

**Accessible Tourism in Spain:
Communication on Official Websites and Social Media**

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of accessibility on the tourism sector as an integral aspect of social sustainability. Specifically, it evaluates how accessible tourism is communicated in Spain, one of the world's leading tourist destinations. The analysis focuses on both the official national tourism website and its associated social media platforms, followed by a case study of three Spanish cities to gain a more detailed perspective.

Findings reveal a significant gap between accessibility efforts and their digital communication. In general, destinations show inconsistencies between their official websites and social media channels. When accessibility is addressed, it tends to focus solely on physical disabilities, while intellectual and sensory disabilities remain largely underrepresented.

This underscores the need for greater awareness and consistency in how accessibility is communicated. It advocates for coordinated efforts among all stakeholders in the tourism value chain to promote truly inclusive tourism experiences because above all, we are all human. Giving visibility to all forms of disability is not just a duty; it is an act of compassion, a powerful step toward a world where everyone feels valued, and free to explore.

Keywords: Accessible Tourism, Tourism Destination, Social Media, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. INTRODUCTION

1. 1. Context

Tourism is considered one of the most important activities worldwide. It is characterized by promoting cultural exchange among people, enabling them to discover new places, cultures, and traditions.

It is well known by countries that the tourism industry generates significant economic impacts, creates employment, and has a multiplier effect that indirectly benefits other sectors. However, the positive aspects of tourism go far beyond the economic, also resulting in social, cultural, and environmental benefits (Khayrulloevna, 2020). Moreover, over the years, there has been a growing trend toward a more sustainable form of tourism, encouraged by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This type of tourism tends to respect local communities and highlights the vital need for collaboration between public and private entities for the effective management of tourist destinations.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the traveler, there must be facilities that enable people to undertake a journey regardless of their condition. As revealed by the World Health Organization (2023): "It is estimated that 1.3 billion people, or 1 in every 6 people worldwide, experience a significant disability". For this reason, people with disabilities, although they represent a minority of the population, like anyone else, may dream of traveling. However, they are often held back by the fear of the barriers they may encounter, especially at the destination. Fortunately, this is no longer an unattainable dream; it has become a fully achievable reality thanks to that gradually, tourism companies are embracing accessible tourism. Today, there are several resources that enable people, whether their disability is, to do everything from searching accessible websites to participating in inclusive tourism activities and enjoying unique

experiences at their chosen destination. Nevertheless, there is still much progress to be made in this field.

Already in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), a foundation was laid to safeguard the personal integrity, well-being, and freedom of every human being. However, it wasn't until 1976 that the Society for the Advancement of Travelers with Handicaps was established in the United States, emphasizing the promotion and adaptation of tourism for people with disabilities in the country. This event marked a turning point, as it led to the creation of what we now refer to as "Accessible Tourism" (Fernández Alles, 2009). From there, various reports on the subject were made public, including the document *"For Accessible Tourism for the Disabled in the 1990s"*, published by the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1991, as cited in Fernández Alles, 2009), which highlighted the barriers faced by people with disabilities in relation to tourism, placing particular emphasis on poorly adapted facilities.

In Spain, during the "tourism boom" in the 1950s (Vallejo Pousada, 2022), this issue was not considered a matter of particular relevance, nor was it anywhere else in the world. And this new tourism movement of "Accessible Tourism" arrived in the 1990s in the country.

Nowadays, Spain stands as one of the world's leading tourist destinations, characterised by its cultural richness, diverse landscapes, and exceptional climate. According to official data from the National Statistics Institute (INE, 2025), Spain welcomed 93,799,505 international tourists in 2024. The tourism industry plays a crucial role in the Spanish economy, accounting for more than 13% of the GDP (Statista, 2025), reaching €207.763 billion (Exceltur, 2025), and generating millions of jobs. Based on this data, we can see that tourism is a major pillar for the country. However, the question remains: is its tourism offer accessible to all?

1. 2. Objective

The objective of this study is to explore the concept of accessible tourism and analyze how tourist destinations communicate accessibility, with a particular focus on Spain (specifically the cities of Valencia, Donostia, and Madrid). The idea is to evaluate whether accessibility is integrated into the digital communication strategies of these destinations and, if so, to what degree. To achieve this, it is essential to understand the accessibility information provided on their official websites and, from there, assess whether this information is communicated and adapted through social media platforms such as Instagram, and YouTube. The reason for choosing these social media platforms is that they are the most popular in today's context. Social media platforms have become a strong and powerful tool of promotion nowadays and the tourism sector should become more and more conscious about this.

This study aims to provide a broader understanding of whether digital communication is being effectively used to promote universal tourism, ensuring that people with disabilities have access to relevant information and are meaningfully considered within the tourism offering.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights & Accessibility

It is important to clarify that accessibility was recognized as a right with the formal establishment of human rights, and its integration into tourism came later. This is why we are presenting this declaration first. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) aims to safeguard the personal integrity, well-being, and freedom of every human being without exception. This forms the basis for explaining accessibility.

For the foundation of accessible tourism, emphasis is placed on Article 1, stating that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Also, it is important to mention Article 3, establishing the right to security for every person, and Article 7 asserts that no one shall be subjected to discrimination that violates the Declaration.

Another key point to consider is Article 13, which affirms the right of every individual to freedom of movement, including the right to leave their country and return to it. Attention should also be given to Article 23, which expresses that everyone has the right to work without discrimination, to freely choose their employment, and to receive fair wages that allow them to live with dignity. It connects to Article 24, reflecting the right to rest and periodic paid holidays.

Lastly, Article 26 supports the right to education for all, guaranteeing at least free compulsory education that is economically affordable. It promotes the full development of the individual, respect for human rights, tolerance, and peace. This article highlights the idea that from an early age, people with any type of disability have the right to education.

Although it is evident that Human Rights include all human beings (and therefore persons with disabilities), there was no explicit and clear allusion to this group. For this reason, the United Nations specifically addressed the issue in the *International Convention on the Rights of*

Persons with Disabilities, held in December 2006. The Convention entered into force on May 3, 2008, and marked a historic milestone as the first international treaty in history to be signed by 81 countries on the same day it was opened. The Convention established that disability arises from social attitudes and prejudices (United Nations Human Rights, 2011).

This treaty, exclusively focused on persons with disabilities, reinforced the rights to:

- Be fully included in the community
- Have access to home and community support services
- Ensure access to healthcare and rehabilitation services of the same quality as the general population (including sexual and reproductive health)
- Prohibit discrimination related to marriage, family, and private life
- Protection of dignity, privacy, and reputation
- Education adapted to all levels to promote inclusion
- Full participation in social, educational, labor, and health-related life
- Work on equal terms, with the freedom to choose inclusive and accessible work environments

2. 2. Definition of Accessible Tourism

In tourism literature, various definitions of accessible tourism have been proposed in order to elucidate the breadth of the concept. One of the most frequently cited interpretations is that of Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization, who explained it as follows:

“Accessibility is a central element of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. It is both a human rights imperative and an exceptional business opportunity. Above all, we must come to appreciate that Accessible Tourism does not only benefit persons with disabilities or special needs; it benefits us all” (UNWTO, 2016, p.19).

Despite the fact that there is no fully agreed-upon definition, various studies on the topic show that the term has been associated with several synonyms in the literature: Inclusive Tourism, Adapted Tourism, Tourism For All, Barrier-Free Tourism, Accessible Tourism, or Universal Tourism (Gómez Leiras, 2022). However, it is true that the most commonly used synonym is **Tourism for All**, as it embraces the idea that all people, with or without disabilities, can access tourism services and places. This was first supported by the Tourism for All campaign carried out in 1989 in the United Kingdom, in Mary Baker's report, where it was described as:

"That form of tourism which plans, designs, and develops leisure and recreational tourism activities in such a way that they can be enjoyed by all kinds of people regardless of their physical, social, or cultural conditions" (Baker, 1989, as cited in World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2014, p. 24).

What we can say with certainty is that it will evolve over time because political, socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors will provide its context. In its early use, the term Accessible Tourism was a disruptive concept aimed at integrating people with disabilities by including this group in the tourism offer and eliminating the most basic barriers found within the sector. (UNWTO, 2014).

Generally, it is often thought that any aspect related to accessibility exclusively benefits people with disabilities. Even so, it goes much further than that. Other individuals such as the elderly, or people who temporarily experience mobility issues, such as those who have recently undergone surgery or pregnant women (Secretaría de Estado de Turismo, 2020). Additionally, it is important to take into account the companions who travel with these individuals, so that their needs are also addressed. According to some studies carried out in Europe and Australia, the

general rule is that people with disabilities are more likely to travel with companions (UNWTO, 2014).

Among people with disabilities, a small classification can be made: those with **motor or physical disabilities**, **sensory disabilities**, or **intellectual disabilities**. Sometimes, a single person may experience multiple disabilities at once.

Following the manual of “Accessible Tourism” by The Secretaría de Estado de Turismo (2020) we will present what each of them consists of:

‘How is Physical Disability conceptualized?’ A person with a Physical Disability is a person that has a reduction or absence of motor or physical functions. Some causes can be spinal cord injury (paraplegia or quadriplegia) and amputations.

‘What is the definition of Sensory Disability according to current literature?’ A person with the condition of a sensory disability implies that they have lost the visual or auditory abilities and those who experience communication or language difficulties.

‘How is Intellectual Disability defined?’ A person with Intellectual Disability is characterized by a reduction in mental functions, it includes mental or psychosocial illness as well as various types of chronic conditions.

Occasionally, the individuals with disabilities may encounter various types of barriers (INVATUR, 2020, 14):

- **Architectural and urban barriers:** These refer to physical obstacles that limit access, such as trash bins placed in inappropriate areas or inside buildings where there is no elevator to access the bathrooms which are not on the first floor.

- **Communication barriers:** These relate to obstacles that interfere with the transmission and reception of messages, such as in the case of deaf individuals who use sign language.
- **Social barriers:** These include difficulties in interaction or acceptance by a group due to a person's disability, which can be a reason of discrimination.

What areas can be improved in accessibility?

In practice, accessibility must be implemented across various areas in order to achieve the long-desired goal of true inclusion. According to the Accessibility Code of Catalonia, approved through Decree 209/2023, four key areas are identified: communication and information technologies accessibility, architectural accessibility, transport accessibility, and urban accessibility (Tu Web Accesible, 2024).

In the field of **communication and information technologies**, drawing attention to the fact that websites, applications, and digital services comply with accessibility regulations. This allows any person with a disability (whether visual, auditory, or motor-related) to use them effectively.

Regarding **architectural accessibility**, public buildings and spaces must be designed according to regulations that guarantee full mobility for users. This includes the necessary incorporation of ramps, signage, accessible elevators, and adapted restrooms.

As for **transport accessibility**, pointing out that infrastructures and services must provide access by providing adapted stations, accessible vehicles, and special entrances for people with reduced mobility.

Ultimately, **urban accessibility** means that all outdoor public spaces, such as parks and recreational areas, should be designed with optimal features to ensure enjoyment for everyone, regardless of their disability.

2.3. The UN Tourism , SDGs & Accessibility

To begin this section, it is vitally important to mention that we cannot discuss accessible tourism without first addressing sustainable tourism, whose fundamental pillars are the Sustainable Development Goals.

In September 2015, the United Nations adopted a new global agenda for sustainable development called the “2030 Agenda,” aiming primarily to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and enhance the quality of life for all people. It is constituted by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are intended to be achieved worldwide by the year 2030 (United Nations, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are universal, as a consequence, in the tourism sector they have been adapted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), fostering a model of sustainable tourism that is environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and economically viable. Currently present in 159 countries, the UNWTO is also responsible for the implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, a key instrument in mitigating the potential negative impacts associated with tourism development (UN Tourism, n.d.).

Now, we will take a deeper look into SDGs 4, 8, 10, 11, and 17 of UNWTO that focus on education, decent work, reducing inequalities, sustainable cities, and global partnerships. These SDGs have been chosen to enhance our comprehension of sustainable tourism while also providing insights into accessible tourism.

