



# Tourism for people with disabilities in Italy: an overview.

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## Abstract

The population with disabilities is constantly growing in the world and in Italy and poses ethical, social and economic problems. The need for greater involvement of people with disabilities in the economy emerges, as a crucial point for a truly inclusive society. The tourism sector must also play its role in a wider reception project. This paper illustrates the evolution and current situation of accessible tourism in Italy, presenting some valuable experiences to propose useful benchmarking to public offices, associations and private companies. Introduction of an adequate review of international literature, a rapid summary of the evolution of the sector and a focus on the main laws is presented. Then it critically described the initiatives implemented in Italy for transport, hotels, restaurants and destinations typical of tourists such as museums, places of worship, natural and archaeological parks, sports facilities and bathing establishments. Despite some limitations, Italy, is a privileged international tourist destination, and can be a valid reference for many other nations that want to develop tourism and accessible tourism, in particular.

**Keywords:** Tourism in Italy, accessible tourism, universal tourism, disability, benchmarking.

## Introduction

The Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) estimates about 3,2 million disabled people living in Italy (Istat, 2017; Laganà, 2017) of which about 2,5 are elderly people. 1,8 are serious. Women constitute 7,1% and men 3,8%. The trend is constantly growing, thanks above all, to the improvement of lifestyles and health advances that have increased the average lifespan of Italians. The Censis predicts that in 2020 people with disabilities will reach 4,8 million and will reach 6,7 million in 2040 (Censis, 2014). The increase of people with disabilities poses ethical, social and economic problems, especially in times of crisis in which public services often suffer lack of resources. The need for an inclusive society designed and managed "for all" is the subject of frequent reflection (Migliaccio, 2015 & 2016; Levitas, 2005).

In particular, the need for greater involvement of people with disabilities in the economy seems to emerge, developing the logic of "disability management" that values diversity as a driving force for process innovation in work environments more inclined to tolerance and collaboration (Metallo *et al.*, 2009; Migliaccio, 2015, 2016 and in press; Angeloni, 2010, 2011, 2013b; Borgonovi & Angeloni, 2016). Therefore, the inclusive economy foresees the productive contribution of everyone, even those who have some physical or psychological limitations: their remaining skills must be valued in a system designed to allow everyone to express their personality in the work that dignifies the human being, regardless of his condition (Borgonovi & Angeloni, 2017).

The tourism sector must also play its role in this broader project of welcome, induced by ethical



principles (Nicolaidis, 2018a; 2018b, 2018c; Ramphal & Nicolaidis, 2018; Nicolaidis & Grobler, 2017) and also by earning opportunities, considering the growing demand also induced by the conscience of persons with disabilities that tourism is a right that prevents depressive forms the effect of marginalization.

This demand for customers with "special" needs also concerns Italy, considering that this nation is rich in history, art, culture and natural attractions. In it the attraction of tourist flows remains high, continuing the positive trend of previous years (ONT, 2018), despite the growing competition from developing countries. However, the Italian tourist offer remains unique, taking advantage of a positive reputation, but also suffers from a considerable degree of age and obsolescence: adapting to the needs of these particular customers can be a further incentive to invest in modernizing the sector and its protagonists.

### **Objectives, methodology and structure of the paper**

The main purpose of this paper is to illustrate the situation of accessible tourism in Italy, presenting some valuable experiences that can be an example for other nations that want to develop a tourist experience of this kind.

The hypotheses to be verified can be defined as follows:

- *H1: Public authorities and private companies are sensitive to the needs of the population with disabilities;*
- *H2: Italy is progressively improving its investments to make the most important tourist sites accessible.*

From these conditions to be verified, some research questions derive:

- *RQ1: What are the main initiatives to favor the access of people with disabilities to the main tourist sites?*
- *RQ2: Can the Italian experiences also export to other nations that wish to adopt this path of welcome and inclusion of tourists with "special" needs?*

To answer these two general questions, the paper presents the most significant inclusive tourism experiences that characterize Italy today, after an adequate review of international literature. Therefore, the paper has a general descriptive content with the aim of subsequently developing, in other papers, the experiences in a more analytical way. It develops the benchmarking methodology, proposing useful experiences in the future, also in other geographical areas, stimulating learning and creativity (Fondazione Cariplo, 2008; Garbellano, 2006; Keegan & O'Kelly, 2007; Watson, 1995).

