

DISABLING JOURNEYS

**The social relations of tourism for
people with impairments in Australia -
an analysis of government tourism
authorities and accommodation sector
practice and discourses**

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**Being a thesis submitted to the University of Technology, Sydney in fulfillment of
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy by Thesis**

December, 2003

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full Description
AAA	Australian Automobile Association
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABCB	Australian Building Codes Board
ACROD	Australian Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled
ADA	<i>Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990</i> (United States of America)
AHA	Australian Hotels Association
AQA	Australian Quadriplegic Association
AS1428	Australian Standards for Access and Mobility
ATC	Australian Tourist Commission
BLRA	Binary logistic regression analysis
BAPC	Built Access Policy Committee
BCA	Building Code of Australia
BTR	Bureau of Tourism Research
CAGD	Commonwealth Attorney General's Department
CDOT	Commonwealth Department of Tourism
CoTAM	Comprehensive Tourism Access Model
CTEC	Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation
DAP	Disability Action Plans
DDA	<i>Disability Discrimination Act, 1992</i> (Commonwealth)
CDFACS	Commonwealth Dept. of Family and Community Services
DTM	Domestic Tourism Monitor
DSA	<i>Disability Services Act, 1993</i> (NSW)
EPAA	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979</i> (NSW)
HACC	Home and Community Care
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ICIDH	International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps
ICIDH-2	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (sic)
IYDP	United Nations 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons
NAWG	National Access Working Group
NICAN	National Information Communication Awareness Network
NRMA	National Roads and Motorist's Association
NVS	National Visitor Survey
NTTC	Northern Territory Tourist Commission
ONT	Office of National Tourism
QTTC	Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation
RIS	Regulatory Impact Statement
SATC	South Australian Tourism Commission
SOCO	Sydney Olympic Games Organising Committee
SRDRN	Social Relations of Disability Research Network
TA	Tourism authorities
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TDR	Tourism Destination Region
TGR	Tourism Generating Region
TI	Tourism Industry
TNSW	Tourism NSW
TQ	Tourism Queensland
TV	Tourism Victoria
TT	Tourism Tasmania
TTY	Tele-typewriter
WATC	Western Australian Tourism Commission
WADSC	Western Australian Disability Services Commission

CERTIFICATION

I, Simon Darcy, certify that the work contained in this Thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution and that the work is the original work of the candidate except where sources are acknowledged.

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Date: 15 December 2003

SYNOPSIS

Introduction

This thesis explores the citizenship rights of people with disabilities and their experience in relation to one activity and industry - tourism. It is proposed that people with disabilities living in Australia have been excluded, oppressed and disadvantaged by government, tourism authorities (TA) and tourism industry (TI), practice and discourses. This exclusion, oppression and disadvantage has been perpetrated by the government, tourism authorities and tourism industry, whose practices and discourses do not provide an equality of service provision for the group. From this position the central question addressed is:

To what extent are the tourism patterns and experiences of people with impairments in Australia unduly constrained by tourism authorities and tourism industry practice and discourse?

In taking direction from the social model of disability (Oliver 1990), the proposition deliberately uses the word impairments rather than disabilities as both a definitional and conceptual approach to the research. This is because the question tests whether the social relations produce the constraints that people with impairments face in negotiating tourism experiences and, hence, create disabling journeys. In other words, the disabling social relations transform the impaired person to the person with a disability in the tourism context. *Unduly* means that people with disabilities were not provided with an equality of service provision in comparison to the non-disabled.

Background and literature

The literature firstly provides a background on terminology used, human rights frameworks of Australian disability legislation and policy, and reviews disability statistics collection in Australia. This is followed by an outline of the major models and discourses for conceptualising disability, before the three main models are critically reviewed to provide an understanding of the major approaches to disability. These are the medical, social idealist and social models.

The disability and tourism literature documents a sporadic, ad-hoc and slow development of the field over the last 20 years. Empirically, the review reveals that large areas of disability tourism lack a substantial research base. While demand and supply have had some significant investigations, the role of government in the regulation and coordination of tourism has not been addressed. The geographic tourism systems should encompass all market segments but the subsequent review of research indicates that it has only begun to do so for people with disabilities. In many ways, the current treatment of disability in the tourism literature has been counter-productive. The research provides some understanding that the levels of tourism of people with disabilities are lower than those of the non-disabled, and the tourism constraints and needs of the group. Yet, there has been no subsequent explanation of why this group has the experiences that it has.

Method

The research design and methodology involves inductive inquiry utilising both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This includes a multiple methodological approach involving secondary data analysis of major national and regional surveys, content/discourse analysis, in-depth interviews and a focus group. The secondary data sources involved the *Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey* (ABS 1993; 1998 n=42,000),

National Visitors Survey (BTR 1998 n=78,000) and *Anxiety to Access* (Tourism NSW 1998 n=2647). A content analysis is undertaken of the HREOC (2002) complaint cases, public hearings, public inquiries, disability action plans and disability Standards projects relevant to tourism. A content analysis is also undertaken of tourism authorities' disability tourism initiatives from 1990-2000. In depth interviews are undertaken with three separate populations that include people with disabilities (n=15), accommodation managers (n=10) and responsible officers from tourism authorities (n=3). A focus group of accommodation managers (n=23) is also undertaken. The data are analysed and interpreted using binary logistic regression, ordinal logistic regression, phenomenology, grounded theory and discourse analysis.

