THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ACCESSIBLE TOURISM IN CENTRAL EUROPE –
Implications From An International Project Co-Operation

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ACCESSIBLE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INNOVATIVE
EDUCATIONAL METHOD OF ACCESSIBLE TOURISM
IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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The development of the innovative educational method of ACCESSIBLE tourism in Central Europe – ACCESSIBLE
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Foreword, introduction to the Accessible Erasmus Project

„Aiming to promote responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism in the framework of the right of all persons to use their free time for leisure pursuits or travel with respect for the choices of society of all peoples" (Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, UNWTO, 1999)

„…affirm the right to tourism and the freedom of tourist movements, state our wish to promote an equitable, responsible and sustainable world tourism order, whose benefits will be shared by all sectors of society in the context of an open and liberalized international economy, and solemnly adopt to these ends the principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism" (Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, UNWTO, 1999)

Everyone, regardless of their physical, sensory, or cognitive capacities, should have the opportunity to travel and explore the world. This should be a universal luxury that is open to everyone. On the other hand, the tourist sector has failed to adequately meet the requirements of people with disabilities for an excessively long period of time. As a result, a sizeable percentage of the population is unable to fully participate in or enjoy the activities that are offered by the industry. Researchers, educators, and professionals working in the tourist sector have been encouraged to critically investigate ways in which tourism might be made more accessible, inclusive, and ultimately more fulfilling for all individuals as a result of this divide.

The present book, titled "*The Theory and Practice of Accessible Tourism in Central Europe – Implications from an International Project Cooperation*," is a reflection of the work of a broad group of academics and institutions located across Central Europe. These researchers have devoted themselves to investigating and tackling the difficulties that are being discussed in this book. The innovative *Accessible Erasmus Project*, which is the source of the volume, is a cooperation that strives to improve educational frameworks and tourism practices in ways that encourage accessible travel for all persons, including those who have impairments.

This book is one of a kind because it blends theoretical analysis with actual case studies from four different countries – Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania – while simultaneously highlighting the social and economic advantages of tourism that is easily accessible. In it, fundamental topics such as legal frameworks, policy restrictions, and the growth of accessibility in tourism are discussed. Additionally, technical solutions and best practices for providing a more inclusive tourist experience are also explained.

It is crucial to understand that the inclusion of all groups, especially individuals with disabilities, represents not just an ethical imperative but also a great economic opportunity. Tourism has become a key component of economic development, and as this sector continues to develop, it is necessary to acknowledge that this inclusion involves a substantial business potential. As we work to make tourism more accessible, we are simultaneously developing a society that is more welcoming to people of all backgrounds, as well as offering up opportunities for economic expansion, enhanced guest experiences, and cultural interactions that are more meaningful.

The authors of this book provide a relevant and complete review of how accessible tourism may be successfully implemented within the area. They do so with the goal that these insights

will inspire new advancements both inside Central Europe and beyond its borders. Not only are we respecting human rights when we make sure that everyone has equal access to tourism, but we are also contributing to the larger social and economic fabric of a world that is more equitable and welcoming to people of all backgrounds.

We have faith that this book will prove to be an invaluable resource for scholars, legislators, tourism experts, and campaigners who are working toward a future in which travel actually does not recognize any borders.

1. Introduction, the theoretical basis of the relationship between equal access and tourism

1.1. The importance of equal access in tourism

The notion of equitable access in tourism is crucial in guaranteeing that the pleasure of travelling and discovering is accessible to everyone without exception. This narrative examines the importance of accessible tourism, specifically in Central Europe, where international partnerships are changing the tourism industry to be more inclusive. In this analysis, we explore the interaction between moral obligations, financial motivations, and legal structures that support the promotion of inclusive tourism. Inclusive tourism seeks to incorporate individuals who have traditionally been marginalized or excluded from participating in tourism endeavours. By acknowledging and rectifying these exclusions, the sector may more faithfully represent the diversity of society and actively contribute to a wider social integration.

People with disabilities and their specific accessibility requirements are increasingly demanding a place in tourism activities. In line with this, many stakeholders in the sector are already committed to initiatives aimed at adapting tourism services to different consumer profiles to support the principle of 'Tourism for All' in order to ensure equal access. In the latest and most comprehensive approach to accessible tourism, it is becoming increasingly clear that the benefits of accessibility are not only for people with disabilities but for the whole population. When the issue of accessible tourism started to be addressed by tourism stakeholders, the term 'Tourism for All' was widely used in many countries, as the aim is to ensure that tourism services and environments can be used and enjoyed by all people, whether they have a disability or not (Gonda, 2023).

Accessible tourism not only focuses on inclusivity but also reveals significant economic opportunities by targeting demographic categories that are generally neglected, such as seniors and individuals with disabilities. Prioritizing accessibility can greatly improve the visitor experience, appealing to a wider range of people and resulting in higher economic benefits. Accessibility is now widely acknowledged by the industry as a fundamental component of the market, rather than a specialized niche, and is seen to have significant potential for growth. Darcy and Dickson (2009) advocate for a comprehensive strategy to tourism that includes accessible experiences for people of all physical abilities.

From an economic standpoint, accessible tourism plays a crucial role in boosting national income, particularly within the framework of European economic cooperation, where policies promote unrestricted mobility and accessibility. Adopting accessible tourism methods not only promotes economic development but also cultivates a more inclusive society. The significance of incorporating accessibility into the wider tourist strategy is highlighted by its dual advantage, thereby establishing it as a customary practice throughout the sector (Buhalis et al., 2012).

Within this frame of reference, the question arose whether equivalence of terminology could be achieved without mentioning accessibility. The concept of 'Tourism for All', which first appeared in the 'Tourism for All' campaign in the UK in 1989 (Baker, 1989), was defined as follows: '*That form of tourism that plans, designs and develops leisure and free time tourist activities that can be enjoyed by all types of persons no matter their physical, social or cultural conditions.*' (Baker, 1998). In this respect, 'Tourism for All' is a concept that applies to the whole

population and includes not only accessibility aspects but also other aspects of tourism such as social tourism. The latter focuses on the possibility of involving population groups with different economic and social characteristics as factors in the integration of tourism. 'Tourism for All' promotes universal accessibility in the tourism industry, with its roots in ethical principles. This notion goes beyond simply removing physical obstacles to improve the overall tourist experience for all individuals, regardless of their physical ability. Also, adopting an inclusive approach in tourism is not just a matter of human rights, but also a strategic measure that improves the quality of tourist sites and benefits the entire tourism ecosystem (Martin-Fuentes et al., 2021).

Social tourism takes a broader view of its potential beneficiaries, as it aims to combat inequalities and the exclusion of people from different cultural backgrounds, those with fewer financial resources or those living in disadvantaged regions. The link between the two concepts is obvious, as people with disabilities are in many cases also considered to be financially disadvantaged.

Although there have been improvements, there are still considerable obstacles to achieving completely accessible tourism. The travel experience for those with impairments is often hindered by inconsistencies in accessible information and fragmented service provisions. The significance of accurate information and uninterrupted accessible systems that empower individuals with disabilities to travel with assurance and completely relish their experiences. To overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to have a cohesive strategy that involves all relevant parties within the tourism sector (Farkas & Petykó, 2020).

The 1999 UNWTO General Assembly in Santiago, Chile, adopted the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, one of the most important documents in the tourism sector. In Article 3 of the UNWTO's Constitution, as recognised by the UN General Assembly, tourism is considered to be a factor that promotes universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of race, gender, language or religion (and, we might add, physical or other disability or lack thereof). It implicitly mentions among its objectives the implementation of accessible tourism (the aim is to promote responsible, sustainable and inclusive tourism in the context of the right to leisure and travel). In Article 7 (Right to tourism), the Code already makes specific reference to persons with disabilities: (1) the universal right to tourism should be seen as a consequence of the right to rest and leisure as enshrined in Article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; (2) social tourism should be developed with the support of the public authorities (as people with disabilities are a significantly higher proportion of the socially disadvantaged, even financially deprived group, this is particularly important for them); (3) and family, youth and student tourism, as well as tourism for the elderly and people with disabilities, should be encouraged and supported (UNWTO, 1999).

Much remains to be done to make universal accessibility a reality in the tourism sector. There is a need to change mindsets and models for the delivery of tourism services, not only to respect the human rights of people with disabilities and their families, but also to meet a significant market need that can significantly increase the competitiveness and growth of tourism destinations and businesses (Baccarani & Cavallo, 2023). The authors of this book are naturally committed to ensuring equal access to tourism as far as possible, regardless of the disability of the individual. Given that tourism is the defining social phenomenon of our time, it can no longer be seen as an economic sector, but as an integral part of human life and a factor that has a significant impact on everyday life. Since tourism is a source of wellbeing and

subjective happiness, a means of personal fulfilment and self-fulfilment for a large number of people in developed countries, it is unacceptable that certain social groups should be excluded from tourism because of some kind of disability or handicap. Fortunately, people with disabilities are nowadays increasingly involved in tourism activities, thanks to their increasing level of economic and social integration. However, as mentioned, there are still many and varied barriers that hinder access to tourism services.

The rise, expansion and mass development of modern tourism dates back around a 60 years' time. The dynamism of this expansion is well represented by the fact that, while in the early 1950s around 25 million visits were detected in international tourism (i.e. travelling abroad), this figure is forecast to exceed 1.8 billion by 2030. Tourism has become the world's dominant economic sector, with its relative weight in the world economy, steadily increasing (Csapó & Törőcsik, 2020). Therefore, the extent to which a wide range of people with disabilities can be integrated into tourism is an important economic issue. We feel it is important to stress at the beginning of this book that accessibility is not only a requirement for people with disabilities, as they are not the only beneficiaries. Tourist destinations that address these requirements and see accessibility as a positive measure can gain a competitive advantage over other destinations. They will find that their product and service offerings evolve to facilitate the tourist experience, promote better access to services and improve the quality of life for all their residents and visitors.

As tourism evolves as a social phenomenon, so does the practice of tourism and the science of tourism. In our view, until recently, accessible tourism was an under-researched area of tourism research since even on the international scene it has been researched in a greater extent only from around 2000. Today, as mentioned, tourism is one of the most important sectors of international trade and a major source of income for many developing countries. Tourism is a means of creating jobs, eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality and preserving and promoting natural and cultural heritage. However, it is not only the development of globalisation that is important, but also the fact that tourism is no longer simply an economic sector, a service sector with a specific offer, but a social phenomenon that affects the daily lives of people in society, has a significant impact on their quality of life and is closely linked to their standard of living and well-being (Gonda & Raffay, 2020).

Moreover, tourism is an exceptional means of strengthening new personal relationships and fostering ties of family and relatives. It is therefore of the utmost importance for us to put into practice the principle of 'tourism for all', as outlined above. In this context, and also as advocates of equal access, we feel it is important to continue to address the tourism practices of people with disabilities, to identify barriers to the further development of accessible tourism and to present possible good practices.

For the vast majority of people tourism is a sympathetic activity and we believe that its perception is generally good. In this book, we would like to draw attention to the fact that the practice of tourism is not yet inclusive and that improvements in social inclusion can and should be made. Accessibility issues should not be neglected by tourist destinations and their service providers. If we can see the failures that exist and know the significant risks that lie ahead, we must not miss the opportunity to change. The opportunities for conscious change, and within that the opportunities for improving the conditions for accessible tourism, are there now.

At the level of declarations, accessibility is no longer an issue, but the reality is different. When we want to explore the relationship between people with disabilities and tourism, we must always bear in mind that different disabled visitors have different specific needs. For them, however, accessibility is vital, as in many cases ignoring their specific needs can make it impossible for them to participate actively in tourism. Today, the tourism opportunities, habits and needs of people with disabilities show significant differences in some aspects compared to the general population sample. An examination of the legislation shows that a paradigm shift has taken place since the 1990s, thanks (also) to the focus on human rights. This change of approach is based on the idea that people with disabilities should not be hidden or excluded from others but should be given the same opportunities as able-bodied people, thus promoting social inclusion.

In modern and civilised societies, it goes without saying that direct or indirect discrimination against any minority (on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, age, language, gender, sexual orientation) in any area of life is prohibited (Henrard, 2007), including, by analogy, the right to travel and the prohibition of discrimination in tourism. Broadening the scope of disadvantaged groups, those who, because of any physical or mental disability, are unable to travel without assistance, or only with difficulty, can be considered a special minority (in the sense that, unfortunately, they are often subject to discrimination. The WHO estimates that one in six people on Earth has a disability, and this number is growing (WHO, 2011).

The promotion of more easily attainable tourism signifies a forward-thinking movement towards inclusiveness. Adopting the concepts of 'Tourism for All' not only enhances tourism services and infrastructure, but also demonstrates how the industry can take the lead in dismantling social and physical obstacles. This trend signifies a forthcoming period in which tourism is genuinely accessible to all, in line with wider social and economic objectives of inclusiveness and fairness. The academic literature emphasizes the ethical, economic, and societal importance of equal access in tourism. It highlights the need for inclusive policies, infrastructure development, and awareness to ensure that all individuals, including those with disabilities, have access.

1.2. The concept of accessible tourism and the difficulties in defining the topic

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

Accessible or barrier-free tourism strives to ensure that individuals with physical limitations can access and enjoy the travel sector like everyone else. This chapter delves into the basic idea of accessible tourism, examines the challenges it encounters, and highlights the theoretical and practical structures that help with its execution. This discussion aims to gain a thorough understanding of how accessible tourism can be attained in the context of sustainable and inclusive global development by integrating findings from various scholarly articles. Accessible tourism involves intentional and coordinated actions to remove physical, informational, and attitudinal barriers, providing equal opportunities for everyone, particularly those with disabilities, to engage in tourism and lead a satisfying life. This concept extends further than just physical access and includes a holistic approach to guaranteeing the involvement of all travellers, regardless of their physical or sensory restrictions (Altinay et al., 2020).

Implementing accessible or barrier-free tourism is filled with difficulties. These factors encompass inadequate infrastructure that does not meet various requirements, subpar service quality, and the widespread lack of surroundings that adequately accommodate the accessibility demands of individuals with disabilities. The difficulties are frequently worsened by insufficient legal frameworks and a lack of agreement on what defines efficient and all-encompassing accessibility (Kotlyarova et al., 2020). Broadening the term barrier-free or accessible tourism we also need to deal with inclusive tourism which aims to eliminate the inherent exclusivity that has traditionally been associated with the tourism industry. The objective is to integrate marginalized or excluded people into the tourism sector in a manner that is advantageous and uplifting. This approach not only improves the travel experience for these groups, but also strengthens the social structure of tourist locations by promoting increased cultural interchange and understanding (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018).

Most people take living without barriers for granted, but in fact, some estimates suggest that around 10% of the European population has a disability. In developed countries, accessibility is also receiving increasing attention in the organisation of tourism offers, partly out of humanity and partly in recognition of the significant business potential. In the most general terms, accessible tourism is tourism that is equally accessible to all, including people with disabilities, people with temporary disabilities, older people, people with young children and multi-generational families. Accordingly, the main areas of analysis of equal access are the same as the main topics of the supply side of tourism, namely: accommodation; hospitality; tourist attractions; transport; communication. Of these, it is perhaps the accessibility of attractions that is most addressed in the literature, probably in the context of the fact that a significant proportion of attractions are public facilities owned by the state (UNWTO, 2016).

Defining the target group for accessible tourism is also problematic. In many cases, the public does not even include in the target group those who, due to their living situation, are members of the target group for a shorter or longer period of time: e.g. pregnant women, people with temporary disabilities undergoing surgery, or the elderly. The proportion of the elderly in the overall population is also steadily increasing and many forms of accessibility are an essential

need for them. Many of us therefore live with a permanent or temporary disability which can be a barrier to their lives and a barrier to their journeys. In fact, accessible tourism is a continuous effort to make all destinations, tourist products and services accessible to all people, regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities or age, and whether they are private or public tourist sites (United Nations - Promoting accessible tourism for all).

A specific definition of the issue is difficult to define, as there is still no internationally accepted and agreed definition of "accessible tourism". In line with the study of the subject, the concept itself has evolved considerably over the last ten years. Two factors make it difficult to adopt a single, common definition:

- Research into accessible tourism and the evolution of the concept over time has led to a number of synonyms for accessible tourism being used in different countries without a common concept being agreed. Some examples of the terms used are: inclusive tourism, accessible tourism, adapted tourism, tourism for all, barrier-free tourism, accessible tourism and universal tourism;
- Since tourism has been linked to the concept of accessibility, there have been many attempts to define the term concretely, but no agreement on a single definition has been reached, despite the increasing prominence of the concept. All experts on the subject have different definitions and there is no international consensus on a definition that satisfies all stakeholders (UNWTO, 2016).

The aim of this book is not to provide a new definition that is different from the one that has been used so far, but rather to provide an overview of the aspects that are taken into account within the concept of accessible tourism. In this overview, we also build on the summary work of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2016), which provides the most relevant definitions through which to monitor the ever-expanding scope of the issue. Two examples of early definitions of the concept are presented below:

'*A series of activities performed during free time devoted to tourism by people with restricted capacities that makes their full functional and psychological integration possible and so full individual and social satisfaction is obtained.*' (Lawrence et al., 1996).

'*A process of enabling people with disabilities and seniors to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of Universal Tourism products, services and environments*' (Darcy, 2006).

This definition includes mobility, visual, auditory and cognitive dimensions of accessibility and aims to facilitate access to tourism services for people with disabilities.

If we analyse the background to the term "barrier-free tourism", we can see that there was an initial conceptual idea of integrating people with disabilities into tourism by removing existing barriers. There was an aspiration for accessibility along the whole tourism value chain, including travel, the host area and all tourism services. Following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), a paradigm shift has taken place in that a more positive approach has been adopted, focusing on accessibility as a measure to create an accessible environment for all, regardless of the abilities of individuals. As the approach to disability has evolved, so has the new concept of accessible tourism. This no longer applied only and exclusively to tourists with disabilities, but rather to the adaptation or re-design of the tourist environment to make it accessible to all groups of the population.

The current trend is to integrate the concept of accessible tourism with the overall idea of universal design, adding other, more global aspects (Darcy, et al. 2010), such as:

- Expanding the range of stakeholders (population);
- The relationship between disability and older people;
- Accessibility as a useful factor for as many people as possible;
- Universal design or design for all as a means of achieving accessibility.

In recent years, the scientific need and governmental efforts to promote the concept of accessible tourism have led to other, more comprehensive definitions of the concept, which have become increasingly broad and inclusive (UNWTO, 2016). A few examples of these new definitions of accessible tourism:

'*Accessible Tourism is tourism and travel that is accessible to all people, with disabilities or not, including those with mobility, hearing, sight, cognitive, or intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, older persons and those with temporary disabilities.*' (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009)

'Accessible tourism is the ongoing endeavour to ensure tourist destinations, products and services are accessible to all people, regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities or age. It encompasses publicly and privately owned tourist locations. The improvements not only benefit those with permanent physical disabilities, but also parents with small children, elderly travellers, people with temporary injuries such as a broken leg, as well as their travel companions' (Miller et al., 2010).

