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# ACCESSIBLE TOURISM - A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION IN TOURISTS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the role of accessibility information in tourists' vacation decision-making process and seeks to obtain a reflected understanding of tourist information from the aspect of travellers with disabilities.

Based on a multilevel triangulation method, this thesis combines qualitative research methods, such as interviews with travellers with disabilities and travel professionals, content analysis of accessible travel blogs and national accessibility schemes with a survey on how tourist information for travellers with disabilities influence their vacation decision-making process. This research approach aims at getting an in-depth knowledge of tourist information directed towards travellers with disabilities.

By analysing different types of accessibility information used in a tourism context, this thesis explores why certain types of accessibility information are perceived as being better than others and from a theoretical perspective of decision-making, moreover it discusses why these are preferred over others.

My survey shows that official tourist information content about accessibility is not generally regarded as useful from the perspective of travellers with disabilities and that the respondents and interviewees instead refer to accessible travel blogs, as well as travel experiences and tips from friends and families, as good examples of tourist information.

Through interviews with experienced travellers with disabilities and through insights into their experiences with accessibility information, this thesis finds that disability awareness of travel providers and staff in tourist related business has a great influence on the level of tourist information on accessibility as well as the travel experience of traveller.

My research show that a high degree of trustworthiness of information about accessibility is regarded as crucial for travellers with disabilities when planning a vacation. However, tourist information has to contain more than reliable information, it has to be simple, to the point and easily accessible.

Moreover, the findings of this thesis suggest that tourist information for travellers with disabilities should be approached with less focus on technicalities and more focus on the context and travel history of the traveller with disabilities.

The findings of this thesis can be used in a further development of accessibility information for travellers with disabilities in a Danish context where the current official tourist information about accessibility consists of accessibility schemes.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of accessible tourism strategies and facilities in Denmark and Copenhagen is a topic that is gaining momentum these days in both the national media and on tourism agendas in different areas of the country. Denmark is far from being a first-mover in this particular field of tourism, and from a recent report made by Visit Denmark (2017) on tourists with disabilities' experiences of Denmark as an accessible destination, it becomes clear that in order to become an attractive destination for accessible travel, changes have to take place.

I have been working in the tourism and travel sector for many years and have a great deal of practical knowledge within different aspects of tourism. I have through my job at the official tourist information in Copenhagen, Copenhagen Visitor Service, encountered problems with lack of useful tourist information for travellers with disabilities visiting Copenhagen. I know from experience that many travellers with disabilities look for information about accessibility, not only before they travel, but also when they get here. My motivation comes from a wish to improve conditions for travellers with disabilities visiting Copenhagen and to from an interest in finding out how to make Copenhagen into a great accessible tourist destination.

From my experience, accessibility is still far from being a natural part of service and hospitality in the tourism sector in Copenhagen today, and on May 24, 2017, Visit Denmark released a research report about travellers with disabilities experience of Denmark as an accessible tourist destination. The report provides a basis for understanding the state of accessible tourism in Denmark and why there is a need for a further development of accessible tourism. This report has many interesting points and surveys that I will return to, but one of the findings of the research was particularly interesting in regard to this thesis,

“(…) Denmark does not currently hold the image of being a country where it is easy to holiday if you are affected by a physical disability. Whether this perception is real or not, is not decisive. The important thing is that Denmark does not appear as an accessible holiday destination, either among experts or people with physical disabilities. (VisitDenmark, 2017, p.42, translated by author).

Although liveability and Copenhagenization, the creation of urban spaces and city planning in Copenhagen, in order to improve the quality of life of the citizens, are among the major selling points for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) such as Wonderful Copenhagen and VisitDenmark and many of the tourism providers in Copenhagen when introducing Copenhagen as

a tourist destination to interested parties (“Copenhagen’s Bike Culture”, n.d.), accessibility has so until now not been a part of the official tourism branding of the city.

In January 2017, the City of Copenhagen asked its citizens to report accessibility problems in the city such potholes in the roads, kerbs that are too high and similar problems that can be dangerous when you are in a wheelchair or blind. Moreover, the city of Copenhagen is also currently working on creating or mapping accessible trails and routes in Copenhagen (Astrup, 2017). This is primarily done in order to improve the physical design of the city for citizens with disabilities or in need of special access in other ways, but it could also prove to be beneficial for the accessible tourism development in Copenhagen and result in an improvement of how Copenhagen is perceived and experienced as an accessible tourist destination by travellers with disabilities.

When looking at the website of the City of Copenhagen and Visit Copenhagen, the information about accessibility for travellers with disabilities is very limited. The website of Visit Copenhagen refers the traveller with disabilities to the Danish national accessibility schemes, [www.accessdenmark.com](http://www.accessdenmark.com), in Danish called God Adgang, where you can find information in 4 different languages about the accessibility of different sites and facilities in Denmark. However, the usability of the website and the schemes seems rather complicated, and it leaves you with the question of how much time it must take to plan a trip for a traveller with disabilities, as well as a wondering about what kind of information and how much information you actually need as a traveller with disabilities?

What I hope to gain knowledge about, is how to produce and promote the information about accessibility and how this information can reach the people it is intended for in an efficient and useful way. What counts as valuable information when talking accessible tourism?

By researching and analysing the relationship between accessible tourism and information about accessibility from different perspectives, this thesis questions whether a tourist destination can become more attractive as an accessible tourist destination merely by improving the information for tourists about the accessibility of the destination. Who should be consulted and what role should the national Destination Management Organisations play in this process? A report from the European Union on the current state of accessible tourism concludes,

“Weaknesses include cases where there is a lack of commitment from Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), which reduces the incentive for businesses to market and develop accessible products and services to a wider audience. Also, where there are no centralised marketing opportunities for accessibility at destination level, take-up of

accessibility can be low because individual enterprises on their own cannot capture the ‘whole of supply chain’ approach” (European Commission, 2015, p.14).

To gain insight into the information aspect of accessible tourism, I believe that it is important to look into how disability has been perceived historically and how it is perceived today. When it comes to accessibility, it is often not just a matter of ramps and lifts and physical access, because disability is more than mobility impairment. This is why I have chosen to look into the scientific research on accessibility in general, but especially on accessible tourism, because I believe that information from other studies will provide a good background, knowledge and insight when looking into the information aspect of accessible tourism.

By creating a survey based on questions related to decision-making, and interviews with information producers such as bloggers, accessibility scheme responsible and a CEO of an accessible travel company, my intention is to learn about travellers with disabilities’ decision-making process before travelling and which sources they find useful when deciding which destination to travel to. I hope to gain insight into how information about accessibility can be created in the most useful way.

All the above thoughts and questions have led to the following research question of this thesis:

## **1.2 Research Question**

*What constitutes as useful and valuable accessibility information in a tourism context for travellers with disabilities and is it possible to improve the accessibility of a destination such as Copenhagen by merely focusing on accessibility information?*

- How does information on accessibility shape the decision-making process of travellers with disabilities?
- What can be learned about information on accessible travel from experienced travellers with disabilities and accessible travel blogs? How do they use information and what kind of information do they search for before and during their travels?
- What are the challenges in regard to developing accessible tourism in Copenhagen when looking at it from an information perspective?

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Accessibility is a broad concept encompassing both physical, psychological, political and philosophical aspects. Although the meaning of the term *accessibility* ideally should be understood from the context it appears in, the understanding of the term is often limited to being linked to physical impairment and physical disability - especially in regard to accessible tourism.

By looking into the relationship between accessibility, accessible tourism and tourist information, this thesis aims at building up more knowledge about accessible tourism and tourist information seen from different perspectives and in various contexts.

Disabilities are defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as,

“Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations” (World Health Organisation, n.d.).

In the majority of the articles that form the basis of the theoretical framework of this thesis, *disability* and *handicap* are terms widely used and discussed in accessibility contexts. In Poria, Reichel and Brandt's (2009) article about obstacles and difficulties people with disabilities might encounter when visiting art museums, they provide the reader with a very useful way of distinguishing disability, handicap and physical impairment, where disability is described as a “(...) restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity”. (Poria, Reichel & Brandt, 2009, P.118). Handicap is a participation restriction and “(...)is a disadvantage for a given individual that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal for that individual (depending on age, gender, and social and cultural factors)” (Poria, Reichel & Brandt, 2009, P.118). This thesis builds on the notion that not just accessibility but also disability is a social construct, and that it is a joint society challenge to remove the public restraints that meet people with disabilities. Although the research question mainly deals with the question of accessibility from a tourist perspective, the fact is that accessibility and the human rights of people with disabilities are important matters in the fight for a World based on equality for all, and this fact cannot be ignored when researching the field of accessible tourism.

Accessibility is recognised as being one of the important aspects of the process of work for equalisation for disabled person in the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,

“Accessibility within the context of the United Nations is not only an inherent right of persons with disabilities, but a means of ensuring that persons with disabilities are able to exercise all rights and fundamental freedoms and are empowered to participate fully in society on equal terms with all others.” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013, p. 3)

Since policy-making on accessibility and disability is still up to the individual countries of the world, there is still a big difference between the countries attitudes towards accessibility.

In the case of accessible tourism, the role of politics and power actually plays a very visible part. As my literature review and theoretical framework will show, both national legislation and an official focus on the development of accessible tourism can, in fact, result in more accessible places to visit and stay in, and in that way, create a better environment for the further development of accessible tourism.

As this thesis will be looking into the role of information regarding accessible tourism and whether it has an effect on the decision-making of travellers with disabilities, the following chapter will begin by setting forth important aspects and understandings of accessibility and accessible tourism. These theories combined with relevant aspects of decision-making and the role of information in the decision-making process will be useful when analysing and discussing the role of tourist information on accessibility. And investigating whether it is possible for certain types of tourist destination accessibility information to affect the decision-making process of travellers with disabilities and result in the creation of a more accommodating tourist destination merely by focusing on improving accessibility information.

## **2.1 Accessible Tourism**

Accessible Tourism is a relatively new topic within tourism studies and research. The majority of existing research and literature is generally focused on 3 different topics,

The **economic aspects of accessible tourism** and the expected gains and losses of investing in - and promoting - accessible tourism in the future (Bowtell, 2015; European Commission, 2015), the **different models of understanding disability and approaches** to - and perceptions of - the topic (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011; Zajadacz, 2015; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011, Portales, 2015) and on the



**practical technicalities when introducing accessible tourism** to various types of tourist destinations, tourism providers and destination managers. (Darcy, 2010; Naniopoulos, Tsalis, Papanikolaou, Kalliagra, & Kourmpeti, 2015; Poria, Reichel & Brandt, 2009).

There has not, until recent years, been much research done on the role of accessibility information and planning of accessible tourism seen from the disabled traveller's' point of view. However, more recent research has been taken this approach and has been interviewing travellers with disabilities and have been analysing the travel reviews from travellers with disabilities. (Daniels et al., 2005; Kim, Ee Kim & Letho, 2012; Darcy, 2010).

In this thesis, accessible tourism should be understood as defined by Simon Darcy and Tracey Dickson (2009),

“Accessible tourism enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments. This definition is inclusive of all people including those travelling with children in prams, people with disabilities and seniors” (Darcy & Dickson, 2009, s. 34).

When studying the existing literature and scientific research on accessible tourism, you find that the development throughout the last 30 years in many ways reflects the trends in how disability and accessibility have been approached from a society point of view, and not solely a tourism point of view.

“The evolution of concepts defining disability has been conditioned mainly by socio-economic and legislative changes. This evolution is reflected in numerous models of disability (MD), for example, ethical, medical, social, biopsychosocial, geographical or economic models” (Zajadacz, 2015, p 190).

From the beginning of the 1980s, the research conducted on accessible tourism was inspired by different models and understandings of accessibility and disability. The main focus in most of the research was put on the differences between the social model, the medical model and practical technicalities of accessibility on different sights and destinations, and how that could affect and have an impact on the development of accessible tourism. From the beginning of 2010 and forward, it seems that researchers are returning to this perspective in the accessible tourism discussions within tourism studies. Research designs and the different models of understanding disability are still being questioned and there has been a general request and search from researchers for a new

social model of understanding disability (Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt, & Sonnenschein, 2012; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011; Zajadacz, 2015).

### **2.1.1 Social and Medical Model**

The Medical Model of understanding disability was predominant until the 1970s where the Social Model was first introduced (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). From the Medical Model's point of view, it is the individual's impairment that causes the disability and it is the individual's own problem. The impairment is in most cases regarded as permanent and,

“A disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an action in the manner, or within the range, considered normal for a human being” (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011, p. 24).

In the Social Model, disability is regarded as a social construct and

“disablement is not an attribute of a person but a complex collection of conditions many of which are created by the social environment which is imposed on top of a person's impairment” (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011, p. 30).

Most of the recent research on accessible tourism based is on the social model and the social understanding of disability, hence accessibility is regarded as a responsibility of the society and not a responsibility of the tourist with the disability. (Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt, & Sonnenschein, 2012; Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011; Naniopoulos et. al., 2015; Portales, 2015; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). According to Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt and Sonnenschein (2012), the social model forms the basis of the understanding of accessibility and disability today which is also demonstrated in the form of approach taken by many Destination Management and Marketing Organisations (DMOs),

“In regard to the present study, social models suggest that it is the disabling context at tourist destinations, rather than bodily impairments, that “produce” PwDs [Persons with Disabilities, red.]. Hence, these models may manifest themselves in DMOs and TDSPs [Tourist Destination Service Providers, red.] choosing to focus on development and marketing of accessible accommodation, restaurants and attractions” (Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt, & Sonnenschein, 2012, P. 204)

In the article “Disabled travel: not easy, but doable” by Blichfeldt and Nicolaisen (2011), the social model as the choice of DMO's and tourism providers is discussed, and the authors stress the importance of not overlooking the fact that disability is dynamic and that “disabled people build

competencies and reconstruct their connections with both their environment and other people (e.g. when they become more experienced tourists)” (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011, p.80).

This notion, made by Blichfeldt and Nicolaisen (2011), that the social model in its current form is not quite adequate, is shared by many other scholars such as Rafael Cruces Portales (2015); Simon Darcy and Dimitrios Buhalis (2011); Poria, Reichel, and Brandt (2009).

Accessible tourism is much more than just physical access, it is also about the understanding of what is important for the tourists. Although access is extremely important for the tourist experience, it is crucial to understand that the way the tourists are met by e.g. hotel staff is a big part of the tourism experience itself. Awareness is a major issue when it comes to travellers with disabilities, and hotel staff and museum personnel should be trained and aware of the accessibility of the building they are working in, and know how to make visits smooth and pleasant for the person with disabilities, according to Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt and Sonnenschein (2012).

Throughout the last 10 years, the voice of the traveller with disabilities has also been given much more attention and the travellers’ own stories and experiences when travelling have been analysed by Daniels, M.J., Rodgers, E.B.D., & Wiggins, B. (2005), and the explorative analysis of complaints made by travellers with disabilities related to experiences in tourism by Kim, Ee Kim and Lehto (2012) have contributed with more knowledge about the field and the development potentials of it.