The comparison with exemplary realities presupposes the collection of useful information to develop better results everywhere. It allows the identification of gaps and formulates proposals to achieve better performance. It identifies opportunities, identifying weaknesses and strengths, overcoming the natural resistance to mutations with innovative methods. Benchmarking can be useful for central and peripheral public authorities and private tourism companies. Although not limited to a mere imitative process, it therefore facilitates the identification of the actions necessary



to fill the gaps, creating the premises for adequate improvement programs, in the context of strategic planning.

Tourism is a privileged topic for benchmarking (Buhalis *et al.*, 2012; De Salvo *et al.*, 2013) considering its peculiarities. In particular, accessible tourism can and must be the object of constructive comparisons, considering the delays that are recorded in a large part of the planet compared to the possibility for disabled people to easily access initiatives related to free time.

## Literature Review

The theme of accessible tourism has had a remarkable development only in recent years. There are some contributions that review the main studies. Small and Darcy (2010a) and especially most recent contribution of Ibarra *et al.* (2016) that, although limited to the Ibero-American journals of tourism, has the merit of providing a good methodology for the critical collection of the studies in question, starting from the shared assumption that the greatest difficulties in bibliographic research derive from the fact that the concepts of disability, accessibility, and tourism have more discrepancies than agreements.

In any case, if we wish to provide an overview of the main contributions to accessible tourism, it is necessary to distinguish the writings that refer to the market demand of people with disabilities and those which, instead, focus on the characteristics of the industry offering of free time. The most relevant contributions related to the psychological and economic characteristics of tourists with disabilities are numerous and obviously are treated by authors of different cultural backgrounds (Gallucci & Marino, 2009; Lurgi, 2009). By limiting the research to the authors of the economic field, it is necessary first to cite the recent study by Gassiot *et al.* (2018) that, although based on results obtained in Spain, presents a theoretical framework that can be exported anywhere. Tourism constraints are defined as factors influencing travel participation and behaviour and can be divided into three categories: intrapersonal (lack of knowledge, health-related problems, and physical and psychological dependency), interpersonal (skill-challenge incongruities and communication), and structural (information and communication, cost and attendant, socio-spatial, and attitudinal). This classification obviously favors a more correct planning of the corresponding tourist offering.

However, each classification has limits and those related to disability are made more problematic by the extreme diversity of disabilities that require very heterogeneous services, even to require a customization of the tourist service that can be particularly difficult. This theme is expressed in the contribution of Zajadacz (2015) according to which the great diversity of disabilities makes finding a universal solution in the creation of accessible tourism supply a complex task. This supports the need for a flexible “mix of various models” increasingly influenced by the economic model.

The differences between tourists with disabilities are also the subject of the study by Figueiredo *et al.* (2012) which, highlighted these different forms of being disabled, meaning different abilities to participate in tourism and diverse capabilities of experiencing leisure activities. In a survey developed in Portugal that distinguished the classic division of disability in intellectual, motor, hearing and visual is confirmed what is intuitive: travel behavior, motivations, interests and needs, motivated by diverse types of disabilities. While noting the heterogeneity of the needs of people



with disabilities, we must also mention those who tried to identify the common characteristics of these tourists, as proposed by Zenko, and Sardi (2014) in an analysis of socially responsible innovations in social tourism.

To these classifications hypotheses certainly useful for the development of an adequate public policy on accessible tourism and a suitable response of the service industry, contributions are added that highlight the importance of tourism for people with disabilities. Just recently, such concepts have been reiterated by Lehto *et al.* (2018) which underline that tourism represents an extraordinary experience for this traveler segment despite the ordinary nature of their travel activities. There are similar conclusions in the contribution of Eichhorn *et al.* (2013): the tourism offers greater possibilities to develop a sense of self-identity, as highlighted by the strong denial to make use of specialised operators. However, it is necessary to overcome the normal resistance of a person with a disability who believes he meets physical and psychological barriers outside his ordinary reality. This also emerges in the study of Pagán (2012) which says that disabled people who are limited in their daily activities are less likely to participate in tourism activities, although the differences in the intensity of this participation by disability status are less evident, particularly among those males with disabilities.

