



MASTER THESIS

BODEGAS VALDEMAR: ACCESSIBLE TOURISM AND ITS RECOVERY AFTER COVID-19.

SOFÍA DI MARCO

Internship developed at Bodegas Valdemar, Oyón, Spain

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TABLE OF CONTENT

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Literature Review.....	2
2.1 Accessibility.....	2
2.2 Coopetition.....	6
2.3 Social Media & Influencers.....	7
3. Methodology.....	8
4. About Valdemar.....	9
4.1 D.O.Ca Rioja.....	9
4.2 Accessible Wine Tourism.....	10
4.3 Segmentation.....	12
4.4 Analysis of Valdemar's Website & Social Media Presence.....	12
4.5 Analysis of Competitors.....	13
4.6 SWOT.....	14
4.7 Customer Journey Map.....	14
5. Findings from the interviews.....	15
5.1 Available Information.....	16
5.2 Companies, Accessible Projects, and Cooperation.....	17
5.3 Traveling After COVID-19.....	18
5.4 Current Challenges and Future Perspectives.....	19
6. Proposals.....	19
6.1 Data Collection.....	20
6.2 Storytelling.....	21
6.3 Product Development.....	22
6.4 Website & Social Media.....	23
6.5 Collaboration with Stakeholders.....	26
7. Conclusion.....	28
8. Acknowledgments.....	29
Bibliography.....	30

Annex.....	32
1. Target Persona.....	32
2. Competitor's Analysis.....	32
3. Accessible Features.....	33
4. Customer Journey Map.....	35
5. Questionnaire of the Semi-structured Interview.....	35
6. Profile of the Interviewees.....	36
7. Data Collection.....	37
8. Social Media Planning.....	37
9. Accessible Services Offered to Stakeholders.....	38
10. Accessible Visits.....	39

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Types of tourism for people with disabilities.....	4
Figure 2. Perceived difficulties in providing accessible services.....	6
Figure 3. Target Persona.....	32
Figure 4. Booking spreadsheet.....	37
Figure 5. Accessible Event Venues.....	38
Figure 6. Accessible Visits.....	38
Figure 7. Accessible Harvest.....	39
Figure 8. Wine Tasting	39
Figure 9. Tour of the winery.....	40
 Table 1. SWOT.....	 14
Table 2. Interview Findings.....	16
Table 3. Proposals.....	20
Table 4. Items for the Competitor's Analysis	32
Table 5. Overall Score.....	33
Table 6. Customer Journey Map	35
Table 7. Influencers.....	37

Abstract

According to the World Health Organization's Report on Disability (2021), 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability. In the case of Spain, this translates to around 11% of its total population (INE, 2022). Therefore, this segment faces serious challenges when practicing recreational activities. In the tourism sector, their needs are not being appropriately catered, and their chances of, for example, traveling and visiting wineries are severely restricted.

Bodegas Valdemar is a family winery that has been producing wine under the *D.O. Ca Rioja* since 1985. In 2018, they decided to adapt the entire winery to offer 100% accessible visits for everyone. Before COVID-19, people with disabilities (physical, visual, hearing, cognitive, and organic) represented 20% of the total number of visits to the Wine Tourism Department. However, once the restrictions were loosened, visitation numbers for this segment have yet to recover.

The main objective of this thesis is to examine whether the needs of people with disabilities have changed regarding wine tourism and, if so, what steps Bodegas Valdemar should take to provide good service that can fully meet their requirements and ensure utmost satisfaction.

A complete and detailed analysis of the current situation was conducted through several methods, including a literature review, semi-structured interviews, and an evaluation of the competitors. The results show that Valdemar has a solid, unique selling point that is not being taken advantage of properly. Indeed the findings suggest a need to improve the pre-purchase and on-site experience by understanding the actual scope of the segment, focusing on storytelling, working in a more intense social media presence, providing helpful information on their website, and collaborating with other stakeholders. In conclusion, this work allowed for the creation of five proposals to address the problem of the lack of visitation from people with disabilities.

Keywords: Accessibility, Universal Design, Inclusion, Rioja, Stakeholders.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PwD: People with disabilities

UD: Universal design

SM: Social media

SMI: Social media influencers

WOM: Word of mouth

USP: Unique selling point

1. Introduction

Bodegas Valdemar, located in Oyón (Basque Country), is a long-time-standing family of winemakers and viticulturists. They started producing wine for self-consumption 130 years ago in a small underground cellar (*calados*). Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, they decided to buy vineyards and built a cellar to start producing and commercializing wines in the *D.O. Ca Rioja* as Bodegas Valdemar. Today, the winery is owned and run by the fourth and fifth generations of the Martínez Bujanda family, and in 2019 they started a new project by building their winery in Washington State, USA. Their pioneer and innovative spirit defines them based on four central values: Sustainability, Globalization, Accessibility, and Viticulture.

Since 2018, Bodegas Valdemar has adapted its facilities and wine tourism offers to become the first winery in Spain to be 100% accessible (Great Wine Capitals). This project aimed to increase visitation numbers by targeting a segment usually not considered in the tourism industry. The objective was met, and before COVID-19, accessible tourism represented 20% of their total visits. The main objective of the thesis is to understand if the needs of this segment have changed and, if so, what steps Valdemar should take to provide good service that can fully satisfy their requirements.

The intern's duties and activities took place from Tuesday to Saturday from 9 am to 3 pm. They centered around three main aspects. Firstly, as a tour guide doing the visits and tastings, organizing the bookings, and selling wine; secondly, tending the wine bar for walk-ins, only looking to taste some wine by the glass; and finally, focusing on accessible tourism. The intern had no previous knowledge about the topic and its implications; the first step was to conduct an extensive literature review to understand the tourists, their needs, and their challenges. After, an update of the database of associations of PwD was done, followed by the development of new products and the creation of promotional flyers to reach out to these businesses and offer the experiences.

The Master Thesis is divided into seven chapters. It starts by focusing on the literature review of the main aspects considered when studying the topic. Then, it describes the main methodological approaches applied in the thesis. Followed by an analysis of the company, centering around the project, the target audience, their media presence, the main competitors in the region, a situational analysis, and a customer journey. The fifth chapter provides a summary of the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted. The sixth one centers around the five proposals created to address the current problem. And finally, the conclusion to outline the main findings and provide an overview of the thesis and its implications.

2. Literature Review

The literature review centers around the main principles of accessible tourism, its current challenges, coopetition among companies, and the role of social media and influencers on the travel decision journey. A lack of research on accessible tourism during and after COVID-19 is evidenced, and empirical research is conducted through interviews and field observation.

The chapter starts by focusing on accessible tourism and its challenges. Such an important matter requires a deep analysis of the current situation and the main problems encountered by the segment. Case studies are also studied to understand how value-added services are created and offered in the accessible tourism industry.

While the research is carried out, a need to expand the literature review arises. Since one of the evidenced problems in the analysis of accessible tourism is the lack of stakeholder collaboration, coopetition is the strategy to explore. Accordingly, there is a need to understand why and how to create proposals collaboratively by working across different supply chain sectors.

On the other hand, after analyzing Valdemar's accessible presence on social media, a lack of an active presence showcasing their values and projects and engaging the potential visitors in their storytelling is evidenced. Correspondingly, the chapter had to be expanded toward social media strategies and the benefits of working with influencers since it is one of the considered proposals.

2.1 Accessibility

For Darcy and Dickson (2009), accessible tourism “enables people with access requirements including mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive, and organic dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity through the delivery of universally designed products, services, and environments.” Limiting the definition to only people with permanent disabilities would be a mistake since people with temporary ones, families with children, and senior citizens must be included. They all encounter severe difficulties during the pre-purchase and on-site experience, which may create an unpleasant experience, or they may avoid traveling at all. In their report, the ENAT (2007) states that:

All tourists, with or without disabilities, should have a choice of selecting accommodation, destinations, and attractions they want to visit because of the location, atmosphere, and price, and not only because it is the only accessible option adapted to their requirements, that is the key to accessible tourism.

Therefore, the entire touristic supply chain should be thought of as something that can be accessed easily by any tourist (booking system, accommodation, transportation, experiences).

On the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008), Universal Design is defined as “the design of products, environments, programs, and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” UD allows places to be accessible to all, no matter if they have a disability or not. It is not the person’s impairment that disables someone from undertaking tourism experiences but the social, political, and economic barriers that affect their full participation on an equal basis with others (Michopoulou *et al.*, 2015). Society and its maladaptation are what disables that person in that environment.

Based on the report made by the *Observatorio de accesibilidad universal del turismo en España* (2017), the visitor profile of PwD can be described as follows:

- They usually choose destinations closer to home (60% travel inside Spain).
- They travel during the off-season to avoid crowds.
- At least one other person accompanies them.
- The total overnight stay may be extended.
- They spend more money on the destination (28% more than people without disabilities).
- They mainly book the trip online (69%) and through a travel agency (19%).