### **2.1.2 Practical Aspects of Accessible Tourism**

This again leads to a second focus on Accessible Tourism, namely the practical aspect. The discussion about the practical aspect can be seen as being divided into two directions. One is questioning why accessibility is often being looked upon as something that can destroy the beauty of e.g. historical buildings or a heritage sites, and investigates how the accessibility issue can be solved in protected buildings and sites if the will and economy to do so exists (Naniopoulos, Tsalis, Papanikolaou, Kalliagra, & Kourmpeti, 2015). The other direction focus on how accessible tourism can be developed solely by improving the accessibility information and the training of staff (Darcy and Pegg, 2011; Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt, & Sonnenschein, 2012). By asking travellers with disabilities about their perception of accessible tourist information and what type of information they believe have an impact on their decision to travel to a destination, this thesis is going to look further into the latter aspect of accessible tourism.

### 2.1.3 Accessibility Schemes and Legislation

Accessibility information Schemes are widely used by tourism organisations all over Europe (European Commission, 2015). In Denmark, the Accessibility Scheme “Access Denmark” was started in 2004 by VisitDenmark, Horesta (the national trade association for the hotel, restaurant and tourism industry in Denmark red.) and the Disabled People’s Organisations of Denmark. On the [www.accessdenmark.com](http://www.accessdenmark.com) website, it is possible to find a lot of information in four different languages about accessibility aspects of those service providers that have decided to register and become an accessibility labelled facility. To be accessibility labelled does not, however, necessarily mean that a facility is accessible. It means that you can find information about the accessibility of the facility (Appendix F). Access Denmark features schemes for seven different types of disabilities and the content of each scheme is very comprehensive. Moreover, it features accessibility of many local places and facilities around Denmark. The Accessibility Scheme is not only meant as an information site, but could also be used as marketing tool, according to the association behind the label (God Adgang, n.d.).

One of the conclusions in the report “Mapping and performance check of the supply of accessible tourism services in Europe” (European Commission, 2015) is exactly the fact, that in most cases the “Accessibility Information Schemes are often run purely with an information focus by NGOs, rather than with a commercial focus by actual businesses and they therefore remain underused as a marketing tool. (European Commission, 2015, p.13-14)

National legislation is another influential aspect of the development of accessibility. This also applies when developing to accessible tourism. As an example, the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in the United Kingdom has contributed a lot to the development of accessible tourism, “The passing of the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has brought increased political and economic attention to the plight of disabled people, especially from service providers and the tourism industry. The Act makes it illegal for service providers, including attractions and accommodation establishments, to discriminate against people with disabilities (Shaw & Coles, 2004, p. 397)

According to Shaw and Coles (2004), all previous work done to improve accessibility in the UK before the passing of the DDA has had a suggestive nature/character. From 1995 improvements were enforced by law and the tourism council of England has subsequently put an effort into explaining the economic benefits of a *Tourism for All* approach. (Shaw & Coles, 2004).

Tourism for All is a project started by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). A set of guidelines set out for tourist organisations to follow.

“It [the General assembly, red.] also approved (1991) the document *Creating Tourism Opportunities for Handicapped People in the Nineties*, which was updated in 2005 in the document *Accessible Tourism for All*. This document includes specific recommendations on tourist information and publicity, preparation of staff, common requirements and requirements concerning specific facilities which, according to UNWTO, should be met by tourism facilities and sites” (World Tourism Organization and Fundación ACS (2015), p. 4).

The Tourism for All is, however, not a legal act and merely a joint statement by the members of UNWTO on how to work on the improvement of accessible tourism in the world with best practices and recommendations.

In United Kingdom, The DDA legislation has been followed up by the Equality Act of 2010,

“All tourism businesses in the United Kingdom have obligations under The Equality Act 2010, which requires them to treat everyone accessing their goods, facilities or services fairly, regardless of their age, gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, religion or belief” (“Case Study: London”, 2015, p.5).

In Denmark, however, there is according to a report made by the Danish Institute for Human Rights, “no general prohibition of discriminations on grounds of disability [...]” (Pedersen, Andersen & Jørgensen, 2016, p. 6). The action taken to improve accessibility in Denmark has up to now been of a suggestive character. This could be changing, as the Danish Minister for Children and Social Affairs in February 2017 introduced a bill on discrimination on grounds of disability. (Munch, 2017).

#### **2.1.4 The Economic Aspect of Accessible Tourism**

“Based on these findings and according to The World Bank (2014) data, the accessible tourism market in Europe (focusing on the countries included in this research and assuming the disabled tourist travels alone) would have accounted for 16.9 per cent of total European tourism receipts in 2005 had a comprehensive solution been in place and allowed for barrier free tourism” (Bowtell, 2015, p. 209).

The economic gains of developing accessible tourism are still among the top selling points of improving accessibility on touristic sites. More recent research shows a very positive attitude among tourist destinations towards looking into and taking advantage of the economic aspects of

accessible tourism and also how to make tourism providers see the advantages of developing a more accessible tourist destination. (Bowtell, 2015; Portales, 2015; Zajadacz, 2015).

“Visitor surveys conducted by VisitEngland in 2013, for example, have shown the average length of an overnight stay is 2.9 nights, with an average spend of £184, but where a member of a group or party has a disability or impairment this becomes 3.3 nights and an average spend of £191” (European Commission, 2015, p.13).

According to studies about the economic aspects of accessible tourism, convincing tourism providers of business prospects of the accessible tourism concept can however be a long and very slow process (Bowtell, 2015). Although the unambiguous focus on the economic benefits of accessible tourism is not always putting the needs of the travellers with disabilities first, according to Shaw and Coles (2004), many researchers see the economic benefits of accessible tourism as a significant component in order to improve the situation for accessible tourism, and a way to develop the accessibility area and opening up for the development of general accessibility which in terms will benefit the traveller with disabilities,

“Inevitably, much of this interest is based on a somewhat narrow agenda that increasingly sees the disabled tourist as a potentially lucrative market waiting to be tapped. At the policy level, the main emphasis is increasingly based on unlocking this potential by improving facilities and access, which are at the core of the DDA” (Shaw & Coles, 2004, p. 398).

The findings of the research by James Bowtell (2015), supports the focus on the economic aspect, as they show that the average disabled tourist spends more money when on vacation than the average tourist, take longer vacations and often travel in bigger groups.

Many of the scientific research articles also predict that the travel pattern of the ageing population will change radically in the future and that people will be more active travellers in their old age and hence form a much bigger part of the tourism market than before. (Bowtell, 2015; Portales, 2015; Zajadacz, 2015)

When discussing the economic perspective of accessible tourism, the tourism providers and organisations are considered valuable players. According to Bowtell (2015) and the report by the European Commission (2015), their engagement in the development of accessible tourism is of great importance if tourism should be for everyone,

“The accessible tourism market is an attractive segment for travel and leisure companies, however the tourism industry has made limited progress so far in providing the market with accessible products” (Bowtell, 2015, p.209).

None of the other studies done on this aspect of accessible tourism contest the findings of Bowtell (2015), and the findings are supported by the report on accessible tourism and the case studies commissioned by the European Commission (European Commission, 2015).

When the question of accessible tourism is approached from a decision-making perspective or an economic perspective, the disabled tourist becomes a market segment and the focus thereby shifts from being on human rights to being on business, revenue and profit. From decision-making perspectives, the general approach is not on whether a disability is a medical issue that should be fixed by the disabled or whether it is the responsibility of the society to create a barrier-free world where disability does not result in a handicap. From this approach, the disabled tourist becomes a customer and the need of the customer should be met and dealt with accordingly. When the traveller with disabilities is a customer with money, dreams and needs, then it becomes interesting to find out how and how a traveller with disabilities makes decisions about travelling to a destination. One way is to look into the decision-making process of travellers with disabilities. What is important, what inspires and does tourist information about accessibility has any effect on the decision-making process of travellers with disabilities?

## **2.2 Decision-Making**

As outlined in the previous chapter, there are many different approaches to the concept of accessible tourism and suggestions on how to best improve the conditions for travellers with disabilities. If you are looking at theoretical approaches to comprehend tourists' decision-making in general, the number of surveys and researched studies are numerous. In the following, some of the theories on decision-making that I have found to be relevant in regarding information and accessible tourism will be introduced.

### **2.2.1 Vacation Decision-making**

According to Hyde and Decrop (2011), one of the first models of vacation decision-making is van Raaij and Francken's 5 step model from 1984. The five steps of vacation decision-making that are described in this model include the decision to travel, the information search, the joint decision of more members of the travel group to travel to a one destination over another, the vacation experiences during the vacation and the evaluation of the vacation afterwards. (Hyde & Decrop, 2011, p.104). Hyde and Decrop are rather critical of the 5-step model and also of most of the models of vacation decision-making that followed right after this one, as they "neglect to examine

other vacation sub-decisions that consumers have to make – including the consumer’s choices of transport, accommodation and activities” (Hyde & Decrop, 2011, p.104).

The importance of sub-decisions has been given more attention in recent research studies and has moreover led to wider focus on the other aspects of the decision-making process, e.g. the importance of interpersonal influence and context (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011; Martin & Woodside, 2011; Teichmann 2011; Moore, 2002, Moore, Smallman, Wilson & Simmons, 2012).

“Conventional models fail to acknowledge that tourists’ decision-making is often focused on poorly defined ‘problems’ in which there is considerable emotional capital. Tourists will have varying degrees of experience in such problem solving, but notwithstanding this, conventional models are poorly suited to explaining how people make such choices” (Smallman & Moore, 2010, p. 415).

Not only is the process of vacation decision-making, according to the above-mentioned researchers, more complex than suggested by the previous models of decision-making, but there are also more people travelling on vacation today than 20 years ago.

Research by Bronner and de Hoog (2011) that focus on couples travelling together and joint decision-making also point to the fact that the art of compromise is a very important factor when making a decision.

“If partners in a couple travelling together disagree about the final choice, arriving at a final decision involves one or more of several strategies. In vacation choice, the golden mean strategy is mostly used. This is a strategy of give-and-take and reaching a compromise” (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011, p. 141)

The vacation decision-making process where couples and families are involved is, according to Bronner and de Hoog (2011) a process of strategies and compromises, but also a context-based process. According to their article, there is a great difference between individual travellers’ decision-making process compared to when people are travelling with other people. Bronner and de Hoog (2011) differentiate between the types of information sources used by the decision makers, and their research shows that there is a clear difference between sources based on the context of the decision - if it is a social context or an individual context and the use of personal sources and commercial sources,

“For example, when considering the quietness of a destination, one may be personally satisfied with information provided in a travel agency brochure, in particular when it reinforces one’s own preferences, but when one has to discuss and reach agreement with a



partner about the same topic, information from friends and relatives is perhaps much more convincing.” (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011, p. 130).

### **2.2.2 Decision-making and Information search**

When looking into the theories and research produced on vacation decision-making, the role of information search in the decision-making process cannot be overlooked. This is the second step of the five steps in the Raaij and Francken’s model (1984), and even more attention has been given to this step of the decision-making process since they first introduced their model (Teichmann, 2011). Researchers have looked at people’s perception of information and at what is regarded as good or bad information, but also what kind of information that is relevant when deciding on a destination and a vacation type, and whether it is possible to generalise when talking about information (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011; Teichmann, 2011, Moore, Smallman, Wilson & Simmons, 2012).

Bronner and de Hoog (2011) investigate whether there is a great difference between the information people gather and use, when looking at it from a context perspective, and how the different types of information sources and information search should be distinguished,

“(…) the sources people use in a social context are more personal than the sources they use in an individual context. This underlines the perspective of this paper, that context makes a difference as regards selecting different information sources in the vacation decision-making process” (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011, p. 137).

The findings of Bronner and de Hoog (2011) indicate that tourist information is not just a general source of information and that the DMO’s or local tourist offices could benefit from thinking in context when looking into the development of tourist information. Could the same be applicable when it comes to accessibility information? Some of the findings of in the article “People with disabilities visit art museums: an exploratory study of obstacles and difficulties” (Poria, Reichel & Brandt, 2009) also suggest that the context of the traveller should be considered when talking about accessible tourism,

“The findings show clear differences between those using wheelchairs and those using crutches. These differences illustrate the need to avoid utilizing generalizations concerning “people with disabilities,” not even for those classified as “mobility challenged.”

Researchers and practitioners investigating people with disabilities should, therefore, limit

their conclusions and management implications to a specific segment only” (Poria, Reichel & Brandt, 2009, p.125).

Another great influence on the decision-making process, and a preferred source of information, is the travel experience and expertise of the traveller. According to the results of an Austrian study from 2007, the relationship between information sourcing and travel experience carried out by Teichmann (2011), “one’s own experience is the most important source of information when making a decision” (p.189).

“More specifically, the more travel experience individuals have the more they consider themselves as experts in terms of travelling. Thus, the level of product expertise functions as a mediator to the extent that it accounts for the relation between travel experience and travel information sourcing” (Teichmann, 2011, p. 191).

Moreover, the study shows that despite having travelled a lot, experienced travellers still search for information before travelling to a place, and that the difference between an experienced and an inexperienced traveller is the learned skills when it comes to searching for and finding information. But the study also shows that,

“(…) interpersonal sources are of particular importance for vacation planning. Friends and relatives thus considerably influence tourists in their information sourcing and decision making. Hence, marketers need to consider the relevance of word-of-mouth recommendation in their marketing decisions” (Teichmann, 2011, p. 192)

The findings of the Austrian study (Teichmann, 2011) are very much in line with the findings of van Raaij and Francken’s more than 20 years earlier - before the influence of online information search and travel communities,

“Social information sources (friends, relatives) are consulted increasingly throughout the vacation sequence, probably for new information, others' opinions, and legitimization. Consumer organizations, books, and travel guides are of minor importance in the decision-making process” (van Raaij & Francken, 1984, p. 106).

Hence, the travellers’ own experiences have a great influence on the travel decision-making, but personal travel experience do not constitute as big influence the individual traveller’s information search as much as the experiences of friends and relatives do. Therefore, not only the source of the information should be considered, but also the type of information, whether it is of personal, interpersonal or commercial style. Moreover, the source of information should not be looked into without considering the context of the information search.

### 2.2.3 The Discursive Tourist

The theories and surveys in the previous sections all point toward a greater integration of context and understanding of where the decision-making of tourists is coming from. This integration should not be disregarded, according to Kevin Moore. He divides tourism research into two branches. One is based on a “sophisticated social theoretical discussion on the nature of tourism and tourist behavior” (Moore, 2002, p. 41), the other is focused on the individual psychological aspects of tourism and consumer behaviour,

“(…) the self-set purpose of cataloguing, modelling and describing a range of characteristics of tourism, and in particular, the individual dimensions and processes of tourists” (Moore, 2002, p. 41).

In his article “The Discursive Tourist”, Moore (2002) argues that the use of a discursive approach when researching tourist choices and actions will provide the researcher with better tools to understanding the complexity of decision-making,

“Discursive approaches are thus ideally suited to answer questions about how tourists ‘negotiate’ the tasks of being tourists, since they highlight acts and strategies that not only accomplish ends, but also help to redefine those ends spontaneously” (Moore, 2002, p. 52).

