Entrance to Saltram House. Wikipedia. (see p. 92)

HERITAGE SITES: ATTITUDINAL AND EXPERIMENTAL DIFFERENCES OF DISABLED AND ABLE-BODIED VISITORS

Michael Pearn

The polemic context of this chapter focuses on conservation within heritage settings as well as adopting an inclusive disability-centred approach. MacCannell's exploration of authenticity within tourist settings (1999) together with Wang's notions of authenticity (1999) form the conservational parameters, in terms of recommending caution to heritage bodies as to potential irreversible infringements on historic settings when considering improving disabled access to sites. In terms of Wang's 'objective' notion, this chapter's perspective attributes priority to the originality of traditional settings, thus warning against undue 'construc- tivist' changes. Crucially MacCannell's conceptual writings, particularly on 'front, back and reality' (1999), are prominent in this investigation, specifically, when gauging the differing settings for disabled and able- bodied visitors. For example, those with disabilities often experience more of the 'back regions' than other visitors,

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as barriers to access often deny them from using the 'front regions'. A hypothesis therefore could be: 'Does this lessen the visiting experience for patrons with disabilities?'

Disablist Perspective

Prior to investigating the ideological clash between disability and conservation, it is important to offer an explanation of what constitutes disability and how it is regarded by various quarters. The term disability encompasses a wide range of impairments including physical or mental conditions with either long-term or short-term effects. It is considered that the term 'impairment' is intrinsically linked to the conceptual nature of disability. A concise appreciation of the meaning of impairment is, according to Doyle (2003), not offered in disability legislation, none the less the meaning of it is vital to the understanding of all types of disabilities. The World Health Organization (WHO) in 1980 classified the meaning of impairment as 'any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function' (WHO, 1980). This classification is still fundamentally relevant to today's understanding of impairment and is largely considered a helpful vehicle for debate.

The social model of disability, inaugurated by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS)in 1976, has been highly influential in the emancipation of people with disabilities. Critically, this has involved the transferring of attention from the constraints incurred by those with disabilities in respect of the barriers in society which curb the freedoms and independence of disabled people. Integral to this ideological shift was the transference from the 'tragedy model' to adopting an absolute inclusive standpoint, which regards people with disabilities as 'normal' and valid citizens.

Further to the medical and social models of disability, there is the 'tragedy principle' or 'charity model', which presents disability as an extremely negative issue. This extremist view, which dwarfs the medical model's pessimism, views disabled people as fundamentally flawed. The principle, according to Hevey (1993), uses a disability or any ailment as 'a metaphor and a symbol for a socially unacceptable person'. Unlike the inclusive agenda of the social model, it is negative misrepresentations of disability like the medical model that aim to alienate and practically demonise disabled people. Hevey sees this kind of ostracism as naturalizing the exclusion of disability, which of course stalls the plight of the social model. Tregaskis (2002), within the context of the recent escalation of the social model's emancipatory influence on disabled people's lives, discusses capitalist-based barriers against disabled people and how disability groups have been perceived as the 'deserving poor'. It seems that such oppression is borne from an out-dated narrow definition of disability, which has only been broadened during the late 1980s/1990s. It would appear that we have now entered an era whereby society is often willing to bend over backwards in the context of building an egalitarian societal construct without giving careful consideration to possible consequences and repercussions within other scenarios, in this case heritage and traditional environments. Indeed it is the well-intended plight of political correct-ness which could result in catastrophic affects on historic environments.

To illustrate the inappropriateness of some disability-orientated facilities, it is necessary to consider the potential clash of modernistic entities within an otherwise traditional setting. Religious settings such as cathedrals and churches

are worthy examples of vulnerable environments. Facilities for disabled access, by definition, are symbols of modernity. By their mere presence within heritage environments some modernistic facilities could be interpreted as a 'fly in the ointment' effect, where a historical experience is tainted by a reminder of the present. An example of such a modern encroachment was the disability provision within Truro Cathedral, particularly in relation to the cathedral's internal ramp adjacent to the altar. The ramp, resembling a marine jetty, was garishly coloured in green and white and typified the inappropriate combination of modernity and gothic.

