

PAVING THE WAY TO ACCESSIBLE TOURISM ON THE EXAMPLE OF KRAKOW

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ABSTRACT: Worldwide, there are about 650 million people with disabilities, which is a significant potential market for tourism industry. However people with limited mobility have their special needs regarding participation in tourism, but also they have the same motivation of travelling. This still unexplored field of tourism for people with disabilities is an ongoing trend and many initiatives are taken in this direction. As an example it could be Krakow which have recognized the potential of disability tourists and introduced a number of improvements. This paper aims to generate relevant knowledge about the travel needs and barriers of people with disabilities, to assess the current level of accessibility in the tourism sector in Krakow especially in accommodation options, museums, offering services on selected examples. The research was carried out based on literature review and a questionnaire and interviews with disability tourists in Krakow. Most of tourists were satisfied with the level of customization of services and attractions to their needs, however they also drew attention to the lack of common regulations regarding accessibility, especially in the private sector.

Keywords: accessible tourism, disability, special needs, innovations

INTRODUCTION

Tourism for disabled people is a phenomenon that is strongly growing. However, despite its development still - to some extent - is rare. This is mainly due to the lack of knowledge on the market of tourist with special needs, the lack of dialogue, coordination and exchange of information between different levels of government, businesses, tourism industry.

People with disabilities have the right and will to undertake the act of travelling just like the rest of the society (Darcy and Daruwalla, 1999). During travelling, every visitor meets tourism related barriers and it was noticed that the barriers are especially affecting the tourist with special needs, i.e. disabled ones. Not only do they have the right to participate in the actions of travelling and leisure, but also have the same needs and motives to take up tourism as their healthy and able counterparts. In spite of that - and despite a variety of actions taken by the EU - the experiencing of travel by disabled tourist is still being

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described from the perspective of the barriers they need to face. These mostly concern the limitations of transport, unadapted accommodation facilities, places of tourist attraction or insufficient tourist information and lack of personnel trained well enough to deal with the social group in question. And even though the number of tourists with disabilities is relatively large and, having adapted their services and facilities, many providers could increase their tourism income, they still fail to see the relevance of taking action in that area.

Availability means that people with disabilities are able to access - on the same level - the physical environment, transport, communication and information technologies, education and other services and facilities. Availability is a condition of participation in social and economic life so breaking the barriers is the main point of the European strategy for disability in 2010 - 2020 (European Commission, 2012).

Facilitating access should not be treated as a burden, especially when the spaces and objects located in large cities are concerned, mainly due to the fact that the vast majority of European citizens lives in these administrative areas. People with disabilities have the basic right to participate in tourism on the same rules as other people. This privilege is guaranteed by the UN Convention dated 13 December 2006 relating to the rights of people with disabilities (Article 30). Changes in the fields of law and organization, products and institutions are necessary in order to facilitate the stimulation of social activity of the impaired by their participation in tourism and, in turn, sightseeing historic cities being famous for their monuments and relicts of cultural heritage. One of such cities is Krakow which offers a myriad of tourist attractions.

In light of the above, the goal of this article is mainly a cognitive one, namely the presentation of the efforts of Krakow to break the barriers in the environment of the city and promoting the participation of people with disabilities not only - on a narrow sense - in tourism but also in social life in the whole. The article will present a number of inspiring best practices in the fields of the environments of life, work and tourism with no barriers in Krakow. The discussed topics will include the availability of transport, accommodation, availability of tourist places (attractions), the act of planning one's stay, gathering information and the very action of sightseeing.

Legal accessibility considerations

It is widely recognized that people with disabilities and their guardians or relatives as well as elderly people create a large potential group of consumers for tourist and hotel industry (Burnett and Baker, 2001). Nevertheless, the level in which this potential market niche can be used

depends on the approach of the tourist sector and the whole tourist industry to making their services available to the disabled. Facilitating access to attractions and various venues will be beneficial not only for the impaired but also for the whole community.

Both the local and international legislations include laws and acts giving everybody the right to access the common environment and limiting social foreclosure. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland includes a passage stating that “no one shall be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever” (Article 32). In light of this it is evident that all citizens are equal and no discrimination can ever take place. Another legal text which helps the impaired is the resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland - The Disabled People’s Bill of Rights (*Karta Praw Osób Niepełnosprawnych*) adopted in 1997. The resolution emphasizes that the disabled have the right to lead independent lives. Additionally, the document clearly mentions tourism when describing the right of the disabled people to “fully participate in public, social, cultural, artistic and sport life as well as recreation and tourism according to their interests and needs” (paragraph 1.10).

