RENATA PŁOSKA

renata.ploska@ug.edu.pl
University of Gdańsk. Faculty of Management
101 Armii Krajowej St., 81-824 Sopot, Poland
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1716-4496

Accessible Cruise Tourism – a Case Study of Carnival Corporation & plc

Abstract

Theoretical background: In light of the trend towards increasing the participation of people with disabilities in socio-economic life, a number of ideas and initiatives are emerging to serve this purpose. Topics discussed include accessible tourism, usually in the context of adaptation of accommodation facilities, tourist transport, tourist attractions and tourist sites. Given the rapidly growing market for cruise tourism, it is worth extending the scope of consideration to include the possibility of adapting its products to the needs of people with disabilities.

Purpose of the article: The purpose of the article is to identify and evaluate the initiatives of Carnival Corporation & plc, a global cruise company, aimed at increasing the accessibility of its services to people with disabilities.

Research methods: The article uses the method of critical literature analysis, a case study based on the analysis of secondary data, and the method of synthesis and logical inference.

Main findings: Based on a model developed on the basis of literature analysis, describing the dimensions of accessible cruise tourism, the activities of Carnival Corporation & plc in this area were identified and assessed. Based on the analysis, it was determined that the company's activities are multidimensional and cover all areas indicated in the model, including those related to physical and communication accessibility. Ensuring the accessibility of services, such as tours in the visited ports, is relatively weakest. This is

a difficult area because it requires cooperation with business partners, and they, for various reasons, are not always able to ensure such accessibility.

Introduction

According to the WHO (n.d.), approximately 16% of the world's population (~1.3 billion people) experience significant disabilities. Moreover, there is a growing trend in this respect, mainly related to the aging of society and the increase in the incidence of non-communicable diseases that can lead to disability. According to research from 2022, 27% of EU inhabitants aged 16 and over reported that they experience long-term limitations in performing everyday activities related to disability (19.8% indicated some limitations, while 7.2% – serious) (Eurostat, 2023). In Poland, as of the end of 2022, there were 2.3 million registered people receiving pension and disability benefits or registered in social insurance, having a certificate of disability, degree of disability or degree of incapacity for work (GUS, 2023).

In recent decades, the approach to the role and place of people with disabilities in society has changed significantly (Gazdulska, 2008), partly thanks to various initiatives from states and government institutions (Koza, 2016). This is manifested in the greater participation of this group in various areas of social life, including economic life. People with disabilities are becoming an increasingly important consumer group, and companies, including those in the tourism industry, are trying to adapt their offers to their needs. The topic of accessible tourism and the challenges related to its development appears both in scientific publications (e.g. Kastenholz et al., 2015; Popiel, 2016; Werner, 2023; Załuska et al., 2022) as well as various types of guidelines (e.g. ACAD, 2011; Drozdowska & Gruszka, 2022; ISO, 2021; Kowalski, 2023; OROT, n.d.). The subject of interest are various segments of the tourism sector, including hotel services (Hussien & Jones, 2016; Ruszkowski & Szewczyk, 2016), travel agency offers (McKercher et al., 2003; Özogul & Baran, 2016; Szlenk, 2016), tourist transportation (Dos Santos et al., 2024; Sanmargaraja & Wee, 2015) and tourist destination products (Kołodziejczyk, 2013; Özgen, 2013; Šebová et al., 2022). Cruise tourism, which is one of the most dynamically developing tourism segments, certainly also deserves attention in this context. An analysis of the literature shows that there are few publications on the accessibility of cruise tourism, and they usually discuss it as one of the elements of responsible or sustainable business (CLIA, 2023), or focus on selected aspects of it (e.g. Sunardi et al., 2023). It can be considered that this is a relatively poorly researched area.

The purpose of the article is to identify and evaluate the initiatives of Carnival Corporation & plc, a global cruise company, aimed at increasing the accessibility of its services to people with disabilities. The article uses the method of critical literature analysis, a case study based on the analysis of secondary data, and the method of synthesis and logical inference.