Furthermore, Moore believes that when one applies a discursive analysis to the models of decision-making, it can provide a much better tool when understanding the needs and decisions made by the tourists before, during and after the travels.

Moore also points towards one of the benefits of the discursive approach being that the tourists “(…) become conceived as active social agents - sometimes seeking similar, sometimes seeking different ends - engaged in the production of tourism and tourist experiences at the microlevel” (Moore, 2002, p. 53).

A discursive approach to accessible tourism and how information is both researched and produced, could be interesting due to different factors such as the travel experience, personality and travel context of the tourist, but also seen from the perspective of the differences between the social and medical models. As well as the different perceptions of disability and accessibility and to what extent they affect the development of accessible tourism in a Danish context. Moreover, it could also be interesting to investigate the impact of the expected economic gains of improving and developing accessible tourism and how that may change tourism providers’ attitudes towards accessible tourism. A discursive approach is therefore useful and interesting when looking at both

the tourism providers and the tourists when looking into accessible tourism, decision-making and accessible tourist information.

#### **2.2.4 Decision-making, information and accessibility**

Working from the notion that economic gain can be a serious driver in the development of accessible tourism, it would be valuable and interesting to look further into the decision-making process of the disabled traveller before travelling to a destination. Who, and what factors, are influential in the decision-making process and what can the development of accessible tourism initiatives gain from this knowledge?

In the theoretical framework of this thesis, the emphasis has so far been on decision-making, understandings of disability and accessibility and in the following, the focus will be on research regarding how decision-making can influence the development of accessible tourism.

Some research has already been done on disabled travellers' decision-making, but there still not many studies within the tourism studies' field of research that look into how the decision-making process of disabled travellers differs from travellers without disabilities (Israeli, 2002).

Aviad Israeli (2002) touches upon the decision-making process in his article about the importance of site accessibility for disabled travellers. His article is based on a study of the relative importance of accessibility. This study was founded on an evaluation questionnaire filled out by 50 disabled visitors to a touristic site in Israel (Israeli, 2002, p.101). The evaluation was done in order to help point out which factors that are important for a disabled traveller when visiting a site. One of the conclusions he makes in the article is,

“If the process is characterized as noncompensatory, the relative importance of the accessibility factors suggests that disabled people may evaluate tourist sites on a yes/no basis” (Israeli, 2002, p. 103).

This means that there is no golden middle way or chances for compromise where travellers with disabilities are concerned. If the site is inaccessible for the traveller with disabilities, the traveller will not or cannot visit the site. The role of compensatory and non-compensatory experiences plays, according to Israeli's study, a very big part of the decision-making process for disabled travellers,

“The proposition offered here is that for disabled tourists, the process is primarily noncompensatory, thus suggesting that a disadvantage in one attribute (e.g., parking that is inaccessible for the disabled) cannot be traded for advantages in any other attribute (e.g., accessible sidewalks)” (Israeli, 2002, p. 103).

According to Israeli (2002), tourism management should use this knowledge actively in both the marketing and the improvement of accessibility. His conclusion is that the decision-making process of the travellers with disabilities is much different from that of the travellers without.

One of the leading accessible tourism researchers in Australia, Simon Darcy, is referring to a survey on how accessible accommodation can influence the choice of travel destination for travellers with disabilities (Darcy, 2010). This survey shows, that accessible accommodation is one of the first things that travellers with disabilities search for when looking into a future travel destination.

“This is because if PwD cannot find suitable accommodation that meets their access needs, by necessity, they change their destination choice or do not travel. In many cases, PwDs prime holiday determinant is finding accommodation that can adequately meet their needs. This is in stark contrast to the nondisabled who in most cases are able to make do with any form of available accommodation if they really have a desire to travel to a destination”.

(Darcy and Pegg, 2011, p. 468)

This distinction, found between the necessary preparation of disabled and nondisabled travellers needed before travelling, is supported by a large study of accessible tourism in Europe commissioned by the European Union, where the researchers also found that,

“Tourists with disabilities require a much higher degree of information and preparation before travelling than tourists without specific access needs. As one respondent to the survey clearly indicated: “for round trips we travel with a tour-operator for disabled people, with guide. We look for hotels with adapted room. So, the more information there is the easier it becomes!” (European Commission, 2015, p. 74).

Moreover, the findings of this study also showed that tourism providers and tourist information staff among others were not well equipped to answer questions or give information about the accessibility of the local and regional tourist facilities or even their own facility. The conclusion of the study suggests that the development of accessibility tourism in Europe still has a long way to go before tourism in Europe can claim to be accessible (European Commission, 2015).

This chapter has introduced the theoretical framework of the thesis and has looked at the relevant approaches to understand and analyse the empirical data in order to reach a more in-depth insight into important aspects of travelling with a disability and providing the necessary service needed. The role of information and context in vacation decision-making has been introduced and will be used in the following to investigate how information about accessibility is valued by travellers with disabilities and whether the quality of information about accessibility influences the decision-

making process of travellers with disabilities. As some theories about accessible tourism claim that travellers with accessibilities make decisions in a different way than travellers without disabilities (Israeli, 2002; Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011; European Commission, 2015). This claim could indeed be interesting to investigate further, as well as the connection between information and the decision-making process.

I would like to look further into these matters, and gain insights into how important it actually is for a destination to have easily accessible information about destination accessibility on websites, the choice of information style and content and to what extent that could have an influence on the decision-making process of travellers with disabilities.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This thesis investigates the relationship between accessibility information in connection to tourism information and travellers' decision-making. The research question is approached from different angles and sources, where the majority of information come from respondents of a survey about accessible travel posted by me on three different accessible travel forums on Facebook and the accessible travel forum of Lonely Planet on Google Plus. The survey has been followed up by more in-depth email interviews with some of the respondents, email interviews with experienced accessible travel bloggers, a skype interview with a CEO of an accessible travel company, Accessible Travel Online, and a representative of the official Danish accessibility scheme. Furthermore, it consists of a content analysis of extracts of websites of professional accessible travel bloggers and an example of official accessible tourist information material from Dusseldorf that has been recommended by one of the respondents of the survey.

Based on a discussion of these different perspectives on accessible tourism information, the theoretical framework of this thesis, as well as a combination of the many different insights the discussion provide to the existing knowledge, the goal is to create an even more insightful understanding of the different aspects of accessibility, tourist information about accessibility and whether an improved and different way of providing accessibility information can turn a city like for instance Copenhagen into a more attractive tourist destination for travellers with disabilities.

#### **3.1 Philosophy of Science**

The theoretical framework of this thesis has been combining the different approaches to disability and accessibility with theories on decision-making processes. Within the study of accessibility and disability, you find that there is a very clear distinction between not only the definitions of what it means to be disabled (e.g. the social and the medical model), but it also becomes clear how important it is to keep in mind how disability affects people's' lives, and how it is experienced differently from person to person. Furthermore, there is not just one experience of the accessibility of a place, but many experiences and just as many understandings of accessibility and disability. The area of accessible tourism is a complex study, partly because of the complexity and variety of disabilities, but also because every country has its own version of accessible tourism, accessibility legislation and information about accessible tourism.

In the theoretic framework of this thesis, the terms of accessibility, disability and handicap are understood as social constructions that should be seen as dynamic concepts according to the context they are found in.

In order to understand how tourist information about accessibility is perceived by the people it is intended for, it is necessary to ask them about their experiences with accessible tourist information and to inquire them about travel experiences where information about accessibility has made a difference. It is also necessary to ask the people who are creating the accessibility content of the accessibility information about why and from which criteria they approach the collection of accessible tourist information.

“Through close examination of individual experiences, phenomenological analysts seek to capture the meaning and common features, or essences, of an experience or event. The truth of the event, as an abstract entity, is subjective and knowable only through embodied perception; we create meaning through the experience of moving through space and across time” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p.1374)

In order to gain knowledge about the perception and importance of tourist information about the accessibility of tourist attractions, a challenge of my own fore-conception of what good tourist information is, is necessary. This is due to the believe that if I want to understand what good accessibility information is for travellers with disabilities, I have to ask them, and also ask the people providing the accessibility information, whether they are the travel bloggers, travel communities, travel agencies or the people in charge of official accessibility information and ask them about their experiences with different types of tourist information.

In the process of reaching a better understanding of what accessible tourism and the role of accessibility information in the decision-making of travellers with disabilities, the research will be conducted in an exploratory way and the empirical material will be analysed from interpretive approach in order to understand accessible tourism and the role of information in the decision-making process of travellers. In this process, I expect my fore-conception of the phenomena “accessible travel”, “accessibility information” and “accessibility” to be challenged by other interpretations and understandings of, and experiences, with the phenomena, and thereby expanding my horizon.

“Horizon denotes both the momentary limits set by the horizon as well as the idea that one’s horizon will change as one moves. In the hermeneutic situation, your horizon is determined by your prejudices, which establish your sphere of possible meaning. In coming to a new



understanding through the encounter with a text, what you understand changes, and so your horizon of meaning changes” (Kennedy Smith, 2006, p. 106).

It is valuable, and nonetheless useful for a non-disabled researcher, to challenge the fore-conception of what it means to be a traveller with disabilities and to expand his/her horizon by investigating different understandings of accessible travel from people having the first-hand experience with it, either personally or professionally. Deducting knowledge from other research conducted within the research field can also contribute to this expansion of this “sphere of possible meaning”. (Kennedy Smith, 2006, p. 106).

When looking into and interpreting travel experiences, narratives and individual understandings of accessibility, the many aspects of accessible travel should lead to a better understanding of accessible travel and hence lead to new perspectives on how to develop, improve and even promote accessible travel.

The interpretive and discursive analytical approach to the research question can lead to a more in-depth knowledge on the topic being investigated. How research is conducted and by which method this knowledge is regarded as legitimate knowledge, is, according to John Tribe, professor in Tourism, an epistemological question,

“Knowing about how and what we know in tourism is an epistemological question, epistemology being that branch of philosophy which studies knowledge. Indeed, epistemology explores the theory of knowledge, and its essential concerns are the meaning of the term ‘knowledge’, the limits and scope of knowledge and what constitutes a valid claim to know something” (Tribe, 2004, p. 46).

According to Tribe (2004), you cannot claim tourism as a scientific discipline, due to its “lack of internal theoretical or conceptual unity, and (...) reliance on contributory disciplines” (Tribe, 2004, p. 48). It can, however, according to Tribe, be regarded an area of study. The methods of producing legitimate knowledge within tourism studies are discussed in the chapter. One of the major issues of tourism research has to do with the “multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and extradisciplinary approaches” (Tribe, 2004, p. 59) that have been conducted by tourism researchers.

“when we approach research in tourism we are armed with the acquisition of specialist knowledge that seems to equip researchers to pursue a disinterested quest for truth” (Tribe, 2004, p.59)

The combination of disability, information, accessibility, decision-making from a tourism perspective in the theoretical framework of this thesis and the research design and collection of data

is in many ways rooted in consumer studies, but at the same time, the discussion about accessibility also has roots in both humanistic studies and social studies.

### **3.2 Qualitative Research Approach**

I have chosen a qualitative approach throughout my research. Since my research question is focused on understanding choices, actions and decisions and getting a better understanding of what accessibility mean to people in contiguity with accessible tourism, a qualitative approach seems to be the best option to obtain a more in-depth understanding of accessible tourism.

“With qualitative approaches, the emphasis is placed upon studying things in their natural settings, interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them, humanising problems and gaining an ‘emic’, or insider’s, perspective” (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 4).

By employing a qualitative approach, the interviewees’ voices have better chances of getting heard and the distinctions in the understanding of the researched topic have a chance of becoming clearer. A qualitative approach can also allow for other and new aspects to be considered in the research, because of the more open and interpretive approach to the analysis of the empirical data. Because the aim of this thesis is to collect knowledge about experiences with information about accessible tourism, a qualitative research approach is regarded as the best approach for this matter, however, the qualitative approach has its weaknesses as well. One of the weaknesses of a qualitative research approach is that the researcher’s own interpretations and understandings become too predominant and that the result of the research cannot be regarded as generalizable result.

“Thus, the key function of the qualitative researcher is to communicate to the reader a sense of context-revealing strangeness about the subject being analysed. It is to interpret the found human actions and aspirations of that context variably or differentially vis-à-vis the different in-group vantage points which are found to be significant at the given tourism site, in the given travel trade setting, or in the otherwise-defined human-societal encounter” (Hollinshead, 2004a, p. 69).

This thesis is making use of both qualitative methods, quantitative methods, semi-structured interviews, netnography and case studies in order to produce more knowledge on accessible tourism and the role of information in accessible tourism. This method is termed multilevel triangulation (Decrop, 2004).

### 3.2.1 Triangulation

The use of multilevel triangulation as a method is appropriate when exploring the meaning of a concept or phenomenon such as accessible tourism, because of the variation of different people, associations, politics involved in and affected by the development of this type of tourism and because there are more at stake, e.g. human rights, when talking accessible tourism as a tourism concept. Not only because it concerns the quality of the lives of many people in the world, but also because it touches the basic human rights. Due to the complexity of the accessible tourism concept, a multilevel triangulation method serves to be the best way to achieve an in-depth knowledge and understanding of this complexity.

“Multilevel triangulation may be considered as a particular kind of informant triangulation. It is inspired by Miles and Huberman (1984), who make a distinction between different levels of analytical interest in qualitative research. Indeed, qualitative research may involve people (social subjects) or phenomena (social objects) at different levels, which can be triangulated” (Decrop, 2004, p. 163).

This thesis builds on the findings from a survey conducted online about accessible travel and a small number of semi-structured qualitative interviews with persons involved in accessible tourism, either as tourism professionals or as tourists. All interviews have been conducted by me during the spring of 2017. Moreover, blog posts and discussions from accessible travel forums account for a substantial part of the empirical data. This data constitutes the primary data of this thesis.

“Data triangulation involves the use of a variety of data sources in a study. Data may be either primary (interview, observation, etc.) or secondary (textbooks, novels, promotional material, minutes of meetings, newspapers, letters, etc.” (Decrop, 2004, p. 163)

The secondary data consists of accessibility schemes, case studies of accessible tourism in different cities in Europe, legislation on accessibility and the role of accessible tourism in current Danish tourism strategies.

According to Decrop (2004),

“Information coming from different approaches and perspectives is used to corroborate, elaborate or illuminate the research problem. Triangulation limits personal and methodological biases and enhances a study’s trustworthiness” (p. 162).

By employing a multilevel triangulation method, the goal is to reach reliable and credible results and knowledge on accessible tourism.

The empirical data collected will be introduced shortly in the following.

## **3.3 Research Design**

### **3.3.1 Collection of Data**

#### **3.3.1.1 Netnography and content analysis**

The use of netnographic research methods has played an important role in the collection of the empirical data for this thesis. I have found this approach very useful in the initial phase of my research as “netnography uses the information that is publicly available in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online consumer groups” (Kozinet, 2002, p. 62).