Disability versus accessibility

Public space is the area of meetings, work, recreation - it is a kind of space where people move from their workplaces to their homes and the other way around. A square, a marketplace, boulevard, street - these are the places where tourists and locals mingle, areas of interaction and actions leading to the integration of the local communities. Public space is the “heart of the city” which should beat with life, connect the citizens and create the field for initiatives, stimulate imagination and development. A kind of space which would be friendly for everybody, available for all and, regardless of their mobility or cognitive abilities, offers its users a full social integration and becomes a place where interpersonal bonds are tightened and society develops (Wysocki, 2009, p 3).

A city - especially Krakow - does not only consist of public places, it also includes monuments, museums, tourist and cultural objects being in the center of the visitors’ interest. Before coming to Krakow it is worth to find out more about its valuables and tourist resources. They can interest or even charm tourists and, as a result, convince them to come again. This will be possible only when the visitors with disabilities will have equal opportunities to get to know the beauty of Krakow through experiencing monuments, tourist attractions and the whole accompanying tourist infrastructure which are adapted for such visitors.

Accessibility depends on the kind of disability and definitely exceeds the physical type. According to Darcy (1998) accessibility can be characterized by three main measures:

- physical accessibility, which applies to people with physical disability, frequently requiring the use of wheelchairs or walking aids and often demanding other conveniences such as railings, ramps, lifts, etc,
- sensory accessibility, which applies to people with impaired sight or hearing or other similar impairments. Such people require special services such as tactile signs, visual signs, labels, audio-visual systems, warning sounds for lifts and crossings, etc,
- communication accessibility, which applies to people with communication impairments, e.g. having difficulties to read, write, hear or speak, as well as people coming from different cultural backgrounds who require some explanation or additional information.

A CASE STUDY OF KRAKOW

People with disabilities have the right and motives to undertake the act of travelling the same as healthy people, Tourism is a way to expand one's horizons and develop the relations between social groups. Disabled people are less willing to stand out from the rest of the society. Additionally, the number of people with acquired impairments, due to an accident or a catastrophe, seems to have increased over the years and they need to learn to cope with their conditions. Therefore, they are more likely to express the will to enjoy travelling and forget the hardships they face every day. Unfortunately, their experience is still being limited by various barriers. To tackle this, Krakow has introduced a number of conveniences for disabled people in the city area. The city also promotes equal participation of people with various impairments in the society and emphasizes to others the special needs of this group. The initiative of the Foundation for Active Rehabilitation and the disabled people's societies can serve as an example as they painted a message to everybody on the Krakow bus station whose goal was to cause empathy and allow others to understand the disabled (photo 1)



Photo 1. Murals on the Regional Bus Station in Krakow (Marcin Popiel)

Transport

Krakow is a large city with an old city centre and new post-industrial areas, hence advancement of accessibility for everybody will be a welcome development.

While air transport is becoming increasingly easy and the providers continue to introduce new types of services and conveniences, every now and again one can hear about mishaps such as lost luggage or delayed flights, etc. Such situations are uncomfortable for every tourist and especially ones with disabilities. Damaging or even losing a wheelchair will most probably make further journey impossible. Other kinds of limitations people using a wheelchair may face include (among other things) lack of a designated parking space in front of the terminal, unadapted municipal transport, difficulties with getting on and off the plane or lack of a special toilet on board. People with sight impairment face another challenge - the identification and collection of their baggage. In case of larger airports there also are cases of communication barriers - poorly labeled roads, lack of direction signs no circulation of information. These are just some of the challenges that people with disabilities have to face.