In this context, it was necessary to understand what the criteria are that lead people with disabilities to choose a tourist destination. Darcy (2010) suggests that, while sociodemographic variables offered some insight into criteria selection, the most significant explanation for criteria selection and information preferences were the dimensions of disability and level of support needs. Obviously, the consequence is that the main information to be provided to this potential customer segment must be particularly detailed on these aspects. The importance of tourism for people with disabilities is also reiterated by Kulichova (2014), marking social and ethical dimensions, as well as by Popiel (2014), Foggin, (2010) and Small and Darcy (2010b) (with particular reference to the needs of mobility). Also Kastenholz *et al.* (2015), using an analysis carried out in Portugal, emphasize that tourism and leisure have revealed many benefits for individuals with a disability, enhancing personal development, quality of life, recovery and contribution to social inclusion.

References to the benefits that tourism can give to people with disabilities could further multiply. However, it is necessary to consider, at the same time, what are the responses that the public authorities and private tourism industry can provide in terms of the provision of transport, accommodation, catering services, etc. For example, in Europe there are initiatives in this regard (Shaw, 2011). Even in some countries, public authorities have promoted appropriate legislation that directly and indirectly incentivize appropriate responses. This is the case, for example, of the United Kingdom, as highlighted by the contributions of Goodall *et al.* (2004) and Shaw and Coles (2004).

However, the international bibliography focuses on identifying the degree of progress of inclusion policies that transit through the removal of physical and cultural barriers. The situation is obviously very different in the different nations. Devile and Kastenholz (2018), for example, analyzed the difficulties that remain for transportation, attractions and accommodation in Iran, for people with physical and motor disabilities. Domínguez Vila *et al.* (2015) have analyzed the factors of accessible tourism competitiveness in Spain and Australia: the climate, locale and tourist structure are the most important for Spain, whereas quality of services, brand and infrastructure are of great



importance for Australia. Le *et al.* (2012) and Patterson *et al.* (2012) propose a review of inclusive tourism in Australia where a macro policy environment emerges that is conducive to having an accessible built environment, transport and service sector, the level of engagement by the tourism industry still involves an ad hoc process of trial and error on the part of individual operators.

Even in Canada, some similar situations emerge (Gröschl, 2007). In particular, in that country, it is also necessary to help hotels to demolish artificial barriers, stereotypes and perceptions of the employment of persons with disabilities. Therefore, discrimination occurs not only in the offering to disabled customers, but also in the recruitment of employees, preferring able-bodied persons more aesthetically attractive.

The comparison between nations is also proposed in the writing by Cernaianu and Sobry (2011) who have studied aspects of sports tourism in France and Romania, highlighting their differences. By combining the different experiences, although heterogeneous, it is still necessary to reiterate that the spread of accessible tourist environments is not just a conquest of the population with disabilities, but an added value for all potential customers (Buhalis *et al.*, 2012).

Indeed, accessible tourism addresses the creation of universally designed environments, services and information that can support people who may have temporary disabilities, families with young children, the ever-increasing ageing population, as well as creating safer work places for employees. The tourism industry that invests in breaking down barriers improve the quality of their service offering, leading to greater customer satisfaction, loyalty and expansion of business. Therefore, it generates a more satisfied influx of customers with obvious benefits for the profitability and finances of the companies (Morad, 2007). However, everything passes through a different culture of acceptance of inclusion that must be proposed already in schools (Bizjak *et al.*, 2011) and through the fundamental contributions of companies in the third sector (Hunter-Jones & Thornton, 2012).

In conclusion, it is necessary to mention the recent contribution of Agovino *et al.* (2017) which focuses on the limits and opportunities of tourism for disabled people in Italy, on the basis of which this paper is located: it provides a geographical assessment of tourism provision within Italy and identifies areas of good and poor provision for this market segment. Angeloni's reflections (2013a) are also very useful, focusing on accessible tourism in the Italian destination and those proposed in Migliaccio (2014), the first bibliographic source of subsequent writings. Numerous local studies must be added to these international publications (Gelarda & Bardi, 2011; Leone, 2013; Lepri, 2011; Citarella, 2016; Bardelli, 2007; Arengi, 2001; Fauzzi *et al.*, 2008) and useful operating guides (Consorzio cooperative integrate, 1992; Fantini & Matteucci, 2003; Touring, 2004) that provide valuable reflections on the subject.

