



CASE STUDY

TOURISM DESTINATION AND INNOVATION

THE UK: A TRIP OR A TRAP FOR DISABLED TOURISTS?

CASE OF THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1) Literature review

People with disabilities have the same needs and desires for tourism as others Yau et. al, 2004. As it was pointed out at the Asian-Pacific conference on tourism for people with disability (24-28 September, 2000), they also have the right to, and want to enjoy travel leisure experiences. However, Smith 1987 noted that tourists with disabilities experience barriers (intrinsic, environmental and interactive) to leisure and tourism participation that undermine their sense of freedom and feeling of personal control. Based on the fact that this sense of control contributes to their experiences Iso-Ahola, 1982 it is therefore very important that the destination (in our case the UK), provides this sense of control to the disabled visitors. What can therefore be done by the UK to enhance their experience? What can be done in the UK to remove all the barriers that limit their sense of control? What has been done so far? Has it been successful?

In the UK the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) makes it illegal for service providers to discriminate against people with disabilities¹ or impairments². In other words, services providers must take reasonable measures to alter their premises in order to accommodate people with disabilities, Shaw and Coles, 2004. Despite measures like the DDA, research projects like the 'Travel is Life Project'³ academic papers such as Gareth and Coles, Hughes and Paterson, 1997etc, one conclusion has been found, namely that society does not seem to be organised in ways that take account the needs of people with disabilities and impairments. Miller and Kirk, 2002 identified in the UK a gap in the quality of services offered to individuals with disabilities in comparison to other travellers. However, Daruwalla and Darcy, 2005 highlighted that training can be a valuable resource in forming and changing attitudes. In 2012, eight years later, what is the situation of the UK regarding the above statement? Shaw and Coles also pointed out that the situation of the disabled people has only been seen from the angle of removing the barriers of physical access, which is only part of the problem. Eight years after, have we changed the reflexions and actions further in the UK? Based on the fact there are 45 million citizens with a disability in Europe (OSSATE), and based on the estimate that 10% or more of the world's population has a disability Durgin et. Al, 1985, it is more than obvious that this segment market is not to be overlooked by the UK. People with disabilities and older people are becoming a growing group of consumers of travel, sports and other leisure-oriented products and services (Asian-Pacific conference on tourism for people with disability, 24-28 September, 2000). Moreover, if we consider the fact the UK with 28.8 million visitors is the 6th destination in the world in terms of tourist arrivals

¹ Impairment is the functional limitation within the individual caused by mental or sensory impairment (Hughes, 1999)

² Disability is the loss or limitation or opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others, due to physical and social barriers (Hughes, 1999)

³ The Travel is Life Project is a project developed by the University of Exeter. The main objective of the project is to promote interest in disability and tourism



(WTO), and Italy, the destination just ahead of the UK received 43.2 million visitors in 2009 (WTO), we can easily notice that the difference between the 5th and 6th destination in the world is about 14 million visitors. If the UK could catch 1/3 of the 45 million citizens with a disability in Europe, it will give the country an edge on its challengers.

With the Paralympics providing a timely opportunity to access how well the country's tourism facilities are serving disabled travellers, calls have been made for better staff training and clearer information about disabled access and facilities (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2012). Some organisations still have not sufficiently equipped to cater for travellers with disabilities as some of the British attractions, hotels, rail operators and airlines need better staff training and clearer information about disabled access and facilities (*Smith*, 2012). "a wheelchair user who was removed from an Easyjet flight earlier this year because he was unable to reach the emergency exit unaided." This shows that this organisation have still a lot to improve in order to cater for the disabled passengers.

