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**Accessible Tourism for the Visually Impaired in Catalonia:
Improving the Legal Framework**

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Abstract

This dissertation will help discover the barriers that people with visual impairment find when doing tourism. The researchers of the project found that there was a lack of acknowledgement of the blind market in the touristic sector and their ability to do tourist activities. Thus, resulting in the motivation to do a deeper research on the elements impeding this market from growing in the touristic sector. The dissertation will include the identification of whether the Catalan legislation and laws are enough to ensure that the needs of the blind people are covered and if they can enjoy their tourist activities, as any other traveler would. The study also checks if the current touristic companies in Catalonia are adapting their products for this emerging segment and which adjustments need to be done for tourism to be more accessible to the visually impaired tourists. The last objective is to make recommendations to improve the current Catalan laws to enable blind people to enjoy tourism and encourage them to be more comfortable in a touristic environment. The research is going to be done through analyzing academic journals about accessibility for disabled people and through interviews, surveys and observation research. Analyzing all these findings has allowed to identify the needs and requirements of the blind community when doing tourism and recommend to the touristic institutions how they can increase the current situation that people with a visual impairment find when doing tourism in Catalonia.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context of the Research

In tourism there are a lot of different possible clients for each touristic product; one of them being disabled people. It is a big piece of market that most companies are not taking into consideration, and even the laws are not really focused on this segment. The touristic companies in Barcelona are under the European, Spanish and Catalan regulations; regardless, it is not enough, there are really few laws and most of the people with incapacity are not able to enjoy most of the touristic products in the market.

The World Health Organization (2018) defines disability as a “complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person’s body and features of the society in which he or she lives.” There are six general types of disabilities: physical, visual, hearing, mental health, intellectual and learning. Moreover, accessible tourism is defined by Darcy and Dickson (2009, p. 32) as a type of tourism that “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.”

The touristic legislations in general mostly consider only physical impairment and companies are adapting their products by simply adding ramps and elevators which might solve some of the handicaps; nonetheless, that is not a solution for a deaf, blind or autistic person who will not be able to use a service if there are no other kinds of adjustments in the product. Firms are just working to fulfill the minimum requirements and only a few organizations are working ahead to really satisfy all the real needs of this kind of target.

1.2. Identification of the Research Problem

Everyday more and more disabled people want to travel and have a normal life and not just focus on making their day to day better. Tourism has become a necessity for everybody, and not just a luxury; with just some improvements in the market, people with disability would be able to fulfil this need. In addition, it is a human right to be able to participate in cultural, and recreational life; tourism is absolutely considered a basic right for all humans, and should be accessible in this case, for the disabled persons.

However, it looks like there is no interest from the touristic companies to make this sector accessible and the industry is just working on meeting the minimum requirements by law. After investigating the regulations on the topic, it was discovered that they are not enough because they do not guarantee the access to tourism to most of the individuals with some type of incapacity. There are really few businesses that are working to integrate their products to guarantee accessibility for everybody. Based on research done by Dimitrios Buhalis on accessible tourism, it can be concluded that there are three main issues that are not yet addressed in the accessibility market, which are, timeliness, relevance, and impact (Buhalis, 2003). These aspects are important to keep in mind as timeliness is necessary to update the long-term strategic plan and strategy changes in case the disabled segment moves forward; as well as relevance to the segment and the destination because both are constantly changing. And finally, by making accessible tourism an inclusive segment in the marketing strategy, the impact is kept of the overall inclusion a relevant topic and a normalized process. (Buhalis and Michopoulou, 2011, p. 148)

This thesis would like to contribute to improve the situation of this piece of market that is being excluded from tourism, a thing that nowadays is considered a need; consequently, everybody should be able to satisfy this necessity. It is essential to reduce the gap between the minimum law all the services need to have in the touristic market and the real need that the people with disability have when travelling. These much-needed product adaptations will change that way that disabled people see travelling and finally be able to enjoy this service without being segregated.

1.3. Originality and Contribution to Knowledge

The thesis started by searching for tourism articles with the regulations that the tourist companies must ensure that their products are adapted to all disabled people. Subsequently, researching information about the world of the handicapped, it was realized that the needs between one kind of disability and another are completely different and that the laws mostly just focus on physical adaptations while ignoring all the adaptations that the other disabilities required.

After searching for blind-specific tourism articles, the topic appears in really few academic papers and online press. Disabled tourism is becoming more important in the travel industry and for this reason, it is not clear why the topic is not acknowledged more. Thereby, it is necessary to study the blind market because it is not studied enough and the few laws made for the visually impaired are done together with the hearing impaired, as if the disabilities could be somewhat comparable or segmented together.

Considering that the tourists with the respective disabilities would need different services when arriving at the destination, it is crucial for the laws to also reflect the clear difference. For this reason, this research will study the blind market and analyze their needs. It will check if there are some laws that regulate what the touristic companies must adapt for this niche to be able to enjoy the same products as everyone else. As well, it will investigate if these regulations are enough, and in case it is not, propose adjustments for the current legislation to integrate the blind market so they can enjoy their free time travelling or travelling like everybody else.

1.4. Aim and Objectives

This Thesis is about improving the current tourist laws for blind people by eliminating the gap between the minimum requirements and the necessary needs in Catalonia. This project has four research objectives; the first one is to identify the barriers that blind people have when doing tourism. The second objective is to identify if the laws are enough to ensure that the needs of blind people are covered and they can do tourism. The third one is to identify which companies are taking into consideration the needs of the blind community and which adjustments are they doing to make its products to be accessible for the blind society. The last objective is to make a recommendation to improve the current Catalan law to enable blind people to enjoy tourism.

1.5. Structure of the Study

This study will be about the laws that regulate disabled tourism in Catalonia. After researching the topic profoundly, there was a clear gap between the current minimum laws and the real demands that people have regarding accessible tourism; specifically, with the visually impaired tourists. The first chapter will cover the chosen topic, the identification of the problem at hand, and why it is important for society to have this study created. The topic at hand is under-researched and this project will shed some light on a growing market that many businesses in the tourism industry need to acknowledge and adapt to. It will explain how the analysis made will help future entities and what objectives this paper has for the analysis in the long run.

Moreover, in the second chapter all the written research found will be disclosed on the topic and background information on the issue of accessible tourism. It will include a conclusion of the academic literature as well as, heavily analyzed articles and data statistics related to the research problem. A

conceptual framework and a literature map will also be included at the end of the second chapter as a small summary to help the reader. This will provide the investigation with enough background information to have a clear direction and understanding of the topic; it will also guide the reader towards a more concise idea and overall purpose.

The third chapter will focus on developing an effective methodology and explaining why it will complement the study. This will be done through the clarification of the ways that institutions can contribute to the inclusion of products and adaptabilities for these handicaps. In addition, the use of the previous knowledge acquired from the literary research and data will identify the best methods to achieve a more inclusive touristic future and use this to add more evidence and statistics acquired through the creation of interviews and surveys. This way, it will support ideas for the modification of the legislation in Catalonia. Also, how this information was collected will be included in this chapter and the individuals and organizations that made this study possible.

Chapter four will disclose the findings and the discussions. After having collected the research and analysis on the topic, a clear comparison will arise and contrast the literary reviews with the findings to find the needs that must be addressed in accessible tourism. A few conclusions regarding the methodology of the findings and how it may have contributed towards the outcome will be added. Therefore, it will also give the reader an insight into the implications that this study will have on higher powers such as the government and legislative organizations.

Finally, the last chapter will reference the conclusions and recommendations on the topic. The findings regarding the investigation and data will be mentioned and how it will be useful in the tourism industry in Catalonia. Recommendations will also be included and it is where our opinion will be added and how enterprises should address the issue with the limitations on disabled tourism. All the project as well as the limitations found will contribute to a better, inclusive future. At the end all the references used during the project are going to include an appendix where all the interviews and surveys handled during the research will be included.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions

To further discuss accessible tourism in Catalonia and how it can be improved further provided that the legislative regulations are modified, we first need to correctly define the terms that are most used in the subject at hand.

Darcy and Dickson (2009, p. 5) define accessible tourism as “a process of enabling people with disabilities and seniors to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universal tourism products, services and environments.” This definition was chosen due to importance that it gives to their independence, equity and dignity. In this sense, it is simple to say that if a tourist destination, company or facility does not give people with extra needs the freedom to travel independently, and without needing extra aid from tourist destinations, it will not give them the possibility of enjoying their travels as others might. In addition, Darcy and Dickson (2009, p. 6) also stress in their journal that the Tourism New South Wales noted that “Accessible tourism is about making it easy for all people to enjoy tourism experiences.” This way, finalizing the thought that accessible tourism is not only meant to include the minimum requirements by law to allow access to the people that need it; it is about their enjoyment and comfortability in the destination.

The World Health Organization and the United Nations Enable draw a distinction between an impairment and a disability; more specifically they state that “an impairment is any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function” and that a “disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being” (Buhalis and Michopoulou, 2011, p. 146). Likewise, according to Irena Szewczyk, a handicap is a “disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or a disability that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex, and cultural factors) for that individual” (Szewczyk, 2015, p. 371).

