Tourism was acknowledged as a fundamental right for the quality of life and as a key for human development. Member States were encouraged to regulate tourist services in order to make this activity access-effective and non-discriminatory (World Tourism Organization, 2014).

Since then and until today, Accessible Tourism is becoming more important on the agendas of governments, thanks to the different General Assemblies supplemented by the various declarations and resolutions and not due to high demands imposed by society. Regarding university education and the subject of the present article, the Spanish legislation (Official State Gazette no. 307) highlights the duty "for all study programmes to take into account that any professional activity must be performed by respecting and promoting both Human Rights and universal accessibility and design standards for all" (p. 53). This bears testimony to the value of a significant swift in considering accessibility not only as an element related to physical itineraries, but as a factor of broader scope.

The report published by the US National Council on Disability emphasises the fact that the future of accessibility lays in our hands, which provides the capacity to assess and interact in order to achieve effective accessibility in all population areas, investigate the nature of the barriers we face in the era of innovation and reflect the need to act so that all individuals have the means to participate without restraint or discrimination in the forthcoming societies.

These considerations are applied to the incorporation of the universal design into education so that future in training is considered as a goal of inclusion and commitment, in a way that would encourage it in professional skills as a key success factor (National Council on Disability, 2001). This is one of the reasons why the role of training and education institutions is relevant to the matter, since it is a way of promoting and making public the new possibilities Universal Accessibility can bring forth within its several dimensions. Education institutions have the capacity to pass on the knowledge that can respond to the need of certain values promoting a socially responsible society.

There are certain guidelines regarding the specifications of Design for All, which refer to the construction of buildings within an accessible and usable modified

environment. And there is also awareness and training with regard to formal and vocational training.

One of the essential aspects of Accessible Tourism training is that it must be comprehensive and reach all tourism professionals through formal education. This will increase the competitiveness of tourist facilities and tourist sector workers in the labour market. At the same time, it will provide tools to fulfil the needs of tourists with different profiles (World Tourism Organization, 2015).

Training as a guarantee of success

An accessibility-based training project would ensure the learning possibilities that will be used in the long term throughout the whole professional experience. This will favour learning and the acquisition of competences. The emphasis placed on inclusion would stress that these goals must be guaranteed for all services that the city life offers to be used and enjoyed (Faris and Peterson, 2000). Hence achieving an inclusive city that is defined by Ainscow and others (1994) as “the city in which any individual can start an independent life project and participate in political, social and economic matters with equal opportunities” (p. 61).

The development of the tourist experience cannot be left to chance. A fact that we defend by referring to the Charter of Educating Cities, which underlines the basic principles for the educational thrust of the city and that is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), and the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001).

We advocate “every human being’s direct and personal access to the discovery of the world’s richness as a fundamental condition to exercise the right to tourism of all citizens” (UNWTO, 2015, p.6). For this purpose, training professionals in the area of Universal Accessibility and design for all is essential, clearly justified by the fact that humankind is both going through a period of changes and experiencing a period of change, in which individuals must be trained to adapt themselves critically and participate actively in the challenges and possibilities brought about by the globalisation of social processes. The Charter of Educating Cities remarks “educating cities shall work together, with their formal education institutions, in order to make the exchange of experiences happen” (p.45).

Training professionals is a challenge, as it entails investing and developing the human potential and responsibility, it requires promoting full equality and all possible factors so that a true inclusive society can be built (Martin, 2007).

In this regard, awareness is shown by international actions, such as the European Accessibility Act. This act represents a milestone of the European disability movement, with which the quality of life was improved in two ways: firstly, the creation of common accessibility standards guaranteeing the access of disabled individuals to products and services, and secondly, the improvement of social inclusion regarding disabled individuals (Muñoz, 2017). In the same way and particularly concerning tourism, the agreement signed by the UNWTO and the World Covenant for the attainment of Ethical Principles and Responsible and Sustainable Tourism Universities is also a significant accomplishment. The aim of such international actions is to promote the commitment of stakeholders in the tourism sector through corporate social responsibility, stressing the fact that tourism is a driver of both development and social welfare (Gomez, 2015).

2. Methodology

Actions aimed at improving the education system must be attached to Universal Accessibility. The starting point must imply the involvement and satisfaction of needs in order to achieve inclusive services that have a positive impact on citizenship in line with the general principles of Human Rights respect and promotion.

