

Accessible and Inclusive Tourism: the Hotel Industry in Porto – The InterContinental Porto, Palácio das Cardosas

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Abstract: Porto is internationally renowned for its hospitality. A city that knows how to welcome, a tourist destination that excels in hospitality, according to the opinion of millions of tourists who visit us every year.

Tourism, on its side, has become increasingly specialised to respond to a growing demand for unique, sustainable and accessible experiences for everyone. In recent years we have been faced with the demands of different and new markets.

According to a study by Booking.com, 54% of travellers in 2023 will choose to travel as a family, with the aim of reuniting the various members. This multi-generational market is very challenging as it includes different age groups in the same group with different motivations and needs, needs that can be special. In addition, physical and mental disabilities are increasingly present, such as limited or reduced mobility, visual and/or hearing impairments, learning difficulties caused by long-term illnesses, in a general way, target public with specific needs to which the tourist offer must be adapted.

These new demand requirements should therefore be considered a central point in the discussion of accessible and inclusive tourism. As the hotel industry is a fundamental pillar of tourism, there is an increasing need to rethink its approach in terms of offer. In this article we will present the Intercontinental Porto - Palácio das Cardosas Hotel as an example of this new way of looking at tourist services, making a significant contribution to affirming Porto as an accessible and inclusive destination.

Keywords: Accessible Tourism, Inclusive Tourism, Hospitality, Porto, Special Needs

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors today, largely since it is becoming increasingly democratized and economically accessible.

In fact, this democratization is largely due to the integration of people with disabilities and other needs into the tourism offer, who make up a significant portion of the global tourism market.

Implementing solutions to expand the network of accessible destinations that aim to respond to the 2016 UN proposal to promote "Tourism for All" is now a social and economic imperative, given that the world of people with disabilities and other needs, seniors and families with young children are a significant part of the global tourism market.

However, even though tourists with disabilities and other specific needs have gained the respect of the sector, they are still not always seen as customers, and there are still many barriers that prevent, limit or mark their tourist experience.

It is therefore important to realize that this type of tourism requires quality and adjustment to tourists' expectations, particularly in terms of hospitality.

Empowering those involved in a tourist experience and breaking down attitudinal barriers related to universal accessibility is the opportunity to transform an existing offer into a differentiated tourist offer, across the board for all those involved in providing tourist and complementary services.

In this context, hospitality presupposes respect and dignity in access to services; information services accessible to all; identification, recognition, and satisfaction of specific needs; adapted transport; reduction and elimination of all physical barriers both in hotel units and in all spaces used for tourist enjoyment and adoption of international accessibility standards.

Porto is a tourist city par excellence, having won many awards in recent decades as Best European Destination, so its offer will have to respond to these growing needs of an increasingly diverse and challenging tourist demand, thus affirming itself as an accessible and inclusive destination. Accommodation plays a central role in a destination's tourism offer, conditioning the experience offered to tourists.

This paper aims to outline how inclusive hospitality promotes competitiveness by making the destination more accessible and so able to receive any tourist.

This reflection outlines why inclusive hospitality should be a priority for Porto as a prior destination, to think strategically about tourism from different perspectives.

This study presents the InterContinental Porto Palácio das Cardosas as a positive response to the challenge of inclusion and accessibility, by adapting equipment and services to make hospitality available for all.

The InterContinental Porto Palácio das Cardosas is presented, revealing a hotel that is open to the world and attentive to changes in tourists' profiles.

2. Accessible tourism vs Inclusive Tourism

Over the last 50 years, there has been a great evolution in the access of ordinary people to tourism and in the extent and diversity of the tourist offer - tourism is no longer an activity for the elite, but for everyone. At the same time, thanks to the evolution of society, we have seen an improvement in the conditions of access for people with disabilities. The convergent evolution of these two realities has led to the concept of accessible tourism for people with disabilities and, as a result of the expansion of this universe, to other audiences with similar needs, affirming the concept of accessible tourism for people with special needs.

2.1 Accessible Tourism

While academic interest in tourism is recent, since it only emerged in the 1960s (Jafari, 2001), the issue of accessible tourism emerged in the 1980s (Lee et al, 2012), mainly associated with the concept of Design for All, originally conceived for the design of architectural and urban spaces. According to this concept, spatial functionality must be catered for in the different stages of people's growth, from children to the elderly, but also in a circumstantial and conditioned way. Smith (1987) was a pioneer in analysing accessibility according to the universal design approach in the field of tourism. He is considered the first academic author to use the term accessibility (Rubio-Escuderos, García-Andreu, & Ullán de la Rosa, 2020) and, in his study, he analysed the impact of a destination's architectural barriers on disabled visitors, and how these physical barriers could reduce satisfaction levels.