The Krakow airport has introduced a set of improvements thanks to which a disability does not make it impossible, and in fact far less difficult, to travel by plain. Before embarking on a trip it is advised to inform the airline, travel agency or airport staff about the type of dis-

ability the passenger suffers from and the special needs they may have as a result. It allows for precautions to be taken and for the service to run smoothly. The passengers are advised to disclose:

- the type of their disability,
- any problems with moving about they may have,
- problems with receiving information (visual and auditory on the airport premises),
- the type of the medical or assisting equipment used (e.g. a wheelchair),
- any medicine that needs to be taken during the trip,
- assistance by a guide dog,
- any special requirements connected with food/meals (www.krakowairport.pl, as of 12 January 2014),

Krakow airport offers a special assistance to the people with disabilities, both inside the terminals and in flight. It stems from certain EU Regulations (regulation EC 1107/2006, as of 5 July 2006). Apart from that, the airport is fitted with a 'blue trail' which consists of a system of labels and signs as well as call panels which facilitate moving around the airport and reaching key terminal areas for the disabled people.

The main element of starting a trip to/from the airport is the means of transport. A taxi spot is located just outside the airport exit allowing for a fast and convenient arrival and departure from the terminals. The taxis are adapted to transport people using wheelchairs and the wheelchairs themselves. The railway is another means of getting to the airport. A special fast railway service is ready to transport people with disabilities from the main station in Krakow directly to the airport (photo 2). The railway station provides a special ticket office designed for the disabled and marked with number 'X'.



Photo 2. Adapted station and train to the needs of disabled people (Marcin Popiel)

City busses are yet another form of transport travelling to the airport's international terminal. It is also suited to transport disabled people. Additionally, there is a special bus traveling between the international terminal, the national one and the airport railway station, free of charge and ready to meet the needs of all tourists (photo 3).



Photo 3. Shuttle bus on the airport (Marcin Popiel)

The airport car parks include specially marked spots for people with disabilities. The handicapped spaces are located near terminal entrances and marked with a well-known sign of a person in a wheelchair.

Separate check-in desks have also been prepared for the sole purpose of serving the disabled. The desks are lower so that people in wheel chairs can use them comfortably, and they also include dedicated sitting areas for passengers awaiting further stages of their journey (www.krakowairport.pl as of 12 January 2014) (photo 4).

After passing security, the passengers wait for boarding in the departure lounge fitted with special seats (reserved places). During boarding a staff member is available for assistance. When boarded, the passenger will be assisted by the airline staff.

The Krakow airport infrastructure includes “help points” allowing for a direct call of the assisting staff. Additionally, adapted toilets, telephones and lifts ready for disabled people all contain additional visual information. The whole airport area is also equipped with an audio-visual information system which announces flights and other important messages. It utilizes large screens to display the information as well as the airport sound system to announce it verbally.



Photo 4. Balice Airport - check-in for tourists with disabilities and reserved seats (Marcin Popiel)

Public transport is also an important element of traveling across Krakow. Being supported by a well-directed transport policy, the city has improved its spatial infrastructure of communication and its information network. Presently, almost all of the city busses are low-entry and low-floor ones and are fitted with railings and audio announcement systems. All trams were planned to follow with similar conveniences by the end of 2013 (www.mpk.krakow.pl as of 12 January 2014).

A disabled tourist finds all these aspects extremely important, from the color of the bus or tram stop, which, when contrasting, will be easier to spot by those with impaired sight, through adapted vehicles and slopes for wheelchairs. The bus stop infrastructure is also adapted to fit the needs of the disabled. Many stops include tactile paving informing the hard of sight that they are approaching the ledge and should mind their step. What is more, some stops include special ramps and platforms facilitating boarding the tram for people in wheelchairs.

Trams and busses frequently suffer due to the way they are “operated”. Buttons requesting the doors to be opened are next to emergency buttons or are placed too high. Krakow vehicles tackle this problem by offering buttons labeled in Braille thanks to which the passengers with visual impairment would not mistake them. Moreover, there are also additional buttons marked with a wheelchair image and placed much lower allowing wheelchair users to travel without barriers (phot. 5). Thanks to these improvements the public transport in Krakow is no longer inaccessible for people with disabilities (phot. 6)



Photo 5. Additional buttons for people with disabilities to open doors in public transport (Marcin Popiel)



Photo 6. Low floor trams and elevated platforms at bus stops to help getting in (Marcin Popiel)

Accommodation

Krakow, being one of the largest cities in Poland, is a destination for tourists both local and foreign. It is all because of the monuments, unique character and exceptional atmosphere of the city that thousands and thousands of tourists decide to visit it each year. Due to that fact the accommodation base is growing year by year.