They tend to become brand or destination ambassadors if they have a good experience and the place is adequately adapted to their needs. If a consumer usually tells five people about their favorite product, people with disabilities could tell 50 (Hsu & Powers, 2002).

It is noted that according to the *Observatorio* (2017), the higher expenditure is linked to the fact that PwD need to pay a higher price for good service, especially in terms of accommodation and tourism experiences. It gives them the feeling that accessibility is a luxury, not a right. If we compare this situation to the definition of what UD is, it is clear that reality goes against the main principles that the theory stands for.

As seen in Figure 1, the primary type of tourism for PwD is, first, sun and beach, and second, cultural.

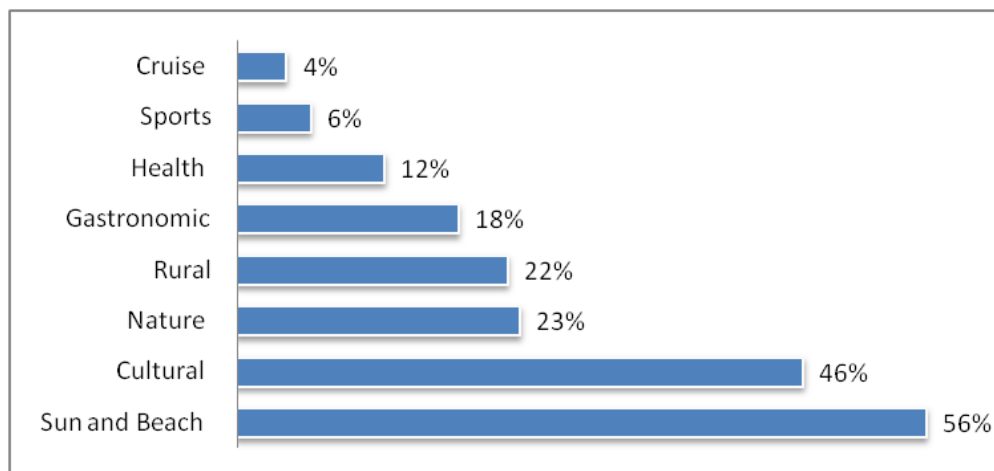


Figure 1. *Types of tourism for people with disabilities (Observatorio de accesibilidad universal del turismo en España, 2017)*

Focusing on the pre-travel phase, PwD needs clear and concise information about the destination and attraction features. It must be as detailed as possible to avoid problems during the on-site phase, which could lead to an unpleasant experience. Since the perception of accessibility affects travel motivation, approximately 50% more people would travel more frequently if they had verified and available information at their disposal (Cole *et al.*, 2019).

Following the recovery of the tourism sector after COVID-19, there is a trend that it is slowly starting to gain ground based on considering accessible tourism as a niche market for sustainable tourism. It can be seen as an essential contributor to sustainability, evidenced by the reduction of seasonality and the inclusion of PwD in product development. To Nigg & Eichelberger (2021), “sustainable tourism refers to a development that seeks to protect both tourism communities and tourists while providing opportunities for the future.” It aims at finding a balance between the impacts of tourism development based on the three pillars of sustainability: economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity. For the UNTWO, accessible tourism must be a central topic in all sustainable policies.

Something that came up across almost all of the papers read by the author is the need for public and private stakeholders to work together in creating accessible tourism destinations, experiences, and services. In doing so, they will become promoters and ambassadors of accessible tourism. Nevertheless, nowadays, there is an evident lack of partnership among them. Mainly because they do not see the need to develop universal accessibility, and they

do not want to invest “in something that their core customer does not require, and they are not going to be able to charge a premium for it” (Bowtell, 2015).

It all comes down to a lack of awareness and the dimensions of the demand for accessibility. This current problem is detailed in the report made by ONCE (2017), showing that 7 out of 10 companies believe the demand for accessible tourism is unimportant for their business. It also refers to the fact that they tend to have a narrow conception of who PwD is since they associate it only with people with visible disabilities., which evidences the lack of consciousness and knowledge related to the topic. Another important discovery is that 59% of these companies perceive, as high or very high, the cost of improving the accessibility of their facilities, as seen in Figure 2.

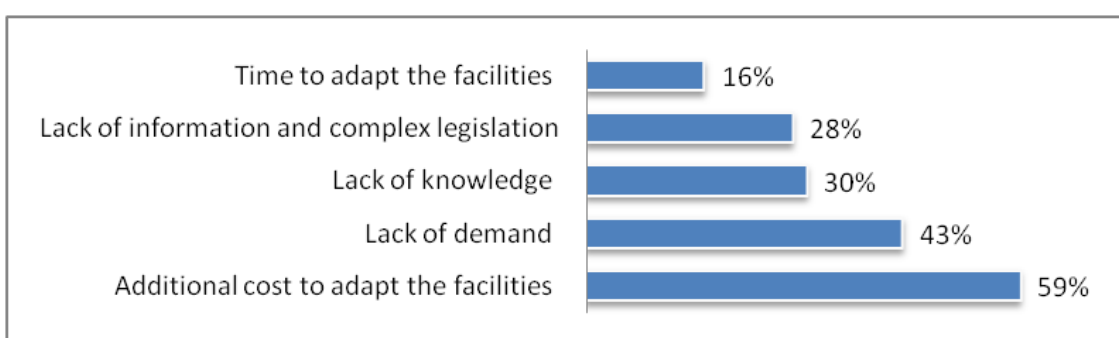


Figure 2. *Perceived difficulties in providing accessible services (Observatorio de accesibilidad universal del turismo en España, 2017)*

According to the UNWTO, if companies are willing to incorporate accessibility and UD from the start, "investment costs can be kept to a minimum, tourism companies become more sustainable, they can attract new audiences, and can employ people with functional diversity, generating business opportunities and greater product differentiation." The positive benefits could be divided into two main categories. The social aspect relies on the fact that accessible tourism can lead to social inclusion by reducing prejudice against them and allowing PwD more independence when traveling. The economic side focuses on the idea that it reduces seasonality, helps with the competitiveness of destinations and organizations, and increases the revenues for the tourism sector by attracting new visitors because it will give the company a more significant market share since it will focus on a segment that it is not being appropriately catered.

Developing accessible tourism offers will benefit the mentioned segment and positively impact society since it weighs a broader segment of consumers already considered by the industry. At some point in our lives, we will all appreciate and benefit from accessibility. The economic and social benefits of accessible tourism should be highlighted; accessibility

standards and legislation should be harmonized, and investment initiatives should be prepared for accessible facilities. In addition, government officials and politicians should encourage tourism businesses to invest in accessible tourism (Garda, 2022).

However, it is not just a matter of stakeholders participating in developing accessible products but of them working alongside people who will be the offer's final users. In the entire development process, there needs to be an interdisciplinary group of people collaborating (Nigg & Eichelberger, 2021). What better way to develop destinations, to create new products and services alongside PwD that will be one of the main targets? They are the ones that can give proper inside analysis, test, and feedback on the environments, facilities, services, and communication.

2.2 Coopetition

By many authors, such as Eriksson (2008) and Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino (2017), coopetition is defined as the result of inter-organizational cooperation and competition that takes place between networks, stakeholders, and organizations to join actions to achieve a common goal. It means that processes traditionally considered incompatible will happen simultaneously by competing for the benefits and cooperating for higher value creation. In this ecosystem, the different actors exchange and integrate resources (Sigala, 2019). It is essential to highlight that this coopetition can happen across industries and should not be limited to a specific market. For example, the tourism product is considered extremely multidimensional hence the need to cross various sectors to create a higher value proposition.

Coopetition can lead to several enhancements at a destination level, such as reducing the tension between competitors, higher co-creation of value propositions, sharing insights and resources, and boosting innovation can improve the destination's competitiveness. Bengtsson *et al.* (2016) believe that coopetition can be triggered when there is a "common external threat" since it will allow stakeholders to work collaboratively to exploit a market opportunity or solve a competitive threat.

For this collaboration to happen appropriately and avoid any problems or tensions, there must be a governance system with an external actor (preferably a third party) in charge of managing the network and developing new proposals. In the wine industry, it can appear in the form of a wine route, a private initiative that brings together, under specific criteria, wineries to boost the region's image and increase visitation, among others.

Companies must understand that joining forces could make tapping into a desired market effortless and effective. If appropriately managed, coopetition can give everyone a piece of the pie.

2.3 Social Media & Influencers

Social Media has become essential for promoting a destination and its interaction with the core customer (Sánchez Jiménez *et al.*, 2020; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Therefore, it comes in handy, especially when a destination or company wants to improve its competitiveness in the sector.

