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Towards Universal Design Hotels in Denmark

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Abstract. Based on the research project ‘Accessible Hotel Rooms’ that studies the balance between the experience of supply and demand regarding accessibility features in Danish hotel rooms, this paper demonstrates factors having an influence on Universal Design hotels in Denmark. The research project was financed by the Danish Transport and Construction Agency. Different notions in the hotel sector of the current supply and demand for Universal Design hotel rooms are identified, as well as future demand. Despite supplying accessible rooms, some hotels do not advertise their accessibility features on their website. There exists an attitude in the hotel sector that functions as a barrier for Universal Design: if there are enough guests, for example business travellers, then why market the hotel on Universal Design? The paper points out the coherence between the understanding of the users and the view of demand. Another important factor is Corporate Social Responsibility, which can be regarded as a strategy or platform towards Universal Design hotels.

Keywords. Universal Design, accessible tourism, hotels, Corporate Social Responsibility, building regulations

1. Introduction

The total number of accessible hotel rooms in Denmark is unknown. Since 2008, the Danish Buildings Regulations have required a minimum number of accessible hotel rooms when a hotel is built or renovated. Users find it difficult to organize a trip, as many destinations and service providers are not yet prepared for the travellers with access needs [1], and this is emphasized by a literature review presenting the constraints. The level, detail and accuracy of information about accommodation are seen as inadequate and it is difficult to locate the accessible accommodations that actually exist [2].

Ron Mace has pointed out the problem with a fixed view of what people with disabilities can or should be allowed to do originate in the past and its inaccessible buildings. This fixed view creates a vicious circle that reinforces the denial of the need for accessibility because business sector do not see any people with disabilities using the inaccessible shops or the like [3]. The language used and staff training are essential to support positive marketing of accessible rooms [4].

This paper addresses the factors that influence Universal Design hotels in Denmark. The empirical material originated from the research project ‘Accessible Hotel Rooms’ completed in 2016. This included two interviews with organisations; 1) Horesta: the

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association for the hotel, restaurant and tourism industry in Denmark, and 2) God Adgang: the organization behind an accessibility labelling scheme. There are also four interviews with hotels (hotel chains) representing different sizes, international representation and accessibility focus: the Brøchner Hotels boutique hotel, Scandic Denmark, Scandic Hotels' Disability Ambassador and Radisson Blu.

2. A Hotel Sector with Mixed Views

The empirical material showed a hotel sector with differing notions of the current supply and demand for Universal Design hotel rooms and also future demand. One hotel, the boutique hotel, had accessible rooms because of the Building Regulation but the hotel did not inform about these rooms on its website. The hotel did not have any guests with a disability and was not aware of a demand. In addition, neither this hotel nor Horesta think that demand will change or grow due to an increase in elderly people travelling, for example. The other hotels were much more conscious of the variations among their guests and wanted hotel rooms to accommodate all kind of guests. They also had guests with disabilities and envisaged increased demand for universally designed hotels, especially due to elderly travellers. These hotels were characterized by a focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Scandic explained that, due to their Scandinavian inheritance, they wanted to be there for everybody. Like Scandic, Radisson Blu also focused on inclusion, but did not market themselves on Universal Design as much as Scandic. The incentive at Radisson Blu originated in their staff policy. It was the intention to include everybody, regardless of gender, culture and ethnicity.

Together with Horesta, the boutique hotel shared the attitude that, *if there are enough guests, for example business travellers, then it is not necessary to market the hotel on Universal Design*. Their view was that a business traveller was unlikely to be disabled and that the disabled were unlikely to choose a boutique hotel. This attitude functions as a barrier for Universal Design.

3. Attitude is a Crucial Factor

At the boutique hotel, the Building Regulations were a factor having an influence on the supply of accessible rooms but at the other hotels it was CSR – quite different approaches to Universal Design. Behind these approaches, there existed a deliberate attitude to inclusion or there was a lack of this attitude. Irrespective of whether or not there is deliberate focus on inclusion, attitude is a crucial factor for the supply of accessible hotels rooms and providing information about the accessible rooms on a hotel's website.

The analysis indicated coherence between the hotel's understanding of its users and the view of demand. When a hotel acknowledges the diversity of all its guests and their different preferences, the hotel's view of the demand is much more elaborate. Conversely, a hotel that does not expect business travellers to have any needs for Universal Design hotel would not expect any people with disabilities to visit the hotel. The vicious circle of Mace is brought into play. As a result, when nobody in need of an accessible room visits a hotel, then the accessibility can come across as an extra requirement that makes no sense because the hotel cannot see a demand.

In a future perspective, CSR could become a strategy or platform towards universally designed hotels and then break the vicious circle.

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