Rationally adapted accommodation for people with disabilities still remains a challenge when the disabled attempt to travel. There is not enough facilities offering rooms adapted to meet the needs of particular tourists including such things as: low-placed wall sockets and switches, hand dryers, hangers or adapted beds. Another issue is caused by lifts and parking spots, or actually lack thereof, or their location far from the hotel (Błaszczuk and Witkowski, 2006).

Presently a lot of focus is given to reducing and completely removing the architectural barriers. Situation is looking the best for the highest ranked hotels. This creates a further barrier for the disabled as such hotels are very expensive. Due to the growing problem of availability of accommodation for people with disabilities, the owners of hotels and other accommodation facilities strive to dispose of the barriers created by architecture.

In Krakow the majority of objects in the Old Town is adapted to serve tourists with disabilities. When trying to find accommodation, one can ask in one of the Lesser Poland Tourist Information System points (*Małopolski System Informacji Turystycznej*) whose database contains over 110 places with facilities for the disabled (verbal information as of 13 January 2014). Additionally, more information on the accommodation dedicated for people with disabilities can be found in the *Traveling unlimited. Krakow accessible. The guide for disabled travelers* which is referred to in the later parts of the article.

Tourist attractions

The attractions are the elements of tourist destinations which stimulate the will and goal to travel and sightsee. These can be related to recreation (entertainment parks, aqua parks), places connected with nature (national and landscape parks), places of history (battle grounds, museums) or social-cultural attractions (festivals). All of the mentioned types can be found in Krakow.

The majority of limitations the disabled tourists face when trying to take part in any of the above focus around the inaccessibility of the area, terrain or facility. Poor access to museums, monuments or other culture objects limits the disabled as they cannot use or see the particular attraction to the same extent as the able tourists do.

One of the main attractions of Krakow is undoubtedly the Main Market Square with the Cloth Hall, City Hall and St. Mary's Basilica. Thanks to its even paving made of flagstone and cobble disabled tourists can move about with no barriers. Unfortunately, the majority of stores and restaurants situated around the square require the visitor to up at least one step. During the summer most restaurants set up beer gardens which are easily accessible even to tourists with disabilities. The Main Market Square area also offers public toilets adapted for the needs of the disabled.

The majority of museums around the Market Square has adapted their facilities according to the requirements of 'architecture without barriers' thanks to which tourists can easily visit a lot of cultural attractions of the city.

The most famous attraction of Krakow is the Wawel hill with the Royal Castle. Due to a large number of steps and a complicated, multi-level architecture, it does not offer too many facilities for the disabled. Only during the winter season the assistance of the museum staff is available allowing the visitors to see the upper storey's of the castle. Such a visit requires a telephone call in advance (www.krakowlife.pl as of 12 January 2014).

Apart from the Old Town, Kazimierz has also become quite a known neighborhood. Many synagogues can be found there, mainly due to a rich history of the Jewish community in that area. Apart from that, Kazimierz is also famous for the unique atmosphere of its narrow streets. Unfortunately, the lack of disabled facilities is clearly visible. The curbs are tall, most synagogues have no barrier-free access and the beautiful, narrow streets are covered with uneven cobble.

Fortunately, Krakow has found a solution for the disabled, thanks to which people in wheelchairs, the blind and the people with any other disability can get to know the attractions of the city. Twelve places in the city center contain touchable mock-ups - models of various sights found in these places. These models are the new tourist attraction of the city called "The Royal Tract for the Disabled Tourist". It was created as a result of a project of the local government who wanted to create an attractive tourist route for people with sight impairments and movement disabilities. It is the first undertaking of this kind in Poland. It came to being thanks to the EU funding within the Lesser Poland Regional Operations Programme. The "Royal Tract for the Disabled Tourist" consists of twelve mock-ups, nine of which are placed on pedestals and the remaining three are hanging on the walls.

The standing mock-ups consist of the model of the attraction, a description in Braille, a description in flat print, the pedestal and its foot. Due to the way the pedestal is made, it is possible to approach it in a wheel chair and read the text and examine the model (phot. 7) The

hanging models also include two types of description, they are placed on a suitable height and have the forms of low-reliefs. The models present the following attractions:

- Barbican,
- area of the old town with the Royal route,
- portrait of Jan Matejko on the facade of the House of the artist,
- St. Mary's Basilica,
- Cloth Hall,
- Town Hall Tower,
- The Franciscans monastery,
- Wyspiański stained glass-"God the father, stand up!",
- Churches. St. Peter and St. Paul and St. George. Andrew,
- Romanesque window,
- the Palace of the Bishop Ciołek,
- Wawel Hill.