Although the lines of research into accessible tourism were initially focussed on people with disabilities, recently this topic has involved other market niches, such as the elderly and pregnant women who, in addition to their social significance, increase the economic value of this type of tourism.

In fact, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has highlighted the growth of the world's disabled population, estimating that around 235 million people have some kind of disability (Pisoni et al, 2021) and European countries have been increasing their senior population (Losada, Alén, Domínguez, & Nicolau, 2016). The World Health Bank organisation (2019) pointed out that 15% of the world's population (1 billion) has some kind of disability, prevalent in developed countries.

Accessible tourism is thus gaining a decisive expression, largely due to the value of the market and its consumers.

According to Darcy & Buhalis (2011, p. 10-11) accessible tourism is a form of tourism that involves collaborative processes between stakeholders that enable people with access requirements, including mobility, sight, hearing, and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services, and environment'. Thus, we will have to consider its implications for the built environment, products, information and communication, customer services and all others that involve interaction with tourists, in the experiences to be carried out.

Accessible tourism thus creates new opportunities for development in the tourism industry by facilitating accessibility for its direct beneficiaries: the elderly, families with children, pregnant women, and people with temporary or permanent disabilities (Vila, González & Darcy, 2019).

The International Standard on Accessible Tourism, ISO 21902, published on 12 July 2021, aimed to establish accessible tourism requirements and recommendations for a destination's tourism industry,

making it an important certification and quality assurance tool for a destination's accessible tourism. The existence of destinations with territorial management based on accessible tourism can be considered a market opportunity and a differentiating or highlighting factor (Vila, Darcy & Gonzalez, 2015), transforming the tourism industry into an inclusive activity, facilitating consumers physically, informally, financially, and emotionally. Accessible tourism becomes socially rewarding, creating a diverse community that is fairer in terms of citizenship and social rights (Buhalis, 2022).

2.2 Inclusive Tourism

The concern with making societies more inclusive has been debated for several years but gaining increased relevance in 1990, when the United Nations World Organization signed a resolution that defends an equal society for all. Currently, inclusion is a broad term and societies face enormous challenges, with the emergence of new realities and profound changes in the behaviour and profiles of individuals. In respect to tourism, it is needed to think tourism strategically to promote inclusive and accessible tourism for all (Small & Darcy, 2010).

The concept of inclusive tourism is defined by Biddulph & Scheyvens (2018, 584) as "Transformative tourism in which marginalized groups are engaged in ethical production or consumption of tourism and the sharing of its benefits".

We believe that inclusive tourism should be seen as a response to the trends of social, economic, and spatial exclusion in tourism.

It's important to note that the term inclusive has, to date, been mostly used in discussions about accessible tourism, in most cases associating the two terms because accessibility in tourism is a condition for it to be inclusive.

Although it is a right enshrined in law, we believe it is a priority to make Porto a competitive destination that is increasingly inclusive and accessible. By making our industry/offer more accessible, we can welcome any tourist, from the elderly and families with children, to people with disabilities, among others.

Our aim is to highlight how inclusive the Intercontinental Porto is as an example of luxury hospitality in Porto.

3. The "new" Tourist Demand: Characteristics-limitations-conditions of the Visitor/Tourist

Increasingly aware that visitor/tourist limitations are not only related to disability, but also arise from situations related to the ageing process or other situations of limited or restricted mobility, such as pregnancy, parents with toddlers, obesity, gigantism, dwarfism, ... or even certain respiratory, cardiac, neurological pathologies, ... the tourist industry must assess the impact of these characteristics of its public on the requirements of the tourist services provided, particularly in accommodation and catering services.

In fact, the situations that cause disabilities (congenital or acquired diseases; domestic, road, work, leisure and sports accidents, etc.), thanks to the pace of modern life and increased longevity, are tending to increase, and the improvement in the conditions of education, vocational training, access to employment and the standard of living of people with disabilities is tending to increase their economic capacity, awareness of their rights and a greater willingness and ability to travel, like any other citizen.

At the same time, we have seen an evolution in the demands of people in specific situations where their mobility is limited or restricted (pregnancy, parents with toddlers, obesity, etc.) and of people with limitations resulting from various pathologies (respiratory, cardiac, neurological, etc.),

obesity, etc.) and people with limitations resulting from the sequelae of various pathologies (respiratory, cardiac, neurological, etc.).