One of the definitions used in recent academic publications on the subject, which includes all the concepts previously described, is: accessible tourism is a form of tourism that involves strategically designed collaborative processes between stakeholders that '*enable people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments*.' (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

This definition takes a life-long approach to tourism. The benefits of accessibility in tourism are evident to all people throughout their lives. This includes people with permanent and temporary disabilities, people with specific health problems, the elderly and families with young children (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). This suggests that the concept of accessible tourism has evolved from the idea of accommodation or adaptation to accommodate people with disabilities in tourism to the concept of quality tourism for all, with the understanding that accessibility is an important part of this quality. It is likely that new definitions will continue to emerge, as tourism is not an exact science but rather a constantly evolving and growing phenomenon, influenced by a range of political, socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors (UNWTO, 2016).

As stated above, the target group for accessible tourism can be almost anyone, temporarily or for life, other than people with disabilities. As people with disabilities represent a significant customer base (more than 1 billion people), the development of accessible services could be a significant economic driver. In the simplest and most general terms, the goal of accessible tourism for all can be defined as enabling all people, regardless of their disability, to travel between or within countries, and to access attractions, events or wherever they want to go and use tourist services.

The number of people with disabilities has been increasing worldwide in recent decades, and this increase is attributed mainly to ageing and other health factors (Darcy, 2002; Yau et al., 2004). It is important to note that the majority of older people, although they have some limitations and require accessibility in many areas of life, do not consider themselves as disabled. However, as this is a very dynamic and growing group, and as senior tourism is a growing factor in tourism, the specific needs of older people should be given special attention when considering accessible tourism. Research has shown that there is a very strong correlation between ageing and disability (WHO, 2007). While this is true, Mann et al. (2005) argues that older people with some form of disability may not necessarily become disabled if they can find ways to adapt to this impairment. In most cases, however, the majority of these older people are unable to compensate for their disability and thus become disabled. The link between disability and ageing is clear and supported by statistical data as well.

This is a major challenge for the global tourism industry (WHO, 2007). This has been recognised in Europe and the USA and the tourism industry is looking for ways to ensure that its infrastructure and products are accessible to older people. The majority of people will benefit from these improvements, including the ageing population, parents with young children, and employees, as they include the appropriate design of a wide range of occupational health and safety requirements (Preiser & Ostroff, 2001). Many developed countries have building codes and standards for barrier-free design that incorporate these ideas (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

The general approach is to classify tourist-active persons over 55 years of age as senior tourists, where we can distinguish between the so-called "young senior tourists – between age 55-54" and the "senior tourists – aged more than 65" (MTÜ, 2017). From a tourism perspective, it is not necessary to adapt the tourism offer to them, but rather to tailor the existing offer. Age alone is not a determining factor, as the same museum can be interesting for a 25-year-old as for a 60-year-old, so it is not the nature of demand that distinguishes this age group from other demographic groups, but where and how, i.e. through which sales and promotion channels, they should be reached and addressed. Senior travellers are more likely to have significantly more leisure time and less seasonal travel, so they can be motivated to travel during off-peak periods, outside school holidays, by developing appropriate offers, thus reducing the problem of seasonality in sensitive destinations. The ageing population in developed countries poses a new challenge not only for the health system but also for tourism and recreation. Many hotels and travel agencies are looking at the prospects of attracting a growing number of older people to tourism and have started to create special products for this new target group, the "senior tourists", such as special tours for over-65s (UNWTO, 2016).

In order to develop the tourism market and product, it is important to identify new demographic challenges and the changing social structure. Thus, the tourism industry must respond to the demographic challenge of an ageing population with new types of tourism and new service technologies. At the same time, the development of hotel and tourism services for older people is hampered by social prejudices. Older people are not seen as a solvent demand, they are seen as having no special needs and the elderly are often perceived as survivors. However, there are examples of companies that have adopted strategies to increase supply for older people. This is the so-called "3G" holiday mode, a holiday for 3 generations (children + parents + grandparents) together. In the US, children and grandchildren are increasingly going on holiday with grandparents. Hotels and holiday complexes are developing multifunctional guest apartments for extended families due to the longer length of stay (30-60 days) and the interests and needs of different generations (Farkas et al., 2023).

Today, the problem is particularly acute due to the ageing of societies. Special needs in older age are common to almost everyone, but there are also many other life situations that may give rise to special needs: e.g. people undergoing rehabilitation after an accident, families with young children (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

Fortunately, it is now accepted that it is our human, ethical, moral and legal duty to facilitate travel for people with disabilities and to provide the necessary physical conditions. The fact that tourism for people with disabilities is also an important economic issue cannot be neglected, as they are currently a largely unexploited niche segment of the tourism market, although there have been several positive counter-examples in recent times (Buhalis et al., 2012).

Further on, technological advancements are also crucial in promoting accessible tourism. Technological advancements like virtual reality and augmented reality can replicate vacation experiences in advance, thereby enhancing accessibility and reducing the challenges faced by those with impairments in tourism. In addition, technology enables the development of tailored tourist profiles, which can assist service providers in meeting individual requirements more efficiently (McKercher & Darcy, 2018).

The establishment of policy and legislative frameworks also has a vital role in determining the conditions and structure of accessible tourism. Efficient policies can cultivate surroundings that cater to the requirements of disabled visitors by enforcing accessibility standards and raising awareness among stakeholders about the significance of inclusivity. In order to provide a unified strategy to establishing barrier-free tourism, it is necessary to integrate such policies across all levels of governance (Dredge, 2019).

In conclusion we can state that the concept of barrier-free tourism aims to ensure equal access for all individuals, but its definition and execution are intricate and filled with difficulties. Integrating wise policy, strategic planning, and technical innovation can greatly improve the possibility of barrier-free tourism. This chapter emphasizes the significance of adopting a comprehensive strategy that takes into account the varied requirements of all tourists in order to promote an inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous tourism sector.

2. Definition and types of disability

2.1. The concept of disability

The concept of disability has preoccupied researchers for decades, with numerous small and large-scale studies being conducted in an attempt to develop a definition that provides a comprehensive, global description of disability (Grövnik, 2009). The problem of developing a single definition also stems from the fact that there are three different approaches to the concept: disability as a functional limitation, disability as an administrative definition, and disability as a subjective definition. The first is the best known, and will be discussed in more detail below, including its subcategories. The second is the legal or administrative definition of disability, which derives from the distribution of welfare benefits, i.e. the group of people in society who are entitled to receive state support for this purpose. We are talking about individuals who are legally recognised as disabled and who receive various care services and/or benefits. A third definition of disability is subjective disability, which refers to individuals who perceive themselves as disabled, a kind of voluntarily defined subjective disability (see also the end of this chapter). Research and statistics show that these approaches result in different figures for the number of people with disabilities, depending on which approach is taken (Grövnik, 2009).

The meaning of "disability" has changed over the decades. As public policy has changed, the meaning behind the term has evolved depending on different social and cultural contexts (Francis - Silvers, 2016). While the view that it was for doctors to determine disability was once a common one, the approach to disability is now a more common and controversial topic, which has changed with the emergence of civil rights protection. Today, the most controversial issue is no longer who counts as disabled, but whether or not a person who is limited in some way in his or her ability to exercise his or her rights is able to do so, and whether or not fair access is provided to that person.

According to the WHO (World Health Organization), 'disability' is in fact a shorthand term, an umbrella term used to describe and identify impairments resulting from illness and injury, physical as well as mental or emotional functional limitations/disabilities. The WHO definition distinguishes three concepts, which differ in level and content: impairment, disability and handicap.

These three categories are (Berszán, 2017):

— Impairment refers to any abnormality or deficiency in the psychological or physiological structure or role of a person (health impairment),
— Disability refers to a person's reduced ability to do certain activities: transport, self-care, work, learning, etc.,
— Disability: a social disadvantage resulting from an impairment or disability that limits or hinders an individual's daily life. Disadvantage is in fact the socialisation of the impairment or disability.

The term "disability" is also used to describe a variety of different characteristics of the disability process, the level of which can vary or fluctuate based on the focus factor as well as individual characteristics (age, gender) and circumstances (Altman, 2014). According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (1991) manual, this includes both physical, mental, emotional functioning or some specific impairment that significantly limits an individual in his or her

functional actions as well as major life activities. These problems can be very diverse, of varying degrees and complex.

In order to conceptualise "disability", several descriptive models of disability have been developed since the 1970s, following the medical approaches, the social model of disability has emerged, which strongly criticises the medical model, considering it outdated and oppressive (Beaudry, 2016). According to this model, environmental factors contributing to disability should also be taken into account. The social model of disability formulated by scientists distinguishes between social exclusion resulting from disability and impairment resulting from physical limitation. Disability is now defined not only in functional terms but also in terms of the limitation of activity caused by a social factor. In this approach, the focus is not on physical disability but on participation in activities (Shakespeare, 2010).

At present, existing views on physical disability can be divided into two categories, depending on the perspective taken: the naturalistic view, which sees disability as a biological trait, and the constructivist view, which sees disability as a partially socially constructed phenomenon. In addition, there is a new concept in the literature, the concept of marginalised functioning (Jenkins & Webster, 2021). This concept refers to the relationship between the physical abilities of an individual and his or her social (mental) world. The introduction of this concept aims to combine physical and psychological factors when talking about disability.

The definition of disability, as a result, varies depending on the context and is inherently complex. What we mean by disability has varied throughout history, depending on what the zeitgeist of the time considered important. In what follows, we will see how the concept of disability has changed over time, from different perspectives (Francis & Silvers, 2016):

— *Medical perspective (end of the 19th century)*: disability is linked to ill-health, in this period abnormal biological functioning is linked to disability.
— *The pre-civil rights perspective (early to mid-20th century)*: once the general view of disability as a functional disability emerged, it was then collectively addressed in policy. Discrimination developed during this period, with the result that some people with disabilities were excluded from access to common services. In contrast, statutory support schemes were introduced for them, based on medical diagnoses for individuals. The judgements were not always uniform, leading to disagreements, for example about whether or not someone was fit for work.
— *Civil rights perspective (second half of the 20th century)*: the exclusion and discrimination of this group are recognised. Efforts are being made to give people with disabilities equal access to public buildings, public transport and education. Civil rights legislation to end discrimination against people with disabilities and to ensure accessibility in all areas. Underpinning these efforts is the view that disability disadvantage is to some extent not a biological deficiency but a social discrimination.
— *Ethical perspective*: the aspect which refers to the fact that disability has different meanings in different contexts, its extent also varies according to the context, and this often creates ethical difficulties (for example, in cases where employment is involved and the individual concerned would like to work). The question concerns whether the individual (regardless of the existence or severity of the disability) has been subjected to disability discrimination and whether his or her right to fair social opportunities has been violated.

According to the WHO's 2022 report on people with disabilities, by 2021, around 1.3 billion people - around 16% of the world's population - will have a disability. This number has been rising over the last decade and is projected to continue to rise. The statistics highlight the importance of this issue and the urgency of action (WHO, 2022). Although often defined as a single group, this group is characterised by its human diversity, as it is in fact a diverse group of people.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2007, is binding on EU Member States and forms part of the EU legal order. It is an internationally binding human rights instrument that obliges states to protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a person with a disability is any person who has a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, together with a number of other barriers, may limit that person's full, effective and equal participation in society. The Convention aims to ensure that persons with disabilities have the same right as all other persons to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.

According to the European Commission's European Disability Strategy (EC, 2010), one in six people in the European Union has a disability. Disability can range from mild to severe and affects nearly 80 million people, many of whom are unable to participate in social activities due to barriers. Not least, people with disabilities are also more exposed to poverty, partly due to limited access to employment.

So, as we have seen, disability has many different approaches and forms; in many cases the term is not clearly defined, because by disability we do not only mean mobility impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment, developmental disability, intellectual disability, learning disability or disability related to a long-term health condition, because people can also have invisible disabilities such as allergies, or we should mention the elderly. It is important to highlight that older people are more vulnerable to developing some form of disability in old age due to their age (Zsarnóczky, 2018). According to the European Commission (EC, 2010), more than one third of people aged 75 and over are affected by a disability that limits them to some extent, and this proportion is expected to increase as the EU population ages. This is why the European Commission's Disability Strategy sets out the goal of enabling people with disabilities to enjoy their rights and participate in society. This is to be achieved through the following priorities: accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health and external action.

As we have seen, there are many different approaches to the concept of disability, and its meaning has changed over time. In the following, we will adopt the following standard definition as our definition: *disability refers to a physical or mental condition that refers to some kind of physical or mental impairment of an individual, and as a result, the individual faces barriers in their daily life* (Zsarnóczky, 2017).

2.2. Classification of people with disabilities

Classifying people with disabilities is not a simple task, as there are several different categorisations based on the perspective used to group these individuals. If a medical diagnosis is used, then a statistical data set calculated in the current situation must take into

account the fact that at any time a disability may potentially develop for some individuals, so there may be situations where this classification is not valid for the time being, but may occur in the future.

Before categorising, it is worth pointing out that disability is not a condition but a process, which may be progressive, static or intermittent. Disability can arise in different situations and stages of life: at birth, in childhood or adulthood, in relation to an injury, or as a result of genetic conditions.

There are several approaches to classifying people with disabilities. The most common and familiar classification is that there are four basic types of disability: physical, intellectual, mental and sensory. It should be stressed that this type of grouping does not necessarily coincide with the groupings found in the literature.

1. A physical disability is a condition affecting a part of a person's body that impairs or limits physical functioning or mobility. It may be caused by genetics, disease or injury. This includes people with mobility impairments.
2. People with intellectual disabilities have difficulties with self-care, safety, communication and social interaction. Causes can be: genetics, illness, injury. This includes, for example, deficits in speech and language skills.
3. Mental disability refers to disorders of thought, emotion and behaviour. It may be caused mainly by brain injury or abnormal neurological development. It can include bipolar disorder, depression, schizophrenia and bulimia.
4. A sensory disability affects a person's hearing, sight, touch, smell or taste. This includes autism spectrum disorder, blindness and hearing loss.

Another approach defines four main categories of disability: visually impaired, hearing impaired, mobility impaired and cognitively impaired (Crow, 2008):

1. When we think of people with visual impairment, we usually think of three types of visual impairment: total blindness, low vision and colour blindness. This division actually refers to the severity of the impairment.
2. The types and severity of hearing loss vary. People with hearing loss may have a reduced ability to hear certain frequencies (pitches) and may have hearing difficulties.
3. People with motor impairments are people with physical or locomotor disabilities who face a range of difficulties in carrying out their activities, depending on the severity and type of impairment. There is a wide range of conditions associated with motor disabilities. For example, some people in this group have limited use of their hands, others have no use of their hands at all.
4. For people with cognitive impairments, memory, perception, problem solving and conceptualisation can be challenging. A wide range of these may be possible, such as autism, brain injury, epilepsy, mental or neurological impairments. There are many cognitive disabilities.

If we adopt the WHO's widely accepted classification, we should think of disability as a condition or function in which an individual is at a significant disadvantage compared to his or her normal level of functioning. In this light, the term refers to individual functioning, including physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, intellectual impairment, mental impairment and various types of chronic illness. A disability may affect organs or parts of the body, but it may also affect a person's participation in different aspects of his or her life.

In 2001, the WHO published the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF International acronym). The following is a description of the classification system contained in the document, the primary aim of which was to provide a useful tool for describing the health status of the population and for international use. The document was intended to be a standardised common framework to enable communication about health and health care across different disciplines and disciplines around the world.

The ICF is a systematic grouping of people with different health conditions. As the name of the classification indicates, the categorisation distinguishes between the concepts of functionality and disability. Functionality is an umbrella term that includes all bodily functions, activities and participation; and disability is also an umbrella term that refers to impairments, activity limitations or participation restrictions. The ICF is not just about people with disabilities, it is about a universal classification of health-related conditions.

Thus, the classification given by the ICF consists of 2 defining parts: *functional ability and disability (1)* and *contextual (environmental) factors (2)*. The latter, contextual factors, refers to the whole context of an individual's life, factors that may affect the health status of the individual. The classification further divides the two main categories into two subdivisions, as shown in the figure below (ICF, 2001).

Figure 1. The ICF classification of people with disabilities

| (1) Functional ability and disability | • (a) Functions and structures of the body
• (b) Activities and participation |
| (2) Contextual (environmental) factors | • (c) Enviromental factors
• (d) Personal factors |
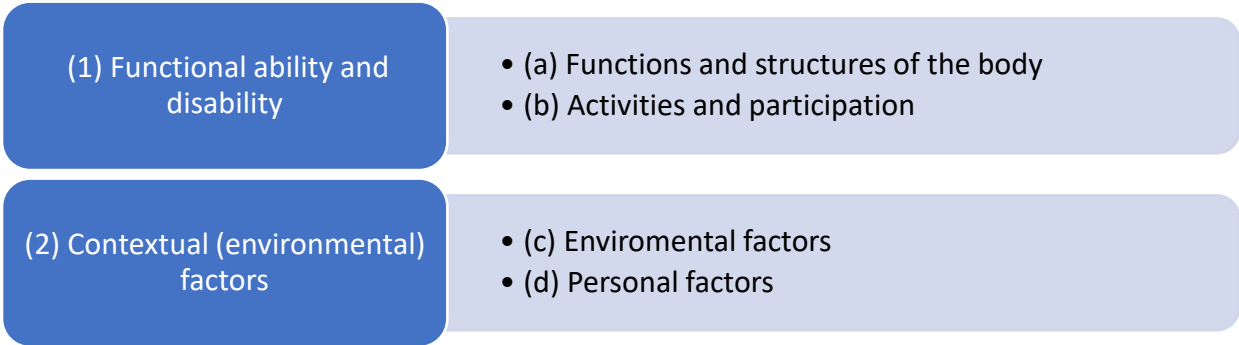
Source: Own editing based on ICF (2001)

(a) By body function we mean the physiological (including psychological) functions of the body systems, while by structures we mean the anatomical parts of the body (such as organs, limbs and their components). In both cases, the damage (deviation/loss) is significant.

(b) In terms of activities and participation, we refer to activity and participation restrictions, where an individual cannot participate in an activity or perform an activity.

(c) Environmental factors are the physical, social and attitudinal factors in which people live. These are generally external factors, independent of individuals. They can have positive or negative effects on an individual's health.