In contrast to the inappropriate provision within Truro Cathedral, Lanhydrock, a National Trust Property in Cornwall, has installed a lift within its 18th century house. The lift, when out of use, has been cunningly concealed behind original oak panelling, successfully disguising the 'modern intruder'.

The ramp in Truro Cathedral. Photo: courtesy of Rev. Roger Bush, Dean of Truro Cathedral

© Tomas Marek | Dreamstime.com .Lanhydrock

Heritage Perspective

The essence of this chapter investigates how a consensus may be reached between conservational ideologies and the emancipation of disabled people. The formulation of a paradigm is therefore proposed whereby the interests of both conservational and inclusive ideologies are carefully considered. The emergence of such a multi-faceted paradigm could be interpreted in pragmatic terms by heritage sites which would ensure any facilities for disabled visitors to heritage sites did not cause negative infringements to the environment or the traditional aesthetics of sites.

This paradigmatic intervention would ensure a compromise is reached and, in the context of disability-orientated changes to heritage sites, would ensure a level of acceptability in terms of associated conflicts between societal inclusion ideologies and conservation. Current research into this ideological conflict is limited. Existing investigations, however, tend to favour a disability-centred approach, thus establishing how current policies and legislation can be applied to traditional settings, without fully appreciating the potential irreversible degrading consequences on the historical aesthetics of heritage environments.

Goodall sets out three scenarios by which planners and heritage bodies can determine whether increasing accessibility to historical sites can be 'conservationally' acceptable. These three scenarios are as follows:

- Sites where it is practical to make full access improvements.
- Sites where full accessibility cannot be achieved and compromise solutions are adopted.
- Sites whose fragility make it impossible to provide access without endangering their special values or the safety of visitors. (2005: 185)

Whilst this is possible for many heritage sites, particularly properties, to adhere to legislation such as the DDA, it is frequently impossible to adapt heritage sites,

Tintagel fortress © Alberto Dubini | Dreamstime.com

like monuments and ruins, in order to achieve greater disabled access. One typical example of this is Tintagel Castle, situated in North Cornwall, whereby access to the castle ruins was solely reliant on winding steps leading up a cliff, below which English Heritage have a very informative visitors' centre, complete with a video presentation of the ruins. However, the question here is raised as to how disabled visitors simply have to forego the experience, both physically and atmospherically, and also to what extent a visitors' centre can successfully supplement experience. It stands to reason that Tintagel Castle is an example of where a compromise has been reached, and where the autonomy of disabled visitors along with the fight for societal inclusiveness has to be surrendered.

A recent PhD study (Pearn, 2009) investigating the attitudes of disabled and able-bodied visitors to heritage sites in the South West of England, primarily aimed to establish a consensus between the access needs of visitors with disabilities along with the non-encroachment of associated alterations into the historical integrity of the sites. The investigation found a distinct willingness, particularly in the context of able-bodied visitor attitudes, as to the adoption of disability-orientated facilities. Despite their unquestionable respect for authenticity, able-bodied visitors were primarily willing to condone alterations, particularly in the knowledge of the disabled visitor experience being significantly enhanced.

Disabled visitors often achieve a very different experience to their able-bodied associates. This experience is frequently a 'watered down' experience due to many diversions and inaccessible areas. A classic example being the use of alternate access points for disabled visitors. Saltram House, a National Trust property in Plymouth, has installed a carefully constructed ramp to its main front entrance, enabling their disabled visitors to enter the house conventionally. In contrast, Lanhydrock provides an alternate entrance for its disabled visitors; the former servants' access point. As a consequence of this, Lanhydrock's disabled visitors forego the grandeur of entering the house conventionally and, whilst this has evidently been a pragmatic approach to the access quandary, a significant part of Lanhydrock's visitor experience is lost due to this alternate access point.