In the beginning of the research process, I was searching the internet for accessible travel forums, accessible travel bloggers and for accessible travel websites by using the search words “accessible travel”, “accessible tourism” and “disability travel”. I looked at the questions asked and discussed in a number of open accessible travel forums, and I looked at the content that was posted both on accessibility blogs and on online accessible travel forums, such as “Accomable”, “Trip-Ability”, “Accessible Travel Online”, “the Wheeltraveler” and many more. I did not participate in the discussions on the travel forums, but I observed and I used some of my observations to form the survey that I later on posted on accessible travel forums that I selected from criteria of numbers of followers and relevance to the survey.

There are various travel websites and forums for specific disabilities such as deafness, mental disorders, mobility challenges and many independent accessibility bloggers as well. I did not post the survey on travel forums for specific disabilities, but chose to post the survey on two general accessible travel forums on Facebook: “Accessible Travel Online” (2392 followers on July 28, 2017), “Trip-Ability” (1412 followers on June 25, 2017) and it was shared by a member of the group “Able Adventurer” (499 followers on July 28, 2017).

After going through a large number of different accessible travel websites, accessible travel blogs and accessible travel forums online, I often found that the majority of travellers and bloggers with disabilities who are posting online on the general travel forums, were in fact wheelchair users.

The empirical data consists of answers to the survey I posted on the travel forums from travellers around the world, interviews with and reviews from accessible travel bloggers and accessible tourist information that have been carefully chosen among many different websites, either inspired by the answers of the respondents or with the main focus on how the different websites and bloggers would provide information about accessibility when travelling.

I also contacted a number of accessibility bloggers, but only two of them returned to me regarding interviews on Skype and when I tried to set up a date and time, they did not reply.

Although my main purpose has been to find out if accessible tourist information has an influence on travellers with disabilities' decision to travel to a certain destination and what the accessible travel means to different groups of travellers, I have also aimed at finding out where Copenhagen positions itself as an accessible travel destinations and to get an insight into the challenges that Copenhagen has as an accessible tourist destination in regard to accessible tourist information.

### **3.3.12 Survey**

The survey was constructed in order to gain a better insight into the topic of the research, but also to make contact with travellers that have experience with accessible travel. The survey consisted of 31 questions taking their departure in decision-making theories. The questionnaire was constructed in a way that the answers should provide insight into the decision-making processes of travellers with disabilities before travelling on vacation.

As previously mentioned. the initial survey was posted on accessible travel forums on Facebook, such as "Tripability" and "Accessible Travel Online" and the Google plus forum for Lonely Planet "Travel for All". I was aiming at getting enough responses on the survey to gather enough useful information, both quantitative and qualitative, to start my initial research from.

The first edition of the survey I focused on accessible travel in general and accessible travel in Copenhagen.

However, not many travellers were interested in answering that survey and it turned out to be more difficult than expected to collect useful data in this way. I then deleted the part about accessibility in Copenhagen, as I suspected the length of the survey to be the reason for the low numbers of replies. Instead I gave the respondents a possibility to leave their email address if they were interested in answering more questions. Although the Facebook travel forums called "Tripability" and "Accessible Travel Online" both shared my post on their Facebook sites and it was shared again by members of the "Tripability" group in closed forums, I did not receive more than 16 responds in total to this survey. Most of the survey answers came after the travel platform "Accessible Travel Online" chose to share my Facebook post on their Facebook page. The survey did, however, provide me with a lot of useful information and tips from those that responded to the survey and 7 of the respondents left their email and 4 of these afterwards elaborated on some of the

replies that they had left in the survey and also answered additional questions regarding accessible travel (Appendix C, Appendix E, Appendix G).

In the survey, I did not ask about respondents type of disability because that was not my main focus, but from the responds, I see that a majority of the respondents are wheelchair users.

### **3.3.12 Interviews**

My data set consists of a set of different types of interviews. The interview styles have been adjusted to the different persons that were interviewed and the different situations the interviews took place in. The interview methods that I prepared for the conduction of the face-to-face interviews, followed the principles of unstructured and semi-structured interviews, as described by Bryman where semi-structured being an interview method where the questions have been prepared beforehand, but the interviewer allows her/himself to follow up on the interviewees answers and if suitable to leave the interview guide or manuscript (Bryman, 2008, p. 436-438).

One of the interviews was conducted on Skype, as the interviewee was based in the Netherlands. I have conducted one face-to-face interview with the Danish director of the Access Denmark Secretariat, Ulla Kramer at her work place, the House of the Disabled People's Organisations Denmark in Høje Tåstrup, Denmark. I had prepared to do this interview as a semi-structured interview, but as another student, Martin F, with another research topic, joined the interview, it developed into a combination of a semi-structured interview and an unstructured interview. His research topic and question did add another interesting dimension to the interview questions that I had prepared beforehand.

All other interviews were conducted on email. I chose the email interview due to different reasons, one of them being that I wanted to give the respondents time to reflect on the questions before answering. Another reason was that I did not have much luck with setting up Skype interviews in most cases, both due to time differences but also because some of the people I contacted, who agreed to take part in an interview, never replied to my request for specific date and time for a Skype interview. I therefore decided to send them questions through email and that seemed to work more efficiently. I received more answers in this way. I ended up making use of the email interview method for all the respondents of my survey that had left their emails and expressed interest in me contacting them about details of their travels and opinions about accessible tourist information. These interviews were of course structured, as I asked questions directly to some of

the responses that they had given in the survey or to some of the things they had written on their travel blogs.

“In order not to overwhelm participants, it is important that the researcher not ask too many questions at one time (Burns, 2010). The researcher must determine the most prevalent themes that they would like to explore in each email exchange” (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015, p.86).

I asked the respondent between 4-5 questions more each and only asked them to elaborate on their answers in those cases where I could see that an elaboration would provide me with an insight of the field of accessible travel

I chose this way of conducting most of my interviews, well-knowing that I could miss out on important aspects by not doing the interviews face-to-face, such as body-language, pause and what Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez describes as “the lack of social cues” (2015, p. 81).

Most of the respondents were, as it turned out, used to expressing themselves in writing and they all provided me with great detailed descriptions of their travels and experiences with accessible tourism and accessible tourist information.

### **3.3.2 Interviewees**

#### **3.3.2.1 Professional travellers and bloggers**

As I wanted to learn from experienced travellers with disabilities, I contacted a number of professional bloggers that blog about accessible travel experiences and also guide and inspire other travellers with disabilities. Some of the bloggers I found by searching the internet for experiences of Copenhagen as an accessible destination, but most of them through searching for blogs about accessible travel in general, and some of them I found through the answers to my survey.

Many of the bloggers have a big number of followers e.g. “Wheelchair Travel” aka John Morris’ Facebook page has 4838 followers. They are professional bloggers and travellers and provide accessible travel guides online and also work together with destinations and attractions on accessibility (Morris, 2016; Lee, n.d.). In this thesis extracts and recommendations from the blogs of two of the professional bloggers; Curb Free with Cory and The Wheelchair Traveller John Morris will be analysed. Moreover, an email interview with the Australian Blogger, Caitlin Lisle from Wheelchair Wanderings (Appendix C), has also served as a great insight into the accessible travel.

### **3.3.22 Accessible Travel Company**

During my netnographic research, I discovered the travel platform Accessible Travel Online from the Netherlands. A platform with multiple functions, such as an accessible travel consultancy, a hotel booking site and a travel forum. I interviewed the CEO, Marlies van Sint Annaland, on Skype about the origin of this platform and her experiences with working with promoting accessibility and accessible travel and tourism (Appendix D).

### **3.3.23 Official Accessibility Scheme**

I met with the secretariat director of Access Denmark (God Adgang, red.), Ulla Kramer, and Martin F, a student of Copenhagen School of Design and Technology. Ulla Kramer used to work for many years for Visit Denmark and has worked with the development of the accessibility schemes since Access Denmark was established in 2003 (Appendix F).

The names of the respondents of the survey have been anonymised using by using cover names and deleting their email addresses. The interview transcripts and the use of the interviews have been approved by the interviewees

## **3.4 Limitations and Delimitations**

As the aim of this thesis is to gain more knowledge about travelling with disabilities and the influence of accessibility information, I deliberately searched for experienced travellers with disabilities who would be able to share experiences about both travelling, but also on how to find information about accessible places to travel to. In order to talk to a variety of travellers, I chose to post a survey on different online travel forums.

By focusing mainly on the tourism part, I deliberately leave out other aspects of what it means to be disabled in an everyday life or work context. By making this compromise, I hope to achieve a more focused and in-depth study of the information aspect of accessible travel and tourism.

I could have contacted the Disabled People's Organisations Denmark and asked for their guidance, opinion and experiences with accessible travel, but this thesis is not about everyday life and about living with a disability, and I wanted to make sure that I was communicating with people about travel experiences and their experiences with accessibility information from a travel perspective. It was important for me to get the traveller with disabilities' point of view.



In the beginning, I focused on finding travellers that did not live in Copenhagen, Denmark, I focused on international travel forums online. My survey was posted in English and there were no people from Denmark that responded to it. Later on, when I tried to find Danish travel forums that were not closed groups for members only, I did not find any with relevance to my research topic. Due to the low number of respondents to my survey, it is not possible to say that my survey is representative. Moreover, the survey is not representative in regard to accessibility for all types of disability, as it turned out to be mainly wheelchair users who answered my survey.

The choice of doing most of the research online have also excluded some of those travellers with disabilities that prevent them from joining in on the accessible travel forums on e.g. Facebook. On the other side, doing everything online may also have included some that would have been excluded otherwise.

I have not immersed myself into an embodied accessible travel experience or followed travellers on their travel, something that without a doubt would have provided a great insight into accessible tourism.

I have not been physically placed in the research field, I have not had any personal experiences of being a traveller with disabilities. I have, however, followed discussions on blogs and in travel communities closely and I have used my observations of the discussions and questions raised in the travel forums as sources of inspiration and as a method of learning about accessible travel from people who depend on accessibility, when travelling, or who are considering accessibility as a factor before deciding to travel to a certain place on vacation.

### **3.4.1 Validity and Credibility**

The choice of searching for information online and making use of a netnographic approach, was due to the fact that I wanted to get in touch with travellers with disabilities around the world. I wanted to get information from people who had experience with both independent travels and with finding accessibility information about the places they wanted to travel to. I could have chosen a different approach and contacted Danish nursing homes or Danish disability organisations, but I wanted the focus to be on the travel experience with accessible tourist information and the travel decision-making of the independent traveller with disabilities and I therefore found that the internet was my best option when finding this kind of information within a relatively short period of time. As I have already mentioned, one of the weaknesses of the survey and the research done on accessible tourism is that the majority of answers come from the perspective of wheelchair users.

Another weakness is the fact that the survey was not answered by a lot of travellers. As a consequence, the results from the survey may not be generalizable when judging it from a quantitative perspective. However, the fact that my research approach is primarily qualitative, and that some of the respondents chose to elaborate on their answers and thereby supplying my research with important details, makes the results of the survey very useful for the purpose of getting an insight into the role of accessibility information in the decision-making process of travellers with disabilities.

Although the findings of my research are based on a small number of interviews and respondents to my survey on accessible tourism, they can be applicable to both other destinations but also to other areas of accessible tourism. The findings could be applicable to e.g. the content production of general tourism information. Some of the findings are also relevant when looking into other aspects of accessible tourism on a destination level or in general.

## 4. ANALYSIS

The analytical part of this thesis is structured after recurrent themes that I found in the empirical data. The empirical data that has been briefly introduced in the previous chapter, consist of travellers' experiences with information about accessible tourist facilities and destinations, that combined with travellers' experiences with finding accessibility information before travelling provide insights into how information on accessibility - or lack hereof - can affect the vacation decision-making process. Although the interviewees, the survey and the blog posts that form the basis of the empirical data used in the following analysis, all relate to the concept of accessible travel from different perspectives, they seem to question and address many of the same issues. Furthermore, they also seem to agree on many levels on ways to improve the world of accessible travel.

My survey provides insight into the experiences with and wishes for accessible tourism information and accessible travel in general, and into travellers with disabilities' approach to collect accessibility information. The survey also investigates the relative importance of available information on accessibility before decisions about travelling to a destination are made. As some of the respondents are travellers with disabilities and some are travelling companions, they all have a lot of practical experience and personal insight into accessible travel. Since the majority of the respondents of my survey and the interviewees, however, turned out to be wheelchair users, this thesis will mainly be investigating and discussing accessibility from the perspective of wheelchair accessible travel.

As the type of disability was not intended to be part of the focus of the thesis, I have not deliberately addressed my survey towards understanding travellers using wheelchairs in particular. The survey was addressed to travellers in general who are in need of special access and travellers who have had experiences with information on accessible tourism when travelling. The reason why I mention this limitation in the analytical part of this thesis, is actually due to the fact that I have categorised it as a limitation or a weakness of the thesis that the majority of the respondents to my survey are wheelchair users. During my research, I have read or heard a lot of examples of how the universal and inclusive approach to accessibility often lead to people either making excuses for talking from a wheelchair user's perspective when giving examples of accessibility, or to people stressing the importance of understanding that accessibility is more than wheelchair access. I think this actually says a lot about how accessibility is discursively constructed and I will be elaborating on that as a part of the analysis as well. When one of the respondents of the survey was asked about

what he thought was important for a tourist destination to understand about accessibility and information about accessibility, he replied,

“That everything should be accessible for everyone because we all have same rights. Also, when trying to make something accessible don't think only about wheelchair users. Try to find official guidelines or consult disabled people” (Appendix E).

First of all, it underlines the respondent's view on how important it is to comprehend accessibility as being more than wheelchair access. At the same time, it articulates the complexity of the terms disability and accessibility. A complexity that makes it complicated to create an overall understanding of what it means for something to be accessible, but at the same time stresses the need for an inclusive approach to tourism. If a tourism facility is not accessible for the travellers with hearing impairment, is it then not accessible? I think this is an important aspect to bring into the discussion on accessible tourist information.

The analytical part of this thesis has been divided into three different parts all related to accessible tourism and accessible tourist information. The different parts are all based on themes in the empirical data concerning accessible tourist information brought up by the respondents and the interviewees, and as underlying background themes in the empirical material after coding the collected data.

The collected empirical data raises many relevant questions such as who is responsible for improving the accessibility of tourist destinations and for producing and promoting accessible tourist information, according to the interviewees and respondents in the empirical material? What does it mean for the production and promotion of accessible tourist information that there is a lack of knowledge and awareness of what it means to be travelling with a disability?

The first theme of this analysis is concerning accessibility awareness and responsibility.

The second theme is analysing the importance of visibility and credibility in terms of accessibility information and promotion of accessibility.

The third theme is addressing the different sources of travel inspiration and information and which effect they have on decision-making processes and what other aspects that may affect the decision-making when planning to travel to a destination.

## **4.1 Awareness and Responsibility**

A recurring theme in both the survey and the interviews is the differences in the diverse views on what it means that something is accessible and how the lack of awareness and understanding of accessibility can lead to misunderstandings and problems for the traveller with disabilities. Who is responsible for improving tourism accessibility and how do you create awareness about disability and accessibility?