These special needs arising from the aforementioned limitations, when in the context of enjoying tourist services, materialise in specific access needs (places, spaces, equipment and activities), but also in specific service needs (interpersonal communication, information, guidance, support). In order for the tourist offer to be able to adequately meet these special needs, it has to fulfil various requirements that allow

for a holistic approach to the provision of services. When it comes to accommodation services, it is essential to guarantee the accessibility of infrastructures and service delivery skills.

4. Accessible Hotels

Bearing in mind this new approach to tourism, it is easy to realise that, although the target audience for accessible tourism is very diverse, in general terms the tourism industry will have to be qualified to meet the specific needs of these customers, not only in terms of equipment but also in terms of training human resources, since in addition to the technical and linguistic knowledge required, there are also specific attitudes and knowledge to respond to and adapt to the general needs of people with visual, hearing, motor or other disabilities and/or limitations.

Indeed, change management studies generally focus on understanding organisational change at different levels, including individuals, teams and organisations (Jacobs, van Witteloostuijn, & Christe-Zeyse, 2013).

Although the main function of any hotel is to provide accommodation for those outside their area of residence for a fee, this accommodation is now not limited to the possibility of resting, but also includes a whole range of services that convey a sense of welcome.

Most of the studies on organisation-level change emphasised organisational environments and populations, specifically the norms, roles, values and interaction amongst employees (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Fløvik, Knardahl, & Christensen, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2013).

In fact, according to Luiza (2010), tourists with disabilities value products adapted to their needs. However, research in the field of tourism involving hospitality and the segment of people with disabilities is relatively uncoordinated and fragmented (Loi & Kong, 2017)

As the customer is the centrepiece of the hotel industry, accommodation will have to adapt to the new realities of tourists, improving their services and communication with the public, regardless of their limitations, to put real "Tourism for All" into practice.

According to the UNWTO (2013, p.10), "accommodation establishments should have a reasonable number of rooms that are fully accessible without the need for assistance. Wherever possible, adapted rooms should be located so as to facilitate evacuation measures and routes to emergency exits."

In addition to having an infrastructure adapted to welcome people with reduced mobility or hearing and visual impairments, accessible hotels must also have staff who are properly prepared to deal with "any type of temporary disability resulting from an accident or illness, or the needs of those with small children or the elderly, women in an advanced state of pregnancy, overweight people, among other situations" (Turismo de Portugal, 2012).

Bearing this in mind, Turismo de Portugal (2021) supported the publication of a practical guide on Accessibility in Tourist Accommodation, which lists the "variables to be considered in a hotel unit that wants to be accessible and inclusive, of which we highlight:

- Infrastructuring the entire tourist accommodation space in accordance with International Accessibility Standards and National Legislation.
- Qualifying the care and service provided to customers with specific needs.
- Promoting teamwork among all employees, considering the social responsibility and image of the tourist facility.
- Hiring employees with disabilities in whom tourists with functional diversity can see themselves in the tourist resources and destinations they seek.
- Networking with partners from other areas of the tourist destination to provide an accessible and integrated tourist offer.

This type of concern will allow customers with specific needs to use the available equipment autonomously and move around the space comfortably" (Turismo de Portugal, 2021, 24-25) .

Understanding that the tourist experience is a whole that begins on arrival at the hotel, it is crucial that the adaptation of services and equipment is considered from that moment on, considering the existence of car parking spaces duly prepared to accommodate people with reduced mobility.

The space(s) must be reserved, duly identified, and signposted with vertical and horizontal signs. The surface of these car parks must be even, stable, and flat, as must the route from the parking space to the entrance of the building/reception. If this is done via a ramp, it must have as slight a slope as possible, have interspersed rest stops and the surface must be even and slip resistant.

At reception, the service should be provided at a lowered counter so that wheelchairs can approach. In the absence of this type of counter, a table should be used for seated, face-to-face customer service.

In terms of the hotel's interior physical space, care must be taken with lighting and the removal of physical obstacles, as well as the signposting of routes. Attention should also be paid to the width of doors, level access and even floors.

Regarding accommodation, the differences between an adapted room and a standard room are the interior areas, door widths and bathrooms. These adaptations are not limited to the equipment installed or available, but also to the design and other functionalities and services.

However, the more discreet the accessibility solutions in the adapted room(s), the less negative impact (visual and psychological) they have on the customer; the less customers without specific needs will be reluctant to occupy that room; and more guests can take advantage of these adaptations (elderly people with poor balance, someone with a temporary disability, everyone if the floor is non-slip, etc.).

