

Editor's note

Points of interest:

- Tourism that's accessible to all... inclusive Tourism
- Special publics

Salt pans for everyone!

Located in muddy areas, often with meandering access, limited by walls and high steep slopes, salt pans present special visiting difficulties for people with limited mobility and vision.

These are the constraints that have kept the public with special needs from visiting and interpreting the salt pans and the salt works areas, thus excluding the salt pans from the attention that modern societies are gradually giving to public accessibility to natural and semi-natural areas. In fact, many gardens, parks, forests and other natural sites of interest, including geological monuments, have created trails, points of access and information-means tailored to the special needs of the public off all age groups.

Within the ECOSAL ATLANTIS project, the University of Aveiro has been testing various accessibility solutions, which include a raised walkway and various means of interpretation in the Santiago da Font salt pans. The interaction of the local ECOSAL ATLANTIS team with the public and their representative associations has resulted in the creation of interpretation structures and adapted access, to such an extent that we can say that the Font de Santiago is for everyone and that everyone can have access to its interior, to see its compartments, colours, enjoy the soundscapes with the lapping of the waters and multiple bird-songs and calls of birds that pass by as well as being reproduced here. We are still developing guides to support groups with special needs during their visits to these natural spaces.

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Inside this issue:

Editor's note	1
Tourism that's accessible to all... inclusive Tourism	2
Special publics	4

Tourism that's accessible to all...

Inclusive Tourism

Outings, moments of rest or recreation are often viewed as privileges only for those who have the economic means or the time to enjoy the small or big "luxuries" that modern society can offer them.

This belief will be doubly challenged when you consider that rest and fun are not necessarily a luxury, or that those who have the time and money have total access to entertainment and culture in many of its most expressive forms.



This reflection becomes particularly relevant when one sees tourism as "a social good, of paramount importance, which should be available to all citizens, from which no population group should be excluded, regardless of the circumstances, be they personal, social, economic or of any other nature" (Turismo de Portugal 2012:4).

People with disabilities as well as their families are particularly susceptible to being excluded from the tourist experience, in that the sites are not always equipped with the facilities and human means to receive people with special needs.

Although the means of ensuring access to everyone (including people with special needs) is entirely foreseen by law, progress is slow in creating real conditions for access to the natural, built and cultural heritage, in a country where these benefits are a strong tourist attraction and a recognized source of wealth. Of particular importance is also the role that tourism plays in developing the country and preserving the attributes that best distinguish a place and its people. And in helping to create better living conditions for local people, and by improving the conditions that give access to

foreign visitors, these will also benefit those who can enjoy them the most, namely the local people.

In order to comply with Article 7. of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism which states that all attractions and facilities must be available to all people, we need to identify "who are" the people a particular tourism attraction is intended for. In this process, and also taking into account the recommendations set forth in Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN), we need to know in depth all those with special needs and their particular disability (motor, visual, hearing, intellectual or otherwise). Given the profile of the current world population and the lifestyles that most developed societies lead today, one can expect that the number of people with special needs will increase in number and will therefore deserve extra attention on the part of tourism.



This means that instead of excluding these people and their companions from tourism experiences, we must create the conditions for access and site visits, an ongoing attempt to make experiences more and more sensorial and thus more memorable for everyone.

Another important fact to be considered is that, generally, the person (in a group or family) that has special needs will be the decider of options for your group. That is, if that person can have access and enjoy a particular visit, the whole group / family will also participate. Otherwise, the group will opt

for another visit or experience where everyone can go.

This integrated and holistic view gives accessible tourism a new point of reference. It is not about creating solutions or making visits and experiences exclusively for people with disabilities or special needs, but to prepare solutions that enhance the enjoyment of all.

The solution then is to find means that, in their diversity, are equally attractive and useful for those who have and those who do not have disabilities. This approach assumes that everyone has special needs and therefore deserves to be respected in their difference.