For Freberg *et al.* (2011), Social Media Influencers are independent third parties that model the audience's attitudes through different platforms. For SMI, the trust consumers deposit in their content and information is crucial in shaping their intention to buy tourist products (Pop *et al.*, 2022). The study by Magno & Cassia (2018) showed the close links between the impact of SMI on travel intentions increasing the likelihood of visiting a specific destination. This result was also supported by the one conducted by Lou & Yuan (2019), which suggests that the willingness to purchase can be affected by the followers' trust in influencer-branded posts.

When analyzing the customer journey, one can notice SMI's impact on the entire process, from pre-purchase to post-purchase. They are present in many touchpoints that the customer encounters when interacting with the brand (Lemon & Varhoef, 2016).

During the pre-purchase phase, for Beeton (2010), travel photos uploaded by travelers that visited a destination could play a more important role when deciding where to travel than a hotel's advertising campaign. Being exposed to content (images, videos, and comments) about a destination through SM can positively influence the customer's experience and knowledge about what they will visit in the future, alongside a more complete and comprehensive perception of the image, quality, and value of the product/service. (Garcia *et al.*, 2022). In the purchase phase, Fotis *et al.* (2012) states SM's more decisive influence on choosing a destination and how likely travelers are to change their plans. For the post-purchase and final stage, satisfaction or dissatisfaction will come from the comparison that tourists will make of the experience with their expectations based on the SMI recommendations and the credibility and quality of the information shared. In conclusion, "consumer trust in SMI directly and positively affects the main stages of the customer journey" (Pop *et al.*, 2022).

There is a spillover effect of the SMI across the entire journey, in which each step can facilitate the move on to the next one. Their actions can be seen spread throughout the entire decision-making journey, especially during the pre-purchase phase, and how the trustworthiness of the SMI is critical to the journey. Influencer marketing has become a tool for online businesses, allowing companies to interact with their clients more credibly and directly (Backaler, 2018; Hays *et al.*, 2013). It is a way for businesses to get their products or services across by having an intermediary that will shape the message with their personality and communicate them to the target audience.

3. Methodology

Once travel restrictions were lifted and Bodegas Valdemar's accessible visits did not return to their usual figures, the need to understand the situation arose. Consequently, the thesis aims to know the segment's current needs and create recommendations to combat low visitation numbers. Based on the first conversations held with the wine tourism department of the winery, where it was discussed the chosen topic and its implication, it was possible to draft a first hypothesis:

H1: *"Lack of visitation due to COVID-19 and its impact on PwD and their travel patterns."*

Following an in-depth analysis of the results from the methods used, a different conclusion is drawn, and a second hypothesis is established:

H2: *"Lack of visitation due to a missing marketing and communication strategy specifically targeting PwD."*

To strategically develop proposals addressing the current matter, a series of research methods are used, such as an analysis of the competitors, a SWOT, a customer journey map, semi-structured interviews, field observation, and visitor-hat research.

As part of the analysis of the competitors, the author realized that no regional, national, or international regulation currently obliges companies to follow specific steps to be legally called accessible. Instead, there are numerous protocols from different organizations (private and public), but they vary from one to the other. As a result, companies make up their own rules and consider themselves accessible. The analysis of the competition started by focusing on the list of accessible wineries offered by <https://www.lariojasinbarreras.org> and www.alavaturismo.eus, but the main problem encountered is that the assessment that the organizations do is only focused on physical disabilities, leaving behind a big group of people

with other types of impairments, which means that the evaluation could not be complete and, hence, correct.

For his reason, the author determined a list of fourteen items that simplify the analysis of competitors (see [Annex 2](#)). The chart has five main categories, general, physical, cognitive, hearing, and visual. Each business is assigned a percentage based on how they meet the requirements. To avoid doing a biased examination, the wineries taken into consideration are the seventeen ones that appear on the website of Equalitas Vitae, the consulting company with whom Valdemar implemented the accessibility program back in 2018. The items for the examination are taken from those listed by the company when assessing Valdemar's accessibility (see [Annex 3](#)). The geographical area of analysis is limited to the autonomous community of Navarra, La Rioja, and Basque Country.

Once the first step of the competition analysis is done, only three wineries that have achieved a percentage of over 60% move on to the second part. Further analysis is done through their websites and social media to see whether they communicate it and how. This last step is of the utmost importance since it is considered one of Valdemar's weak points and could be used as future guidance to improve their social media and website presence.

A consumer journey map was developed to understand the main touchpoints between the tourist and Bodegas Valdemar to better identify the problems along the journey, which helped develop the proposals (see [Annex 4](#)).

Five interviews were conducted with people of different profiles to have a more holistic approach to the subject (see [Annex 5](#) and [Annex 6](#)). Four were via video call with semi-structured questions, and all the interviewees allowed the session recording. The fifth one was via e-mail since arranging a video call was not possible.

4. About Valdemar

4.1 D.O.Ca Rioja

The Rioja wine region was the first Spanish Denomination of Origin established in 1925. In 1991 it upgraded its status, and it was the first D.O to become a Qualified one (*D.O.Ca*). It is located in the north of the country, on both sides of the Ebro River, and it is divided into three large zones: Rioja Alta, Rioja Alavesa, and Rioja Oriental, with over 66.000ha of vineyards. Today, alongside Priorat, it is one of Spain's only two Qualified Denominations. This *D.O.Ca* is positioned at the top of the sales ranking year after year. In the 2016/2017 campaign, 1 out

of 4 bottles sold in Spain, and 1 out of 5 bottles exported, were from the *D.O.Ca Rioja* (Rioja Wine Academy).

Bodegas Valdemar, which produces around two million bottles yearly, can be considered a medium size company for this wine region. Throughout history, several milestones have helped their positioning in the region. Firstly, by working to recover grape varieties that were almost extinct after phylloxera, such as Graciano and Maturana, and also producing single variety wines, which are uncommon to find in Rioja. Secondly, two of their most iconic wines are under the singular vineyard label, a new category established by the *D.O.Ca* in 2017 that "designates wines from particular vineyards or states and it is directly linked to the terroir and tied to the quality requirement that they are excellent wines" (Rioja Wine). Both are 100% Viura, a still wine fermented and aged in oak, and their only sparkling wine was and still is the first one in the *D.O.Ca* to be granted the singular vineyard label.

Bodegas Valdemar has four main pillars on which they base their mission and values. Firstly, sustainability by enhancing the vineyard's diversity of the local ecosystems. Then, globalization is established on their new project in the USA. Thirdly, viticulture by recovering almost extinct native grape varieties. Finally, accessibility with the purpose of opening both their wineries to all.

4.2 Accessible Wine Tourism

In 2017, following a request from a group with a cognitive disability, the Wine Tourism department decided to adapt the winery's facilities to make it accessible to all, always. Valdemar's primary goal is to position themselves as a winery opened to the entire world by creating a sensory experience based on the senses that unite us all: smell, touch, and taste. It means that the offer is the same for everyone, not an adapted visit but an inclusive one. Thus, regardless of their needs, everybody enjoys the same experience on the same tour.

The adaptation of the winery and creation of these experiences for all was made alongside the consulting company 'Equalitas Vitae,' a business based in La Rioja that provides assessments for companies and destinations looking into becoming accessible. This firm also played a vital role in staff training by giving courses to service the segment properly.

In 2018, all the efforts paid off since they became the first European winery to offer a 100% accessible and adapted wine tourism visit (Great Wine Capitals). This project was implemented in both companies, in Spain and the United States, and both are adapted to people with all types of disabilities (cognitive, hearing, visual, physical, and organic). The

reception by the public and media was outstanding. From the moment the project was put into practice, they appeared in more than 100 newspapers and magazines and received several awards, such as the 'Innovative Wine Tourism Experiences' by Great Wine Capitals, in 2019. This international recognition reassured Valdemar as a winery of excellence in accessible tourism.

4.2.1 Offerings

Nowadays, Valdemar offers two tours, and all can experience them, whether they have a disability or not. The 'Visit & Paired Tasting' is held in the winery, and the 'Visit to the Vineyards' is mainly developed in a nearby one owned by the family. They are not working with any online booking platform since they believe the commission scale is relatively high. Bookings can only be made through travel agencies, their website, or via email/phone, and walk-ins are welcome.

All activities include a wine glass holder so people can walk around the winery hands-free. When needed, the visits can have braille and easy-to-read booklets, wine bottles with braille labels, QR codes with videos and subtitles, the visitor can hire a sign-language interpreter, and a wheelchair is available if required.

The first offer is a 90-minute visit to the cellar and a three-wine tasting paired with local products. In this experience, the visitor will learn about the basic winemaking process and the milestones that make this family a pioneer. The price per person is 20€, and booking in advance is recommended. The visit is available from March to November and is offered from Tuesday to Saturday at 11.00 for families with children and at 12.30 for adults.

The second is a two-hour experience directly in the vineyards where the tourist will learn about the region's main features and what makes that Valdemar plot so unique. After a walk along the vineyards, they will do a two-wine tasting with tapas. The visit will finish in the winery with another two-wine tasting paired with local products. The price per person is 35€, booking in advance is required and the activity is available only for groups of at least eight people.