As far as the catering areas are concerned, the same guidelines apply as for the other communal areas, adding that for customers of short stature or in wheelchairs, it is recommended that the self-service counter(s) and buffet tables offer the possibility of wheelchair access to the products.

In addition to these aspects relating to accessible equipment/furniture, we would once again emphasise the importance of care and service in the case of guests with specific needs, namely sensitivity to anticipating common needs and making procedures more flexible.

5. Research Methodology

Inclusion as a growing matter in today's society is increasingly a concern in tourism, which is intended to be available to all. Promoting accessible and inclusive tourism is now a socio-economic imperative that determines the orientation of the offer in tourist destinations.

Therefore, this study is based on a qualitative and descriptive literature review, carried out from the survey of theoretical references through which the characterisation of accessible and inclusive tourism was sought, in particular in order to ascertain the needs to which this tourist segment must respond. Focussing only on the luxury hotel offer, this literature review was restricted to the adaptations needed to hotel equipment in order to respond adequately to the needs of demand.

To be able to analyse these implications in practical terms, we carried out a qualitative study based on a survey, followed by a guided interview with two members of the Human Resources department at the Hotel Intercontinental Porto-Palácio das Cardosas. In this way we were able to evaluate the hotel's offer in terms of services and equipment and estimate how it contributes to accessible and inclusive tourism in the city of Porto.

The questionnaire had as its fundamental objectives to evaluate the hotel's range of services and equipment as an example of luxury hospitality and to estimate how this could contribute to the affirmation of inclusive tourism in the city of Porto. It was structured in six parts. The first allows us to characterise access to the hotel, the second looks at customer service and the remaining parts highlight the physical characteristics of the hotel's various spaces, from the common areas to the rooms.

The results allowed us not only to make a very approximate estimate of the structural and human implications to these new tourism proposals in Porto, but also to analyse the importance of these proposals in redefining the city's tourism offer and its diversity.

6. Inclusive Tourism in Hospitality: the Example of the InterContinental Porto

The Intercontinental Porto Hotel is in Porto's central business district, in connection with its historic centre, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1996, a privileged location in the city at the crossroads of

all land connections. The hotel is a 2-minute walk from the central train station (S. Bento station), bus stops and the metro station that connects it directly to Porto airport, a journey of around 45 minutes.

This hotel occupies the former Palácio das Cardosas, an 18th century building, and since 2011 has become a luxurious 5-star hotel, the second in this category in the city centre.

The hotel is currently part of the IHG group (InterContinental Hotels Group) and aims to be a benchmark in the city, not only for the luxury service it offers its guests, but also for its concern to welcome an increasingly demanding and differentiated public.

Aimed at all types of clients who want a high-quality service, this hotel in particular, but in a transversal vision to the entire group which has the luxury collection brand, has been investing in adapting its services, infrastructures and equipment to the differentiated needs of its clients.

In fact, the hotel has established itself as an important centre of attraction for luxury tourism, aimed at both business and leisure clients, with Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe, Brazil, and the United States as its main markets. Its values include "doing the right thing", "celebrating the difference", "showing that we care" and "striving to excel". In this sense, the purpose of every activity at the hotel is to provide a service for everyone, not only to meet their needs and expectations, but also by focussing its internal activities on training and encouraging all employees to offer what they understand to be True Hospitality, which they define as an exceptional experience.

In order to assess the hotel's ability to respond to the demands of an increasingly differentiated and demanding public, often with special conditions, we were able to ascertain in an interview with the human resources department and through a questionnaire that we implemented, that the main access to the hotel is via an entrance without a gap and a door greater than or equal to 77 cm and the reception desk has a height adapted for wheelchair users. In the interior circulation areas, these users find it only partially easy to get around, particularly in terms of the lighting in these spaces, which have appropriate signs with contrasting coloured text.

As the hotel has several floors, the lifts are medium-sized and have audio and visual information, and the buttons are embossed and placed at the right height for wheelchair users. If you choose to take the stairs, although they have more than 3 steps, they do have handrails.

The hotel has 2 adapted rooms. The access doors are 77cm or wider and the interior area is large enough to allow the customer to move around easily inside, with manoeuvring space equal to or greater than 150cm of rotation. There is side access to the bed and access to the bathroom is without unevenness and through a door similar in width to the access to the room, opening outwards and with space to transfer to the toilet. The toilet is located next to the shower, and the seat is a standard size, but has support bars on both sides and can be folded down. The bath and washbasin have single-lever taps. The bath and shower have an approach space of 80cm or more, with a transfer board and grab rails. In the case of the bath, the shower is adjustable and has a single-lever tap, but in the case of the shower, although the shower is adjustable, it does not have a single-lever tap. The shower chair has a fixed seat.