Figure 1. UNWTO's 17 Sustainable Development Goals



Note. UNWTO (<https://www.unwto.org/tourism4sdgs>)

➤ **Sustainable Development Goal 4: “QUALITY EDUCATION”**

As stated on the official UNWTO website, for tourism to thrive, it is essential that professionals in the sector are well-trained and competent in their roles. Therefore, investing in education and vocational training is crucial, not only through financial incentives but also by supporting labor mobility via cross-border agreements on qualifications, standards, and certifications. In particular, educational initiatives should prioritize support for some social groups such as youth,

the elderly, women, and people with special needs, as a means of promoting inclusivity (UN Tourism, n.d.).

➤ **Sustainable Development Goal 8: “DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH”**

Tourism is one of the main pillars of the global economy. In fact, it is estimated that 1 in every 11 jobs is related to the sector. In this way, the industry promotes the creation of decent employment, with a focus on the inclusion of women, young people, and persons with disabilities. By 2030, policies and practices are expected to be implemented following a sustainable tourism model that creates jobs, highlights local culture, and promotes the value of local products (UN Tourism, n.d.).

➤ **Sustainable Development Goal 10: "REDUCED INEQUALITIES"**

As reported by the UNWTO, tourism can serve as an effective tool for reducing inequalities if all stakeholders are involved, especially the local population. In rural areas, it can contribute to development by revitalizing the region and stimulating the economic flow. On a larger scale, tourism can represent an ideal opportunity for developing countries, enabling their participation in the global economy.

➤ **Sustainable Development Goal 11: “SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES”**

UNWTO emphasizes that sustainable tourism can contribute to the development of more accessible urban infrastructure, promote the revitalization of degraded areas, and ensure the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, assets that are essential to tourism activity. Therefore, investing in a green city is synonymous with investing in a smart city, from which both residents and tourists will benefit.

➤ **Sustainable Development Goal 17: “PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS”**

Due to its cross-sectoral nature, the tourism industry can play a key role in strengthening ties between the public and private sectors, enhancing their collaboration to address the SDGs. These partnerships are essential for tourism development and its contribution to the global development agenda (UN Tourism, n.d.).

This information prompted a more specific exploration of the UNWTO's engagement accessibility aspect derived from this sustainability.

The UNWTO began to highlight tourism as a social factor in 1980, during the UNWTO General Assembly in Manila and through the World Tourism Declaration. For the first time, the link between tourism and accessibility was emphasized, establishing tourism as a fundamental right for quality of life and as a core element for human development. The following year, in 1981, the United Nations declared it the “International Year of Disabled Persons,” marking a significant shift in the tourism sector's attitude toward this minority group (UNWTO, 2014).

Afterwards, between November 19 and 20, 2014, the 1st UNWTO Conference on Accessible Tourism in Europe took place as a result of the meeting between the UNWTO and the Government of San Marino. Five years later, The UN Tourism and the ONCE Foundation launched in 2019 the annual distinction of “Accessible Tourism Destination”, which awarded destinations offering universal tourism experiences based on an Expert Committee evaluation. However, this initiative has been temporarily suspended (UNWTO, n.d.).

In collaboration with other institutions, UN Tourism and the ONCE Foundation have developed several reports providing guidelines on accessibility for the various sectors that make up the tourism synergy:

- Recommendations for key players in transport, ensuring safe and dignified travels for people with disabilities.
- Suggestions for Travel Agencies and Tour Operators to incentive accessible tourism experiences.
- Proposals for managers of natural resources to facilitate access to protected nature areas , beaches and park to this minority.
- Tips for cultural tourism key players, making their offer more accessible.
- Advice for Accommodation, Food & Beverage and MICE companies to enhance their levels of accessibility.
- Action points for governments and destinations, promoting the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The UN Tourism has also led two events known worldwide: **the UN Tourism International Conference on Accessible Tourism in November 2023** , in collaboration with the Government of San Marino's Republic, and **the International Accessible Tourism Forum - Asia & the Pacific in December 2023** hosted by the Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism and the Korea Tourism Organization.

2.4. Tur4all & Tourism accessibility chain

A closer examination of inclusive tourism, especially in the Spanish context, inevitably brings attention to the Tur4all organization, a key actor in the field.

Tur4all is the first entity to foster accessibility in the Spanish tourism sector and provides great support for this minority, as it offers information about establishments, resources, and tourism services with a single requirement: they must have features that ensure accessibility for all. It has been in charge of developing projects such as the first guide of Accessible Tourism in

Spain. In addition, it is responsible for transmitting awareness on this subject as well as promoting this type of tourism. It works closely with DTI in the development of the Spanish standards UNE 178501 and offers advice to touristic enterprises.

Tur4all has introduced a **Chain of accessibility in tourism**, in which it reflects the process when a disabled person lives the tourist experience from the start until the end (Tur4all, 2023).

Firstly, we find the planification step, where websites have to be accessible, updated, detailed and reliable. Some of the elements that need to be integrated are: voice recognition systems, text-to-speech systems, high contrast designs, subtitling of videos or audios, special iconography, controls to change letter-background colors, and controls for font sizes (Secretaría de Estado de Turismo, 2020, pp. 19–20).

The second step is round-trip transportation, where more challenges are detected. So it becomes crucial to take care of the passenger. Then , the urban environment has to count with accessibility measures and clear signs. To continue, the local transport such as taxis or buses has to be more adapted, for example the stops in the street or inside the own vehicle.

Following this, the disabled person enters the accommodation, and obviously it must follow the measures imposed by the law, providing a comfortable, private, and adapted space. Ideally, some hotels or other accommodation establishments should have a reasonable number of fully accessible rooms, which, for example, are equipped with an alarm system, a communication system with the reception convenient for deaf people, or in which guide dogs are welcomed and essential elements are provided to facilitate their stay. After that comes the moment when that person with a disability goes to a restaurant. This is one of the most important stages: the menu

must be legible, clear, and detailed, as well as the access points, services, products, etc (Tur4all, n.d.).

During the stay, imagine that the person wants to visit some tourist attractions. Ideally, several basic principles should be established to guarantee equal access and prevent discrimination. For excursions, it is essential to provide clear information and ensure accessibility for everyone. The last step is the medical services, where adapting the transmission of information is notably important (Tur4all, 2023).

Figure 2. Screenshot of “Chain of accessibility in tourism”



Note. Tur4all.com (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.tur4all.com>

This explanation of the accessible tourism chain highlights that a positive travel experience depends on multiple stakeholders, not just the destination. Effective collaboration among all of them will result in a high level of visitor satisfaction.

2.5. Smart Tourist Destination & Accessibility

In recent years, there has been a growing aim for destinations to embrace the smart model, which inherently includes accessibility.

The Smart Tourist Destinations project is promoted by the State Secretariat for Tourism (SETUR) and implemented by the State-Owned Company for the Management of Innovation and Tourism Technologies (SEGITTUR), with the aim of helping tourist destinations boost their competitiveness while improving the quality of life of their residents. Currently, the Smart Tourist Destinations Network is made up of 619 members, including 440 destinations, 86 institutions, 86 companies, and 8 observers. To achieve this distinction, its actions revolve around five key pillars: governance, innovation, technology, sustainability, and accessibility. The process consists of:

Firstly, it begins with the destination's adhesion to the Network, allowing up to two years to request an initial diagnosis based on 97 requirements and 261 indicators across five pillars. Then, based on the results an action plan will be carried out and a distinction will be given according to its level of compliance: "Adhered" if it exceeds 20%, or "Smart Tourist Destination" if it reaches at least 80%. The implementation of the recommended actions begins with ongoing monitoring to track progress. If the destination has progressed with at least 10% of the recommended actions after two years, it reaches the renewal phase with updates of the diagnosis and actions reviewed. This part of the process guarantees the maintenance and improvement of the destination's status as a Smart Tourist Destination (Destino Turístico Inteligente, n.d.).

This Smart Tourist Destinations Network allows access to resources such as the future SEGITTUR Tourism Intelligence Platform. This platform will have the capacity to integrate, relate, and combine both public and private data through continuous innovation, as well as

address the needs of the three stakeholders (tourists, destinations, and companies) that make up the tourism value chain. Its development began in 2021, however, it is not yet operational.

It represents a revolution in the new Spanish tourism model, which revolves around three pillars: the digitalization of tourism services, data, and digital intelligence. This will enable Spain to position itself as one of the pioneering countries in tourism digitalization (Segittur, n.d.)

2.6. The role of the official destination website

The Internet represented a significant technological revolution, although today society has already firmly integrated its use. In fact, according to Statista data, by April 2023 there were approximately 5.18 billion Internet users worldwide, representing 64.6% of the global population (as cited in Yılmaz & Dağdelen, 2023). As the Internet spread, a great number of tourism firms and state tourism offices, as well as national tourist organizations, opted to incorporate this powerful tool as a part of their marketing and communication strategies (Lee, Cai, & O'Leary, 2006; Buhalis & Law, 2008, as reported in Tanrisevdi, 2011).

In this context, tourism destinations have taken advantage of the opportunity to use the Internet to reach a wider audience, inevitably competing in a global market (Farias et al., 2013, as cited in Yılmaz & Dağdelen, 2023, p. 113). Thus, by creating tourism destinations official websites, tourists had an information source (Vila, González, & Darcy, 2018, as cited in Yılmaz & Dağdelen, 2023, p. 113), where they could learn about activities, accommodation, transportation, and any other matters that tourists may need (Vila et al., 2018, as referenced in Yılmaz & Dağdelen, 2023, p. 113). And simultaneously tourism destinations were starting to build their image at a low cost (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012, as mentioned in Yılmaz & Dağdelen, 2023, p. 113).

Therefore, the strong persuasive power of destination websites to influence the moment when tourists plan their trips became evident (Anderson, 2006; Hwang et al., 2006; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008, as cited in Rodríguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2015). To be persuasive, these websites must follow certain characteristics, such as being designed with high-quality information (Rosen & Purington, 2004, as cited in Rodríguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2015). Another key aspect is usability, as it refers to how easy the website is to use, whether the content is appropriate, if it has a well-organized structure with proper links, and whether it presents an overall appealing appearance (Wong & Law, 2005, as noted in Tarrisevdi, 2011). Finally, navigation is relevant as it refers to how easy it is to search for information and move through the website (Ho & Lee, 2007, as referenced in Tarrisevdi, 2011).

This leads us to the conclusion reached by Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008), who stated that destination websites not only provide information but also serve to generate interest and motivate individuals to visit the destination (as cited in Tarrisevdi, 2011).

Over the years, official tourism websites and online advertising have gained increasing prominence, bringing about a radical shift in tourism marketing, which initially focused on print media and travel agencies. Subsequently, the emergence of social media helped tourist destinations promote themselves through images, videos, and immersive content, as well as interact with a global audience. Today, the influence of social media when choosing the next travel destination is striking. Each platform targets a different audience, and it is essential to understand this in order to ensure that the digital marketing strategy aligns with the specific aspect of the tourist destination being promoted. (Gharib, 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY & ANALYSIS

3.1. Methodology of the analysis

To begin this section, the methodology applied is outlined. This research adopts a **qualitative content analysis approach**. First, it examines how Turespaña communicates accessibility from a general perspective of Spain as a tourist destination, through its official websites and social media platforms, namely YouTube and Instagram. Second, it explores how the cities of Málaga, Valencia, and Donostia specifically address accessibility through the same digital communication channels. This type of analysis will allow for an exploration of the visibility of accessibility, the frequency of accessibility-related messages published on these digital platforms, and the quality of such communication.

The study is structured around a **descriptive research design**. The data were collected from the content published by Turespaña on its official websites (both the Turespaña website and Spain.info), as well as from its Instagram and YouTube profiles. Data related to the three cities Donosti, Málaga, and Valencia were also gathered from their respective official tourism websites and their corresponding Instagram and YouTube accounts. For the analysis of social media content (YouTube and Instagram), the focus was on materials published during the past five months (specifically from January 1, 2025, to June 1, 2025) including both social media posts, videos and highlighted stories.

The reason for selecting these two social media platforms is that they are currently the most widely used and they offer quite different formats. Instagram is primarily characterized by photo sharing, although additional features such as stories, reels, and live streams have been incorporated over time and it is generally aimed at a young audience. On the other hand, as Gharib (2024) argues, YouTube is known for its longer video format, making it an ideal platform

for more detailed travel guides designed to persuade viewers in their decision-making process when choosing a travel destination.