The definitions of visual impairment, low vision and blindness can be found in the Bulletin of World Health Organization (2004), where they define the three aspects of blindness to clarify the difference. Visual impairment is an inclusion of both low vision and blindness, it englobes the disability category. Furthermore, they define low vision as a visual acuity of less than 6/18, but equal to or better

than 3/60, or a corresponding visual field loss to less than 20 degrees in the better eye with best possible correction (ICD-10 visual impairment categories 1 and 2) [and] blindness is defined as visual acuity of less than 3/60, or a corresponding visual field loss to less than 10 degrees in the better eye with best possible correction (ICD-10 visual impairment categories 3, 4 and 5).”

2.2. Why we Need to Discuss Accessible Tourism

Disabled tourism is a segment that is disregarded as a profitable segment for tourist destination. Many believe that making tourism accessible is unnecessary and too much work; this is due to a large misconception about the needs of disabled people when travelling and the thought that adapting facilities is costly, which causes a lot of tourist companies to show indifference towards the market (Buhalis and Michopoulou, 2011, p. 147). This leads to many firms only complying with the legislative requirements; however, these efforts are hardly enough for the various disabilities that need to be considered in travelling needs. Souca Maria Luiza states in her article that there are two potential reasons for the disinterest in accessible tourism: there is little research on the topic and that there is a perception that accessible tourism will not generate a lot of income for the tourist companies (Maria Luiza, 2010, p.1155).

Michopoulou and Buhalis (2013, p.229) stated that the elderly and the disabled population make up over 125 million people in Europe alone; and that this number is expected to increase in the next 30 years. And although this is a very high number, considering that the population in 2013 in Europe was 740 million according to the World Population Data Sheet, this means that almost 17% of the European population are not being acknowledged as potential touristic customers.

According to Buhalis et al (2015, p.181), a GfK survey is held every year for European citizens, and the results in 2015 showed that over 50% of the European population with disabilities do not travel when they have holidays due to the lack of information on their options, lack of personal funds, and from previous bad experiences while travelling. Although this percentage does not travel for their respective reasons, that does not mean that they do not wish to be able to travel on their own terms if they could. This means that it is not their handicap that stops them from travelling, it is for either personal reasons or for the destination’s incapacity of welcoming and integrating a disabled tourist.

Clinton (2013, p.17) made an argument in his article where he explains how accessibility is in no way a setback for anybody. Although the process towards a more accessible environment may be a temporary obstruction, the benefits that a disabled individual will be able to enjoy afterwards will not

take back benefits from the other market segments. He clearly states that “the benefit that one person can experience from accessibility in the physical environment and in information and communication technologies does not diminish opportunities for others to enjoy the “ease and flexibility” of using an accessible good or service at national, regional or global levels”. Supporting this thought, the theory of public goods was studied by Professor Paul Samuelson, which identified two categories of consumption: private consumption and collective consumption. Private consumption goods are individual satisfactory goods; it is not sharable as it is for a private preference. Nonetheless, a collective consumption good, is a good that is enjoyed collectively as a group knowing that it does not take away from the individual goods of each member (Randall, 1997, p.2). Thereby, Clinton (2013, p.17) sees accessibility advancements as a ‘global public good’, in which all individual tourists can enjoy the benefits of accessibility without taking away individual enjoyment.

Michopoulou, Darcy, Ambrose, and Buhalis, (2015, p.183) stated in their article that “the tourism environment of the future needs to be designed in a way that allows for interaction between a person’s abilities, their support needs and the assistive technologies to allow for the enjoyment of all”. The authors previously mentioned, have generated a substantial amount of research on the matter, and the fact that although accessibility for all is a crucial part of tourism development, it is still to be given more attention by countries and tourism firms all over the world. They speak strongly of the significance of Universal Design and how “applying the principles of UD can be seen as a way of developing tourism environments, transportation, services and offers, underpinning sustainable communities and businesses. [...] Adopting UD enlarges the target markets of destinations as well as ensures that more pleasant experiences can be delivered.” (Buhalis et al, 2015, p.184).

2.3. Market Size and Economic Impact

There are over 650 million disabled people globally, symbolizing 10% of the world population (Fujiura and Rutkowskikmitta, 2001). This percentage might seem small but this does not mean that the turnover profits made with this segment is low-yield.

Disabled tourism is still a relatively new market and it has been seen that tour operators can have a lot of profit if they invest and expand in this market. According to Jim Tobias, the president of Inclusive Technologies, “People with disabilities have the tendency to become brand evangelists for the brand they love; if a consumer would tell another 10 people about their favorite product, people with disabilities

could tell 10 times more people” (Hsu & Powers, 2002). The Department of Culture, Media and Sports created a statistics report in the UK in 2010 concluding that disabled tourist is a potential market and easily to create loyalties if you adjust your product for them. James Bowtell (2015, p.205-206) argues they “become regular clients after finding a tourism facility that suits their needs [, they] tend to take longer holiday breaks than the average [and they] tend not to travel alone”. About the economic situation of people with disabilities Horgan-Jones and Ringaert (2004) and Van Horn (2002) say that “The myths that persons with disabilities are poor have been proven wrong through research concluding that disabled tourism tend to spend more per day than able-bodied tourists”. “Disabled citizens in Germany for example would be willing to pay between 1000€ and 2000€ more for suitable tourism products and services than the able bodies tourism” (BMWA, 2004). “The German Federal Ministry of Economics and Labor found on average, [that] the disabled tourist spends 1.16 times more than the able bodies tourist” (Bowtell, 2015, p.206). According to James Bowtell (2015, p.206) in Germany disable people travel much less due to lack of accessible products and service available. “On average people with disabilities take an average of 1.3 holidays and 2.3 short breaks a year; however, the travel seasonality of disabled tourists differs from the able-bodied tourist. Once an appropriated destination has been selected by the disabled traveler, they tend to ensure they make use of the low season for their holiday, subsequently avoiding crowded places.” (BMWA, 2004)

According to Leidner (2006, p.2) “About 10% of the population, 50 million people, in Europe is officially acknowledged disabled.” Nonetheless, if we add the seniors and the people temporarily disabled “it can be estimated than about 30% of the population may feel uneasy when travelling, or rather, would travel more when the environment would be better accessible. A study of the OSSATTE project estimates that the market potential for tourists with accessibility needs at even 230 million people representing travel expenditures of about €160 billion” (Leidner, 2006, p.2). By not adapting the tourism sector and undermining travelers because of existing barriers means “a lack of turnover in the tourism sector, less economic growth and employment than possible. Furthermore, it must be considered that a higher degree of accessibility simultaneously results in more quality” (Leidner, 2006, p.2).

A survey into travel habits of approximately 4000 German disabled people concluded that “About 40% of them had already at least once renounced going on holiday because of too many barriers and nearly 50% said they would travel more, if the environment was more accessible” (Leidner, 2006, p.3). If we take into consideration these last numbers and that disabled people spent above the amount spent by the average tourist and taking into consideration that disabled travelers don’t usually travel alone, by

not adapting the touristic products, the German tourist sector is losing a lot of money. “The researchers forecast that the turnover yielded with disabled German tourist might rise from currently €2.5 billion to €4.8 billion in an accessible tourist environment resulting 90,000 additional jobs (currently 65,000). The creation of an accessible service chain in the tourism sector contributes to economic growth and employment and cannot be considered as social welfare” (Leidner, 2006, p.3).

2.4. Legislative Behavior

2.4.1. Human Rights

There have been international and national legal actions taken amid the inclusion of accessibility for all in tourism. But despite their efforts being acknowledged and being a step forward towards a substantial legal accessibility act, they are not sufficient to ensure equality for disabled people (Buhalis et al, 2007, p.7). However, as Imrie (1999) argues “disabled people’s views are incorporated as an afterthought, thus leading to the assumption that information access schemes are dominated by the able-bodied population. The resulting standards set by able-bodied persons might be too low to satisfy the needs of the disabled individuals.” (Buhalis et al, 2007, p.8)

Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that the State Parties (A/RES/2200A(XXI)): “recognize the right of everyone:

- (a) To take part in cultural life;
- (b) To enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications”

Moreover, Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/61/106) states that “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity [...]

- (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- (b) [...]
- (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country”

2.4.2. International Legislation

The United Nations has a large control over what the minimum requirements for tourism businesses should be regarding disabled tourists. In 1990, they released the *Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities*, which according to James Bowtell states that, “in all societies there are still obstacles preventing persons with disabilities from exercising their rights and freedoms. These obstacles make it difficult for them to participate fully in the activity of their societies and it’s the responsibility of states to take appropriate action to remove such obstacles” (Bowtell, 2015, p.207).

The CRPWD was present with the first article stating the purpose of the convention in which it stated that it serves “to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity” and it is currently signed and ratified or accessioned by 519 countries or regional integration organizations. The convention itself is signed by 161 members and ratified/accessioned by 177 members. Furthermore, the Optional Protocol is signed by 92 members and ratified/accessioned by 92 members as of the 5 April 2018. In which Spain, is a ratified/ accessioned country for both the convention and the optional protocol (UN, 2006).