Among the theoretical concepts supporting this research was MacCannell's 'staged authenticity' (1976). Largely based around touristic settings, staged authenticity involves 'front' and 'back' regions, the front region being the focus of tourist gathering and activity and the back region being the part of the setting not permissible to tourists and where the contrived is far less prevalent. In applying MacCannell's staged authenticity to heritage settings, disabled visitors frequently have to divert from the conventional 'visitor route' thus experiencing back regions in order to avoid barriers to access.

Goffman's theory of 'performers' and 'performances' (1959) can be applied to staged authenticity in that the front regions are based around the performances. It is therefore possible to make further links from his well-established approaches to this comparatively modern assessment of disability perception within society. Goffman's term 'performance' refers to activities of an individual occurring under the observation of other people. In his insights into the 'individual', as someone who, like those with disabilities, is set apart from other members of society, Goffman focuses on the stigmatism of such individuals which leads to unwanted attention, acting as a distraction from another focal point. In the context of heritage settings, disabled visitors have the potential for being such distractions through their conspicuousness, caused by their disability.

The 'front' for the purpose of this investigation is the setting of a typical heritage site, for example a stately house, whereby the setting consists of able-bodied visitors (the observers) and one, or a number of visitors with disabilities (the individual/s). The visitors with disabilities are the unacquainted, and so, to a certain extent, taint the otherwise scenic surroundings. To reiterate, this portrayal is based upon the discriminatory opinions of a minority of visitors, and should not be an indicative representation of the majority. Using the terms of Goffman, visitors who possess wheelchairs or mobility aids often see these aids as an important part of their 'personal front'. Such apparatus exist as part of their identity and could therefore be termed as the individual's 'expressive equipment'. Continuing this analogy, of 'expressive equipment', pre-judgemental attitudes towards disability in general can be linked to Goffman's interpretation of status in terms of 'appearance and manner' (1959). Wheelchair- users for example, may be regarded by some as having a lesser status than others because of the mere fact they are disabled. However, it must be noted that this interpretation is based on pure prejudice, before any social interaction takes place.

A Dual Experience

Paradoxically, the parameters of this study defy conventional attitudes in terms of human rights law. Monaghan (2005) discusses 'soft law' in relation to gender and nationality discrimination. The historical ineffectiveness of soft law within the context of disability legislation has resulted in disabled people not receiving the autonomy they rightfully deserve. However, the paradox comes within the context of heritage sites and the inappropriateness of current disability legislation in terms of its potential degradation of traditional aesthetics.

The crux of this investigation attempts to identify a compromise whereby disablist legislation is applied to places of historical significance sensitively, thus not incurring negative encroachments on the authentic and traditional visitor experience. This compromise involves a fundamental attitudinal shift which, if anything, will result in a slight reversal of inclusive ideologies such as those manifested by the social model of disability.

The tourism industry, being dominated by supply and demand patterns, is often torn between preservationist paradigms and the need to commoditise touristic environments. In discussing the dilemma of balancing conservation and enterprise, Silberberg (1995), in Apostolakis (2002), discusses the commercial development of a typical heritage site having to transfer from the mentality of 'being willing to take tourists to a stage of being able to accept tourists'. Applying Silberberg's philosophy to heritage sites accommodating visitors with disabilities, the dilemma of knowing how far to go without sanitising heritage environments is clear. The dilemma lies within being cautious against inadvertently 'repackaging what was once regarded as authentic'.

The obligation of many heritage sites and organisations to accommodate visitors with disabilities ultimately extends the commoditisation process in terms of transforming heritage sites to heritage attractions. A critical or even cynical approach would suggest that this transference even involves heritage sites entering into the realms of pseudo-escapism as discussed by Boorstin (1964). Considering this investigation from an accessibility perspective, one might feel that comparing disability- orientated alterations to commoditisation and pseudo-events may be somewhat overstated. However, those harbouring impassioned

conservationist stances would be more inclined to support the curbing of external encroachments into the historical integrity of heritage sites.