In 2020 they conjunctly developed a full-day itinerary with Villa Lucia. This company, based in Laguardia, has a museum, a restaurant, and several event venues that are all 100% accessible. This package includes a visit and wine tasting at Valdemar, a visit to the Museum of Villa Lucia, lunch at their restaurant, and a guided tour of Laguardia. In addition, an optional panoramic tour of the Rioja Alavesa region is offered, where tourists can visit a

Dolmen, the most famous vineyards of the area, and stop at some of the most breathtaking panoramic views. Considering that the package was designed right before COVID-19 hit, this year will be the first one where it will be fully offered to tourists, meaning the results of this proposal cannot yet be evidenced.

4.3 Segmentation

As seen in the literature review, a general profile of the accessible segment was established. Later, it is narrowed down to the people visiting Valdemar to create a more specific one focusing on wine tourism visitors. A target persona was also created to complement the analysis (see [Annex 1](#)).

The tourists that benefit from accessible tourism are mainly Spanish men and women between 30 to 60 years old. Primarily they receive groups as part of day trips organized by different associations; to a lesser extent, they also get groups from travel agencies; individual bookings are almost zero. They usually come from the northern part of the country and nearby areas, especially Basque Country, Navarra, La Rioja, Catalunya, and Madrid. A big group inside this segment is senior citizens and families with small children that mainly benefit from the absence of physical barriers when carrying a stroller. However, they are not considered in that 20% of total visits of PwD.

According to the field observation during the accessible visits, this segment is considered to have medium to low wine knowledge. According to Charters and Knight (2001), wine visitors can be categorized into four groups: Lovers, Connoisseurs, Interested, and Novices. Valdemar's tourists can be placed in the two last categories. In the case of the Wine Interested, they may have attended a wine tasting before and are eager to learn how to taste, but they do not have any prior wine education, and buying wine is an important part of their visit. The Wine Novices, just like the Interested, may also have attended a wine tasting before but do not have any previous education; their interest in learning how to taste is not relevant, and they do not consider it to be an essential skill to acquire and may be keener to visit the vineyard and walk along scenic places.

4.4 Analysis of Valdemar's Website & Social Media Presence

When analyzing Valdemar's Website and Social Media presence, a common problem evidenced is the need for more information and a targeted social media strategy.

Their website, under their pioneer values, mentions the accessibility project briefly. However, it does not focus on what is important; what does that accessibility mean regarding facilities,

resources, and services? Understandably, the company wants to express its central values and mission in this project, but it should continue beyond there. For PwD, knowing if they can adequately access the winery or if they will have videos with subtitles rather than reading a more poetic approach to the winery's commitment is more important. On the booking platform, the visits only mention that they are 100% inclusive and accessible. Once again, crucial information is missing.

The analysis of their SM was done on Instagram since they use this platform as the main content creation platform, and it is later re-posted on Facebook and Twitter. Scrolling through their Instagram showed that the latest post mentioning accessibility dates back to the 3rd of December 2021. Almost one year and a half have passed since, with so many changes in between, and Valdemar has yet to show and re-confirm their commitment to accessibility.

4.5 Analysis of Competitors

As mentioned in the methodology section, a chart with a list of items considered when analyzing the competition was created (see [Annex 2](#)).

Wineries that have yet to reach the minimum of 60% show the following results. Those with an accessibility percentage of up to 30 are adapted only to people with physical disabilities. Once the number increases, they tend to have other features, mainly sensory activities, videos, and written information. These findings reassure what is stated in the literature review that many companies only focus on physical disabilities and disregard other types.

Only three of the seventeen analyzed wineries have over 60% approval (see [Annex 3](#)). None offer optional sign language interpreters, no mention that they have trained staff, and braille pamphlets are available only in one. The lack of presence of these features, which indeed exist in Valdemar's offer, shows the winery's commitment to this matter. This significant USP needs to be used in their communication and marketing strategy since it can be considered that, in the region, Bodegas Valdemar is the only winery that truly offers 100% accessible visits.

The second step of the analysis focuses on their websites and social media, and the findings prove that it is not just Valdemar who needs to give more accurate information. For example, there is only one winery that, at the bottom of their website on the 'wine tourism tag,' mentions that they are 100% accessible and certified by Equalitas Vitae, providing a link to the website of the consulting company where the user can have access to the complete information about their features. Additionally, wineries have no posts or a slight mention on

their social media that they offer accessible tourism experiences. It shows a lack of interest on behalf of the companies to become ambassadors or spokespersons, which has been proven to have a very positive effect on society and potential customers.

4.6 SWOT

The internal and external forces were examined to understand better the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that occur inside and outside the company. This situational assessment will provide a more straightforward path when developing the proposals.

Table 1. SWOT

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• First winery in Europe to offer 100% accessible tourism experiences • 5 minutes from Logroño • Well-trained staff • Full-day tour with Villa Lucia • PwD represents 20% of the total number of visitors • 2019 Best of Wine Tourism Award • Few competitors • Accessible facilities in both wineries • Several event spaces	• Lack of presence on social media • Missing information on the website about their accessible features • The segment has not reached its original visitation numbers after COVID-19 • No mention of it during the tours for people without disabilities • No concise data collection • Located in an industrial area with no scenic landscape
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• Work with different stakeholders • D.O.Ca known worldwide	• Lack of initiatives from the public and private sector • No positioning on the accessible wine tourism market • No promotion of accessible tourism offers from the 'Rioja Alavesa Wine Route'

4.7 Customer Journey Map

Before developing the proposals, a customer journey map was developed (see [Annex 4](#)). From the consumer's perspective, this map is defined by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) as the interactions, also known as touchpoints, that take place between the consumer and the brand, product, or service from pre-purchase to post-purchase. In crafting it, the company will better understand the potential and engaged customers, allowing the creation of a targeted marketing and communication strategy. After analyzing the entire journey, some problems were found, and that information is used when developing the proposals.

In the Awareness stage, two main issues arise. Firstly, there is no presence on SM regarding accessibility, meaning on their Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter, they do not mention that they offer inclusive experiences, consequently an absence of compelling storytelling. Secondly, during tours of people without disabilities, which could be considered the perfect moment to spread the WOM, the speech used for the visit does not contemplate discussing accessibility. The same question can be asked in both situations: How will people know that Valdemar is accessible if it is not adequately communicated?

During Consideration, the main problem is the need for complete and quality information. It has already been shown that there is no updated information on their SM. Still, when the customer surfs Valdemar's website, the information about the visit's accessible facilities and features is highly vague and unclear.

In the Purchase phase, if the tourist can get past the main difficulties faced in the first two stages, the booking process is quite simple, and there is a 'notes' box where they can detail any requirements and add extra information.

When the Experience takes place, it is at this point that Valdemar excels without any problem. Trained staff, adapted facilities, and know-how ensure a smooth on-site tour. The problem that can be evidenced is the absence of engaging storytelling and no mention of the accessible project during the visits. It can affect the WOM for potential customers and the conversion of tourists into loyal ambassadors and advocates of the brand.

During the Loyalty and Advocacy stage, there are no evident problems, and they can be considered to function correctly. Posts from visitors get uploaded to the winery's social media, comments (both negative and positive) get replied to, and on-site feedback is asked during the final tasting.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that the weaker points are located in the pre-purchase stage and on-site experience. It may interfere negatively in moving from consideration to purchase, so it could be inferred that many potential bookings get lost on the way. The same could happen when converting visitors into potential brand ambassadors during the on-site experience.

5. Findings from the interviews

As stated in the methodology, five interviews were conducted with people from different backgrounds, nationalities, jobs, and with or without disabilities (see [Annex 5](#) and [Annex 6](#)).

Semi-structured interviews allowed the author to adapt the questions to the interviewee's profile, resulting in a richer and more engaging conversation. Although they come from very diverse areas within the world of accessibility, their thoughts and conclusions appear pretty similar. Therefore, the findings were divided into four main topics to allow for a better understanding of the discussed matter.

Table 2. *Interview Findings*

TOPIC	SUMMARY
Available information	Lack of trustworthy information.
Companies, accessible projects, and cooperation	Target groups need to be involved in the project. Companies are not interested in developing accessible offers.
Traveling after COVID-19	The segment seems to be traveling OK.
Current challenges and future perspectives	Work on awareness, proper information, and creative proposals.

5.1 Available Information.

Out of all of the obstacles that PwD have to face during their travels (before and during), the lack of trustworthy information is the one that represents the highest risk. It is usually not clear, accurate, or coherent. The gap between what is offered and what is given on-site is considerable. According to the research conducted by ONCE (2017), two main criteria are considered very important for PwD when traveling. Them being the customer service and the information available about the destination and resources.