Moreover, the justification for selecting Valencia, Málaga, and San Sebastián-Donostia is that all three are listed as accessible destinations on Spain.info. However, it should be noted that this is due to the fact that all three cities hold the Smart Tourist Destination distinction, and one of the core pillars required to obtain and maintain this status is accessibility. Hence, their high level of importance for study.

Table 2. Overview of Digital Presence of Analyzed Destinations

Destinations	Spain	Donosti	Málaga	Valencia
Tourism Website	www.spain.info	www.sansebastian-turismoa.eus/es/	www.visitacostadelsol.com/	www.visitvalencia.com/en
Accesible Tourism Website	https://sustainability.spain.info/en/discover-spain/accessible-tourism/	https://accessibility.sansebastianturismoa.eus/es/	https://www.visitacostadelsol.com/planifica/informacion-turistica/turismo-accesible	https://www.visitvalencia.com/en/valencia-accesible
YouTube Profile	https://www.youtube.com/spain	https://www.youtube.com/@sansebastianturismo	https://youtube.com/@vivecostadelsol	https://www.youtube.com/user/Turisvalencia
Followers	28,5K	1,4K	3,23K	3,16K
Posts	1,1K	404	804	423

Instagram Profile	www.instagram.com/spain/	www.instagram.com/sansebastiantourism/	www.instagram.com/vivecostadelsole/	www.instagram.com/visit_valencia/
Followers	977K	75,1K	39K	211K
Followed	1.285	512	2.249	795
Posts	6.456	1.889	1.540	2.742

Source. Own elaboration based on data collected from official websites, Instagram and Youtube

3.2. Accessibility in Spain : Turespaña & Spain.Info

Spain is a top global tourist destination, known for its diverse experiences, from natural beauty and historic cities like Donostia to unique gastronomy and iconic landmarks such as Valencia’s City of Arts and Sciences or Málaga’s Alcazaba. The public organism in charge of the tourism promotion of Spain as a tourist destination worldwide is “**Turespaña**”, attached to the Ministry of Industry and Tourism through the State Secretariat for Tourism.

Turespaña is key in the management of Spanish tourism. To begin with, it was responsible for the development and implementation of the Strategic Marketing Plan for the period 2021–2024, establishing four strategic lines, focused on the recovery of demand after the Covid-19 as well as on social, environmental, and economic sustainability.

Although the functions of Turespaña go far beyond that. Turespaña is in charge of the analysis and implementation of the Annual Operational Plan (POA). Moreover, in terms of marketing and communication, it coordinates the development of advertising campaigns, content creation, social media activity etc. Regarding digital tourism knowledge, Turespaña also provides resources that serve as a foundation for tourism professionals in the fields of international promotion and marketing. In addition, this public organism contributes to initiatives for the

conservation of historic buildings in 39 Paradores, with support from the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan (PRTR) - Next Generation, a European Union program that promotes economic and social development (Turespaña, n.d.).

Lastly, Turespaña owns www.spain.info since its creation in 2003, being responsible for its management and direction, which is carried out by SEGITTUR. This website is Spain's main international online promotion platform as a tourist destination (SEGITTUR, n.d.). As the digital face of Spain's national tourism strategy, it must reflect, among other things, its commitment to accessible tourism, presenting Spain as a destination for all.

In order to identify the accessibility-related information provided by Turespaña, we looked into its official website. Subsequently, the website was carefully reviewed by scrolling to the bottom of the homepage, where links to Turespaña's official social media accounts were displayed, along with the following related websites: Spain.info, Knowledge , Secretary of State for Tourism and E-Office.

Figure 3. Turespaña homepage

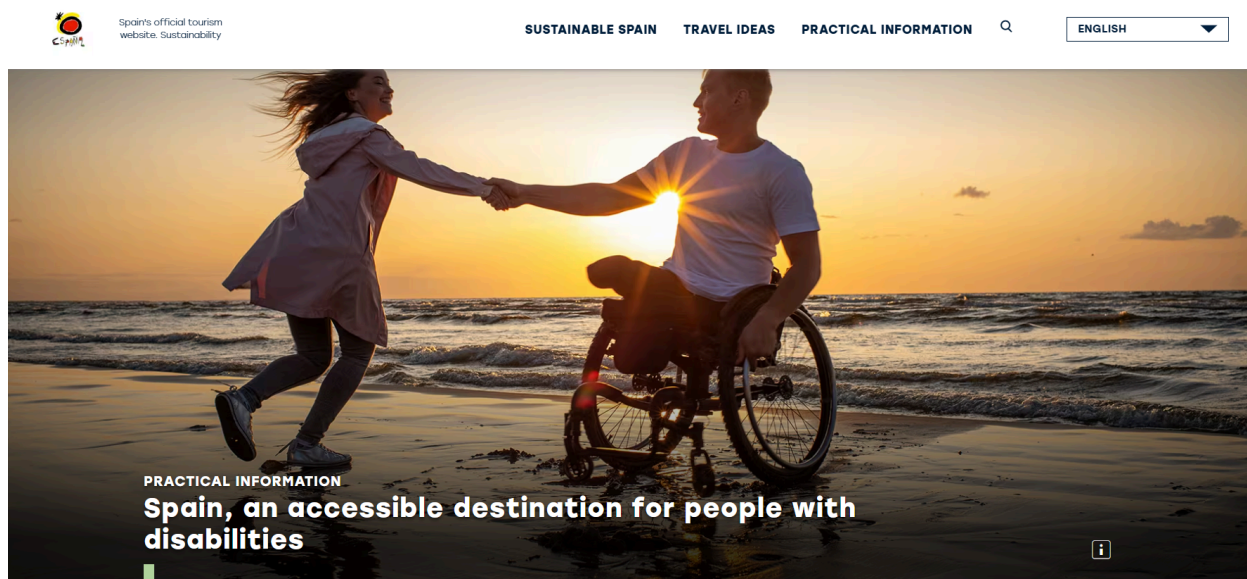


Note. Turespaña. Retrieved from <https://www.tourspain.es/en/>

The [Spain.info](#) link was clicked, which redirected to its official website (see Appendix A). The entire website was examined, but no direct link was found regarding how Spain, as a tourist destination, communicates accessibility. Therefore, using the Spain.Info's search engine, we typed "accessibility," and eleven thousand two hundred eighty-one results were returned. Among these, we can find the link to the website 'Spain: An Accessible Destination for people with disabilities', Accessible Culture for All in Spain, Accessible Destinations, numerous accessible Paradores and accessible beaches in Spain.

If we select the link "Spain, An Accessible Destination for people with disabilities", it takes us to Spain's official tourism website - Sustainability section, where there is practical information provided for people with disabilities traveling in Spain. As we can see in the following image from the homepage, inclusivity is conveyed through the image of a young man in a wheelchair holding hands with a girl who appears to have no physical disability.

Figure 4. Spain's official tourism website. Sustainability



Source. Spain.info Sustainability. Retrieved from

<https://sustainability.spain.info/en/discover-spain/accessible-tourism/>

This website provides guidance for people with motor, visual, intellectual, or hearing disabilities that want to visit the country. For example, it affirms the fact that airports offer free assistance to facilitate travel, as do medium- and long-distance trains, which provide accompaniment services and accessible stations. In cities, public transportation such as the metro, buses, and taxis is mostly adapted. It is also guaranteed that accommodations, monuments, and cultural activities are accessible. However, it recommends checking platforms like Tur4All, which provide updated accessibility info for hotels, restaurants, and attractions.

Once we enter **Spain.Info's sustainability site**, there is the possibility of a language out of five given (english, italian , french , etc..). Furthermore, there is a symbol on the left that represents the "accessible mode." If we scroll to the bottom of the website, we will see the icons for Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which, when clicked, redirect to each of their respective social media profiles of Spain.Info (see Appendix B).

3.3. How does Spain.Info present accessible tourism on Instagram and YouTube?

This leads us to examine the [Spain.Info](#) profiles on Instagram and YouTube more closely. We begin by the **Instagram** profile. From January 1st to June 1st, only three posts were directly related to accessible tourism.

The first video addressing the topic of accessible tourism was published on April 5th. This is a testimonial video, incorporating the voice of the protagonist accompanied by jazz-style background music. It is short, lasting only thirty-eight seconds, and feels dynamic.

It features a tourist with reduced mobility sharing her experience in the Valencian Community, speaking in English. She mentions that Spain is one of her favorite destinations, emphasizing its accessibility. Initially, she appears in her wheelchair on a seafront promenade with a ramp leading to the beach. Later, she uses an adapted staircase to enter the swimming pool. Then,

she highlights the accessibility of Spanish beaches. While discussing this, the video depicts her lying on an amphibious wheelchair on the beach, being pushed into the water by a lifeguard and one of her travel companions. She also presents the accessible shaded area of the beach, which is reached via wooden walkways. These elements are essential components for the structure of accessible beaches. The video also displays various activities she engaged in during her trip, such as adapted windsurfing with her travel companion, as well as a route she completes using her wheelchair while her companion rides a bicycle. It continues by showing her accessible hotel room, pointing out how spacious it is to move around comfortably in her wheelchair. The bathroom is adapted, for example, the sink is positioned at a suitable height, making it easy for her to wash her hands without difficulty. In the concluding scene, she appears to be getting off a bus using a ramp designed for people with reduced mobility.

In general, several stages of the accessible tourism chain, as defined by Tur4all, can be observed in the video. These include accessible accommodation at the destination, adapted transportation such as the bus for getting around, and inclusive activities.

The second video found on the Instagram profile was posted on April 12. It is an informative and promotional video about accessible public transport in Alicante, with a duration of thirty seconds. In contrast to the previous video, this one does not include any voiceover; instead, it features music that could be described as fitting within an indie pop style.

In the opening scene, a young woman with a motor disability boarding a city bus using a ramp suitable for her wheelchair. Then, she enjoys the city views, as the designated space for wheelchairs is located next to the window. Finally, she gets off the bus using the same ramp to descend with her wheelchair.

And the last video can be classified as a testimonial one, as it shows the real experience of a man with a physical disability enjoying a tourist activity, namely exploring landscapes using a

handbike. However, it can also be considered promotional, since it was published by Spain.Info and serves as a way to showcase the destination of Mallorca as both accessible and active. In this short video of thirty seconds, a British Britpop music with vocals has been used. In this case, the clip starts with the trunk of a car being opened to take out a handbike. The car is properly parked in a designated disabled parking space, which includes extra space marked on the sides. This additional space is essential, as we see a man with a physical disability transferring from his wheelchair to the handbike, and he needs that to do so safely. When he is ready, we see him pedaling with his hands to begin his route along the road. Later, he takes a short break to eat a banana and regain energy. Finally, he returns to the parking space where the car was parked. Upon arrival, he performs how he transfers from the handbike back into his wheelchair.

We proceed with the highlighted stories and none of them brings up accessibility. After inspecting the Instagram profile, we are now going to study how Spain.Info communicates accessibility on **YouTube**. To our surprise, only one video was found that even briefly mentioned accessibility, dated January 13, 2025. The video is titled "*Spain's Path to Sustainable Tourism: A Model for the Future.*" As shown in the video published by Spain.Info (2025), concerning accessibility, the only direct reference is a statement that Spain, as a destination, offers a wide and varied range of accessible options for everyone. At that point in the video, a shot depicts a person in a wheelchair seen from behind.

In summary, Spain.Info's social media focuses mainly on physical disability in its accessibility messaging.

