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Main Article Draft 3

Topic: Accessibility in Valencia

Word Count: 1028

Summary of Changes:

I rewrote my intro to take out any first-person voice. Additionally, I included interview quotes from both Messana and Harvylyshyn. Messana talked about the city’s accessibility requirements concerning public transport, as well as a personal anecdote about a blind student who studied abroad with his guide dog in 2003. I included quotes from his story about this student who, on a tour in Madrid, was authorized to touch different building materials so he could experience things more fully. Harvylyshyn gave excellent information on her daughter’s experience at school in Valencia, where they added an elevator in order for her to be able to access it. I included a great quote about how Harvylyshyn searched for many cities before settling on Valencia, which she decided was the best place for her daughter to grow up in. Lastly, I added a conclusion paragraph encouraging prospective students to contact FSU IP if they have any questions, and I fixed the grammar issues Susan highlighted on my second draft.

Accessibility in an ancient city

It’s hard to imagine that a city over 2000 years old is a pioneer of urban design, but then again, Valencia, Spain commonly exceeds expectations.

Since its foundation in 138 BC, the city of Valencia has become a braiding of Roman, Muslim and Christian cultures. While the city holds fast to its rich history, Valencians have made strides in modernizing its ancient structures.

For instance, the La Almonia museum, which was built at the crossroads of two main Roman roads, the cardus maximus (north-south) and the decumanus maximus (east-west), illustrates a successful merging of accessibility measures and historic sites. A string of stairs, glass walkways, and best of all, ramps, allows museumgoers to view ancient Roman bathhouses, gravesites, and government buildings below and around them.

Javier Alonso Valero, a 17-year employee of the museum, says that “The museum opened Christmas 2007, and since then we have had the same elevator.” He explains that while not all exhibits are accessible from the inside, there are separate access points for those unable to climb stairs, and so people of all abilities are encouraged to explore the ruins at La Almonia.

Likewise, “Historical preservation doesn’t mean putting things in a glass box.” says FSU Valencia urban planning Professor Tisha Joseph Holmes. “History is not only about structure. Keeping the structure is important, but having people learn and understand and touch and be in that experience is also part of the historical process.”

With modern technology, access can look a little different, too. For example, Holmes suggests the use of a 360 degree camera on top of Valencia’s famed *Torres de Serranos* to provide viewing access to those who can not climb the towers.

Additionally, online guides like *Visit Valencia* and *Accessible Spain Travel* offer comprehensive guides for differently abled folks looking to explore Spain. These websites provide contact information and resources for restaurants, museums, historical sites, guided tours, hotels, and transportation services; allowing peace of mind for differently abled people wishing to travel to Valencia.

FSU Valencia Program Director Ignacio Messana says that while Valencia is quite historical, it’s also very modern in other areas, and “has been developed in quite an interesting way.” For instance, he says “[Valencia] is one of the few cities in the world that every single intersection of a street has the curb marked with a ramp for wheelchairs and an indicator for blind people.”

Additionally, he adds that all of Valencia’s public transportation systems are equipped with indicators to help blind folks find their seats and that, “every bus has an automatic ramp, and if the automatic ramp fails, they have a manual one ready to use.”

Although these solutions do not always ensure equal access, it shows a collective effort towards inclusivity, a sentiment Valencians have been working towards via the city’s 2030 Urban Plan. According to the city’s website, the plan is a “roadmap that will allow a comprehensive, innovative, shared and transformative development of the city for the next decade.”

The plan has six “Looks” for Valencia, one of which being the “Shared City. According to their website, this Look is “the one that boost[s] citizen participation in the creation of public policies aimed at the common good and equality.”

Holmes says that “[The 2030 Urban Plan] seems really robust and thoughtful.”, explaining how Valencia’s urban planners spoke with a variety of neighborhoods, stakeholders, and partners while forming goals for the project. For Holmes, it is particularly important to hear from those who are directly affected by any changes in the urban sector because “they are the experts.” Highlighting these voices can help lead to extensive and lasting solutions.

Valencia’s commitment to inclusivity has already been acknowledged far and wide: In 2022, it was chosen as the World Design Capitol, and in 2023, it was titled a UNESCO Creative City. Valencia’s residents have positive remarks too:

“We were looking for the place where she could live her best life, taking in all the possibilities, and this is the city we chose.” says Iryna Harvylyshyn, a Ukrainian native who relocated to Valencia with her daughter, who’s medical condition requires her to use a wheelchair, in 2015.

Harvylyshyn says that her daughter goes to a school for special needs children three days a week, and a traditional school the remaining two days. “I never could have expected the attitudes that people in Valencia would have towards my daughter… everybody accepts her completely.”

Not only does her daughter “have brilliant relations with the kids there” but “For her to be able to study there, the school added an elevator.” says Harvylyshyn. “Then they changed the classrooms. They did a lot of work so that she and other kids like her in the future could come to this school”.

Messana speaks fondly of a blind student and his guide dog that studied abroad with FSU Valencia in 2003, “His name is Carlos. He was Hispanic origin, and I remember the name of the dog that is not with us anymore. That was Lionel, because the dog was one more with the program.”

“We went all over Spain with Carlos and with Lionel.” Says Messana. “He was authorized in many museums. In some of them, we got permission for Carlos to be able to touch some of these sculptures.”

He recalls one tour in great detail; “I'll never forget where in one single plaza of Madrid, they are explaining four different architectural styles, and the guide took Carlos to each one of them to be able to touch differences, from granite to the typical Arabic brick, to the plates, very delicate decorations, to the marble. It was a beautiful experience.”

Messana explains that while this is an ongoing project, FSU IP is committed to working alongside students’ needs to create study abroad programs that are accessible for all. “I don't want to say there are no difficulties, because they need to be brave, obviously and courageous, but we are quite ready for those needs”

Messana encourages all differently abled students looking to study abroad to contact FSU International Programs at IP-info@fsu.edu, @IP-Valencia-info@fsu.edu or the Office of Accessibility Services at OAS@fsu.edu.