## **Description and Discussion**

### **Evolution**

In 2013, the Mission Structure for relaunching the image of Italy in the Prime Minister's Office, using the collaboration of the Committee for the Promotion and Support of Accessible Tourism, presented the first "White Paper" on tourism for all in Italy (Mission Structure for Relaunching the Image of Italy, 2013), object of critical analysis of some authors (Angeloni, 2013a). It highlights the main



stages of accessible tourism in Italy, summarized below.

The origins are found in the articles of the Constitution of 1947. Until the mid-1990s, the rights of people with disabilities were almost exclusively supported by trade associations, including federations. Accessible tourism, in the first decades of the Republic, coincided with the social tourism of the weak categories (colonies, stays of relief, group holidays with assistance, etc.) to which some rules were added that directly or indirectly favored the category. Terms now well known as accessibility, visitability and adaptability were already introduced with the ministerial decree number 236/89. In 1990, European Year of Tourism, some first initiatives related to accessibility were found. Then seminars and conferences were multiplied all over the world, as well as publications on the subject. Since 1995 the BIT, International Tourism Exchange of Milan, is also interested in accessible tourism.

In 1997, the "*Italia per tutti*" project was launched, which openly proposed the access of people with disabilities to the tourism market. With the National Committee "Yes, to travel ... tourism for all" the difficulties faced by operators were faced for the costly investments necessary to make reception facilities and sites accessible and usable. To be mentioned, then, the project "STARe - Tourist Services for Accessibility and Comfortable Residence" which focused the actual and potential demand for accessible tourism, also creating the "Vademecum for tourists with special needs".

In the following period the Italian regions assumed exclusive authority in the tourism sector: local projects and initiatives spread. In 2000 the "SiPuò" Association was born for the development of tourism services for all: it organized fairs and events. Since March 2001, the INAIL (National Institute for Accident Insurance at Work) promoted the SuperAbile System, an online portal of advice and information for disabilities still operational ([www.superabile.it](http://www.superabile.it)).

In May 2001 the "International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health", called ICF, was launched. In 2001, as part of the First International Conference on Sustainable Tourism, the Rimini Charter was drafted containing recommendations for the "sustainability of tourism", including mass tourism. In 2002 the Madrid Declaration was drafted in the European Disability Congress: the year 2003 was declared the European Year of People with Disabilities. In the declaration, anti-discriminatory legal measures emerged, favoring services that promote the independent life of disabled people, especially women. In 2003, as part of the international conference "The Park is for everyone. The world also", there is also discussion of the accessibility of naturalistic destinations.

In those years, numerous books and manuals spread, including: Laura and Petrangeli (2003), Fantini and Matteucci (2003), Touring (2004), etc. In 2004 there was the C.A.R.E. (Accessible Cities of the European Regions) to make the municipalities more functional and welcoming for everyone. We also write the "Charter of the Hospitable City" which invokes principles of inclusion, equality, equal dignity and equal opportunity for each person, considering the first protagonist tourist to be adequately informed and welcomed in a usable and accessible territory, collaborating with the trade associations and experts.

In 2006 the ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism) was born, a network of organizations that deal with accessible tourism that involves numerous subjects in more than 30



countries and 5 continents. In 2006 the United Nations Assembly approved the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified in Italy in 2009, the year in which the interregional project of tourism development "Interregional itineraries of tourism for all" also starts, proposing thematic routes such as: "*Paesaggi d'autore*", "*Borghi storici*", "*Via Francigena*", etc.

In 2009 the IsITT was founded, Italian Institute for Tourism for All, on the initiative of the Council for People in Difficulty Onlus, which starts its activities also through the project "*Turismabile*". IsITT promotes the culture of hospitality, establishing relationships with public and private bodies for the development of accessibility and tourist usability, training operators, professionals and managers. In 2009 also the Calypso project started, a three-year initiative of the European Commission for the promotion of social tourism that brings the needy categories closer to the travel world. In 2009 the Minister of Tourism established the Ministerial Commission "For an accessible tourism" that launches the "Manifesto for the promotion of accessible tourism" subsequently described, also signed by the European network ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism).