Literature review

Disability

Disability is a phenomenon that is not easy to define. Polish legislation defines it as "a permanent or periodic inability to fulfil social roles due to a permanent or long-term impairment of bodily functions, in particular resulting in inability to work" (Ustawa, 1997). Perhaps the most popular definition, adopted by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), states that "persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". The WHO (n.d.) recognises that "disability results from the interaction between individuals with a health condition […] with personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support". In these definitions, reference can be seen to two frequently described approaches to understanding the disability: medical and social. In the medical model, disability is seen as a personal problem, caused by illness, injury or other issues, related to a medical condition. It requires, first and foremost, the provision of appropriate medical care. The social model sees disability as a problem generated by the social environment and related to the limitations and lack of full integration experienced by people with disabilities (Hoffmann-Aulich, 2023; Kuzior, 2019). Some authors identify more approaches to understanding disability – e.g. Retief and Letšosa (2018) write about: moral/religious, medical, social, identity, human rights, cultural, charity, economic and limits models.

There are different types of disability. In literature, it is common to find a distinction between physical, mental, sensory and combined disabilities (Wolińska, 2015; Woronowicz, 2014). Physical disability is mainly identified with mobility disability, but this category also includes disabilities of individual body systems or organs caused by chronic diseases and hindering daily functioning (Nawrocka & Zozula, 2020). Mental disability includes disability caused by mental illness, and intellectual disability (Wolińska, 2015; Woronowicz, 2014). The latter refers to the presence of certain limitations or deficits in general mental abilities that affect functioning in two areas: intellectual (learning, problem solving, judgement), and adaptive (daily activities, communication, independence) (Zakrzewska-Manterys, 2021). Sensory disability is related to damage to the sensory organs and includes: blindness and low vision, deafness and loss of hearing, deaf-muteness and deaf-blindness (Nawrocka & Zozula, 2020; Wolińska, 2015). Combined disability occurs when a person is affected by several disabilities at the same time (Nawrocka & Zozula, 2020; Woronowicz, 2014). There are also other ways of classifying disabilities – e.g. a report by Buhalis et al. (2005) divides them into: mobility, sensory, communication, intellectual/mental and hidden disabilities (impairments) (e.g. heart problems, blood pressure or circulation problems, breathing difficulties, diabetes, epilepsy).

The way in which the disability is understood is reflected in the approach to the treatment of people with disabilities. The separation model treats them as a separate social group and assumes that the needs of its members should be met within that group. It is based on an approach that perceives people with disabilities as a threat and therefore in need of isolation from the rest of society, or assumes that such separation is the safest and most beneficial solution for them. Nowadays, the model referred to, e.g. in international and national regulations, is the inclusive one. It postulates the inclusion of people with disabilities into normally functioning groups and social institutions. This requires adapting the physical and social environment to the needs of people with disabilities so that they can function in it on an equal footing with healthy people (Ostrowska, 2015).

Accessible tourism

People with disabilities, like other members of society, should be able to participate as fully as possible in society, including tourism. This is addressed in key international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) or the EU Directive on the Accessibility of Goods and Services (2019). Unfortunately, such persons actually face many barriers to participation in tourism, among which are physical, psychological, social, communication, information, human resources or financial barriers (Kruk et al., 2015). These barriers can be also divided into internal (directly related to the person with disability – health status, mental state, independence), environmental (architectural, regulatory, etc.), and interactional (e.g. communication) (Ruszkowski & Szewczyk, 2016). The elimination or reduction of these barriers, especially environmental or interactional, is the goal of accessible tourism.

Accessible tourism is a concept present in the literature. It generally focuses on making tourism accessible to people who face certain problems and limitations in this context. Darcy and Dickson (2009) write that "accessible tourism enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments" (p. 34). Some authors refer to tourism accessibility not only to people with disabilities, but also to people travelling with young children, and seniors (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; Zsarnoczky, 2017), people with temporary disabilities (e.g. people after surgery) (Michopoulou et al., 2015; UN WTO, 2016), and even people travelling with heavy luggage (Werner, 2023). There are related concepts in the literature. Among them is the concept of "inclusive tourism". It seems broader than accessible tourism, mainly because of the catalogue of beneficiaries it refers to – these are not only people with disabilities, but also other disadvantaged or marginalised groups who, for various reasons, have limited or difficult access to tourism services (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2017). Similarly,