3.4. Accessible Destinations in Spain

Returning to the different accessibility results that show up on the search engine of the Spain.Info website, there is the **Accessible Destinations** link, where a list of nineteen

accessible destinations in Spain appears, along with their corresponding accessible web pages and the accessible UNESCO World Heritage cities marked on a map. At first glance, it is also indicated which destinations have their accessible website available only in Spanish or in other languages, which is particularly helpful for people with disabilities from other parts of the world to access information, thus promoting an inclusive international approach. All accessible Spanish destinations are included in the following table:

Table 1. Accessible destinations in Spain

ACCESSIBLE DESTINATIONS	
ÁVILA	https://www.avilaturismo.com/organiza-tu-visita/avila-accesible
BAEZA	https://turismo.baeza.net/baeza-accesible/
BARCELONA	https://www.barcelona-access.com/
BILBAO	https://www.bilbaoturismo.net/BilbaoTurismo/es/turistas
CÁCERES	https://turismo.caceres.es/es/caceres-accesible
CANARIAS	https://www.holaislascanarias.com/un-destino-turistico-accesible/
CÓRDOBA	https://www.turismodecordoba.org/
GRANADA	https://turismo.granada.org/es/granada-accesible
MADRID	https://www.esmadrid.com
MÁLAGA	https://www.visitacostadelsol.com
SEGOVIA	https://turismodesegovia.com/es/turismo-accesible
SEVILLA	https://visitasevilla.es/
SALAMANCA	https://www.salamanca.es/es/salamanca-con-todos-los-sentidos

SAN SEBASTIAN	https://accessibility.sansebastianturismoa.eus/es/
SANTANDER	https://turismo.santander.es/organiza-viaje/destino-accesible
SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA	https://www.santiagoturismo.com/accesibilidad
TARRAGONA	https://www.tarragonaturisme.cat/es/tarragona-accesible
VALENCIA	https://www.visitvalencia.com/valencia-accesible
ZARAGOZA	https://www.zaragoza.es/sede/portal/turismo/post/visita-zaragoza-accesible
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE CITIES	https://www.ciudadespatrimonioaccesibles.org/

Note. Own elaboration based on information from Spain.info (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.spain.info/es/descubrir-espana/destinos-accesibles/>

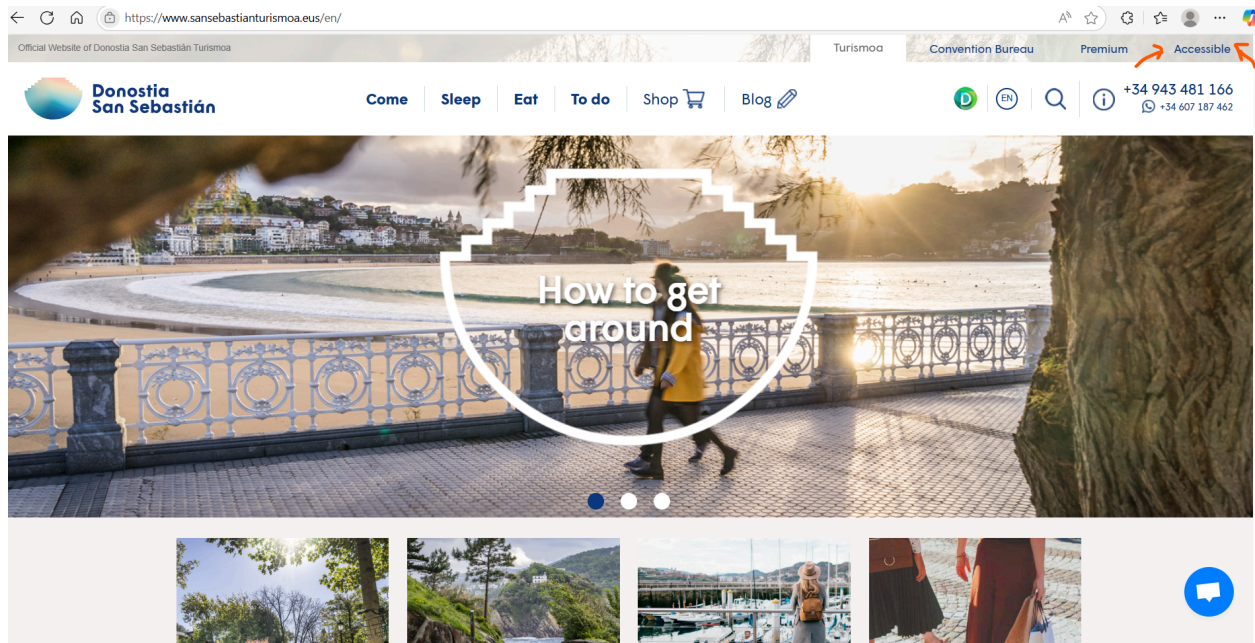
Among these cities, the focus will be on three of them: Donosti, Málaga, and Valencia.

3.5. How does Donosti present accessible tourism on Instagram and YouTube?

Donostia-San Sebastián is the capital of the province of Gipuzkoa, one of the three provinces that make up the autonomous community of the Basque Country. It is a tourist city located in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, bordering the French Pyrenees to the northeast, Navarre to the south and southeast, Bizkaia to the west, Araba to the southwest and the Bay of Biscay to the north. Concerning tourism data, according to official sources (San Sebastián Turismo, 2023), the city recorded 1.945.862 overnight stays in 2023, of which 738.633 were by domestic tourists and 1.208.880 by international tourists. With regard to the city's tourism management, in 2019, it received the 'Award for Innovation and Sustainability in Public Policies and Governance' at the 15th edition of the United Nations World Tourism Organization awards (San Sebastián Turismo, 2019).

Now, we will now proceed to analyze its tourism website. As illustrated in the image below, the tourism website is visually appealing and has a well-organized structure. A highly relevant detail for this study is: the word "accessible" appears at the top right corner. Clicking on it directs the user to the **accessible tourism webpage**.

Figure 5. Homepage of the Official Tourism Website of Donostia–San Sebastián



Source. San Sebastián Turismoa, (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.sansebastianturismoa.eus/es/>

On San Sebastián's accessible tourism website, the homepage features a one-minute and forty-five-second video published on February 13, 2024 portrays Donostia as an accessible destination. It features inspirational background music but no voiceover. It is undoubtedly a promotional video. According to Donostia San Sebastián Turismoa (2024), the opening scene is portagonized by several young people who are playing wheelchair basketball. Then, as the sound becomes distorted to simulate a deaf person's perception of the environment, several people can be seen in a bar communicating through sign language. Next, two women around 65 years old are depicted: one is clearly blind, as she is using a cane, and it is implied that the

other woman accompanying her does not have a disability. They reappear later in a scene where the blind woman is touching a tree in a park. This is followed by a scene in which a classical band is performing in a theater. The next scene shows a middle-aged man with reduced mobility in a spacious room that accommodates his wheelchair; he enters the bathroom to dry his hair and we can clearly affirm that the bathroom is adapted. Later, he is featured in a bar, sharing a drink with a friend who also uses a wheelchair. Then we see a couple in their 30s visiting the Aquarium - Palacio del Mar. They appear again saying goodbye to the hotel receptionist, and it is implied that the woman is deaf. The video ends with the man in the wheelchair seen earlier in the video, this time alone, shown from behind, sitting in his wheelchair and contemplating the vastness of the sea from an accessible area of the beach.

Through the portrayal of various disabilities, the video sends a clear message that Donosti warmly welcomes all individuals, regardless of their age or abilities.

Next to it, there are some phrases to complement it. The website can be described as having an intuitive layout and straightforward navigation. It is structured once more into four sections:

- Organize your trip
- Eat and Sleep
- What to visit
- To do

When selecting the first section “Organize your trip,” some options are displayed like the explanation why Donosti offers a high level of physical accessibility, where visitors can find adapted public toilets, tourism companies specialized in providing accessible services, and detailed information about adapted transportation, including buses, taxis, and trains. If we open the “Eat and Sleep” section, a list of hotels and restaurants that meet accessibility standards is presented. Choosing the “What to visit” section reveals tourist attractions suitable for this minority group, such as museums, beaches, and other points of interest. Finally, under the “To do” section, accessible routes specifically designed for people with reduced mobility are shown,

such as the Maritime Route or a walk through Woody Allen's San Sebastián, as well as accessible events and festivals, including the Film Festival and the Jazz Festival.

The next step is to examine how Donosti communicates accessibility via its Instagram and YouTube social media profiles (see Appendix C for more details).

On the **Instagram profile**, there is only one post that addresses the topic of accessibility, specifically, a video published on January 20th. It could be considered a short, one-minute video of inclusive tourism promotion through a paid collaboration with an influencer. She has cerebral palsy and, throughout the video, shares her experience taking an accessible trip to the tourist destination of San Sebastián. Her voice narrates how she feels while engaging in different activities, accompanied by background music that features percussion, trumpets, and electronic influences. The video has subtitles. The language used is inclusive and clear.

In the first scene, she takes part in a zipline course, suggesting that this activity may not be well-suited to an accessible trip. This is followed by a scene in which she is lying down, ready to sleep, implying that the accommodation meets accessibility standards. The following day, she visits a cheese-making agrotourism farm, interacts with sheep, and tastes cheese. In the caption of the post, she mentions that the accommodation is accessible. She later goes to an iron mine and points out in the caption that, although the mine is inaccessible, the museum offers accessible facilities. A countryside landscape is shown. Then she appears at the San Telmo Museum, followed by a dining scene in a restaurant. She is seen swimming in an indoor pool, and afterward, enjoying the sea at La Concha beach, which is recognized as one of the best urban beaches in the world. The video ends with a scene in a massage center, where we see her receiving a leg massage.

Moreover, on January 13, 2025, in the “foodie” highlights folder, a story of the same influencer is posted tasting a torrija (a traditional Spanish Holy Week dessert), showcasing the high quality of the food, even though this dish is not specifically typical of the area.

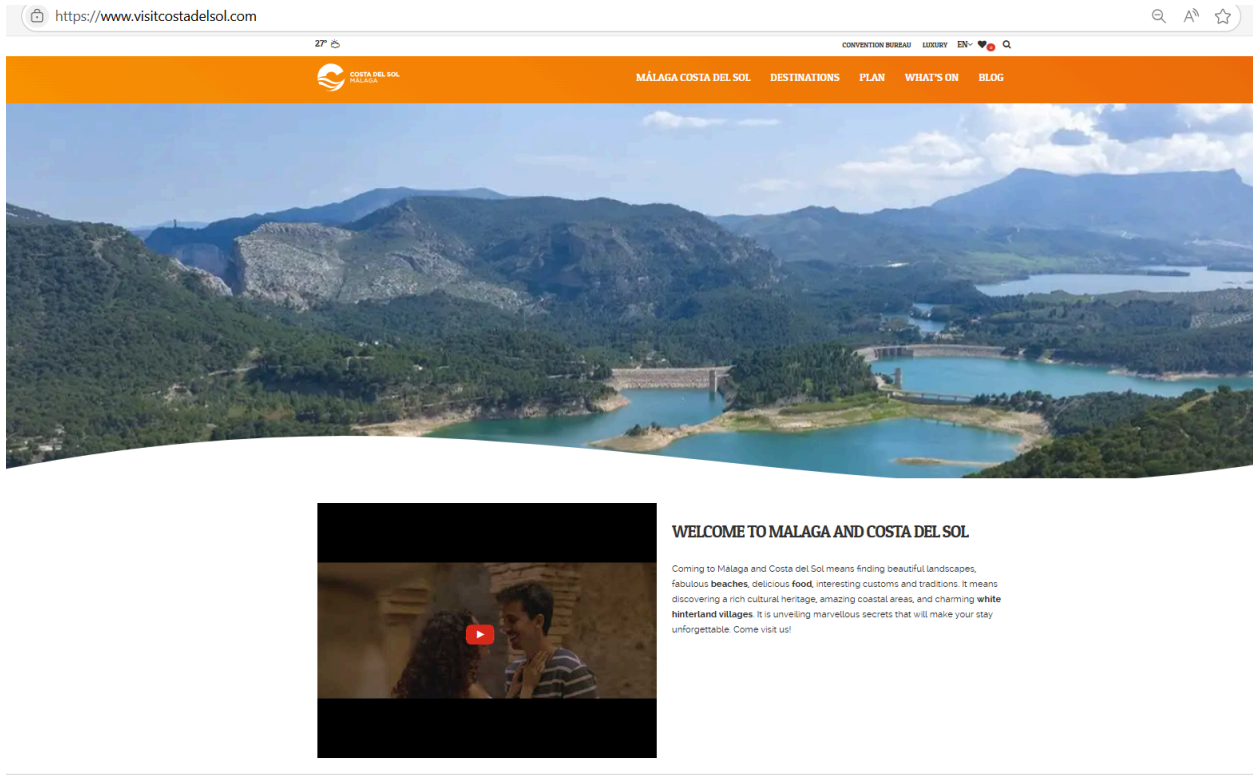
On **YouTube**, during the research period from January 1 to June 1, only one video was uploaded that does not address accessibility.

