

Predicting and Preparing Tomorrow's Accessible Tourism

Presentation abstract

Today, accessible tourism seems to be coming of age—some projects were first created several decades ago and there is much we can learn from them. Accessibility suppliers already offer made-to-measure and off-the-shelf tried and tested formulae, such as tactile models, visual guides using Sign Language, special routes for people with mobility impairments, etc. It's becoming 'easy' to improve accessibility and any remaining obstacles are rarely of a practical nature but rather the result of political or financial constraints.

This improved accessibility is primarily based on new technologies, such as tablets, augmented reality, 3D printing, geolocation and so on. Disabled tourists are able to make use of the same range of technologies that are available to the general public as a whole. However, very few technologies from the medical field have made their way into the world of tourism, except, perhaps, in the case of accommodation, where hoists may be used, for example. Is this to avoid stigmatising disabled people or is it because not enough is known about what is happening in the medical field and in research? Do disabled visitors really have to leave behind their normality and their prostheses in order to have a fully inclusive tourist experience? But surely this kind of 'one size fits all' (Design for all) approach is detrimental to the unique needs of disabled visitors?

It would appear that the current trend towards 'Universal Design' might have something to do with this type of standardisation of the typical tour format: people just become part of the whole and, if their specific needs do not apply to everyone, then they are no longer of interest, they are 'has-beens'.

Paradoxically, today's approach to accessibility is based on 'has-beens': clearly, everything we have now was introduced in response to needs and concerns expressed some time ago, from the 1970s to the 2010s, even though the accessibility improvement strategies and mechanisms put in place represent investments in tourism not just for tomorrow but for the long term. What lies behind such a time lag and how can it be avoided? It takes nearly a whole generation for an expressed need to be formalised: complaints are made, standards and practices are established, a market is created and specialist companies begin to emerge. This is why accessible tourism currently seems to be lacking in basic innovation—the very latest technologies are being used to solve yesterday's problems, which in turn are not being challenged. Mirror image versions of these technologies are being transferred from the general public to disabled users, often under the guise of the "Universal Design" philosophy, but without any rethinking of their functionality. Real needs are not being re-examined in light of all the possibilities to come: What is the future for lifts and for the exemptions granted to multi-storey buildings? What about making all heritage sites accessible by providing exoskeletons? What about the idea of increasing the independence of visually impaired people living in rural areas by making driverless cars available to all? What is the role of 'ordinary' innovation in the fundamentally 'extraordinary' nature of tourism? Doubtless, introducing new technologies can also mean having to change the way a tourist site operates or might affect insurance and legal matters—how are image rights to be managed when camera drones are used? How can discrimination be avoided when specialising mediation tools? These are all problems that may hamper the use of accessible mediation mechanisms.

Lastly, the art world—particularly cinema—is able to transcend disability and handicap, in science-fiction films that are not all that far from reality: isn't Iron Man's exoskeleton (apart from the heart)

exactly the same as the exoskeletons used by the army? The soldier in Avatar regains the use of his legs and finds a life in another world—isn't that the same principle as augmented reality games?

There is no doubt that this raises questions about eugenics and transcending the body, issues that civil society may not be quite ready to deal with as yet. But these technologies already exist on screen and today they can be partially—or indeed fully — transposed into real life. Instead of seeing them as science-fiction, we should see them as examples of forward-planning— something the world of tourism should take as its inspiration—because it brings innovation, excitement and sensory experiences. The details make the difference: the extent to which we accept or do not accept, the way we look at disability and to what extent we accept that it should be compensated for.

What I have to offer is state-of-the-art accessibility for existing cultural and tourist sites, in light of current and future major innovations, to try to foresee what accessibility might mean, not far off in the future, but tomorrow!

Lead speaker : Maud DUPUIS CAILLOT

Organisation : Polymorphe Design

City (Country) : Chazay d'azergues(France)

Biography : Designer Maud Dupuis-CailLOT has been interested in accessibility issues since she began her studies, specialising in individual packaging for medications, combination therapies and medicines for the elderly. After designing a special scenographic presentation for the visually impaired, with the Institut des Jeunes Aveugles and the Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation in Lyon, she founded Polymorphe Design, a company specialising in improving the accessibility of tourist sites. Whether working as assistant project manager or project manager, on iconic sites like Futuroscope or on mountain paths for France's National Parks, Maud Dupuis-CailLOT has never ceased to question the place of disability in the tourist experience.

2nd speaker :

Organisation :

City (Country) : ()

Biography :