(d) Personal factors refer to the specific background of the individual's lifestyle and refer to characteristics that are not necessarily part of the health status assessment. Such factors may include fitness, lifestyle, habits, upbringing, education, etc. We recognise that these factors may play a role at any level of disability, but these personal factors will not be discussed in detail below as they vary from individual to individual.

There are several benefits of using ICF classification. One of the main benefits of the ICF is that it codes individuals in terms of their health status, thus ensuring that problem solving and interventions are not just for the individual, but have an impact on society and the attitudinal behaviour of society. Another major advantage is that any intervention programme that is created for these groups can be used to assess whether the programme has been effective. The implications of using the ICF in intervention can be as follows (Bornman, 2004):

— by highlighting the strengths of people with disabilities, it focuses on their participation in their specific social environment, helping them to interact with others.
— contribute to wider participation through targeted programmes for members of society.
— a focus on environmental factors helps to promote awareness, social inclusion and improve attitudes towards disability.

Last but not least, it is worth looking at the identity consciousness of people with disabilities and the corresponding typology found in the literature. According to the literature, there are two types of orientation towards disability: the 'cultural majority' orientation and the minority or 'subcultural' orientation (Darling, 2003). The 'cultural majority' orientation refers to the acceptance of and/or access to generally accepted norms of appearance and ability on the part of the individual. Minority or "subcultural" orientation is based on the value of diversity on the part of people with disabilities, i.e. it implies acceptance that alternative norms (special cases) exist alongside majority norms. In this form of orientation, an individual may choose to reject mainstream norms and prioritise their disability identity.

Based on these two orientations, Darling (2003) defined a typology of identity consciousness of people with disabilities, which may change over time (people may go through these processes), but basically fall into one or the other category at a given time, as they place themselves in society, as they orient themselves, as they inform themselves in society.

Before introducing the typology, let us introduce the concept of normalisation. The concept of normalisation was coined by the Danish author Bank-Mikkelsen, who in 1969 stated *"...to enable people with intellectual disabilities to achieve an existence which is as close as possible to normal living conditions."* (Disability Studies Glossary, 2009). This has given rise to an overarching theoretical concept that disability should increasingly be seen as a normal form of human life. In addition, the so-called "affirmation model" has emerged in the literature, according to which disability should be seen as part of a positive social process (Darling, 2003).

Darling (2003) distinguishes the following categories in which an individual with a disability can be classified based on their identification with each type:

— Normalisers: people who accept the norms of the majority society and who more or less succeed in developing a way of life in which the majority society lives. They are those whose disability is usually not very visible, they may even choose to present themselves as "normal".
— Crusaders: those who accept the norms of the cultural majority but who do not have access to a normalised way of life. Therefore, they become involved in the disability subculture, primarily for self-advocacy and social change.
— Affirmers: individuals who identify with the disability subculture in order to achieve their goals. In contrast to the previous category, their identification is strong, they see their disability as their own, their primary identity.

- Situational identifiers: individuals who are able to maintain multiple identities at the same time, depending on which one suits them. Sometimes they accept the majority norms, other times they accept the subculture.
- Rejects: people who desire normalisation but cannot achieve it, but who also lack access to a disability subculture. They may be illiterate or live in poverty or isolated areas. Such individuals are more likely to be exposed to the norms of the majority culture.
- Apathetic: individuals who remain apathetic or completely uninformed. In this category, individuals who suffer from a serious mental illness or learning disability are most likely to be included.
- Isolated reinforcers: people who have no access to the disability subculture. As soon as they become aware of it, they are likely to join the disability subculture.

As we have seen above, there are several different classifications of people with disabilities. Research has highlighted that people with disabilities do not form a large homogeneous group, but are in fact individuals with a variety of unique characteristics (Zsarnóczky, 2017). Overall, there are many types of disability and many consequences for the socialisation of individuals in society. It is very important to have a positive social attitude and to apply policies appropriately in order to improve the situation and living conditions of people with disabilities in society. We have seen that it is in fact a kind of umbrella term within which many different subgroups can be defined. It is important to emphasise that the terms used should not be stigmatising or discriminatory, but should encourage educational, health and social policy efforts appropriate to the condition.

Given that we will now focus on the participation of people with disabilities in tourism, we will consider the specific target groups of accessible tourism. It is important to note (from the perspective of accessible tourism) that the following *4 basic categories* (disabilities) are distinguished for the participation of disabled individuals in tourism: sensory (visual, hearing), communication (speech-related impairments), physical (mobility, temporary disability, age-related disability) and intellectual (or psychosocial). In addition to these 4 basic categories, it is important to note that there is also a so-called multiple disability, where a person has more than one disability.

3. Historical changes in the situation of people with disabilities

In today's societies, often referred to as post-industrial or service-based societies, the opportunities in life for people with disabilities – in terms of employment, travel, recreation, access to services, etc. – appear to be the same or at least not significantly less favourable than those of their non-disabled peers. By the 21st century humanity has the technological solutions and social (legal) possibilities to ensure a seemingly level playing field, a life without disabilities for all. And although we take it for granted today – as we should – that people with different disabilities can live their lives in their entirety, the period when it is actually more or less true in the history of human civilisations is only a few decades, at best a century – it is a shockingly short period during which the specific needs and requirements of people with disabilities have been addressed by the majority of society and by legislation and the state.

For most of the history of human societies, there have been at least prejudices (and unfortunately rarely positive ones) against people with disabilities in the majority societies, which has made the daily lives of those who need accessibility extremely difficult: whereas today we see the problem of people with disabilities encountering difficulties when travelling as the issue of accommodation and catering facilities that are advertised as accessible but are not in reality, tourist attractions (old castles, churches, monuments) that are not accessible, transport difficulties – for thousands of years, the mere existence was a daily hardship for people with physical or intellectual disabilities, and it was often at the mercy of the family or society as a whole that people who were born or who became disabled – blind, deaf, dumb, or intellectually disabled – could enjoy a quality of life. Worse still, it was considered a sensation to show off for someone who was visibly physically or mentally handicapped, see the institution of the freak shows (or creep shows – Figure 2.) that reached their peak of popularity in the second half of the 19th century and in the early years of the 20th century (Putova, 2018; Kirkwood, 2017)[1].

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[1] We need to define what we mean by "freak" and "freak show". Freak show is the practice of presenting human difference for profit, which was popular in America especially from the mid-19th century until about the 1920s and 1930s. However, the display of 'extraordinary bodies' was as much a performance involving stylised modes of presentation as a bodily 'condition', that is, we represented or were represented as ourselves – in a certain way or pose – relying on historically and culturally contingent notions of 'weird' or 'normal'' each of which was imbued with malleable and contested elements of race, gender, and sexuality (Kirkwood, 2017, pp. 5-6).

Figure 2. The "Human Caterpillar" in a freak show

Source: https://www.dailymail.co.uk
He was known as the 'Human Caterpillar' because he had been born limbless. For entertainment he would roll himself over and light cigarettes with only his mouth.

This humiliating situation was common in the world until the beginning of the last century, and to this day we cannot say that the situation of people with disabilities has been resolved. On the one hand, even in the most tolerant societies, there are still prejudices against people with disabilities, see ableist people and their attitudes, ableism (Friedman, 2017) – not to mention societies where superstitious prejudices against minorities in general still exist today – and on the other hand, even in societies that are relatively advanced in accessibility, there are still difficulties in transport and in daily administration, for example, when someone is wheelchair-bound. In many countries, the needs of people with disabilities are still not taken into account when new facilities are built, old ones are rebuilt, transport is installed and made accessible, etc.

In the field of tourism, in terms of the most basic tourism service, accommodation as part of the primary tourism superstructure, there are just under ten countries where the proportion of accessible hotels reaches 50% (Table 1.).

Table 1. Countries with the highest and lowest rates of accessible hotels, 2015

Top 10 countries with the highest percentage of accessible hotels		Countries with the lowest percentage of accessible hotels	
Country	%	Country	%
United States of America	77	Uruguay	10
United Arab Emirates	55	Vietnam	8
Ireland	55	Nepal	8
Portugal	55	Thailand	8
New Zealand	54	Azerbaijan	8
Mauritius	53	Cambodia	8
Italy	52	Bolivia	8
Norway	52	Georgia	8
Puerto Rico	51	Montenegro	7
Israel	49	Laos	1
...			
Hungary	25		

Source: https://turizmusonline.hu 2015[2]
Note: the figure does not refer to the number of hotel beds but to the number of facilities, and therefore does not tell us much about the proportion of accessible rooms – not to mention that if the registration of accessibility is based on self-reporting, there may be significant differences between facilities that are actually accessible and those that are only promised to be.

Throughout human history, different ages and cultures have responded to disability and impairment (and also old age and serious illness) in a wide variety of ways. Each society is characterised by its attitude towards people with disabilities. The literature on disability history is rather "handicapped", poor (Könczei, 2019), and mostly exhausted in medical history, picture books for medical students, but providing knowledge about types of illness, and sometimes presenting more or less off-putting, repulsive images, often for its own sake, with an end in itself, to provoke horror, and thus without social scientific analysis or interpretation. We do not really get to know from these sources either the everyday lives of people with disabilities living in the given culture in the given era, or the typical reactions of society, so we have to approach the cultures of the given era not with our own values and standards, but with our own perceptions and prejudices, which can give rise to many misunderstandings.

The community-social relationship with people with physical or mental disabilities is determined by the image of the human body and mind that the age has created. This is no different in modern societies, where people with disabilities are seldom recognised or appreciated. For members of modern societies – influenced by the media and advertising – health, youth, independence and beauty are the values that are paramount. The stereotype of "what is beautiful must be good" operates in the everyday thinking of members of society, the idea of "what is beautiful is good, what is good is beautiful" (Plato, 2005), which originates in Greek philosophy and has been shaped by the consumerist world of today, according to the following image: only what is beautiful is good.

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[2] We are aware of the age of the data tables/data, but to the best of our knowledge there is currently no such level of summary available for the area we are studying, which shows that people with disabilities are still a less privileged group in society, even in the case of relevant social science research and reports.

Although the problem of disability has been known to man since the ancient times, it is known in its widespread and severe form only since the 20th century, only. It has become a worldwide problem since the mid-20th century: on the one hand, in the old days, people who were born with or who became disabled did not usually live long lives, whereas today's medicine can give long and meaningful lives to those who would have had no chance of survival before industrial societies, and on the other hand, our modern age produces disability in many ways (unhealthy workplaces, congested and dangerous transport, unhealthy lifestyles, excessive consumption of medicines, daily exposure to huge amounts of harmful chemicals, even just through our food intake, etc.).

The rehabilitation approach has also only been around for a few decades. In the animal kingdom, the injured individual is in the vast majority of cases doomed to extinction due to the Darwinian principle of "survival of the fittest". What distinguishes human society from animal society is, among other things, that the complex (barrier-free) system that humans have built enables them to operate social institutions that make it possible to avoid the consequences mentioned above at the animal level (Könczei, 2019; Farkas et al., 2022c).

The ultimate, most distant source of prejudice against people with disabilities is presumably in part an atavistic, ancient instinct from which "modern" man cannot always escape. A further possible explanation for the origin of prejudice is that disability itself was, in most historical periods and in most cultures, deeply associated with transcendence: from prehistoric times to the so-called modern times of today, it has been believed to have its origin somewhere beyond the visible, tangible world.

Another cause of prejudice may be the otherness that is valued by many today but not accepted by others. It is arguable that culture itself, that is, the great human cultures such as the ancient Jewish tradition, the ancient Greek tradition, the ancient Egyptian culture or Christianity, do not discriminate, and if this is the case, then prejudice against people with disabilities does not stem from the great cultures, but are generated and reborn by atavistic, ancient instincts, pagan superstitions, wrongful religious convictions and the otherness of the disabled person, alongside and interacting with the dominance of the major cultures (Könczei, 2019).

3.1. Historical perceptions of people with disabilities at different ages

In this sub-chapter we take a look at how "otherness", disabilities were seen and handled in society from the ancient ones (Egyptian, Greek, Roman cultures) through early medieval Christianity until today's modern societies.

3.1.1. Mesopotamia

It is in the cuneiform tablets that have come down to us from Mesopotamia that we first discover the dominant connection, until recent times, that vulnerability and disability in human and social consciousness are most deeply linked to the search for transcendence. Although we know little about the relationship of members of society to the disabled person and their place in the community, we do know that they did not only try to forecast future from oil and smoke, but also "freaks": they were seen as prognostic omens, signs that helped to predict the future, and were thought to be influenced by forces from the other world. "If

there was no rational, mundane explanation for the disability, they looked for something otherworldly. If the disability is of otherworldly origin, it seems to be capable of what worldly thinking is generally incapable of doing: seeing the future." (Hegedüs et al., 2011, p. 1818)

In other monotheistic and polytheistic cultures, we also find the motif of divine punishment for congenital or acquired disabilities. The Italian nature scientist (or rather naturalist) Ulisse Aldrovandi, who worked in the second half of the 16th century, commented on the issue: "Monsters[3] are God's exhortations to avoid sins, or at least to repent and turn to Him." He also hopes that transcendent forces will enable us to escape from disability.

3.1.2. Ancient Judaism

The Torah, one of the most important documents of ancient Jewish life, not only lays down as a basic rule for sacrifice that only animals without blemish may be sacrificed (Leviticus 22:21), but there is much more to the priests' duties: "For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is a hunchback or a dwarf, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles." (Leviticus 21:17-20). Even worse was the case of those who were disabled by one of the widespread diseases of the time: leprosy, the leper – for if someone was "diagnosed" with leprosy, it was considered a "providential punishment" for slander, and the infected person, as an unclean person, had to live outside the camp from then on. After his eventual recovery, he could return to the community after certain rituals.

The question is whether it was the disdain and severe prejudice against the disabled persons that isolated them and excluded them from the community. In addition to the transcendent context and the imperative character, the text also contains the hidden meaning that a person with a disability, marginalised, excluded, and in difficulty, has the right to live a human life on an equal footing with the rest of society. This is the basis for the obligation to provide assistance.

3.1.3. Ancient Egypt

The people of ancient Egypt did not "revere" the dwarf man as a fairground entertainer at all, as so many other cultures did, but rather associated him or her with positive human and divine qualities. The dwarf Khnumhotep from the 22nd-21st centuries BC, during the reign of the 6th Dynasty, may have been a slave-supervisor, i.e. he did not live on the margins of society, and was entrusted with an important position.

Seneb, the dwarf, in a group of statues from the 13th century BC, is seated with his wife in a dwarf's seat – in a scribe's garb – in the circle of his family, with their two small but not dwarf-sized children standing in front of them (Figure 3.).

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[3] The original meaning of the word is deformed figure; prodigy, beast (arcanum.com).

Figure 3. Seneb, the dwarf, with his wife in a dwarf's seat in the circle of his family

Source: https://egymonuments.gov.eg

Seneb is interesting not only from a social rehabilitation point of view, because of his disability, which is quite severe by today's standards, and not only because he married and had children, but also from an occupational rehabilitation point of view: he was the head of the Pharaoh's huge textile mill, which means that he was an important and respected figure in the society of his time, and held many titles, including priesthood. Seneb received various gifts from the emperor not only for his loyalty. The reason for the depiction found in the tomb is primarily to embody his "ka-soul".

The dwarf Pataikos[4], whose figures which were mainly used as amulets, was also often depicted as a deity protecting against dangerous animals. The Phoenicians, who also used Pataikos as amulets, had small statues like these pinned to the bows of their ships.

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[4] Pataikos was worshipped as a protective deity in Egypt during the Old Kingdom, circa 2686-2160 BC, and in amulet form he was often seen in the New Kingdom, circa 1550-1069 BC, to protect against the evil forces of nature. Despite their small stature, Pataikos (and related deities) are often depicted as subduing violent forces of nature – most often Pataikos often stepping on and grabbing crocodiles, snakes and scorpions. Patron deities such as the Pataikos amulets were used by their wearers to ward off evil that caused illness, injury or misfortune. Pataikos is believed to be a manifestation or son of Ptah, the god of craftsmen. According to the writings of the Greek historian Herodotus, Ptah was depicted in the form of a dwarf, and the name he coined, "Pataikos", literally means "little Ptah". Dwarves often worked in workshops as craftsmen, as Egyptian tomb scenes attest (archaeologicalmuseum.jhu.edu).

Figure 4. The figure of dwarf Pataikos

Source: https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/4115

3.1.4. The Ancient Greeks

In the ancient Greek world, health was at the top of the hierarchy of values, with health and wholeness being the ideals of the time, with no sharp distinction between health of body and soul (bbc.com). For the ancient Greeks, a beautiful body was considered to be direct evidence of having a beautiful mind: anyone considered beautiful was automatically a good person, and the Greeks actually had a word for this: "Kaloskagathos", which meant gorgeous to look at, insinuating a good person. This is a concept that we still follow, consciously or subconsciously, today. Villains portrayed in film and television tend to be society's view of "ugly" whereas the hero of the film is generally considered "beautiful" (www.eternalgoddess.co.uk).

Figure 5. The Artemisian Bronze, c. 460

Source: www.eternalgoddess.co.uk

The art of the period also accurately recorded life situations and activities that carried the imminent possibility of serious and permanent physical injury, but there were many ways of becoming disabled in Hellas other than hard physical labour: it was war in the first place. In Sparta, a warrior who was seriously injured in battle was held in public esteem and respect. It was here, however, that the well-known (infamous) tradition, which is the opposite of institutional support for children born with disabilities, existed. As Plato mentions: "... those who... are born crippled shall be put away in an inaccessible, secret place, according to the order and manner of the place" (State 460c) – but Aristotle did not disapprove this cruel practice, either: "... no freak-born child should be brought up..." (Politics 1335b). The contradiction is resolved by the fact that Greek society of the time did not consider a handicapped infant to be truly human, i.e. the permanent exclusion (i.e. killing) of a handicapped infant from society was not, according to the moral norms of the time, seen as taking a human life.

An important aspect of the relationship to disability in Greek culture of the time was that physical disability was almost never automatically associated with an inferior character. In fact, there was an unadulterated Greek hero who, despite his severe, congenital physical disability, was a full-fledged citizen of mythology and dazzled both god and man with his smithery: he was Hephaestus – albeit his disability was the result of (mainly) divine punishment: another example of the seemingly eternal human fascination with the derivation of disability from divine punishment in Greek thought.

3.1.5. Ancient Rome

Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis, a satirist widely known in Rome in the mid-first century, is the author of the oft-quoted saying: "a sound mind in a sound body". Although at first reading this may imply that only in a healthy body can the soul be healthy, that is, someone with a physical disability may also have defects of character, in fact there is no evidence to suggest that Roman culture was clearly anti-disabled. (The original quotation from Iuvenalis also suggests this out of context; if we read the whole of the invocation to the deities, from which these few words have become a catchphrase derive, we would not even think that he was speaking against physical disability.) And although there is a line from Virgil: "Virtue appears peculiarly graceful when associated with beauty" (Gratior est pulchro veniens a corpore virtus: Aeneid, v. 344), this too is more a praise of beauty and harmony than a sign of the anti-disability attitude of Roman culture.