Among these external encroachments, besides accessibility, are various interpretations of authenticity which, in their own right, depict the meaning of authenticity. In relation to Wang's Notions of Authenticity (1999), objectivist authenticity poses the greatest threat to traditionalist thinking and to the historical integrity of heritage environments. Pseudo-events and objectivist authenticity both occur when originality has been contrived, usually with the aim of creating a more enhanced experience. In relating these two originality opposers to accessibility, the resistance to change for traditionalism becomes increasingly challenged. It could further be argued that such resistance even curbs disabled visitors' quest for intra-personal authenticity, which arguably cannot be achieved within a society dominated by obstacles to access. Therefore, the pertinent question is whether people with disabilities should have their spontaneity and freedoms temporarily curtailed when visiting heritage sites.

The Alarde celebration. © Alvaro German Vileda |Dreamstime.com

The addition of disability-orientated provisions within heritage sites could be regarded as a method of commodifying heritage for the benefit of paying visitors. This process in essence is similar to the tourism industry commodifying indigenous cultures. Greenwood (1989) cites the case of local culture within the Basque region of Spain in which commodification has been instrumental in commoditising and belittling culture. He uses the Alarde, an ancient ritual of the Spanish town of Fuenterrabia to celebrate the town's victory over the French during a siege in 1638. The Alarde initially was very much a private ceremony, restricted to just Fuenterrabia's population.

However, the ritual became a victim of commercialisation on being exposed to large numbers of tourists, thus resulting in the 'collapse of cultural meanings'

and traditional value. Greenwood comments: 'Making their culture a public performance took the municipal government a few minutes; with that act a 350-year-old ritual died' (1989: 180).

This investigation argues that, despite the feelings of able-bodied and disabled visitors, any alteration to a heritage site or property, no matter how charitable, is an infringement and commoditisation of heritage. As with the commercialisation of the Alarde, transforming a heritage site into a touristic attraction inevitably involves the extraction of authenticity. In dealing with the conservation versus accessibility, and for that matter objectivist authenticity and pseudo-encroachments, schism, a balanced approach between able-bodied and disabled visitors is fully intended. It should therefore be stated that the investigation acknowledges that able- bodied visitors experience barriers too. Stumbo and Pegg put emphasis on barriers being wide-ranging and applicable to all social groups. These constraints, they say, 'are the elements of a tourism destination that stimulate visitation' (2005: 204). Stumbo and Pegg take a participatory approach to the experience of tourism and speak of the importance of inclusive leisure facilities 'without undue constraints'. However, a more balanced and moderate approach is reflected within this investigation which, in practical terms, places emphasis on reaching a compromise.

The Disability Perspective

The constructs of this investigation include establishing synergy between the disabled visitor experience within heritage sites being enhanced as well as supporting the preservation of authenticity. To gain a balanced approach, a brief analysis of society's current and past treatment of people with disabilities is necessary.

The transference from the medical model to the social model has involved a revolutionary attitudinal shift which has led to people with disabilities becoming valid members of all sections of society. This has recently been escalated through the passing of the Disability Discrimina- tion Act 1995 (DDA), which has now made any discriminative behaviour towards disability illegal. Much of the legislation within the DDA can be heralded as a positive breakthrough in terms of the resulting autonomy rightfully awarded to people with disabilities. However, the heritage sector, namely historical sites and properties, is one of the few areas in which the powers of the DDA are less clear-cut. Statutorily the listed status of buildings has power and priority over the DDA and other disability-related legislation. The premise of this chapter and of a recent PhD is inclined to agree and support the promotion of conservational practices over and above the DDA and other disability-related philosophies.

It is therefore the ideological clash of conservation and social inclusion which is under scrutiny and a concept pioneered by the PhD pre-empting this chapter.