### **4.1.1 Accessibility and Awareness**

In recent research, especially on hotel accessibility (Darcy, 2010; Darcy & Pegg, 2011; Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt, & Sonnenschein, 2012), as well as in my own survey and interviews, it is being underlined by all of the interviewees and respondents that one of the biggest problems when talking accessibility is the different perceptions of what it means for something to be accessible.

“I find going through travel agents or non-accessible tours very difficult as their perception of a person with a disability is very different to what a person with a disability can or can't do (obviously depending on the individual) so it can be very frustrating. For example, I had planned to book a tour with G Aventures to do part of Eastern Europe but they said it would be too difficult for me as they would be using public transport - I therefore visited all those countries that were in that tour using public transport” (Appendix C).

In Caitlin Lisle's case, the travel company assessed that the tour she wanted to book was not wheelchair accessible, and therefore assumed that she could not join the tour. The travel company thus refused to sell the travel product to her. Caitlin Lisle's reaction to this was then to choose to fight this prejudice by doing the tour all by herself and she succeeded in doing so. But an action like that requires a lot of effort, a sense of adventure, personal and physical strength of the person travelling with a wheelchair. And a trip like the one Caitlin Lisle ended up doing on her own, could maybe have been more relaxed, had the only thing to concentrate on been the accessibility of the public transport - and doing a tour in a group with other travellers could even result in a helping hand at some point along the way.

This example is a perfect example of how travel agencies, or non-accessible tours as Caitlin calls them, are not trained in the complexity of accessibility and the fact that accessibility is more than physical access since inaccessibility in some cases can be over won by the will to succeed combined with a little extra effort. This is what Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt, & Sonnenschein (2012) also found in their research of hotel and travel staff and their ignorance to disability and to what it means

for something to be accessible or inaccessible. In such situations, it becomes clear that the division between the social model and the medical model, is still very influential, when the traveller is judged by his/her physical impairments and regarded as a traveller defined by her disability, although it was the abilities in Caitlin Lisle's case in fact were dominant. The experience of Caitlin Lisle is an example of a person's disability being perceived by others as a hinder for her travelling to a certain place and engaging in a certain type of activity, not trusting the disabled person's own ability to judge own capabilities. It can prove as a challenge for a tour provider, but something that is important to master when working with accessible travel.

Caitlin Lisle is not alone and her experience is apparently not a single episode of misunderstandings when dealing with travel agents. In a survey of online customer complaints of tourism experiences by disabled travellers, Kim, S., Ee Kim, S., and Lehto, X. Y. (2012) found that,

“(...)people with disabilities are largely dissatisfied with the performance of the travel agency sector and highlighted travel agents' inability to cater needs of individuals with various types of disabilities. The majority of travel agents tend to underestimate what people can do and what assistance they particularly need” (Kim, Ee Kim & Letho, 2012, p. 467).

From most of the answers I received through my survey, it seems, however, that it is just as often the opposite that is the case. That facilities, and especially hotel facilities, are sold and described as accessible even though they are not.

“Even though we have called ahead and asked questions to confirm the accessibility for my husband, they too often think that because they have an elevator to get into the room and everything is on the same level, that it automatically is wheelchair accessible. Oh I don't have the count of how many times I have had to rearrange all the furniture in a hotel room to make it accessible for my husband to even wheel around and get into bed” (Appendix B, Respondent 3).

A similar experience has happened to Respondent 7,

“I booked online the hotel and it was supposed to be accessible, but when I arrived I discovered that it had a step in the entrance and in addition to it, I couldn't fit into the tiny elevator. I lost all of my first day in the city trying to find another hotel and in the end, I found a cheaper one and in a much better location! The secret is to stay cool and don't panic when you encounter a problem and the solution will come! That is my travel mentality.” (Appendix E, Respondent 7)

Respondent 3 and Respondent 7 are both travellers with adventurous and positive mindsets. Respondent 7 puts it this way, “The secret is to stay cool and don’t panic when you encounter a problem and the solution will come! That is my travel mentality” (Appendix E, Respondent 7). The two examples pose as examples of people with disabilities being met with ignorance by the hospitality sector, but at the same time these responses also challenges the point made by professor in service and hospitality management, Aviad Israeli (2002), in his article, where his findings show that inaccessibility is a crucial factor that can destroy the vacation of the traveller with disabilities. In his research article, he concludes that there is no golden middle way or chances of compromises if there is no accessibility. If the tourist site is inaccessible or the hotel is inaccessible for a wheelchair user, then there is no way to compensate that. The consequence of an inaccessible hotel, described in Respondent 7’s story, was that he had to find another hotel and as a result lose a day of his vacation. In Caitlin Lisle’s case, she was not accepted on the tour which could have deprived her of an experience that she had been looking forward to. Caitlin Lisle’s story shows that inaccessibility cannot just be defined from objective parameters, but can be a very subjective matter.

Respondent 3 describes how she and her husband while on vacation decided to abandon their plans in the middle of an already well-planned vacation and instead do a road trip down the Australian coast without any prior planning. The biggest worry was, according to her, how to find accessible accommodation, and her husband had to spend a lot of time during the road trip searching for this. It could be interesting to look at it from the non-accessible facilities’ point of view. As they, according to Bowtell (2015), are losing business, when they are incapable of accepting a certain segment of customers due to inaccessibility. When something is inaccessible, it also derives the individual of his/her chances of independent travel and hence the individual’s independent choice of activity. In my conversation with Marlies van Sint Annaland, CEO of Accessible Travel Online (ATO), she underlines the fact that accessibility is often misunderstood as being equivalent to the staff showing willingness to help people with disabilities get around in a shop or a museum (Appendix D). According to Marlies, the point of accessibility is that “they don’t want to be helped. That’s the point (...) They want to go independently into the store” (Appendix D, lines 306-307). One of the tools to fight this ignorance and misunderstanding, is according to Marlies, to create awareness.

The significance of making people aware of what it means to be disabled and to be in need of e.g. accessible rooms, is of great importance to Marlies van Sint Annaland and one of the reasons

behind a 100 Awareness Facts Campaign that she launched in 2016 to increase people's awareness of disability and accessibility (Appendix D). The awareness of disability and accessibility is also useful when it comes to improving other services in the tourism sector. This idea is in resonance with the findings of Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt and Sonnenschein (2012) and Darcy and Pegg (2012) whose studies show that physical access cannot stand alone when talking about accessibility, but that it is necessary that e.g. hotel staff are trained properly to understand the needs of the persons in front of them - including the various need for accessibility.

#### **4.1.2 Responsibility**

Another aspect of the accessibility brought up by all the participants in my survey and interviews, is the question of who is, or should, be responsible for improving and developing accessibility and the information about accessibility (Appendix A, Appendix F & Appendix E).

Ulla Kramer, head of the Access Denmark Secretariat sees it in this way,

“They [the restaurants, red.] all think that disability and accessibility it the responsibility of the public sector. Well, that's it how it is. It's not a market segment, it's just something that has to do with disabilities. And it doesn't matter that that we all may be affected at some point in our lives. It does not matter (...) There is a completely different perception of people with disabilities being a special kind of people suffering their whole life from start to finish. But that is actually not how it is. It's all of us at some point in our lives (...)” (Appendix F, lines 295-298, translated by author).

Is the attitude of the restaurant- and hotel owners, according to Ulla Kramer's experience, an expression of a prevailing medical understanding of what it means to be disabled? An understanding where accessibility is the problem of the disabled person and not the society. Unlike Ulla Kramer's description of disability as a condition of life. By doing exactly this, could Ulla Kramer be giving voice to a new social model of understanding accessibility and disability, like the one that Nicolaisen, Blichfeldt and Sonnenschein (2012) is calling for in their research. An understanding of disability as a dynamic condition that will change over time. The fact that the tourism businesses, tourism facilities and people in general could begin understanding accessibility in a different way, as something that can happen to everybody at some point during a lifetime. Moreover, what Ulla Kramer expresses, in the above citation, also indicates that working for a more inclusive tourism, is not only beneficial for other people, but there is a chance that it will benefit yourself or your family at a certain stage in your life.



As previously mentioned, one of the first steps, according to Marlies van Sint Annaland (Appendix D) is to create a general awareness of disability and accessibility. If people don't have an understanding of what it means to make something accessible and how to capture the diversity of disabilities and people with disabilities ability to cope and travel, then it is difficult to make people see why it is important to have accurate and reliable accessibility information.

“How disability is perceived in the model (consciously or subconsciously) accepted by tourism services providers shapes the supply structure of the tourism market. Changes in the perspective of disability (models) is the “driving force” of current and future transformation in tourism supply which is undergoing increasing diversification” (Zajadacz, 2015, p. 190).

The use of the social and medical model to create awareness of how much difference still exists in different sectors in how accessibility and disabilities are perceived could be effective when explaining the consequences of one position over another.

According to Ulla Kramer, hotel accessibility is one place, where Copenhagen is still falling behind in comparison with other European destinations. Both in the number of accessible hotel rooms, but also regarding information about hotel accessibility (Appendix F). When the attitude of restaurants and hotels in Copenhagen, as described by Ulla Kramer, is seen from a responsibility perspective, the question of who should be responsible for improving the information about accessibility and increase the awareness of disability and accessibility could also be understood as deriving from a different interpretation of the social model of disability.

Following the social model, as previously introduced, accessibility and disability is not the responsibility and fault of the individual, but it is a joint responsibility to eliminate obstructions. To create accessibility for all is seen as a common effort that can build a world where disability and handicap is not limiting the individual's participation in general activities (Zajadacz, 2015). The problem, that Ulla Kramer has encountered is that many restaurants express that they consider the improvement of accessibility to be a task for the public sector, this seems to be a version or an interpretation of the social model of understanding disability where the effort of creating accessibility is seen as less of a society effort and more of an effort for, and a responsibility of, the public sector.

### **4.1.3 Hotel accessibility**

According to my survey (Appendix A), hotel accessibility and especially access to bathroom, toilet and bathing facilities are mentioned in most of the answers to the question: “What is valuable

information about accessibility for you?” As other surveys and research has shown, accessible hotels and hotel facilities are essential for the travel experience of travellers with disabilities (Shaw & Coles, 2004; Kim, Ee Kim & Lehto, 2012),

“As I said before, official tourist information on accessibility can be very general and not reflect on your needs and preferences from a place. Even calling ahead can be a bit hit and miss, as hotel staff and other employees are not generally trained to know what ‘wheelchair accessible’ means and what it actually entails” (Appendix B, Respondent 3).

This is another example of the complexity of accessibility and also an example of why the conclusions by Israeli (2002) regarding the golden means and non-compensable consequences of inaccessibility can be seen from certain points of view as being too general.

On their website, the Accessible Travel Online company shows examples of design hotels and videos of beautifully designed accessible bathrooms. Marlies, as the CEO of the company, feels strongly about breaking the assumption that an accessible cannot be a beautifully designed hotel rooms or bathroom. This is also part of ATOs 100 Awareness Facts Campaign. To make people aware of the possibilities of combining great design and accessibility .

In Denmark, there are national laws about the number and measurements of accessible hotel rooms when renovating or constructing a new hotel. But according to Ulla Kramer, the rules are not always followed through and the architects involved are not always aware of the fact that some rooms should be constructed and designed in a certain way in order for them to be accessible for e.g. wheelchair users (Appendix F).

Access Denmark was involved in the construction phase of a new hotel that was to be built in Copenhagen. It was a big hotel, and the plan was to make 36 rooms out of 800 rooms accessible. When Access Denmark came by after the hotel was finished, they were surprised to see that the doors of all the rooms in the hotel were too narrow to qualify as doors to accessible rooms. The hotel afterwards chose to change eight of the rooms into accessible rooms. (Appendix F).

Since hotel accessibility, according to the study by Simon Darcy and Shane Pegg (2011), is an influential part of the decision-making process, this could be a great place to begin to improve the awareness about accessibility. And maybe even focus on how to make accessible hotel rooms trendy.

According to Marlies, one of the reasons why some of the more exclusive hotels do not have information about the accessibility of the hotel, is that they are afraid not to live up to the standard and not to be good enough when it comes to accessibility (Appendix D). According to Ulla Kramer,

it is more a question about not being willing to admit that the hotels are not living up to the standards and that they are not accessible because “they do not want to air their dirty laundry in public” (Appendix F, line 133, translated by author).

In the study by Darcy and Pegg (2011), they found that one of the main issues regarding promotion and development of accessible hotels and hotel rooms was the attitude of the hotel managers and staff,

“Some used person-first language, discussing the needs of PwD and referred to their facilities as being accessible or our accessible rooms. Some sought to avoid direct reference to PwD at all. These contrasting uses of language have important marketing implications as one manager discussed the way that he positively markets the hotel’s adapted rooms as having extra features, while another told the nondisabled guests that they would have to make do as ‘all that’s left is the disabled room’” (Darcy & Pegg, 2011, p. 475).

Their findings show that there was a big difference in the way managers would approach the subject of accessibility. Moreover, the attitude and awareness of the front-line staff also played an important role when evaluating the accessibility of a hotel (Darcy & Pegg, 2011).

The problem in Copenhagen is, according to Ulla Kramer, that there is no need to attract new customers. The hotels are fully booked in the Danish capital these days, and according to Ulla Kramer, that is reflected in the will to attract new customers such as travellers with special needs for accessibility. Renovating a room and making it more accessible can be quite costly. This is also the conclusion in a report made in 2016 by The Danish Building Research Institute about accessible hotel rooms. In this report, the organisation for hotels and restaurants (HORESTA) states that the hotels have not experienced an increased demand for accessible hotel rooms (Grangaard, Mathiasen & Schiøtt Sørensen, 2016, p.8).

Ulla Kramer from Access Denmark points out why she thinks that the question about accessibility is often misunderstood by the hotel owners and managers,

"No, you do not need to have five wheelchair users; you only need five [guests, red.] who think it's nice that there are armrests. It does not have to be wheelchair users. And then the investment budget looks different. If it does not have to be guest in wheelchairs. It is all about our mind-sets and about understanding of what disability is and what it means to be disabled” (Appendix F, lines 301-303, translated by author).

The example of the new hotel that was built in Copenhagen also shows how the awareness of accessibility is low. This is also an indication of the necessity for a change of mind-set before major

changes can happen in the accessibility field of the tourism business. An awareness campaign like the one Accessible Travel Online is doing in the Netherlands could perhaps be one of the answers to creating an increasing awareness of accessibility and disability. Is it simply an increased demand for accessibility that is needed before the hotels see a point in changing or creating their accessibility policy?

Could the solution be to focus on the economic gain of promoting hotel accessibility based on experiences from other destinations? After all, many tourist facilities are privately owned, medium-sized businesses and they do not necessarily have the means to upgrade the accessibility facilities of their business. How do you inspire to accessibility improvement in a market that is not lacking customers? This is definitely one of the challenges when promoting accessible tourism to local businesses in a city like Copenhagen, according to Ulla Kramer (Appendix F).

Hotel accessibility is the most important for all the participants in my survey when deciding on where to go. Improving the way of providing and finding information about accessible hotels could maybe lead to an increased demand.