In 2011, the Charter of Rights of the Tourist provides information for people with disabilities. The most recent five-year period is characterized by further initiatives that confirm the described directives: today disability has full right of citizens in national political and cultural choices.

### **Laws (Notes)**

The actual initiatives of development of accessible tourism in Italy are part of a new concept of disability, certainly the result of significant national regulations, also in implementation of various types of provision at international level.

Among the international rules that generally protect personal rights and health, we mention (Italian Pharmaceutic Agency, 2016): the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the European Social Charter (1961); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), etc.

Instead, with regard to international standards that directly protect the rights of persons with disabilities, the specific United Nations Organization Convention in 2006 emerges decisively (Baratella, 2009; Foggetti, 2017). Consequently, in recent years, many countries have adapted their legislation (Serono Foundation, 2016): in the United Kingdom, after Disability Discrimination Act (1995), today there is the Equality Act (2010), in France the *Loi Handicap* (2005) was promulgated, in Spain there is the combined provisions of the *Liondau* (2003) with the *Ley de Dependencia* (2006); in Germany at the beginning of the new millennium new laws on the subject have been promulgated. Even in Italy, while implementing constitutional principles for the protection of the inviolable rights of man and the duties of political, economic and social solidarity (Article 2) and of substantial equality (Article 3), specific rules apply (Law 104/1992 and 68/1999, among others) passed as laws for assistance and integration (Borzetti, 2008; Assennato & Quadrelli, 2012; Buzzanca, 2009; Buffa, 2009) that today should be interpreted in the new and wider inclusive optics (Migliaccio, 2018b).

The legislative provision favors the culture of acceptance, but by itself it is not enough because it



could remain non-functional, sometimes limiting itself to mere philanthropy. With respect to the specific needs of accessible tourism, two posters must necessarily be mentioned, the first explicitly on the subject and the second strictly connected because it relates to accessible culture. It is necessary to examine them before even critically describing the initiatives implemented in Italy for transport, accommodation facilities and typical places such as museums, places of worship, natural and archaeological parks, sports facilities and bathing establishments.

### **The Proclamations for Accessibility**

*Accessible tourism.* In 2009, the Ministry of Tourism launched a special "Manifesto of Accessible Tourism" in implementation of Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 10 points it is stipulated that every person has the right to take advantage of the tourism offer completely and independently. All operators are involved in the implementation of this principle, focusing on the specific needs of each client. The information must be precise and usable so that each choice is adequately weighted. Every effort must be made to promote the quality of reception for all, as a result of a changed conception of disability free of prejudices. Therefore, a new culture must be produced that impregnates the action of each operator. Public entities, associations and private companies must coordinate their efforts for inclusive tourism.

*Accessible culture.* Tourism is relaxing, but also culture! In Italy a "Manifesto of Accessible Culture to all" ([www.castellodirivoli.org](http://www.castellodirivoli.org)) was adopted in implementation of the same art. 30 previously mentioned. It establishes the right of access to all places and cultural initiatives. It is divided into 10 points, defining the users in an extended way, to include people with disabilities. An extended concept of accessibility was also adopted, extending it also to the usability of the tourist / cultural experience, also through adequate information, favoring activities and paths based on multi-sensoriality and interactivity. Obviously the effective success of each initiative is based on a specific training of employees and on the sensitivity of the protagonists of accessibility that must progressively impregnate the dominant culture.

Appropriate "Guidelines for overcoming architectural barriers in places of cultural interest" have also been launched by the competent Ministry (Mibac, 2008; Caprara *et al.*, 2008), as well as special tourist information portals on accessible sites, and finally the accessible publishing activity. Many initiatives are financed by public entities, to which are added activities of associations or foundations (Attanasio, 2009).

### **Accessible transport**

In compliance with the provisions of Article 20 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, approved by the Italian Parliament, the State is progressively taking effective measures to ensure the mobility of people with disabilities at low costs, breaking down architectural barriers and providing assistance with competent staff (Serluca, 2009). Indeed, transport is the main and necessary tool for accessible tourism. In the individual transport special driving licenses are provided for driving adapted cars and tax benefits for the purchase of vehicles that can park in reserved places, often free.