It suffices therefore to take basic precautions which are based on simplicity, functionality and multi-sensorial stimuli. And this care should include every aspect - the physical and human environment and, in particular, the overall approach, which must be one of full communication, also founded on the idea of "multiformat" and multimodality.

To this end, all communication and information must be simple and structured in order to stimulate and deepen knowledge on the various topics, in accordance with the individual interest of each person. Here we consider children, people with less information and / or with lower education levels and people with learning disabilities. But it must be noted that what is simple "is accessible to all"; that which stimulates the senses is "useful for all", in this way allowing everyone to live these experiences more intensely, ensuring that those people who only have this means to gain "access" will indeed have it.

In short, acceptance of human diversity provides an enrichment of the visited site and a motivation for collaborators, guides, the people responsible, and all those involved in tourism, since the expectations of the public with special needs and their relations and support groups are, in many places, still very low and the levels of satisfaction with a positive experience of inclusion, very high. The provision of inclusive tourism will always be a progress factor and enrichment for all, of vital importance in a society that is ethical, responsible and sustainable.



Ana Garcia

Josélia Neves (docente e investigadora do Instituto Politécnico de Leiria)

Special publics

The development of tourist activities accessible to all is a segment with a growing potential, particularly in areas of natural interest with tourism potential. Despite this reality, these areas in general and more specifically the spaces where there are salt-works have some accessibility and mobility limitations for people with special needs. The visiting programme commonly used in these spaces, as well as promotional and support materials for the visits are also not yet adapted to these publics, which imposes a constraint on the development of tourism activities that are accessible to all, in these spaces.

In this context and acting within the ECOSAL ATLANTIS project, the University of Aveiro, a partner in the project and responsible for the action "organization of workshops", framed in the Activity "Sustainable Territorial Development", held the workshop "Special Publics - Promotion of accessible tourism in the salt pans", which sought to identify the needs of people with special needs on visits to these locations.

The workshop was conducted in three phases:

For the first phase (preparatory phase), associations and organizations that work with special publics and who have carried out work that has been referenced as "best practice" were



Figure 1 - Presentation of the site "Marinha de Santiago" to those attending (1st phase).

invited. By analysing and discussing this work we wished to appraise the feasibility of adapting it to the "Marinha Santiago da Fonte" site. With this in mind, a presentation of the space was made, as well as the programme and materials used in the visits, to identify their weaknesses and strengths, as well as existing potential and challenges.

In the second phase a visit to Marinha Santiago da Fonte, was conducted by a group of people with mobility and sensory difficulties, in order to evaluate the location and the visiting programme.

Finally (third phase) the "workshop" was conducted with project partners, associations and entities with interests in the tourism sector and people who are responsible for the enhancement of the natural locations, with the aim of promoting the exchange of experiences and to discuss the most critical aspects identified in the previous phases.

The following key issues were defined as material for the workshop:

- What are the necessary adaptations to be made to the equipment and the existing routes?
- What adjustments must be made to the products used in the promotion and dissemination?
- What adaptations must be made by tour guides in receiving people?

The idea is to respond to a set of goals that will allow these



Figure 2 - Visit to Marinha Santiago da Fonte (2nd phase).

spaces to be improved and adapted to the needs of people with impaired mobility and sensory difficulties, when they visit natural amenities, specifically salt-producing areas:

- Transmit information about the needs of people with limited mobility and sensory difficulties in visiting natural spaces, namely salt-producing spaces;
- Receive inputs from various stakeholders to develop the proposed visit programme;
- Develop a proposal for a visit programme for groups with special needs.

In order to meet the proposed objectives and the questions raised, a presentation was held with a subsequent analysis of examples of good practices and the following cases were chosen:

- Lousã: accessible tourism destination
- Pia do Urso Sensory Eco Park

Besides the analysis of the case studies above, we also relied on the collaboration of two experts in the field of accessible tourism. Dr. Josélia Neves presented policies for effective communication for all, as well as forms of adapting spaces and materials. Dr. Ana Garcia, director of the first travel agency in Portugal dedicated to people with reduced mobility (member of the European Network for Accessible Tourism) made special reference to the work that business managers and players in the field of tourism have engendered to make destinations and tourism facilities accessible to all.