3.1.6. The Middle Ages

Perhaps the most interesting and exciting period of history in terms of societies' perceptions of disability is the Middle Ages (although only posterity is likely to find this interesting and exciting, as those who lived with a disability in the medieval centuries would probably have had a very different opinion on the subject). Being centuries, even millennia, closer to the present, we are likely to have considerably more information about the social perception of people with disabilities, so the section on the Middle Ages and modern times may be slightly more detailed than the section on antiquity.

In the Middle Ages, many of the beliefs mentioned earlier were reinforced, and the people of that age preferred to populate their immediate environment with miraculous creatures – devils, witches, werewolves – even more than the people of our own time – and being born with a disability was no surprise to them. And if the good, the beautiful, came from God, then behind the not beautiful, or even "deformed", medieval man suspected evil otherworldly forces or God's punishment. In Dante's Divine Comedy, an excellent exposition of the medieval worldview and thinking, the punishment for a serious lack of character in this world is physical disability, often mutilation, in hell. Mutilation is a severe form of physical disability. (In antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and even in modern times, certain capital sins were often punished by the justice system with mutilation.)

In Europe, the influence of Judeo-Christian culture in the Middle Ages brought the poor, the fallen and the disabled much more into the spotlight than before, with rather ambivalent attitudes: caring for them was a paramount moral duty, but disability was still seen as a punitive action of Providence. It is also necessary to care for the disabled, to keep them in their vulnerable position – in other words, in this age, we cannot talk about the social integration and inclusion of people with disabilities. We know from the research of the French thinker Michel Foucault that excommunication from society, exclusion in the modernising world, only began in the mid-1600s (at least in Europe, because Marco Polo had already described an institution for the rehabilitation of disabled in the 13th century in China). In 1656, a hospital was established in Paris (Hôpital général de Paris, i.e. General Hospital of Paris), where thousands of homeless people, vagrants, beggars, "idlers" and, of course, "fools", i.e. people with mental disabilities, were confined (Winance et al., 2007). The earlier ages had been able to live with them, but in the modern age, with increasing urbanisation and the continuing

development of the science of medicine, and partly as a consequence of this, the social bonds seemed to weaken as the number of human beings continued to grow.

The practices used to "cure" those with disabilities, especially mental ones, seem rather stomach-turning today. One of these methods was "trephining", where one would be treated by receiving a hole in their skull (or trephine) so that the evil spirits can leave their head. This method had already been used in the ancient times and skulls have shown us that the patients healed from these; later on down the road of time these trephining methods were used to relieve migraines as well as skull fractures.

During the Early Medieval Ages people still believed that the fluids were the ones that caused mental illness, so, in order to bring balance back to the body, extracting blood was a common medical treatment, and any form of bleeding was used, including extracting it from the forehead, tapping the hemorrhoidal veins or the head.

A unique form of shock treatment was used during the medieval ages where the mentally ill would be thrown into cold waters so that the shock would "bring them to their senses", or tied up closely so that they could hardly move (Figure 6.).

Figure 6. A look inside Bedlam asylum

Source: https://about-history.com/

Negative prejudices against people with disabilities stemmed partly from society's perception of disability not in terms of its actual characteristics, but in a highly coloured form, spread by word of mouth. The Industrial Revolution had consequences in this area too, and in addition

to the less widespread employment of women and children, we can already find a specific form of occupational rehabilitation in England in the 1690s: there were manufactories employing people with intellectual disabilities – but the aim was by no means the same as today's rehabilitation and equal opportunities objectives, and far from being noble, it was more prosaic: to preserve the production secrets of the manufactory.

3.1.7. The New Age

Organised care for mentally handicapped children only began in the modern era, in the mid-1700s, with the work of Jacob Rodrigues Pereire of Spain, and then continued by Jean Marc Gaspard Itard. But perhaps the greatest figure of the early days was the Swiss Johann Jacob Guggenbühl, founder of the first institute, the Abendberg. Both Itard and Guggenbühl worked in a very hostile and provocative social climate. The latter had the great merit of consistently educating the "souls" entrusted to his care in a healthy and natural atmosphere close to nature. The first institute in the Western Hemisphere was founded by Samuel Gridley Howe in Massachusetts.

Although the care of the handicapped had already been formulated in the Middle Ages, it only became a legal obligation with the French Constitution of 1793, Article 21 of which made it a constitutional rule: "Public assistance is a sacred debt. Society owes subsistence to unfortunate citizens, either by obtaining work for them or by providing means of existence to those who are unable to work." (https://alphahistory.com) These are in fact the two conditions that are still essential for the development of rehabilitation in the modern sense: the disabled person is at the centre of the rehabilitation process; and society must assume constitutional responsibility for disabled citizens (Hegedüs et al., 2009, p. 210).

But the core of rehabilitation work was still care. The breakthrough came in the 20th century, only – brought about by the two world wars of the century: the first saw an unprecedented increase in the number of people with disabilities, which led to the establishment of the disability cooperative movement in Poland, the creation of large care institutions in several countries and the development of group employment in response to the massive demand, particularly in those countries that had suffered the greatest losses in the war. (In the relatively less affected United States and Canada, institutions and financial support for the blind were already in existence in the 1910s and 1920s.)

The first rehabilitation law was enacted in the United States in 1919, and the states had a federal rehabilitation programme as early as in the 1920s. Even in the Netherlands, which did not participate in the first great war, the first legislation was not enacted until 1919, under which disability pensions were paid in the event of temporary or permanent incapacity, but generally after 52 weeks. After the Second World War, in 1945, a centre for the rehabilitation of war-wounded was set up, which later served as a model for the establishment of similar institutions for the care of civilians.

According to the definition by the United Nations, "The term 'rehabilitation' refers to a process aimed at enabling persons with disabilities to reach and maintain their optimal physical, sensory, intellectual, psychiatric and/or social functional levels, thus providing them with the tools to change their lives towards a higher level of independence. Rehabilitation may include measures to provide and/or restore functions, or compensate for the loss or absence of a function or for a functional limitation. The rehabilitation process does not involve initial

medical care. It includes a wide range of measures and activities from more basic and general rehabilitation to goal-oriented activities, for instance vocational rehabilitation." (UN 1993 Standard Rules, Preamble 23)

Unfortunately, the 1930s and 1940s also brought a process in the opposite direction; it happened in Germany, when the goal was definitely not the rehabilitation of people with disabilities, the creation of a quality of life equal to that of their non-disabled counterparts, but the systematic destruction of their right to exist and their right to life, which rose to the level of state policy. In addition to the idea of exterminating the Jews, from 1933 onwards in Germany more and more groups of people were condemned to sterilisation and death, including the disabled, partly "justified" by economic considerations, and in the ideology (also driven by eugenics) by the disregard for lives that were considered worthless. The forced sterilisation of people with hereditary diseases, the organised killing of children born with severe mental and physical disabilities, and of adults with mental illnesses, intellectual disabilities and incapacity for work, was set in motion.

Apart from this dark chapter, the 20th century also brought many positive achievements for people with disabilities: the process of rehabilitation moved from the original focus on care and assistance to one of self-sufficiency, independence, integration and inclusion. Two movements are worth mentioning here: the Independent Living Movement and the movement for deinstitutionalisation by people with intellectual disabilities and their parents.

3.2. Progressive movements

3.2.1. The Independent Living Movement

Independent living is the right of people with disabilities to self-determination; a philosophy, approach and practice of living; and an opportunity to live an equivalent life. But to do this, they must first be empowered to want independent living and then they will act to achieve it. The Independent Living Movement is therefore primarily a movement for people with severe disabilities who cannot live without personal assistance. The disabled person must have access to correct and complete information in order to be able to make choices and decisions, and to be in a position to buy the services of their choice. It is society's responsibility to create the conditions for this.

The growing civil rights movement of the 1960s also led to initiatives among people with disabilities to assert their rights more fully. At the University of California, Berkeley, four severely disabled young men wanted to study, but their access to buildings and dormitories was almost impossible, so they were accommodated in the university hospital. One of them, who was living with a respirator, fought against his isolated, foster care situation. He wanted to live independently with personal assistants, on an equal footing with his fellow students. In course of time, many people joined the fight, and it became clear that tens of thousands of people suffered from exclusionary discrimination because of their vulnerability, from paternalistic care by family and residential institutions across the United States. Thus began the civil rights movement that spread across America, later to Europe and then the world as the Independent Living Movement (Dejong, 1979).

The leaders of the Movement have set up Independent Living Centres, where they carry out the following activities to this day:

- organising a personal assistance service with public funding;
- advice and support for fellow travellers;
- fight for equal rights against discrimination through demonstrations, blockades of buildings, transport, etc.;
- fight for integrated education, employment, equal pay;
- organising meetings and forums with city leaders and politicians (Hutchison & Pedlar, 1999).

After 20 years of struggle, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1993, which states that people with disabilities are citizens with full rights and that discrimination against them because of their disability is against the law. Today there are hundreds of Independent Living Centres in the US and all over the world (https://www.independentliving.org). The movement is about people with disabilities taking control of their lives, making decisions for which they are responsible, because they know best what they need and what is best for them (whereas in the past, it was always professionals or family members who made decisions for them, believing that they were not capable of thinking for themselves – although people with disabilities are capable of living independently, of having control over their lives). Self-determined, independent living means that we decide when, where and from whom we get the personal help that we need because of our disability. We set our own priorities and organise our own lives. This minimises dependency and vulnerability.

The role of society is to ensure equal participation in all aspects of life through legislation, guaranteeing the right to housing, health care, assistive devices, personal assistance, mobility, communication, access to information, education, training, employment, political activity, education, etc.

Independent living is very often confused with and equated to self-sufficiency, which is the goal of rehabilitation, but is far from being the same as independent living. Independent living for people with disabilities has moved away from the traditional rehabilitation approach, which tries to adapt the person to an environment that is not designed for them. They argue that the environment must be adapted to the needs of the disabled person, which is known to be less a matter of money and more a matter of attention[5].

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[5] https://onalloelet.hu/az-onallo-elet-filozofiaja

Figure 7: An Independent Living Centre in the United Kingdom

Source: https://www.lbhf.gov.uk

3.2.2. The movement for deinstitutionalisation

The movement of people with intellectual disabilities and their parents for deinstitutionalisation means the dismantling of large, closed institutions and the creation of smaller, human-scale, humane living environments that are more conducive to human rights. The European Parliament's Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development unanimously adopted a draft resolution and a draft recommendation to European governments (European Parliament, 2022) and stressed that the work of the UN Convention on Disability should be the guiding principle. The Commission pointed out that the UN has clearly moved towards a human rights-based approach to disability, which emphasises equality and inclusion. It recommends the gradual repeal of laws allowing institutionalisation of people with disabilities, as well as mental health legislation allowing for treatment without consent and detention based on impairment.

Governments should develop well-funded strategies, with clear timeframes and benchmarks, to effectively transition people with disabilities to independent living. "People with disabilities are often assumed to be unable to live independently. This is rooted in widespread misconceptions, including that people with disabilities are not capable of making good independent decisions and that they need institutionalised 'special care'." ... "In many cases, cultural and religious beliefs may also fuel this stigma, as well as the historical influence of the eugenics movement. For too long, these arguments have been used to wrongfully deprive people with disabilities of their freedom and to segregate them from the rest of the community by placing them in institutions." – the Commission pointed out.

In this respect, the Commission pointed out in its resolution that action must be taken to combat the culture of institutionalisation that results in the social isolation and segregation of people with disabilities, including at home or in the family, preventing them from interacting and being included in society.

A systemic approach to the deinstitutionalisation process is needed to achieve good results. The goal is not the mere deinstitutionalisation of people with disabilities, but an effective transition to independent living. This would be in line with Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment No. 5 (2017) on independent living and community inclusion, and the forthcoming guidelines on the deinstitutionalisation of persons with disabilities, including in extreme situations.

The transformation of residential institutional services is just one element of a wide range of changes in areas such as health care, rehabilitation, support services, education and employment, and it also has an important role to play in the social perception of disability. Simply moving individuals to smaller institutions, community homes or other congregate settings are not sufficient, nor are they consistent with international legal standards[6].

As a result of these two movements, and their move from national to international frameworks, new international laws have been created and the attitude towards people with disabilities has changed fundamentally throughout the modern world, with an emphasis on the responsibility of society as a whole.

Half a century ago, in 1973, the United States Congress passed a rehabilitation law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with a qualifying disability. As discrimination did not significantly decrease despite the enactment of this legislation, a new wave of legislation in this area was introduced in the US in the mid-1980s. On 9 December 1975, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which summarises in 13 points the main rights they enjoy (from their right to human dignity, civil and political rights, protection against all forms of exploitation, the right to live in a family).

Following the proclamation of the "Year of Disabled Persons" in the early 1980s, the United Nations adopted the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in the first half of the 1990s. Although they do not have binding legal force, adherence to the Standard Rules represents a strong moral and political commitment by governments to ensure equal rights for persons with disabilities. The Standard Rules summarise human rights in a total of 22 points, divided into four broad chapters covering all aspects of the lives of persons with disabilities. These are: basic conditions for ensuring equal participation; target areas for equal participation; implementation measures; and monitoring tools. The basic conditions for ensuring equal participation include awareness-raising, health care, rehabilitation and support services, while the eight target areas for equal participation are accessibility, education, employment, income maintenance and social security, family life and personal integrity, culture, recreation and sport, and religion[7].

To briefly summarise the history of social integration and equal opportunities for people with disabilities, the so-called "human approach", the transcendental element, the sacrality, was the dominant approach for a long time. The rights of people with disabilities were, if not

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[6] https://emberesszabadsag.hu

[7] https://www.un.org

explicitly, recognised in the early days, but they were accompanied, for reasons that varied from age to age, by the recurrence of exclusion, marginalisation or, in their most extreme form, the desire to destroy. By the end of the 20th century, as the disability movements developed, there was a marked shift in societies, affecting the daily lives of people with disabilities, their quality of life and, most importantly for the topic of this book, their ability to travel. There has been a shift from the former, essentially paternalistic attitude, defined by sacrality and transcendence, which later became regretful and contemptuous, treating the issue as a medical problem, to a human rights approach and the need to achieve equal opportunities.

3.3. Evolution of models of disability

Historical changes in the situation of people with disabilities are reflected in the evolution of disability models. Many theoretical concepts have been presented in the literature (Buhalis & Darcy 2011; Forrester & Davis 2011; Zajadacz, 2015), from ethical, through medical, social and economic to geographical model of disability.

In the ethical model (Goffman, 1963; Imrie, 1997), disability was treated as a stigma (also as a punishment for offenses). In turn, the medical model (Parsons, 1951; Hahn, 1986; Bickenbach, 1993; ICF, 2002; Gaines, 2004) treats disability as functional loss, as a problem within the individual that requires medical intervention or "fixing". Critiques of this model highlight its tendency to pathologize disability and overlook social and environmental factors (Shakespeare, 2013). On the back of criticism of the medical model, the social model of disability was developed. It shifts the focus from individual impairments to the barriers created by society that prevent full participation and inclusion of people with disabilities. Disability is seen as a social construct resulting from societal norms, attitudes, and physical or attitudinal barriers. This model emphasises the need for social change and the removal of barriers to enable full inclusion and participation (Oliver, 1990; Barnes & Mercer, 2010).

In turn, the economic model of disability is based on conclusions emerging from the functioning of the medical model and social model. This concept presents disability in the light of diverse needs generating demand on the tourism market (Forrester & Davis, 2011). The needs of people with disabilities and the elderly are perceived in terms of segmentation and personalisation in the tourist services. This model also emphasises that full and equal participation in social life for people with disabilities equates with the ability to perform socially valued roles, particularly in the field of work (Geue, 2023).

The geographical (geospatial) model of disability applies experience gathered to date (connected to the medical model and social model) and focuses mainly on the interrelation between people with disabilities and geographical space (Zajadacz, 2015). Geographers connect the nature of factors causing disability (disabling nature) both with social and spatial aspects of the human environment, they promote solutions which are more "inclusive", and which provide access to sites and the full scope of life within society taking different degrees and types of disability into consideration. The geographical model also aims to remove social "tensions" related to the social model which treats disability as a process of social exclusion (Chouinard et al., 2010). It assumes that limited ability is caused by both individual conditions (related to specific dysfunctions) and factors in the surrounding physical and social environment, which together create the restrictions experienced by people with disabilities in their interaction with the environment. The geographical model has accepted a significant paradigm in that it treats needs connected to various types and degrees of disability not as

"special" but as one of many which occur in contemporary society. The central postulate is not to concentrate on "disabilities", but to focus on various social needs and adapt the geographical environment (social, as well as physical) accordingly (Imrie, 2012; Zajadacz, 2014).

A review of the evolution of disability models offers insights into the historical development, theoretical frameworks, and practical applications of each model within disability studies and related fields. It also refers to the evolution of attitudes and social activities related to the transition from exclusion through integration to inclusion of people with disabilities (Figure 8.).

Figure 8. Models of social exclusion, integration and inclusion of people with disabilities

Exlusion   Integration   Inclusion
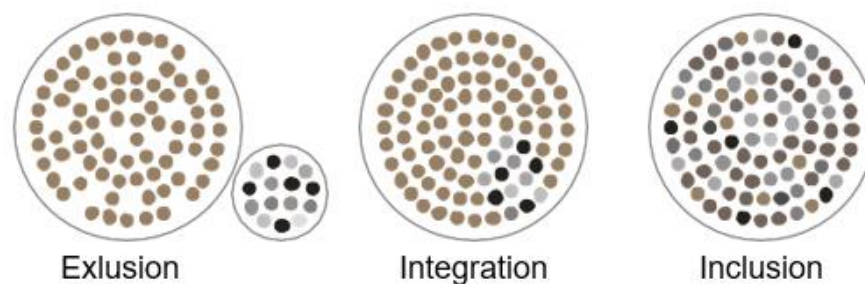
Source: Schrader (2012)

Exclusion refers to the process of actively keeping individuals or groups out of certain social, political, or economic activities, opportunities, or spaces. In practice it means the following: systematic denial of access or participation, lack of accommodation for diverse needs or backgrounds; social, economic, or political marginalisation. Integration involves incorporating individuals or groups with diverse backgrounds or characteristics into existing systems, structures, or environments. This process involves (1) focus on assimilating individuals into mainstream settings, (2) limited modifications or accommodations to existing systems, (3) emphasis on bringing diverse individuals together without necessarily addressing underlying barriers. Inclusion is a more comprehensive approach that aims to create environments where all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or characteristics, are valued, respected, and fully participating members of society. Characteristic features of inclusion include emphasis on removing barriers and creating equitable opportunities for all, (2) recognition and celebration of diversity and individual differences, (3) active efforts to ensure that everyone's needs are met and that all voices are heard. In summary, exclusion involves actively preventing individuals or groups from participation, integration means incorporating diverse individuals into existing systems without necessarily addressing underlying barriers, while inclusion focuses on creating environments that are accessible, equitable, and welcoming to all. Inclusion goes beyond mere presence or assimilation, striving for meaningful participation, belonging, and empowerment for everyone.