As my research has shown, hotel accessibility is interpreted in many ways and the interpretation of what accessibility means by hotel managers and staff are not always corresponding with the actual situations. Hotel accessibility is, according to the responses in my survey (Appendix A), more than a lift and it does not necessarily mean that the bathroom in the hotel room has to look like a hospital bathroom, and that you cannot design a beautiful bathroom that is also accessible. Knowledge and awareness are among the first important steps when improving hotel accessibility. A better understanding of why it is important to have accessible rooms and bathrooms for travellers with disabilities and how accessibility can turn into an asset is an important factor. If the market is not seen as lucrative or attractive, then the costs of making different tourist facilities accessible could be seen as a doubtful investment.

In Denmark, it is not illegal not to inform about accessibility. When information about accessibility is not a legal demand, then findings from my, research, survey and interviews suggest that it is either a question of feeling a moral obligation and responsibility towards accessibility or about eyeing a business opportunity.

## **4.2 Information, Visibility and Credibility**

### **4.2.1 Official tourist information**

For 30 % of the respondents in my survey, contacting an official tourist information is the first thing they do before travelling to a new destination. However, a much higher percentage of the respondents, 56%, state that official tourist information offices either cannot be trusted or are not useful when searching for information about the accessibility of a tourist destination. I asked some of those respondents that had left their email in the survey, if they could elaborate on that statement. One respondent replied that

“In most cases, every place that deals with tourists will have some kind of information about accessibility, but this information can be quite general and not cater to individual’s needs, so I always recommend calling ahead to places that you plan on visiting and asking them the direct questions that will decide if it is a good fit for your needs or not” (Appendix B, Respondent 3).

In other words, if the available information is too general, it is not useful, according to respondent 3. This is probably one of the places where you will find the biggest difference between general tourist information guides and tourist information about accessibility. The general type of tourist information will typically cover the main points and focus on selling the attractions or destinations as places of interest. In the general tourist information, you do not provide all the details, because people are different and they are interested in different things. You do not put all information into the description of a place, but you make sure that you leave a reference for the tourists to find more information according to their own needs. You do, however, have to make sure that people are given the right information about the important basics such as addresses, entrance fees and opening hours.

“Personally if I find any information (which I don't search very much) I take a look, but I am not relying 100% on the website, as I know that I only will be sure on the spot” (Appendix E, Respondent 7).

When looking at the Danish accessibility schemes, we find that they are the complete opposite of being a general type tourist information. They are very specific and maybe even specific to the point where you lose the overview of the facility or attraction? It is without a doubt a professional and detailed scheme where you should be able to find the necessary information on all accessibility levels. This approach to accessibility content will be discussed further when looking into the accessibility schemes in the following.

In my survey, I asked how important it was for the respondents to find information about accessibility before deciding to travel to a destination. 50 % of the respondents answered that they

“only travel to places that have detailed information about accessibility” (Appendix A). Seven respondents out of 16 answered that they “[did] not mind contacting the tourist attractions, hotels etc. beforehand and ask them directly” (Appendix A). Only one respondent answered that information about accessibility was not crucial in the decision on whether to travel to a place or not. 10 out of 16 of the respondents have chosen not to travel to a destination due to poor or lack of information about accessibility. These answers indicate that information about accessibility is indeed very crucial for travellers with disabilities and can influence which destinations they choose to travel to.

Also, the answers to the questions in my survey indicate that travellers with disabilities are very conscious about the choices they make when deciding when to travel to a certain destination, the type of vacation and accessibility issues in connection with planning the journey. Although the survey sample is very small, the fact that such a great majority of all respondents agree that it is crucial with information about accessibility indicate that good quality information can have an effect on the decision-making process of travellers with disabilities.

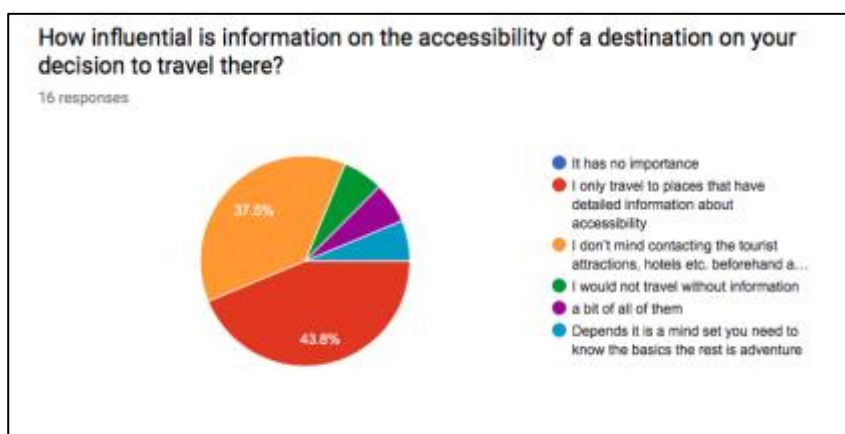


Figure 1 Answers from my survey (Appendix A)

The recent report made by VisitDenmark and published May 27, 2017 is based on a much larger survey on the experienced accessibility in Denmark by both foreign and domestic travellers with

disabilities. This survey points to many issues regarding information about accessibility in Denmark from a tourist perspective and one of the findings in this report is,

“There is high demand for online information about the accessibility of Danish holiday destinations and experiences. Many in the target group [travellers with disabilities, red.] find it difficult to find the information and demand a comprehensive overview. Lack of travel rate is partly subject to lack of information and insecurity in relation to what the journey can offer of obstacles, experiences and challenges”. (VisitDenmark, 2017, p.11, translated by author).

The report indicates that a more comprehensive collection of accessible tourist information is still needed if the goal is to make a city like Copenhagen, for instance, an attractive accessible

destination for tourists with disabilities - foreign tourists as well as domestic (VisitDenmark, 2017). The report is not investigating the information part in depth, but is focusing more on the experience of being a tourist with disabilities in Denmark and just touches the information part of the tourism experience in some contexts. The two aspects of travelling can, however, be difficult to separate when talking about travel and tourism.

The findings of the report correspond well with some of the answers I received from the respondents of my survey. One important issue is, according to the respondents, that information about accessibility cannot be found or is difficult to find (Appendix A). A reason for this could be due to a lack of marketing and awareness of this market segment in the local destinations management organisations and tourism providers. However, it does not explain why so many of the travellers in my survey state that they do not feel that they can trust tourist information about destination accessibility.

The Danish Accessibility Scheme, Access Denmark, is according to the European Commission's report on accessible tourism in Europe, among the best, most detailed and accurate accessibility scheme you find in Europe (European Commission, 2015). Then how come only a few in my survey mention Copenhagen when asked about an accessible destination? This question will be further addressed in the following.

#### **4.2.2 Accessibility Schemes**

In 2004 the European Union published a guidance for tourist destinations and facilities to accessible tourism and accessibility information. This guide was meant as an inspiration for tourism facilities to register information about accessibility of their facilities. Also, this guidance underlines the fact, that accessibility is not only about physical access, but also about manners of employees and staff (Westcott, 2004). According to these guidelines, staff in tourism related businesses should be well-trained and aware of possible access issues and also know how to approach travellers according to their disabilities as “(...) poorly trained staff can represent a serious barrier for disabled people if they are unable to provide services in an appropriate manner” (Westcott, 2004, p. 7).

The Danish Accessibility Scheme, Access Denmark, is best described as a controlled accessibility scheme. Every facility listed on the Access Denmark website has been subjected to control visits by the Danish socio-economic non-profit organisation “Access Denmark [God Adgang, red.]”. The information on the website is very detailed and the accessibility schemes cover seven categories of information.

“Denmark is at the higher end of the main scale, with about 3,650 registered accessible venues in one national scheme. This number includes public infrastructure such as educational institutions and separate listings for some individual accessible guests rooms within the same hotel or conference centre” (European Commission, 2015, p. 30)

But although Denmark is at the higher end of the scale and has trustworthy information, my observations were, that you rarely see Denmark and Copenhagen mentioned as being among the attractive destinations when it comes to accessibility and accessible travel. Tourist destinations such as Barcelona, England, Italy and Germany are mentioned as good examples of accessible tourist destinations when looking on different accessible travel forums.

“I don't know so much about Denmark, but here the law on disability has just been approved. We [Holland, red.] are the last ones in Europe. So over here, so much work still has to be done. and we see that things are very good in Germany, or in England, for instance. Italy is supposed to be okay. But other people tell us, that there are so many other places where it is not” (Appendix D).

If we work from the notion that travellers with disabilities spend more time searching for information and planning than the average traveller, then how come Denmark is not one of the first countries to be mentioned when talking about accessible destinations and Copenhagen when talking about accessible capitals? Especially if Denmark, according to the European Commission is in the top when it comes to information about accessibility? And furthermore, if the information listed on the Danish Accessibility Scheme is both detailed and reliable, then why is Denmark not mentioned? This is something investigate further in the following by focusing on the visibility of the accessibility schemes.

If reliability is among the more important aspects of accessibility information, then Access Denmark's accessibility schemes should be able to attract many more tourists with disabilities because of its controlled and detailed approach to accessibility information. The reason for this could be due to the fact that people do not know that Access Denmark exists. The people I asked in the survey about their use of accessibility schemes when travelling, almost all answered that they didn't use accessibility schemes when planning their travels. (Appendix A; Appendix B; Appendix D; Appendix E; Appendix H).

When asked why, they had different reasons. Respondent 12 answered,

“I usually don't look at them per se. As long as there are an elevator in the hotel and preferably no bathtub in the hotel room, I can manage. On the other hand, because I'm very



interested about accessible travel and developing it further, I have been examining a vast amount of different accessibility schemes lately. A truth to be told, I find many of them quite confusing, because different schemes have different ways and criteria when mapping, classifying and presenting the level of accessibility” (Appendix H).

Respondent 12 points at different problems regarding the use of accessibility schemes. First of all, that he does not use them himself, and secondly how it can be confusing to read the schemes due to the differences in how the schemes are designed. The schemes, according to respondent 12, do not necessarily help explain the accessibility of a place in a way that is easy to understand for people who are not used to travelling.

In my survey, I asked the respondents to comment on an example from Access Denmark. I chose an example of the accessibility of [Christiansborg Palace](#) in Copenhagen and asked people on their thoughts and opinion about the information given on that scheme (Access Denmark, n.d).

The majority of the respondents, that I asked to comment on and evaluate the usability of the information about Christiansborg Palace in the Danish Accessibility Scheme, stated that they found the information to be detailed and useful.

“As for the link, really a lot of details. This is rare. Definitely useful for many people”  
(Appendix E, Respondent 7).

Respondent 7 stated that he did not, in fact, use accessibility schemes when planning his own travels.

Another respondent could read from the scheme, that her travel companion would have access problems if visiting due to the width of the doorway and size of the lift, but was impressed with the details of the accessibility information as well. Her comments were,

“Accessibility schemes can definitely be helpful in terms of planning to travel, but as accommodation businesses have varying levels of accessibility, it can be hard for people with access needs to find appropriate accommodation. What defines ‘accessible’ for one individual might not be the case for the next “(Appendix B, Respondent 3).

The experiences of Respondent 3 are important aspects of accessible travel and they provide an insight into some of the problems the travellers with disabilities encounter when they travel to new and unfamiliar places.

The respondents that commented on the Christiansborg Palace example of the Danish accessibility scheme were all very positive in their evaluation of the usefulness of the scheme. However, they all

stated that none of them actually used accessibility schemes when planning their travels. This raises the question of the use of accessibility schemes from a marketing perspective.

But is it worth considering why Denmark was not mentioned once by any of the respondents of my survey when asking about accessible places to travel to? The evaluation of the accessibility scheme, by my respondents, in concerning its role as tourist information indicates that the lack of usability and visibility makes it inadequate to use the accessibility schemes as tourist information or tourist inspiration.

The Danish accessibility scheme covers many important details for a big number of users. Although you can question the range of tourism related facilities that Access Denmark actually covers, the big amount of collected information about accessibility has been controlled by an independent authority and hence has a high level of trustworthiness.

When asked about what should change in regard to accessibility schemes in order to improve the usability, respondent 12 said,

“I have been thinking about this a lot lately and I’m not sure what should change :) On the one hand it is about the amount of information. There should be enough of it to be useful for the person with disabilities. But not too much, because it makes it difficult and boring to use” (Appendix G).

As my analysis show, the use of accessibility schemes as the only type of accessible tourist information can pose some difficulties when looking at the marketing value of the schemes and their ability to inspire and attract tourists. Furthermore, the fact that none of the respondents stated that they would use the accessibility schemes when planning their trips also points towards the fact that accessibility is more than physical access when it comes to travel planning and that the individual travellers with disabilities need more information than the schemes provide them with. On the other side, the detailed access information provided by the Danish Accessibility Schemes was well-received by some of the respondents asked, while others thought that it was too much information. (Appendix A; Appendix B; Appendix C; Appendix E; Appendix G)

### **4.2.3 The Logo - visibility**

When visiting the Secretariat of Access Denmark, the other student, Martin F., questioned the use of the Access Denmark logo. Ulla Kramer explained that when a facility or an attraction has the Access Denmark logo or label on its website, it does not necessarily mean that the facility is accessible. It means that the accessibility of the facility has been inspected (Appendix F). A facility

needs to live up too many standards on seven different disability levels in order to actually be fully approved as an accessible place, however receiving the logo or label just means that the facility is working on improving its accessibility and that reliable information about the accessibility of the place is available. As Martin F pointed out, he would understand the Access Denmark Logo as a sign of the facility being accessible. This could be the source of some misunderstandings which Ulla Kramer also indicated that it actually had been.

Also, the accessibility schemes used in Denmark are, as previously mentioned, very complex, because they aim at providing correct and accurate information to the people needing special information about access. How can you create a logo that reflects all accessibility standards, and at the same time avoid that is a very thin catalogue of facilities and attractions that will actually meet the logo standards?

Although the Access Denmark initiative was originally started by VisitDenmark, Horesta and the Disabled People's Organisations Denmark, it has over the years moved away from the tourism perspective to include other public institutions in Denmark. During the conversation with Martin F and Ulla Kramer it became clear that the complexity of access is very difficult to capture in a logo.

“That a place has obtained the Access Denmark label does not mean that the place is accessible. It means that you can get information about the accessibility of the place in reality. And that is a challenge, because people think that it means that the place is accessible. But we have never said that. And that is why we have seven labels. It really is a challenge”. (Appendix F, lines 104-108, translated by author)

When the use of a pictogram or a logo to simplify the communication of e.g. accessibility, actually causes more confusion about the meaning for people who use it, then the function of the logo is lost.

The use of a logo is also brought up by the CEO of Accessible Travel Online. They are currently working on creating a ATO logo, to signal that a hotel or another facility has been approved by them as being accessible. The ATO logo was not explained into details as the new ATO platform is still in its starting phase and the CEO could not share all the ideas behind the logo with me yet (Appendix D). But Marlies van Sint Annaland did, however, share their vision of the platform and the use of the logo in rough details,


“But the most important thing we want to do is to create a community and to create a platform, so that is easier for everybody, for travellers, but also agencies and suppliers or airlines. There has to be one place where everybody will go to. Because everybody wants to

save time and money. So that is a very big advantage to have one place. There are so many hotels. But we want them to have the ATO logo” (Appendix D, lines 70-74).