The findings from *Observatorio* (2017) show that the information displayed by the accommodations, restaurants, and destinations about their facilities and resources do not match the reality on more than 50% of the occasions. In the tourism sector, accessibility is mainly linked to physical barriers and prevails over other types of disabilities. For Rodrigo, this is the main problem that the sector is facing nowadays. As a travel agent, finding reliable information that matches on-site services is the job's most challenging part. It is more than just a matter of finding the information by calling the hotel or the service provider; the lack of knowledge and awareness on the topic by those informing will later create the famous gap between what is offered and what is provided.

Luis believes that when one can travel and be as autonomous as possible, that creates a positive experience and increases the loyalty and advocacy of that person to the brand/destination.

In her influencer role, Stefania knows she is not here to inform their followers about accessible travel destinations but to encourage and show them that PwD also travels and enjoys recreational activities. For her, this segment may not yet feel entitled or have the desire to travel since they believe it is not for them, and she is eager for them to start speaking up and having their recreational rights recognized.

There is an evident lack of proper standardization policies regarding how companies detail their accessible facilities and resources. Unified protocols and user manuals must be created to close the gap between what is considered accessible and what it actually is. From one website to the other, the information is not consistent, and what may be seen as accessible by one company could be considered entirely different by another one. Many believe that by just placing the blue wheelchair sign on their social media/websites, PwD will get the whole picture of how companies provide their services.

5.2 Companies, Accessible Projects, and Cooperation.

In this matter, Luis has an evident and concise question: Have companies asked PwD to take part in the projects while they are being planned and later executed? He highlights that the final user must be involved in the entire process if companies want to do something meaningful and well-designed. It will allow for a more holistic approach and avoid having to redo significant parts of the plan once it is implemented. Nigg and Eichelberger (2021) believe that the target group needs to be involved so that the requirements of PwD are taken into account properly. This engagement can change the perspective that one may think is the right one, and in doing so, avoid making big mistakes.

There is also a clear absence of products and services that cover the entire supply chain; there are only isolated items. Luis puts it this way: I do not want to travel and only have one piece of the package; I want to enjoy the whole experience. Finally, he believes companies need more creative ideas during product development; to look outside the box and develop new and innovative proposals.

For the five interviewees, tourism companies are not interested in developing accessible projects first of all because of a lack of knowledge; they believe they will have to spend large amounts of money, make lots of changes, and also because it is a tourist profile that they are

not keen on targeting, something that circles back to the evident lack of awareness. Although Pilar is evidencing an increase in the interest for companies to become accessible, for her, this trend is not replicated in the tourism sector, which is taking a long time to awake.

In the same line of thought, they agree that although private stakeholders are short on initiatives, there is a need for the public sector to bring them together to showcase and advertise the destination as an accessible one. In addition, they should communicate what is happening in the region and what is there to offer for PwD. It means they need to be the first to know the target sector's needs and challenges and try to encourage companies to meet that demand.

A perfect example of this lack of collaboration can be seen in The Wine Route of Rioja Alavesa. They create a handbook detailing the region's offers regarding accommodation, gastronomy, wineries, museums, and other activities. This book, in each service provider, has a list of items for people to understand if they have free parking, if they accept large groups, if it is suitable for families, and so on. However, they left out the accessibility assessment. That such an important Wine Route, which has more than 140 partners, is not informing users if the business is accessible is a pity. Moreover, it also reconfirms the lack of cooperation and awareness among stakeholders.

5.3 Traveling After COVID-19.

For Stefania, the main problem that PwD encountered during COVID-19 was that, although they may not have had any health issues, just because they had some disability, they could not leave their house, travel, or go back to work. So their lockdown was more prolonged than other sectors of society. It increased their fear and uncertainty during the pandemic, which may explain why it took them longer to go back out there and start traveling again.

Now that travel restrictions have loosened, Pilar believes that the travel sector of PwD has recovered and can call the current situation 'normal.' However, she is cautious when making this affirmation since she highlights that no current statistics confirm this. Something that could be very useful in analyzing the target segment and its current needs and also comes to reconfirm the lack of literature review on the matter. Rodrigo, as the owner of an accessible travel agency, has seen the sector's recovery firsthand. He believes the segment fully travels and sees no significant fear from PwD for potential health issues.

Alejandro believes the accessible segment is slowly recovering, but why did it take longer than other audiences? Although he recognizes that PwD may still be afraid of potential health

problems, he focuses on the economic aspect. During the pandemic, many people lost their jobs or saw their working hours reduced, hence, their salary also. Consequently, the household's economic income dropped, which meant that leisure activities were cut down if not eliminated from their schedule.

5.4 Current Challenges and Future Perspectives.

According to Popovic *et al.* (2022), accessibility lies in three essential pillars that will add value to the tourist industry. Physical, informative, and service based. It means eliminating physical barriers, integrating the concept of universal design into the development of the offer, and educating the staff for it to be a key factor when implementing the strategies and plans.

They all agree on one thing; information needs to be clear and of quality for users to have a positive experience when planning a trip. Once again, putting the wheelchair sign on their website is not enough for PwD to know how adapted they are to their specific needs. Rodrigo emphasizes communication. For him, all of the sectors in the supply chain need to know and understand the segment's requirements for them to be aware of how and what to provide.

For Alejandro, awareness is the most crucial aspect that needs to be addressed today. First, society needs to understand the importance of accessibility and that it benefits us all. For him, this is the first step, and later they can focus on barrier-free architecture and product development. If nowadays people cannot understand the scope and importance of accessibility, there is no point in adapting facilities or offering accessible services. This educational aspect must occur throughout the entire supply chain so it can later be merged to provide a comprehensive tourist offer. PwD do not want to go to an accessible all-inclusive resort and look outside the window to see how others are having fun at the beach because they cannot access that area. Service providers should first focus on awareness and later work together to create an integrated, accessible product.

Luis is all about creative product development. Companies and destinations should offer new and different things and more outdoor activities in contact with nature. PwD want to choose where to travel to and is unwilling to settle for only a few places that offer accessible services.

6. Proposals

The goal of this thesis is to understand why are accessible tourism visits not going back to the average values before COVID-19. All of the work done throughout the thesis allowed the

understanding of Valdemar's problem in the accessible tourism segment. Their USP, being the only winery in the region that genuinely offers 100% accessible visits, is not being adequately communicated to visitors and potential customers.

The new hypothesis (*"Lack of visitation due to a missing marketing and communication strategy that targets specifically PwD"*) allowed for the development of five proposals aimed at addressing the current problem. In addition, the budget was considered, which influenced each recommendation's scope.

They can be divided into four main categories. Research, which focuses on accessibility and its target audience. Product, centering around the services provided by the winery. Communication regarding their strategy and SM presence. Finally, Governance highlights the concept of coopetition and stakeholder relationships.

Table 3. Proposals

TYPE	RECOMMENDATION	SUMMARY
Research	Data Collection	Compile information that genuinely reflects the size of the segment.
Product	Storytelling	Integrate the accessibility narrative into the visits and media
Product	Product development	Re-establish the original tour that focused on sensory experiences
Communication	Website & Social Media	Include quality information on the website and target specifically PwD
Governance	Collaboration w Stakeholders	Create joint proposals

6.1 Data Collection

Proposal: Compile information that genuinely reflects the size of the segment.

The literature review states that people with temporary disabilities, senior citizens, and families with small children should be considered among the beneficiaries of accessible tourism. Today, senior citizens make up 64,8% of the disabled population requiring accessibility (Buhalis *et al.*, 2005). If the worldwide tendency of population aging is considered, this number will increase in Europe a 30% by 2030 (Eurostat, 2022).

Valdemar's statistics show that 20% of the PwD visits are only limited to those with permanent visual, hearing, physical, cognitive, and organic, leaving many visitors behind. Regularly, Valdemar works with family tourism meaning grandparents with their grandchildren and many families with small children and strollers.

Not including the mentioned sector in the overall number of people benefitting from accessibility is a mistake and causes a biased situational analysis. For this reason, concise data collection needs to happen to develop a complete and accurate assessment. In doing so, the wine tourism department can fully understand the scope of the segment and to what extent it contributes to final numbers. It can boost the put into practice of the following proposals and increment the budget assigned to the accessible tourism segment.

Although many changes could be implemented to the spreadsheet currently registering the bookings, the wine tourism department is not keen on modifying the general structure of the document. Hence, minor adjustments can be made, such as creating a drop-down list to differentiate which segment participated in the visit. Two general categories can be used: PwD and PwoD (people without disabilities). It could be helpful to subdivide PwD into families, seniors, physical, visual, hearing, cognitive, and organic. As a result, an even more complete analysis of the tourist profile that visits Valdemar could be performed (see [Annex 7](#)).

6.2 Storytelling

Proposal: Integrate the accessibility narrative into the visits and media.