3.6. How is accessibility in Málaga communicated through Instagram and YouTube?

Málaga is located in the south of Spain, in the autonomous community of Andalusia, specifically in the province of the same name. It is situated on the Costa del Sol, with beaches along the Mediterranean Sea. It borders the province of Granada to the east, Cádiz to the west, and Córdoba and Sevilla provinces to the north. Regarding tourism data, Málaga closed the year 2024 with 1.612.800 hotel guests, of which 38.29% (617.553) belong to the national market and the remaining 61.71% (995.247) to the international market. Here we clearly see the importance of this foreign market. A total of 3.476.561 overnight stays were recorded (National Statistics Institute, as cited in Málaga City Council, 2025).

Upon visiting the **official tourism website of Costa del Sol - Málaga**, one is immediately greeted by a rotating slideshow of captivating landscapes, changing automatically every few seconds. Scrolling further down, a promotional video mainly pays tribute to professionals, the human heritage responsible for making tourists happy, it is part of the “Dame tu Mano” campaign. This audiovisual content is supported by descriptive text designed to attract visitors.

Figure 6. Homepage of the Official Tourism Website of Costa del Sol - Málaga



Source. Visit Costa del Sol (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.visitacostadelsol.com/>

Just below the video, various tourism resources are organized into clearly labeled folders, offering easy access to relevant information. Continuing down the page, a section titled “Practical Information” provides links to other pages and downloadable materials, including maps, eBooks, must-see places, and specific information related to accessible tourism.

To explore accessible tourism in the destination (see Appendix D) in more detail, we click on this option, which leads us to a subsection of the main page of Visita Costa del Sol - Málaga. Here, we find information on the topic and the possibility of reading it in four languages: Spanish, French, English, and German.

Firstly, it clearly states that the province of Málaga is fully equipped to welcome people with disabilities. It highlights some of the most iconic accessible monuments, such as the Alcazaba

of Málaga, its Cathedral, the Nerja Caves, and the Ronda Bullring. A large number of museums are also accessible, including the Picasso Museum, the Pompidou Centre, and the Antequera City Museum. For beach lovers, it is clarified that most beaches are adapted for accessibility, with ramps, amphibious chairs, and support staff. Beaches like La Malagueta and La Carihuela are mentioned, as well as Las Gaviotas Beach in Fuengirola, which was the first accessible beach established in Andalusia. In terms of leisure options, the Costa del Sol offers a wide range of adapted facilities, such as La Rosaleda Stadium, the Martín Carpena Arena, cinemas, leisure parks like Bioparc Fuengirola, and shopping centres. Nature lovers will also find accessible routes in natural areas such as El Torcal de Antequera and the Fuente de Piedra Lagoon.

Regarding villages that have made significant efforts in accessibility, Frigiliana and Ronda stand out. In fact, Frigiliana is especially notable for a project developed by Sign Language Interpretation students, which has increased inclusivity for blind, deaf, and deaf-blind individuals, allowing them to enjoy this charming village as well.

Finally, for those seeking more specific information, the website offers a search tool with four fields: “where,” “type,” “area,” and “preference,” which can be used to find, for example, details about a specific tourism office in the Costa del Sol.

Now let's take a look at what is reflected about accessible tourism on their **Instagram profile** (see Appendix D):

Throughout the five-month research period, no full video was found that explicitly focuses on accessible tourism. However, glimpses of accessible tourism were identified in three videos.

The first video to be analyzed dates back to February 7, 2025. It is a one-minute informative video presenting the village of Genalguacil. Characterized by a voiceover and subtitles, it

explains the available resources in a simple way and introduces them dynamically with cheerful background music. As Genalguacil, also known as the "museum village", is showcased, we can see several charming staircases featured throughout its streets. However, there are also a couple of shots showing ramps as symbols of accessibility, suggesting that accessibility is considered in the destination. While this is not explicitly mentioned or written in the caption, it is visually conveyed.

Another noteworthy video was published on February 10, 2025. It is a short promotional piece, only twenty-two seconds long, showcasing the "Código Valentina" Route in Arriate. The video is accompanied by an upbeat soundtrack synchronized with a rapid sequence of images, creating a collage-like effect. The opening image portrays the Plaza de la Constitución, the starting point of the route, where a visible disabled parking sign suggests accessibility considerations in the area.

The most recent video where a hint of accessible tourism can be observed was published on May 1st. With a duration of 30 seconds, it captures the sunsets along Málaga's beaches. The soundtrack, featuring a gentle piano melody and soft vocals, gives the video a promotional yet emotional tone. In the first few seconds, wooden walkways near the shoreline are shown, which are key parts of making the beach accessible.

Now we will examine how accessible tourism is communicated on **YouTube** (see Appendix D):

In the promotional video titled "*Vive Costa del Sol: The Podcast of a Unique Destination*", published on February 19, 2025, Visit Costa del Sol (2025) presents various distinctive elements of the region, including its gastronomy, beaches, white villages etc. The video, accompanied by inspirational music, creates an engaging and emotionally appealing atmosphere that leaves the viewer curious to explore the destination. It is worth noting that in one of the final scenes, a wide wooden walkway appears, seemingly located on a natural beach, as it is surrounded by sand

and shrubs. This wide walkway suggests inclusivity, providing access for people with reduced mobility who use wheelchairs, so they too can enjoy the beach.

To sum up, Málaga shows limited and subtle references to accessible tourism on social media, contrasting with the stronger commitment seen on its official tourism website.

3.7. How does Valencia showcase accessible tourism on Instagram and YouTube?

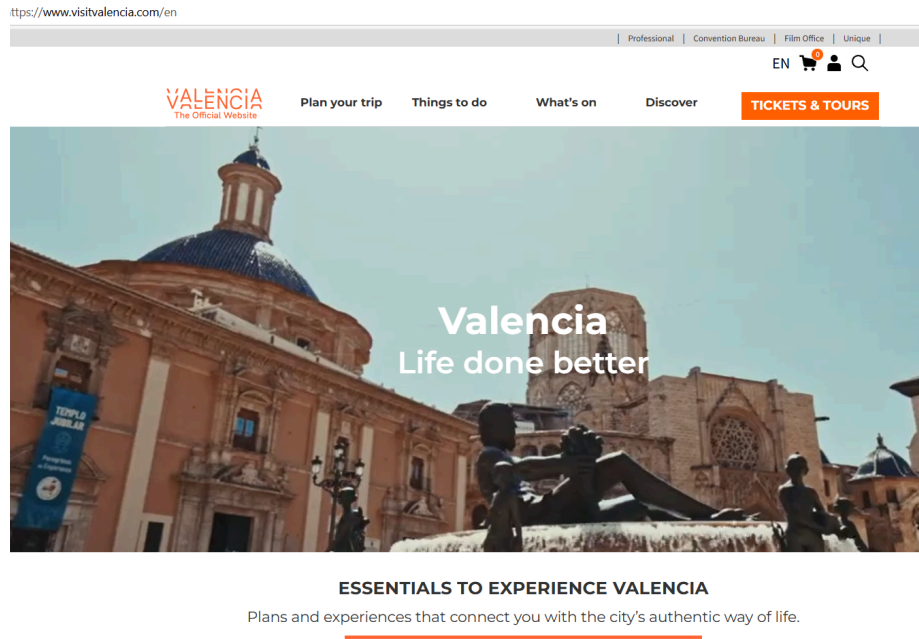
Valencia is located on the eastern coast of Spain, specifically in the region of the Valencian Community, on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It borders the province of Castellón to the north, Alicante to the south, and Cuenca (Castilla-La Mancha) to the west. It is considered the third largest city in the country, after Madrid and Barcelona (Hosteltur, 2025). Regarding tourism statistics, data from the Visit València Foundation (2024) indicate that the city of Valencia registered 6.085.962 overnight stays and 2.419.998 visitors in 2024. International tourists made up 68.5% of the total overnight stays, compared to 31.5% for domestic tourists.

In reference to the city's tourism management, it is worth highlighting that, according to the European Commission (2021), Valencia was named one of the winners of the 2022 European Capital of Smart Tourism competition. This initiative recognizes achievements across four pillars: accessibility, sustainability, digitalization, and cultural heritage and creativity.

After setting the context of the destination, we proceed to explore its official tourism website. On the homepage, there is an image of the City of Arts and Sciences, accompanied by a book tickets button on the left offering options to get tickets for guided tours, entrance fees, special offers, access to the City of Arts and the Oceanogràfic, as well as the Valencia Tourist Card. Additionally, four main categories are displayed: 'Plan your trip,' 'Things to do,' 'What's on,' and 'Discover.' By expanding the first category, 'Plan your trip,' we find the option "Accessible

Valencia.” Clicking on this directs us to the accessible tourism section (see Appendix E) where relevant information will be collected.

Figure 7. Homepage of the Official Tourism Website of Valencia



Source. Visit Valencia. (n.d.). Visit Valencia. <https://www.visitvalencia.com/en>

The accessible tourism webpage for Valencia opens with a video that occupies a significant portion of the homepage. This one-minute and eleven-second video demonstrates Valencia’s preparedness to accommodate people with various types of disabilities, including physical disabilities (represented by individuals using wheelchairs), sensory disabilities such as visual impairments, and psychological disabilities. The video offers options to be played with or without sound, and simultaneously features a man interpreting the spoken content in sign language. The background music is lively and rhythmic, with a brief vocal section containing simple and memorable lyrics. The music’s tone closely resembles that of a commercial advertisement.

If we continue scrolling down, we will find a guide to accessible establishments in Valencia organized by category: hotels, restaurants, leisure venues, cultural and sightseeing attractions, tourist information centers, and transportation services.

Following this, there is a section titled “Tourism Pictograms,” designed to enhance the accessibility of tourism services through the use of pictograms tailored for individuals with communication or language challenges commonly associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). From here, users have the option to learn about this initiative and download the pictograms. These pictograms are implemented across tourist offices, museums, beaches, hotels, and other venues, facilitating the planning of adapted visits. They serve a dual purpose: supporting families with autistic members in organizing their trips and offering tourism businesses a free resource to improve accessibility. Additionally, tourist offices incorporate pictograms in Braille and provide systems for individuals with hearing impairments. In the near future, tour guides will adopt transparent masks to enable lip-reading, further enhancing communication accessibility.

Next, there is a section titled “Tourist Routes to Read or Listen To,” which explains that, for people with hearing or visual impairments, accessible information about maps will be provided through Maps Voice. This technology enables users to either read or listen to the content. So far, it has been applied to six routes : Historic Centre & Old Town; Ensanche y Ruzafa; City of Arts and Sciences; Bioparc and Cabecera Park; Seaside, Marina and Beaches; and Albufera Natural Park of Valencia.

The final section on the page is titled “Tips for Organizing an Accessible Event,” which aims to promote events that are accessible to people with any type of disability. A downloadable PDF guide is available, ensuring that a lack of knowledge does not become a barrier to accessibility.

Once we have obtained this key information about the destination, it is time to check how it is communicated through its social media channels:

On its **Instagram profile**, we highlight three related posts. The first one is a video published on January 16th, lasting 24 seconds. It is a short clip from the video found on the homepage of Valencia's accessible tourism website, adapted into a reel. In the opening scene, Valencia is depicted as a unique and accessible city for people with physical disabilities. A woman in her 30s is shown using a wheelchair on a boardwalk. Then, we see a couple (the woman in a wheelchair and the man walking) strolling through the City of Arts and Sciences. Another scene shows a young man crossing a bridge in his wheelchair. Also, there is a moment where an instructor is giving a paddleboarding class to two men with Down syndrome. Then, other two men in their 30s are later shown using a tablet displaying pictograms, the same ones mentioned on the official website. An exhibition of sculptures is presented, with Braille descriptions alongside and a blind person reads them using their sense of touch. Additionally, a group of young people from an association, possibly living with psychological conditions, appears in one of the scenes. Lastly, a blind woman is also included, walking with her white cane. Most of the scenes take place outdoors such as in parks, beaches, museums, the City of Arts and Sciences, and the marina while only one is indoors, at a museum.

The second post that stands out in relation to the research topic is a photo published on April 17th. Specifically, it is the third of three images in a photo carousel. The image captures a street in Valencia with palm trees, four-story buildings, and bars on the ground floor, which have set up their terraces to take advantage of the sunny weather. At one of the terrace tables, a woman in her 50s is sitting with a man, seemingly ordering something to drink. A waitress is assisting them by providing spoken information so they can make their choice.

