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Introduction

In this chapter, we investigate access and inclusion for people with disabilities in tourism. From a policy-systematic analysis conducted at a state level and a case study of Victorian tourism, we conclude that despite the impressive state-wide policy of community oriented inclusion, those policies need greater recognisable impact on the ground (Department of Human Services Victoria, 2007; Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2001, 2005). In particular, while much the tourism practice and research still imagines physical accessibility equates to inclusion, one community used as a case study illustrates consideration for wider community social oriented inclusion. The state-wide policy analysis therefore identified future implications for theory and research on inclusive and accessible tourism in a broader context.

This study explores the benefits of inclusiveness from a stakeholder perspective. It investigates access and inclusion for people with disabilities using a broad state policy analysis in Victoria, Australia. This study provides readers with:

1. An analysis of the key policy initiatives that impact access and inclusion for people with disabilities in tourism.
2. A ‘gap analysis’ which may be used to further enhance strategic development for tourism inclusion.
4. Strategies to foster the concepts of inclusion in all Victorian communities through tourism.
Research on tourism and inclusion is crucial for the following reasons. First, international and Australian studies record that people who are socially marginalised have impaired access to health and community services and have worse mental health compared with people who are socially well integrated (Shaw et al., 1999). Socially marginalised persons in need of assistance often under-utilise support services due to lack of knowledge about availability, stigma and discrimination, geographical isolation, inadequate transport, mobility challenges, cost of services and inflexibility of services (Eichhorn et al., 2008; Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005). These practical barriers are often exacerbated by a lack of services and service providers either inadequately trained or unwilling to address inclusion for people with disabilities (Bi et al., 2007).

Second, inclusion is argued to be of increasing importance to community cohesion and community capacity building in the policy environment. For example, in 1993, approximately 3.2 million Australians, representing 18% of the population were classified as having a disability (Darcy and Daruwalla, 1999, Department of Human Services Victoria, 2007). That figure rose to 3.6 million people with disabilities (19%) and a further 3.1 million with a long-term condition or impairment, but no disability (17%) in 1998 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). All these statistics indicate that people with disabilities continue to face challenges accessing and being included in community activities. More importantly, by excluding socially marginalised people the quality of life for the entire community is diminished as they do not get to experience the value diversity can bring.

A third element of the policy environment is the sometimes fractious relationship between policy makers and program delivery people which may adversely affect policy implementation on the ground. Such problematic relationships have been reported by Chalip (1995) and as the cause of breakdowns in the links from policy to implementation by De Bosscher et al. (2006). These concerns indicate that policy and implementation analysis ought to be conducted at the macro, meso and micro levels in order to identify the determinants of policy implementation success.

An Overview of Stakeholder Theory

Research used stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) to articulate the policy dynamic of the tourism sector. Stakeholders are defined as groups within the sphere of influence of an organization: those who can influence or are influenced by the organization (Jonker & Foster, 2002; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). Stakeholder theory arose as an attempt by organizations to consider and address neglected internal and external factors in the strategic planning process (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). Freeman (1984) identifies three components of successful stakeholder management as (1) identification of stakeholders, (2) processes of relationships and (3) management of transactions.
Sautter and Leisen (1999) address stakeholder theory in relation to tourism, viewing the role of tourism as a proactive force which benefits the growth of the local community rather than an exploitative force that only benefits affluent tourists. Whether stakeholders are broadly or narrowly defined, all exponents of stakeholder theory agree that organizations have economic relationships within the moral-oriented management context (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005).

Stakeholder theory is therefore critical to understanding social inclusiveness for service providers such as tourism. Increasingly service-oriented organizations such as tourism operate in close proximity to customers, accordingly, inclusion ought to be a top priority for both economic and socially moral reasons. This study analyses case study data in light of stakeholder theory.

**Research Methods**

A case study methodology was chosen as one of the research approaches appropriate for the systematic study of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). Yin (1994) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry utilised to investigate ‘a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (p.13). Overall, case study methods are suitable for defining the topic broadly, to cover contextual conditions and rely on multiple sources of evidence. A qualitative case study approach was selected as an appropriate way to investigate in-depth the relationship between inclusive policies at a state level and their impacts on practice within the Victorian tourism sector.

