

An investigation of european destination management organisations' attitudes towards accessible tourism

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Situation/purpose of study

Destinations compete intensively, and need to constantly enhance their attractiveness and competitiveness. These depend on their ability to satisfy the needs of buyers effectively and efficiently and to address the specific requirements of different target markets. One of the rapidly emerging market segments is the accessibility market, which includes people suffering from some form of disability as well as the ageing population which often develops illnesses that lead to disability. To address the disability markets and benefit from the multiplier effects generated by friends and relatives travelling with them, destinations should not only have "barrier free" facilities but also develop mechanisms to widely disseminate information about accessibility. Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) therefore need to gather, manage, and disseminate reliable and accurate information on accessibility.

Approach and/or methodology

This study explores attitudes of DMOs with regards to accessible tourism. A qualitative approach was adopted to examine DMOs perceptions of the current state of accessible tourism within their regions, their views on future developments and key drivers for change. A series of in-depth qualitative interviews with 19 European DMOs revealed their approach towards addressing information/content and usability requirements of the disabled traveler market and unveiled the challenges and barriers they face in addressing these requirements.

Results/conclusions

Results indicate that most DMOs were aware and made some efforts to be involved in accessible tourism, with very few distinctively disinterested in the matter. In terms of accessibility content on their websites, DMOs tend to provide some (limited) accessibility information and usability is addressed mainly according to the generic principles. It was mostly agreed that there are positive changes towards accessible tourism, albeit slow, and the main drivers include law and market value, with secondary focus on ethical/social responsibility. Challenges faced by DMOs include communication and coordination between stakeholders, attitudinal issues, validation and ownership of information, and time and personnel shortages.