4. Legal regulation and policy documents on accessibility and accessible tourism at international level and in the countries participating in the project

The main aim of accessibility legislation is to promote equal opportunities and ensure equal participation for all, regardless of the conditions of people with disabilities. Legal regulation has a huge role to play in creating good and ethical practice. In our opinion, the legislation on disability and accessible tourism is basically adequate in the countries concerned; the basic legislation on this issue has been in place for the last three decades and harmonisation has taken place in this area during the process of accession to the European Union. The problems lie more in the practical implementation of the legal provisions. In this short summary chapter, we aim to provide an overview of the most important international documents influencing the legislation on accessible tourism in the respective countries.

In civilised societies, it goes without saying that any direct or indirect discrimination against minorities (be it racial, ethnic, religious, age, language, gender, sexual orientation) in any area of life is prohibited, including, by analogy, the right to travel and the prohibition of discrimination of participation in tourism. Broadening the scope of disadvantaged groups, those who, because of any physical or mental disability, are unable to travel without assistance, or are only able with difficulty, can be considered a special minority (definitely in the sense, unfortunately, that they often suffer discrimination, see Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030). Disability can take many forms. "We can include not only people with reduced mobility, visual and hearing impairments, intellectual disabilities, but also those with other conditions that have a long-term impact on their quality of life, such as allergies." (Zsarnóczky, 2018:39) Based on WHO estimates, the UNWTO puts the number of people affected by accessible tourism at 1 billion (UNWTO, 2016). We can be affected at any time, just think about our ageing and the fact that an accident can make someone temporarily or permanently disabled.

Today, the problem is particularly acute due to the ageing of societies. Special needs in older age are common to almost everyone, but there are also many other life situations that may give rise to special needs: e.g. people undergoing rehabilitation after an accident, families with young children (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). Today, it is fortunately accepted that it is our human, ethical, moral and legal duty to facilitate travel for people with disabilities and to provide the necessary physical conditions. The fact that tourism for people with disabilities is also an important economic issue cannot be neglected, as they are currently a largely unexploited niche segment of the tourism market, although there have been several positive counter-examples in recent times (Buhalis et al., 2012).

Looking at the national legislations in the areas of accessibility, people with disabilities, and equal treatment, there are hundreds of laws in all the countries concerned that deal to a lesser or greater extent, directly or indirectly, with people with disabilities. An analysis of the legislation shows that a paradigm shift has taken place since the 1990s, (also) due to the more intensive focus on human rights. This shift in approach is based on the idea that people with disabilities should not be hidden or segregated from other people, but should be given the same opportunities as able-bodied people, thus promoting social inclusion. In this context, their social care has been transformed, with personalised services and better living conditions available to them.

The documents highlighted in the list below have a significant impact on the lives of people with disabilities and help to create equal access. The fact that conventions and laws on disability rights exist at global, European and national level is very important. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the United Nations in 2006 and proclaimed in the countries concerned, obliges States Parties to ensure access for persons with disabilities to sport, recreation and tourism facilities and services. Based on the European Commission's paper made in 2010, the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: a renewed commitment to a barrier-free Europe, a new and strengthened Disability Rights Strategy (2021-2030) has been prepared, building on the achievements of the previous ten years and offering solutions to the challenges ahead.

4.1. General introduction to legal regulation and policy documents on accessible tourism at international level

According to the WHO's latest estimate 1.3 billion people on Earth, 16% of the total global population, have a disability, and this number is growing (https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health). The question of whether people with disabilities will have access to a supportive environment that takes their specific needs into account throughout their lives, or whether they will have to suffer some form of disability, is therefore a very important one.

Accessibility itself, as a complex term, naturally covers a number of areas, the main themes of which can be outlined as follows:

- Built environment: accessibility of the built environment includes the appropriate design and construction of buildings, public spaces and infrastructure to ensure that they are easily accessible to people with disabilities. This may include: barrier-free entrances, ramps, lifts or lifts instead of stairs, doors and corridors of appropriate width, etc.
- Transport: accessible transport means that transport infrastructure is accessible and adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. This can include appropriate vehicles, accessible stops, flat access, and easy access to information for people with disabilities.
- Digital accessibility: information, websites and applications on the internet and electronic devices must be made accessible for people with different disabilities. This includes the appropriate design of websites and applications to allow, for example, the use of screen readers, easy navigation and other assistive devices.
- Communication and information: in this area of accessibility, it is important that information and communication are easy to understand and accessible for people with disabilities. This includes the use of easy-to-read fonts or, for example, the appropriate preparation of texts and documents for reading aloud.
- Services and administration: in this area of accessibility, public and private services and administration should be designed to be accessible and usable by people with disabilities. This means, for example, providing appropriate means of communication and accessible customer services.
- Education and employment: accessibility is a priority in education and in the workplace. Educational institutions must comply with accessibility standards and ensure equal access to education for people with disabilities. In addition, accessibility

in the workplace must be a priority to ensure that people with disabilities have the opportunity to work and develop their careers.

These are therefore the most important areas where the development of a legislative environment is essential in the field of complex accessibility regulation, with the main aim of promoting equal opportunities and ensuring equal participation for all, regardless of their disability status (Gonda & Raffay, 2021; Farkas & Petykó, 2019, 2020; Farkas et al., 2022a).

Legal regulation has a huge role to play in creating good and ethical practice (Farkas et al., 2022b). In our opinion, the legal regulation of disability and accessible tourism in Hungary is basically adequate; the basic legislation on this issue has been adopted over the last 3 decades and the harmonisation of legislation in this field has been achieved during the accession process to the European Union. The problem is rather the practical implementation of the legal provisions. In our short summary, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the most important relevant Hungarian legislation.

4.2. Presentation of the global context of the relevant related legislation

Among the legal regulations concerning this issue, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the United Nations in 2006 and also promulgated in Hungary, is worth highlighting, which obliges the States Parties to ensure access for persons with disabilities to sports, recreational and tourist facilities and services (Act XCII of 2007).

This issue can of course affect any member of society, just think of our ageing population, which is why the image of ageing societies gives the problem a special weight today. Special needs in old age are common to practically everyone, but there are also many other life situations which may give rise to special needs: e.g. people undergoing rehabilitation after an accident, families with young children, etc.

In addition to the above, the UNWTO, the United Nations World Tourism Organization, is committed to promoting accessible tourism, and has dedicated the 2016 World Tourism Day to this theme. The organisation has made a number of recommendations and published a handbook on the issue (UNWTO, 2016).

As a further milestone in this field, the European Parliament resolution of 29 October 2015 on new challenges and visions for the promotion of tourism in Europe stresses the importance of developing sustainable, responsible and accessible tourism; the principle of "tourism for all"; and that full accessibility and affordability of tourism is a key element for the sustainability of the sector. The resolution recommends that Member States develop a Europe-wide, uniform and transparent labelling scheme for accessible offers and make accessibility a criterion for support in the context of economic support programmes for the tourism sector (European Parliament resolution of 29 October 2015 on new challenges and ideas for promoting European tourism https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0391_HU.html).

4.2.1. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD) in 2006 was a breakthrough in setting minimum standards for the rights of persons with disabilities. The Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006 and entered into force in 2008. It was ratified by the European Union in 2010 and by 2015 had been ratified by a total of 156 states. The CRPD is the latest in a line of UN human rights declarations that begins with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The guiding principles are as follows: respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, including freedom to make one's own decisions, non-discrimination, full and effective social participation and inclusion, equal opportunities and accessibility.

The general idea of the CRPD is to integrate people with disabilities into society and communities, rather than creating special rules and institutions. The CRPD aims to stimulate profound changes and social progress in many areas of society, such as schools, the workplace and public transport (Steinert et al., 2016). The preamble of the Convention emphasises the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings, their equal and inalienable rights and that all rights and freedoms should be enjoyed by all, without discrimination of any kind. The Convention recognises that disability is a changing concept and that disability is the result of the interaction between persons with disabilities and attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent them from participating fully and effectively in society, on an equal basis with others (i.e. someone who is disabled in one country because of their disability and is prevented from moving and living a full and dignified human life may be barrier-free in another country with the same problems – this may even be an incentive to travel) It also recognises the diversity of people with disabilities, which, in better cases, does not stop at technical accessibility provided with ramps.

The preamble to the Convention also points out that persons with disabilities continue to face barriers to their equal participation in society and that discrimination against anyone on the basis of disability is violation of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person. The document also emphasises that persons with disabilities can make a significant contribution to the overall well-being and diversity of their communities, that promoting their full participation enhances their sense of belonging to society and that it leads to significant progress in the human, social and economic development of society and the eradication of poverty.

The document recognises the importance of the individual autonomy and independence of persons with disabilities, including the freedom to make their own decisions (including to travel as freely as possible) and the importance of actively involving persons with disabilities in decision-making processes regarding programmes and policies, especially those that directly affect them (it is not good when "able-bodied" people design travel packages and programmes for them, the solution is to make all experiences, attractions, physical facilities and services accessible to the extent that allows their participation). Since it is an unfortunate fact that the majority of persons with disabilities live in unfavourable financial conditions, the adverse impact of poverty on persons with disabilities must be addressed – including, for example, financial support for travel for persons whose financial means do not allow it. The Convention also recognises the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, health and education, and information and communication, in order to enable persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Article 30, paragraph 5 of the Convention (Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport) already deals specifically with the promotion of the participation of persons with disabilities in tourism:

"With a view to enabling persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:

a) To encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels;

(b) To ensure that persons with disabilities have an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources;

c) To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues;

(d) To ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system;

e) To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to services from those involved in the organization of recreational, tourism, leisure and sporting activities." (https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities)

In paragraph 2 of the same article, the document mentions the right of persons with disabilities to participate in cultural life on an equal basis with others, which has many tourism relevance: all necessary measures must be taken to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to venues for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and travel agencies, and, where possible, to monuments and major national cultural sites.

The importance of travel and the need to support it is indirectly mentioned in several places:

Article 4, General obligations: States Parties undertake to undertake or promote research and development of universally designed goods, services, devices and facilities that meet the special needs of persons with disabilities with the least possible modification and financial expenditure, facilitating their usability and use, and to promote universal design in the development of standards and guidelines; research and development of new technologies suitable for persons with disabilities, including information and communication technologies, to promote the availability and use of transport/mobility equipment, appliances and assistive devices, giving priority to technologies that are affordable; and the provision of accessible information to persons with disabilities on transport equipment, appliances and assistive devices, including new technologies, as well as other forms of assistance, support services and other types of services.

Article 9, Accessibility: In order to enable persons with disabilities to lead independent lives and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, transport, information and communication (including information and communication technologies and systems), and other facilities and services that are publicly

available or accessible. Measures to identify and remove barriers and obstacles to access include, inter alia, buildings, roads, transport and other indoor and outdoor facilities; and information, communication and other services, including electronic services and emergency services. States Parties shall also take the necessary measures to develop, enforce and monitor the application of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open and available to the public.

The Convention also deals with general issues that affect travel, such as

- equality and non-discrimination: States Parties prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability and ensure equal and effective legal protection against discrimination in all areas for persons with disabilities;
- awareness-raising: States Parties undertake to take prompt, effective and appropriate measures to: a) raise awareness of persons with disabilities at the societal level, including the family, and promote respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities; b) combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices against persons with disabilities in all aspects of life;
- Article 20, Personal Mobility: States Parties shall, while ensuring to the maximum extent possible the independence of persons with disabilities, take effective measures to ensure personal mobility, including, inter alia, facilitating access of persons with disabilities to quality mobility supports, equipment, assistive technology and various forms of personal assistance and mediators, including making them available at affordable prices; and providing training on mobility-related skills for persons with disabilities and their professionals;
- Article 26, Habilitation and Rehabilitation: States Parties shall take all effective and necessary measures, including the provision of family assistance, to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy the fullest independence in all aspects of life.

Overall, the document is of crucial importance for the development of national practices on disability and accessible tourism. It represented a paradigm shift in the field and the principles and values it contains have since become a benchmark and reference point. The only noticeable shortcoming is that the Convention does not address the sensitisation of the "able-bodied" society (especially service providers), of people who live without disabilities.

4.2.2. An EU for Equality: a strategy for the rights of people with disabilities (2021-2030)

Both the EU and the Member States are party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is part of the EU legal order and obliges States Parties to protect the fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities. The EU strategy is the EU's main instrument to implement the requirements of the UN Convention and to ensure that Member States always bear it in mind. An estimated 87 million people in the EU live with disability. The European Parliament is working to create an inclusive society in which the rights of people with disabilities are adequately protected and in which there is no discrimination. To this end, in June 2020, the Parliament set out its priorities for a new disability strategy post-2020, building on the 2010-2020 strategy. In this, the main recommendations directly affecting travel and tourism are as follows:

- The rights of people with disabilities must be asserted in all areas and policies (including, of course, tourism);
- equal access to health care, employment, public transport and housing for people with disabilities;
- people with disabilities, their families and their organisations should take part in the dialogue and be part of the implementation process – in the field of tourism: it is not the majority of the society without disabilities and decision-makers who determine which tourism services can be provided, but all together, people affected and not affected.

To make further progress in ensuring the full participation of people with disabilities, the new and strengthened Disability Rights Strategy will also guide the work of Member States and EU institutions, building on the achievements of the past ten years and offering solutions to the challenges ahead. The Disability Rights Strategy aims to address the many challenges faced by people with disabilities. It aims to make progress in all areas of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, both at EU and Member State level, to ensure that people with disabilities in Europe, regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation should

- enjoy their human rights,
- have equal chances,
- have equal chances to participate in society and the economy,
- be able to decide where, how and with whom to live,
- be able to move around the EU, regardless of what support they need,
- no longer experience discrimination.

The new strategy outlines a number of priorities, including guaranteeing equal access to justice, education, culture, sport and tourism (while ensuring freedom of movement and residence and the ability to participate in the democratic process, a decent quality of life and independent living). Tourism is addressed in much more detail than the UN Convention in the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030). Specifically, travel and tourism are addressed in the document in the following form:

Equal access and non-discrimination: persons with disabilities have the right to protection from all forms of discrimination and violence, equal access to justice, education, culture, housing, leisure, recreation, sport and tourism, and equal opportunities and improved access to arts and culture, leisure, recreation, sport and tourism. Accessible and inclusive ... leisure, recreation and tourism are essential for full participation in society. They enhance well-being and provide opportunities for all, including people with disabilities, to develop and fulfil their potential. Accessible tourism for people with disabilities is key to supporting participation and socio-economic development. The Commission will strengthen the participation of people with disabilities in all these areas ... and will seek to make cultural heritage and all arts accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities through EU funding, for example through the Creative Europe programme.

The Commission is also preparing a study on the implementation of Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in order to support Member States in policies to increase participation and support for persons with disabilities in sport, culture and leisure activities; to partner with the International Paralympic Committee to promote inclusion

in sport and combat stereotypes; to continue to promote the development of accessible tourism, in particular for cities, through the "European Capital of Smart Tourism" award.

4.2.3. The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism and Accessibility

The 1999 UNWTO General Assembly in Santiago, Chile, adopted the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. In Article 3 of the Statutes of the World Tourism Organisation, recognised by the UN General Assembly, tourism is considered to be a factor that promotes universal respect for and assertion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of race, gender, language or religion (and we might add with certainty: physical or other disability or lack thereof). It implicitly mentions the implementation of accessible tourism among its objectives (the promotion of responsible, sustainable and inclusive tourism in the context of the right to leisure and travel). Moreover, the whole document reflects a spirit and values that are closely linked to the topics presented in this book. Unfortunately, the document is not yet widely known by those interested in tourism or those working in the sector, even though it was very progressive in its content when it was adopted and most of its objectives are still relevant today. The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism summarises in ten articles its recommendations for all tourism stakeholders. We will only touch on those that, in terms of content, strengthen the development of accessible tourism.

- *Article 1*: The role of tourism in mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies. This point sets out the expectations for the behaviour of tourists: respect the rights and customs of minorities and indigenous people; respect local laws and customs; respect the different lifestyles and tastes of the host area; be careful to respect the law; and avoid offensive behaviour.
- *Article 2*: Tourism as a means of individual and collective fulfilment. Tourism, the activity most often associated with recreation and leisure, sport, culture and nature, should be conceived and practised as a special means of individual and collective fulfilment; if practised with sufficient openness, tourism will be an irreplaceable factor for self-education, mutual tolerance and the knowledge of legitimate differences and diversity between peoples and cultures.
- In *Article 7* ("The right to tourism"), the Code already implicitly mentions persons with disabilities: the universal right to tourism should be seen as a corollary of the right to rest and leisure, including the right to enjoy the rights set out in Article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; social tourism should be developed with the support of the public authorities (as people with disabilities belong in a significantly higher proportion to the socially disadvantaged, even financially deprived group, this is particularly important for them); and family, youth and student tourism, as well as tourism for the elderly and people with disabilities, should be encouraged and facilitated.

4.2.4. Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics (2019)

In September 2019, the UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics was approved at the 23rd UNWTO General Assembly in St. Petersburg, following the proposal submitted by the World Committee on Tourism Ethics (WCTE) to the UNWTO General Assembly in 2015 to

transform the UNWTO's main policy document, the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, into an international convention, in order to make it more effective and more widely enforced. Subsequently, the UNWTO General Assembly (Medellín, Colombia, 12-17th September 2015) mandated the UNWTO's Secretary General to establish a special working group to examine the procedures and implications of the adoption of the Convention, in cooperation with the WCTE. The Working Group, composed of representatives of 36 UNWTO Member States, was established in early 2016 and examined the initial draft text of the Convention, and reviewed the document article by article and section by section. As part of its consultations, the Working Group agreed not to make any substantive changes to the nine principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, as they were adopted by the UNWTO General Assembly in 1999 and are widely known to the international tourism community. These nine articles have been included in the draft Convention on Tourism Ethics in the section on "Ethical Principles in Tourism" and form the backbone of the Convention. The UNWTO's Executive Council has endorsed the approach that it is unnecessary to change the nine principles of the Global Code of Ethics. The English version of the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics was then approved at the 22nd session of the General Assembly and adopted in all five official languages of the Organization at the 23rd session.

The Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics is built around the nine principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. A number of provisions have been adapted to incorporate these principles into the classical structure of the international treaty.