Article 3 of the convention (A/RES/61/106) also presents the principles of the resolution in which we can find the following 8 segments:

- (a) Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons;
- (b) Non-discrimination;
- (c) Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
- (d) Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
- (e) Equality of opportunity;
- (f) Accessibility;
- (g) Equality between men and women;

(h) Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

Although the minimum requirements by legislation and the United Nations, as well as disabled individuals themselves together with representing associations are a step towards a more inclusive tourist environment. Upchurch and Won (1996) concluded “compliance with legislation in the tourism industry is often not met and a lack of understanding is apparent” (Bowtell, 2015, p.213). Bowtell as well as many other experts in the matter, commented on the fact that legislation is not always acknowledged the way it should in the tourism industry and especially when it refers to accessibility. For instance, O’Neill and Ali Knight (2000, p.171) clearly stated in their article that “the biggest threat faced by the hotel industry is its very ignorance of its obligations under the legislation.” Furthermore, Bowtell (2015, p.213) also commented on the matter saying that “public policy in tourism can be linked to more general social policies of disability and exclusion in order to facilitate the full integration of disabled people into the tourism industry”.

2.4.3. European Legislation

On a European level Leidner (2006, p.3) investigated the governmental activities and actions taken towards creating a fully accessible continent with no discrimination on people with deficiencies. There are many EU Member States that have participated in entering disability acts or anti-discrimination acts in their country, and “authorities are often obliged to design their websites according to the international accessibility standards” Leidner (2006, p.3) about internet and public transport. Notwithstanding, it seems that hotels and restaurants are not as inclusive, as most Member States have a construction legislation which forces hotels to include an obligatory number of rooms accessible for wheelchairs, which fails to provide accessibility to guests with other disabilities. Leidner says that “even in Member States where legislation and standards on the construction of public buildings invite owners to provide accessibility measures for blind people (ex. Elevators with synthetic voice, guidance stripes to be followed using the white cane) or visually impaired people (high contrast design) this legislation is, maybe with the exception of the United Kingdom, not applied in hotels and restaurants” (Leidner, 2006, p.3). The United Kingdom has a legislation that in comparison to other European countries exceeds the expectations of the norm and thinks of a more global understanding of the accessibility needs of the disabled. It is also reflected in

the British Disability Discrimination Act that places duties on providers of goods, services and facilities to not discriminate against people with disabilities” (Leidner, 2006, p.3).

Moreover, the European Commission published an article in 2005 addressing accessible tourism information that was considered important for European countries to know. This article is a guide for people to be able to deal with disabled tourists without facing problems; it gives tips and helps guides based on different disabilities such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical impairment and learning difficulties. It also provides hoteliers with a checklist to facilitate assessment of their establishment and whether it is fit for people with some sort of disability. However, Leidner (2006, p.7) still argues that “a positive self-evaluation does not result in having the right to use a (European-wide) accessibility label”. In addition, the EU funded the ‘European network for accessible tourism’ in 2005, which can be accessed through www.accessbletourism.org and where people can find more information about accessibility in European cities. In 1996, the European Disability Forum (EDF) was created by disabled members in Europe and their representative organizations to make sure that no decisions on policies or initiatives that have a direct impact on disabled people are taken by the European Union without consulting them first.

2.4.4. Spanish Legislation

Spanish legislation regarding accessibility, is presented in the Official State Bulletin of 2013, with The Royal Legislative Decree, 1/2013, of the 29 of November, approved for the General Law of the Right of the Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion (BOE 289, 3 December 2013). The Decree mentions in Article 23, clause 2, that the basic conditions of accessibility for each area must be to avoid discrimination and reduce difficulties for the disabled. This clause includes accessibility to buildings and surroundings, instruments and equipment, as well as technology and other products needed in the area. This is extremely vague and does not specify in which areas this must be applied as well as which tools must be accessible as it is nearly impossible for all areas in the country to be adapted. The rest of the legislation is more oriented towards acceptance and inclusion of the disabled into a normalized society and workplace, rather than the accessibility to physical places.

There are also various Spanish laws regarding the accessibility requirements that were published in several years such as, the 15/95 law, about the limits on buildings for eliminating architectonic barriers for people with disabilities (BOE 31/05/95). The Royal Decree 505/2007, of the 20th of April, approved

the basic conditions of accessibility and non-discrimination against people with disabilities for the access and use of public spaces and buildings (BOE 11/05/07). Specifically, for the blind, there is only one law regulating visual impairment and it is the Royal Decree 3250/83, in which they regulate the use of guide dogs for visually impaired people (BOE 02/01/84).

2.4.5. Catalan Legislation

In terms of specific Catalan laws towards accessibility, there are very similar laws to the Spanish legislations which simply support them. In specific visually impaired laws, there is the 10/93 Law, of October 8, which regulates the surrounding accessibility of people with a visual deficiency accompanied by guide dogs. The *Generalitat de Catalunya* has been making many more progresses than the Spanish government laws, as it has included more specific laws to follow in the community. They published the Official Diary of the Catalan Government, Law 13/2014, of the 30th of October, Accessibility, where the President of Catalonia had as an objective, to establish the conditions in which necessary accessibility must be in public spaces and buildings, integrate the basic conditions of accessibility on the normative framework of Catalonia, and promote the use of products to support accessibility which will improve living conditions for disabled people. Article 35 of this law states that the cultural, sport and recreation activities organized in nature will be communicably adapted so that people with mobility, sensory and intellectual disability will be able to enjoy the activity as much as others (13/2014).

Although legally there have not been many improvements made for Catalonia, there have been a series of actions taken by associations and disabled people themselves together with the *Generalitat de Catalunya* that are looking to improve the conditions of the community. One of the most promising projects is 'La Visió 2020 pel Turisme Responsable de Catalunya: La Declaració de Barcelona' (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016) in which they largely discuss sustainable and responsible tourism for the region, and which actions they plan on taking by the year 2020 for a better touristic future. However, they also included a part about 'Accessibility for all', where they specify that as it every human person has the right to relax and recreation that allows them to fully develop their personality and social integration; it is only normal that they tourism to exercise this right. The project states that regarding accessibility, they plan on:

- Having a strong commitment to the social inclusion of people with disabilities, offering services and training that guarantee accessibility in all areas and allow them to develop autonomously and actively participate in their environment.

- Promote 'Tourism for all' as an action for the universal accessibility of natural and cultural resources, sports, communications, events, etc.
- Progressive elimination of architectural barriers in different areas, such as roads, public buildings, transportation and communication.
- The tourism industry and the interested parties must have the responsibility to apply or support programs and actions that guarantee access to all tourists, recognizing the potential of this market segment as a business opportunity and a means to contribute to economic and social development.
- Social tourism activities must be characterized to offer special care to the total quality, both in terms of facilities and the service of the staff.
- Recommends that the monitoring, evaluation and reporting be part of the global declaration. (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016)

2.5. Needs and Requirements of Disabled People

Lee, Agarwal, and Kim (2011, p.570) mention that many scholars define and explain tourism constraints as a different experience or segments in which we can analyze each traveler; and although each specialist sees it differently, they all agree that tourism constraint is multidimensional.

Previous information of the destination's accessibility is crucial when a disabled person is planning a trip as many writers have expressed. Shaw and Coles (2004) make a fair argument about how "without sufficient information regarding accessible destinations, people with disabilities are unsure if their physical needs can be met and may therefore refrain from travelling, and so fail to satisfy important social and psychological needs that include the desire to travel for rest, relaxation, the feeling of freedom, opportunities for social interaction and the experience of visiting new places." (Buhalis et al, 2007, p.4) The experiences that hold disabled people back can clearly affect their psychological well-being and this should not be something that any human-being must worry about. Yau and Packer (2004) say that although this is a very extensively researched topic, it still lacks theoretical framework for improving and understanding the situation. In support of these claims, Buhalis et al (2007, p.5) mentioned that after a close look at what citizens with access requirements need when visiting new environments, many follow a multi-source planning approach because a single source of information is usually insufficient in what they need to know, only partly accurate on the information given or completely inaccessible.

The needs and requirements of the disabled market can be grouped into three main categories according to Buhalis and Michopoulou (2011, p.158): Accessibility of physical/built environment, information regarding accessibility, and accessible information.

Firstly, there are various physical barriers that people with all types of disabilities face when travelling or including in their everyday lives. Consequently, Eleni Michopoulou and Dimitros Buhalis mention a series of mistakes that tourism facilities make and the lack of interest that the tourist destinations give towards accessibility for all tourists. For example, “steps, stairs, and heavy doors for people with mobility impairment; inadequate lighting, poor color contrast, lack of tactile guide paths for visually impaired people; and lack of induction loops and alternative fire alarm signals for people with hearing impairments.” (Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2013, p.230) This causes a lot of disabled tourists to believe that they cannot travel at all.

Secondly, a critical issue that needs to be addressed is the insufficient information in the tourist facilities for the tourists with incapacities, because although “facilities [may be] accessible, unless they provide relevant information regarding accessibility, disabled travelers will not be able to complete their planning process and engage in travel.” (Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2013, p.230). Furthermore, Miller and Kirk (2002) argue that “the higher level of accessibility requirements, the more inadequate the provision of specialized and detailed information tends to be.” Meaning that there is less specialized information as the handicap level gets higher (Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2013, p.230). This may be due to the lack of products available or because of the smaller number of individuals that have these high levels of deficiency. Despite these reasons, simply having one customer with a high level of impediment should justify making the destination as accessible as possible for all tourists. In addition, it is relevant to mention the objectivity of this issue, as Michopoulou and Buhalis argue (2013, p.230); “Objectivity allows the disabled person to judge for his or herself the suitability of a facility, rather than relying on the perception of the facility owner or assessor [...] Objective information also allows the disabled user to select between factors if there are no ideal conditions in the market [and it] enables trade-offs between attributes.” All these aspects add to the unfamiliarly risk factor that disabled tourists face constantly, including the fact that tourist information is often scattered in the geographical areas and the impediment becomes higher for some tourists, especially if they are in an unfamiliar place and outside of their comfort zone.