The direct intervention with reality and the subjects who execute it (Fuentes y Cruz, 2014) require choosing qualitative research methodologies as a means for stressing the importance of restoring the training and education system.

For this purpose, the use of a methodology based in universal design is crucial, understating Design for All as:

The intervention in environments, products and services which aims to ensure that anyone, including future generations, regardless of age, gender, capacities or cultural background, can participate in the construction of society (White Paper on Design for All at University, 2006, p.34)

It is about a methodology that is able to adapt to a new context, promoting the prevention of obstacles for integration in educational, social and professional practices (Soren, 2010), and that can be complemented by new technologies based on social innovation and the use of Information and Communications Technology (I.C.T.) in training. This must also be addressed from Design Thinking, a discipline that focuses on understanding which need there are for the purpose of responding to the supply and demand of new products and services (Roca, 2015).

The use of these methodologies based on teaching innovation proceed from the outcomes that are provided hereafter, in relation to the good practices implemented for training professionals in order to acquire competences regarding Universal Accessibility.

3. Outcomes

We hereby proceed to present the outcomes that move forward in the attainment of Inclusive Tourism, under Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013 of 29 November, by which the General Act on the rights of disabled persons and their social inclusion was approved. This act defines Universal Accessibility as a requirement with which environments, processes, goods, products and services, objects, instruments, tools and devices must comply in order to be easy to understand and used by All Individuals under conditions of security and comfort and in the most autonomous and natural manner; it includes an strategy for Universal Design or Design for All. This strategy is understood notwithstanding reasonable adjustments that may need to be applied, and through a methodology developed from social innovation. Accessibility applied to the acquisition of competences by professionals is therefore placed at its core.

- **Curricular Training in Design for All in Tourism**

The project Curricular Training in Design for All in Tourism was initiated in 2012 and it aims at including the concepts of Universal Accessibility and Design for All in training curricula within university studies.

This initiative was launched by the Conference of Spanish University Rectors (CRUE), which is a non-profit organization composed by 76 Spanish universities, 50 of which are public and 26 private, and that is supported by the Spanish National Association of the Blind (ONCE) for the Cooperation and Social Inclusion of Disabled Persons and the Royal Board on Disability. Both of them are considered as Spanish benchmark institutions in the field of disability.

The CRUE is the main interlocutor of universities with the central government and it plays a key role in all regulatory developments that have an impact on the Spanish higher education. Furthermore, it fosters initiatives for the purpose of promoting links between the production and social system, institutional relations, both national and international, and it contributes to the value of Spanish universities. The Curricular Training in Design for All in Tourism has already issued 14 publications that include universal accessibility and design for all in the following areas: Business management, political sciences, law, education, nursing, pharmacy, medicine, pedagogy, journalism, psychology, sociology, occupational therapy, tourism and social work. The aim is for the professional future to take into account the impact of disability on society, to respect all the rights attached to it

and to apply their knowledge in order to design and provide fully inclusive services (CRUE, 2018).

There is an express need regarding curricular training and design for all individuals and it is an obligation laid down by the legislation, with which all administrations must comply. However, when this need becomes a commitment for equality boosted by universities “it implies a higher relevance, since its subsequent impact has a greater effect on the life that higher and specialised training provides” (Fernandez-Pita, 2017, p.13).

More precisely, the first contact Tourism training is experiencing with regard to the inclusion of disability has the shape of an adaptation applied to the Bachelor’s Degree in the year 2004-2005 in compliance with the White Book of Tourism Studies, which is now willing to incorporate Universal Accessibility and Design for All competences. The aim is that new professional tourism profiles can be performed by individuals with various disabilities, sharing apprenticeship on disability, accessibility and the needs of individuals in various different disability situations in the classroom.

Revising study programmes in the curricular training book allows us to understand the incorporation of Design for All in Tourism university studies, which is carried out by creating subjects that enable students to become aware and apply their knowledge on the matter. Such is the case of “Tourism Psychology” at the University of Zaragoza, “Sustainability and Accessibility” at the University of Valladolid and “Disability Assistance” at the University of Almeria.

- **Master’s Degree in Accessibility for Smart City. The Universal City: Example of open training in accessibility and tourism**

Since 2014, the University of Jaen offers a postgraduate formal training course on Universal Accessibility and Design for All, of 60 ECTS credits, that is unique in the European region.