And finally, the last selected post, like in the previous case, is the third photo in a carousel of three images, dated May 1st. The photo appears to have been taken from the upper floor of the Mercado de Colón, showing an escalator that leads to the lower level. Right next to it, there is a red sign indicating that the elevator is nearby. The sign includes the symbol of a person in a wheelchair with an arrow pointing up and down.

As for the highlighted stories, there is no trace of any that refer to accessibility.

Now we switch to a different social media platform and move on to explore **YouTube**. In the past five months, one notable video is *Valencia without limits* by Visit Valencia (2025). It is the same video that appeared on the homepage of Valencia's accessible tourism website.

Since much of the video has already been described in the Instagram reel, we will just add a couple of details from the full YouTube video, such as a moment showing a man in his 50s using a wheelchair as he prepares to board a boat at the marina. With the help of a ramp, another man assists him onto the vessel. The boat, which is red, has blue accessibility symbols, including a wheelchair icon. Overall, we can state that in the full one-minute-and-eleven-second video, most of the scenes feature people using wheelchairs, emphasizing physical disability. However, there are also representations of sensory disabilities, and cognitive disabilities. This video showcases multiple aspects of disability and reflects a genuine sense of inclusion.

To sum up, Valencia promotes inclusive tourism through actions and social media, showing true alignment with its commitment to accessibility.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the results obtained after carrying out all the analyses mentioned in the previous pages.

Let us begin with the findings from the analysis of **Spain.Info**: It reveals several limitations in the communication of accessible tourism. Navigating the official website to find the section dedicated to universal tourism proves to be highly challenging. Accessing this content requires the use of the search tool which reduces visibility and ease of access for users seeking information on accessibility. Once the appropriate section is located, the website provides only basic information regarding accessibility in Spain, including transportation, monuments, accommodation, and activities. This content is both limited in scope and outdated, prompting the site to redirect users to external platforms such as Tur4all for more comprehensive resources. The tone of the language is generally formal and neutral, although the absence of easy-to-read content reduces its accessibility, particularly for individuals with cognitive or learning disabilities.

On the other hand, accessibility visibility on Spain.info's social media could be improved. On **Instagram**, the profile does not include any highlighted folders specifically dedicated to accessible tourism. During the period of analysis, a total of 149 posts were published, of which only three were directly related to accessible tourism. All three posts were from April, with no updates since, making it hard to identify a clear posting strategy. None of them include official accessibility-related hashtags. Each post was shared as a visually simple reel under 50 seconds long, with inclusive and respectful language, but without subtitles or sign language interpretation. These videos show people with disabilities as active tourists, but only centers on physical disability. Concerning the **Youtube** profile, accessibility is briefly mentioned in only one video, where a wheelchair symbol reinforces the focus on physical disability. The video includes subtitles and uses clear language. In general, we can affirm that Spain.Info's accessibility content on social media mainly addresses physical disability, lacking broader inclusion.

The following section presents the results for the three cities regarding how they communicate accessible tourism through their digital channels and compares their approaches.

We begin with the city of **Donostia**. Broadly speaking, it strongly promotes the visibility of accessibility on its **official tourism website**. As soon as users enter the homepage, the accessibility section is clearly visible at the top right corner, making access to this information much easier. The site provides quite comprehensive and up-to-date information on adapted tourism services, organized by category.

Despite the efforts made on the official tourism website, the city's presence on social media remains limited in terms of accessibility communication. On **Instagram**, out of 88 posts published during the research period, only one addressed the topic. This post was a paid collaboration with a content creator with a physical disability, aimed at promoting the destination and giving visibility to the voices of people with disabilities, an action that reflects strong commitment. On **YouTube**, no content related to accessibility was published throughout the five-month research period, highlighting a lack of coherence between the website and the city's social media communication. In short, Donostia's website shows strong commitment to accessibility, but this is not really echoed on social media.

Proceeding with the city of **Málaga**, on its **official tourism website**, the accessible tourism section can be found by scrolling down the homepage. Although not as intuitive as Donostia's website, it is still visible. General information on accessible tourism is provided, with a particular focus on Frigiliana's initiatives for people who are blind, deaf, or deaf-blind, alongside efforts in Ronda. A search tool is also available for more specific queries.

In contrast, this level of attention is not reflected on social media. On **Instagram**, none of the two hundred and two posts published during the research period focus directly on accessibility. Only three reels contain subtle visual cues such as a ramp, a wide beach walkway for

wheelchair access, and a parking symbol for people with disabilities. These elements are present but not mentioned explicitly. Two posts were in February and one in May, suggesting a loose three-month pattern. On **YouTube**, a similar walkway appears in one video, but again, without any direct reference to accessibility. Overall, Málaga's social media shows little direct mention of accessibility, and key initiatives like Frigiliana's sign language program are completely absent, indicating that there is still much work to be done.

In the case of **Valencia**, its **official tourism website** does not provide immediate access to the accessible tourism section. It is somewhat hidden under the "Plan your trip" menu, requiring users to navigate further to find it. Once there, the site offers extensive and up-to-date information on the accessibility of different tourist services. It also includes dedicated sections on initiatives supporting the inclusion of people with cognitive, hearing, and visual impairments. Additionally, there is a downloadable guide for businesses on how to host accessible events.

Regarding social media, on **Instagram**, Valencia shared three relevant posts out of 120 during the research period (one reel and two photos). Posting lacks a clear pattern: the first appeared in January, the second three months later, and the third less than a month after that. The reel addresses a wide range of disabilities, including physical, psychological, and sensory. The photos focus more on physical disability, featuring a woman in a wheelchair and an elevator sign for reduced mobility. On **YouTube**, the same reel appears in a longer format, emphasizing the same inclusive approach. Overall, Valencia's commitment to accessibility is well reflected in both its website and social media, showing consistency and depth in its communication.

Once these results have been discussed, we can summarize that among the cities analyzed, there is no doubt Valencia is the city that communicates accessibility most effectively, both on its website and through its Instagram and YouTube platforms. Donostia has the most visible accessible tourism section on its official website and shows strong potential, being on the right path to improving its communication efforts. However, Málaga is the city that most urgently

needs to improve how it communicates accessibility, as its message is weak and does not reflect the importance the topic deserves.

Table 3. Comparative Data on Accessibility Communication

Destinations	Spain	Donosti	Málaga	Valencia
Posts related with accessible tourism	3/149 (2%)	1/88 (1,14%)	3/202 (1,49%)	3/120 (2,5%)
Comment	Mainly physical disability, lacking broader inclusion	Donostia commits to accessibility on its website, but not on social media	Málaga's social media barely mentions accessibility	Valencia ensures coherent accessibility communication

Note. Data compiled by the author from websites and social media profiles.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to examine how Spain, as a tourist destination, communicates accessible tourism through its official websites and social media channels. To support this analysis, a theoretical framework was developed to establish that accessibility is a fundamental human right, as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, rather than a recent trend. The concept of accessibility was then explored in the context of tourism, emphasizing that it should apply not only to the destination itself but to the entire tourism chain. The destination is just one element among many that must be accessible. Furthermore, the increasing drive to position Spanish destinations as smart tourism destinations has contributed to the advancement of accessibility measures, as accessibility is one of the key pillars they are expected to fulfill.

The evaluation of Turespaña, specifically its Spain.info website and related social media channels on Instagram and YouTube, has highlighted the considerable progress still needed to adequately address accessibility. On the website, accessing the section on accessible tourism is not straightforward, which complicates the process of finding information about accessible travel options. On social media, accessibility is not given much visibility, as there are no dedicated Instagram highlights, and the content shared is minimal and focuses only on physical disability. This narrow portrayal fails to represent the full spectrum of disabilities.

Similar patterns were observed in the cases of Donostia and Málaga, where there seems to be an underlying assumption that disability equates solely to physical impairment, particularly wheelchair users. However, disability is a broader concept that includes sensory and intellectual dimensions as well.

In contrast, Valencia stands out for its more comprehensive approach. It effectively addresses physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities in both its website and social media presence. Among the three cities analyzed, it demonstrates the most inclusive communication strategy, whereas Málaga still needs substantial improvement.

These findings are crucial because there is often a general assumption that, since laws already establish minimum standards of inclusivity for people with disabilities, that alone is sufficient, when in fact, it is not. In the context of tourism, researching whether a destination is accessible can be a demanding task. And if social media, which today plays such a central role in our daily lives, fails to embrace inclusivity in its content, it inevitably contributes to the exclusion of people with disabilities. As discussed, sensory and intellectual disabilities are especially likely to be overlooked. Even though they may not be as visibly apparent as a wheelchair, they are very much present in our society and must be taken into account.

However, It must acknowledge certain limitations of this study. First, the analysis was conducted over a brief five-month period, which may not fully capture long-term communication strategies. Additionally, the study was restricted on only three Spanish cities, limiting the generalizability of the findings to the broader national context. It also considered just two social media platforms (Instagram and YouTube) excluding others such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), or TikTok, which could provide a more comprehensive view of the digital strategy. Lastly, the study concentrates solely on the communication of accessibility, without verifying whether what is communicated aligns with the actual accessibility conditions of the destinations.

Now, several recommendations will be put forward to help improve the current situation. To ensure greater consistency between the content on their official tourism websites and their social media channels. Additionally, they should adopt a more inclusive communication approach that reflects all types of disabilities and regularly incorporate subtitles and sign language interpretation in their video content. On Instagram, it would be beneficial to create specific highlight sections dedicated to accessible tourism.

As future lines of research, it is suggested that strategic and marketing plans of tourist destinations incorporate more targeted communication initiatives to raise visibility for people with disabilities, with a reinforced commitment to promoting social sustainability. On top of that, the role of community managers is essential in bringing these initiatives to social media in a dynamic, engaging, and inclusive way.

To conclude, we can't forget that people with disabilities often face barriers that prevent them from fully enjoying everyday life. That is why, as a society, we must do our part to enhance inclusion and guarantee that no one is left behind. True accessibility goes beyond physical disabilities, it also embraces intellectual and sensory differences. Giving visibility to all forms of disability is not just a responsibility; it is a step toward a more just and empathetic world for all.

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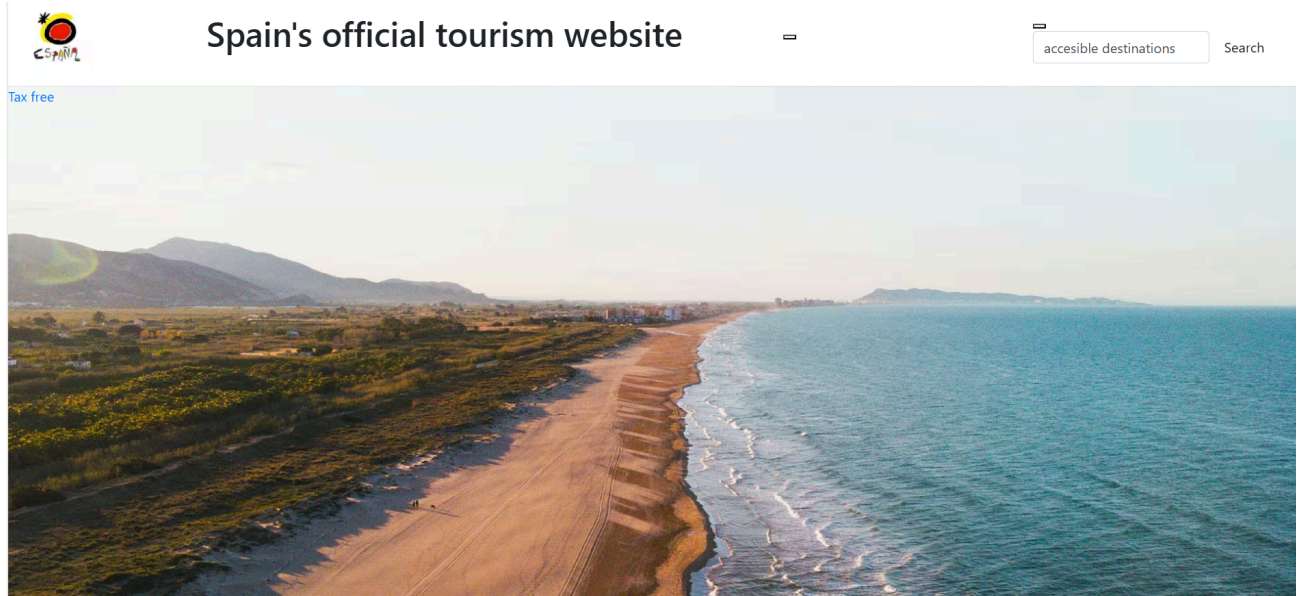
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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Homepage Info.Spain