Findings

Patterns

In Australia, people with impairments travel at significantly lower rates than the non-disabled. Subsequently, they constitute proportionally less of the travelling public than their proportion of the Australian population. People with impairments do not perceive their impairment as the reason for their non-participation in tourism but attribute non-participation, or reduced participation, to a series of structural constraints encountered. The tourism requirements of the group are dependent on their impairment, with the most marginalised travellers being those with mental health, vision, speech, mobility and hearing impairments. Impairment related considerations (type, level of independence and mobility aid) together with socio-demographic considerations of age, lifestyle situation, income, and geographic region are all statistically significant influences on the likelihood of an individual having a tourism experience. However, the number of trips taken each year is influenced purely by socio-demographic rather than impairment related considerations.

Experiences

The next chapter documents the lived tourism experiences of people with disabilities and the outcome of these experiences on the individuals. The chapter is deliberately in-depth to let the voices of people with disabilities be heard. People with disabilities reflect on their tourism experiences through the stages of travel including planning, transport, accommodation, destination experience and other considerations. From these reflections, it becomes evident that a series of substantial tourism constraints unduly affected their opportunities, patterns and experiences. However, contrary to Smith's (1987) conceptualisation of barriers to leisure travel, this research finds that many of the constraints thought to be intrapersonal or interpersonal are largely structural. Further, the interrelationship of structural constraints creates a socio-spatial tourism segregation of people with disabilities.

Explanation

The social relations of tourism for people with disabilities are explained through two interrelated areas. The first seeks to explain why people with disabilities have the tourism experiences documented in the thesis. This is found to be a product of the discourses of access and accessibility. People with disabilities have a highly individualised understanding of access that share a common set of experiences. However, their discourse of access varies substantially different to that of the TA and TI. The TA and TI understanding of access is non-existent or overly simplified and does not provide the level or detail of information for people with disabilities to make informed decisions about accessibility. The simplified understanding of access is a combination of the development of the environmental planning process and the process of assessing accessibility. These are

compounded by the TA and TI having little understanding of their responsibilities under the DDA. The implementation of the citizenship rights of people with disabilities through the DDA further compounds the discourses of access because of the individualised and confidential complaints cases. The research reveals that a discourse of inaccessibility exists that is multi-faceted and inextricably bound with social and economic power of TA, TI, design, planning, construction and operations sectors, that, together with government regulators, shape the tourism environment.

The second seeks to understand why TA and TI behave the way they do towards people with disabilities. Four approaches emerge to the treatment of disability by TA and the accommodation sector. These are: do nothing; be seen to be doing something; react to legislative requirements; and identify as a market segment. What becomes apparent is that most of TA and TI do not have disability on the tourism agenda. Organisations omit, undertake token initiatives or set a low priority for disability. This is attributable to a series of preconceptions about people with disabilities that constitute a medical model worldview that results in ableist practices. This discourse is underpinned by a market ideology founded on yield that values market segments for their perceived profitability to the nation or corporation. This leads to managers of the TA and TI making decisions that deliberately exclude people with disabilities from an equality of service provision. Reinforcing this ideology is the lack of recognition of the human rights discourse of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1992 that has had little to no impact on TA and TI. In effect, there is a clash of values between the desire held by people with disabilities for citizenship (human rights and social model) and an ableist, market driven discourse of the TA and TI.

Comprehensive Tourism Access Model (CoTAM)

CoTAM is presented as a model of disability tourism experiences. The model consists of four interrelated components. These components are:

- A. People with disabilities and their tourism experiences (demand);
- B. Tourism industry (supply) and tourism authorities (coordination) practice;
- C. Government human rights framework of the DDA (regulation);
- D. An explanation for the experiences of people with disabilities through the discourses (market ideology; ableism; and power) and the social relations of access (discourses of access; development of the environmental planning process; and implementation of disability citizenship rights).

CoTAM is framed within the geographic tourism system (TGR ⇌ TRANSIT ⇌ TDR). CoTAM offers an opportunity to include social model and constraint theory within tourism system development. The model is inclusive of all stakeholder positions of demand, supply and coordination/regulation.