Two main sources of qualitative data collection were used: *in-depth interviews* (with stakeholders), and *documentation* (Victorian inclusive policies), to construct a framework for investigating the cases being studied, and to understand how policy influences operations of the Victorian tourism sector. The researchers’ field investigations were largely conducted in the Local Government areas of City of Greater Geelong, Mansfield Shire, Surf Coast Shire and City of Warrnambool. These regions are popular year-round tourist destinations. The regions feature a wide variety of accommodation styles and standards and also feature a broad range of cultural, artistic, musical and sporting events throughout the year. Each of these activities contributes to tourism in the regions studied.

Purposive sampling (Neuman, 2000) was utilised to identify and to select respondents to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted with different stakeholders such as managers, volunteers and tourist operators, government officials and festival managers \((N=10)\). As accessible tourism has interrelations with other sectors in society such as arts and tourism government bodies, field interviews with key stakeholders reflected powerful change messages contained in the draft policy. These change messages
were being accepted progressively across the industry and had been embraced enthusiastically in one community. The findings in this community are detailed in the case study.

Based on the case study findings, we believe that to achieve successful accessible tourism, a whole of community approach is necessary. In other words, disability tourism will only take off if arts, events and accommodation/hospitality work in unison. Interview questions were open-ended and semi-structured. The researchers were particularly interested to hear of disability inclusion awareness and of examples of 'good practice'.

Documentation: Victorian Inclusive Policies. Policy analysis was a significant part of the data collection and analysis. While the Victorian Government has had several policy initiatives, only key policies in Victoria were analysed for the purposes of this research. These policies provided necessary background knowledge of case studies and a foundation for understanding inclusive policy context and their impacts on operations of the tourism sector.

A conceptual framework for policy analysis is employed. This project takes a systems approach to analysing government policy implementation on tourism at micro, meso, and macro level. Specifically, the macro level includes the social ecology and cultural context in which people live: their economic welfare, geographic and climatic variation, degree of urbanisation, political system, and cultural system (De Bosscher et al., 2006). The meso level includes policies developed to effect change and in response to the social ecology. This is the level at which policies may influence implementation. The micro level includes individuals, such as tourists, artists, athletes, and such like. At this level, some factors can be controlled (such as funding provision, targeting of programs and their delivery, sports training techniques and tactics) and others not controlled (personal differences) (De Bosscher et al., 2006; Ashton-Shaeffer et al., 2001). A systems framework was considered appropriate for this study as it allows an implementation construct to be developed to identify drivers of success and barriers at the meso level. In this study, the overall success of policies is analysed at the meso level and of their implementation at the micro level. Analysis of legislation is considered at the macro level. There is some overlap between the three levels as no level operates in isolation. The systems approach to analysis by levels is illustrated in Figure 10.1.

Interview analysis

After a coding process, themes were revealed, and propositions were developed which linked issues. These helped yield patterns and regularities, which then became the themes, compatible with the purposes of the study. Themes were confirmed and refined in relation to what the researchers saw in the data, and relative to the theoretical framework.
Victorian Policy Framework: Macro Level

Despite a robust state economy and investment in social capital projects, the Victorian Government recognises that some social injustice and exclusion still exists and seeks to redress this with progressive social policies. The Government has adopted a social policy framework aimed at creating a fairer, more equitable and just society through macro-initiatives. The philosophy underpinning this approach to social citizenship is embodied in a number of key policies including Growing Victoria Together (2001), A Fairer Victoria (2005) and the Disability Act 2006. The Victorian Government’s vision is to develop an inclusive community that balances economic, social and environmental actions to benefit all Victorians by expanding their opportunities and improving their quality of life. Of particular importance to people with disabilities in the context of tourism is the Government’s commitment to build cohesive communities and to provide socio-economic and infrastructure support for disadvantaged areas and disadvantaged groups.