Legislative Framework

Before setting out the social model of disability's purpose, it is important to address the meaning of disability and the identity of disabled persons. An estimated 8% of the UK population are said to have a disability of some kind, and it is further estimated that 2% of visitors to heritage sites are registered as disabled. It could be surmised that one prominent reason for the percentage of disabled visitors being so low is because heritage sites, due to their nature, are not 'disabled friendly', particularly from an accessibility perspective. With the

combined presence of the social model and the DDA, there could be a strong and justified argument for heritage sites to raise the disabled visitor quota by improving accessibility.

The term disability encompasses a wide range of impairments including physical or mental conditions with either long-term or short-term effects. It is considered that the term 'impairment' is intrinsically linked to the conceptual nature of disability. A concise appreciation of the meaning of impairment is, according to Doyle (2003), not offered in disability legislation, nonetheless the meaning of it is vital to the understanding of all types of disabilities. The WHO in 1980 classified the meaning of impairment as 'any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function'. This classification is still fundamentally relevant to today's understanding of impairment and is largely considered a helpful vehicle for debate.

The Social Model and its Influence

This investigation sets out to interrogate how the 'social model of disability' can suitably be applied to heritage settings. Unusually, this involves a certain amount of 'watering down' of some of the concepts' ideals, particularly as the eradication of all barriers within heritage settings is conservationally unfeasible.

While maintaining many positive aspects of the social model, this investigation challenges and questions the model's practical application within sites of historical interest. For example, if the model were to be applied in its entirety, the destruction to historical integrity would be undesirable. Whilst the investigation by no means supports any ideal within the medical model of disability, it does call for sensible and realistic thinking and planning when imposing access amenities on any construction or environment classified as heritage.

A Historical Background

Fundamental meanings of disability have radically changed since the dominance of the medical model during the pre 1970s. Nowadays disability is regarded by most as not a medical or pathological deficiency, but a condition requiring changes within society in order to improve the lifestyles of those who are disabled. This viewpoint typifies the social model, its ramifications and its quest to bridge the disabilities/able- bodied divide. Watson (1998) in Swarbrooke and Horner (1999) advocates an 'interpretative analysis' which contextualises disability and related chronic conditions. This approach aims to shift the emphasis onto personal identity, rather than the focus being on the impairment. Watson's vision is an attempt to 'de-stigmatise' disability and, similar to the social model's position, can be seen as a viable pathway towards inclusion.

The ethos of the 'social model of disability' was introduced in Britain in 1976 by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). However it was Oliver (1986) who claims to have interpreted and conceptualised the Union's assertions into the social model. Oliver's creation meant it was then possible to directly challenge the medical model. The social model's broad agenda asserts that society disables the impaired, as opposed to the disability itself being the hindrance.

The social model was introduced to challenge the ethos and repercussions of the medical model. The medical model is the traditional definition of disability, and many see it as an outdated concept. This is mainly because of its narrow,

'disablist' vision. With the recent full inception of the DDA, it would appear that the UPIAS's vision is beginning to accelerate. However, there is still scope for criticism of the DDA, particularly because it contains too many legislative recommendations which are fundamentally based on the medical model rather than the social model.

There seems to be a plethora of now obsolete models which accompanied the medical model prior to the late 1970s. Disability policy consultant June Isaacson Kailes (Kailes, 2002) discusses the 'segregation' and 'rehabilitation' models in relation to the oppressive era of disability. The rehabilitation model, having distinct similarities to the charity model,made half-hearted attempts in the 1970s to medically cure disability by making ill-conceived efforts to include people with impairments. Kailes describes how society's attempt at rehabilitation and inclusion did not involve the removal of physical barriers. Such a lack of pragmatism involved disabled people faced with the impossible task of, for example, having to tackle flights of steps to reach a workplace, not being given the necessary provisions to enable them to work effectively, and a general lack of sensitivity in the able-bodied approach to disability. Aside from the rehabilitation model's drawbacks, there was at least the attempt to include those with disabilities.