Finally, the use of accessible online information is an aspect that is clearly needed by disabled users planning on traveling. However, it is also where most people with disabilities have the most trouble due to the variety between websites in reliability, adequacy and accessibility. Drews and Schemer (2010),

mention that a very large number of disabled people use social media, travel review platforms and video-sharing platforms to get the most trustworthy information on accessible tourism (Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2013, p.231). This meaning that disabled tourists find that reviews are more valuable if it comes from a first-hand deficient traveler's perspective. There are also extra assisting technologies needed for people with impediment regarding technological tools, such as screen readers, alternative keyboards, and refreshable Braille displays. For these accessible tools to work, it is also necessary for the websites to be accessible; thereby "accessible design is essential to allow people with disabilities to use the internet more efficiently." (Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2013, p.231)

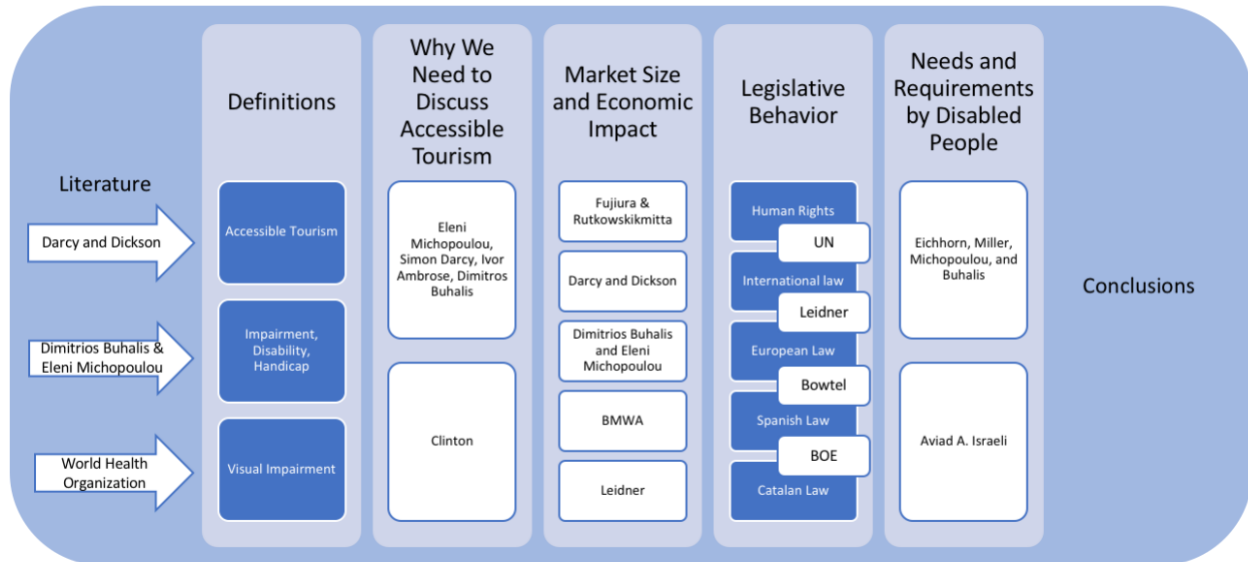
As mentioned previously, Michopoulou and Buhalis (2013, p.232) have a clear idea of what the integration of the disabled tourists could look like; they focus mostly on the gap between what tourism currently looks like and what disabled travelers need it to be. The biggest issue that they find is the lack of adequate information that disabled travelers fail to find when planning a trip. They mention that in general tourist destination will have the necessary information available, but scattered over a range of organizations such as Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), national, regional or local accessibility schemes, hotel aggregators, etc. It is quite difficult for the disabled traveler to find the information necessary to plan a trip in the first place. Additionally, as well as the information being hard to find, there is also the language barrier that some may find while researching all this information. Furthermore, they argue that after a survey was conducted it was concluded that "of 43 accessibility schemes in 19 countries [...] although these organizations provide accessibility specific information, the content primarily focused on mobility impairments and neglects other types of disabilities" (Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2013, p.232), which further confirms their previous argument of inadequate provision of specialized information for the big range of disabilities.

Moreover, Aviad A. Israeli (2002, p.103) argues that there are two approaches for evaluating the destination's approaches towards accessibility in their tourist facilities: compensatory and non-compensatory. Compensatory would be the type of tourism that although they might have a negative experience in one aspect of their trip, there are other attributes that make up for it and in the end of it all, the trip is not a complete failure. In this case, some may even consider returning to the destination. However, Israeli suggests that this is not usually the case and that it normally is a non-compensatory trip. This suggests 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)." Thereby implying

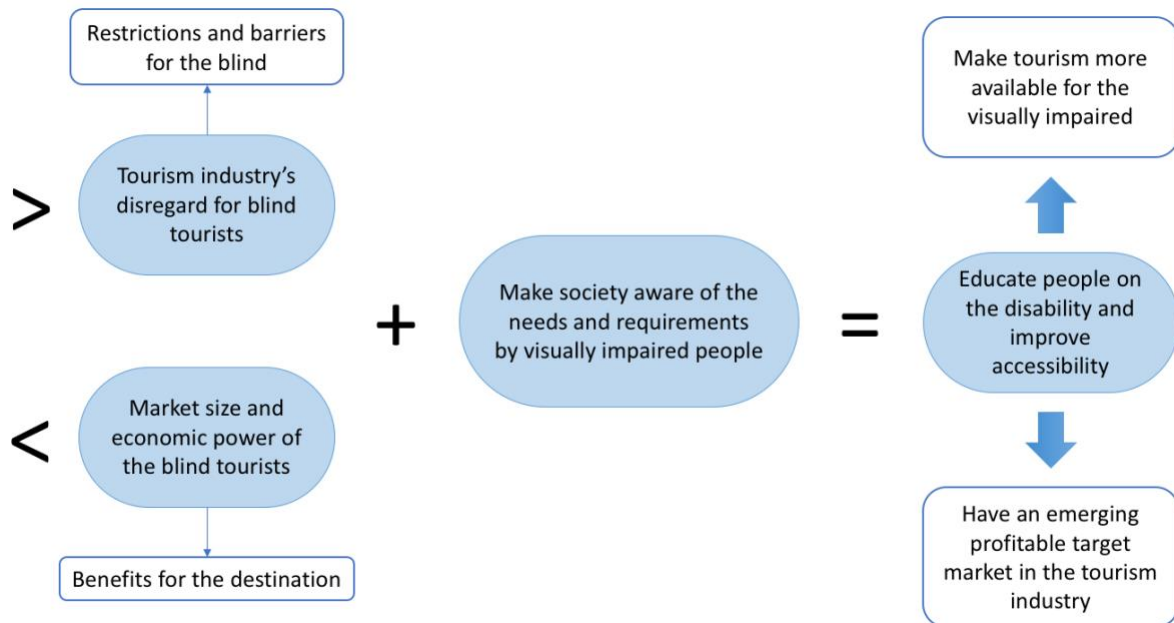
that, if the most important factors of the trip are present or not, will determine if the travelers will return to the destination, regardless of the positive efforts in other aspects.

Thereby, Buhalis et al (2007, p.6) brought to light in their journal article that the emergence of the internet is one of the best upbringings for the disabled tourist as it gives them an independent information source with which to plan their holidays. Independence is one, if not the most important aspect for the visually impaired when travelling and as mentioned previously, the fact that online adaptations are more and more popular, it makes universal design a more achievable goal. There are many actions being taken regarding the inclusion of disabled people to express their rights and be acknowledged on a global standpoint in every legal decision. From an economic point of view, there has been more than enough data collected to conclude that the disabled market is still to be explored and that it can be of benefit for a lot of tourist destination. The disregard of disabled tourists in public establishments calls for more attention from the tourist sector to improve their organizations and adapt the tourist destinations as much as possible. This would make the disabled segment appreciate the extra effort as well as bring more profits to the tourist business.

2.6. Literature Map



2.7. Conceptual Framework



3. Methodology

3.1. Research design, data collection techniques, research instruments and data analysis

To get a proposal to improve the current laws in Catalonia by eliminating the gap between the real needs of the blind people and the regulations that the *Generalitat* imposes to the touristic sector in the laws, this thesis is going to contain primary and secondary research and some will be qualitative and some quantitative. By doing these the thesis will get more accurate results because it will have first-hand information analyzed especially for the thesis and information from specialists in the material already analyzed and studied.