The new Victorian Disability Act (2006) is predicated on an important paradigm shift and will affect many aspects of community inclusion for people with disabilities, including the tourism sector. The new legislation adopts an ‘inclusive model’ approach under which people with disabilities
have the same rights and responsibilities as other members of the community. Traditional approaches to disability legislation have either taken a medical approach, which situates the 'problem' in the person with a disability and seeks to fix this problem through some adaptive interventions; if the adaptation is not possible, the person is excluded (Fullagar & Darcy, 2004). Or, a social approach which places the disability within a social context and recognises that the extent to which a person is impaired is affected by societal infrastructure and cultural and social conventions, such as building design. The social model locates the barriers to full participation in society and calls upon society to confront and remove barriers (Walsh & London, 1995).

The Disability Act 2006 takes a fresh approach, which we term a socio-political 'inclusive model' within which people with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as other members of the community. We define the inclusive model as the theory that seeks to redress discrimination, and recognises that people with disabilities are an integral part of society. Individuals have a right to participate in all aspects of social, economic and political life to the extent they wish. People with disabilities are to be consulted appropriately, and their personal views respected. We consider this principle as vital for organizations to re-conceptualise the meaning of social inclusion.

The Disability Act 2006 informs the Victorian State Disability Plan 2002–2012 which emphasises the importance of people with disabilities being included and participating in mainstream activities in their communities. Moreover, in Victoria people with disabilities have the right to support in the exercise of their social citizenship. We view tourism to be an important conduit for people with disabilities to integrate into their communities and to develop their communities toward social inclusion. Because tourism is such a personal experience it has a unique opportunity to provide a community oriented-natural social setting in which Victorians of all abilities and status can integrate in a manner that is non-political, non-hierarchical, informal and relaxed. If the tourism sector can provide not only physical infrastructures to support people with disabilities to widen their access but social infrastructures for them to integrate with surrounding communities, it would not only increase business opportunities but also act as an excellent exemplar for the inclusion model (Patterson, 2007; Shaw, G. & Coles, 2004; McKercher et al., 2003).

In the reported case study it was evident that an enlightened, whole of community approach to inclusion was not only possible, it paid dividends in many different ways. However, this was not the case in other communities who had not yet seen the potential in disability tourism. In those communities meeting the needs of people with disabilities was still viewed as a 'cost' not as a 'benefit' to business and to the community as a whole.
Victorian Accessible Tourism Plan 2007–2010: Meso Level

The Victorian Accessible Tourism Plan 2007–2010 is a draft document that sets the strategic direction for the tourism industry to ensure that it provides tourism products that cater for all potential tourists, including tourists with disabilities. It is the result of a collaborative process which brought together key organizations and stakeholders, including service providers and people with disabilities, to draw up a draft plan for the sector. The plan is a work in progress which is being evaluated by stakeholders, including Government. The plan provides some salient advice to tourism operators on their obligations under Commonwealth and State law. The following statement articulates such advice:

Not only does accessible tourism make good business sense; it is also a legal requirement for all service providers enshrined in legislation in the form of the Federal Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (1984). This makes it the responsibility of all businesses to provide a service that does not discriminate against people on the basis of their disability. (Tourism Victoria, 2007: 4)

From our analysis however, despite the Victorian Government’s vision for an inclusive community that balances economic, social and environmental actions that will benefit all Victorians by community oriented inclusion, the current Victorian Accessible Tourism Plan indicates limited connection to community oriented inclusion as a means to enhance participation by people with disabilities.

The current plan largely equates physical access with inclusion and is more of a business plan/marketing document than an inclusive policy document. This is consistent with the commercially driven nature of the tourism industry. It includes propositions for the development of a positive attitude amongst tourism operators toward people with disabilities, facilitating a change towards more accessible and inclusive business practice by operators and facilitating the provision of accurate and accessible information about tourism product, services, experiences and destinations in Victoria. Despite the above policy initiatives, people with disabilities are not identified as a discrete target group for intervention or implementation strategy. Nor are people with disabilities mentioned in the policy’s progress measures. The tourism industries commitment to developing and implementing inclusive tourism for people with disabilities is reflected in the recent work by Tourism Victoria’s Reference Group which developed the following policy statement:
Accessible tourism, core values and principles: Accessibility is a concept relevant to more than just infrastructure; it also relates to attitude, awareness, language, services, and information. As a result, access is provided to a diverse community including all societal groups regardless of gender, race, ability or sexuality. (Tourism Victoria, 2007: 8)

Overall, the policy analysis at macro and micro levels indicates that there is a gap between state-wide definition of community oriented inclusion and the tourism sector focus on inclusion as physical access. However, we also observed some improvements into tourism inclusion of people with disabilities and Tourism Victoria’s enthusiasm for a more inclusive industry. These new inclusive attitudes were not universally embraced by tourism and hospitality operators.