1.2) Rationale for the case study

Tourism is considered as the world's largest industry, Hegarty, Prezborska, 2005. The UK is the 6th destination in the world with 30.7 million visitors in 2007, WTO, 2008. London welcomes more overseas visitors than any other destination on earth. The capital city is therefore regarded as the driver of the British tourism economy, Bidwell, 2008. Despite its performance, the tourism industry is considered as a 'hidden giant' of the UK economy Wright, 2008. Over the next 4 years, the objective of the government is to attract 4 million extra inbound tourists, bringing £2 billion more spend and creating 50,000 more jobs Robinson, 2011. Innovation in the tourism industry can help the UK to do better and obviously reach its targets. In this case study we are going to focus on innovation that can help the UK to reformat its tourism products and services to disabled customers to make sure that taking holidays in the UK does not remain a challenge for people with disabilities.

The aim of this case study is to offer an expansion of current knowledge on meeting tourists with disabilities' needs as Shaw and Coles, 2004 are claiming detailed research on disabled travellers is fairly limited. The case study is going to be based on the hospitality sector in the UK mainly because of our experience. In fact, during the summer of 2012, each of us spent 2 weeks in a top hotel in London. It was a perfect opportunity for us to analyse the situation as being 'insiders' in the industry. The case study unfolds in 4 parts:

- a) A presentation of each hotel where we did our placement (background of the place, type of visitors to the place, internal policy regarding disabled customers)
- b) We are going to carry out a survey to identify the barriers to the disabled customers when staying at the hotels and what is done or being planned to be done to remove those barriers. We are then going to compare our finding to existing literature on the topic
- c) We are going to design a guide book aiming at the disabled customers of the hotels, with the objective being for the organisations to implement our suggestions and give us some feedback.

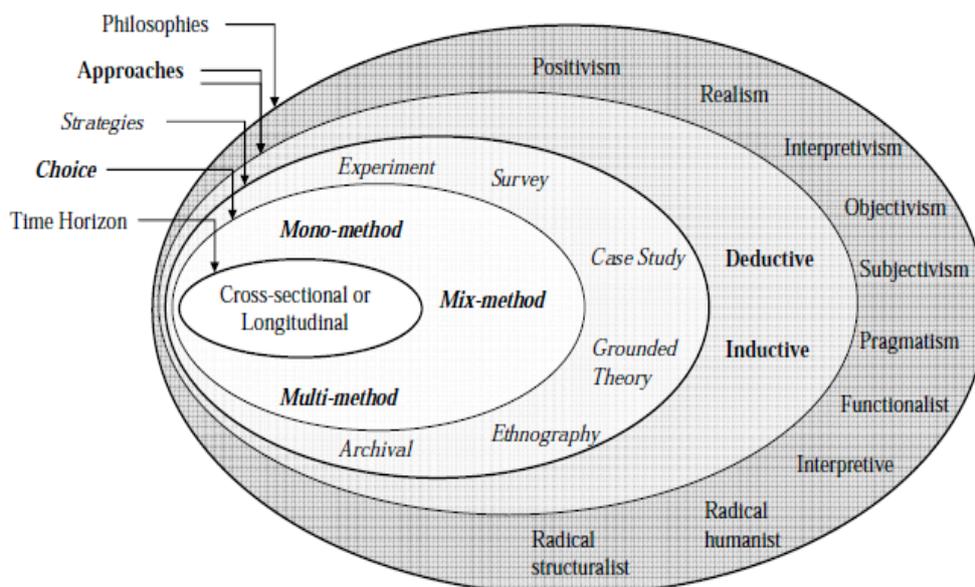
d) Based on the fact reducing barriers to participation is the responsibility of everyone in the tourism industry, Smith, 1985 we are going in the last part going to think out of the box and suggest different ways the UK can get better in terms of accommodating the needs to the disabled tourists. In this part we are going to emphasise on our important it is for the tourist sector of the country to meet the needs to this segment market.

Following the conference in Monaco, we are also planning to keep in touch with our colleagues (other winners of the GTTP Awards) from other parts of the world to set up a world-wide committee to tackle the problem more efficiently. In this endeavour, our first step will be to set up a UK committee. Eichhorn et al.2008 also suggested that a networking approach can help remove informational barriers that currently restrict travel options of disabled individuals. The whole point being for us to compare the scheme in the UK and in the world and repeat the good practices in our country. Our final objective is to make the UK a memorable experience for all our visitors (whether they have any impairment/disability) and not a trap, hence the titles of our case study (*The UK: a trip or trap for disabled visitors?*).