This first part of the thesis contains primary qualitative research. It will start by analyzing the laws that are uploaded on the web page of the United Nations, European Union, the 'Boletín Oficial de Estado' and the *Generalitat* in relation to tourism requirements that the tourism sector must do to remove the barriers that the blind people have when travelling. After this the research is going to continue with some more primary qualitative research through interviews of some people from the *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment* and *ONCE (Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles)* to get first-hand information of the real needs that blind people have when doing tourism and which barriers they find. With these interviews the requirements by law will be found and followed by the industry; if disabled people are able to travel and enjoy tourism; if the accessibility in the tourism sector is good; what would they need to travel successfully and to know if they always need as assistance to travel. Subsequently, the thesis is going to contain some primary quantitative research by including some surveys done to blind people asking what they think about accessibility in Catalonia, about the kind of tourism that they do and which barriers they find. The surveys are going to be done through the web page 'survey monkey' <https://es.surveymonkey.com/> and are going to be anonymous and relevant by englobing people from different ages and backgrounds. The thesis is going to include secondary qualitative information as well by including studies already done by other people talking about the situation of disabled people and the barriers that these people find when doing tourism. This data is going to be analyzed to gain more information about the topic and to check if the results found in the interviews and done in this paper have the same focus of the authors from these articles and journals mentioned above. Simultaneously some primary qualitative research will be done through observation. Firstly, observation research will be

acquired in ILUNION Hotel and in Inout Hostel to compare the adaptations done in two different tourist accommodations where people with disabilities must spend time. The first place is known for being an example of accessible place and the second one for having the 95% of the employees with disabilities. Later another observation research will be done during a touristic activity for people with visual impairment to know how it is prepared, organized and the adaptations that need to be done to be successful.

Later this study continues by analyzing all the information obtained with the interviews, the surveys, the research done and the observation to find if there is gap between the needs of the blind society and the minimum requirements that the touristic companies have by law. A check will be done to know if the businesses are meeting with the minimum requirements.

To conclude, the thesis is going to contain a summary of the research done and then a purpose of improvement of the actual Catalan law to better integrate the blind community in the Catalan tourism. To do that the paper is going to contain solutions for the barriers not being taking into consideration found in the previous point. To obtain ideas of possible adaptations that the touristic products can add, further secondary qualitative research is going to be done in newspaper regarding adaptations done in some existing touristic products and that are obtaining good results. Also, in the interviews to the visually impaired people mentioned in the first part of the investigation, there will be questions about adjustments that they found to some touristic product and that can be solutions to their problems. After analyzing possible solutions that would eliminate the barriers that don't allow the blind community to do tourism it is possible to write improvements of the actual Catalan laws related to the adaptations that tourist companies must do to be more accessible for the people with visual impairment.

3.2. Research context and participants

On Thursday 15th of March C.J.B. was interviewed; he is 30 years old and he works in *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment* as trainer, social communicator and event presenter. He has a visual impairment and is as well an associate and a volunteer. On Thursday 5th of April J.P. was interviewed; he has a visual impairment and he works in La ONCE Catalunya as the head of the Department of Sport and Culture. They were chosen because as blind persons they could give their personal point of view of the problems that the community has and as well because they work in the sector they could give the view of experts on the topic. *Catalonia's Association of Visual*

Impairment is in 'Carrer del Cardenal Reig, 32, 08028 Barcelona' and they were contacted by email. *ONCE* is in 'Carrer Sepúlveda, 1, 08015, Barcelona' and they were also contacted by email.

On Thursday 12th of April an observation research was done in ILUNION Hotel Barcelona at Carrer de Ramon Turró, 196-198, 08005 Barcelona and on Sunday 15th April in Inout Hostel at Carrer Major del Rector, 2, 08017 Barcelona. The objective was to check how adapted the installations were and which kind of adaptations were done to be accessible for the people with visual impairment.

On Sunday 22th of April an observation research was done participating with *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment* in a touristic activity in Collserola as some sighted members.

When doing the surveys there was a complication in getting the answers because for blind people it requires much more time to read an email and find where is the link to the questionnaire and then answer it. For this reason, *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment* offered that instead of providing the email of the associates to do the surveys, to provide the list of telephones of the associates and contact the associates by phone. This required much more time but the results for the study were more accurate because more people answered.

30 associates accepted to participate in the survey. All the people interviewed were adults with visual impairment. The survey was created using the webpage [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) and all the answers obtained were introduced there to obtain graphics to analyze the information and draw conclusions.

3.3. Ethical considerations

To overcome the ethical risk and issues of confidentiality the Ethics Form was signed at the beginning of the project with the supervisor agreeing that the confidentiality of the people that accepted to participate in the project with interviews and surveys was going to be respected. [Appendix 1]

Before all the interviews a consent form was signed with the person interviewed to make sure that the person interviewed knew what the aim of the project was and that he was giving consent to use the information explained for the project. [Appendix 2 and 3]

In addition, when the telephonic surveys were being done before doing each interview the following consent form was read and they were asked if they accepted to participate in the survey. Below is the text read to the participants of the questionnaires:

Hello we are calling from *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment*, we are Irene Pujol and Marta Vergés and for our degree Thesis we would need your collaboration. This research is being conducted as part of a Degree Thesis project for students of HTSI School of Tourism and Hospitality Management. The purpose of the study is to study the difficulties that people with visual impairment find when doing tourism and checking if these needs and adaptations that this market segment has when travelling are covered by law and if the touristic companies are making adaptations to comply with the law. You have been chosen to participate as you are part of *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment* and you have visual disability.

The information you give in the questionnaire will be used in the research project and later publications. Your personal data will be kept strictly confidential. All participants in this study will remain anonymous and information that could lead to the identification of individuals will be concealed within the final report.

By completing and submitting the questionnaire, you are giving consent for the information you provide to be used in the dissertation project and publications. Would you agree to spend 5 minutes answering the survey that we have prepared?

Because the surveys were done through telephone and the association was providing with telephone contacts of their associates another consent form was signed between both parties agreeing that the contacts were just going to be used for the project and that the information obtained was not going to be shared for other functions. [Appendix 4]

4. Findings and Discussions

To find data about visually impaired people some groundwork was done. The first investigation was secondary qualitative research through all the literature review that was found speaking about disabilities. Then primary qualitative research was done with two interviews to blind people working in two different associations of blind people. Afterwards, to obtain more primary qualitative research, it was done observation research in two hotels and in a tourist activity that a group of people with visual impairment did. To conclude, primary quantitative research was done collecting data through surveys done to different people with visual impairment.

4.1. Literature Review

Many authors agree that the disabled segment of tourists can bring a lot of economic benefits for tourist destinations and that it is a misconception of tourist establishments to ignore them as potential customers. Some people with disabilities refrain from travelling due to the insufficient adaptabilities in the sector and this does not comply with the human rights legislation, where it mentions that every human being has the right to take part in cultural life as well as have access to the public services of its country.

The legislation and laws about the disabled tourists are mostly recommendations and guides to how to make tourist organizations more accessible. In accordance to the laws that must be followed, they do not truly mention the visually impaired and there are not universal requirements that include people with impairment.

The needs and requirements by the disabled individuals are not as expensive and demanding as they seem. Accessible information is the most repeated need that all people with an impairment ask to have at hand. The rest are more directed to specific disabilities in which most are physical disabilities.

4.2. Interviews

Two interviews were done to professionals in the visually impaired community to find out from a first-hand experience what their true needs are in the tourist sector and how they currently felt about the legislation surrounding their segment. The first interview was conducted through *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment*, to C.J.B., the Trainer, Social Communicator and Event Presenter of the institution. He explained his experience as a person with a visual disability from birth which gradually has become harsher and eventually will take over his full vision. [Appendix 5] The second interview was conducted at the ONCE, where J.P., the head of the Department of Sport and Culture, introduced us to a different perspective on his personal experience as a blind individual and how his company works towards a more socially accepted culture of the visually impaired and the integration of the blind community into social acceptance. [Appendix 6]

Firstly, C.J.B. is originally from Argentina; he explained how apart from the capital city, Argentina is not the most adapted country in the world and that Barcelona in comparison, is a disabled person's dream. He walked us through what blind people need when travelling or doing tourism in cities, and the main takeaways were that they need things that they can touch, audio

guides, personnel trainings in public establishments so that employees know how to interact with blind guests, and adapted websites. Most of the websites are adapted so they can be read through voice over; nonetheless there are still a few websites which are not up to date which makes online reservations a struggle. Visiting museums, monuments and cities is completely doable for a blind person, the only difference is that they travel through their other senses, and that they simply have a different perspective. Instead of walking around a museum looking at the art, he simply sits in the middle of the building and listens to the description and history of each painting, he pays attention to how wide the streets and metros are and how many stairs there are in Paris, and when on top of the Eiffel Tower he noticed how windy it was from the second floor, rather than the city views, the most important thing when travelling for C.J.B. was the food. As mentioned, the other senses play a very important part of the visit and gastronomy is one of the most diverse aspects of each country. When asked about accessibility in other countries, C.J.B. explained how the accessibility standards were great in Paris but even then, he disliked the city because people were too quiet in the streets and public transport. Notwithstanding, Rome was a mess regarding accessibility, but due to their loud personality, he loved every single aspect of the city. In addition, he explained a little about the association and what they do for their clients; they were working on an accessible travel guide where their associates could be comfortable in knowing what was accessible for them in the city.