Evidence from the Field: Micro Level

Field interviews were conducted with government bureaucrats, regional tourism association managers and tourist business operators. Most interviewees believed in the essential need for inclusion in tourism and that the industry needed to embrace a wider definition of disability that took it way beyond ramps, wheelchairs and accessible bathrooms but others were still focused on ‘costs for my business’.

Tourism managers and event managers spoke about expanding consumer participation for their respective services; inclusion for people with disabilities was an integral part of their industries’ service delivery. Moreover, they understood that drawing a consumer to one service was interdependent with meeting the consumers’ wider needs. For example, a regional cultural or artistic event catering for people with a range of disabilities was linked to the need for the regional tourist accommodation and catering businesses being able to also meet those consumers’ needs.

The Warrnambool festival operator spoke of how inclusion is seen as providing strong community involvement, and fostering pride:

The inclusion element here is that, whilst it’s a tourism strategy, there are strong elements of community involvement and it strengthens our community as a result. We have over a thousand local volunteers, including people with a disability... It’s also the fact that the volunteers have a sense of pride in contributing to something that is significant. For inclusion for people with a disability, we work to make the event a ‘one in all in’ event and accessible. We do an audit of the site to make sure it is accessible to those with disabilities. We have put in hearing aids and signage for hearing impaired.
The Warrnambool festival organization demonstrates in both the design and delivery of its festival that it understands disability inclusion in a most practical manner. All members of the local community, including those with disabilities are welcomed into the organizational process; the festival meets the accessibility needs of a broad range of disability types and the local tourist accommodation outlets welcome guests of all abilities. The local tourism and hospitality industry worked in tandem with the festival organizers to ensure that their premises and staff were equipped to satisfy the special needs of tourists with disabilities.

Several interviewees spoke of organizational cultural change, education programs and the importance of government policy and legislation. But they recognized that it was people who really made the difference. A Warrnambool tourism operator said: ‘You can have all the policies you want, but in the end, it’s up to individuals to make a difference’. Within his own business, he had implemented a staff training process designed to change the way his people thought about disability. Another regional tourism authority manager emphasized the importance of education and training: ‘... developing a tourism plan for accessibility and inclusion is an important process in itself; ... going through the process, releasing it and making people aware that there is a plan and what it’s about is really important’. He also said: ‘including people with a disability makes good business sense; it’s a largely an untapped market’.

This concept of an untapped marketing opportunity was echoed by another tourism manager: ‘Government commitment, finances, training, and human resources need to go hand in hand; we need to ensure that we keep building the focus on improving visitor experiences. So if you do that as an organization then you have to think more broadly about the market you’re dealing with’. Local Government also has a vital role to play in community development. A regional local government administrator made the following comments: ‘... ensuring that those involved with the provision of services for people with disabilities receive adequate and up-to-date training is an important issue in terms of our community development and local capacity building. Training of participants at all levels should be ongoing and has the power to affect change’. However, other tourism industry people interviewed expressed concerns about the value of providing services to the disability tourism market. One regional tourism authority manager reported that many of his members did not understand the potential demand for disability tourism and that the concept still had to be ‘sold’ to the industry. Talking of the concerns of his local tourist business members, this manager said: ‘they’re mostly small business operators and want to know how they can do it in a way that’s not going to adversely affect the bottom line.’ A Government tourism department manager said: ‘it’s a hearts, minds and wallets issue; disability tourism must be explained to the industry in a manner where they can see the size of the potential market and the value to their business by gaining some of that market’. He added that: ‘small business operators cannot be encouraged to become involved in catering to the disability tourism market on ‘feel
good', 'feel good' will follow if it makes good business sense.' Both the regional tourism manager and the government manager were essentially saying the same thing. Tourist business operators need to be convinced of the commercial potential as well as educated about the wider disability issues.