Figure A1. *Info.Spain Homepage*



Note. Spain.info (<https://www.spain.info/es/>)

Appendix B: Screenshot of Spain.Info's social medias profile

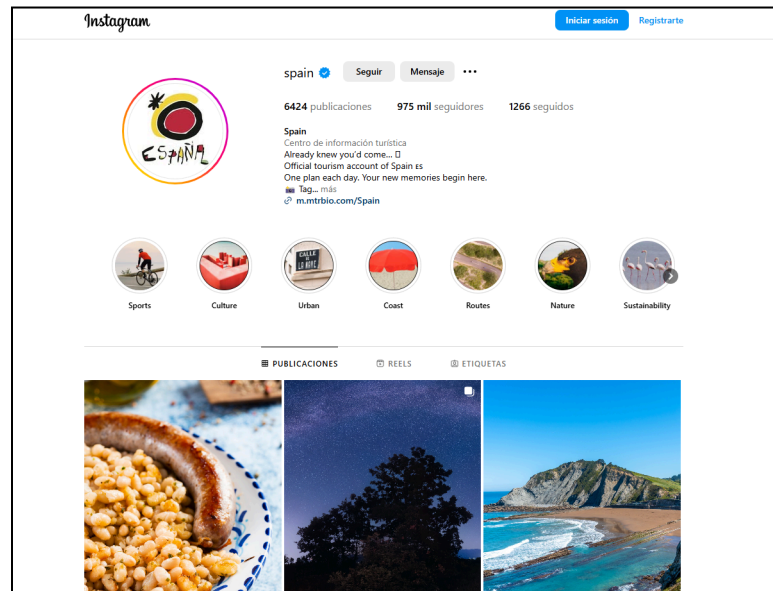
Figure B1. Youtube Profile of Spain.Info



Source. Spain.info [@spain]. (n.d.). [Screenshot of YouTube profile]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/spain>

Figure B2. Instagram Profile of Spain.Info

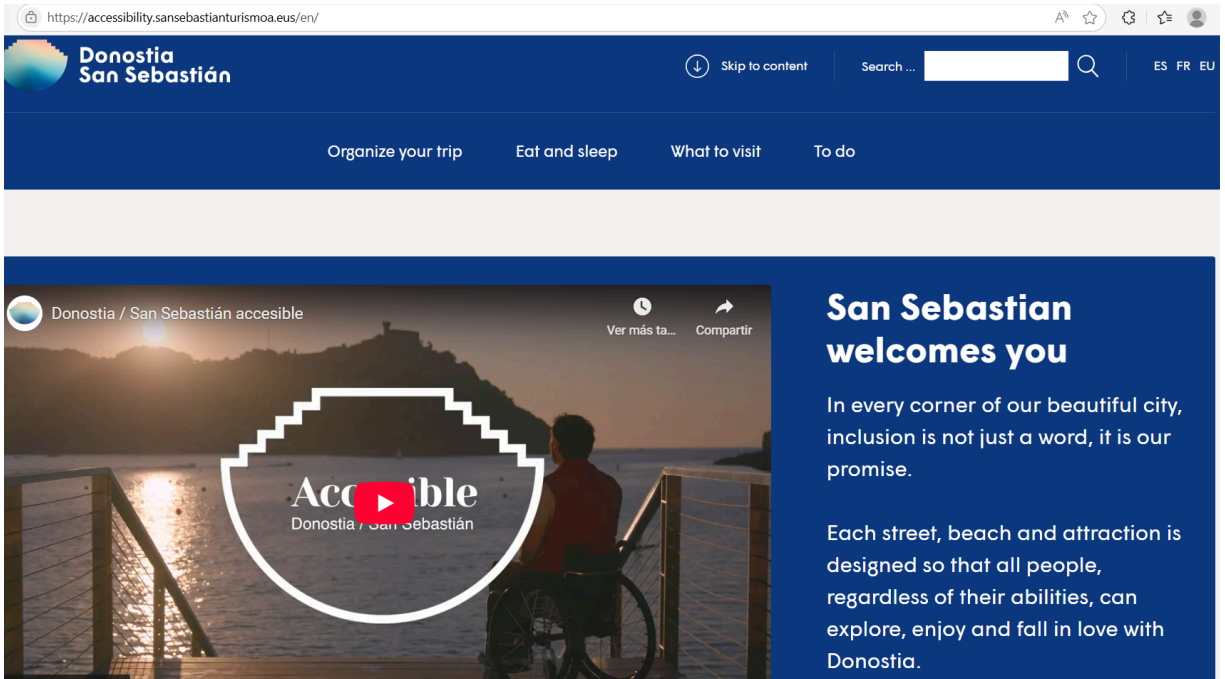


Source. Spain.info [@spain]. (n.d.). [Screenshot of Instagram profile]. Instagram.

<https://www.instagram.com/spain/>

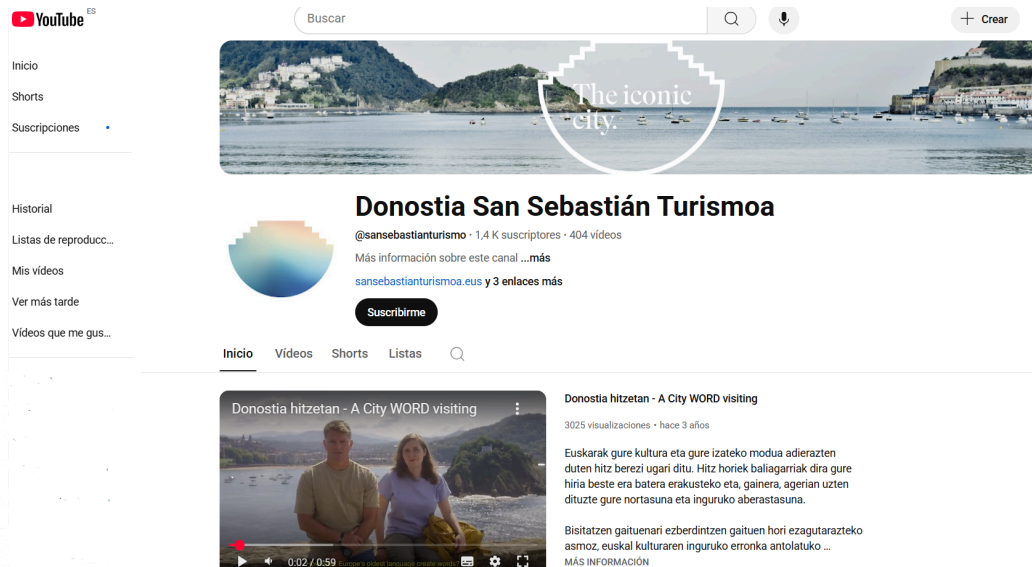
APPENDIX C:
HOMEPAGE OF DONOSTIA'S OFFICIAL ACCESSIBLE TOURISM WEBSITE
& SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES

Figure C1. Official Website for Accessible Tourism in Donostia-San Sebastián



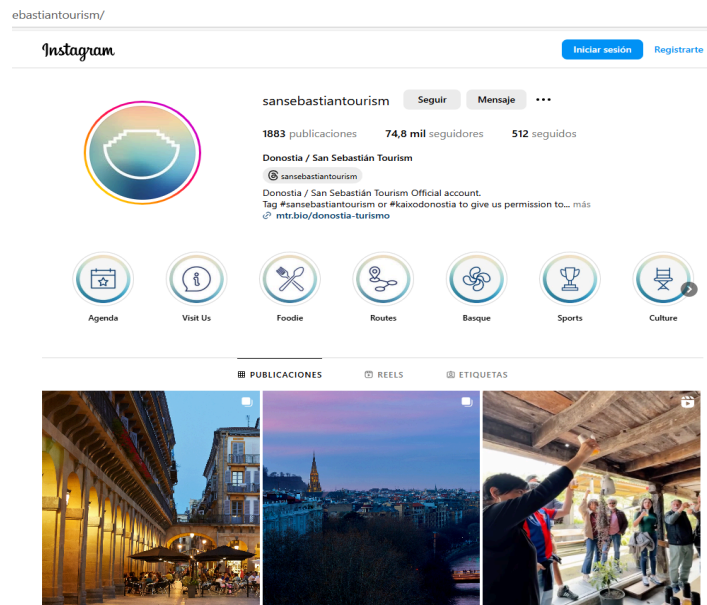
Source. Donostia-San Sebastián Turismo (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://accessibility.sansebastianturismoa.eus/es/>

Figure C2. Youtube Profile of Donosti / San Sebastian Tourism



Source. Sansebastianturismoa.eus [@sansebastianturismo]. (n.d.). [Screenshot of YouTube profile].
Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/@sansebastianturismo>

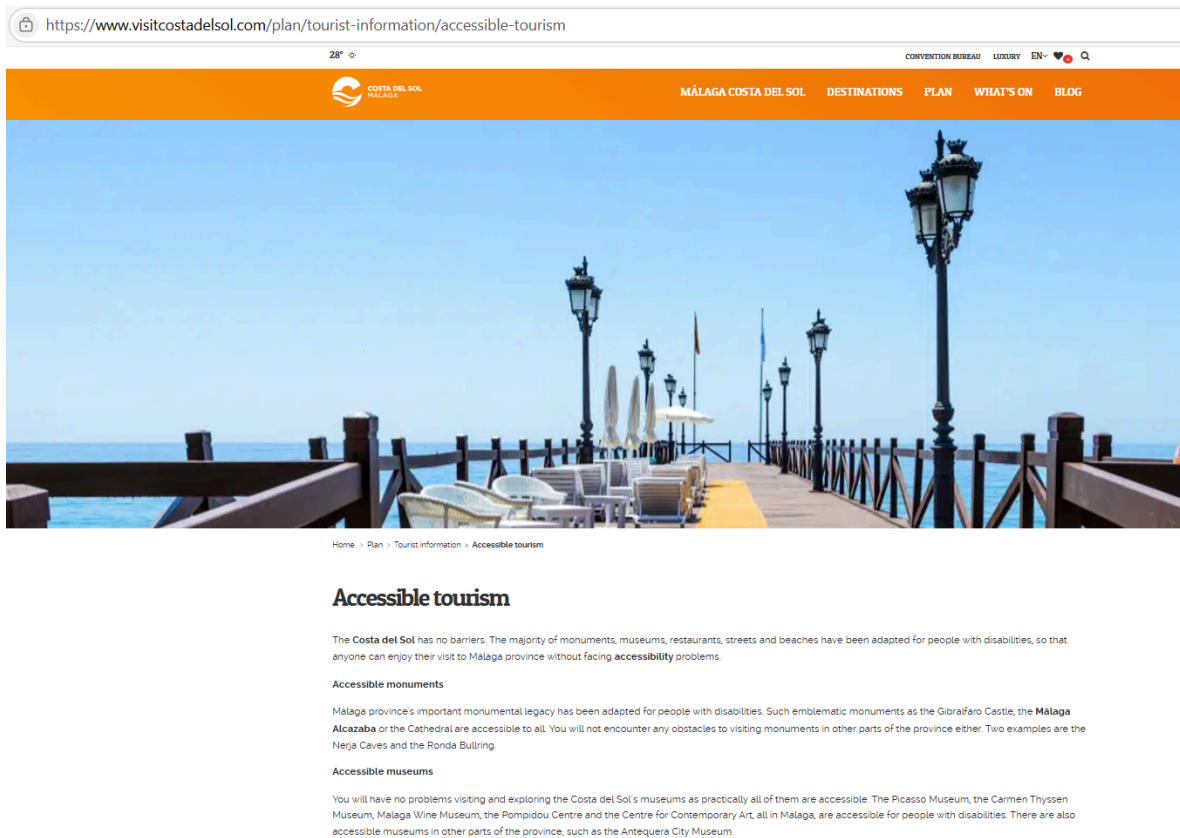
Figure C3. Instagram Profile of Donosti / San Sebastian Tourism



