

# **Access to Cultural Tourism. Perspectives on Policies and Practice**

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## **Keywords**

***Accessibility, Accessible Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Disability, Design-for-All, Universal Design***

**The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018) has estimated that cultural tourism accounts for around 39% of all international tourist arrivals and, before the Covid-19 pandemic, was still increasing. This report also stated that 89% of national tourism administrations include cultural tourism in their policies. One of the most globally accepted definitions of cultural tourism is that adopted during the 22nd session of the UNWTO General Assembly in 2017: “Cultural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination”. [1]**

**Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), provides that States Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and must take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:**

- *Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;***

- ***Enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;***
- ***Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.***

**States Parties are required to take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities “to have the opportunity to develop and utilise their creative, artistic and intellectual potential” (Article 30, paragraph 2). [2]**

**Enabling citizens with disabilities and those with specific access requirements of many kinds to participate in cultural activities and visit cultural heritage venues remains a “work in progress” (to use a well-worn euphemism), both in terms of enactment of appropriate policies and policy implementation. There is also need for practical interventions and supports, both in destinations as a whole, and at the level of thousands upon thousands of individual cultural heritage sites. This lack of accessible provisions impacts local citizens and visitors alike.**

**As we have written elsewhere, the terms Accessible Tourism, Inclusive Tourism, Barrier-free tourism or simply, Tourism for All, should be understood not as a separate type of tourism but as a set of preconditions for every type of tourism. People of all ages and abilities, including persons with disabilities and other tourists with specific access requirements, experience many barriers to participation in tourism throughout the whole “visitor journey”. This is largely because products, services and the built environment are**

**not designed to be accessible to the widest range of users. These visitors may require certain accommodations when travelling, staying overnight or visiting a venue. information design, environmental design, equipment or services and a welcoming attitude, ensuring they have a safe, comfortable and fulfilling experience. [3]**

**Fundamentally, there is lack of disability awareness and knowledge about how to achieve accessibility among many cultural tourism providers, but here we will focus on positive examples and good practices which, I believe deserve wider exposure and appreciation by scholars, decision-makers and practitioners in the cultural tourism sector.**

**Design-for-All (DfA) and Universal Design (UD) have contributed considerably to the creation of accessible buildings, environments, products and services over the past 20 years and these related approaches have also influenced design teaching, spreading from the environmental design fields to service design and information and communication sciences. Design standards based on UD principles provide ease of access not only for persons with physical impairments but also for the general population, who benefit from more comfortable and safer environments. [3, op cit.]**

**In keeping with the mission of "Design for All India", the scholarly articles presented in this edition serve to inform readers about some of the latest research and practice in Design for All. In this case, we draw on the international experience, analysis and insights from**

**eight European and one Japanese expert working in the fields of architectural and urban heritage.**

**As an aside: whether we use the terms “Design-for-All” or “Universal Design” – and what each of these entails – is a discussion that may be left for another day. In my view, what both these design approaches aspire to is to design for the greater good of all people, based on the wide diversity of human conditions.**

**The five instructive articles presented below give substantive examples of design and evaluation methods and processes that are applied in the context of heritage conservation, building rehabilitation and accessibility, ranging across the continuum from concept, plan and detail design to the implementation and maintenance of the monument, building or environment. Each contribution addresses at least one heritage site that is internationally or nationally recognised (and, indeed, “protected”), where temporary or permanent accessibility features have been introduced with the aim of enhancing the accessibility of the structure to enable people with disabilities or those with specific access requirements to experience the heritage environment and its artefacts.**

**Besides these well-described and detailed examples of technical innovation and skill, the authors also raise and discuss significant questions about the dynamic interplay between the need to respect and conserve the material heritage and the values associated with a building or object, on the one hand, and the desire, on the other hand, to make such places and objects accessible to citizens who**

**may be excluded due to inherent access barriers or inadequate and insufficient provisions in the form of accessibility measures.**

**In the context of improving access in heritage buildings, Alberto Arengi and Carlotta Coccoli (Article 1, below) note that it is widely presumed that there is "...a need to balance the two values underlying the accessibility and conservation of cultural heritage: its use and its protection". The authors point out that such values "...are often, wrongly, regarded as opposites, or as incompatible. The reason for this contrast originates in the way of understanding ancient architecture and in the value of the relationship between architecture and people." Their salutary case study refers to "The Denied Ramps at the Church of San Salvatore in the Santa Giulia Museum in Brescia", Italy. Here, I suspect that many readers will feel themselves drawn into an uncomfortable conundrum where process and power eventually take precedence over some rather ordinary access ramps, leaving a sense of regret and disbelief. The case study indicates, that cultural values and access present not only technical challenges but also raise fundamental issues of community identity and democracy.**