the concept of "tourism for all" should be considered broadly, encompassing different groups of beneficiaries, not only people with disabilities but also, e.g. the less well-off (Loi & Kong, 2016; McCabe, 2020). The term "barrier-free tourism", on the other hand, suggests a focus largely on identifying and removing barriers faced by people with disabilities (Altinay et al., 2020; Schmidtchen & Gonda, 2020), while the term "tourism for people with disabilities", seems to isolate and focus on this particular group of service recipients and their specific needs (Kruk et al., 2015).

Various suggestions can be found in the literature regarding the areas that need to be adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. Polish legislation points to three aspects of accessibility for persons with special needs: architectural accessibility, digital accessibility, and information and communication accessibility (Ustawa, 2019). The literature also mentions: physical accessibility of the environment and accessibility of tourism services; delivery of information regarding accessibility; accessible information presentation, so as to make it easier for people with disabilities to learn about the offer themselves (Pühretmair & Buhalis, 2008). Darcy (1998) focuses on physical accessibility and identifies three dimensions of it: physical access – providing physical accessibility for people with physical disabilities who have mobility difficulties (e.g. handrails, ramps, lifts); sensory access, for people with hearing or visual impairments (e.g. tactile signage, audible signals for lifts and lights); communication access for people who have difficulties with the written word, speech. The literature also points to the importance of appropriate behaviour and communication by those working in the tourism sector with people with disabilities (Buhalis et al., 2005; Kourkouridis & Salepaki, 2023). In addition, the specific health needs of people experiencing disability can still be mentioned, including nutritional issues (CBM International, 2018; Centi et al., 2006).

Cruise tourism

Cruise tourism is one of the fastest growing segment of tourism (Tiago et al., 2018; Wondirad, 2019). The number of cruise passengers was 29.7 million in 2019, 5.8 million in 2020, 4.8 million in 2021, 20.4 million in 2022, and 31.7 million in 2023. The data includes the period of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), which negatively affected cruise tourism (Radic et al., 2020), but also shows how quickly this segment has begun to recover. Projections show that passenger numbers could reach 39.7 million by 2027 (CLIA, 2024). Cruise traffic is largely concentrated in the Caribbean, with around 44% of passengers visiting this region in 2022. The second most popular destination was the Mediterranean, which was visited by 18.5% of cruise travellers (CLIA, 2023).

Cruise tourism is traditionally categorised as marine tourism, understood very broadly as tourism related to the marine environment and taking such forms as: scuba diving, snorkelling, windsurfing, fishing, watching sea mammals and seabirds, the

cruise and ferry industry, all beach activities, sea kayaking, visits to coastal villages and fishing lighthouses, maritime museums, sailing and motor boating, maritime events, Arctic and Antarctic tourism, etc. (Orams, 1999), or somewhat more narrowly described as tourism encompassing the following types of cruises: on coastal cruise ships, on sea ferries, on merchant ships, on deep-sea yachts, on deep-sea cruise ships (Mika, 2007). However, it should not be overlooked that there is also cruise tourism, taking place on inland waters, usually rivers (Mańkowska, 2019; Tomej & Lund-Durlacher, 2020).

Cruise tourism is defined as "a pleasure voyage on a cruise ship where the voyage, the cruise ship's amenities, and the various ports of call are essential parts of the experience" (Lin et al., 2022, p. 1). The literature highlights the complexity of the cruise product, which is described as a voyage on board a ship that is actually a floating resort (Ritter & Schafer, 1998), or as both a form of transport and a tourist destination offering attractions (Lee & Yoo, 2015). Espinet-Rius et al. (2018) emphasise that cruise tourism encompasses not only the cruise ship itself and what is offered on board, but also the entire itinerary and the destinations visited. Thus, the specificity of this form of tourism is that its participants can do both: visit interesting destinations and experience many attractions on board the ship in a short period of time. Looking more broadly, cruise tourism is also seen as a kind of combination of tourism taking place at sea (on the water) and land-based tourism (Razović, 2016). In the context of accessible tourism, there is also an interesting statement that cruise ships, by their nature, provide an accessible option for many people, with physical, sensory or other limitations, who, for these reasons, would not be able to travel otherwise (CLIA, 2023).

