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## Development of a Catalogue of Criteria for Assessing the Accessibility of Cultural Heritage Sites<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** The article presents the postulates of developing a catalogue of criteria for assessing the accessibility of cultural heritage sites as tourist attractions from the point of view of the needs of several social groups: persons with disabilities, elderly people and visitors with children. In this catalogue three basic components are of key importance: physical/technical preparation, tourist information system and the skills and competences of the staff serving guests. The first part of the article is a review, discussing the concept of accessibility as well as the barriers and constraints that may exist in cultural heritage sites from the perspective of the groups of visitors concerned. The second part focuses on the presentation of the postulates for the development of a catalogue of criteria for the assessment of accessibility on the example of the case study of the Piast Trail – the main historical thematic route in the Wielkopolska region. The contents of the article constitute a knowledge base useful in the process of equal opportunities in access to historical and cultural heritage. They also serve as guidelines for improving the quality of services in tourist facilities.

**Keywords:** accessibility, accessible tourism, disability, elder tourists, family tourism, cultural heritage sites

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<sup>1</sup> The presented postulates and research results are the outcome of the project “Criteria for assessing the accessibility of the Piast Trail” (pol. Kryteria oceny dostępności Szlaku Piastowskiego) carried out on behalf of the Department of Sport and Tourism of the Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region in Poznań (2018), grant manager: A. Zajadacz, contractors: A. Lubarska, A. Minkwitz, K. Piotrowski, I. Potocka, E. Stroik. A. Zajadacz.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of accessibility has a wide range of meanings. It refers to spatial relations (ability to reach without obstacles), temporal relations (accessibility at a given moment), individual predispositions of a given person (ease of making contact) or characteristics of places, objects, information and their users (lack of difficulty in accessing, ease of assimilation). Nowadays, as a result of the activities of the World Tourism Organisation, the concept of accessibility and accessible tourism is promoted, which takes into account both the characteristics of the environment and the needs of individual users, in accordance with the assumptions of the social model of disability and the observed trends in the tourist services market, related to their customization. However, despite many initiatives undertaken in this field, meeting the conditions of accessibility in practice is still a challenge for many tourist facilities, including museums.

The aim of the article is to introduce the context of defining accessibility of cultural heritage objects from the perspective of needs of various social groups. However, in the strict sense, it is the presentation of postulates how to shape the evaluation system of the availability of cultural attractions. These postulates were developed in cooperation with representatives of the community of persons with disabilities (PwD), elderly people, as well as visitors with children and were tested in selected objects constituting the main attractions of the Piast Trail in the Wielkopolska region. The implementation of both tasks is important not only in terms of specific application at the scale of a given facility, but also in the process of unification and standardisation of solutions for improving accessibility in general, which include three basic categories: physical accessibility, accessibility of the tourist information system and the skills of the staff serving visitors.

## 2. Accessibility, barriers and availability limitations

“Accessibility prevents or removes barriers to the use of mainstream products and services. It allows the perception, operation and understanding of those products and services by persons with functional limitations, including people with disabilities, on an equal basis with others” [*Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council* 2015: 2]. Accessibility is not only relevant to the needs of the people with disabilities, it is also relevant to any individual who encounters difficulties in travelling due to their personal circumstances. It was underlined in the definition of accessibility being understood as: „how easy it is for everybody to approach, enter and use buildings, outdoor areas and other

facilities, independently, without the need of special arrangements” [*Improving information...* 2004: 5]. This means that appropriate facilities as well as the skills of service providers should be guaranteed in the place visited, as default standards in public spaces or facilities.

Accessibility is the essence of „Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” [2006], to which the EU and 25 of its Member States have acceded. This is one of the priorities of the “European Disability Strategy 2010-2020”. In the context of this document, accessibility means that persons with disabilities can benefit on an equal footing with others: In the context of this document, accessibility means that PwD can enjoy, on an equal footing with others: the physical environment, transport, information and communication technologies and systems (ICT) and other facilities and services. Increased accessibility of tourist facilities requires breaking down many of the barriers that can be caused:

- characteristics of the natural environment (e.g. slopes, unpaved, sandy road surface),
- architectural constraints (e.g. doors too narrow, stairs),
- lack of basic equipment (e.g. inductive loop, Braille descriptions, touch-screens),
- the way in which services are provided and information about them is provided.