1.3) Methodology

As explained above we are going to use a range of methods to collect information and draw our conclusion. We derived our methodology directly from the research onion methodology Saunders, et al. 2007.

Figure 1: The Research Onion



Source: Saunders, et al. (2007)



In order to gain a better understanding of the disabled tourists staying in hotels we have created and completed a handbook (appendix 1) designed to support our research. The handbook is going to enable us to collect the following information:

- General information about the hotels used as a sample.
- The average number of customers with disabilities and the most recurrent type of disability.
- The type of products and services offered to those customers and the level of satisfaction recorded.
- The importance of the disabled market for hoteliers in London.



Case study 1: Antoinette Hotel Group

a) General presentation of Antoinette Hotel Group

For this case study I have interviewed Lorraine Fare (Manager of Antoinette Hotel). Antoinette Hotel Kingston (main headquarters) was founded in 1961 by Mr. Arpad Buzasi and over the years the hotel has expanded. The Antoinette in Kingston has 90 staff members (management staff included) with 100 bedrooms and 8 banquets facilities. Each year the hotel accommodate an average of 60,000 customers per year (those customers staying overnight), the hotel hosts other events like weddings and conference meetings (160 extra occasions) which enable the hotel to gain more customers. The turnover of the hotel is approximately £2m. On June 2007, Antoinette purchased a new hotel in Wimbledon. It is now the largest and most established Hotel in Wimbledon with over 50 bedrooms. The Buzasi group also have two others hotels which are located in South-West London. The first one is in Bosco and its called Bosco Hotel and the second one is the Best Western Crown Hotel in Lyndhurst (it was purchased by Antoinette Hotel for £2.5m). All four hotels are part of the Antoinette Hotel Group⁴.

b) Customer Service at Antoinette Hotel

Lorraine Fare stated that “when it comes to complaints we only receive a very limited number of unsatisfied customers”. Meeting the needs of the customers is the number one priority of the organisation. At Antoinette Hotel they welcome different types of customers including business, leisure and those customers who coming for special occasions. On average those customers stay for 3 nights and spend about £250.

c) Antoinette Hotel and disabled customers

Out of the 60,000 customers of Antoinette hotel the number of disabled customers is extremely low (0.25%). According to Lorraine the hotel has catered for wheelchair users, visual impaired, deaf and multiple sclerosis customers. In order to accommodate the needs of those customers, the Antoinette hotel provides 2 mobility friendly rooms, ramps, rails, lower/larger furniture, disabled toilets and a stand up shower. Without going in to much depth in to our analysis we can already notice that those facilities meet the needs of a limited type of disability. What about the other disabilities? However the Antoinette hotel is doing its best to meet the needs of those customers, before arriving the hotel tries to identify the needs of the customers so that when the customer arrives in the hotel they already have in place all the required equipment. As Lorraine mentioned “organisation should adapt to the customers’ needs, not the customers to adapt to the organisation”. But as stated earlier they can only cater for a limited type of disability. The Antoinette hotel provides questionnaires to the customers (reception and bedroom) to identify what needs to be improved in terms of product and services for (disabled) customers. Furthermore, the hotel is ready is go the extra mile by implementing a new scheme to meet the needs of disabled customers. Even if there is room for improvement we can say that Antoinette hotel has improved over the years, their products and service for disabled customer. 10 years ago they did not have any facilities for disabled customers but now they have some as stated above.