Research methods

To achieve the article's objective of analysing and evaluating Carnival Corporation & plc's accessible cruise tourism initiatives, a case study method was chosen based on secondary data analysis.

There is a belief that the case study is a method suitable for use in the economic and management sciences (Dźwigoł, 2018; Glinka & Czakon, 2021; Grzegorczyk, 2015; Lechman, 2014), especially when a complex phenomenon is studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is a detailed description, usually of a real economic phenomenon, e.g. an organisation, a management process, an organisation's environment, in order to formulate conclusions about the causes and results of its course (Grzegorczyk, 2015). Among its advantages, the possibility of a broad and multidimensional description of the studied phenomenon or entity, taking into account its context is mentioned (Dźwigoł, 2018). Like any method, it also has its limitations and weaknesses, among which we can point out the lack of possibility to generalise the results, but also the risk of excessive detail and bias when describing and assessing the phenomenon (Glinka & Czakon, 2021; Grzegorczyk, 2015; Mielcarek, 2014). Given the specificity and complexity of accessible tourism activities, it was decided that a case study would

be an appropriate approach to analyse them. Such an example can both be a source of information about potential actions to increase the accessibility of cruise tourism and provide inspiration for companies operating in this market.

The case study uses a variety of research methods, such as interview, observation, or documentary method (Pizło, 2009). The latter method is mainly based on the analysis of secondary data, i.e. information that has already been collected by someone else and which is available for the researcher (Clark, 2005). The most important advantages of using secondary data include the relative ease of access to this type of data, the often relatively low cost of obtaining and using it, its often wide scope and, if derived from reliable data, its high quality (Bednarowska, 2015; Clark, 2005). In contrast, weaknesses of studies based on secondary data include that their scope may not be tailored to the needs of the study, there is usually no way to verify the data and that they can sometimes be complicated, time-consuming and costly to acquire (Clark, 2005; Glinka & Czakon, 2021). It should also be noted that, in the case of the use of data made public by companies, their manner and scope of presentation can be affected by both a potential lack of objectivity and their use to create a positive image.

Given the relatively easy availability of secondary data that could have been used to analyse the activities of Carnival Corporation & plc, this was the approach chosen. The sources of secondary data used in the analysis were the 2019–2023 sustainability reports, and information published on the company's website. Both sources are typical forms of communicating activities that are part of the concept of responsible business (Mazurowska & Płoska, 2022), which also include various initiatives to support people with disabilities (Próchniak et al., 2023).

The subject of the study, Carnival Corporation & plc, was chosen not only because it publishes the information that could be used for the study, but also because it is one of the largest companies operating in the cruise tourism market. The company's origins date back to 1972, when Carnival Cruise Line began operations (Carnival Corporation & plc. Corporate Information, n.d.). It has nine brands in its portfolio (AIDA Cruises, Carnival Cruise Line, Costa Cruises, Cunard, Holland America Line, P&O Cruises (Australia), P&O Cruises (UK), Princess Cruises, and Seabourn). Its fleet totals 95 ships, with the largest number (27) operating under the Carnival Cruise Line brand (Carnival Corporation. Our Brands, n.d.). In 2023, the company's turnover reached USD 21.6 billion (Carnival Corporation & plc, 2023).

The research included three stages:

– developing, based on the analysis of the literature, a model of accessible cruise tourism, defining key areas (dimensions) that should be adapted to the needs of people with disabilities and special needs;

– obtaining and analyzing secondary data regarding the activities of Carnival Corporation & plc to increase the accessibility of the offered tourist services for people with disabilities;

– discussing the involvement of Carnival Corporation & plc in accessible cruise tourism.