A logo that has been clearly explained, could be an answer on how to make the collected accessibility information work as trustworthy tourist information material and as marketing material at the same time. But, as Ulla Kramer pointed out in the interview (Appendix F), it is difficult to decide and agree on which part of the information that is the least important type of information and what should be left out (Appendix F).

Other European destinations have managed to find a solution to that problem, and one of the respondents of my survey mentions the accessibility information for tourists of the German city, Dusseldorf, as a good example of accessible tourist information.

**66** **Kunstsammlung  
Nordrhein-Westfalen  
K21 Ständehaus**  
City map page 38



International art from 1980

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40217 Düsseldorf

Phone 0049 211 83 81 600  
Fax 0049 211 83 81 209

service@kunstsammlung.de  
www.kunstsammlung.de

**Opening hours**  
Tue – Fri 10:00 – 18:00  
Sat + Sun 11:00 – 18:00  
1st Wed every month is  
KPMG Art Night  
10:00 – 22:00  
(with free entrance from 18:00)

**Public transport:**  
Graf-Adolf-Platz (400 m)

**Information on barrier-free access**

→ Step-free access, electronic button for doors in front of entrance

→ Disabled toilet on ground floor accessible from one side, transfer space to left of toilet: 100 x 150 cm, door width: 93 cm

→ Disabled toilet on 2nd floor accessible from one side, transfer space to right of toilet: 96 x 150 cm, door width: 93 cm

→ 4 disabled parking spaces on site, entrance via Wasserstraße or Elisabethstraße, bollards can be lowered, request from car via information pillar in front of bollards

→ Wheelchair available on loan, width of seat: 45 cm

→ Round lift (diameter): 200 cm, door width: 90 cm

→ Exhibition room 2018 (2nd floor) 10 cm high kerb in room

→ Step-free access to museum café and shop










Figure 2 Example of accessible tourist information from Barrier-free Dusseldorf (Dusseldorf Tourismus and Marketing, n.d.).

Here we clearly see an example of how Barrier Free Dusseldorf makes use of pictograms. The accessibility guide to Dusseldorf covers necessary accessibility information on selected hotels, restaurants and attractions. But, furthermore, it also explains the accessibility of public transport and how to find your way to and from Dusseldorf and a guide to Dusseldorf Airport. Although, the information provided on each attraction is not so detailed, the overall information provides the visitor with an impression of the accessibility of the place mentioned and the tools to find out more

about the accessibility of the destination. At the same time the information also works as an inspirational folder that you can browse through for ideas on what to see, do and where to live (Dusseldorf Tourismus, n.d.). This material is produced by the official tourism authority in Dusseldorf and was pointed out by one of the respondents of my survey as being good and informative tourist information on Dusseldorf as an accessible destination. This information resembles a tourist brochure about any kind of destination that you find in tourist information offices. The layout may seem old fashioned, but it is an example of the accessible tourist information that were directly mentioned by the respondents. Even in a digital world, a PDF file such as the “Barrier-free Dusseldorf” is mentioned as a good example of tourist information about accessibility of a destination. The site is a well of information about accessibility and it actually make use of a logo, the Natko-logo (Tourism for All Germany, red.), to guarantee the accessibility. The use of a logos and pictograms followed by easy understandable tourist information about the museum seem to work very well and the layout resembles that of any tourist brochure. It leaves the focus on the attractions and allows for the accessibility details to work as additional information.

### **4.3 Information and Inspiration**

For many of the respondent of my survey and my interviewees, information is not just information. The same names of accessible travel blogs are mentioned by many of the respondents as being inspirational (Appendix A).

When contacting one of the new bloggers on the scene, Caitlin Lisle ([www.wheelchairwanderings.com](http://www.wheelchairwanderings.com)), who blogs about her solo-journey in Europe in a wheelchair, she answered that her reason for starting a blog was,

“(...) information for disabled travellers is very limited which is something I am trying to change through writing my blog” (Appendix C).

Caitlin Lisle expressed interest in inspiring other travellers with disabilities to see possibilities and not only obstacles to travelling in a wheelchair. In many ways, she and the other bloggers mentioned in this thesis are perfect examples of discursive tourists that are “conceived as social agents (...) engaged in the production of tourism and tourist experiences at a microlevel” (Moore, 2002, p. 53). This chapter will discuss the role of accessible tourist information as a part of the decision-making process.

### **4.3.1 Official information, inspiration and decision-making**

Only a couple of the respondents have stated that they find official tourist information valuable when deciding and planning where to go.

“However, the accessible tourism market lacks visibility and coherence, partly since marketing takes place via many small, local channels, with few internationally oriented channels. Accessibility Information Schemes are often run purely with an information focus by NGOs, rather than with a commercial focus by actual businesses and they therefore remain underused as a marketing tool” (European Commission, 2015, p.13-14).

Although the website AccessDenmark.com provides the traveller with a lot of useful information, it is not a very inspiring website. If you compare to e.g. Barrier Free Dusseldorf (Dusseldorf Tourismus, n.d.), you find that this page and the Dusseldorf without Barriers PDF is constructed based on the principles of a more conventional tourist information. Access Denmark is the only official webpage in Denmark dealing with accessibility and accessible tourism, also, it is the website that is referred to by VisitDenmark and VisitCopenhagen when you look for accessibility information in tourist facilities.

According to my survey, the local official tourist information offices are widely used as information points. However, they are not mentioned as places where travellers with disabilities can find inspiration on where to go and reasons to go (Appendix A). The responses to the questions in the survey and in my interviews, point towards the recognition and use of bloggers as inspiration and inspirational factors when choosing travel destinations.

### **4.3.2 Bloggers and travel forums as inspiration**

“In recognising that a person's impairment does not constrain their travel motivations, the boundaries to what is regarded as accessible tourism destinations and experiences are continually pushed by the accessible explorers who forge new pathways for others to follow. (Michopoulou, Darcy, Ambrose, & Buhalis, 2015, p. 181)”

The travel blogger community for travellers with disability is a well of information on accessible travel. Doing my initial research, I read about the travel adventures of many accessible travel bloggers with mobility impairments touring the world in their wheelchairs.

There are many popular blogs concerning accessible travel and during my interviews with some of the respondents of my survey, the interviewees introduced me to blogs they thought were useful and inspirational (Appendix B; Appendix C; Appendix E). Especially blogs on wheelchair accessible

travel. This analysis will look into the type of information given by two accessible travel bloggers and how the information is presented.

“As I mentioned above there is not a lot of great websites for accessible travel information. Sometimes the city itself will have a link on their tourist website. My favourite accessible travel blog is Curb Free with Cory Lee. Cory Lee is an electric wheelchair user and even though his needs are a little different to mine his posts are always a great read” (Appendix C).

I have looked into the website of Cory Lee from [www.curbfreewithcory.com](http://www.curbfreewithcory.com), because he is mentioned by several of the respondents of my survey, and John Morris from [www.wheelchairtraveler.com](http://www.wheelchairtraveler.com). John Morris has been to Copenhagen and reviewed a hostel, but he also has a large number of followers of his blog and Facebook site. Both do consultancy work and also sell accessible travel accessories, and give out a lot of advice and recommendations to their followers and less experienced travellers.

“Curb free with Cory Lee” was started by Cory Lee, a 27-year American guy diagnosed with Spinal Muscular atrophy, due to this reason,

“I launched Curb Free with Cory Lee because I wanted to share what I’ve learned on the road with you. Since starting this blog in December 2013, I have gained more than 50,000 engaged and supportive followers, traversed 6 continents (my life goal is to visit all 7... just Antarctica left) and became the leading travel blogger focusing on accessibility” (Lee, n.d).

Cory Lee runs his website primarily like a blog, but great parts of the website is also designed in the same style as many destination marketing websites are with pages such as “5 accessible places to visit in Helsinki” (Lee, 2017). Cory Lee visits places and then reviews different facilities as well as the destination with photos and accessibility details. But at the same time, he also spices the information up with e.g. fun facts or anecdotes from his travels.

“Whenever I’m planning a trip, transportation is the first thing that I research because without wheelchair accessible taxis and public transportation, I’m stuck. It’s usually not quite as easy for us, as wheelchair users, to get around as everyone else does, but in Helsinki we’re all equal. There is plenty of accessible transportation and I thought that Helsinki was one of the easiest cities for me to get around in... ever!” (Lee, 2016)

According to my survey, bloggers are mentioned as being inspirational and useful when looking for information about accessible destinations and they are also used as inspiration for the planning part before travelling to a new destination. When reading through many posts on the Curb free with

Cory website, you quickly get the impression from the comments that many people gain much from reading his posts and reviews.

“But one way I find very helpful in getting more detailed information is by reading blogs or watching YouTube videos from other people with disabilities that have shared their experience from that place and what they thought of it.” (Appendix B. Respondent 3).

The comments from visitors of his blog express gratitude for the information he provides to other travellers with disabilities. He builds his website by collecting and sharing his travel adventures and experiences with accessible tourism. He always reviews the hotels he is staying in, he covers airplane travel with wheelchairs and provides many descriptions of the things that are pointed out as being the most useful things for accessible travel (Lee, n.d.).

In general, the impression you get when going through different accessible travel blogs is that they are focusing a lot on e.g. the bathroom facilities of establishments such as hotels and restaurants (Lee, n.d; Morris, 2016) and the importance of being able to use the shower in the bathroom and not only the toilet.

Another blogger, John Morris, is also known as Wheelchair Traveler. He also shares many trip reports from his travels around the world. When looking at his report from a trip to Copenhagen in 2013, you find that much can be learned from how he presents the details of an accessible hostel room, an accessible hostel bathroom and the overall review of the hostel Urban House that he was staying in.

Before John Morris was in a car accident he used to travel a lot and now he is travelling the world experiencing different cultures, sports events and nature from his wheelchair. According to many of the comments left on his blog, his adventures and travel reviews are inspiring for other people (Morris, 2016).

In his review of the Copenhagen hostel he writes,

“In all, I believe the ensuite bathroom is adequately accessible for most - much more than I expected to find in a hostel. Particularly one in a country, Denmark, that has enacted very little legislation designed to promote equal access for the disabled” (Morris, 2016).

As I have referred to previously in the thesis, there are plans on a government level to propose changes to the current situation in Denmark where there is no prohibition of discrimination on grounds of disability (Munch, 2017). The fact that John Morris even mentions the legal situation regarding laws on equal access is in Denmark, could mean that more profound changes of the laws on disabilities and equalities also could play a role when deciding on where to travel to. The



example also illustrates how much the legislation on accessibility means when developing accessible tourism and not just on a national level, in the continuous work for Tourism for All, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

“calls for State Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to the physical environment, information, transportation and other facilities and services open or provided to the public. It (...) also calls for State Parties to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy the benefits of tourism” (United Nations, n.d.).

Benefits of tourism is a very broad description. But if some of the benefits of tourism could be made possible by opening up for the possibility for wheelchair users to find cheaper and more social accommodations such as e.g. hostels or other, then that could perhaps count as a step in the right direction when looking at it from a Tourism for All perspective. The travel costs are very important when you decide where, when and if to go travelling.

“If you'll be visiting Copenhagen and would like to save money on wheelchair accessible accommodation, Urban House may be the answer! If you've never stayed in a hostel before, don't worry - Urban House is inviting to budget travelers both new and old” (Morris, 2016).

By looking at the commentary field below the review of the Copenhagen Hostel, you see many comments thanking John Morris for introducing the possibility of staying in a hostel although travelling in a wheelchair.

One of the comments says,

“The urban House in COPENHAGEN, DENMARK looks quite nice, I'm really inspired by all the work you do to write about wheelchair accessible hotels and places to go! You are a great teacher in that anybody can go anywhere and having a few extra wheels shouldn't detour you:)” (Morris, 2016).

This comment is exactly the response, that supports both Cory Lee and John Morris when they stress that it is of great importance them is to create accessibility awareness, inspire and give others the courage to go travelling and through this, create more accessibility in the world (Morris, 2016; Lee, n.d.).

Apart from the accessible travel bloggers, there are also a great number of travel forums online where people share experiences and these are widely used by many travellers with different types of mobility issues. According to Marlies van Sint Annaland, the company ATO Accessible Travel Online has been aware of the benefits of this way of providing and producing accessible travel information and they are now about to open and administer a travel platform for accessible travel.

The platform is meant as a tool improve both customer service, create a platform where people can discuss things concerning accessible travels and share travel experiences. At the same time, however, the platform is meant as a way to gain knowledge about what is important for people when travelling with disabilities and also what is trending in accessible tourism (Appendix D) The ATO platform and the ATO social media accounts are also trying out alternative ways and methods of communicating accessibility awareness and accessibility information.

“But the other day I posted a video of one of our consultants. She filmed how to film an accessible bathroom. Everybody loved it and in one week I had 25 extra followers on Instagram. Because of one video.” (Appendix D, [Link to the video](#))

The Danish Accessibility Schemes are also using photos more and more often when the organisation displays the accessibility of the facilities they have assessed. But they have so far not started filming the facilities, yet (God Adgang, n.d; Appendix F).

The mention of the bloggers as inspiration by the majority of the responders of my survey and the fact that many of the accessibility bloggers have a great number of followers, could indicate that they succeed in giving information and inspiration in a way that makes sense to other travellers with disabilities. But could it also be that the bloggers are able to give their followers a personal and a familiar introduction to new travel destinations? And more importantly, that they have earned the trust of their followers by passing on reliable and useful information about the accessibility of places and destinations that would otherwise seem inaccessible for travellers with disabilities?

At the same time the accessibility bloggers also spend a lot of time explaining details about transport, accommodation which supports the findings of Hyde and Decrop (2011) regarding the importance of the sub-decisions. As previous research has shown, the influence of interpersonal relationship plays a great part in the decision-making process (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011), however, Teichmann (2011) found in her study that it was a the travellers' own travel experiences that would often lead to the decision-making.

It could be interesting to investigate the actual influence of travel bloggers on traveller with disabilities decision-making. From the comments on their blogs and websites, it seems as if they could play a great part by providing other travellers with inspiration and showing possibilities, but so far, I have not come across a study of the accessible travel bloggers influence of traveller with disabilities decision-making.

### **4.3.3 Personal experiences and role of recommendations from family and friends**

Studies of how the travel experiences of friends and families and the interpersonal sources are quite influential do exist, and when it comes to traveling with disabilities all of the respondents in my survey responded that they value recommendations from friends and much higher than other sources of information (Appendix A).

Moreover, travel experiences and attitudes of family members can also affect the traveller with disabilities' own courage to travel despite expected difficulties. Caitlin Lisle gives this reason for her not being nervous about travelling on her own in a wheelchair,

“Also because I've travelled a lot with my family I knew what to expect in terms of plane travel, how to choose a place to stay, how to kill time on long journeys and I think most importantly what to do if things don't work out. Also my mum travels a lot on her own so therefore my family didn't see it as unusual for me to do so” (Appendix C).