- The preamble of the text is inspired by the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, but updated to the current international context and purpose of the proposed Convention.
- The first part of the convention contains general provisions that put the text in context and outline the key terminology, purpose and scope of the convention, as well as the means of implementation.
- The second part deals with the ethical principles of tourism, which are the backbone of the Convention.
- The third part of the Convention refers to the mandate, composition and functioning of this subsidiary body of the General Assembly under the Convention (World Committee on Tourism Ethics).
- The last two sections of the convention contain the standard provisions for international treaties, namely the fourth section on the Conference of the States Parties and the fifth section containing the final provisions governing the procedures for signature, ratification, acceptance, approval and accession (source: UNWTO: Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility).

4.3. Regulation of accessible tourism at national level in the countries concerned – Croatia

In the Republic of Croatia, the Croatian Institute of Public Health is responsible for publishing statistical data on people with disabilities. According to the report published by this Institute (2023), there are 657,791 people with disabilities living in the Republic of Croatia, of whom 56.1% are male and 43.9% are female. People with disabilities make up about 17% of the total population of the Republic of Croatia. Most people with disabilities, namely 47.6%, belong to the 65+ age group, while 41.2% of people of working age are between 20 and 64 years old. Disabilities are also found among children aged 0-19 years, with a share of 11.1%. An overview

of the types of impairments that lead to disability or are comorbidity diagnoses related to a person's level of functional impairment, as well as an overview of functional ability impairments in relation to gender and age groups (both on 1 September 2022) are shown in Table 2. and 3.

Table 2. Overview of the types of impairments that cause disability or as comorbidity diagnoses relate to the degree of functional impairment of a person (state on 4 September 2023)

Type of disability	Total number	Share in the total number of people with disabilities	Prevalence / 10,000 inhabitants
Multiple disabilities	203,136	30,9	52
Damage to the locomotor system	188,623	28,7	49
Damage to other organs and organ systems, chromosomal diseases, congenital anomalies and rare diseases	180,750	27,5	47
Mental disabilities	160,165	24,4	41
Damage to the central nervous system	118,319	18,0	31
Speech-voice communication impairments	54,704	8,3	14
Intellectual disabilities	35,522	4,9	8
Visual impairments	21,728	3,3	6
Damage to the peripheral nervous system	18,933	2,9	5
Hearing impairments	18,923	2,9	5
Autism spectrum disorders	4,730	0,7	1
Deaf blindness	166	0,03	< 0,1

Source: Benjak (2023), p. 7

Table 3. Impairments of functional abilities - overview according to gender and age groups (state on 4 September 2023)

Type of disability	Gender	Age groups		
		0 - 19	20 - 64	65 +
Chronic diseases	f	922	33,605	44,854
	m	1,167	25,766	31,561
Mental illnesses	f	1,385	19,747	24,613
	m	3,394	43,169	28,853
Physical disability	f	853	8,175	14,786
	m	1,067	9,368	9,203
Voice, language and speech disorders	f	8,014	6,754	512
	m	14,249	12,176	706
Intellectual difficulties	f	2,700	8,729	1,121
	m	4,156	11,952	1,069
Chronic diseases in children	f	8,462	-	-
	m	10,344	-	-
Visual impairment	f	553	2,753	5,624
	m	694	4,024	4,648
Multiple disabilities	f	2,866	3,494	59
	m	5,115	6,212	47
Developmental disabilities that are not defined in the List of impairments	f	5,884	-	-
	m	10,110	-	-

Hearing impairment	f	511	2,105	2,912
	m	750	3,359	3,347
Autism spectrum disorders	f	608	244	10
	m	2,528	762	6
Deaf blindness	f	4	13	9
	m	2	14	7

Source: Benjak (2023), p. 9

In Croatia, Ministry of Tourism and Sports is in charge of creating policies for tourism development. Within the program Tourism for all, special emphasis and importance is given to accessible tourism, and Republic of Croatia has committed to take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities (among other things):

- have access to tourism services,

- have access to tourism destinations and

- have access to tourism activities (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, n.d.).

In order to achieve equality between children with difficulties and people with disabilities, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports has developed and implemented a series of measures to encourage the Croatian tourism market to enable people with disabilities to enjoy the tourism offer equally, but also to be integrated into the labour market. In order to remove access barriers and obstacles, the Ministry is cooperating with organisations representing people with disabilities, because only through synergetic action can we achieve the set goal – equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The Ministry has created 3 measures in 2 specific objectives (Improving the accessibility of the built environment and transport and Improving the accessibility of the content of public life and strengthening security in crisis situations) in the Action Plan of the National Strategy for Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities from 2021 to 2024, the adoption of which is underway.

As per legal status, in the Republic of Croatia, the rights of persons with disabilities are regulated by several laws, and they must be obeyed when planning the development of accessible tourism as well. The most important means of regulation are discussed below.

Law on the Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Republic of Croatia signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 30 March 2007. The aim of this Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

Law on Social Welfare

This Law regulates the activity of social welfare, principles of social welfare, financing of social welfare, rights and social services in the social welfare system and procedures for their realization, beneficiaries, content and method of performing social welfare activities, professional workers in social welfare, collections data, inspection and administrative supervision and other issues important for the activity of social welfare.

Law on Croatian Sign Language and Other Systems of Communication for Deaf and Deaf-Blind Persons in the Republic of Croatia

This Law stipulates the right of deaf and deaf-blind persons and other persons with communication difficulties to use, be informed and educated in Croatian sign language and other communication systems that meet their individual needs, with the aim of equal access to the social, economic and cultural environment and the equal realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. This Law also determines the beneficiaries of the right to use, information and education in Croatian sign language and other communication systems for deaf and deaf-blind people.

Law on movement of a blind person with the help of a guide dog

This Act regulates the right of a blind person with a guide dog to use means of transport and their free access to public places. A blind person with a guide dog has the right of access to public places such as: offices, hotels, restaurants, banks, post offices, theatres, concert halls, sports facilities, markets, shops, schools, universities, etc. (ch. 6, No. 1).

Declaration on the rights of persons with disabilities

Among many rights listed as part of this Declaration, the ones closely related to the development of accessible tourism are:

1. Discrimination against persons with disabilities manifests itself in the failure to take measures to remove barriers in the environment and in the general attitude of society or in the creation of new barriers that hinder the availability of services and the full participation of persons with disabilities in the activities of civil, cultural, economic, political and social life.

Accessibility is a measure or condition that enables all persons, including persons with disabilities, to utilise various resources (on a physical, visual, auditory and/or cognitive level). It should be achieved, where necessary, through design and adaptation that takes into account all forms of disability. Accessibility includes access to physical facilities, buildings and public transport, as well as access to information and communication, including information and communication technology and assistive devices.

2. A person with a disability has the right to equal participation in cultural, scientific, educational, political and other forms of social life.

3. A person with a disability has the right to an existence worthy of human dignity and to a standard of living adequate for the well-being of the person and his or her family, supplemented, if necessary, by means of social protection.

4. The Republic of Croatia will take the necessary measures to promote human rights and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities and to remove psychological, educational, family, cultural, social, professional, financial and architectural barriers to the full integration and participation of persons with disabilities in social, economic, cultural and political life under equal conditions.

5. In an effort to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and exercise their rights, the Republic of Croatia will promote the employment of persons with disabilities in regular labour relations, create the necessary fiscal measures, credit policies and incentive policies,

develop employment strategies for persons with disabilities and ensure the establishment of professional orientation, training, rehabilitation and employment services.

National strategy for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2017 – 2020

This National Strategy aims to ensure the most successful implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with the aim of making progress and further promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and children with developmental disabilities. The task of the National Strategy is to harmonise all policies in the field of promoting the rights of persons with disabilities with the standards achieved at global level, but also with all developments aimed at making all areas of life and activity open and accessible to persons with disabilities, while respecting the principles of universal design and reasonable adaptation.

National Social Tourism Development Program – Tourism for all

In view of the fact that social tourism is becoming increasingly important in modern tourism trends, the Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with the Institute for Tourism, has prepared this document that provides a strategic development framework for the activities and implementation of the activities of various relevant stakeholders in the field of social tourism. In addition, the document represents the operationalisation of part of the tourism policy measures planned in the Strategy for the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Croatia until 2020. The document defines the main guidelines for the development of social tourism in the Republic of Croatia until 2020 in close cooperation with all interested stakeholders and in accordance with the modern principles of participatory planning. This includes the definition of guidelines for: the vision of the development of social tourism, the goals of social tourism development, the main actors that are important in the context of social tourism development, key projects in the development of the social tourism offer and ways of promoting and financing models of social tourism development, with special attention to the possibility of financing projects in the field of social tourism from EU funds. Finally, the importance of the document also arises from the fact that it represents the operationalisation of the previously adopted Strategy for the Development of Croatian Tourism until 2020, in which social tourism is listed as one of the important tourism products that need to be further developed.

4.4. Regulation of accessible tourism at national level in the countries concerned – Hungary

An analytical presentation of the relevant Hungarian legislative environment

For a descriptive analysis of Hungarian legislation in the areas of accessibility, disability and equal treatment, we can rely heavily on the comprehensive collection of legislation of the National Association of Disabled People's Association (MEOSZ), Hungary's most important professional organisation in this field. An examination of the legislation shows that a paradigm shift has taken place since the 1990s, thanks (also) to the focus on human rights. This shift in approach is based on the idea that people with disabilities should not be hidden or excluded from others, but should be given the same opportunities as able-bodied people, thus promoting social inclusion. In this context, their social care has been transformed, with personalised services and better living conditions available to them.

In summary, 256 pieces of legislation currently in force in Hungary contain some level of accessibility-related subject matter, of which 39 can be considered relevant to the issue. The following list of legislation, in whole or in part, affects the lives of people with disabilities and promotes equal access:

- Fundamental Law (Accessibility is not specifically mentioned, but equal opportunities and social inclusion are)
- Act CLI of 2011 on the Constitutional Court
- Act CXI of 2011 on the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights
- Act CXXV of 2003 on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities
- Act XXVI of 1998 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Ensuring their Equal Opportunities (FOT.)
- Government Decree 141/2000 (VIII. 9.) on the rules for the classification and review of severe disability and the payment of disability allowance
- Parliamentary Decision 15/2015 (IV. 7.) on the National Disability Programme (2015-2025)
- 1653/2015 (IX. 14.) Government Decision on the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Disability Programme for the years 2015-2018
- Act CXCI of 2011 on benefits for persons with reduced capacity for work and amending certain Acts
- Government Decree 327/2011 (XII. 29.) on the procedural rules concerning benefits for persons with reduced capacity for work
- NEFMI (Ministry of National Resources) Decree No 7/2012 (II. 14.) on the detailed rules for complex certification
- Government Decree 74/2015 (III. 30.) on the National Rehabilitation and Social Office
- Act LXXX of 1997 on persons entitled to social security benefits and private pensions and on the coverage of these services
- Act LXXXI of 1997 on Social Insurance Pension Benefits
- Act LXXXIII of 1997 on Compulsory Health Insurance Benefits
- MT Decree No 83/1987 (XII. 27.) on invalidity benefits
- Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits
- Act LXXXIV of 1998 on Family Support
- Decree No 5/2003 (II. 19.) of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment of the Republic of Finland on illnesses and disabilities entitling to higher family allowances
- Act CLIV of 1997 on Health Care
- Act XCVIII of 2006 on the General Rules for the Safe and Economical Supply of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices and the Marketing of Medicinal Products
- Decree No 14/2007 (III. 14.) of the Ministry of Health on the inclusion of medical aids in social security benefits, ordering, distribution, repair and loan of medical aids with benefits
- Government Decree 12/2001 (I. 31.) on State aid for housing
- Act LXXXII of 1991 on Motor Vehicle Tax
- Government Decree No 102/2011 (VI. 29.) on transport benefits for persons with severe reduced mobility
- Government Decree 218/2003 (XII. 11.) on the parking card of persons with reduced mobility

- Joint Decree No 1/1975 (II. 5.) of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of 5 May 1975 on the rules of the road (Kresz)
- Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education
- EMMI (Ministry for Human Resources) Decree No 15/2013 (II. 26.) on the operation of pedagogical institutions
- Act LXXVIII of 1997 on the Shaping and Protection of the Built Environment
- Government Decree 253/1997 (XII. 20.) on national settlement planning and building requirements (OTÉK)
- Act V of 2013 on the Civil Code
- Act CLXXV of 2011 on the right of association, the status of public benefit and the operation and support of non-governmental organisations
- Act CLXXXI of 2011 on the Court Register of Non-Governmental Organisations and the Procedural Rules Related thereto
- Act CXL of 2004 on the General Rules of Administrative Procedure and Services
- Act III of 1952 on the Code of Civil Procedure
- Act CLV of 1997 on Consumer Protection
- Act I of 2012 on the Labour Code
- Act IV of 1991 on the promotion of employment and unemployment benefits
- Act LXXV of 2018 on Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Organisations

Figure 9. Number and year of adoption of legislation addressing accessibility issues
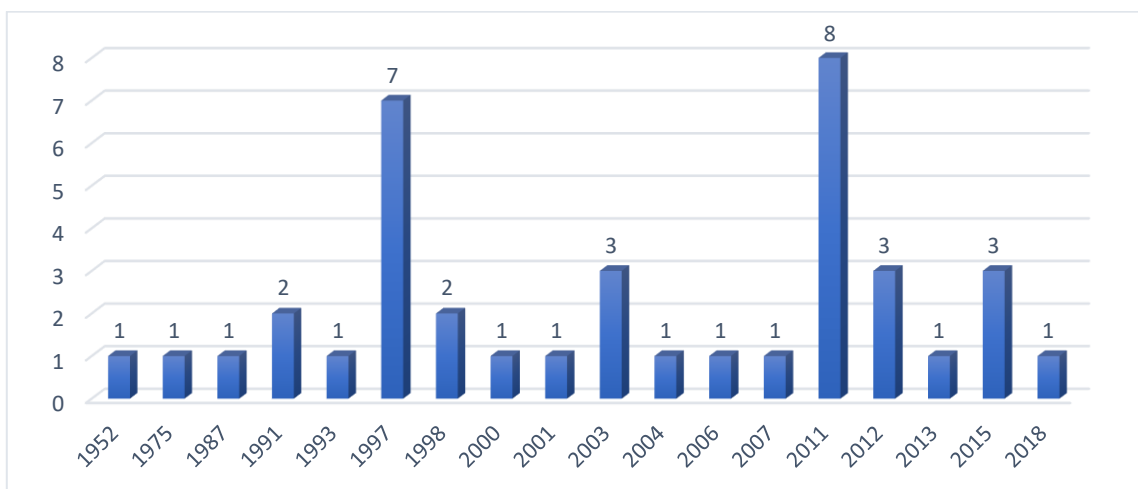
Source: own collection

With the help of the MEOSZ's professional analysis, it can be stated that one of the most important starting points and the basis for many relevant areas is **Act XCII of 2007 on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto** and **Act XXVI of 1998 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Ensuring their Equal Opportunities**.

Accessibility, as an ever-widening concept, can be clearly seen in the regulations originally adopted in the context of *accessibility of the built environment, which, according to* the definition of **Act LXXVIII of 1997 on the Shaping and Protection of the Built Environment**

(hereinafter: the Act), "*the built environment is accessible if its comfortable, safe and independent use is ensured for all people, including individuals or groups of people with health impairments who require special equipment or technical solutions. The built environment is defined as that part of the built environment which is the result of a conscious construction work and which is primarily intended to create the conditions for individual and community existence*."

In line with MEOSZ's analysis, this means that, contrary to the everyday terminology that accessibility is nothing more than the modification or conversion of existing buildings and facilities, which make them accessible to people with disabilities - **the definition of the above-mentioned law covers much more complex areas, so that accessibility, in addition to serving the interests of people with disabilities, also benefits other users in society with special needs, such as the elderly, children, mothers or people who use temporary assistive devices** (https://www.meosz.hu/mozgaskorlatozott-vagyok/akadalymentesites-egyetemes-tervezes/).

This broader approach is also reflected in the recommendation of the so-called CRPD Committee (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – the EU framework for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) to Article 9, which is presented later in this paper:

"*The focus is no longer on legal personality, and not on whether buildings, transport, infrastructure, vehicles, information and communication and services are in private or public ownership. As long as goods, products and services are available to the public or are intended to be available to the public, they should be accessible to all, whether owned by a public authority or a private individual. People with disabilities should have equal access to all goods, products and services intended for the general public in a way that ensures effective and equal access for them and respects their dignity.*" (https://www.meosz.hu/mozgaskorlatozott-vagyok/akadalymentesites-egyetemes-tervezes/).

A very important area for the study and analysis of the legal regulation **based on the link between accessibility and tourism is** the **Act XCII of 2007 on the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, Articles 9 and 20**, which regulate, among others, accessibility/accessibility and personal mobility:

Article 9

Accessibility

1. To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter alia:

(a) Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;

(b) Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.

2. States Parties shall also take appropriate measures to:

(a) Develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public;

(b) Ensure that private entities that offer facilities and services which are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for people with disabilities;

(c) Provide training for stakeholders on accessibility issues facing people with disabilities;

(d) Provide in buildings and other facilities open to the public signage in Braille and in easy to read and understand forms;

(e) Provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public;

(f) Promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to people with disabilities to ensure their access to information;

(g) Promote access for people with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet;

(h) Promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost.

Article 20

Personal mobility

States Parties shall, while ensuring to the maximum extent possible the independence of people with disabilities, take effective measures to ensure personal mobility, including:

a) enabling the personal mobility of people with disabilities at a time and in a manner determined by them and at an affordable price;

(b) facilitating access for people with disabilities to quality mobility supports, equipment, assistive technologies and various forms of personal assistance and mediators, including their provision at affordable prices;

(c) provide training on mobility for people with disabilities and their experts;

(d) encouraging entities producing mobility supports, devices and assistive technologies to take into account the mobility aspects of people with disabilities.

In terms of legislation, these two articles and the activities they regulate therefore underpin and reinforce the key conditions for personal mobility for people with disabilities.

In the context of the discussion of this topic, it should also be pointed out that the new National Disability Programme (2015-2025) adopted in 2015 states that domestic service providers have not yet sufficiently recognised the tourism opportunities for people with disabilities. Therefore, it is important to update and disseminate existing tourism demand surveys within the tourism profession, as well as to train and sensitise service providers and staff, emphasising the principle of universal design. The aim is, of course, to encourage the operation of tourism packages for people with disabilities, which target accessibility in a complex way and which serve not only equal opportunities but also economic interests.