Results

Accessible cruise tourism model

The literature review was based on publications retrieved from EBSCO, Emerald, Science Direct, Springer Link, Taylor & Francis, Wiley Online Library and Google Scholar databases. The following were used as keywords: "people with disability", "accessible tourism", "inclusive tourism", "tourism for all", "barrier free tourism", "tourism for people with disability" and "cruise tourism", "accessible cruise tourism". The review has provided knowledge on the specifics of the phenomenon of disability, with particular reference to its complexity, which is reflected in the classifications adopted in publications. It also made it possible to identify areas and activities that are key to developing accessible tourism for people with disabilities. As the subject of interest is cruise tourism, its specific operating conditions were also taken into account. As a result, a definition of accessible cruise tourism and its model were developed, which was then used to conduct research and evaluate activities.

Accessible cruise tourism can be defined as:

> tourism taking place on cruise passenger ships, combined with visits to tourist destinations, organised in such a way as to enable people with different types of disabilities and people experiencing different types of travel difficulties and limitations (e.g. elderly people, people with short-term disabilities) to access and enjoy to the fullest extent possible the services and attractions offered by the tourist cruise product.

In order to make the cruise tourism offer more accessible to people with special needs it is important to make appropriate modifications to the cruise tourism product, both on offer itself and the processes related to it. These changes should address the six key dimensions (Figure 1).

The first dimension relates to the removal of physical barriers on board a ship, making it difficult for people with various disabilities to use the ship's infrastructure (both cabins and common areas on board) and the services available on board (e.g. catering, shopping, wellness and spa, entertainment).

The second dimension concerns the provision of necessary medical care for the safety of persons with disabilities during the voyage (e.g. in the form of provision of appropriate medication or medical equipment necessary for emergency assistance). It also includes the possibility of providing nutritional services to people with special needs in this area.

The third dimension is related to preparing and publicising information on the accessibility of the services offered for persons with disabilities. This allows them to make a choice of tourist offer that is appropriate to their situation.

The fourth dimension concerns the accessibility of various types of information (including, but not limited to, accessibility of services) for independent use by persons with disabilities, including the use of the Internet and IT tools in this area.
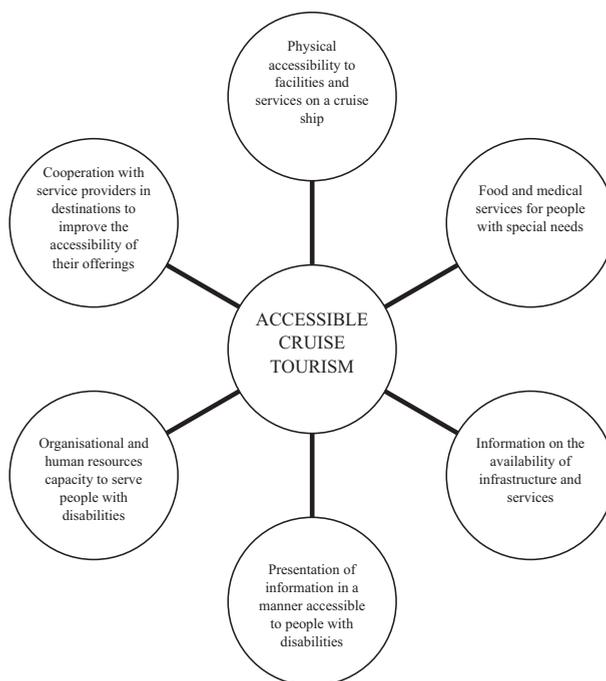
Figure 1. Accessible cruise tourism dimensions

Source: Author's own study.

The next dimension is the creation of appropriate organisational and human resources conditions, including adequate preparation of staff to interact with persons with disabilities, also in terms of *savoir-vivre* and communication.

The last dimension goes beyond the services available on board the ship and includes services provided by subcontractors and business partners in the destinations visited – mainly port service providers and tour operators. In the latter case, it is about cooperation with local tour operators who are able to provide transport suitable for disabled people, care during the trip and help them enjoy the visited attractions. As far as port services are concerned, it is a question of preparing the infrastructure and port staff to serve people with disabilities.