**In the second article, Francesca Morandini of the Brescia Museums Foundation gives an inspiring, illustrated description of the many measures, carried out over several years, to make Brescia's heritage inclusive and accessible to everyone. These include the adoption of relatively ordinary paths and tools that guarantee various degrees of access to all members of the public, to the design and implementation of inclusive strategies, avoiding distinct itineraries and experiences in line with the basic principles of Universal Design.**

**Particular examples are shown addressing physical access, access to cultural information access and audience awareness, and the value of cultural appreciation for human wellbeing.**

**The third article, by Professor Emeritus Satoshi Kose, gives a clear exposition of the particular situation concerning the preservation of heritage buildings in Japan and considerations regarding their accessibility. It is noted that the oldest traditional building construction techniques used wood rather than masonry and therefore the buildings that survive are often very fragile and unsuited to major structural interventions. Some are shrines or religious buildings which lack space for any modern facilities such as accessible toilets. The creation of reproductions of buildings and monuments is one method of enabling visitors to understand the building features and styles associated with these cultural heritage sites and objects. In some situations, the need for earthquake safety measures and improved accessibility were combined in innovative solutions to save the buildings from collapse and provide accessible services. Some accessibility interventions were boldly implemented before the buildings were listed as heritage sites, although this is not usually the case.**

**The fourth article by Christian Ebbesen and Marianna Brenna presents a case study of the accessibility measures carried out at Akershus Castle, Oslo, situated beside the fjord, where fortifications were built in a succession of buildings, walls and ramparts since the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Renovation, re-purposing, extensions and adaptations are part of the history of this listed monument. For many years the castle has functioned as a museum**

and also as a venue for hosting government functions, royal baptisms and other events of national importance. Several years ago, Norway introduced planning legislation that requires Universal Design of buildings and services and, therefore, it was decided to address the architectural access barriers in the castle's main representative areas. The title chosen for the project was "Improved Accessibility" in recognition of the challenges involved. The authors explain how stakeholders including representatives of people with disabilities participated in the planning process. The distinction between the concepts of accessibility and universal design was an important clarification of expectations at the beginning of the project. Nevertheless, it was an ambition that the measures chosen should be as close to universal design as possible.

Guiding principles were agreed among the stakeholders concerning, for example, equity and dignity (independent access and use of the entrances and building interiors); types of materials for structural elements, equipment enabling access; (a new lift, a platform lift, handrails, doors, handles, etc.) and finishes.

The fifth article selected for this edition of the Design for All India journal is by Spanish architects, specialising in accessibility of heritage environments: Delfín Jiménez Martín, Alba Ramírez Saiz, and Miguel Angel Ajuriaguerra Escudero. Their article addresses "Urban Accessibility in World Heritage Cities", with particular focus on challenges and solutions in the design of accessible pedestrian routes. Their opening statement frames the issue succinctly:

*"In Spain, fifteen cities have been declared World Heritage Cities by UNESCO. This implies a responsibility to conserve all the heritage wealth of these places. However, what is the point*

***of heritage if it cannot be known and visited? In order to be able to do this for all people, in equal and inclusive conditions, it is essential to consider Accessibility and Universal Design principles. This is a challenge that requires a personalised study in places that were precisely built with the idea of being inaccessible.”***

**From their study of six historical quarters in the heritage cities the authors have established a series of criteria and indicators that can be used as a guideline, described as "keys to consider in the intervention on pedestrian routes in historic centres". These keys address issues of mobility, location, orientation, understanding, and other factors, enabling an holistic consideration of accessibility as a fundamental principle for all people, and in particular for the growing numbers of older people who need an accessible environment that is easy to use. Thanks to their systematic and analytical approach and rich use of examples, the authors have provided a valuable resource for academics and practitioners, who may wish to apply this method in historical cities of all scales and ages.**

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**All articles were originally published in:**

**Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Universal Design (UD2022) “Transforming our World through Universal Design for Human Development”.**

**I. Garofolo et al. (Eds.) ©The authors and IOS Press.**

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**I extend my thanks and appreciation to all the authors of the selected articles, and to the editors of the entire UD 2022 Proceedings for their willingness to share their work with the worldwide community of scholars, practitioners and stakeholders in cultural heritage and accessible tourism. I hope that this edition of Design for All India will foster ever-closer bonds between all those who design and build environments for the greater good of all.**

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