This programme is supported by the ONCE Foundation for Social Cooperation and inclusion of disabled individuals and it is accessible to any student holding a university degree. The aim is to promote the multidisciplinary and cross-wise nature of accessibility. Since the course is online, it has achieved to train more than one hundred students from all over the world. It is focused on the specialization in Universal Accessibility and Design for All with regard to the creation of environments, products and services that take place in the city at three levels: physical, social and virtual. More than fifty teachers who have professional skills gained from a wide range of areas and disciplines teach this course. More precisely, there is a subject called “Tourism for All”, which offers professionals specific training on issues such as designing accessible tourist products or accessible technology in tourist services.

The online course on Accessible Design, Design for All set in motion by the University of Jaen in 2017 is a pioneering example that is supported by the ONCE Foundation for Social Cooperation and Inclusion of Disabled Persons. It has an

Online Open Course format (MOOC) and it is an online distance-learning course that is based on an accessible interface. The course does not limit the number of students, so it allows a high number of them, and it also favours the acquisition of competences focused on universal design from an online community perspective.

This is evidenced by high figures of enrolled students – within 72 hours more than 700 applications were submitted.

The course consisted of 25 hours divided in two units. The first unit included general contents regarding diversity as an inclusive factor and individuals' interaction with the environment. The second was a specific unit that focused on the relation between accessibility and several issues, for instance tourism.

4. Conclusions

Training employees and managers who will perform in the field of disabled persons and individuals with special needs care constitutes a factor allowing, in some cases, to ease accessibility inadequacies of a certain environment and it improves communication with the customer, since it enables a better understanding of his or her needs and demands (Hernandez-Galan, et al., 2017, p.280)

The outcomes published by the Spanish Observatory for Universal Accessibility in Tourism in 2017 showed that 3 out of 10 individuals affirmed that the personnel assisting the public holds specific training in this regard. However, 60% of them declared the contrary and 10% did not know about it. These findings show the essential role of university studies in the construction of the society we live in, in which one of their commitments is to set the basis for the creation of a more diverse, accessible and inclusive environment (CRUE, 2017).

Professionals in the accessible leisure and tourism industry must be trained in order to perceive and assess accessibility so that it does not jeopardise full integrity. Therefore, these professionals must not only receive such training but also they must understand the concept of inclusive tourism as a regulatory requirement and as a demonstration of professionalism.

Article 3, paragraph 5 (b), of Royal Decree 1393/2007 of 29 October that regulates the arrangement of official university studies, highlights the following:

In compliance with tenth final provision of Law 51/2003 of 2 December on equality, non-discrimination and Universal Accessibility for disabled persons,

all Study Programmes shall include lessons related to the aforementioned rights and principles

Along with the conclusions that will be mentioned, this article aims at evincing the relevance of training professionals who can take into considerations the impact of disabilities in society, who can respect such rights and apply their knowledge in order to design and provide inclusive services. They must be leading examples of good practices thus ensuring that Universal Design and Design for All will be part of all the projects related to human activity in the future (IMSERSO, 2006).

It is at this point that we feel the need to address the conclusions gathered in relation to the Council of Europe's Universal Design, which tackles the need to introduce universal design principles within professional training programmes devoted to the built environment (Resolution ResAP, 2003). This resolution notes that Universal Design is a strategy aimed at making the structure of different environments, products, technologies and information and communication services accessible, easy to understand and to use for all individuals in the most general, independent and natural possible way, preferably without resorting to adjustments or specific solutions.

New technologies as integrating tools for dependent individuals have always played an essential role for the development of disabled persons' autonomy with regard to the aid with communication, mobility, computers, home automation or innovations that allow to guide their displacements by Global Positioning Systems (GPS) (De la Fuente y Hernandez-Galan, 2014).

Both accessibility and design for all individuals are inevitably not exclusive for disabled persons, since all individuals see their own functional capacities limited at some point of their lives.

Finally, one of the main challenges of training is to promote a balance between identity and diversity. In the process of decision-making in any of its responsibility areas, tourism will take into account the impact on education, so accessibility training will take special care in assessing the need of disabled persons, thus ensuring the quality of life and the tourist experience of all inhabitants and visitors. Consequently, we will achieve an Inclusive Tourism, which is a term that comprises social values and those related to the principles of Universal Accessibility, Design for All, technology and disability.

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