Secondly, J.P. explained how he travels quite often due to his job responsibilities and that although for leisure he travels only once a year. It is not because of his disability, rather than simply time constraints. He gave us an insight on all the processes to travel, which are very similar to those of visually able people. First, information on the destination is needed, which can sometimes be difficult if the webpages are not adapted for voice over features. This obliges them to spend more time than necessary looking for information online. One of the websites that J.P. mentioned was Renfe, although their Attendo service for disabled clients is exceptional, their website is mostly based on pictures and graphs which cannot be read through the voiceover app. He mentioned how road travel is probably the least comfortable for a blind person, but that cruise ships are apparently extremely adapted since there are very few cruise companies and that most of them are based in the United States which is one of the countries with the highest physically disabled population in the world. Additionally, he mentioned that regarding accommodation, there is not much to be added for the visually impaired, apart from communicative elements and trainings for the staff. The hotel buildings are generally old and when they were built they might not have taken into consideration that someday part of their guest's market might be disabled tourists with some extra needs. Therefore, he believes that it is difficult for hotels to

adapt at this stage; it might be more expensive now than if they would have adapted the hotel from the very beginning. Of course, in the ONCE they work towards an inclusive world and they organize all sorts of activities for their associates as well as charity runs and public forums. They also work very closely with the *Generalitat de Catalunya* to make themselves more visible. He also mentions that moving forward is hard but it's slowly getting done; everyday there's more adapted museums, buildings, audio description movies, theater, tours. But everything depends on the building's property. If it's a private entity, it's much harder than if its public; however, lately Corporate Social Responsibility is becoming a trend in businesses and this will move the process along much faster. He stresses that people with a visual disability do not generally find themselves in situations where they need to ask for help but if they do, a person with disability normally creates proximity, not rejection, so it's quite easy to find a helping hand. J.P. thought that there have been so many advances made in the past twenty years and that twenty years from now, we will probably be amazed about how much has changed from now. Although, society is working towards moving forward and making the blind community acknowledged by society, it is an ongoing goal that he, as well as many other in *ONCE* and *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment* are working towards.

Finally, both interviewees were quite satisfied with the accessibility in Barcelona's public transportation. After speaking with J.P., we found out this was due to Barcelona's Olympic games in 1992, where they renovated the city and it became a popular tourist destination for the world. Due to the number of people expected at the Olympics and the Paralympics, the city was adapted for all types of disabilities from a very early stage. Furthermore, regarding the legislative behavior in Barcelona, they both believed that the problem was not how the laws were not inclusive enough, but the fact that the establishments are not following these laws and nothing is being done. So, despite all the advances being made, it is still not sufficient for us to reach an all-inclusive society. Another aspect that both interviewees agreed upon was that the main requirement for the visually impaired was for people to be conscious of their disability and to know how to interact with them. At the end of the day, it's a social responsibility to include these individuals into society and this can only be reached through company trainings. Despite contrary opinion, people with a visual disability can travel on their own, nowadays with the technology advancements it's becoming much easier; however, most people don't because they travel with friends or family, which in the visually able society is the same. J.P. specifically said that the good thing about disabled tourism is that it is a family concept, so not only they are enjoying their time with their loved ones but it is also a very profitable market for the tourist destinations as it brings more customers to the tourist activities and restaurants. Additionally, both interviewees mentioned that most of their associates were senior citizens but that is due to most of the visual impaired people being affected

at a later stage in life. They also have some younger associates as well. The ones that participate in the planned activities are the older generations; notwithstanding, this is simply because younger people want to travel and do things with people their own age and their group of friends.

4.3. Hotel & Hostel Observations

Two hotels were visited to discover how adapted they were for blind people. The first hotel was the ILUNION hotel in Barcelona known for being a reference for adapted hotels. The second business visited was the Inout hostel in Barcelona known for being a referent in inclusion of people with disabilities and where the 95% of the employees have disability. To do the observation, a checklist was created with all the adaptation discovered during the interviews and through the literature review that an establishment needs to have for blind people to move independently through the buildings without any assistance. [Appendix 7 and 8]

In ILUNION, the employees from reception, concierges and restaurant were aware of the needs of visual impaired people. They explained that during the year they receive different trainings and have mystery guests that challenge them to act properly in different situations with guest with different disabilities. The building was checked for walking accessibility for the visually impaired as it helps to have floor texture changes from the hallways to the rooms and to the lifts. Nonetheless, the floor just had a change of texture to guide the blind in front of the lifts. Moreover, regarding activities in the city, the employees of the hotel did not have a specific guide or information for people with a visually impairment. An important aspect of the hotels was for information to be adapted for the visually impaired, so information in braille was one of the main observations to look out for. They had restaurant menus adapted in braille; however, they didn't have the check-in forms adapted in braille, they simply had to read it out to them, but they also disclosed that most blind tourists do not travel alone so it is not usually a problem. The buffets were checked and they didn't have the signs of the food in braille. Furthermore, the information signs and the evacuation plan were not adapted either. When trying to find the room numbers in braille, they were located on top of the key sensor.

Regarding the adapted facilities in the ILUNION hotel, the lifts had a voice control feature and buttons in braille. The room was big enough to move with the stick and the telephone was adapted for a blind person, as well as the television which had the audio description option. In the minibar there was just water so there is no confusion of where each product is located. The internet corner was not adapted

with the special keyboards for the blind users; however, the webpage of the hotel is adapted for the voiceover system and easy to use for a person with visual impairment. In the public areas of the hotel there was music and smells to stimulate the other senses of a person with a visual disability.

Secondly, Inout is in the Natural Parc of Collserola so to go there you must go or by car or by Ferrocarrils stopping at Baixador de Vallvidrera and walk around 10 minutes uphill through a road that is not in the best conditions. The Hostel is big and has three different spaces with facilities around the mountain. [Appendix 9] There was no reception information, menus and information signs in braille throughout the whole hostel and the employees do not receive training about how to interact with people with a visual impairment. The floor does not have different textures to help the visually impaired to move around and the internet corner is not adapted for blind people. It is important to point out that the webpage is adapted for the voice over option. The public areas have music to stimulate the other senses of a person with a visual disability.

4.4. Tourist Activity Observation

To understand the day to day of people with a visual impairment and how they experience tourism, the researchers of this project, Irene Pujol Fernández and Marta Vergés Ubach, participated in a touristic activity that consisted of an excursion in Collserola. There were five blind people and 16 visually abled persons. A sighted member was assigned to each blind person to guide them during the excursion. The excursion started at 8:00 in Barcelona in the metro stop Urgell and we went to Sant Cugat with metro and ferrocarrils de Catalunya to start the walk there. It finished at 14:00 in Barcelona in “La Vall d’Hebron” so in total, it was six hours of excursion.

It was observed that in the metro to walk straight the blind persons used the lines of the floor to guide themselves with the stick. Then during the walk the sighted volunteers offer them their arm and the blind person uses it as a reference to follow our movements and walk without problem. Then we simply informed them if there were obstacles to avoid on the path. We also were explaining the views and in which point of the walk we were. When the path was narrow or there was a big obstacle we had to do a single file line and the sighted person walked in front of the visually impaired to guide them. When crossing a road, the traffic was cut by the guide to be completely safe. Furthermore, we observed that one of the blind tourists refused to hold the arm of the sighted member during some parts of the walk

and liked to guide himself with his walking stick. He moved confidently and got around by himself just fine; however, his sighted volunteer was always close informing him about the difficulties of the path.

Additionally, we observed that even though they could not see, they enjoyed the excursion. One woman was constantly commenting on the sounds of the birds and the smells. Another one said that he really likes to sit on the grass and do picnics. We realized that even though they do not see they were able to do the 13 kilometers of excursion without problems and we found only two moments where a little bit difficult because of the track surface, such as a lot of rocks during a slope or the ground suddenly sinking. However, to overcome these difficulties, they just needed us to guide them well and inform where to put their feet. We were surprised and impressed that they could walk and do all the tracks just knowing by sound where they must put their feet.

4.5. Questionnaires

The surveys were done via telephone to 30 associates of *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment*. According to Idescat (2018) as checked on the 24th of April 2018, there are 33,432 persons in Catalonia with a visual impairment so if 30 surveys were done and considering a confidence level of 95% the margin of error is 18.

Half of the persons interviewed were men and half women and mostly all in the ranges of 41 to 80 years old. About the level of visual impairment there are 53.33% with total blindness, 33.33% with low vision and 10% said they experienced light perception which would also be considered total blindness level. Considering how many times per year they do tourism the biggest group travelled 5 or more times per year with 33.33%, 13.33% said they never travelled, 16.67% travelled once a year, 6.67% travelled twice a year, 16.67% travelled three times per year and 13.33% travelled 4 times per year. When we asked if they are happy with the accessibility in Catalonia currently, 43.33% said they were dissatisfied, 26.67% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 20% were satisfied and 10% were very satisfied. When we asked them to rank what they like the most when doing tourism 44% said excursions and walks in first place and 33.33% visiting cities and villages. In the second place 48.15% said visiting villages or cities. On third position 44% said visiting museums or expositions. In fourth position 36.36% said going to spas or resorts to relax and in fifth position was with 75% for adventure sports. This means that an 81.48% said on first or second position visiting villages or cities and that most of them said in last position adventure sport.

