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# access by design



John Penton

Getting colour right

Accessible kitchens

Multi-sensory tourism in Greece

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# Welcome to *Access by Design* issue 136 / 137

Our double issue is packed full of great practice examples. Our contributors share their expertise, skills and insight into many stimulating topics.

One of the greatest contributors to the advancement of inclusive design in the built environment, John Penton, is fondly remembered in our latest issue. Adam Thomas shares his knowledge about designing the hub of the home - the accessible kitchen. We take a closer look at the technical aspects of choosing the right colours to supplement accessible designs, and the importance of accessible ATMs is brought to light by David Cavell.

We get a glimpse of sunnier climes with multi-sensory tours of Greece, and inclusive design education raises awareness in Turkey. Whilst Vivien King reviews the recent Housing Standards Review.

We hope you enjoy our latest edition – our double-issue! Do send your comments to us - we'll be pleased to hear your thoughts.

**Geraldine McNamara**

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## The burning issue

Improving accessibility for the UK's disabled population is a must. The momentum stirred by London 2012 is now set to influence the very heart of this subject by becoming an integral feature of built environment education.

A newly launched Built Environment Professional Education Project will bolster this shift but how long will it be before successful outcomes of such a significant project can be substantiated?

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# Discovering Greece through the senses

## Applying inclusive design to multi-sensory tours

The following article by access consultant, Anastasia Kalou introduces the development, design and realisation of multi-sensory tourism in Greece. Anastasia explains the principles of inclusive design underlying the creation of her multi-sensory tours, whilst outlining the practical implications of organising such experiences for disabled travellers. She shares some examples of how the tours are being created, how they remain informed, and why they will appeal to disabled tourists.

by Anastasia Kalou, Founder of Access Greece, access consultant and designer

The necessity of accessible tourism, that is, tourism that enables people with access requirements (including, mobility, vision, hearing or cognitive) to function independently, with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments, is

clearly implied in Article 30 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as the European Union's (EU) European Disability Strategy 2010 - 2020.

In both resolutions it is clearly stated that disabled people have the right to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, including leisure activities, and among other things they should enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats, and as far as possible, enjoy access

to monuments and sites of national cultural significance.

It is estimated that over the last two decades, the prevalence of disability throughout the world has increased to now average some ten per cent of the population. Moreover, in most western developed nations, average rates of disability are higher and vary from 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the population. This is mainly a direct consequence of an increasing rate of the ageing population and the fact that western developed nations demonstrate a higher level of acceptance of community diversity.

However, it is neither the formal UN or EU resolutions and corresponding statues, nor the significant percentage of the general population that are disabled that prompt me to create multi-sensory tourism experiences, but my direct involvement during the course of my work with visually impaired people.

My work focuses on the design and realisation of inclusive exhibitions, or the adaptation of existing exhibitions to become accessible to wider audiences. I follow the principles of inclusive design in my work; working closely from the earliest stage through to the implementation of a project with end-users, such as, disabled people, and I am regularly exposed to their needs, desires and expectations. Subsequently, two issues became apparent to me. First, the lack of an holistic approach to accessible tourist services in Greece - accessibility should go beyond the point of accessible entrances and toilets. Second, the fact that Greece, apart from the sunny beaches and clear waters of the Mediterranean Sea, has a variety of cultural, historical, naturalistic, culinary, religious and sporting experiences to offer. All of this provides a perfect opportunity to put together a multitude of multi-sensory experiences to satisfy the various requirements and preferences of disabled travelers. Putting these two together is what really gave rise to my initiative, Discover Greece through your senses, and prompted me to create multi-sensory tourism experiences for disabled travelers in Greece.

Travellers of all ages, sizes and abilities will have diverse social, cultural, economical, and educational backgrounds, so there isn't just only one way to cater for them. They should be provided with choice. Information presented by

different means and appealing to the senses in a multi-sensory tourism experience, can offer much to be appreciated by the multitude of different travellers. So, in order to provide the best inclusive outcome, as is my aim, I took a holistic approach. I followed the principles of inclusive design throughout the development and implementation of the multi-sensory tourism experiences I was to create.

The notion of inclusive design originates from the efforts made by designers and architects in reducing access barriers within the built environment. As defined by the Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE):

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**'Inclusive design places people at the heart of the design process, responds to human diversity and difference, offers dignity, autonomy and choice, and finally, provides for flexibility in use'.**

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However, over the years, the notion evolved beyond the built environment and it is now widely used in the design of products and services. Inclusive design calls for the designer to take an holistic approach towards their design and take into consideration the end user during the design process. Whatever it is to be designed, be it a building, a product or a service, it is not any more the centre-piece of the design process; it is viewed as a part of a wider correlation between the end user, the design outcome, and the way the two interact within their environment. Moreover, it is by now widely accepted that to follow the principles of universal design, yields the desired results for the targeted end-user group, without explicitly referring to their needs, desires, and expectations, and at the same time, the designed outcome is universally appreciated, and suitable for all users.

Following the principles of inclusive design and adopting a holistic approach to designing the multi-sensory tours, access barriers are reduced. First, we ensure accessibility during the course of the tour, and secondly, we provide information about the tours in a variety of accessible formats.