The classification of barriers and restrictions to tourism for persons with disabilities, based on a broad review of national and foreign literature, was presented by Lubarska [2018]. On this basis, the division proposed by Smith [1987] can be considered the universal one, which was also reflected in later classifications. The Smithian division distinguished intrinsic, environmental and interactive barriers. Intrinsic barriers are the result of conditions directly or indirectly related to a given type of disability (e.g. overprotection of parents, carers, inadequate education system, difficulties in the labour market, low income, high expenses related to everyday functioning, rehabilitation). According to Smith [1987], they are primary and intrinsic in nature (such as knowledge deficits, health problems, physical and mental dependence). On the other hand, environmental restrictions refer to both the social environment (social attitudes, negative social relations) and the natural and architectural environment (e.g. bad weather conditions, steep slopes, difficult to overcome type of surface, unsuitable transport, lack of lifts, driveways). Interactive constraints include difficulties arising from inadequate ability to meet a challenge and barriers to communication (e.g. inadequacy of the form of information provision to the needs of people with visual or hearing impairments). In the context of accessibility that can be guaranteed by cultural heritage sites, the most relevant activities focus on the elimination of environmental and interactive barriers. These include

a well prepared physical aspect of the area (including technical improvements), a tailored tourist information system in terms of content and form, and the skills and competences of guest service staff.

### **3. Assumption of shaping the catalogue of criteria for assessing the accessibility of cultural heritage objects**

The basis for the assumptions of the catalogue of criteria for assessing the accessibility of cultural heritage objects was based on:

1. A review of recommended actions for the development of internationally accessible tourism, i.e. by United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO 2013, 2014a, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e], European Network for Accessible Tourism [ENAT 2018]; good practices in selected European countries [i.a. Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus 2014; NeumannConsult 2014a, 2014b; Visit England 2017; Agovino et al. 2017; Hamraie 2017], as well as solutions applied in Poland [Zajadacz 2014; Walas 2017; Wysocki 2017]. The theoretical foundations of the integrated quality management system for tourism have also been taken into account [European Commission 2000; Integrated Quality Management – UNWTO 2017]. This review was the basis for the development of an initial catalogue of evaluation criteria.

2. Participation of representatives of beneficiary groups in testing the preliminary catalogue of criteria for assessing accessibility in selected cultural heritage sites. The selection of objects was based on their representativeness for the trail, therefore 8 out of 33 attractions (Poznań Archaeological Museum, Models of Old Poznań, Archcathedral Basilica of St. Peter and St. Paul in Poznań, Archaeological Reserve Genius Loci, Porta Posnania “ICHOT”, Pobiedziska Gord, Museum of the First Piasts in Lednica and Museum of the Origins of the Polish State in Gniezno) were selected, representing 3 types of objects: historic, outdoor and modern. The opinions of the expert groups they belonged to (persons with physical, hearing and visual impairments, elderly people, visitors with children) made it possible to optimise the adopted features both in terms of the needs of the selected target groups and the overall specificity of cultural heritage sites.

As a result, a catalogue of criteria for assessing the accessibility of cultural heritage sites was developed as a tool for auditing their accessibility. It was also assumed that this catalogue should be reviewed periodically (at least every 3-5 years) and, if necessary, modified in line with the changing needs of the addressees of activities and realities on the international tourist services market.