Participants visited the site of “Marinha Santiago da Fonte” to become acquainted with the “case-study”. After the visit they were divided into groups, in order to discuss alternatives and propose suggestions for improving the location, with regard to accessibility, mobility and materials used as a way to make the site accessible and interesting for everyone.

To finalize the group dynamic, participants presented a set of intervention measures proposed for the site and for the support materials.

Natural areas, due to their inherent characteristics, present challenges to make them suitable for groups with special needs. They are also frequently subject to protection statutes, which impose some limitations on adjustments that they may be required to undergo. This is the case with the Marinha Santiago da Fonte saltpans, included in the SPA (Special Protection Area - Natura 2000) Ria de Aveiro (PTZPE0004).

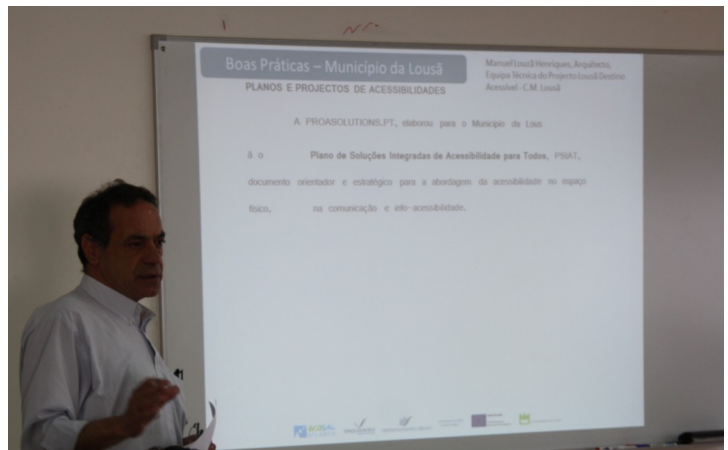


Figure 3 - Example of Good Practice of the Project Lousã Destino Acessível - Lousã Municipality (3rd phase).



Figure 4 - Example of Good Practice, Pia do Urso Sensory Eco Park - Batalha Municipality (3rd phase).



Figure 5 - Group dynamics of the workshop (3rd phase).

However, there are some improvements, both in terms of physical space, and with regard to materials, which can be brought about even in these areas. Accordingly, with this workshop it was possible to identify the main problems (or challenges) in developing tourism visits for people with special needs to the Santiago da Fonte saltpan, that are common to other salt-producing spaces. The main problems referenced are varied in scope, relating to the site and to the materials used in the visit.

Regarding the physical space, we identified problems with both the accessibility to the site and to the visit route that is usually carried out. In fact, the existing ground outside the Marinha Santiago da Fonte, is not the most suitable for people who have mobility problems as it is very irregular.

Furthermore, we detected problems inside the warehouse where the materials used for the visits are placed, particularly in the access ramp to the observatory, which presents a pronounced slant and does not allow access to wheelchairs.

With respect to materials, the majority of the identified problems have to do with a lack of materials produced in Braille or audio format, in order to allow the blind or partially sighted better access to existing information. The need to produce material in high relief, e.g. the plan of the salt pans and images of species that visit these sites, was also considered.

This workshop allowed us to realize that many of the identified problems can be overcome with specific interventions. To this end, however, it is necessary to identify financial and human resources in order to carry out some of the suggestions.

As this is a natural area, with some constraints due to the fact that it is part of a SPA, we need to also understand and identify what types of materials can be used in the implementation of some of these suggestions, without coming into conflict with the very characteristics and location of the site and the activity that is still carried out here - the extraction of sea salt using traditional methods.

As a final result of this workshop, a report and a documentary in several languages (Portuguese, Spanish, French and English) will be produced, which will set out both the problems and the suggestions forwarded by the various participants.



Figure 6 - Accessibility of the access route (problems detected).



Figure 7 - Access ramp to the observatory (problems detected).

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