Providing information in accessible formats ensures greater choice for everyone

Since many travelers experience some degree of anxiety - not really knowing what to expect, and not being familiar with new surroundings, it is important to provide useful, yet inspiring information in advance; for disabled travellers,

even more so. Providing general information about the tour and the activities involved, as well as information about the minor details, such as, daily routines, accommodation layout, food menus and so on, in a variety of accessible formats, lowers access barriers because it removes potential anxiety from the equation.

So, to turn theory into practice, the first thing we do in order to put together a multi-sensory tour is to identify a popular destination, preferably one that is supported by an airport servicing international flights in order to ensure easy and direct access from abroad.

Having identified the destination, the next thing is to learn more about its particulars. My team and I first identify places of cultural interest, such as, archeological sites for example. Then we identify places of natural beauty, and finally, we research our chosen destination, identifying treasures hidden away from the usually busy mainstream tourism sites.

These treasures may vary from local customs and traditions, to local recipes based on local produce, or even places like the Ano Vouves village on the island of Crete, home to the oldest olive tree in the



A group enjoying a multi-sensory walking tour on the island of Tinos



A tourist enjoys discovering beauty through tactile experience

world existing for more than 3,000 years. Branches from this tree were used to form the wreath bestowed upon the first Marathon winner in the Olympic Games of Athens in 2004 and Beijing in 2008. Finally, with the help of local tour guides we put together a list of potential accommodation and check means of transportation.

The next step is to audit and consequently categorise all identified means of transportation, accommodation, and places of interest in terms of their accessibility. For example, for visually impaired travellers, a major part of the tourist experience is the auditory, olfactory, taste and tactile experience, and that is exactly what we provide for them. Whilst for people with mobility impairments, physical accessibility to sites or events is of greater importance. Having all necessary information to hand, we move on to the next level.

With the help of a focus group comprised of people with differing access requirements, we put together a holiday package which combines a variety of multi-sensory activities, such as, attending a workshop by local women on the traditional art of kopanelli - a popular technique of lace needling dating back from Byzantine times, or, taking part in the preparation of a local recipe and then enjoying it while tasting local wines and spirits.



A tourist learning about marble crafting

After having put together a proposed multi-sensory holiday package in close cooperation with the focus group, we re-evaluate it in terms of its accessibility, and design, and construct any necessary assistive material that will enhance the multi-sensory experience of the traveler. This might include tactile maps of archaeological sites to be visited, or information sheets in Braille and in large print. Finally, any part of the multi-sensory holiday package, we think necessary, we put to



test by organising on site visits with members of the focus group, or if possible, with the involvement of local community disability groups.

For the successful outcome of our initiative it is important to incorporate the aspect of the local community in our design process. The involvement of the local community groups will help local businesses, enterprises, and organisations to come closer and better understand the needs and expectations of disabled people. Therefore, they will be prepared to offer a warm welcome, and provide the services required in an appropriate and respectful manner towards disabled travelers.

Finally, different people experience the same things differently, and so is the case with disabled people. For example, among visually impaired people, there are differences in how they experience and interact with their environment. Which senses have primacy in different circumstances depend upon the nature of an individual's impairment. Therefore, we consider that the design process of our multi-sensory tours should be an ongoing process of gathering feedback from travelers, and constantly revising the tours to incorporate as much of the feedback as is possible.

For the time being our multi-sensory tours are being promoted through our personal contacts in disability organisations and associations around the world. Our website is our main hub. We see it as a live node of ongoing information. Our aim is for it to be simple, straight forward and accessible, reaching as many disabled people worldwide as possible. As with our multi-sensory tours, we think of the design process of our website as an ongoing process. We have encouraged the involvement of disabled people in the process of its creation and evaluation, and we welcome feedback in order to revise and update the site's accessibility.

In our forthcoming plans, we consider travelling worldwide to meet more disabled people to encourage them to experience a glimpse of our multi-sensory tours. We also want to learn what key elements are necessary when planning the ideal holiday.

To date, our experience shows that disabled people have the desire to travel, however, they are not traveling as freely as non-disabled people do. This is undoubtedly due to the series

of access barriers, both physical and attitudinal, they have to overcome. Constraints to travel start even before leaving home - at the very first stages of planning a journey. In most cases travel information is not accessible and there is an absence of representation of disability in promotional materials, potentially making people feel excluded from such activities.

While the ignorance of the public towards disabled people could be forgiven, the ignorance of the service providers towards them is less excusable since the emerging recognition of their human rights and purchasing power make them an important segment of the tourism economy that should not be ignored.

By following the principles of inclusive design and placing the end-user in the centre of the design process it is exactly these problems that we try to address and provide a universally acceptable solution in the form of the multi-sensory tours.

Finally, we cannot stress enough the importance of applying the principles of inclusive design in the tourism sector. Society needs to take a step forward and become more equitable, diverse, and democratic, and provide a decent quality of life for all of its members.

Anastasia Kalou is an access consultant with a design background, specialising in inclusive design solutions for museums and heritage sites. Her work aims to increase inclusion of disabled people in the cultural and tourism sector. She is the founder of Access Greece, a not-for-profit organisation that encourages disabled people worldwide to visit Greece and explore Greek culture.

*For further information about discovering Greece through the senses, visit the Access Greece website*

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