

DMOs and Tourism Product Development: Accessible destinations, The case of Monterrey, Mexico

Summary of the Case

The evolving role of Destination Management Organization (DMO) is highlighted through a case study related to accessible tourism development in Monterrey, Mexico. Specifically, it allows the future DMO professional to understand the characteristics, potential and service needs of the segment of more than one billion people with disabilities in the world as well as the requirements of an accessible destination. The benefits, training needs and challenges that arise in developing and promoting accessible tourist infrastructure and services for this market segment will be discussed. Learning objectives can be accomplished by a combination of individual work, group discussion, and visits to tourism establishments.

Monterrey, the third most populated city in Mexico and a destination for business and medical tourism, has been experiencing a tourism slowdown since 2007 due to economic crisis and travel warnings derived from drug related incidents. Tourism stakeholders requested the city's DMO to develop concrete strategies and action plans to increase tourism visitation; one of the potential strategies is to develop accessible tourism to attract the market of tourists with disabilities. However, a study shows that the city does not perform well in the basic aspects related to accessibility: useful and detailed information about accessible tourism products and services and accessible physical infrastructure. On the other hand, it shows that tourism managers hold a positive attitude towards people with disabilities and accessible tourism but are financially constrained to make accessibility improvements in their establishments. This case aims to encourage students' reflection towards the needs of tourists with disabilities and propose strategies to enhance the city's infrastructure and obtain stakeholder support and collaboration in making Monterrey an accessible tourism destination.

Teaching Objectives and Suggested Themes

Based on secondary sources and an empirical study of the accessibility of a real destination (Monterrey, Mexico) the teaching objectives of this case study are to:

- Familiarize the student with the different roles and activities of a DMO
- Internal activities (destination management and development, advocacy, stakeholder coordination)
- External activities (destination promotion and marketing)

Given the competitive and fragmented nature of the tourism industry, as well as the challenges posed by issues related to sustainability, governance, product development, etc., the primary tasks and responsibilities of a DMO have evolved from destination promotion,

marketing, and branding (external activities) to destination development and management (internal activities). Examples of functions related to destination development and management include industry coordination, stakeholder and residents engagement, human resources development, product and service development, crisis management, destination stewardship, information and research management, etc. Specific to this case study, Monterrey's DMO could be acting as an product developer, advocator for accessibility improvements, industry coordinator, accessible information disseminator, staff training provider, among others in a business environment that is financially constrained and unaware of accessibility requirements.

Describe the segment of tourists with disabilities

- Market profile
- Travel patterns
- Travel needs

The Segment of Tourists with Disabilities

The segment of tourists with disabilities is composed of people aged 55 or older and characterized by the low activity in the labor market. Travel motivators include visiting friends and relatives, leisure, recreation and relaxation. People with disabilities travel accompanied by friends, relatives or care assistants, mainly during off-season time. The length of stay in a destination is usually longer than that of tourists without disabilities, and domestic travel is preferred over international travel.

Travel Needs of Tourists with Disabilities

Reliable and detailed information about accessible accommodations and bathrooms, transportation, parking facilities, medical services, and other accessible establishments and attractions, among others

Accessible infrastructure for people with a mobility disability including accommodations with accessible bathrooms, continuous pathways, ramps or lifts, accessible transportation; for people with a visual disability clear edging of steps, color contrast on materials, suitable lighting, contrasting handrails, clear signage; and for people with a hearing disability, visual alarms and announcements, to name a few

Positive service attitudes towards people with disabilities, an understanding of their impairments and the correct forms of communicating with them to ensure a good travel experience.

Introduce the concept of accessible tourism and the criteria of an accessible destination

- Information
- Infrastructure
- Staff training

Accessible Tourism

Accessible Tourism has emerged to provide tourists with disabilities the opportunity of enjoying their trips by being able to have access to destinations and their attractions. Different definitions of accessible tourism have been proposed; all of which agree that it consists in offering accessible tourism products and services for people with disabilities and other segments, procuring their independence. These other segments include senior citizens and families with small children, among others.

Accessibility Requirements

Accurate tourism information indicating accessible products and services at a destination is required along with a list of support services for people with disabilities. Information is not enough; it must be accessible by all people, so websites and reservation systems are required to be designed in a usable and accessible way.

Adequate preparation of staff is needed to ensure the enjoyment of the travel experience of tourists with disabilities. Tourism staff should be prepared to deal with problems presented to them, and some of the staff should be able to communicate with people with a hearing disability using sign language. The staff should have accurate and current knowledge about accessible products and services in their establishment and know how to offer assistance to tourists with disabilities when needed.

Other requirements at tourism facilities include designated parking areas for people with disabilities located near the entrance; acoustic signing; visual signage in adequate size and color; elevators wide enough for accommodate a wheelchair, with buttons in Braille and acoustic information; accessible public telephones that consider height and have sound amplification options; accessible toilets with enough space and technical aids; equal pricing for tourists with disabilities; among other (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2005).