Source. Sansebastianturismoa.eus [@sansebastiantourism]. (n.d.). [Screenshot of Instagram profile].
Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/sansebastiantourism/>

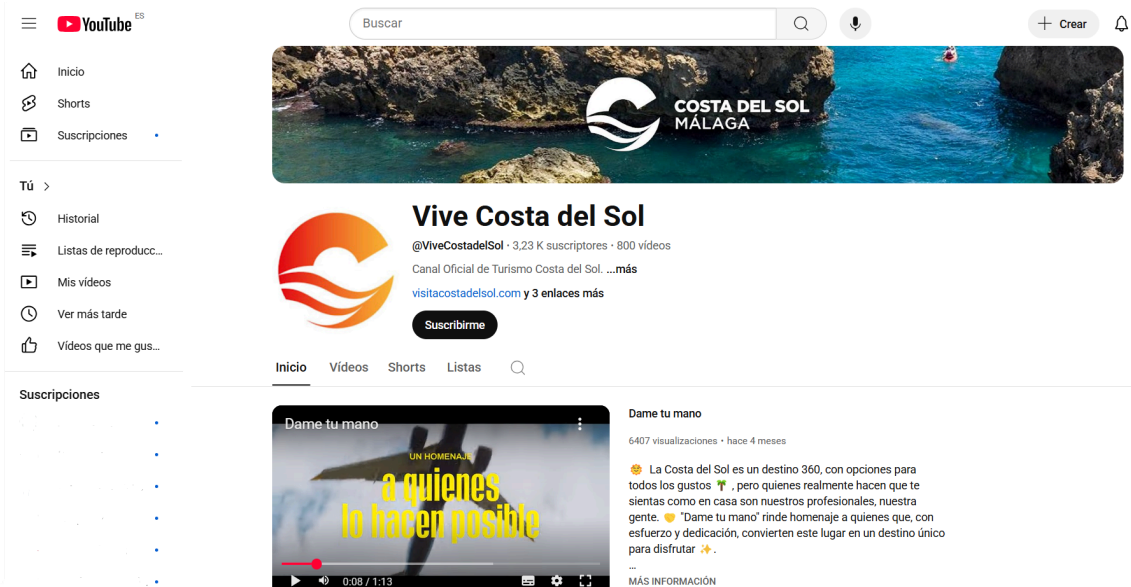
APPENDIX D:
HOMEPAGE OF COSTA DEL SOL- MALAGA'S OFFICIAL ACCESSIBLE TOURISM
WEBSITE
& SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES

Figure D1. *Official Website for Accessible Tourism in Costa del Sol- Málaga*



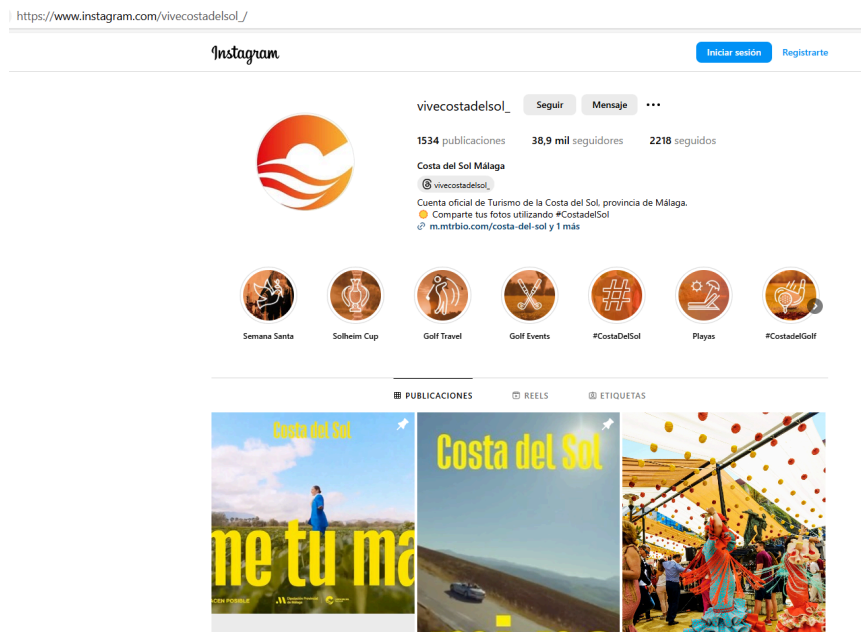
Source. Visit Costa del Sol. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.visitcostadelsol.com/plan/tourist-information/accessible-tourism>

Figure D2. Youtube Profile of Costa del Sol Málaga



Source. Visita Costa del Sol [@ViveCostaDelSol]. (n.d.). [Screenshot of YouTube profile]. YouTube. <https://youtube.com/@vivecostadelsol>

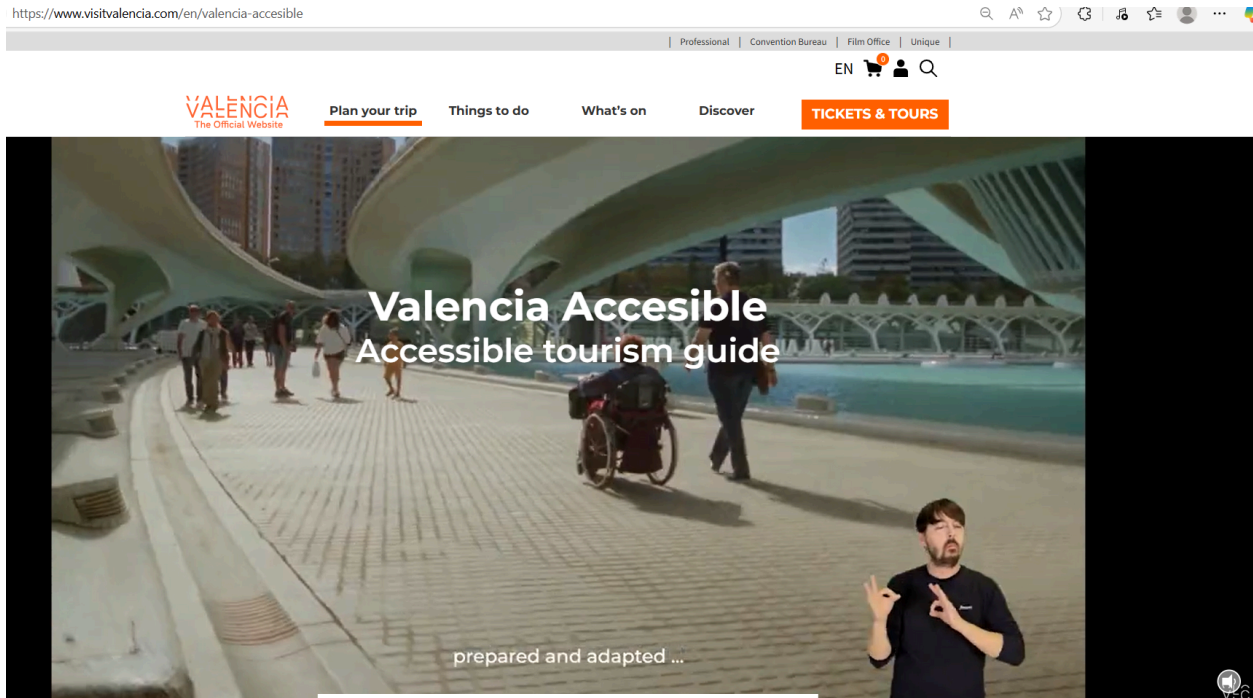
Figure D3. Instagram Profile of Costa del Sol Málaga



Source. Visita Costa del Sol [@ViveCostaDelSol]. (n.d.). [Screenshot of Instagram profile]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/vivecostadelsol/>

APPENDIX E:
HOMEPAGE OF MALAGA'S OFFICIAL ACCESSIBLE TOURISM WEBSITE
& SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES

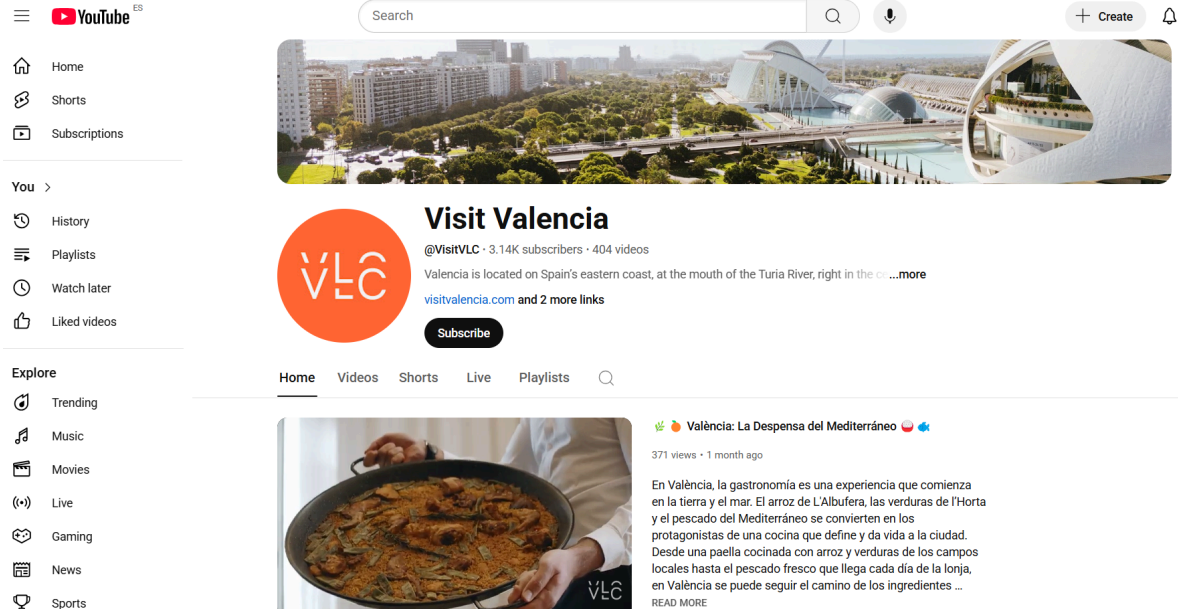
Figure E1. *Official Website for Accessible Tourism in Valencia*



Note. Visit Valencia. (n.d.). *Valencia Accessible*.

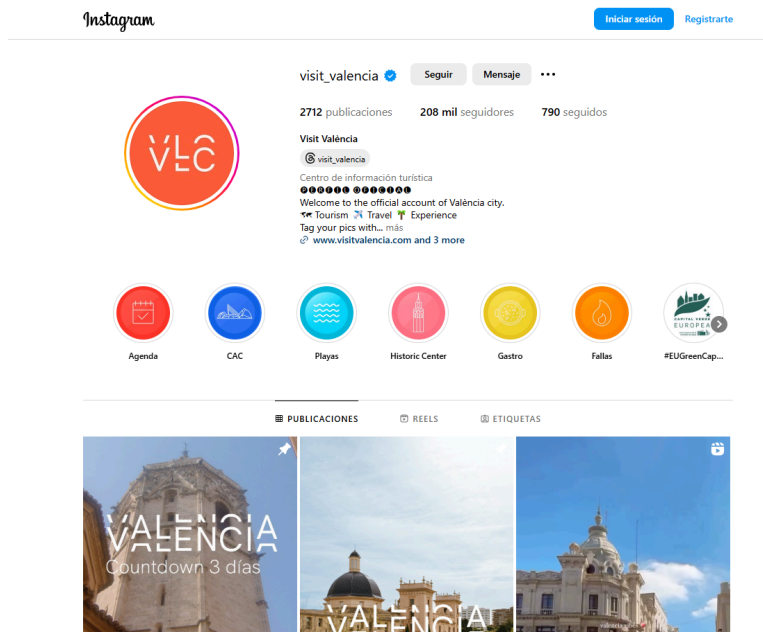
<https://www.visitvalencia.com/en/valencia-accessible>

Figure E2. Youtube Profile of Valencia



Source. Visit Valencia [@VisitVLC]. (n.d.). [Screenshot of Youtube profile]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/user/Turisvalencia>

Figure E3. Instagram Profile of Valencia



Source. Visit Valencia [@Visit_Valencia]. (n.d.). [Screenshot of Instagram profile]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/visit_valencia/