For Ong *et al.* (1986), stories are tools to guard memories and organize our ideas; they can be a way to keep track of the past, be immersed in the present, and look at the future. Consequently, developing proper storytelling can lead to a competitive advantage by gaining visibility and notoriety, benefitting from the WOM, and engaging the visitor in the activity by making them an active part of the experience. To Bassano *et al.* (2019), "such deeply felt stories can stimulate interest and motivate tourists (and even residents) to expand their experience in the place."

Compelling and engaging storytelling is missing, as evidenced by the analysis of their website, media presence, and speech delivered during the visits. It should be an opportunity to communicate it properly and work on creating trust, confidence, and a sense of belonging. The storytelling of the accessibility project already exists. It was created in 2018 when the

proposals were implemented and used throughout the following two years, especially in media coverage. It means that the three main stages of story building, according to Bassano *et al.* (2019), have already been created and need to be exposed during the visit and across all media channels. These steps refer to, first, an autobiographical analysis selecting what makes the winery unique. Second, the definition of a plot, coming up with a narrative structure that will be the common thread. Finally, the creation of a place story, tying the place to the people.

When tours of people without disabilities are taking place, the accessibility project and Valdemar's values need to be acknowledged. One never knows when someone taking part in the visit may have friends or family with some disability that could benefit from our services. During the visits, the intern took a few minutes to mention the project and why it is essential to focus on creating inclusive and adapted visits. The response from the tourists was highly positive, and many great experiences were shared. They had yet to learn Valdemar was focusing on such an important matter, which reaffirms the lack of information from the winery. It also shows how nurturing it is to involve the tourist in the winery's commitment to accessibility, which could lead to a positive on-site and post-purchase experience.

6.3 Product Development

Proposal: Re-establish the original tour focusing on sensory experiences.

Before the pandemic, Valdemar's visit revolved around the three senses that unite us: smell, touch, and taste. During the visit, tourists had different stops to participate in sensory activities such as touching corks, wood, tartaric acid; and smelling different aromas, all of which try to showcase the different aromas, textures, and elements present in the wine. However, during COVID-19 and until September 2022, these interactions had to be removed from the visit due to national health regulations.

Since the restrictions were loosened, sensory corners have yet to be re-established. Also, information in the braille, easy-to-read booklets, and QR codes must be updated. In addition, prices, information, and wines have changed and need to be renewed. Finally, the entire visit should be revised to re-establish the sensory activities since it appeals to all audiences and can be considered a point of differentiation from other wineries' classic and standard visits.

Working with different online booking platforms that focus or do not focus on accessible travel could be an excellent way to increase visits and visibility once the tours are back to

their complete itinerary. For example, the Chilean start-up <https://wheeltheworld.com> is a platform focusing on physical disabilities where different service providers can list their offerings (15% commission rate). However, this proposal was declined since, nowadays, the wine tourism department is not interested in working with intermediaries since they believe the commission scale is not beneficial.

6.4 Website & Social Media

At all times, the project's values and storytelling should be considered to create an integrated marketing communication strategy to deliver the same unified message across all channels.

Proposal 1: Include complete and quality information on the website.

If a topic came across in the literature review on accessibility and during the interviews, it is the lack of quality and complete information. On a global scale, the need to create a protocol of legal value to standardize and unify the steps to be taken regarding accessibility has already been mentioned. On their side, Valdemar needs to be more proactive in the information they provide to potential customers. As mentioned in the analysis of their website and SM presence, they make little mention of their accessible features and how well-adapted the winery is for PwD.

Understandably, Valdemar does not want to be perceived as profiting from PwD. However, they are doing a disservice to this visitor segment by not promoting their on-site infrastructure. PwD have particular trip planning requirements and rely on accessing this information. If businesses do a better job sharing this information online, it makes it easier for PwD to plan their trip and can also be a point of differentiation. Given the limited availability of accessible wine tourism experiences, Valdemar must disclose the information and celebrate it in order for it to make it easier for PwD to find wine tourism experiences that work for them.

As mentioned before, consumers use SM sites with different intensities at all stages of the decision-making process. So, the more information the winery provides, the more complete and accurate assessment of their offer can be made, simplifying the entire process. On their website, Valdemar should list all their accessible features and try to be as explicit and concise as possible (see [Annex 3](#)). Not just under their section on 'Accessibility' but also on each visit in particular since they are both held in very different surroundings. It will enhance the user experience while booking the tour, the visitor will avoid having to call to double check if the winery meets their requirements, and finally and most importantly, it could close

the sale. Supporting this information with pictures or videos showing how people experience the tour could also be an excellent approach to showing real-life situations of how the winery works.

If one focuses on the findings from the interviews, the fear that this segment may still be going through is mentioned even though travel restrictions have been lifted. Letting people know how and what they will encounter when visiting the winery will reduce uncertainty, close the gap between what is offered and later delivered, improve the entire experience, and, most importantly, provide PwD with the autonomy and freedom they constantly seek during decision-making. Reducing uncertainty and fear is something that Bodegas Valdemar can work on. Nevertheless, destinations and public entities must carry out campaigns to raise awareness to reduce these concerns and support private companies comprehensively.

Proposal 2: Work on a more active presence on social media platforms.

As seen during the analysis of Valdemar's SM presence, since the end of 2021, they do not mention accessible tourism. So it is no wonder the number of visits has not returned to its usual figures after COVID-19. If the winery is not reminding people on SM about their services and products, if they do not want to work alongside online booking platforms, and if they do not detail their accessible features on their website, how are people supposed to know that they offer accessible tourism? Nobody will do it for them if they do not spread the word.

It is recommended an intense usage of their SM platforms (Instagram and Facebook) to post once a week something accessible-related and then continue to do that once a month, to constantly remind customers and potential clients of Valdemar's way of working with tourism. Since they are not working with any communication company, the strategy needs to be created and handled from inside the company.

The main topics the SM strategy needs to focus on cover several aspects and be supported with photos, videos, and reels. In addition, paid advertising should be considered to create a more substantial campaign to reach more potential customers and improve their presence on these platforms.

1. *'Mission, vision, and values of the accessibility project'*. Why and how did Valdemar decide to adapt their entire facilities to become a winery open for all, and what were the primary motivators behind that decision.

2. *'How and where the visits take place'*. For their followers, having a reliable source that showcases how the tours are held is an essential tool that will satisfy the constant need for concise and quality information. In this case, collaboration with influencers could be one of the pillars to try to reach our target segment through content creators and their trustworthiness.
3. *'Accessible features'*. A specific post needs to be dedicated to all the accessible facilities in the winery; this is aligned with the second post, which aims to reduce the lack of proper information.
4. *'Sensory activities'*. It should focus on letting people know what makes Valdemar's visits different, showing all the interactive activities during the tours.
5. *'Accessible Events'*. As will be explained later in the last proposal, Valdemar holds many events that need to be targeted to PwD, so the communication of these celebrations should also include this segment.
6. *'Information of general interest, articles, among others'*. Many articles or important news could be interesting to share with their followers to keep interacting with them and make it more educational.

Proposal 3: Work with influencers.

Consumers pay attention to the company's image in society and how they treat different target groups. Therefore, being accessible and informing society about it enables better positioning and influences consumers through this aspect of socially responsible behavior. By doing this, the winery can diversify itself from the competition, which may allow greater loyalty of buyers because of the positive perception of the company, and, consequently, better sales of products and services (Jevic *et al.*, 2019). Besides informing society on their website and SM, as mentioned in the previous proposals, working with influencers could be an exciting approach to getting closer to potential clients in a more relaxed and informal way.

The main goal is to have content creators share their experience of doing a wine tour at Valdemar in their 100% adapted facilities. The campaigns could be divided into two different ones. On the one hand, they could go to the winery to participate in any of the tours held in very different surroundings. For example, the one in the vineyards could be more suitable for

people with hearing, cognitive or organic disabilities; while it is adapted for people with visual and physical impairments, it is believed that they would not enjoy the visit 100% since the terrain is rocky and uneven. On the other hand, they could be invited to one of the many events the winery hosts during spring and summer.

A list of influencers with disabilities living in the most important regions of the main target segment is created (see [Annex 8](#)). By trying to keep things on a budget, the first three options could be a good starting point. They are located near La Rioja, and travel expenses and other arrangements could be avoided compared to those living in Catalunya or Madrid, which may require to have accommodation and food covered in order to come to the winery.

6.5 Collaboration with Stakeholders

Proper communication must always be the central topic of any stakeholder conversation, providing complete information about the winery's facilities and resources. Since they are the ones who may act as intermediaries with the final client, Bodegas Valdemar must be as transparent as possible to avoid any problems during the on-site experience.

It must be noted that although Bodegas Valdemar can push stakeholder collaboration since it can be evidenced as a weak point in the region, at a destination level, and from the public sector, initiatives must be developed to encourage the private sector to become accessible. They are the ones that should join forces to incentivize and facilitate cooperation.