Comparative Viewpoint

The social model adopts the necessary approach for an inclusive society which, from its inception, has emphasised the positive attributes of someone with a disability. McConkey and McCormack in arguing for changes in attitudes to people with disabilities say: 'People's negative stereotypes of disability can be counteracted by presenting opportunities for disabled people to demonstrate what they can do rather than dwelling on their limitations' (1983: 56).

McConkey and McCormack (1983) discuss the need for greater collaboration between disabled people and their able-bodied counterparts. The social model, along with McConkey and McCormack's call for greater inclusion, may potentially be without due consideration to the negative impact on heritage and culture.

Further to the medical and social models of disability, there is the 'tragedy principle' or 'charity model', which presents disability as an extremely negative issue. This extremist view, which dwarfs the medical model's pessimism, views disabled people as fundamentally flawed. The principle, according to Hevey (1993), uses a disability or any ailment as 'a metaphor and a symbol for a socially unacceptable person'. Unlike the inclusive agenda of the social model, it is negative misrepresentations of disability like the medical model that aim to alienate and practically demonise disabled people. Hevey sees this kind of ostracism as naturalising the exclusion of disability, which of course stalls the plight of the social model.

Hevey's perception of disability harks back to the way in which disability has been regarded historically. Before the emergence of the social model, the prejudice against people with disabilities was commonplace. The social model has reversed this preconception of disability and through its ethos, together with other emancipatory concepts and legislation, prejudice of disability has become far less prevalent.

The historical integrity of certain areas within society is, however, in danger of being impinged upon by this otherwise positive and egalitarian movement. The shift towards a more inclusive societal approach has involved a radical

increase in disability-related legislature effectively instructing changes upon the physical constructs of society to enable greater autonomy amongst people with disabilities. According to the Approved Document Part M, which ensures planners and developers adhere to current building regulations, the requirements of the document are met by 'making reasonable provision to ensure that buildings are accessible and usable'. In reference to people regardless of disability, age or gender, the document legislates that they should be able to: 'gain access to buildings and to gain access within buildings and use their facilities, both as visitors and as people who live or work in them . . .' (Approved Document Part M, 2000).

Part M is chiefly wholly acceptable within the majority of societal scenarios. However, the document, like the DDA, falls short of recognising the often inappropriateness of many accessibility recommendations within heritage settings. Despite the strict restrictions enforced by listed building statuses, there is a certain amount of flexibility and tolerance around such restrictions which allow for certain alterations to take place. Conservationists are even at times compelled to alter heritage sites for the greater good. A measured and balanced stance has to therefore be maintained in the interest of conservation to ensure well-meaning political correctness is not responsible for the diluting of otherwise enriched, meaningful and genuinely educative heritage experiences.

Conclusion

The fundamental aim of this investigation is to introduce synergy between disablist emancipation and preservation of historical places. This unique standpoint provides immense challenges to both heritage sites and the patience and understanding of people with disabilities. Where this synergy and subsequent balance exists is variable and determinant on the nature and scale of various heritage sites.

This investigation is still very much in its embryonic stages. Theoretically, the grounding and concepts of the investigation, both from a conservational and disability stance, have been broadly set. The next stage is the marrying of these theories pragmatically to the heritage industry, which would be followed by the adoption of 'best practice' approaches in terms of the sensitive installation of accessibility amenities. As with the disabled tourists attitudinal continuum (Appendix A), any such amenities have to be appreciative of both the valid experience provided for disabled visitors to heritage sites as well as being mindful of our duties as custodians of sites of historic interest. The second continuum (Appendix B) projects the need for a balanced approach in the maintaining of the integrity of heritage along with the onset of objectivist authenticity, in terms of Wang's approach. The continuum represents satisfactory levels of alterations imposed on heritage sites by accessibility amenities, whilst also representing at the opposing end levels of unsatisfactory infringement likely to cause irreversible inroads into traditional aesthetics.