The projects to improve the accessibility of public transport are numerous and related to the access of wheelchairs, to vocal announcements of the next stop for the blind and luminous





warnings for the deaf. Free transport on call is also provided. Sometimes the public service deviates from the planned routes to reach the disabled passenger home. Such services mainly characterize the large regional capitals, unfortunately less present in small towns.

The trains also have special places reserved for people with disabilities and there are often accessible toilets. Disability Assistance Centers (Cad) have also been set up which organize, at the request of the client, support in the departure and arrival stations. Finally, tariff concessions for disabled people and their carers' are recorded.

Air travel guarantees forms of assistance to passengers with reduced mobility in line with the international principles which necessarily establish the necessary aid to persons with disabilities from arrival to exit. Transportation to boarding is also guaranteed by special vehicles. Similar services characterize national maritime navigation: ship owners must provide information on services and assistance, in addition to accessible facilities (access doors, ramps, walkways, corridors and handrails that must also be equipped with tactile guidance and handrails). Desirable, but not everywhere present, for example, elevators with wide doors, adapted toilets, doors without thresholds or steps, non-slip floors.

### **Hotels and Accessible Restaurants**

The accessibility of accommodation facilities and catering is certainly one of the most important requirements to enable tourism for people with disabilities. In many Italian facilities, especially the most modern, common parts and services and several rooms and outdoor areas are intended for temporary stay for people with reduced or impeded mobility. The architectural structure, even the toilets, and the furnishings must consider their needs, also aesthetic. Safety must also be guaranteed (Migliaccio, 2012), so it is advisable for the rooms to be placed in the lower floors or in any case near an escape route. Emergency situations must also be appropriately reported to customers with sensory disabled guests.

In Italy there is a special decalogue for hoteliers (Vitali, 2009) that reminds tourists that they need to find analytical and reliable information, considering, however, that accessibility is not the only assessed requirement: tourists with disabilities have cultural, historical, enogastronomic, sporting interests like those of non-disabled people! Moreover, they do not live only in the hotel and therefore consider the accessibility of the whole surrounding tourism system, hoping for effective networks between the companies (Migliaccio *et al.*, 2018; Tolkach *et al.*, 2016). The staff must assume a normal behavior, relating directly to the customer and not to the possible accompanying person, providing services without becoming overbearing, overprotective or differentiating them in a blatant way. We must also consider non-evident needs (allergies, etc.), remembering that disabilities can be very heterogeneous.

Therefore, to provide effective services it is necessary a respectful, but also sincere communication, considering that, in general, people with disabilities are active protagonists, able to correctly explain their needs.

It is impossible to mention the many Italian structures that meet these requirements, even if there are sometimes non-reported deficiencies that generate inconvenience (Leone, 2018).



## **Accessible Museums**

Accessibility to museums is different depending on the type of disability and the exhibits (<https://museisenzabarriere.org>; Migliaccio, 2018a):

- the removal of architectural barriers is necessary for motor disabled people;
- for blind people it is necessary to prepare audio guides and obstacle detection systems, allowing the tactile exploration of the works or its architectural, pictorial or photographic reproductions in relief, or even reproducing smells and sounds (Caruso, 2011; Bellini, 2000; Association of friends of the academy Carrara Onlus, 2011).

In Italy, positive experiences are at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, the Museo dell'Opera di Parma, the tactile museums: Homer at the Mole Vanvitelliana in Ancona, in Varese, Stamperia Regionale Braille in Catania, Anteros of the Institute of the Blind "Francesco Cavazza" in Bologna, etc. Also accessible are the National Alinari Museum of Photography of Florence and the Natural Sciences of Lake and Mountain of Trarego, Cheglio and Viggiona (VB) which reproduces entire natural environments with living plants and naturalized animals, offering also typical smells and sounds.

## **Accessible Prayer Places**

More than for the respect of the current legislation, the problem of accessibility to places of worship is an ethical, moral and religious problem. The cardinal principles of almost all religious confessions lead to respect for persons with disabilities by soliciting their participation in religious services. This is particularly true in Christian confessions, very widespread in Italy. In particular, Catholicism has been a dominant religion for centuries and its temples are rich in artistic and architectural beauties that are often the object of tourist attraction. Accessibility problems are mainly connected to the steps leading to the main entrance which could be overcome with the creation of special ramps. Any internal obstacles can be overcome in a similar way with the catwalks: this would allow participation in celebrations and tourist visits. Other places of tourist interest can be the crypts and the bell towers often characterized by difficulty of access. To avoid disturbing the aesthetic elements of the temples secondary access can be used (Arengi, 2003; Della Torre & Pracchi, 2003).