The room number is in Braille and, to meet the needs of guests with hearing impairments, the door has an eyepiece and a light indicator, which is also considered on the telephone for incoming calls. Information about services is available in written form in the rooms and emergency signs are translated into visual icons.

In the case of restaurants, there is no counter height for wheelchair users, and table service is favoured. Menus are not adapted with enlarged characters or contrasting colour or Braille, but there are options for people with food allergies or intolerances. The tables are accessible and child seats are available.

Access to the toilets in the communal areas is not uneven and the doors are 77cm or more, opening outwards, with 150cm or more of interior space for manoeuvring, allowing lateral transfer to the toilet on both sides and with folding support bars on both sides. The washbasin has a single lever tap.

As for the services and equipment, the hotel's floor plan is displayed near the entrance in a contrasting colour, but it doesn't provide enough information about the hotel's accessibility.

The documentation with additional information is available at the entrance; it can be easily read, and it is accessible to manual wheelchairs. The front-office staff have specialised training to support people

with special needs, and there are spaces and rooms in the hotel adapted for customers with hearing, visual, motor, or other difficulties, and the furniture allows wheelchair users to approach the hotel.

The hotel has a car park reserved for People with Reduced Mobility, but it is not close to the hotel as it does not belong to it. This space has no unevenness, is of an appropriate size and is well signposted.

In addition, the pedestrian walkway outside is free of obstacles and the pavement is even and slip resistant.

7. Final Considerations

Accessible tourism was born out of the need to cater for a growing population of people with special characteristics.

As a new trend in tourism, this segment is, above all, a proposal for innovative solutions that allow tourist activities to be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of their physical condition, age, or other individual circumstances. In this sense, we can say that accessible tourism can be a fundamental tool for making life easier for visitors to a destination, responding to the needs and expectations of any potential consumer (Polat & Hermans, 2016).

The quality of accessible spaces, products, services, information, and communication provides well-being for everyone, boosting inclusion and socialisation between visitors and residents, which allows us to say that accessible tourism is part of inclusive tourism, and is a source of impetus and reinforcement of the quality of a destination's tourism.

If trends show that accessible tourism can be an asset for a destination, as it raises the quality of tourist experiences and is thus a fundamental tool for innovation and competitiveness in the management of that destination, this study makes it possible to understand the role of hotel services in this experience, especially when it comes to luxury hotels.

The Hotel Intercontinental Porto - Palácio das Cardosas, a luxury hotel in the city of Porto, is one of the city's tourist developments that promotes inclusive tourism, as it has two rooms that are properly equipped and large enough to meet the needs of different audiences, from those with hearing, sound, or motor difficulties to families with children or senior citizens. It was possible to see that the hotel's common areas, from the hotel's main entrance to the outside pavements or car park spaces, have no physical barriers or unevenness, which promotes accessibility for wheelchairs or babies, as well as making it easier for people with special conditions to get around. The same is true of the hotel's interior communal spaces, including the service desk, restaurant, and lounges, which have adapted dimensions and equipment. We would also like to emphasise the concern for the services provided, with information available throughout the hotel in adapted, wheelchair-accessible language and the staff duly trained to provide differentiated service.

This study was initiated with the aim of exploring how hospitality develops tourism inclusion and identifying the challenges in implementing inclusive strategies in hospitality. In addition, this study provides practical implications by showing how inclusion can be driven by hospitality as part of change initiatives for the development of accessible tourism in Porto.

Although there are studies on guests with special needs, most of these studies focus only on the physical environment of the hotel, practically ignoring areas such as restaurants, bars, swimming pools and other common areas, as well as the interaction between these guests and hotel staff.

It is therefore necessary to explore this topic more and more, based on the experiences of people with disabilities in hotels (Poria et al., 2011), particularly in the case of luxury hotels.

In addition, since this study has only analysed the supply side, it would be important to carry out further studies looking at the opinion of customers and analysing their expectations of the destination as a whole in terms of its inclusive offer.

Studying the motivations and needs of disabled tourists is essential, by identifying tourist patterns and understanding their preferences, expectations and requirements, it is possible to develop tourism products and services that meet their expectations (Buhalis et al., 2005).

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