Model-based analysis of Carnival Corporation & plc activities for accessibility

Analysis of Carnival Corporation & plc's sustainability reports and information, including from the websites of individual brands in its portfolio, enabled identification of its actions to make cruise tourism more accessible to people with disabilities. The results of this analysis, arranged in accordance with the adopted model of accessible cruise tourism, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Carnival Corporation & plc activities for cruise tourism accessibility

Dimension	Description
Physical accessibility to facilities and services on a cruise ship	• cabins designed and equipped for guests who use a wheelchair or have limitations in mobility (different numbers of cabins available) • a limited number of wheelchairs, usually for emergency situations only and for transportation of passengers to and from the ship • possibility – on some ships – to rent equipment for people with mobility disabilities (e.g. shower seats) • wheelchair-accessible lifts • automatic doors in most of public spaces • swimming pool lifts (on some ships) • marked pathways to allow access for persons with reduced mobility to most areas • electric vehicles (on few ships), to facilitate mobility for persons with disabilities • possibility to purchase transfer service from and to the airport • restaurant tables adapted to the needs of people with disabilities, including those in wheelchairs • disabled-accessible catering facilities located in casual dining areas • a 24-hour room service, allowing meals to be ordered to the cabin • possibility to use guide dogs (on specific terms)
Food and medical services for people with special needs	• medical care, mainly for emergencies • assistance from the medical team in the event of a medical emergency in the ports of destination (if required) • assistance in the safe storage of oxygen (only emergency supplies are available on board) and medicines required by the passenger • the possibility of taking specialised personal equipment on board (its delivery, bringing on board and installation are the responsibility of the passenger) • possibility to prepare (usually in the main restaurants) special diets – meals suited to the following special dietary needs: vegetarian, low-cholesterol, low-fat, low-carbohydrate, low-sugar, and gluten-free • on some ships – food ingredient programme, using software that, after inputting information on food allergies, indicates which dishes can be used (available on tablets, also for passengers) • no possibility to prepare meals on your own or take catering equipment (except in agreed situations) • possibility (by prior arrangement) to take necessary food (only pre-packed) • possibility of agreeing on a time for the meal other than the scheduled time
Information on the availability of infrastructure and services	• a tab on the websites with information for people with disabilities (almost all brands) • possibility of informing about special needs and obtaining information about facilities via a special form on the website, phone line or email • possibility to obtain information on board from the guest service staff
Presentation of information in a manner accessible to people with disabilities	• a website prepared in accordance with WCAG 2.0 AA standards (in some cases also with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act), providing access to information (regardless of the tools through which the passenger uses the Internet) • subtitles allowing the viewing of films and some television programmes, as well as an instructional video displayed in cabins, in some cases – also public performances • a teletypewriter to communicate with guest services • lifts with audible signals for the visually impaired • alarm signals, both audible and visual • Braille signage indicating cabin numbers and names of public areas • available (on request) assistive listening headsets to amplify the sounds of live, onboard performances • on request, a cabin alert system that notifies room occupants of a door knock, a telephone call, the alarm clock, or a smoke-detection event • telephones with amplified sound or an amplification attachment for telephones in staterooms

Dimension	Description
	• possibility to order a sign language interpreter for the duration of the cruise (on a shared basis, to interpret performances, shows, etc.; service available for cruises departing from and arriving at US ports) • dining room menus in an electronic PDF file • access to menu information via special phone app • information brochure available in cabins in Braille • availability in large format of daily newsletters, dining room menus, information on shore excursions etc. (in many cases – on request) • an audible format for the newsletter
Organisational and human re-sources capacity to serve people with disabilities	• staff training on the needs of people with various disabilities • staff and procedures prepared for evacuation of people with disabilities • possibility for children with special needs to participate in organised activities (individual care is not provided, but parents/guardians can assist during activities) • Carnival Cruise Line certified as "sensory inclusive" by KultureCity®, a leading nonprofit initiative for individuals with sensory and invisible disabilities (such as autism, ADHD, etc.)
Cooperation with service providers in destinations to improve the accessibility of their offerings	• limited possibilities for wheelchair users to go ashore in some ports where passenger transfers to land are by boat (available list of ports) • varying degrees, depending on the port, of adaptation of vehicles, ramps and lifts to the needs of persons with mobility disabilities • information on shore excursions an their accessibility (in some cases using a categorisation that takes into account their difficulty and accessibility for wheelchair users) • program of fully accessible tours for the same price (one of the brand) • possibility, for most coaches, to take folding a limited number of wheelchairs • usually no possibility to provide a specific diet during shore excursions • possibility (in some cases), where a shore excursion provider does not provide a sign language interpreter, to take (with their consent) an interpreter provided by the shipowner (either as part of the free ticket or at the passenger's expense)