The personal experiences and influence from friends and family seems to play a very important part of the decision-making. There is naturally more attention given towards destination accessibility, but in fact, like any other travellers, travellers with disabilities are couples, families and often the decision is a joint decision made on many levels.

“I probably get inspiration from hearing about certain places from family or friends that have travelled there and then learning more about that place online” (Appendix C).

One of the issues that this thesis has been researching, is information about how a destination can influence the decision-making process of travellers with disabilities and their choice of destination, and how own or others travel experience might have an effect on that process as well. None of the respondents in my survey answered that they would find inspiration on official tourism sites. They would try to find valuable information, but they would not find inspiration. Inspiration would come from own previous experiences and recommendations from friends and families. But bloggers were also mentioned in this category of inspirational information on accessible travel. Do these answers indicate that the most effective way of influencing traveller with disabilities' decision-making process in general, is to make sure that people with special access needs, who are visitors or tourists to a destination, experience the destination as being accessible?

When using the case of Respondent 3 as an example, the fact that she is a traveller before she meets her husband, has, according to herself, a lot of influence on them conquering the world together and not letting the disability control everything and prevent them from travelling. Her previous

experience could be part of why they are not afraid of taking some chances when travelling, but with time have been ready to act spontaneously while they are on a planned vacation (Appendix B).

“I introduced my passion for travelling to my husband, and through me I think he found more confidence in believing he could travel more despite of his disability and worries about wheelchair accessibility and other struggles. Together as a couple we become more confident in travelling together and taking chances where he might would have before” (Appendix B, Respondent 3).

Much of the research done on the decision-making processes of couples, families and friends show decisions are made jointly. When we look at Bronner and de Hoog's (2011) findings in their research of couples travelling together and how they make decisions, their findings apparently also apply to people travelling with travellers with disabilities. Respondent 3 and her husband' decision to travel down the Australian East coast, without having anything booked in advance, was according to Respondent 3 a joint decision, because both of them needed to see something else. A decision that was made without previous investigation of accessibility in the area.

According to Marlies van Sint Annaland, this example does not apply to the majority of travellers with disabilities (Appendix D). Travellers with disabilities need to be reached at another time and also if accessibility information is very easy to find them the chance of people actually traveling to that place and booking hotel is even bigger. Marlies is talking about this as well, as she says it will for some travellers with disabilities take more than half a year to plan a trip where as people without disabilities can just pack a suitcase and go. (Appendix D)

My survey and interviews also shows that most of the respondents spend a lot of time planning a vacation. And this is according to the Marlies probably the biggest difference between travellers with and without disabilities. The majority of the respondents of my survey also state that their vacation planning is carefully done and that they would not travel to a destination if they could not find any accessibility information.

Moreover, they also responded that they have previously chosen not to travel to a destination, if the information about the accessibility of the destination has been inadequate.



Figure 3 Results from my survey on Accessible Tourism and information (Appendix A)

According to my empirical data, family and friends have a big influence on the traveller with disabilities' decision-making process. The planning process can be very time consuming and the familiarity of

bloggers and how they describe travel destinations and travel obstacles can be helpful and inspiring in the planning. Moreover, the importance of the sub-decisions, as pointed by Hyde and Decrop (2011), plays a great part in this decision-making process, and both of the accessible travel bloggers introduced in the thesis, thoroughly covers most questions of sub-decisional character.

From the both my survey and interviews it becomes very clear, that many travellers with disabilities use a lot of time planning. That could lead to the assumption that the travellers stick to their plans, but in fact 41,3 % of the survey respondents claim that they often change their plans during the vacation or travel without planning.

#### 4.3.4 Travel Decision-Making

The majority of the respondents to my survey wrote that they would often change plans along the way. That means that as a tourist destination you can influence the travellers, not only before, but also during their vacation and that accessible travel planning is apparently not as fixed as previously assumed by me and also indicated by some of the travel professionals in the accessible travel business (Appendix D). Half of the respondents stated that they would not return to the same destination. Following reasons were given, "the world is a big place" and "Life is too short to go to same places "(Appendix A).

The other half of the respondents would return or often return to the same destination, since "less work since already have the information first time around", "I know that it's accessible for me" and "If you know the facilities are good it saves risking a bad experience ". (Appendix A). Many of these respondents also answered that they would always stick to the plan and find inspiration from online destination marketing (Appendix A).

Could it be the case that the first group of travellers that prefer travelling to new places and often change plans along the way, are unknown to many travel professionals, due to the fact that they travel more independently?

“The other thing, I like travelling on my own is that it takes you out of your comfort zone and forces you to make friends and meet new people which I wouldn’t have done if I was travelling with my husband or friends. When I did this trip I mainly did it by myself because I wanted to prove it was possible for a wheelchair user to backpack around Europe”

(Appendix C).

This division between the answers to the question about changing plans shows the complexity of accessible travel. Not just due to the many different types of disabilities, but also because accessible travel, as a concept, does not mean the same to people.

This thesis works from the definition by Simon Darcy and Tracey Dickson (2009) that defines accessible travel as the possibility to travel without obstacles caused by mobility impairments and other disabilities. Accessible travel is travel for all on equal terms. And a rise in accessible travel opportunities should ideally prevent stigmatisation and help build a more equal world. However, this is not always the effect, according to Caitlin Lisle,

“I think accessible tourism is a good idea. I however hate the idea of having to go on a 'special' tour designed just for disabled people. Disabled people shouldn't have to go on special group tours with other disabled people they should be able to travel with everyone else. That is however my opinion, I do know people that like going on special disabled designed tours as everything is easy they don't have to worry and they meet other people that are like them. As a younger person I wanted to travel as normally as possible like other young people” (Appendix C)

Caitlin Lisle adds to the understanding, by underlining what accessible travel, according to her, should not be about. This leads us back to the point made by Marlies van Sint Annaland, that travellers with disabilities do not want to be helped, but want to be able to travel independently (Appendix D). Accessible tourism is to provide access for all and thereby turning disability into ability.

The story about Respondent 3 and her husband travelling around Australia and Norway is also a story that shows that by not making decisions solely based on accessibility, on where to travel to, they were pleasantly surprised (Appendix B). They took a chance and were lucky to find an accessible place to stay the night while they were on the way.

But is there is a way to push the boundaries of what it means that something is accessible and what you can do and where you can go without having to take a chance? A way to make it easier to get an overview of the different possibilities of accessible places.

This leads us back to the discussion about the use of logos as a way to create easy accessible information.

As all the information given on the accessibility scheme is of importance to somebody, reducing the number of things to document and measure is, according to Ulla Kramer, close to impossible.

“Every time we sit down to discuss the content of the accessibility schemes, and we discuss what we need to take out of the accessibility scheme, then another 10 things are added”

(Appendix F, lines 78-79).

But when it comes the marketing aspect of accessible tourism, are there conditions that could be accepted as accessible enough while traveling, that would not be accepted in your everyday life? Is the high standard of the information provided by the Danish national accessibility schemes part of the problem when it comes to the promotion and marketing of accessible travel?

In the article by Blichfeldt-Nicolaisen and Sonnenschein (2012), they find that there is a need for an understanding of disability that differs from both the social and the medical model. They conclude that disability is not static, it is dynamic (2012). Their findings and suggestion of a revised awareness of disability as having a dynamic nature allows for a better understanding of the relationship and the travel history of Respondent 3 and her husband. The spontaneous road trip that they decide to go on, as well as the two of them gradually being more open to new types of travel adventures and getting themselves out into unknown territory, could be sign of exactly the dynamic nature of disability. Her husband’s disability, although he is still the same and still has the same disability, is not in the same way disabling him. They now travel in a different way and the world is more open, because he has gained more confidence in his own ability through their previous travels. This is also an example of how the change of context affects their travel decision making process. The planning part of the process becomes less dominant.

Bronner and de Hoog (2011) address the role of context in the decision-making process and they look at the difference between the social context and personal context.

Only 1 out of 16 of the respondents from my survey, answered that he or she preferred to travel alone. This reflects the findings of other studies, that travellers with disabilities and in need of special access often travel with other people (European Commission, 2015). The context of the

decision-making process is therefore, when looking at it from a Bronner and de Hoog (2011) approach, a social context.

“For tourism marketing, taking into consideration that personal sources are more significant in the social context as compared with the individual context, is important. This implies not only trying to influence the consumer who has to take a decision but also trying to influence the “significant others” (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011, p.141).

When talking about accessible travel, the fact that people often travel together could be used from a marketing perspective, where not only accessibility would be addressed, but also directed towards other visitor segments such as family vacation or interest based. And as Teichmann (2011) points out, then the

“marketers need to consider the relevance of word-of-mouth recommendation in their marketing decisions” (p. 192). 14 out of 16 respondents to my survey stated that they found information from friends or relatives useful or very useful. Although the sample is too small to make generalisations, it points towards the possibilities for marketing and information to make use of this knowledge of the importance of recommendations of friends and families. Social media and campaigns that involve travellers with disabilities could perhaps gain from being launched and shared directly by the participants in the accessible travel forums. In order to awaken people’s interest in a destination,

“Thus, to encourage a traveler’s preference for a specific destination, an effective tourism marketing strategy is to gain a large share of first mentions among such travelers who are considering competing travel destinations” (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989, p.8)

Another context that could be interesting to look into, when thinking about directing information towards the travellers’ special need of accessibility, is the background of the traveller. You have to look at what kind of disability the travellers have, and in what way the disability affects their everyday lives, but at the same time it is also important to look at the travel history of the traveller. If you look at Respondent 3 (Appendix B) and Respondent 7 (Appendix E), you see that these two travellers actually take a lot of chances when travelling and that they are experienced travellers. The same applies for Caitlin Lisle. She is also an experienced traveller and before her accident she had been travelling a lot with her family. Travelling was not new to her, but travelling alone in a wheelchair was new (Appendix C). The travel agent that she contacted in order to join a tour and who did not accept her as a customer, could perhaps have gained from seeing her in the context of her travel experience and not in just in a wheelchair context.



The respondents were completely divided when it came to returning to the same destination when travelling on vacation. Reasons such as “If you know the facilities are good it saves risking a bad experience” (Appendix A, Respondent 5), and “less work since already have the information first time around” (Appendix A, Respondent 9). A way to influence these traveller’s decision-making is basically by giving a good impression first time around. Many of those travellers who like returning to the same place stated that they would often spend up 2 to weeks per trip (Appendix A). This kind of loyal tourists could prove advantageous for tourist destinations. The other half were focused on the how “life is short” and “the world is big” (Appendix A).

Most of the travellers that have responded to my survey and my interviews seem to be both adventurous and independent travellers. Taking the small number of respondents to my survey into consideration, it is impossible to generalise from this observation. But the respondents to my survey, and the bloggers leave you with an impression of accessible travellers that are open to challenges and see and seize opportunities for accessible travellers. Perhaps that could be an indication of a new generation of travellers on the way. Travellers who are inspired by the professional bloggers and who see opportunities and are not afraid to take a chance and find another solution if plans do not work out. These travellers are good examples of the dynamic nature of disability.

“As accessibility is a social construct, the exact nature of the relationship between the tourist with a disability and the rest of the tourist system is not constant” (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011, p. 3).

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has investigated the decision-making process of travellers with disabilities and looked at the role of information about accessibility from a tourism context. My research shows that the quality and scope of information about accessibility prior to travelling on vacation has influence on travellers with disabilities' choice of destination. However, the type and design of the information also has an effect on how the information is perceived by the travellers.

The thesis has put a special emphasis on looking into the function of accessibility schemes as tourist information and has found that, although accurate and trustworthy, accessibility schemes are too technical in their design and function. Accessibility schemes, in general, were not mentioned by any of the respondents of my survey as being used in the first steps of travel planning or as reasons or inspiration to travel.

As my survey shows, there is a general dissatisfaction among travellers with disabilities regarding official tourist information on accessibility. Many of the travellers in my survey mentioned accessible travel forums and travel bloggers as good sources of information. The only official tourist publication mentioned was "Barrier-Free Dusseldorf". By analysing, from the theoretical perspective of decision-making, how two popular accessible travel bloggers communicate accessible travel, I found that both bloggers are focusing exactly on the type of information that covers the sub-decision aspect of the vacation decision-making process and that they at the same time provide a touch of personal experience to the travel information, thus enhancing the feeling of familiarity.

By looking into the design of the official accessible tourism publication from Dusseldorf, I found that this publication also focuses on providing information in the sub-decision category of decision-making, combined with simple solutions such as pictograms and logos, photos of the selected tourist facilities and information on whether the facility is especially suitable for certain types of disabilities. My analysis of these two different types of accessibility information supports the theories on the influential aspects of sub-decisions in a vacation decision-making process aspects, as introduced in my theoretical framework.

The travel stories told by the interviewees moreover underline the importance of looking at the context of the traveller and not simply seeing the travellers as a traveller with disabilities. The majority of the travellers that I have interviewed are all experienced travellers with a lot of travel experience and often a personal history of overcoming obstacles and problems. Although these travellers may not account for the majority of travellers with disabilities, they have disabilities, too,

and they are travellers. Information about accessibility play a great role in their decision-making, but they all stated that they would mainly find information and inspiration online. Making use of their experiences with travelling and information search could be valuable when creating accessible official tourist information content that has both information value and marketing value.

Furthermore, tourist information on accessibility could also benefit from thinking the context of friends and family into the information, as 15 out of 16 of the respondents to my survey found travel tips and experiences from friends and families very useful in their travel planning project. The findings of my research confirm what other researchers of accessibility have found (Darcy, 2010; Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011), that information is not limited to published information in written form, logos and pictogram, but that it is also the information about accessibility you can get from e.g. hotel and museum staff or tourism providers. By applying the the social and the medical model of understanding disability, I have looked at how the perception of disability affects the attitudes towards information about accessibility from tourist providers. Moreover, the thesis has looked into how the role of awareness and responsibility indirectly have an effect on the development of information about accessibility in a tourism context.

The findings of this thesis can to some extent be applicable when looking at some of the challenges that Copenhagen is facing in regard to accessible tourism and information about accessibility. Moreover, my analysis of the accessibility information situation in Copenhagen and Denmark suggest that the collection of detailed information in the accessibility schemes could be used in a more marketing friendly way by learning from the evaluations and experiences of travellers with disabilities.

When the context of the travellers and the dynamic nature of disability are considered in the production of accessibility information in a tourism context, it provides the information with a better chance of influencing the travellers with disabilities' vacation decision-making process and hence make a destination more attractive and more accessible for this segment of travellers.

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## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A	Survey about accessibility	Questions and Results
Appendix B	Email interview and survey responds	Respondent 3
Appendix C	Email interview	Caitlin Lisle/wheelchairwanderings.com
Appendix D	Skype Interview	Marlies van Sint Annaland /CEO of Accessible Travel Online
Appendix E	Email Interview and survey responds	Repondent 7
Appendix F	Interview	Ulla Kramer/ Director of the Access Denmark Secretariat
Appendix G	Email Interview and survey responds	Respondent 12