⁴ <http://hotelbosco.co.uk/terms-conditions/>



d) Disabled customers as a target market

Even though the Antoinette hotel does not fully cater for disabled customers, Lorainne the manager states that those customers represent an important market for the organisation. However in their marketing strategy they don't segment the market, they just consider all customers are the same, even if they are not. I suggest that the Antoinette should have lowered reception desks, hearing loops and Braille menus to further meet the needs of their disabled guests. As our research has shown the disabled customers must be treated separately because of their huge potential.

e) The Antoinette and the Paralympics 2012

Nigel Jatha (Deputy Manager of Antoinette Hotel) said that adapting for the 2012 London Paralympics is straight forward as they have already facilities in place to cater for disabled customers. They ensured that Health and Safety procedures are updated and in place, a first aid team were briefed as they were dealing not just with mobility impaired guest but the visual, hearing and so on. A wide variety of structural work had to be done such as checking the ramps for wheelchair users, disabled toilets, and hand rails and so on. They were no increases in their disabled customers. The Antoinette hotel made sure that their advertisements were in place highlighting their disabled services because there is a demand for disabled friendly rooms.



Case study 2: The Cavendish London

a) General presentation of the Cavendish London

In the 18th Century, 81 Jermyn Street became a hotel and in the year 1836 the Millers Hotel was changed to the Cavendish. The Cavendish London is a 4 star deluxe hotel whose most famous owner was Rosa Lewis also known as the “Duchess of Jermyn Street”. In June 1962 the hotel closed down and the new Cavendish re-opened in 1966 costing £2 million pounds to re-build. The Cavendish London has 230 rooms, 5 conference rooms and 150 staff including agency staff. They have 5 different room categories which are standard room, queen superior, double executive, junior suite and penthouse. In 1966 when the new Cavendish re-opened, the tariff for a double standard room was £9 including continental breakfast served in the room and £12 for a penthouse. The Cavendish is now an independent hotel owned by the Barclay Brothers who also own the Ritz Hotel, Telegraph newspapers, Yodel (Korea) and shares in the Maybourne Group. The average number of customers in The Cavendish London per year is 26, 320, the average number of nights is 2.3 per customer and the average money spent is £483. The average turnover of The Cavendish London is £6, 458, 379 per year.

b) Customer Service at the Cavendish London

Providing excellent customer service at the Cavendish London is very important. Excellent customer service helps the hotel to get good feedbacks, repeat business and increase their turnover. In order to improve customer service each time a customer comes to the hotel, personal information about the customer is recorded on the hotel system and if a customer comes back again the receptionist will have all the required information about this customer. The advantages for the regular customer are as follows:

The customer will probably feel at home as they will be welcomed by their name, have their needs fulfilled before asking, presents (envelope with complimentary drinks vouchers) will be offered to loyal customers and room upgrades.

Customers who make a reservation for the first time get a personalised service for example, when a honeymoon couple processes their booking the hotel always try to exceed their expectations by providing a bottle of champagne and romantic decorations in their room (toiletries in the standard room for instance are products from penthouse and the room is decorated with rose petals and scented candles). If it is a family, the hotel has several rooms which allow them to have extra beds and cots. Some rooms are connected with each other enabling larger families to stay together by just opening the partitions.

c) The Cavendish London and disabled customers

Meeting the needs of customers is vital for the Cavendish London however they still have room for improvements when catering for disabled customers. They have 230 rooms and only 3 of them are easy access rooms in other words only 1% of the rooms are easy access rooms which is very limited for such a big hotel. Even if they want to do more for the disabled



customers the location of the hotel is in itself a barrier and the cost of installing facilities for this type of customer is another one. Despite these barriers the management of the hotel is willing to implement any new scheme to improve their products and services to disabled customers, as they are looking to improve for all their guests.

d) Disabled customers as a target market

The Cavendish London does not consider disabled and leisure customers as their main market. They target business people even if within this group you can have disabled customers. In other words they just have an overall vision of their customers and they do not really segment their business customers. I still however recommend the hotel to have at least hearing loops and to put together disabled friendly rooms to accommodate more disabled guests.

e) The Cavendish hotel and the Paralympics 2012

The Cavendish did not really adapt specifically for the Paralympics, as they already have ramps, disabled rooms and wheelchair accessible toilets even before the Paralympics. The hotel only has three disabled accessible rooms and there was no major increase in disabled guests during the Paralympics but all rooms were used during the event. All three rooms that cater for disabled people are fitted with shower seats, alarms and handles to assist them. However because the Cavendish is a corporate hotel they do not specifically advertise to disabled guests but they make guests aware that they can assist them and that the hotel do cater for disabled guests. The restaurant has Braille and large print menus available and the hotel is wheelchair friendly. The Paralympics only affected the hotel in terms of general occupancy not necessarily in terms of an increase in disabled people.