Source: Author's own study based on (AIDA Cruises, n.d.; Carnival Corporation & plc, 2023; Carnival Corporation & plc. Annual Reporting, n.d.; Carnival Corporation & plc. Governance, n.d.; Carnival Corporation & plc. Transparency & Reporting, n.d.; Carnival Cruise Line, n.d.; Costa Cruises, n.d.; Cunard, n.d.; Holland America Line, n.d.; P&O Cruises Australia, n.d.; P&O Cruises UK, n.d.; Seabourn, n.d.).

The vast majority of the activities listed are available across all brands, although sometimes there are be some differences in availability. These differences may be due, among other things, to the degree to which individual brands have historically advanced the issue of accessible tourism. The age, condition of the fleet and therefore the possibility of architectural and technical changes may also be a reason. The degree of accessibility for people with disabilities may also be determined by the conditions in the destinations visited by the cruise ships of a particular brand. It is recommended by all the brands, that special needs should be declared by passengers in advance, so that the possibility of meeting these needs can be determined.

Discussion

The results of the case study show that Carnival Corporation & plc takes a number of steps to make its tourism offer more accessible to people with disabilities. Certainly at least some of it is due to legal requirements. Some authors also draw

attention to the importance of regulations for the implementation of solutions for people with disabilities in tourism (e.g. Hamdani & Purwoko, 2024). Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the commitment of the company analysed to accessible tourism is relatively strong and fits in with the suggestions appearing in the literature on the subject.

The analysed company takes into account (to varying degrees) the needs of people with different types of disabilities – there are various solutions for people with physical, sensory and mental disabilities. Descriptions of similar solutions, although usually in the context of other tourism segments and activities (hospitality, destinations, events, etc.), appear in the literature on the accessible tourism (e.g. Florido-Benítez, 2024; Leask et al.,2021; Nowak da Costa & Bielski, 2018; Park et al., 2022; Pehlivanoğlu, 2019; Rebelo et al., 2022; Ruszkowski & Szewczyk, 2016). Facilities have also been introduced for people with special nutritional needs or those resulting from certain chronic diseases – these types of measures are described less frequently in the literature (e.g. Dos Santos et al., 2024).

The solutions address physical accessibility, by eliminating limitations and introducing facilities for people who have mobility problems, and communicative accessibility, mainly for people with sensory disabilities. The former include amenities in passenger cabins and sanitary facilities, as well as solutions facilitating the movement of people with mobility disabilities on or between decks. Solutions dedicated to people with sensory limitations concentrate on communication issues. In this case, both traditional solutions (e.g. sign language interpreters) and modern technologies, especially digital ones, are applicable. The latter are relatively often described in the literature on accessible tourism (e.g. Cassia et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2013). In the context of the availability of information on facilities for people with disabilities, the study showed that in the case of some company's brands there are noticeable limitations from the point of view of potential clients.

In addition to the aforementioned areas, the analysed entity also undertakes a number of organisational and human resources measures to better serve people with disabilities, including those with mental disabilities. An understanding of the need to properly prepare staff to interact with people with special needs is highlighted. This conclusion is consistent with the conclusions of other studies on accessible tourism in other segments of the sector (e.g. Ferst & Coutinho, 2021). There are also activities in the area of medical care or dietary offer, although, of course, due to the great diversity of needs in this area, as well as the limited, if only by the specifics of a facility such as a cruise ship, possibilities, they are not able to meet all possible expectations. Such solutions are less commonly used in other segments of tourism, mainly because they usually take place in locations that allow for the provision of health services located there. Cruise ships spend a significant part of their time away from land infrastructure and must be, at least to some extent, self-sufficient.