The field interviews indicated that good practice flourishes when there is community recognition that to cater for disability tourists, local events have to be disability friendly and local tourist accommodation also needs to be disability friendly. The best example of this synergy was in Warrnambool. An extensive education process had been undertaken about disability and the cultural change necessary to adopt a more disability friendly approach to service delivery had been undertaken within the festival community and by local hospitality/accommodation providers. Underpinning the efforts of the local businesses was the support of the regional tourist authority and local government. This is a whole of community approach involving not-for-profit festival organizers, commercial hospitality and accommodation businesses, local government, the regional tourist authority and thousands of local volunteers. It shows what can be done to make a town disability friendly.

Implications For Policy and Practice

Policy and the case study analysis provided a platform by which the tourism sector could further their inclusion from physical access to a community oriented integration of people with and without disabilities. The study had implications for theory and for practice. Implications for theory include empowering people in communities with disabilities through social service to build community engagement and integrating people with disabilities into communities. Community engagement develops especially through partnerships between people with disabilities and those in communities and with families (Bradley, 1994; Cheung & Man-hung Ngan, 2007; Wituk et al., 2007). We perceive that the tourism sector, if well managed and adequately resourced, would be able to offer social services for people with disabilities. As mentioned earlier, tourism offers unique social service opportunities for people with and without disabilities to integrate in a relaxed and pleasurable environment. Therefore, tourism could provide a grass roots approach to what community integration processes most beneficial for people with disabilities and most educational for people without disabilities.

Bhattacharyya (2004) postulates three ways to integrate people with disabilities into communities by: (1) educating people willing to help and give to others, (2) providing opportunities for the people with disabilities to share their own perspectives and experiences of needs rather than being defined by their needs, and (3) training and development for stakeholders in communities (such as tourists with disabilities, communities, families
members/carers and tourism managers/operators) to meet the needs of people with disabilities for future social integration. This research suggests that volunteering could be another way forward for integration of people with disabilities in communities.

Implications for practice are three-fold. First, policy development allows inclusion policy to be ‘refreshed’ across departments, in order to better align them with the intent of government community oriented inclusion policy. Second, policy implementation requires integrating diverse groups of stakeholders. In order to implement the community oriented social inclusion policies in tourism, engage a wider range of stakeholders, such as community members in general, people with disabilities and their families, carers, festival organizers and tourism operators.

Inclusion also requires those who choose to become active in the community in diverse ways, such as through programs, administration or volunteering, to have the opportunity to do so. One of the important planks of the Victorian Government’s social policies, expressed in *A Fairer Victoria* and *Growing Victoria Together*, is that of involving communities in a consultative manner and building community capacity.

Our stakeholder analysis of developing a community oriented inclusion process for the tourism sector examined critically the means of including people with disabilities in the inclusion planning process. The case study provided one example of practical ways that engagement had occurred in one regional Victorian community. Including people with disabilities as problem solvers for matters related to social inclusion offers a positive future for tourism services to comply with community oriented government policies and values. Making people with disabilities’ opinion ‘equal’ to the rest of communities’ opinion means that a holistic-community oriented inclusion process can be established (Bhattacharyya, 2004; Muir et al., 2008). In so doing, the tourism sector can develop a creative and innovative inclusion process. We propose that such participation has important future research and practice implications for the tourism sector.

**Conclusion**

From our analysis, we recommend that the tourism sector refresh its inclusion policy formation and implementation to align more closely to the state government community oriented inclusion policies. To achieve this goal, we suggest that both practitioners and scholars alike acknowledge the gap in tourism inclusion practice and research which has been more focused on physical access and information than on community integration views and practices. Such an approach will necessitate some cognitive change and wide appreciation of the ‘inclusive model’ of disability under which people with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as other members of the community.
Moreover people with disabilities need their voices heard, received and ideas implemented in the development of inclusive policies and practices for the tourism sector. If the tourism sector embraced a uniform socially progressive approach, it would offer a unique conduit for community oriented inclusion on the ground level. Touring is a pleasurable and relaxing social activity which provides a mainstream approach to community oriented inclusion. In order to ascertain what kinds of initiatives would be most effective, calls for future research into tourism include a stakeholder participative model of inclusion and its impact on future community development and integration.

References