Case study 3: Pizza Hut Epsom

a) General presentation of Pizza Hut Catering

In 1958, Frank and Dan Carney opened the first Pizza Hut in Wichita Kansas (America) and over the years the Pizza Hut catering company kept expanding their products and services. Pizza Hut is now a worldwide company. Pizza Hut in Epsom (UK) is the company branch that I have used for my interview. This branch has 19 staff members (including the managers), approximately 250,000 customers and a turnover of roughly £336,000 each year.

b) Customer Service at Pizza Hut

In terms of complaints the Epsom branch receives an average of 10% of customers complaining about: number of staff, queues, impolite staffs and small food portions (salad bar). Customers play an important factor in the business, so it is vital for the company to provide excellent customer service and improve their product and services. One of the methods that they are using is giving a voucher (2 for 1 voucher and win £1000) to the customers, encouraging them to write feedback. The Epsom branch welcomes different types of customers such as: families, business, teenagers and over 50's. The average minimum spend of the customer is £20 per person. Pizza Hut is a global chain company, each branch cannot make their own rules, this can be a problem in terms of flexibility as they cannot meet the needs of their own customer.

c) Pizza Hut and disabled customers

From the 250,000 customers Pizza Hut receives each year only 0.25% are disabled. They cater for deaf, blind, wheelchair users and mentally impaired customers by offering products and services such as disabled toilets and larger menus. Based on the type of products and services offered by Pizza hut to disabled customers, it is quite obvious that the company only meets the needs of certain type of disabilities. What about the others? In terms of reactivity Pizza Hut (Epsom) have been really slow based on the fact they opened 25years ago and only installed disabled toilets 5 years ago. But in general, disabled customers are satisfied about the services and products as they already know what to expect before coming in. Pizza Hut staff haven't received training to meet the needs of disabled customers. This is an issue that needs to be address.

d) Disabled customers as a target market

Disabled customers are an important market to the industry that cannot be overlooked. They don't single them out, as the manager stated "everyone who walks in the door is a customer". However nothing has been done to identify the important market of disabled customers. Probably if the branch in Epsom offers more products and services such as lowered reception desks and hearing loops to cater for disabled customers it will potentially increase the number of disabled customers which will result in more revenue for the business as a whole.



Findings and discussions

Our 3 case studies have identified the fact there is room for improvements in the hospitality and catering sector in the UK. Obviously, our results are just based on a small sample, meaning that it is not obviously the case in every single organisation. We have identified the following gaps in provision:

a) Lack of training and policy

Concerning training our research has clearly shown that there is a huge gap for improvements. Despite the fact all 3 organisations offer training to their staff in order to meet the needs of disabled customers, those trainings are really superficial. For instance, at The Cavendish Hotel staff are trained to deal with disabled customers only in case of emergencies (like fire, earthquake etc.) and the staff who really have in depth knowledge of the needs of disabled customers are staff that are working in the front office. At Pizza Hut Epsom, no formal training is offered through the company guide book, however the manager provides its own training to the staff. Our last example is the Antoinette Hotel. Some staff receives 6 months training (staff working in the morning) and other staff receives 3 months training (night shifts staff). Overall it shows that training does not happen by default in every single organisation as disabled customers are customers like any other type of customer and their needs need to be met as any other customers would.