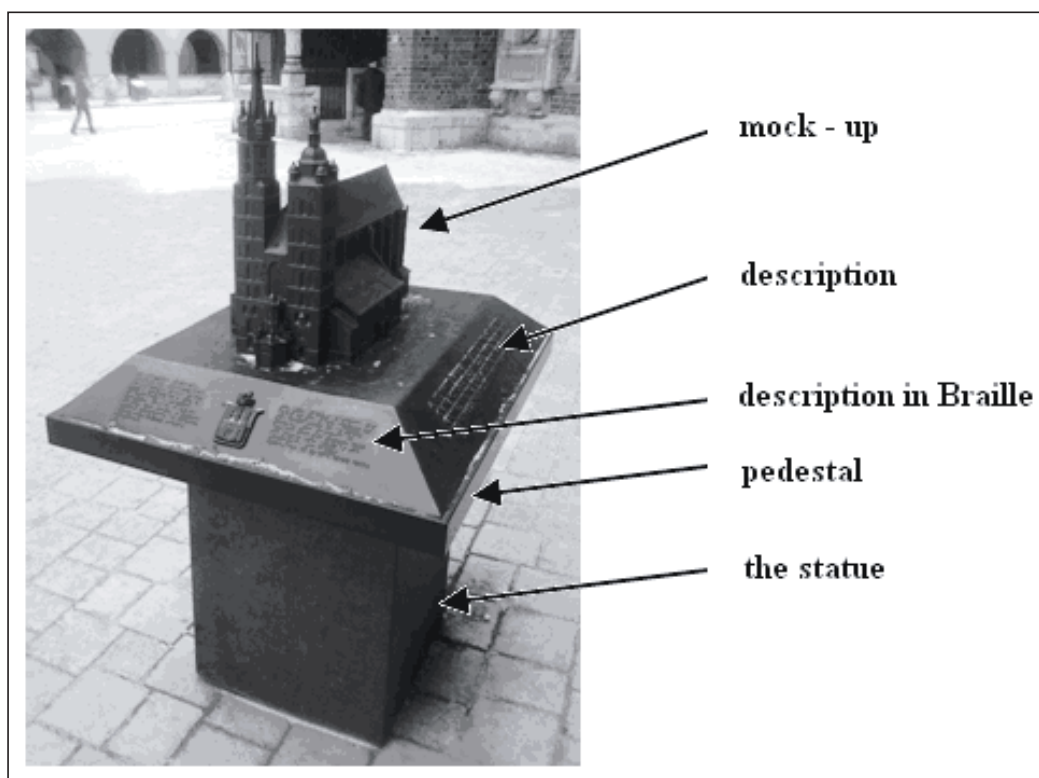


Photo 7. Standing mock-up (St. Mary's Basilica) (Marcin Popiel)

Planning and organization

People with disabilities might find that planning and organizing their stay proves problematic. According to the kind of their disabilities, the travelers need to pay attention to various aspects which address their needs.

The providers working in the field of tourism should strive to increase the accessibility of attractions in tourist destinations. The same can be said about the self government of each administrative unit. On the other hand, the disabled themselves should gather information about their destination from a variety of sources and thus facilitate their own planning and the possibility to break the barriers.

A special guide was released in Krakow: *Traveling unlimited.- Krakow accessible. The guide for disabled travelers*. It describes attractions available for visitors with inhibitions. Apart from the obvious (for this type of a book) information such as maps, history and legends, the guide was additionally fitted with sections concerning the number of steps, availability of toilets, height of curbs, etc. It also contains section of practical tips about planning the trip to Krakow, looking for accommodation and organizing the stay.