Summary

For a modern society, creating a barrier-free environment is crucial, as it helps, among other things, to promote equal opportunities and respect for human dignity for all. Accessibility is a priority for the following reasons:

- *Equal opportunities*: ensuring an accessible environment allows people with disabilities to have equal opportunities in education, employment, transport and other areas of society. This helps reduce inequalities and discrimination and enables everyone to contribute to society according to their abilities.
- *Full participation in society*: an accessible environment enables people with disabilities to participate fully in social and economic life. If infrastructure, services and communication are not barrier-free, many people feel excluded and cannot fully participate in society.
- *Human dignity and self-determination*: an accessible environment helps to preserve and respect human dignity. Every person has the right to live independently and to be in control of their own life. Accessibility contributes to empowering people with disabilities to make their own decisions about matters that affect their lives.
- *Economic benefits*: accessibility can also bring long-term economic benefits. Accessible infrastructure and environments enable the participation of people with disabilities in the labour market and contribute to economic growth. It is also an important factor in tourism, as accessible cities and attractions become attractive destinations for tourists.
- *Older people and people with disabilities*: accessibility is not only important for people with disabilities, but also for older individuals. An accessible environment helps make their lives easier and contributes to maintaining an independent and dignified life.
- *Legal requirements and international expectations*: in many countries and at international level, laws and directives are required to promote accessibility. In many countries and internationally, accessibility is a legal requirement that must be respected.

Creating a barrier-free environment is therefore not only in the direct interest of – a great percentage and ratio of – people concerned, but also contributes to the development and economic prosperity of society as a whole. It is an investment that has long-term positive effects for all, which is why it is essential to continue to learn about, research and advocate in this field, while at the same time creating a barrier-free legislative environment is of

paramount importance for social justice, the protection of human rights and the promotion of equal opportunities in both the international and domestic context.

In summary, creating a barrier-free legislative environment is a top priority in terms of ensuring equal opportunities, protecting human rights, preventing exclusion, designing infrastructure and services appropriately, and delivering economic benefits and meeting international expectations.

4.5. Regulation of accessible tourism at national level in the countries concerned – Poland

In Poland, **the Charter of the Rights of Disabled Persons**[8] was adopted by the Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of August 1, 1997. **The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, drawn up in New York on December 13, 2006, was ratified in 2012 (Journal of Laws of 2012, item 1169)[9].

The concept of disability is defined in Art. 2 point 11 of the Act of 27 August 1997 **on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities** (Journal of Laws of 2020, items 426, 568 and 875)[10], chapter 1., art. 2, point 10: "disability - this means permanent or periodic inability to fulfill social roles due to permanent or long-term impairment of the body's fitness, in particular resulting in inability to work". The Act also includes rights for people with disabilities. For example, in ch. 4, "Art. 20a.

> 1. A disabled person with an assistance dog has the right to enter:
>   1) for public utility facilities, in particular: buildings and their surroundings intended for the needs of public administration, justice, culture, education, higher education, science, health care, social and social welfare, banking services, trade, gastronomy, services, tourism , sports, passenger service in rail, road, air, sea or inland waterway transport, provision of postal or telecommunications services and other publicly accessible buildings intended to perform similar functions, including office and social buildings;
>   2) to national parks and nature reserves;
>   3) to beaches and swimming areas.
> 2. The right referred to in section 1, is also available in means of rail, road, air and water transport and in other means of public transport.
> 3. The right referred to in section 1 and 2, does not release a disabled person from liability for damage caused by an assistance dog.
> 4. The condition for exercising the right referred to in section 1 and 2, is to equip the assistance dog with a harness and for the disabled person to have a certificate confirming the status of the assistance dog and a certificate of completion of the required veterinary vaccinations.

Basic concepts such as accessibility and person with special needs have been defined in art. 2 of the Act of July 19, 2019 **on ensuring accessibility for people with special needs** (Journal of Laws of 2019, item 1696)[11]:

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[8] https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WMP19970500475/O/M19970475.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)
[9] https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20120001169/O/D20121169.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)
[10] https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19971230776/U/D19970776Lj.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)
[11] https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20190001696/U/D20191696Lj.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)

- "Accessibility - architectural, digital and information and communication accessibility, at least to the extent specified by the minimum requirements referred to in Art. 6, resulting from the consideration of universal design or rational application improvements."
- "Person with special needs – a person who, due to his or her external features or internal, or due to the circumstances in which he finds himself, he must take additional steps activities or take additional measures to overcome the barrier to participation in various spheres of life on the basis of equality with other people."

In art. 6 defines "minimum requirements to ensure accessibility for persons with special needs that include:

  1) in terms of architectural accessibility:

> a) ensuring barrier-free horizontal and vertical communication spaces buildings,
> b) installation of devices or use of technical measures and architectural solutions in the building that allow access to all rooms, excluding technical rooms,
> c) providing information on the layout of rooms in the building, at least in a visual and touch or voice way,
> d) providing access to the building to the person using the abovementioned assistance dog."

In terms of digital accessibility - requirements are specified in the Act of April 4, 2019. **on the digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities** (Journal of Laws of 2019, item 848)[12]. The Act specifies:

> 1) digital accessibility requirements for websites and mobile applications of public entities;
> 2) requirements regarding the content, review and update of accessibility declarations of websites and mobile applications of public entities and their publication;
> 3) competences of the authority responsible for monitoring ensuring digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities and supervising the application of the provisions of the Act; 4) rules for monitoring the digital accessibility of websites or mobile applications and reporting on digital accessibility;
> 5) proceedings to ensure digital accessibility of the website, mobile application or their elements.

In Poland, sign language has been recognized as a separate language of the Deaf community. The legal act refers to this - **Act of 19 August 2011 on sign language and other means of communication** (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1824)[13]. The Act sets out the rules:

> 1) authorized persons using the assistance of an adopted person in contacts with public administration bodies, system units and entities medical facilities, police units, the State Fire Service and municipal guards and voluntary units operating in these areas;
> 2) servicing authorized persons in contacts with public administration bodies;
> 3) co-financing the costs of education of eligible persons and their family members and other people who have permanent or direct contact with people authorized in the field of Polish sign language, the linguistic and - sign and methods of communication for deafblind people different levels;

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[12] https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20190000848/U/D20190848Lj.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)
[13] https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20112091243/U/D20111243Lj.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)

4) monitoring solutions supporting communication and access to them. According to the act, "Polish Sign Language (PJM) is a natural visual and spatial language of communication for authorized persons."

Announcement of the Minister of Sport and Tourism of October 26, 2017 on **the announcement of the uniform text of the regulation of the Minister of Economy and Labor on hotel facilities and other facilities in which hotel services are provided,** Annex No. 8 - Minimum requirements for adapting hotel facilities to the needs of people disabled (Journal of Laws of November 24, 2017, item 2166)[14]. The regulation specifies:

1) requirements for individual types and categories of hotel facilities regarding equipment and the scope of services provided, including catering services;

2) minimum requirements for the equipment of other facilities where hotel services are provided;

3) conditions for allowing derogations from the requirements referred to in point 1;

4) method of documenting compliance with construction, fire and sanitary requirements;

5) detailed rules and procedure for classifying hotel facilities into particular types and categories;

6) the procedure for exercising control over compliance with the requirements in individual facilities regarding equipment and the provision of services corresponding to the type and category of the facility;

7) method of keeping records of hotel facilities and other facilities where hotel services are provided.

The above-mentioned legal acts are among the basic rights of people with disabilities regarding architectural, digital, information and communication accessibility in Poland. They are supplemented by more detailed regulations in the field of tourism and recreation for older people and people with disabilities. Recommendations are also being made for the tourism services sector regarding their accessibility.

List of basic documents related to the development of accessible tourism

Act of July 19, 2019 on ensuring accessibility for people with special needs. Journal Laws of 2019, item 1696, https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20190001696/U/D20191696Lj.p df (access: 11.10.2023)

Act of August 27, 1997 on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities. Journal Laws of 1997 No. 123 item 776 https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19971230776/U/D19970776Lj.p df (access: 11.10.2023)

Act of April 4, 2019 on the digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities. Journal Laws of 2019, item 848, https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20190000848/U/D20190848Lj.p df (access: 11.10.2023)

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[14] https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20170002166/O/D20172166.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)

Act of August 19, 2011 on sign language and other means of communication. OJ 2011 No. 209 item 1243. https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20112091243/U/D20111243Lj.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)

Announcement of the Minister of Sport and Tourism of October 26, 2017 on the announcement of the uniform text of the regulation of the Minister of Economy and Labor on hotel facilities and other facilities in which hotel services are provided, Annex No. 8 - Minimum requirements for adapting hotel facilities to the needs of people disabled (Journal of Laws of November 24, 2017, item 2166) https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20170002166/O/D20172166.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, drawn up in New York on December 13, 2006 (Journal of Laws of 2012, item 1169) https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20120001169 /O/D20121169.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)

Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of August 1, 1997, Charter of the Rights of Disabled Persons. https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WMP19970500475/O/M19970475.pdf (access: 11.10.2023)

4.6. Regulation of accessible tourism at national level in the countries concerned – Romania

The number of people living in Romania who are registered as having a disability has gradually increased over the last thirty years. In 1992, only 74,000 people in the country were recorded as having some form of disability (Figure 10.). The majority of these persons, 88%, were adults and the remaining 12% were children with some type of disability. The number of persons with various disabilities showed a gradually increasing trend until 2022, when the number of people affected in the country reached almost 886,950 (Figure 10.). This corresponds to 4.46% of population. Of this number of persons, 91.4% were adults and, consequently, children with some type of disability registered in the health register accounted for the remaining 8.6%. From the above figures, it can be concluded that the number of persons with a disability as a proportion of the Romanian population is moving in the opposite direction to the decreasing trend of the country's population. In the thirty years review, the country's population has decreased by 16.41%, while at the same time, in the same period, the number of persons with disabilities has increased from 74,053 to 886,950 in 2022, which is approximately a twelvefold increase over the last thirty years, so that, on average, the number of persons with disabilities in the country has increased by 27,096 per year (Figure 11.).

Figure 10. Changes in the number of disabled persons in Romania between 1992 and 2022
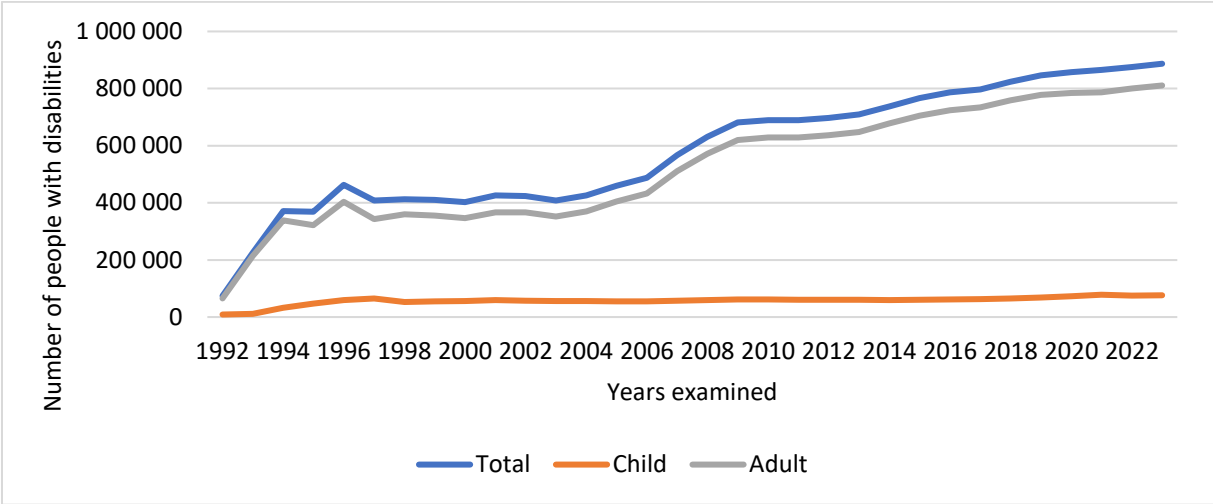
Between 2008 and 2019, there has been a significant increase in the number of institutions responsible for the care of adults with disabilities in Romania, as shown by data from the Romanian National Institute of Statistics. At the beginning of the period under study, in 2008, there were only 343 institutions specialised in the care of adults with disabilities (Figure 11.). The number of these institutions increased until 2012, when it reached 564. This has a significant correlation with the number of persons in need of care, as the same trend change between the two variables can be observed between 2008 and 2012 (Figure 11.). In the year 2013, the number of adult care facilities mentioned above experienced a large decrease, as there was a 30.5% decrease in the number of facilities. Following that year, a gradual upward trend was observed between 2014 and 2019, resulting in 503 facilities responsible for the wellbeing of adults with disabilities by the end of the period under review in 2019 (Figure 11.).

Figure 11. Changes in the number of social assistance institutions for adult with disabilities in Romania between 2008 and 2019
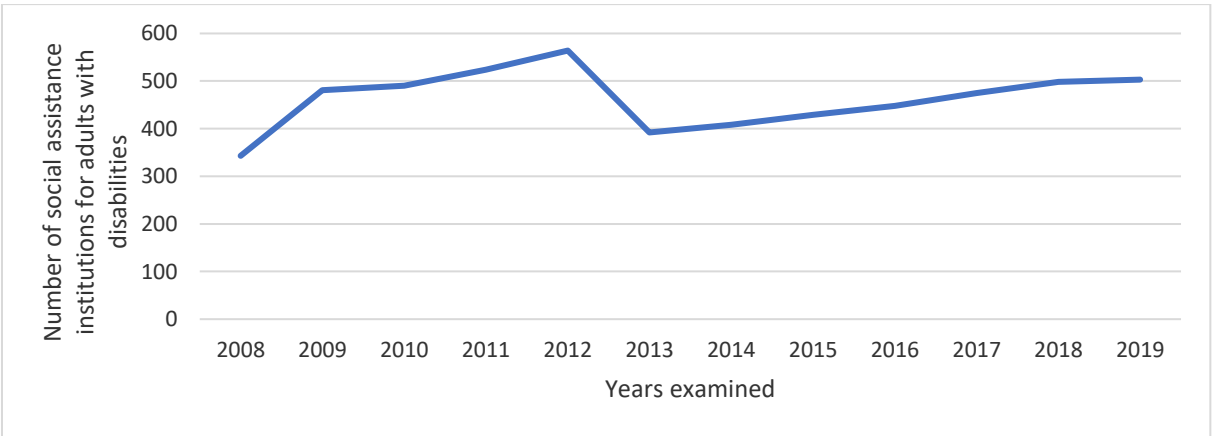
The main official body dealing with the rights and facilities for people with disabilities is the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (https://anpd.gov.ro).

Romania has committed to take all necessary measures to ensure the integration of all persons with disabilities into the community, including those living in long-term residential institutions, by providing places of residence freely chosen by persons with disabilities, as well as access to a wide range of health services. The main topic in Romanian legislation is de-institutionalisation. From 2023 onwards, local authorities will monitor the status of achievement of key performance indicators (KPI) on an annual basis. The nationally planned targets linked to the KPIs are:

1. By 30 June 2026, at least 32% of institutionalised adults with disabilities will be supported to deinstitutionalise and implement the independent living pathway;

2. by 30 June 2026, the percentage of institutionalised adults with disabilities is reduced to 32% of the total number of people supported in the residential system at the end of 2020;

3. between 1 July 2026 and 31 December 2030, the percentage of adults with disabilities in institutions will be reduced by 10% of the total number of people supported in the residential system on 30 June 2026.

Legislation

I.   Law no. 221 of 2010 the "National Anti-Discrimination Council Act," is a significant piece of legislation in Romania aimed at combating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities. The law was enacted on May 19, 2010, and it plays a crucial role in safeguarding the rights of various marginalized and vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.

II.   Law no. 7 of January 2023 - de-institutionalisation

III.   Law no. 448 of February 2006 - Fundamental Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities (Methodology of Application DECISION no. 268 of 14 March 2007)

IV.   Decree no. 189/2013 - Approval of the Technical Regulation Standard on the Adaptation of Civil Buildings and Urban Space to the Individual Needs of People with Disabilities, Indicative NP 051-2012 - Revision NP 051/2000

V.   Law 232/2022 on the accessibility requirements for products and services

I. Key points about Law No. 221/2010:

Purpose: The primary purpose of Law No. 221/2010 is to establish the legal framework for preventing and combating discrimination in Romania, including discrimination based on disability.

- Scope: The law covers a wide range of areas, including employment, education, healthcare, social protection, access to goods and services, and participation in public life.

- Prohibition of Discrimination: The law explicitly prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including disability. It mandates that individuals and institutions must treat others equally and without discrimination.
- National Anti-Discrimination Council: The law establishes the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), which is an independent public authority responsible for enforcing the provisions of the law and addressing discrimination complaints.
- Sanctions: The law provides for sanctions and penalties for acts of discrimination. These may include fines, injunctions, and other measures intended to rectify the situation.
- Complaint Procedures: Law No. 221/2010 outlines the procedures for filing discrimination complaints with the National Council for Combating Discrimination.
- Positive Measures: The law allows for positive measures to be taken to promote equal opportunities and combat discrimination, including measures to support persons with disabilities.
- Awareness and Education: The law encourages educational and awareness-raising activities to promote tolerance, diversity, and equal treatment.

III. Key points about Law no. 448 of February 2006 - Fundamental Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities (Methodology of Application DECISION no. 268 of 14 March 2007)

According to Art. 6, persons with disabilities are entitled to:

a) health care - prevention, treatment and rehabilitation;

(b) education and vocational training;

c) employment and job adaptation, vocational guidance and retraining;

d) social assistance, i.e. social services and social benefits;

(e) housing, personal living environment, transport, access to the physical, information and communication environment;

(f) leisure, access to culture, sport, tourism;

(g) legal assistance;

(h) tax relief;

(i) assessment and reassessment through home visits by members of the Assessment Committee to non-removable persons every two years.

Article 7.

(1) The promotion and enforcement of the rights of persons with disabilities shall be the primary responsibility of the authorities of the local public administration where the person with a disability resides or is domiciled and, subsidiarily or complementarily, of the authorities of the central public administration, civil society and the family or the legal representative of the person with a disability.

Article 21. – Culture, sport, tourism

(1) The competent authorities of the public administration are obliged to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to cultural values, heritage, tourism, sports and leisure objectives.

(2) In order to ensure the access of persons with disabilities to culture, sport and tourism, public administration authorities are obliged to take the following specific measures;

(a) promote the participation of persons with disabilities and their families in cultural, sporting and tourist events;

b) organise cultural, sporting and leisure events and activities in cooperation or partnership with public or private legal entities;

c) ensuring conditions for the practice of sports by persons with disabilities;

(d) to support the activities of sports organisations of persons with disabilities;

(e) provide, both inside the buildings and in the outdoor areas of cultural, tourist, sports and leisure facilities, specific adaptations for the following types of disability, without this list being exhaustive

(i) for persons with locomotor disabilities and reduced mobility: ramps and/or, where appropriate, electronic or automated access systems, lifts or elevators

(iii) for the hearing impaired: visual warning systems and electronic amplifiers for hearing aids

(iv) for the mentally handicapped and people with learning disabilities: sign language guidance systems;

f) To provide at least one toilet accessible to people with disabilities inside the buildings related to cultural, tourist, sports and leisure objectives or, where appropriate, in the outdoor areas related to them.