## 4. Scope and results of tests

The scope of research related to testing the preliminary catalogue of criteria for assessing the availability of cultural heritage objects was tested in selected objects belonging to the main attractions of the Piast Trail. This route is one of the most popular and oldest tourist routes in Poland, connected with the dynasty of the first royal family. It is possible to get to know both the objects which were built until 1370, i.e. until the death of the last king of the Piast dynasty, Casimir the Great, and contemporary institutions popularizing knowledge about the Piast times. Taking into account the diversity of tourist attractions, during testing, in order to guarantee the universality of the results, three basic categories were taken into account: historical buildings, outdoor facilities (e.g. Ostrów Lednicki) and contemporary facilities (e.g. the Poznań ICHOT Gate).

Field works were carried out in eight representative objects (October 2018, Figure 1). Representatives of all target groups were involved in modifying the catalogue of accessibility assessment criteria:

- persons with reduced mobility: 3 wheelchair users;
- blind and partially sighted persons: 3 persons (1 blind person, 2 partially sighted persons);
- deaf and partially deaf persons: 7 persons (5 deaf people, 2 partially deaf people);
- families with children: 10 adults and 10 children aged from one year to 10 years, including:
  - elderly people: 3 persons aged 70-74.



Figure 1. Verification of the criteria for assessing the accessibility of the Piast Trail by people with motor disabilities (Photo: authors, October 2018)

Table 1. Criteria for assessing accessibility for older people

No.	Criterion/characteristics	Yes/no, not applicable	Supporting description for auditors (important elements)
1.	<b>General requirements</b>		
1.1.	Comfort of the sightseeing (comfort of equipment, pace of sightseeing adapted to the needs of the elderly).		
1.2.	If there is a need to walk long distances, there are seats at least every 30 meters.		
1.3.	The surfaces in the facility are stable and non-slip.		
1.4.	Surfaces in terrain conditions are stable, non-slip, maintained in such a way as to prevent water accumulation and puddles.		
2.	<b>Exhibition and exhibition space</b>		
2.1.	Individual guided tours.		
2.2.	Group guided tours		
2.3.	Events, workshops for seniors (permanent, cyclic, occasional, on request).		
3.	<b>Hygienic and sanitary facilities</b>		
3.1.	Toilet in the facility.		
3.2.	Toilet in the vicinity of the facility.		
3.3.	Alarm and call system in the toilet.		
4.	<b>Resting places/areas</b>		
4.1.	Chairs / benches / seats with backrests available when visiting the exhibition.		
4.2.	Chairs / benches / seats with backrest in viewpoints.		
4.3.	In the lobby, chairs of different heights are available for guests in the reception area, some with armrests (for those who have difficulty sitting and standing up).		
5.	<b>Tourist information</b>		
5.1.	Website with information about the offer and facilities for the elderly.		
5.2.	Printed materials: plans, maps, brochures, guides with an offer for the elderly, information on amenities and infrastructure (toilets, changing rooms, lifts, stairs, resting places, etc.).		
5.3.	Information point in the facility.		
5.4.	Continuous updating of information on the website, in mobile applications.		
6.	<b>Staff serving visitors</b>		
6.1.	Staff trained in service for elderly people (training institution).		
6.2.	Possibility of using the services of an assistant, tourist guide.		

Table 1 – cont.

No.	Criterion/characteristics	Yes/no, not applicable	Supporting description for auditors (important elements)
6.3.	“Accessibility consultant” – a contact person for questions related to the accessibility of the facility, which can be asked by phone, e-mail, or directly in the facility.		
7.	<b>Other services, facilities</b>		
7.1.	Parties, family events.		
7.2.	Possibility of renting folding chairs, seats, as well as with a backrest.		
8.	<b>Admission tickets</b>		
8.1.	Reduced tickets.		
8.2.	Free entrance.		
<b>Autoevaluation</b>			
1.	Is the place well adapted for sightseeing by the elderly?		
2.	Are the staff able to evacuate the elderly in an emergency?		
3.	Are there plans for work in the coming year related to with improved accessibility for older people? If yes, please specify which?		
4.	Are enquiries and comments from older people recorded and processed? If so, what are the issues at stake and what action has been taken to address them?		

Source: The project “Criteria for assessing the accessibility of the Piast Trail” [2018].