The visit to the places of prayer should be guided at least by multimedia indications that everyone can enjoy. There are many Italian churches that have now fulfilled these legal and moral precepts. For example, the Tactile Vision Onlus blind panels placed in the most important churches in Milan should be noted: San Vittore al Corpo, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Sant'Ambrogio, San Maurizio, San Lorenzo, Sant'Eustorgio, etc.; the Church of Spina in Pisa; the Montecassino Abbey, etc.

## **Accessible Natural Parks**

In Italy a special decalogue has been launched for accessibility to protected natural areas, even knowing that not all can be available to everyone, considering the limits of the person and the due respect for the ecosystems (Lancerin, 2003; Vacca, 2010). Accessibility should already be defined in the area fruition project, to avoid subsequent and higher adaptability costs. More entrances should be identified, if possible, next to the parking spaces reserved for disabled people. While



maintaining the natural characteristics, you should create paths for pedestrians equipped also usable by people with reduced motor skills or sensory, in which there are benches, fountains, shaded areas, refreshment points, toilets and so on. The accessible multimedia information must be taken care of by specifying the difficulties of the paths, to favor the best choice of the excursion, sound, olfactory or interactive path. Appropriate ecological mini-taxi could facilitate travel. These facilities can be really useful only if maintained and supported by competent and sensitive personnel.

Among the best Italian experiences, there are the natural parks: Adamello Brenta with the accessible path of Lake Tovel, Panaveggio-Pale of S. Martino, of Majella, of Sila, of Stelvio, of Alto Garda in Brescia, of Gran Paradiso, Agricolo South Milan, etc. The list is very long, considering the mountain ranges of the Alps and the Apennines. Generally, each park has a website that specifies the geomorphological characteristics and services available to people with disabilities.

### **Accessible Archaeological Parks**

The Italian archaeological heritage is among the first in the world for its historical importance and vastness (Vescovo, 1996). Usability depends on the extension and the need to safeguard the aesthetics that hardly admits modern facilities. The "visitability" for people with disabilities can be made possible by constructing itineraries to be reported with tactile maps, since access should take place within easily accessible entrances. Furthermore, it is also necessary to imagine equipped areas for rest stops, refreshments and assistance services. For the visually impaired, audio guides and sensors can be used to signal obstacles. For the deaf illustrated publications and/or expert guides in sign language. Italian best practices are recorded in Rome (Colosseum and Archaeological Area of the Mercati di Traiano), Pistoia Sotterranea, Napoli (Roman Domus in the basement of Palazzo Ricca), Ozzano (BO) at Claterna (archaeological site of the historic Roman Urbe), Reggio Calabria (Submarine archaeological park), etc. In any case it is possible to state that in Italy the State has tried to tackle the problems of geographical location, avoiding invasive interventions, using new technologies. However, few nations have a vast archaeological heritage like the Italian one: in many others the necessary investments are certainly lower.

### **Accessible Sporting Facilities**

Sports tourism should not be precluded to people with disabilities (Jannelli, 2009). For years there has been the activity of special associations that would favor access to the various disciplines (Isod - *International Sport Organization for the Disabled*, Ibsa - *International Blind Sport Federation*, Cp-Isra - *Cerebral Palsy International Sports & Recreation Association*, etc.). From the Olympic Games in Rome regular Olympic games were started (also in winter) for people with disabilities, with an increasing number of sports specialties. From 10 to 19 March 2006 the IX Winter Paralympic Games were held in Turin.

The disabled person can be considered a new target market for companies in the many sectors related to sport. Accessible tourism is spreading both to allow disabled people the practice of sporting activities and also to easily access spectator sporting events, adapting means of transport and stadiums, sports halls, racecourses, etc. with accessible structures similar to those already described. In Italy the most widespread sport is certainly the football that is practiced in



the numerous stadiums. These structures, especially the most modern ones, are made considering the principles and operational guidelines proposed by UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) and by CAFE (Centre for Access to Football in Europe) in 2011 (UEFA & CAFE, 2011). In them, individual football clubs are invited to draw up a declaration of intent that must identify the facilities and services and their characteristics of accessibility, also indicating a person responsible for all matters concerning accessibility (facilities and dedicated staff). There are numerous cities with stadiums that comply with these principles (Turin, Rome, Bologna, etc.) that favor free or reduced prices.