The process of organizing the stay in Krakow - and the whole of Lesser Poland - can be assisted by the Lesser Poland Tourist Information System (*MSIT*). It is based on a network of units providing tourist information. The assumptions are that the system would be user-friendly and meet the expectations of every tourist in the field of information, advice and promotion. Currently, not all units working in the system are adapted to meet the needs of the disabled but it was suggested that more and more information points should be suitable for people with disabilities. Currently the facilities include:

- separate computer workstations with software for the disabled (including the blind and hard of sight),
- promotion and information material with multimedia content for the blind and hard of seeing (including Braille texts and the list of Lesser Poland tourist attractions in large font.
- audit of tourist attractions and places evaluating their possibility of providing service to the disabled together with the description of the actual state and recommendations for changes increasing the level of availability,
- vehicles and lifts facilitating access to the information points for people in wheelchairs (www.malopolskie.pl, as of 12 January 2014).

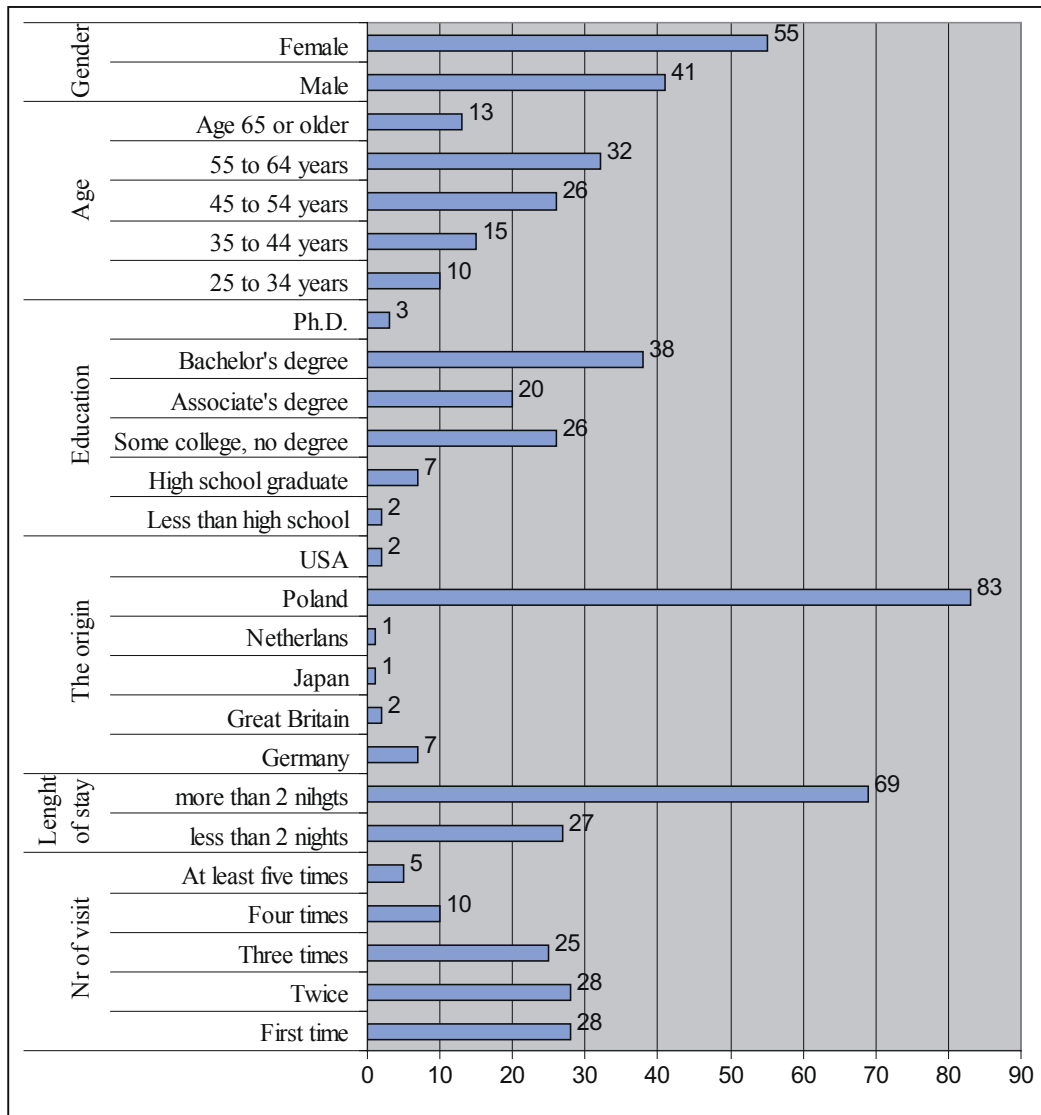
Seven units of MSIT can be found all across Krakow and they are there to offer help to the disabled. the units are marked with a special logo. All of the information points are adapted to fit the needs of people with disabilities. The units also offer assistance by phone without the need of visiting them personally.