Conclusion

The central argument to emerge from this thesis is that disability is a social relationship – or rather a complex set of social relationships – between people with disabilities, and the organisations that control and administer the institutional and social environments in which they live. Tourism represents an important arena for social and cultural participation. Given the commitment by governments to ‘reduce disability’ it is thus critical to consider whether the relationships in the area of tourism are disabling or enabling. The thesis shows that the practices and discourses of tourism authorities and the tourism industry unduly constrain the tourism opportunities and experiences of people with impairments in Australia and create disabling journeys.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to many people whose support made this thesis possible. In particular, I wish to thank the following:

- Foremost I would like to thank all those people with disabilities who contributed their time and experiences to the thesis for without their involvement this research would not be possible. I was overwhelmed by their generosity and their enthusiasm for travel. Secondly, I thank all those from government agencies and the tourism industry who contributed to this research directly and indirectly. In particular, those officers and managers of the tourism authorities and the accommodation sector who were willing to speak with me and provide an insight into the reasons for their organisation's behaviour towards people with disabilities.
- My supervisor Professor Tony Veal and co-supervisor Associate Professor Helen Meekosha (UNSW), for their guidance, support and professional mentoring. A Ph.D. cannot be undertaken without the sustained dedication of supervisors with an interest and expertise in the candidate's topic. Finding a supervisor is difficult but I was exceptionally lucky to find two supervisors whose interests and expertise complemented each other in a topic area that is interdisciplinary. I am deeply indebted to them for encouraging, enlightening and invigorating me over the long process that the Ph.D encompassed. I am particularly indebted to Tony for his interdisciplinary vision, theoretical rigour and his superb editorial eye.
- Dr David Pfeiffer, Resident Scholar at the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, for his encouragement to pursue the area of study, his invitation to present internationally and his engaging discussions. Sadly, David passed away in December 2003.
- The small band of scholars and practitioners who believe in the right of people with disabilities to enjoy tourism in every sense - Bruce Cameron, Dr. Pheroza Daruwalla, Jeff Heath and Dr. Beth Stark Foggin, to whom I am particularly indebted for their support, good humour and for fighting the good fight.
- The Social Relations of Disability Research Network for the critical space to inquire, present, question and nurture researchers with disabilities. To the core group members, Helen, Leanne, Lynne, Anne, Andrew, Karen, Judy and Mike, I wish to express my gratitude for your support and critical inquiry. I'd also like to acknowledge all those people who presented, attended and added to the diversity of the seminars, intellectually and socially.
- Dr Peter Petrocz, School of Mathematics UTS, for his direction and cheer with Chapter 7.
- Lawrence Franklin from Tourism NSW for having the insight to support the original study of the tourism patterns and experiences of people with disabilities. This support was continued by Jane Anderson with the development of the Disability Action Plan and implementation of disability awareness training.
- The Ageing and Disability Department of NSW for the provision of a research grant in 1999/2000 to investigate the supply side perceptions of providing goods and services for people with disabilities.
- The UTS Accelerated Doctoral Completion Leave Program of which I was a beneficiary. It provided a semester's teaching release that allowed a consolidated time to write up the research in Autumn Semester 2002.
- My colleagues in the School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism UTS, and in particular Tracy, Paul, Jennie, Stephen and Ravi, for their collegiality and cappuccino-related sustenance.
- To the examiners whose insightful thoughts have provided ideas for future publications.
- My family Karma, Tex and Monique who have been there supporting my academic endeavours throughout my life. Little Samuel J Darcy-Massey for reminding me that a Ph.D. is a Ph.D. and that there are many more important things like spending time with your nephew and learning the joys of Shrek, Bob the Builder, Spiderman & Nemo!
- Lastly, my wife Fiona for living through the Ph.D. melodrama with me, giving unconditional tender loving care when needed, and listening to my many rambling diatribes on the latest theoretical issue I was grappling with.

PREFACE

My interest in the problem derived from a chance involvement in research on the *Disabled People's International World Assembly* held in Sydney in December 1994 (Darcy 1995). Over 1000 delegates attended the World Assembly, approximately half of whom had disabilities. I thought that the World Assembly would be an opportunity to assess the delegates' experience of tourism in Australia and their perceptions of Sydney as an accessible city. This interest was both professional and personal. To an academic working in the area of environmental planning and public policy for leisure and tourism, the World Assembly delegates provided an outsider perspective on Australian responses to people with disabilities and the accessibility of Sydney as a destination. My interest was also as a person with a disability for whom the World Assembly was a turning point. It was my first experience of being part of the disability community in Sydney and was an event that stimulated my interest in advocacy, research and the politics of disability issues.

After the World Assembly had finished and I had completed gathering the questionnaire-based data, the preliminary results prompted a range of other questions. The major of these was 'what is known about the tourism experiences of people with disabilities?' Upon consulting the literature in Australia and overseas the answer emerged as a stark - 'not much'. This, in itself, was an insight into the status of disability and tourism as a focus of academic study and industry practice. From this position, I embarked on research into the tourism patterns and experiences of people with disabilities supported by Tourism NSW (Darcy 1998). In the time since this research began a lot more is known about tourism and people with disabilities. However, two recent incidents in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (MacLennan 2003) and the Commonwealth Government *Hansard* (Hansard 2003) highlighted that the struggle of people with disabilities for an equality of tourism service provision continues.

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December 2003