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Excursiones y paseos/ Excursions and walks	44.00% 11	8.00% 2	20.00% 5	24.00% 6	4.00% 1	25	3.64
Visitar pueblos o ciudades/ Visit villages or cities	33.33% 9	48.15% 13	3.70% 1	11.11% 3	3.70% 1	27	3.96
Deporte de aventura/ Adventure sport	12.50% 3	0.00% 0	4.17% 1	8.33% 2	75.00% 18	24	1.67
Ir a balnearios o resorts a relajarme/ Go to spas or resorts to relax	9.09% 2	22.73% 5	22.73% 5	36.36% 8	9.09% 2	22	2.86
Visitar museos o exposiciones/ Visit museums or expositions	4.00% 1	24.00% 6	44.00% 11	20.00% 5	8.00% 2	25	2.96

When asked to rank the problems in orders of importance that people with visual impairment have when doing tourism, 40.74% said in first position that the biggest problem is when buying the touristic product through internet or in the box office such as flights, hotels or tickets. The second biggest problem was said by 39.29% that it is when visiting the touristic product for the indications, the explanations of the products and the visits to cities. Then the third biggest problem was for 35.71% of the people entering the touristic product because of the doors, stairs, elevators, ramps. As well 34.62% of the people said that the third biggest problem is getting to the touristic place because of taking flights, public transport and taxis. When deciding the fourth biggest problem there is different opinions and the four options have similar percentage.

	1	2	3	4	TOTAL	SCORE
▼ Al comprar productos turísticos: Vuelos, Hoteles, Entradas (Por internet o en las taquillas) / When buying touristic products: Flights, Hotels, Tickets (Through internet or in the box office)	40.74% 11	14.81% 4	14.81% 4	29.63% 8	27	2.67
▼ Al acceder al producto turístico: Puertas, escaleras, ascensores, rampas/ To get into the touristic product: Doors, stairs, elevators, ramps	21.43% 6	14.29% 4	35.71% 10	28.57% 8	28	2.29
▼ Al visitar el producto turístico: Indicaciones de recorrido, explicaciones del producto como museos o obras arquitectonicas, visitas a ciudades, etc/ When visiting the touristic product: Indications of the route, explanations of the product such as museums or arquitectonic works, when visiting a city, etc	21.43% 6	39.29% 11	17.86% 5	21.43% 6	28	2.61
▼ Al ir al sitio turístico: Coger vuelos, transporte publico, taxis etc / To go to the touristic place: take flights, public transport, taxis etc	15.38% 4	26.92% 7	34.62% 9	23.08% 6	26	2.35

For the question about if they would like to be able to do more tourism 60% said they would, 13.33% probably would, 16.67% said that they already do the amount that they want, 6.67% probably would not and 3.33% said would not like to be able to do more tourism. About if they would be willing to do tourism unaccompanied 60% said no. For the question if they would come back in the future and

recommend a place that they discovered that is well adapted 73.33% answered that they would come back and recommend it and 26.67% said that they would not come back but will recommend it.

5. Conclusions

After all the research we have detected that the people with visual impairment do much more tourism than what we expected when we started with the project and that they are not afraid of getting out of their comfort zone and exploring new places. Moreover, some of the blind people told us that it is difficult to do tourism without assistance of someone visually abled. However, some like to take this challenge and with patience and technology this can be done. Notwithstanding, we realized that without the help of the volunteers, blind people cannot do some activities because these cannot be adapted; for example, the excursion where we participated as sighted members. For this reason, they were grateful after the excursion and they did not allow any of the volunteers to pay for the expenses. Additionally, we felt that the visually impaired people know that they cannot do these activities without the help of others and that sometimes they feel that the volunteers are there for compassion or obligation.

It has been discovered that even if a product is not adapted for the blind community they visit the touristic product anyways; nonetheless, when it is adapted they usually repeat and recommend the product. Visually impaired people normally do not travel alone so if a company adapts its products for the blind people it will automatically have a lot of loyal clients repeating and recommending the product. Leidner (2006, p.2) support the possibilities of this rich and loyal market, demonstrating that they are a segment to target rather than avoid. However, Maria Luisa (2010, p.1155) said that businesses think that this niche of market is not rich. This might be the reason why companies are not working on accessibility. Most hotels are not adapted for the blind community; for example, from the two hotels that we visited only one was adapted. In both accommodations there are disabled people there every day, in one they are employees and in the other one as guest; but just the second one was adapted. Buhalis and Michopoulou (2011, p.147) said that institutions believe that making their establishments accessible will be expensive, but it is not that costly. During our research we found that the visually impaired people do not need that many adaptations and that these are not expensive. Mainly, they need information in braille, changes of texture in the floor so they can walk alone with the help of their stick, websites adapted with the voice over function, tactile models, audio guides and people trained to guide them and give them information properly. Buhalis and Michopoulou (2011, p.158; 2007 p.6), as well as the people that we interviewed, said that what blind people need the most is accessible information and that with the

advances in technology they are solving this problem a lot. Notwithstanding, a visually impaired person cannot just travel with the help of the technology, the human factor is indispensable and for this reason proper training is necessary.

Through our primary data, the questionnaires and the interviews allowed for first-hand perspective on their needs and requirements for the advancement of the disabled tourism. Firstly, we discovered that visually impaired tourists find issues in all the steps of travelling: buying the product, going to the destination, and entering and enjoying the surroundings due to the lack of adaptability, information and employee training. Additionally, through the questionnaires we also noticed that we did not contemplate gastronomy into the options of what they liked the most when travelling. We found that many participants disclosed that if it were an option, they would've chosen that one. Similarly, the most chosen options were outdoor excursions and visiting cities and villages. These findings, proved that the conception that most people have of blind people when doing tourism is completely wrong. Meaning that adaptability and trainings in the tourism sector would be greatly appreciated by the blind community. During the interviews we realized that according to the two representatives, Barcelona is one of the most accessible cities of Europe and after doing some research we found out that Barcelona has a project and is working towards accessibility. This Project is 'La Visió 2020 pel Turisme Responsable de Catalunya: La Declaració de Barcelona'. However, when we asked about the accessibility of the city during the surveys a lot of people said that they are not happy with the accessibility and that there is still a lot to do.

When we first started this project, we believed that accessibility for the blind tourists was lacking due to the disregard from the laws and regulations. After investigating, we discovered that the laws were vague, they included all the disabilities under one same category. Regarding different disabilities, the tourists will have different needs; thus, putting them under the same market segment is not acceptable. Moreover, we found that the current legislations mention social inclusion and labor inclusion but it does not do anything to really achieve this global inclusion. The problem regarding the legislation is that there are a lot of suggestions and recommendations that public establishments can apply to their companies to facilitate accessibility for all; regardless, there are no minimum requirements that must be followed. Furthermore, whether the laws on accessibility are applied is not a main concern for the government departments; thereby, changing the laws will not create such a commotion, we find that the problem is not necessarily in creating more laws, but rather in applying them.

6. Recommendations

As we have found through our primary data and general knowledge, corporate social responsibility has become more insightful and important in businesses. By taking advantage of this trend, it is easier to opt for social inclusion of the disabled market; presenting more information about adaptability benefits for their businesses and positive economic impact, the corporations will be more willing to make their establishments accessible without the need of legal pressure.

We also find that the laws of the state need to specify the atmosphere, the situations and which disability it refers to when regulating a certain amendment, to break the category of the disabled individuals as one whole.

Moreover, we also believe that gaining economic help from the Catalan government to add any extras needed for accessibility will make companies more willing to adapt. Choosing to adjust their buildings will not only benefit them economically, but it will also support the corporate social responsibility mentioned previously. Similarly, this will not only support the tourist sector, but also the country. As we have found, disabled people recommend accessible tourist destination to other blind tourists; thus, increasing the tourist market significantly.

Because it is difficult to make a mountain accessible for a person with visual impairment we believe that the government should support blind people and make strong laws that will ensure that all which can be accessible is, and not just recommend possible actions. It should be regulated by law that all museums and visits have tactile models of the buildings, sculptures and paintings and audio descriptions. All cities should be adapted with the info-accessibility device for the blind people and with changes of texture on the floor. All establishments should have information and products marked in braille. Information signs inside and outside buildings should be in braille as well and all cinemas, theaters and tv programs should have an audio description option. Additionally, more apps should be created to guide the blind people inside shopping centers, buildings, in which street and number they are, which metro stops they have around, which shops they can find nearby, and information about monuments that they have close to them, as well as other functions. Also, governments should sanction the company websites that are not adapted for the voice over function like Renfe's website and should regulate by law that all the companies give training to their employees about how to interact and guide the blind customers.

7. Limitations and Further Research

There were a few limitations while finding data for this project in terms of interviews that we wanted to do; having namely, the number of visually impaired people to complete our questionnaire, and time constraints.

An attempt was made to interview someone from ILUNION hotel or Inout hostel which are example companies that integrate people with disabilities in their products. This attempt was made to know the adaptations that they do in the hotel and hostel to be accessible for the tourist and the employees with visual impairment. Both companies were contacted by telephone and they asked to contact them by email. ILUNION did not reply and Inout did but said that they could not help us with this information. An attempt was also made to contact the 'Generalitat de Catalunya, Consell per a la promoció de l'Accessibilitat' to obtain first-hand information about their implication to adapt the touristic products for people with visual impairment and the laws, but they replied saying that the laws could be found in their webpage and to send them more specific questions by email.

Additionally, *Catalonia's Association of Visual Impairment* was kind enough to allow access to their associates personal data to do the questionnaires via phone and send the online questionnaires. We were only able to get 30 responses from the visually impaired tourists. Ideally this number would have been much bigger but answering by phone was the easiest method for them and for us to ensure answers, and this took much longer than if they were all answered online. Notwithstanding, *ONCE* refused to allow us to call some of their associates or send the questionnaire via email on our behalf; this reduced the number of responses significantly.

