

Chapter 6

Smart and Accessible Cities? Not Always – The Case for Accessible Tourism Initiatives in Buenos Aires and Sydney

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to discuss disability, aging, and accessibility and their relationship with technology trends, taking into account a world full of different kind of constraints, taking Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Sydney (Australia) as study cases. Moreover, the authors also study how a hypothetically smart and accessible city could set the basis for making it touristic for all. Particularly, this chapter focuses on how cities that are being designed and planned under the smart city/destination model do not always consider people with disabilities and seniors in their models. So, these models that leave out more than the 30% of the world's population are not only inappropriate but also ineffective and inefficient, and consequently challenge the underlining sustainability of such projects.

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INTRODUCTION

Disability, ageing, and accessibility have a close relationship. On one side, it is estimated that 15% of the population worldwide live with one or more disabling conditions (WHO, 2011) and, on the other side, more than 46 percent of seniors – those aged 65 years and over—have disabilities at an increasing rate. Looking ahead, the global trends in ageing populations and the higher risk of disability in older people are likely to lead to further increases in the population affected by disability (UN, 2015). Indeed, for the first time in history, by 2050, the number of senior citizens -those over 60 years old- will be higher than the number of children in the 0-14 aged group (European Commission, 2014). With this reversing of the “population pyramid” (UN, 2019), it is envisaged that the ageing of the world population is leading to significant social transformation with major implications for all sectors of society (Patterson & Balderas, 2020). These areas include labour and financial markets, tourism, leisure, housing, transportation, and social protection, among others (Sudbury & Simcock, 2009; UN, 2015). In this scenario, accessibility is defined as the conditions which enable PWD, seniors, pregnant women, among others, to use and enjoy places, products, and services through the principles of universal design. Darcy & Dickson (2009) calculate that 31% of the population benefit from accessibility provisions. Nevertheless, accessibility becomes an active enabler of mobility, daily activities such as self-care and communication, if technological factors (digital advances and innovation) are present (Sert, 2019; Darcy, 2010).

Problems with wayfinding and mobility to move from one place to another or the lack of information about the right direction to take are some of the difficulties that PWD (PwD) experience. In this scenario, the Internet of Things (IoT) plays a role as an enabler technology, offering PwD the assistance and support they need to achieve a good quality of life and allows them to participate in the social, cultural and economic life (Nitti et al., 2018; Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013). Within the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability’s Article 9 places the built environment transport and information communication technologies (ICT) in the same article. ICTs like the Internet and social media are ubiquitous with modern travel and have democratized the travel process for many people: PwD traveling is much easier now than ever before. Accessing public spaces is such an important issue that the promotion and development of ICT services for PwD are considered one of the axes of smart city models. Although ICTs are valuable tools to make a city smart, it does not create a smart city by itself, but it is the integration of ICTs and the fulfilment of basic needs and services as a whole that creates the foundation for the development of smart cities (Sánchez et al., 2019). It is important to point out that the accessible and technological features of a smart city benefit not only residents but also tourists. An accessible city for residents is a tourist city for visitors with disabilities.

This chapter aims to discuss disability, ageing, and accessibility, and their relationship with technology trends, taking into account a world full of different kind of constraints, taking Sydney (Australia) and Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA, for its Spanish acronym, Argentina) as study cases, considering that both cities have interesting backgrounds in accessible tourism (Porto et al., 2019) and are in different stages of smartness development (ESI Smarter Cities 2025, 2018). Moreover, we also study how a hypothetically smart and accessible city could set the basis for providing tourism for all. In particular, this chapter focus on how cities that are being designed and planned under the smart city/destination model, do not always consider people with access needs – considering seniors with access needs, PwD or reduced mobility or communication, pregnant women, people with temporary limitations, among others– (Buhalis & Michopolou, 2011) in their models. So, these models are not only inappropriate

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