Proposal 1: Create joint proposals. Become an ambassador of the region.

Considering Valdemar's strong USP and the lack of competitors in the region, it could be a perfect moment to start working closer with associations of PwD, accessible travel agencies, and tourism hubs. By collaborating with stakeholders, they can reach a greater audience, and all the work and efforts could be divided among the different collaborators.

Regarding associations of PwD, a list, divided by region, was created to have a complete database of the existing ones. Later, emails were sent to offer our services, the itinerary with Villa Lucia, and showcase the winery's different event spaces (see [Annex 9](#)). Since the proposals were mailed, an association of twenty-five people with physical disabilities from Bilbao booked the Valdemar and Villa Lucia itinerary (see [Annex 10](#)).

Concerning travel agencies, Valdemar currently works mainly with two European ones focusing exclusively on the accessible segment. However, when visitor-hat research was

conducted to list different accessible travel agencies in Spain and Europe, many were found, reflecting the size of the demand for these services. Therefore, Valdemar could potentially reach more customers if collaboration with travel agencies were to be worked on and developed.

Once a list of the travel agencies was created, contact was made through LinkedIn to introduce the company briefly and express interest in keeping in touch for future collaborations. Then, a follow-up email was sent to coordinate a call for a one-on-one meeting to explain how the experiences are held and provide accurate information about the facilities and resources. After, another email with the conversation summary mentioning services, rates, commissions, and accessible features was sent.

Based on the fact that PwD become a regular client after finding a tourism facility that suits their needs (UK Report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010), Bodegas Valdemar needs to come up with different proposals for people to visit the winery in more than one occasion. It could mean creating packages or day trips to provide tourists with a broader range of activities that may vary from the winery's standard services offered every day.

Focusing on different tourism hubs, the itinerary created alongside Villa Lucia is a perfect example and needs to be replicated with other service providers. The winery came in contact with the Sagardoa Route, the Basque Cidery Route, which offers different regional itineraries depending on one's interest. Their one-day trips specialize in visiting cideries and trying the local gastronomy. However, their two or three-day packages also include many other exciting visits showcasing the region's gastronomic and cultural heritage. The main idea behind this potential collaboration is to assemble our offer with Villa Lucia with the itineraries offered by Sagardoa to create a three or four-day itinerary in the Basque region combining gastronomy, wine, cider, and heritage. It is yet to be seen if a collaboration between the winery and the route can occur, but conversations are on track to make it happen.

Proposal 2: Target PwD for Events.

For a few years now, Valdemar has been focusing on the MICE segment and other events, such as weddings, birthdays, and christenings. They have several rooms that can be used for many different purposes, and the results have been favorable. The accessible segment is not being targeted in the category, and it could be the perfect opportunity to start

collaborating closer with associations. Valdemar could offer their facilities and services to host events such as 'end of the year' celebrations, training, conferences, and special events.

At the same time, from easter up until the end of October, the winery holds different wine-related events on its terrace surrounded by vines. Therefore, it could be a good opportunity to invite PwD to participate in these celebrations by informing and giving them accurate information when releasing the tickets and doing the SM campaign.

They have a very well-developed structure to host these events, meaning that the winery does not need to create a business plan from zero; it is just a matter of using the existing structure and resources.

7. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this thesis aims to create proposals to increase the accessible visits, which have dropped after COVID-19 and have not yet recovered once traveling restrictions have been eased.

Two hypotheses were established, the first was quickly discarded, and the second remains the one to work on. Choosing one over the other is possible due to the methodologies implemented during the four months internship, such as an analysis of the competitors, a SWOT, a customer journey map, semi-structured interviews, research on Valdemar's website and SM presence, and field observation.

Five proposals are created to target the current problem. They focus on research, product, communication, and governance. They are also a result of the extensive literature review that allowed for a better understanding of the problems and future challenges that face PwD in the tourism sector.

Valdemar is doing a fantastic job at providing good accessible wine tourism experiences. They have a USP that differentiates them from the competition. However, they should understand that more is needed to increase visitation numbers. The project, which brought them outstanding media coverage in 2018 and 2019, must be reminded to the clients. They cannot expect tourists to remember that Bodegas Valdemar works with accessibility; the brand must have a strong and proper marketing and communication strategy to continue being around customers' minds.

Although challenging, collaboration with other regional stakeholders could be an interesting idea to increase the market share. Becoming ambassadors of accessibility is another step in reassuring Valdemar's presence and commitment to PwD. Considering there is not much coopetition among the few businesses considered accessible, the winery could take the lead and become a pioneer and trailblazer in working with stakeholders. However, coopetition can be complex if not supported by the destination and public initiatives since they are the ones that must encourage and push private companies to turn accessible.

As Botwell (2015) says: "People with disabilities are being served poorly by the tourism industry". They are not considered when new projects are being developed, and the facilities and staff training adaptation is usually very poor or non-existent. Creating a standardized protocol that gathers all the information and creates clear rules is essential for companies to follow just one path. It will make things easier for businesses, and the final user will mostly be the beneficiary of standardized information, making the entire experience easier and more enjoyable.

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Annex

1. Target Persona



Stefania Fernandez
Pamplona
Female
30 y/o
Psychologist
Travels w/ partner & friends

GOALS & MOTIVATIONS

I like to travel and experience new places while feeling comfortable in the environment and its facilities. I want to encourage other PwD to be independent, travel and enjoy life.

FRUSTRATIONS

Even after checking the destination's facilities, I never know what I will encounter on-site. I do not want to have to choose a place because of its accessibility but because I want to go there.

EXPECTATIONS

To have precise and proper information about the destination's facilities with trained and empathic personnel. I would love for PwD to speak up and demand accessible tourism.

HOBBIES

I enjoy creating content on SM to show what it is like to live with a physical disability. I am keen on playing sports, and I especially love competing in different parts of the world, which gives me a chance to travel and experience different cultures.

BIO

I seek to be as independent as possible without forgetting about my limitations. My many hobbies and activities show me how far I can go.

Figure 3. Target Persona

2. Competitor's Analysis

Table 4. Items for the Competitor's Analysis

1. General	2. Per disability			
	2.1 Physical	2.2 Cognitive	2.3 Visual	2.4 Hearing
1.1 Sensory activities	2.1.2 Access to the winery	2.2.1 Easy-to-read information	2.3.1 Written info	2.4.1 Explanatory videos with subtitles
1.2 Bathrooms	2.1.3 Wine shop	2.2.2 Images	2.3.1 Braille pamphlets	2.4.2 Optional sign language interpreter
1.3 Trained staff	2.1.4 Access to different rooms			
1.4 Signage				
1.5 Parking				

Table 5. Overall Score

WINERY	ITEMS out of 14	%
Ochoa	11	78%
Murrieta	4	28%
Otazu	4	28%
Ontañon	6	42%
Piedemonte	8	57%
Olarra	2	14%
Campo Viejo	6	42%
Marques de Riscal	9	64%
Real Rubio	5	35%
Maximo Abete	3	21%
Roda	4	28%
Ramon Bilbao	3	21%
Martinez Lacuesta	4	28%
CVNE	4	28%
Bilbainas	4	28%
Marques de Teran	5	35%
Azagra	10	71%

3. Accessible Features

General

- The staff carrying out the visits have been trained to guide people with disabilities.

Physical

Parking

- Parking area with two spaces. Both signposted horizontally and vertically.
- One is next to the wine shop, where the guided tour starts and ends. The other one is in the lower part of the winery.

Access

- Outside the cellar, a metal gate is usually closed. It automatically opens when the doorbell is pressed and can be operated from the driver's car seat.
- The guided tour begins at the wine shop, located at the top of the winery and next to which there is a parking space for PwD.
- Access through a ramp with a slope of less than 10%.
- Two folding doors with a space between them of 220 cm.

Wine Shop

- Table located 115 cm high.
- Several tables with chairs Optimal mobility with obstacle-free turning space larger than 150 cm.
- Many shelves with wines for sale. The vast majority are within reach (40-140 cm).

Mobility during the visit

- Rooms free of architectural barriers, with large turning areas and passage areas. The visit takes place in different buildings located on two heights.
- Access to both is done through a ramp.
- Wine glass holders are offered so during the visit the customers are hands-free during the visit.

Sala Cantabria

- Projection of a video with subtitles and a sign language interpreter.
- Door with passage space greater than 100 cm.
- Non-slip floor.
- 2m space between barrels.
- Information panel with the transcription of the information provided by the tour guide.

Cellar & Warehouse

- Located in the lower part of the winery and accessible through ramps.
- Room with optimal mobility and obstacle-free turning zones greater than 150 cm.
- Non-slip floor.
- A giant map that shows export countries of Valdemar.
- One can touch the crystallized tartaric.