By adopting a politically correct approach, some heritage sites, given the lack of advice as to how to sensibly adapt within this flexibility, could inadvertently be the perpetrators of their own downfall, in terms of causing irreversible degradation to their traditional aesthetics and identities. It is the avoidance of an ideological clash and the determining of an acceptable balance between the autonomy of disabled

visitors and the integrity of heritage sites that custodians and society collectively should seek to achieve.

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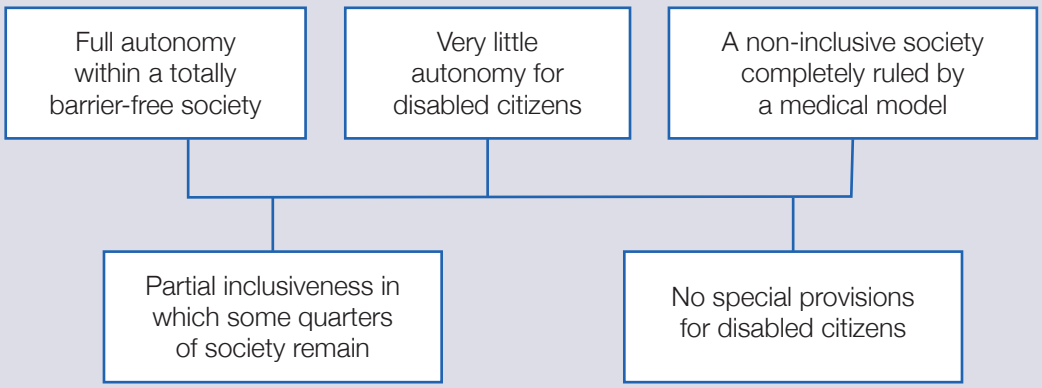
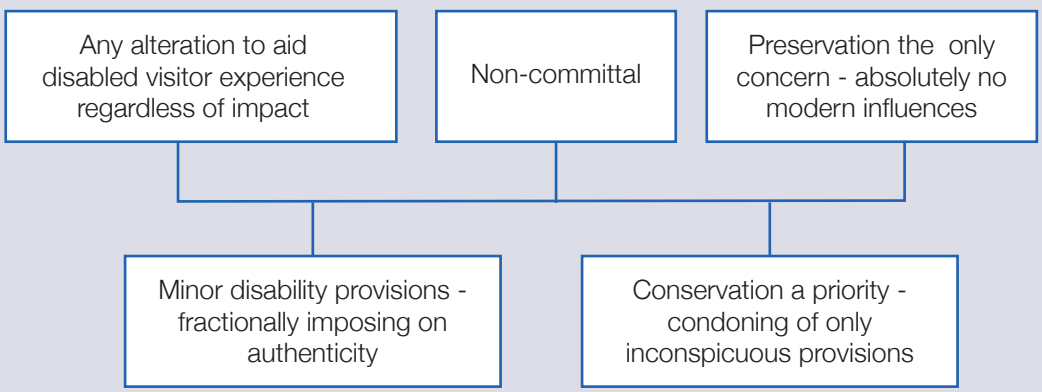
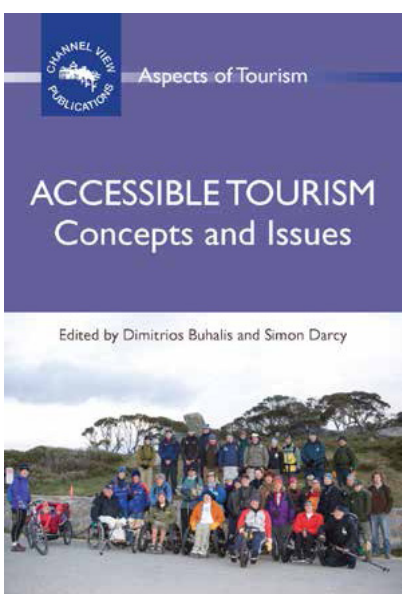
Appendix A Continuum representing opposing societal treatment of people with disabilities



Appendix B Experiential continuum representing the opposing priorities attributed to disabled visitors and the conservational concerns of heritage sites





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