The most difficult challenge is ensuring the accessibility of services at destination ports. The study shows that it is in this area, especially when it comes to the

offer of trips enabling participation by people with disabilities, that the greatest gaps
are noticed. This is partly due to the different conditions (e.g. legal, economic) in
different destinations. Additionally, the company must take into account the right
of independent and independently operating enterprises to make their own business
decisions. It is worth considering closer cooperation with the visited destinations
and local tour operators, in order to increase accessibility also during the land part
of the cruise, although this is certainly a complex process. This approach fits into
the specificity of accessible tourism, which requires the cooperation of various
stakeholders (UN WTO, 2013).

Conclusions

The article addresses the issue of accessible cruise tourism. The need and pos-
sibility of development of this type of tourism can be justified by two groups of
argument. The first concerns the significant share of people with disabilities in the
world's population and their growing number, a change in attitudes towards people
with disabilities and their participation in society, and growing importance of people
with disabilities as market participants. The second group of arguments concerns
cruise tourism, and is related to both, its relatively high potential in terms of creating
an offer for people with disabilities and its growing popularity, as a form of travel
and recreation.

The purpose of this paper was to identify and evaluate Carnival Corporation &
plc's activities for accessible tourism. It was assumed that increasing the accessibility
of cruise tourism requires a holistic approach and a whole range of activities that fall
into six key dimensions: 1) the physical accessibility of infrastructure and services
on board cruise ships, 2) the availability of medical care and appropriate food service
for people with special needs, 3) the provision of information on what is on offer
for tourists with disabilities, 4) the use of communication tools to enable people
with disabilities to access information and services, 5) organisational and human
resources capacity to serve people with disabilities, and 6) working with business
partners to increase the accessibility of services in places visited by cruise ships.
Each of these should take into account the needs of people affected by different types
of disabilities and thus facing different types of challenges. Such a holistic approach
is crucial, given the nature of the tourism product offered by cruise tourism and the
buyer's perception of it – as a wide range of services, offered both on board the ship
and in the destinations visited.

The company's survey exemplifies a relatively strong commitment to increas-
ing the accessibility of the tourism offer for people with disabilities. As it has been
established, these actions are implemented in each of the areas identified in the ad-
opted model. The analysed cruise tourism operator can serve as a model for similar
companies, although obviously areas for improvement can still be identified.

Of course, there are also some challenges. First of all, in the area of ensuring accessibility and support for people with disabilities in port terminals. The differences in the level of adaptation of port and transport infrastructure to the needs of people with disabilities may result from different local conditions – economic, legal or social. Large cruise ships visit destination ports both in large agglomerations and located in poorly urbanized regions. It is easy to notice that they are characterized by different conditions. The cruise companies, like Carnival Corporation & plc, should cooperate with terminal operators and local authorities to implement technical (infrastructural) and organisational solutions for accessible tourism.

From the company's point of view, a relatively weak element is the accessibility of land excursions for people with disabilities. Here, including elements such as means of transport adapted to the needs of people with disabilities or skills of guides to work with this group of tourists in the list of criteria taken into account in the supplier selection process is recommended. In addition, company can consider various forms of incentives or support (knowledge, organizational, financial) for local business partners, helping them to increase the accessibility of their services.

The study has its limitations – as it is based on a single case study, it does not provide a complete picture of the cruise tourism sector's efforts to increase its accessibility for people with disabilities. To provide a more complete picture, further research covering similar companies should be conducted. As mentioned earlier, within individual companies the accessibility of facilities for people with disabilities can vary, so in-depth comparative analyses within them could be an interesting line of research. These could provide suggestions as to why these differences occur.

The study is based on secondary data, extracted from materials published by the company under review. As mentioned earlier, this type of information may have some shortcomings, so it would be worth supplementing it with data from other sources – an interesting solution could be the use of participatory observation. It also seems advisable to complement it with research, e.g. surveys, among people with disabilities (actual and potential participants in such tourism) to better understand their expectations and assessment of the existing situation.

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