Identify the benefits of serving the market of tourists with disabilities

- Economic benefits
- Social benefits

Attending the market of tourist with disabilities makes financial sense. It represents almost 15% of the world's population and has the time and resources to travel. The economic impact of tourists with disabilities can reach billions of dollars (for instance, Americans with disabilities spend approximately US\$ 13.6 billion on travel annually, according with a 2005 survey. England receives approximately US\$ 3 billion annually from tourists with disabilities) in a destination and that is one of the main reasons why private business and destinations are investing in accessible infrastructure, staff training, accessible tours, and information platforms for tourists with disabilities. Besides providing increased revenues, higher occupancy levels, or better destination

image, an accessible destination will also benefit its local residents and senior citizens who will enjoy barrier free access to leisure and recreation sites and sensitive and dignifying staff service, which can increase community attachment and pride.

Understand who the different tourism stakeholders in a destination are and the ways a DMO can foster their collaboration

- 5.1. Tourism stakeholders
- 5.2. Leadership role of a DMO
- 5.3. Collaboration in destination management and marketing
- 5.4. Benefits of partnerships and collaboration

Within a destination, there are several stakeholders that not only are affected by but have a direct influence on tourism development and. These include government agencies, local residents, the private sector (hotels, restaurants, transportation companies, tour operators, travel agencies, etc.), NGOs (environmental organizations, cultural institutions), unions, academic institutions, tourists, and the media, among others. Tourism planners therefore should ensure their participation and collaboration in tourism development, but conflict can arise due to the diversity of interests and agendas. A DMO can play different key roles to encourage participation and collaboration, among the most relevant for this case study (Morrison, 2013):

- Setting the tourism agenda: A DMO should set the agenda for tourism, with the involvement and input of all stakeholders, and coordinate all efforts toward achieving it. It should define a vision and engage all stakeholders in planning.
- Guiding and coordinating tourism sector stakeholders: The DMO needs to guide and coordinate the efforts of tourism sector stakeholders. The coaching role of the DMO is to bring all of the team together to focus on a shared set of goals and objectives.
- Educating about tourism: The DMO should conduct research and be up-to-date with all trends in the tourism sector so it can be the source of information for all stakeholders.
- Leading tourism marketing: The DMO is the organization responsible for increasing awareness of the destination, marketing the destination as a whole, setting the directions for tourism sector stakeholders to follow, and providing partnering opportunities to achieve marketing goals and objectives.
- Maintaining tourism quality standards: The DMO must participate in the setting and monitoring of tourism quality standards, in this case accessibility standards for all tourism establishments.

Participation and collaboration of all stakeholders in tourism initiatives can provide several mutual benefits that can be highlighted in order to gain their support, among them, access to new markets, enhanced image, shared customer data and information, shared expertise and technical support, and higher budgets.

There are several mechanisms and processes that can be imple-

mented to foster collaboration in tourism planning, development, management and marketing. Jamal and Getz (1994), for instance, proposed a number of steps for facilitating collaboration in tourism (Table 1):

Target Audience

This case study is suitable for undergraduate and graduate (master's degree) students in hospitality, tourism as well as recreation and leisure programs as it covers several areas within a destination including hotels, restaurants, museums, parks, convention centers, and recreation sites, among others. The intention of the case is to develop an understanding of the needs of tourists with disabilities, a topic suitable to undergraduate students who may encounter such tourists in their professional life. Issues emerging in planning for accessible tourism as well as the understanding of the economic and social benefits of promoting an accessible destination are topics suitable for a master's degree class.

Teaching Approach and Strategy

It is recommended that at least three class sections be dedicated to the case study. The first section can start with an introductory lecture about DMOs and their evolving roles from external activities (e.g. destination promotion and marketing) to internal activities related to destination management and tourism product development.

The second section can start with an explanation of the market of tourists with disabilities and their rights, in particular those to cultural life, recreation and tourism. This can be followed by a group discussion about the challenges that people with disabilities can encounter when planning a trip and/or during their visit to a destination. Role playing activities in which students act as a person with a mobile, visual or hearing disability can enhance students' understanding of such challenges. In addition, students can be assigned, individually or in groups, to visit tourism websites and tourism establishments to get familiar with the accessibility conditions of their cities as well as research the accessibility legislation applicable in their city.

Having asked the student to read the case study in advance, the third class section can be dedicated to discuss the accessibility of Monterrey and, in groups, present a proposed action plan with specific recommendations to make the city an accessible destination. Another teaching strategy can consist of dividing the class into stakeholder groups and simulate a meeting to propose a common vision for Monterrey as an accessible destination and collaboration strategies among them.

A discussion of students' observations of websites and tourism establishments in their city and the additional socio-cultural benefits of making a city accessible can be an adequate closure to the topic.

Table 1

A Collaboration Process for Tourism Planning

Stages	Actions/Steps
Problem setting	Define purpose and domain Identify convener Convene stakeholders Define issue to resolve Identify and legitimize stakeholders Build commitment to collaborate by raising awareness of interdependence Balance power differences Address stakeholder concerns Ensure adequate resources available to allow collaboration
Direction setting	Collect and share information Appreciate shared values, enhance perceived interdependence Ensure power is distributed among several stakeholders Establish rules and agenda for direction setting Organize subgroups List alternatives Discuss various options Select appropriate solutions Arrive at shared vision, plan and strategies through consensus
Implementation	Discuss means of implementing and monitoring solutions, shared vision, plan or strategy Select suitable structure for institutionalizing process Assign goals and tasks Monitor ongoing progress and ensure compliance to collaboration decisions.

Adapted from Jamal and Getz (1995).

Suggested Readings

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