Concerning further research on the topic, it is important to keep in mind that a vast amount of external groundwork is done on disabled tourism in general, but not enough on visual impairment specifically. The next step for us would be to check government opinion and what they are currently doing to open their tourism market to the visually impaired tourists. We believe this would be a step forward towards being able to change or add laws regarding what the blind tourists need in public establishments.

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9. Appendix

Appendix 1: Ethics Form



ETHICS FORM

It is important that you are sufficiently prepared to collect data doing fieldwork with 'human participants.' Your supervisor will support you in completing the Ethics Form.

The Ethics Form **MUST BE COMPLETED BY YOURSELF AND SIGNED OFF BY YOUR SUPERVISOR BEFORE UNDERTAKING RESEARCH.**

THE SIGNED ETHICS FORM **MUST BE INCLUDED IN THE FINAL UNDERGRADUATE DISSERTATION.**

Risk checklist – Please answer ALL the questions in each of the sections below.

Risk category 1	Yes	No
Use any information OTHER than that which is freely available in the public domain?	X	
Involve analysis of pre-existing data which contains sensitive or personal information?		X
Involve direct and/or indirect contact with human participants?	X	
Require consent to conduct?	X	
Require consent to publish?	X	
Have a risk of compromising confidentiality?		X
Have a risk of compromising anonymity?		X
Involve risk to any party, including the researcher?		X
Contain elements which you OR your supervisor are NOT trained to conduct?		X

Risk Category 2		
Require informed consent OTHER than that which is straightforward to obtain to conduct the research?		X
Require informed consent OTHER than that which is straightforward to obtain to publish the research?		X
Require information to be collected and/or provided OTHER than that which is straightforward to obtain?		X
Risk category 3		
Involve participants who are particularly vulnerable?		X
Involve participants who are unable to give informed consent?		X
Involve data collection taking place BEFORE consent form is given?		X
Involve any deliberate cover data collection?		X
Involve risk to the researcher or participants beyond that experienced in everyday life?		X
Cause (or could cause) physical or psychological negative consequences?		X
Use intrusive or invasive procedures?		X
Include a financial incentive to participate in the research?		X

IF APPLICABLE:

List agreed actions with your tutor to be taken to address issues raised in questions Risk Category 2:

Since the surveys will be conducted via phone interaction, we have agreed with our supervisor that the associations that give us access to their private data such as phone numbers, will have to sign a consent form in which both parts agree that this information will be completely confidential and that we will inform the participants of their contribution to this project.

Student Declaration: I confirm that I will undertake the Undergraduate Dissertation as detailed above. I understand that I must abide by the terms of this approval and that I may not make any substantial amendments to the Undergraduate Dissertation without further approval.

Name: IRENE PUJOL FERNÁNDEZ Signed:  Date: 14/03/2018

Name: MARTA VERGÉS UBACH Signed:  Date: 14/03/2018

Agreement from the supervisor of the student:

Name: GEOFFREY BELLIGOI Signed:  Date: 14/03/2018

Risk Category 1: If you answered NO to all the questions, your study is classified as Risk Category 1. In this case:

- The supervisor can give immediate approval for undertaking the field work for the Undergraduate Dissertation.
- A copy of this signed Form MUST be included in the Undergraduate Dissertation.

Risk Category 2: If you answered YES only to questions in Risk Category 1 and/or 2, your study is classified as Risk Category 2. In this case:

- You must meet with your supervisor and clarify how the issues encountered are going to be dealt with before taking off with the field work.
- Once clarified, the actions taken must be stated in the Form. Then the supervisor can guarantee approval for the field work for the Undergraduate Dissertation.



- A copy of this signed Form MUST be included in the Undergraduate Dissertation.

Risk Category 3: If you answered YES to questions included in Risk Category 3, your study is classified as Risk Category 3. In this case:

- You must discuss with your supervisor how to re-direct the research and data collection thesis to avoid risks mentioned in Category 3.
- You must complete the Ethical Form again until Risk Category 1 or 2 is obtained.
- A copy of this signed Form MUST be included in the Undergraduate Dissertation.

A copy of this signed form MUST be included in the Undergraduate Dissertation.

Appendix 2: Consent Form CJ.B.

INTERVIEWS

Name of Researchers: Irene Pujol Fernández & Marta Vergés Ubach

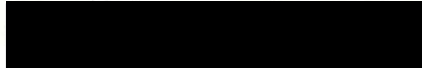
We are gathering research as part of a Degree Thesis Project of HTSI School of Tourism and Hospitality Management.

The enquiry we will conduct is for our dissertation as part of our

The aim of our study is to gain information and an understanding of the difficulties that people with visual impairment find when doing tourism and checking if these needs and adaptations that this market segment has when travelling are cover by law and if the touristic companies are making adaptations to comply with the law.

We would like to know if you could give us any information regarding your personal experience and knowledge on the topic at hand. By answering our interview questions, you are giving consent for the information you provide to be used in the dissertation project and research publications as we would be most grateful.

Contact details of agreeing party:



Students Email: irene.pujol@htsi.url.edu

marta.verges@htsi.url.edu

Supervisor's name and email:

Geoffrey Belligoi

geoff.belligoi@htsi.url.edu

Please tick to confirm

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated for the above study.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have answered them satisfactorily.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my business or legal rights being affected.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I agree to take part in the above research study.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I give permission for the interview to be voiced recorded.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I certify that the information shared with the researchers can be revealed in the study.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I certify that my personal details will not be revealed for the study and made anonymous.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / <input checked="" type="radio"/> No

Name of Person taking consent:

Date:

Signature:

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

15.3.18

Researchers:

Date:

Signatures:

Irene Pujol Fernandez

15.3.18

Marta Vergés Ubach

15.3.18

[Redacted]

Appendix 3: Consent Form J.P.

INTERVIEWS

Name of Researchers: Irene Pujol Fernández & Marta Vergés Ubach

We are gathering research as part of a Degree Thesis Project of HTSI School of Tourism and Hospitality Management.

The enquiry we will conduct is for our dissertation as part of our

The aim of our study is to gain information and an understanding of the difficulties that people with visual impairment find when doing tourism and checking if these needs and adaptations that this market segment has when travelling are cover by law and if the touristic companies are making adaptations to comply with the law.

We would like to know if you could give us any information regarding your personal experience and knowledge on the topic at hand. By answering our interview questions, you are giving consent for the information you provide to be used in the dissertation project and research publications as we would be most grateful.

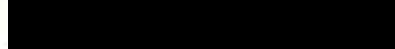
Contact details of agreeing party: [REDACTED]

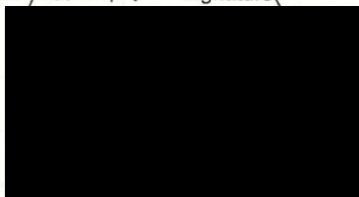
Students Email: irene.pujol@htsi.urj.edu
marta.verges@htsi.urj.edu

Supervisor's name and email: Geoffrey Belligoi
geoff.belligoi@htsi.urj.edu


Please tick to confirm

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated for the above study.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have answered them satisfactorily.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my business or legal rights being affected.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I agree to take part in the above research study.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I give permission for the interview to be voiced recorded.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I certify that the information shared with the researchers can be revealed in the study.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / No
I certify that my personal details will not be revealed for the study and made anonymous.	Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No

Name of Person taking consent:


Date: 05/04/18 Signature:


Researchers:
 Irene Pujol Fernandez
 Marta Vergés Ubach

Date: 05/04/18 Signatures:

 05/04/18

Appendix 7: Accessibility checklist Hotel ILUNION Barcelona

	Yes, it is adapted	No, it is not adapted
Receptionist knows how to interact with blind people	X	
The information at the reception it is in braille		X
There is information about accessible activities in the city		X
The concierge helps blind people with enough information	X	
Are there sensory and oral stimulus in the public areas of the hotel? (music and perfume)	X	
The floor has different textures	(just in front of the lifts)	X
The information signs are in braille		X
The numbers of the floors are in braille		X
The numbers of the rooms are in braille	X	
The emergency explanations are in braille		X
The buttons of the lift are in braille	X	
Elevator has voice control feature	X	
The restaurant has menus in braille	X	
The buffets are adapted for the blind with names in braille		X
The waitresses know how to interact with blind people	X	
The webpage is adapted and easy to use	X	
The bartender knows how to interact with blind people	X	

The minibar is adapted for blind people	(only water)	
Internet corner is adapted for blind people		X
Telephones are adapted for blind people	X	
TV is adapted with sound system	X	

Appendix 8: Accessibility checklist Inout Hostel Barcelona

	Yes, it is adapted	No, it is not adapted
Receptionist knows how to interact with blind people		X
The information at the reception it is in braille		X
There is information about accessible activities in the city		X
The concierge helps blind people with enough information		X
Are there sensory and oral stimulus in the public areas of the hotel? (music and perfume)	just music in Reception	X
The floor has different textures		X
The information signs are in braille		X
The numbers of the floors are in braille		X
The numbers of the rooms are in braille		X
The emergency explanations are in braille		X
The restaurant has menus in braille		X
The buffers are adapted for the blind with names in braille		X
The waitresses know how to interact with blind people		X
The webpage is adapted and easy to use	X	
The bartender knows how to interact with blind people		X
Internet corner is adapted for blind people		X

Appendix 9: Map of Inout Hostel Barcelona Facilities