### **Accessible Beaches**

Holidays by the sea should not be closed to people with disabilities, guaranteeing them relaxation, fun and comfort, even at the bathing establishments. The accessibility requirements that an establishment should be: a reserved parking lot near the entrance, recognizable pedestrian path, free access to all catering and recreation services for adults and children, reserved location on the beach, aids allowing entry and exit from the sea, toilets, showers, accessible changing rooms, guidance and assistance for the visually impaired. Clear prior information and reception and assistance during the stay are essential. The beaches should also be open to types of disability, such as psychic ones, which require special attention also to protect other guests. Accessible bathing facilities are widespread in Italy. For example, in Abruzzo, in some places in the Martinsicuro area, Giulianova, Torino of Sangro, etc.; in Puglia at Polignano a Mare, Torre Pozzella, S. Cesarea, Gallipoli, etc., in Calabria at Roccella Jonica, Belvedere Marittimo, Cala Janculla, Costa Viola, etc.; in Campania at Bacoli, Ischia, Capri, Procida, Eboli. The list is long and complex, considering the thousands of kilometers of the Italian coastline.

### **Conclusion and implication**

The described experiences show a growing sensitivity of a small nation, that, with modest investments, can make accessible environments also for non-able people. These results have also been achieved thanks to younger and more sensitive managers and more modern rules, despite limited public funds. The technological development that provides low-cost products has also contributed.

This overview, although necessarily brief and incomplete, confirms the two initial hypotheses. Although with successive approximations, since the beginning of its existence, the Italian Republic has been characterized by a progressive attention to the needs of the population with disabilities (H1), with a marked acceleration in the last 20 years.

Thus, the second starting hypothesis (H2) is confirmed: Italy is progressively improving its investments to make the most important tourist sites accessible, despite some delays and sometimes lacking communications (Leone, 2018).

These confirmations derive from the examination of the main initiatives that have favored the access of people with disabilities to the main tourist sites, answering the first research question (RQ1). It can be concluded that Italian experiences can also be exported to other nations that wish to undertake this process of welcoming and including tourists with "special" needs. (RQ2). However, a strong push towards welcoming the needs of people with disabilities has also come



from international and continental organizations.

We must also consider the peculiar tourist connotations of the Nation and the growing latent demand (Agovino *et al.*, 2017) which is progressively finding acceptance, even considering the greater economic convenience and a changed sensitivity of disability.

Nations that want to consider the Italian experience, should obviously evaluate the local needs, the national and international contexts in which they are located, the needs of the population with disabilities and its number. The response of each state also depends on the prevailing culture, more or less favorable to inclusion (Migliaccio, 2018) and the public and private financial resources necessary to break down structural and social barriers.

However Italy, considering its culture impregnated with ethical and religious values and its natural tourist vocation can be considered as a reference element for development strategies of any other geographical area wishing to invest in tourism and accessible tourism, in particular.

The limits of this study are mainly identifiable in its purely descriptive nature and in the necessary summary imposed in the presentation of the different situations of tourist destinations. In the future this article can become a reference framework for other detailed analyzes of the many aspects that have been mentioned.

The practical implications are easily understood. First users may be governments and therefore the Ministries responsible for Tourism and Equal Opportunities. So also the local authorities which are responsible for the direct management of the territories. Other beneficiaries are associations and foundations dedicated to assisting people with disabilities, considering the propulsive drive registered in Italy, as well as in other countries. Lastly, also private companies engaged in transport, the provision of accommodation and restaurant services, the organization of fairs, shows, concerts, sporting events, etc., or even the reception and tourist guide to museums, places of worship, naturalistic or archaeological parks, etc. they might be interested in this paper. This contribution can also be useful for authors who study the social phenomena of the neediest groups and the evolution of the tourism economy.

There is no doubt that other nations that are even more economically and socially evolved can provide more and more ideas for reflection, for the planning of targeted actions in favor of accessible tourism. However, Italy can be considered a very useful reference.

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