b) Disabled customers not considered as a target market

Not many organisations know the real potential of the disabled market. When we researched for the 3 case studies (Antoinette, Cavendish and Pizza Hut) all 3 organisations mentioned the fact that they have not recently done any surveys to identify the potential of the disabled market for their own company. Based on our findings it seems that if all 3 organisations had specific products and services for disabled customers they would have attracted more of them and probably increased their turnover. As mentioned in our introduction there are 45 million citizens with a disability in Europe (OSSATE), and over 10 million people with a limiting long term illness, impairment or disability in Great Britain (Office for Disability Issues, HM Government). If we consider those figures we cannot ignore this market. Once again our researches have shown that the 3 organisations we used as a sample are not really catering for this market. For instance, they have been really slow in implementing and installing facilities for disabled customers in their organisations. If we take the example of the Antoinette Hotel, The Cavendish and Pizza Hut, all 3 organisations have been around for at least 55 years and it is only in the recent years that they managed to include disabled facilities in their premises and yet those facilities only meet the needs of some type of disability. What does that tell about the industry? Even if the professionals are aware of the situation they are really slow in reacting. One of the main reasons for this lack of consideration is the money because it costs a lot to have facilities for disabled customers. When interviewing staff at the Cavendish



Hotel, one of them ironically said that to meet the needs of disabled customers in their hotel they would have to “demolish” the hotel.



Conclusion and recommendations (in terms of innovations)

The definition of innovation is *'the creation of better or more effective products, processes, services, technologies, or ideas that are accepted by markets, governments, and society'* (Hjalager, 2002). Bearing this in mind, what needs to be done in the hospitality sector to make it more suitable for tourists with a disability in the UK? Most of the time when we think about innovation, we always think it needs to be a giant leap forward, but it does not. Innovation is a feedback process (Conference on innovation and growth in tourism, 2003). As innovation usually consists of a series of small steps that lead to incremental growth, our recommended improvements are as follow:

1) Recommendation for Training Schemes

We are the future of the tourism sector in the UK, therefore we have an important role to play in the development of the industry. This recommendation will be for hospitality providers to offer training that covers: World Host Customer Service Training, Health and Safety Training and Presentation/tour of the hotel. As part of this training they should include some time about meeting disabled customers' needs (how to use sign language, how to lip read, etc) in order to have an idea on how to deal with those types of customers. When we were doing our placements we would have been fully able to meet the needs of the disabled customers and disseminate good practice.

2) Just Easy Access website

We chose this heading based on the GAG⁵ (Good Access Guide) website. This website provides information about: accommodation, leisure time, independent living and holidays for disabled customers in the UK. We think that this website is a good, useful and practical tool for disabled customers, however this website and the products and services listed on this site can be improved and be a wonderful tool for disabled customers visiting our country. Our recommendations are as follow:

- a) Our website will be called "Just easy access UK" because we obviously cannot use GAG as the name is already taken.
- b) Our website will be in different languages to make sure that it appeals to customers with different languages. As a customer if you do not understand what the website is about then it is like being "disabled" in a way.
- c) On our website the information can also be audio to meet the needs of visually impaired customers.
- d) Our website will have a section dedicated to disabled customers feedback about the hotels, restaurants and attractions. According to the feedback the ranking of the organisation will go

⁵ <http://www.goodaccessguide.co.uk/>



up or down depending on the quality of the feedback. When a disabled customer checks the website they will automatically know where to go and how good the facilities are.

3) Equal opportunities and diversity

When we watch TV or any advertisements on TV, it is all about family holidays, romantic holidays, etc. with everybody being able bodied. Does that mean disabled people are not going on holiday? Obviously not. Why are we not seeing anyone with disability in those adverts? Disabled people are excluded and in some instances deliberately ignored by mainstream advertisers and advertising agencies (Barnes, 1991). The tour operators selling the UK should make this part of the population much more visible. In France, the government has enacted a law making the minority (social background) more visible. In the UK and more particularly within the tourism sector advertisements we should make all types of disability more visible. TV has the power to influence people's visions, therefore why not using it to change the situation of the disabled people and the way people perceive them.



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