SURVEY RESULTS

A survey was conducted on a group of disabled people with different types of impairment who have come to Krakow (n=96).

Among the respondents there were 55 women and 41 men. The predominant age group 55 to 64 years (32 respondents), the vast majority of people came from the Polish (81 respondents). 69 respondents indicated that they came to Krakow for more than 2 nights, so they have the opportunity to take advantage of a variety of products and services that the city offers (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents (n=96)



Respondents were asked to answer to the question regarding their level of satisfaction with various elements of their stay in Poland in terms of availability of tourist products and services to the needs of people with disabilities. Respondents ranked accommodation facilities, gastronomic base, transport, tourist attractions and their overall level of satisfaction with the stay. On the basis of the results we can see that a large part of the accommodation meet the

expectations of tourists with special needs. 8 people were very satisfied and 47 people were satisfied with the services. However, 12 people give the answer – dissatisfied. A similar situation applies to the gastronomic base, where 43 people have given an answer – satisfied. Although 27 respondents marked dissatisfied answer.. This may result from the lack of awareness of the restaurateurs about the disabled, hence they do not take action in the direction of leveling all sorts of barriers that prevent people with disabilities from full participation in society. Question concerning the transport has been a very positive response. 38 respondents were very satisfied. On the question concerning the tourist attractions until the 72 people responded very satisfied and 21 people - satisfied. These results may not come as a surprise, as Krakow undoubtedly trying to adjust the sights, museums, attractions to meet the needs of all people. In conclusion there was asked questions about the overall level of satisfaction. On the basis of their positive experience with their stay in Krakow, 65 people responded with a very satisfied answer and 35 with satisfied. (Tab.2)

Table 2. Evaluation of accessibility of products and tourist services in the eyes of the tourists

How would you rate the following elements of stay in Krakow in terms of accessibility for people with disabilities	Number of answers	%
Accommodation		
Dissatisfied	12	13
Neutral	6	6
Somewhat satisfied	23	24
Satisfied	47	49
Very satisfied	8	8
Gastronomic base		
Dissatisfied	27	28
Neutral	0	0
Somewhat satisfied	18	19
Satisfied	43	45
Very satisfied	8	8

(cont.)

How would you rate the following elements of stay in Krakow in terms of accessibility for people with disabilities	Number of answers	%
Transport		
Dissatisfied	0	0
Neutral	5	5
Somewhat satisfied	17	18
Satisfied	36	38
Very satisfied	38	40
Tourist attractions		
Dissatisfied	3	3
Neutral	0	0
Somewhat satisfied	0	0
Satisfied	21	22
Very satisfied	72	75
General satisfaction with the stay		
Dissatisfied	0	0
Neutral	0	0
Somewhat satisfied	0	0
Satisfied	31	32
Very satisfied	65	68

CONCLUSION

The access to tourism, different kinds of services and related products should be a standard and not an exception. The facts are that providing the accessibility is not always an easy task, but now, in the age of creating the Europe “for everybody”, cities without barriers are on demand. Krakow can be used as an example of an agglomeration which strives to break the barriers in the town environment and promote the participation of the disabled and elderly in tourism. Thanks to these efforts and changes they caused, tourists with impairments from all around the world can get to know both the city and its tourist resources and infrastructure. The wide

range of facilities is also beneficial for the disabled citizens on a daily basis. The increase in accessibility leads to increase in tourist movement, draws in new capital opening the possibilities of further development of best practices and the availability of the city for everybody.

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Legal acts

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Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 concerning the rights of persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility travelling by air. Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 1 August 1997.

The Bill of rights of persons with disabilities (M.P. from 13.08.1997 no item 50.475)

Internet resources

- www.krakowairport.pl (as of 12 January 2014)
- www.krakowlife.pl (as of 12 January 2014)
- www.malopolskie.pl (as of 12 January 2014)
- www.mpk.krakow.pl (as of 12 January 2014)

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