Bottle Aging Room

- Accessed from the warehouse through a door with a passage width over 100 cm.
- There are several benches placed at a height of 55 cm without backrests.
- There is a wine-tasting area with 107 cm high tables.
- Room with optimal mobility and obstacle-free turning zones greater than 150 cm.

State Wines Room

- Light is dim or practically non-existent to play with the name "Valdemar Family" projected on the floor and wall.
- Work with the sense of smell through a game of primary aromas that will later be found in the wine.
- Accessed through a door with a passage width greater than 100 cm.
- Room with optimal mobility and obstacle-free turning zones greater than 150 cm.

Shop/Reception

- The visit ends at the starting point, and the wine tasting occurs.

Toilets

- Located in the wine shop.
- Signposted with SIA symbol with chromatic contrast (white/red)
- Folding door with 88 cm of passage.
- Bolt with an external opening system in case of emergency.
- Standard toilet at 40 cm height.
- Support bars in the toilet: folding on both sides.
- Lateral transfer space to the toilet over 80 cm on both sides.
- Obstacle-free turning space less than 150 cm.
- Single lever tap.
- Mirror 90 cm high.

- Switches and other mechanisms between 40 and 120 cm.

Visual

- The brochure is available in braille.
- The bottles have Braille labels and QR codes.
- The set of aromas used during the visit is explained in braille.

Hearing

- Throughout the visit, QR leads to sign language videos with subtitles. These videos offer the same information the guide offers during the oral visit.
- A video is shown at the visit's beginning, subtitled, and available in sign language.
- Hiring a sign language interpreter is possible for groups that book in advance.
- Easy-to-read brochures.
- Signs in toilets have chromatic contrast and high relief.

Cognitive

- Easy-to-read booklet from the winery is available
- During the tasting, there is an image of the appetizer to be tasted along with the wine.
- The toilets are identified with pictograms.

4. Customer Journey Map

Table 6. Customer Journey Map

PHASE	Awareness	Consideration	Purchase	Experience	Loyalty	Advocacy
Touchpoint	• WOM • SM • Ads	• WOM • SM • Website • Travel websites	• Email • Website • SM • Instagram • Phone • Travel Agencies • Associations	• On-site	• On-site feedback • SM	• WOM • SM • Travel Websites
Goal		Find the visit that adapts to their needs. Complete and quality info.	Effortlessly. Excellent and fast customer service.	Enjoy without any worries.	Repeat the excellent experience.	Share the experiences. Give feedback

5. Questionnaire of the Semi-structured Interview

- How do you think Spain is positioned against other European countries regarding accessible tourism?
- Are leisure and tourism included in the State's public policies on PwD? Do you think that it could be improved?
- Is there a collaboration between private stakeholders? And between private and public ones?
- What was the general situation of persons with disabilities during COVID? How is it now?
- Regarding tourism, has the segment not returned to its regular visitation numbers? Why? Or do you consider that the segment is already traveling?
- Why do you think companies do not want or are interested in adapting their facilities and offers?
- What are the mistakes they usually make when developing accessible proposals?

- What do you think is the necessary training of human resources as providers of services to people with disabilities?
- Have you visited wineries? What has been your experience?
- There is always a long way to go and many things to do, but what should be the next step?

6. *Profile of the Interviewees*

Luis Casado is the founder and president of Fundacion Iddeas, based in Pamplona. This non-profit consulting company assesses and trains businesses in marketing, customer service, communication, and design. Their mission is to help companies achieve social inclusion in the work environment by focusing on diversity and accessibility. Luis, who has a visual disability, has a degree in Journalism and Public Relations from the University of Navarra and specializes in communication, marketing, and management.

Stefania Ferrando is an Argentinean high-performance athlete, a paralympic Boccia medalist, psychologist, and content creator. On her Instagram account (@stefaniaferrando), she shows what it is like to live with Spinal Muscular Atrophy. One can be part of her day-to-day life when she talks about accessible tourism, accessible fashion, and sports, among others.

Alejandro Lopez is a multi-tasking Argentinian currently working on several projects and companies. He founded 'Red de Turismo Accesible' and works in the public sector as a consultant, trainer, and project developer. In addition, he is the coordinator of the first Accessible Tourism Postgraduate at the University of Avellaneda.

Rodrigo Moreno Becerra is the CEO of Travel Xperience, a travel agency based in Andorra specializing in accessible tourism. They offer various packages and tailor-made itineraries to many parts of the world. Their success relies on the quality of information they provide their clients for an enjoyable, smooth, and fantastic trip.

Pilar Soret Lafraya is the Tourism Commercial Officer for Ilunion Accesibilidad. Ilunion has six different units, one of them being Accesibilidad, and the company is part of Once Social Group, a service provider for people with visual disabilities. Pilar's unit focuses on providing consulting services to favor the inclusion of companies in tourism, banks, health, and social services.

7. Data Collection

Tour	Visit + Paired Tasting	
Profile	Physical	
Name	Javier Cuevas	
Adults	15	
Kids	0	
Time	11.00	
Phone	677654325	
Email	javier@gmail.com	
Observations	Paid	

PwD
Physical
Hearing
Visual
Cognitive
Organic
Families
Seniors

Fure 3. Booking Spreadsheet

8. Social Media Planning

Table 7. Influencers

Name	Account	Followers	Profile	Disability	Region
Inazio Nieva	@inazionieva	72.000	Spokesperson	Cognitive	Basque C
Sonsoles Conde	@sonsoles.conde	17.700	Spokesperson	Physical	Castilla y León
Lola Gonzalez	@desdemisilla	6.368	Spokesperson	Physical - Cognitive	Cantabria
Marta Bustos	@stuntmanmarta	190.000	Spokesperson	Visual	Catalunya
Miriam Fernandez	@miriamfernandez90	50.900	Singer	Physical	Madrid
Fernando Vega	@fernando_vega_de_seoane	36.500	Businessman	Physical	Madrid
Alan	@alanelruedas	36.000	Spokesperson	Physical	Madrid

9. Accessible Services Offered to Stakeholders

#MomentosValdemar

Espacios accesibles

Celebra una reunión comercial, una actividad de incentivo MICE o un evento en un entorno enológico. Áreas únicas y exclusivas que aportarán valor añadido. ¡Elige el venue Valdemar que más te guste!

DESCUBRE NUESTROS ESPACIOS 100% INCLUSIVOS

 A 5 min. de Logroño

 Trato directo y personalizado

 Distintas salas para cada necesidad

 Experiencias accesibles: catas y visitas a bodega

 100% adaptados

BOTELLERO GRAN RESERVA

Más de 1.000 m2 rodeados de un espectacular botellero. Capacidad máxima **500 personas**.

ENTREVIÑEDOS Y TERRAZA

Espacio con múltiples posibilidades y acceso a viñedo para disfrutar de un ambiente exclusivo. **100 personas**

PIONEROS

Sala equipada para conferencias, presentación de producto o cóctel. Capacidad máxima **200 personas**

PERFECTOS PARA

- Actividades de incentivo
- Team Building
- Conferencias y expos
- Celebraciones y cócteles
- Comidas y cenas
- Reuniones

Con la Certificación Oficial de Accesibilidad

www.momentosvaldemar.com

CONTACTA CON NOSOTROS

663334535

enoturismo@valdemar.es

Figure 4. Accessible Event Venues

#MomentosValdemar

Visitas accesibles

ADAPTADAS PARA TODOS

- Auditiva
- Cognitiva
- Visual
- Física
- Orgánica

SIEMPRE PIONEROS

Conoce nuestro carácter emprendedor desde hace 5 generaciones. Visita la bodega y experimenta una cata maridada de 3 vinos con 3 tapas.

 **MARTES A SÁBADO**

 **90 MINUTOS**

 **20€**

LOS SENTIDOS QUE NOS UNEN

Una experiencia puramente sensorial. Visita la bodega y disfruta de una cata de 3 vinos maridados con Kankel Cacao.

 **MARTES A SÁBADO**

 **60 MINUTOS**

 **20€**

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enoturismo@valdemar.es

Figure 5. Accessible Visits

38

#MomentosValdemar

Vendimias accesibles

Comenzaremos por la **recogida de la uva** y su selección para que estén en las mejores condiciones para elaborar el vino.

Realizaremos el **pisado de la uva** para sentir a través del tacto cómo se prensa para sacar el primer mosto que podremos catar.

Visitaremos los rincones más especiales de la bodega, para finalizar en el comedor donde disfrutaremos de una cata **maridada de 3 vinos con 3 aperitivos**.

A través de los sentidos del olfato, del tacto y del gusto recorreremos todo el proceso de elaboración del vino.

SÁBADOS - 11AM

3 HORAS

25€

ADAPTADO PARA TODOS

- Auditiva
- Cognitiva
- Visual
- Física
- Orgánica

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Figure 6. Accessible Harvest

10. Accessible Visits

Figure 7. Wine Tasting

39



Figure 8. *Tour of the Winery*