The research was conducted on many occasions, in intimate conditions, in groups of a few people, so that it was possible to conduct in-depth interviews with representatives of particular groups with regard to the relevance of the proposed criteria. Administrations of all of the objects selected for testing responded to the request for an invitation to visit a given object, agreed to waive all admission fees, as well as designated an employee for direct contact, which significantly facilitated the course of work.

In total, 5 catalogues of evaluation criteria were developed – separate for each target group. These features referred in detail to the needs of specific groups, while the “axis” of their ordering were common categories such as: general requirements, exhibition, exhibition space, hygiene and sanitary facilities, resting places and zones, tourist information, tourist staff, other services and facilities, admission tickets and questions related to self-evaluation. In view of the size of the tables, one illustrative catalogue of criteria for assessing the accessibility of cultural heritage sites for the elderly is given below (Table 1).

Catalogues developed in the “Criteria for assessing the accessibility of the Piast Trail” project (2018) was adopted as a tool to conduct “Analysis of accessibility of the Piast Trail” (2019) covering all objects located on this route on the scale of the Wielkopolska region.

## 5. Findings and conclusions

The developed catalogue of accessibility assessment criteria should not be treated as a permanent set of guidelines, rather it should be periodically verified and modified. The basis for these activities should be the conclusions of the conducted audits. Therefore, it is important for the audit team to have a broad knowledge of both theoretical and practical aspects of accessibility and universal design for tourist facilities, knowledge of good practices at the European level and experience resulting from cooperation with the environment and organisations of the PwD.

It is worth stressing out, taking into account the applicability of the project, that the main effect in this case is not the ranking or categorizing objects in terms of accessibility, but: (1) improvement of the tourist information system (TIS) in terms of: details of data on the real conditions in the objects on the route (facilities, barriers, limitations); unification of the way of providing information in terms of the scope of content and form of their presentation, improvement of IT management tools; (2) provision of tourists at the stage of planning and implementation of the trip with convenient tools enabling easy and quick verification of information on the characteristics of the objects (3) encouraging the managers of tourist facilities to improve the quality of their offers through improvements in facility equipment, care for reliable tourist information, as well as improving the competence of staff serving guests.

Undertaking these actions ought to lead to the creation of opportunities for further improvements of the facilities in terms of improving the quality of services, which in consequence should contribute to guaranteeing a boost of both the visitors numbers and their satisfaction.

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## Kształowanie katalogu kryteriów oceny dostępności obiektów dziedzictwa kulturowego

**Streszczenie.** Artykuł przybliży założenia kształtowania katalogu kryteriów oceny dostępności obiektów dziedzictwa kulturowego jako atrakcji turystycznych z punktu widzenia potrzeb kilku grup społecznych: osób z niepełnosprawnościami, osób starszych oraz odwiedzających z dziećmi. W katalogu tym kluczowe znaczenie odgrywają trzy podstawowe komponenty, do których zalicza się: przygotowanie fizyczne/techniczne, system informacji turystycznej oraz umiejętności i kompetencje personelu obsługującego gości. Artykuł w pierwszej części ma charakter przeglądowy, obejmuje ona dyskusję na temat pojęcia dostępności, jak również barier i ograniczeń, jakie mogą mieć miejsce w obiektach dziedzictwa kulturowego z perspektywy rozpatrywanych grup

odwiedzających. W części drugiej przedstawiono założenia kształtowania katalogu kryteriów oceny dostępności obiektów na przykładzie studium przypadku Szlaku Piastowskiego, będącego głównym historycznym szlakiem tematycznym w regionie Wielkopolski. Treści zawarte w artykule stanowią bazę wiedzy użyteczną w procesie wyrównywania szans w dostępie do dziedzictwa historycznego i kulturowego. Służą także jako wytyczne do podnoszenia jakości usług w obiektach turystycznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dostępność, turystyka dostępna, niepełnosprawność, osoby starsze, turystyka rodzinna, obiekty dziedzictwa kulturowego