(on 18-05-2023, Paragraph 2 of Article 21, Section 4, Chapter II was supplemented by Paragraph 3, Article I of LAW No. 96 of 12 April 2023, published in the OFFICIAL MONITOR No. 322 of 18 April 2023)

(3) The disabled child and the accompanying person have the right to free admission to shows, museums, artistic and sports events.

(4) Adults with disabilities shall be entitled to free admission to shows, museums, artistic and sporting events as follows:

(a) the adult with a severe or acute disability and the accompanying person shall be admitted free of charge;

(b) adults with moderate and slight disabilities shall be entitled to tickets under the same conditions as pupils and students.

(5) The amounts of the entitlements referred to in paragraphs (1), (3) and (4) shall be borne by the State budget, through the budget of the Ministry of Culture and National Identity, the National Agency for Sport*), local budgets or, where appropriate, the budget of public or private organisers.

IV. Key points of Decree no. 189/2013 in Romania pertains to the approval of a Technical Regulation Standard that addresses the adaptation of civil buildings and urban spaces to the individual needs of people with disabilities. Specifically, it approves the Indicative NP 051-2012, which is a revision of NP 051/2000.

Here's a breakdown of the key components:

- Technical Regulation Standard: The Technical Regulation Standard is a set of specific technical guidelines and requirements established by the government to ensure that civil buildings and urban spaces are accessible and adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities.
- Adaptation of Civil Buildings: This refers to making physical adjustments to buildings to accommodate individuals with disabilities. This can include the installation of ramps, elevators, wider doorways, accessible bathrooms, and other modifications to improve accessibility.
- Adaptation of Urban Space: This focuses on making public areas and spaces within a city or town more accessible. It involves considerations like constructing wheelchair-friendly sidewalks, installing ramps at pedestrian crossings, and creating accessible parking spaces.
- NP 051-2012: This is the specific set of technical regulations that outline the requirements for adapting civil buildings and urban spaces for people with disabilities. It is a revised version of the NP 051/2000 standard.
- NP 051/2000: This is the previous version of the technical regulation standard for adapting civil buildings and urban spaces. The revision in 2012 likely involved updates, improvements, or clarifications to better address the needs of individuals with disabilities.

The aim of this decree and the associated technical standards is to ensure that buildings and urban environments in Romania are designed and constructed in a way that promotes accessibility and inclusivity for all citizens, including those with disabilities.

Other acts

1. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 December 2006 and opened for signature on 30 March 2007. Romania signed it on 26 September 2007 and ratified it through Law no. 221 of 2010.

2. The National Strategy for the prevention of institutionalization of adults with disabilities and acceleration of the deinstitutionalization process for the period 2022-2030 has been approved by the Government through Decision no. 1543/2022.

Approves the National Strategy for the prevention of adults with disabilities being institutionalised and for the acceleration of the deinstitutionalisation process between 2022-2030, as described in Annex*, which is an integral part of this Decision.

3. In addition, Government Decision No 1.444/2022 approves the Data Collection and Monitoring Mechanism for implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and amending some normative acts.   Draft Order No. 1914/29/09/2022 aims to amend and supplement the Annex to Order No. 762/1992/2007, which approves the criteria for determining the degree of disability 5 from a medical-psycho-social perspective. The document adheres to conventional academic formatting, including regular author and

institution formatting, and uses a formal register to avoid colloquialism, contractions, or informal expressions. Additionally, the text ensures objectivity by excluding subjective evaluations, bias, figurative or ornamental language, and filler words. Finally, precision in vocabulary and grammatical correctness are ensured, with specific technical terms used when conveying precise meaning and free from grammatical and spelling mistakes.

4. Draft Order No. 1914/29/09/2022 aims to amend and supplement the Annex to Order No. 762/1992/2007, which approves the criteria for determining the degree of disability 5 from a medical-psycho-social perspective. The objective and logical structure of the document is maintained through clear and concise language, with technical term abbreviations explained upon first use.

5. Order No. 847/2021, approved on 23 September 2021, outlines the procedure for the authorisation of protected establishments.

- Pursuant to Law 448/2006, an authorized sheltered enterprise is a legal entity, either public or private, that possesses its own management, **in which no less than three disabled individuals must be employed, representing at least 30% of the total number of employees**, and their combined worked hours account for no less than 50% of all worked hours of the entirety of the employees, and any configuration of conducting an economic operation by an individual possessing a disability.

Certification. 6. DECISION No 268 of 14 March 2007 (*updated*) for the approval of Methodological Rules for the application of provisions of Law no. 448/2006 on protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities (updated until 29 November 2012*) Article 8a.

Free spa treatment tickets for disabled adults will be granted in accordance with the State Social Insurance Budget Act for the current year, subject to an annual agreement between the National Authority for Individuals with Disabilities and the National House for Pensions and Other Social Insurance Rights. It should be noted that on 15-02-2010, Art. 8 was amended by paragraph 2 of Art., thereby establishing a definite limit on the total number of tickets available. I of DECISION No. 89 from 5 February 2010, which was published in OFFICIAL MONITOR No. 103 from 15 February 2010.

Transportation and other tourism related discounts for disabled persons

Severely disabled adults may receive social assistance based on supporting documents or by application. This assistance comes in the form of **free interurban transport via any train** type up to the cost of an inter-regional (IR) train with a 2nd class reservation, or by bus or river transport vessel for a total of 24 journeys per calendar year. Alternatively, a fuel discount of 1500 lei is available.

For adults with accentuated disabilities: 12 free interurban journeys per year are available by train, bus, or river transport, limited to the cost of a second-class inter-regional (IR) train ticket with a reservation. A fuel discount of 750 lei is also available. In addition, all urban public transport lines offer free surface transportation, and a monthly metro pass with an unlimited number of journeys is provided.

Access to public service buildings, such as cultural institutions, should be facilitated for people with disabilities. This can be achieved through the implementation of Braille signs and clearly visible shapes.

Accommodation facilities should also be designed with accessibility in mind. Additionally, free bathing passes should be provided to individuals with disabilities and their companions.

Funding may be provided from the local and central budget for disabled individuals and their companions to participate in educational, cultural, and sporting activities as well as competitions and seminars. This includes transportation and accommodation within the budget staff limitations, participation fees, and entry fees to museums and auditoriums abroad. Please note that this information pertains to disabled individuals and their accompanying persons only.

Additional amenities for tourism activities in Romania, as per the local regulations:

- **Complimentary spa vouchers**

- Reserved parking spaces in public areas for individuals with disabilities or their authorized representatives

- **Exemption from toll fees when using the national road network with a valid vignette**

- **Discount on fuel expenditure when travelling by car**

- Unrestricted access to educational programs, regardless of age, disability type, and educational requirements.

- The standard retirement age for employed individuals is being reduced.

- free or partially subsidised access to cultural, sporting and leisure events at national and European level in Slovenia, Cyprus, Belgium, Italy, Estonia, Finland, Malta on the basis of the European Disability Card

The law grants rights and facilities, but it remains to be seen whether such rights are upheld by public institutions and private entities. Adequate infrastructure and equipment are in place to ensure accessibility and enable events. In conclusion, Romania offers a number of discounts and services for people with disabilities. The problem is that most of them are not transparent and in many cases only temporary. The system of support for leisure and travel for people with special needs still needs to be developed.

5. Organisations supporting travel for people with disabilities in Europe and in the project countries

5.1. European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT): Ensuring Travel Without Barriers

The European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT) is an innovative initiative focused on ensuring tourism is accessible to everyone. The beginning and actions highlight the increasing acknowledgment of accessible tourism as not only a specialized business but also as a basic entitlement for people with disabilities. Here we outline the role, significance, and various actions of ENAT in promoting travel for individuals with disabilities in Europe and other regions.

ENAT believes in inclusive tourism, allowing individuals with disabilities, elders, and those with mobility issues to travel with respect, comfort, and freedom. The group serves as a liaison that unites stakeholders in the tourist industry, such as governments, businesses, and consumers, going beyond advocacy. ENAT plays a vital role in promoting collaboration and understanding among different groups to enhance inclusivity in the tourism sector.

ENAT's work is important due to its holistic approach to accessibility. ENAT pushes for enhancements in infrastructure, service supply, and awareness to address physical, informational, and attitudinal barriers to travel. This comprehensive viewpoint guarantees that initiatives aimed at improving accessibility consider all the various requirements and difficulties encountered by travellers with impairments (https://www.accessibletourism.org/).

Programs and Projects

ENAT engages in a wide range of activities including research, training, policy formulation, and promoting best practices. Some primary initiatives are:

Research and Development: ENAT engages in research and development programs to gather essential data on the requirements, choices, and financial influence of disabled travellers. This research provides evidence-based policy recommendations and industry standards, ensuring they are based on practical experiences and requirements.

Training and Education: ENAT provides training programs for tourism personnel to enhance their knowledge and skills in offering accessible services. The classes encompass several subjects, including creating user-friendly websites and delivering customer service tailored to the requirements of disabled passengers.

Certification and Quality Labelling: ENAT has created a certification method to assist consumers in recognizing firms that adhere to high accessibility requirements. This approach helps businesses enhance their accessibility and provides travellers with a reliable emblem of accessible services.

Policy Advocacy: ENAT interacts with policymakers at the national and European levels to support legislation and regulations that encourage accessible tourism. It has helped incorporate accessibility issues into important EU tourist and transport policy.

Networking and Collaboration: ENAT facilitates networking and collaboration among its members to exchange knowledge, experiences, and resources. Stakeholders from all sectors

collaborate through conferences, workshops, and online forums to share best practices and establish collaborations.

Public Awareness Campaigns: ENAT conducts public awareness programs to alter attitudes and enhance understanding of the significance of accessible tourism, emphasizing the advantages of accessibility for everyone. The campaigns aim to debunk misunderstandings and highlight the economic, social, and cultural benefits of inclusive tourism (https://www.accessibletourism.org/).

The European Network for Accessible Tourism is crucial in promoting barrier-free travel. ENAT advocates for the rights of tourists with disabilities and showcases the wider advantages of accessible tourism for society through its diverse activities and initiatives. ENAT plays a crucial role in the network of organizations that facilitate travel for individuals with disabilities, ensuring that people of all physical abilities can enjoy the beauty and variety of Europe and its project countries (https://www.accessibletourism.org/).

Figure 12. The logo of the ENAT

Source: https://www.accessibletourism.org/

5.2. Access4you

The trademark access4you® is an international certification mark. It is currently registered in the European Union and the United Kingdom. Its creation was inspired by an unpleasant experience of its creator (which is entirely consistent with the personal experience of Farkas, J. the author of several chapters in this book): a problem caused by a property advertised as fully accessible but in reality, inaccessible by wheelchair. "That's when I realised that being helpful is not enough. We need a common language about accessibility that we all understand and speak. I decided that we were going to do it." – writes Berecz, B. founder and managing director. The common language they have been working on since then is certified accessibility information.

The Access4you mark provides detailed and reliable information on the accessibility of the built environment for people with different disabilities - mobility, visual, hearing and cognitive special needs. This not only helps people with disabilities themselves and their relatives, but also property owners and companies: in addition to providing a detailed picture of the accessibility of their premises, the Access4you certificate also effectively supports business and sustainability objectives.

The Access4you database and mobile app, which contains detailed profiles of more than 700 international locations, is available free of charge to everyone. The site profiles are based on

a 1,000-point criteria system, which has been compiled according to the criteria of 8 stakeholder groups and provides information filtered by impact, with precise dimensions and a range of useful photos (https://access4you.io/about-us).

Figure 13. Access4you's app for finding accessible places

Source: https://access4you.io/
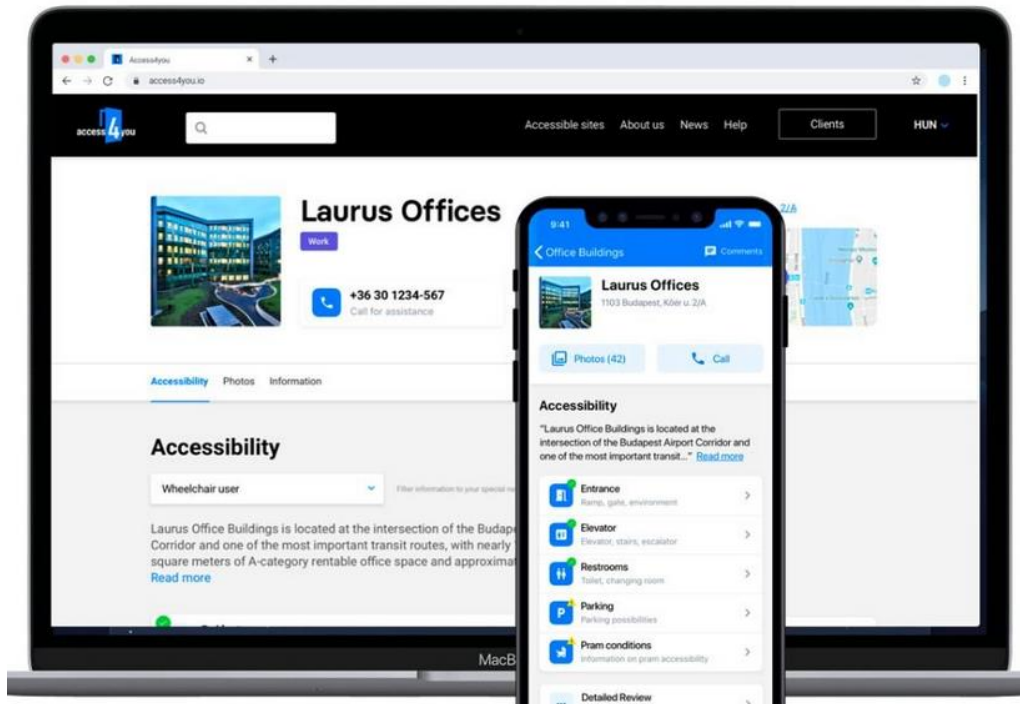
The database gives users an advantage on both the supply and demand side. The demand side (the traveller/tourist) can be assured that they are using a truly expert-certified, accessible service, while the supply side can contribute to their own business objectives by participating in the database (attracting new customers; increasing brand value through social contribution; and providing measurable data for the social (S) leg of ESG reports).

5.3. Croatian examples

In Croatia, the tourist offer for people with disabilities is still quite sparse and fragmented. The biggest challenge faced by people with disabilities is the quality of information about the specific segments of the offer. For this reason, it is important that various organisations participate in this process in order to create a quality product in the context of accessible tourism. Looking at the market from the perspective of private companies, there is currently no travel agency that specialises in the needs and requirements of people with disabilities. There used to be such an agency, but it has ceased its activities. In view of this fact, it is important to know that the national government is making great efforts to raise awareness of this tourism product and to give tourism employees the opportunity to participate in special workshops aimed at improving understanding and knowledge of this segment of tourists.

In addition, several NGOs are involved in creating a platform for knowledge sharing – not only those working to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, but also those working to improve the quality of life of older people who also need better accessibility to tourism facilities and attractions. The collaboration of these individual initiatives in creating a more accessible, universal design of various facilities will hopefully lead to an organisation that specialises in this particular segment of tourists, providing them with access to tourism services and experiences, but most importantly, accurate and reliable information on the availability and quality of accessibility of destinations.

Examples of good practices within accessible tourism in Croatia include several sites and programmes, both in private and public sector, some of which are discussed below.

Tourist guides in Pula

The Association of Tourist Guides of Pula and the Association of the Blind of Istria County have launched the "Colours of Inclusive Tourism" project.

A dozen of members have successfully completed theoretical and practical training for working with blind and visually impaired people, and they are the first tourist guide company in Croatia whose members have undergone professional training to be able to present the world around them in the most suitable way for blind and visually impaired people.

The project was funded by the Ministry of Tourism and consists of GPS technology and voice software built into cell phones, which contains the most important sights of Pula and Premantura. As part of the project, a spoken tourist map of Istria with 134 tourist points was created, which was also translated into Italian and is intended for blind and visually impaired people and other tourists. The map is available via the voice computer.

The aim of the project is to motivate tourist guides from Istria County to include vulnerable groups in their programs, to actively participate in the conference on the development of accessible tourism in Istria, to educate members about the needs of people with disabilities with a focus on blind people.

Figure 14. Insight into the work of the "Colours of Inclusive Tourism" project members

Source: Authors

In addition to further strengthening and deepening intra-industry cooperation between the Association of Tourist Guides in Pula, the Association of the Blind of Istria County and the Istria Mountain Guides Station, tourist guides and mountaineers will be able to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in guiding and hiking with blind people in their further work with groups of people with disabilities.

The partner organization has a mentoring role in the project and strengthens the capacity of the host organization through continuous informal learning about the project implementation, monitoring the flow of funds, activity plan and media promotion.

Manual "Care for guests with disabilities"

The High School Project - Center for Education Zagreb in partnership with the Center for Education "Vinko Bek", the Center for Education "Slava Raškaj", Zagreb, and the Electrical Engineering School, Zagreb, was funded by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports as part of a public tender for vocational and artistic secondary schools to promote and strengthen the skills of professionals in tourism. The manual contains very clear instructions on how to serve guests with different types of disabilities. Video examples have also been included — support procedures for guests with hearing impairment, with intellectual difficulties, with autism spectrum disorders and with physical disabilities.

The handbook was published in 2020. The students wanted to take into account the fact that every person has different, individual needs and they came to the conclusion that active guest care in the hospitality industry cannot be universal for every guest. Every guest with a disability is a person with their own unique needs. Therefore, with this handbook, they want to educate service providers about the needs of people with disabilities in the hospitality industry and this process requires constant enrichment of the emotional and social skills of hospitality workers.

Accessible Dubrovnik Map

The "Accessible Tourism" map of Dubrovnik shows the accessibility of tourist facilities for wheelchair users (hotels, cultural facilities, beaches) as well as other useful facilities for wheelchair users (pharmacies). For each hotel on the map, for example, there is various information - number of rooms for wheelchairs users, accessibility of the entrance with description, amenities, accessibility of the pool and the hotel beach. For tourist locations, there is information about the presence of ramps, elevators, toilets, vans and platforms. Each location contains information about the address and internet address. In addition, this website contains a base of places that are accessible for wheelchairs users, with information about various barriers such as sidewalks, curbs, steps or slopes. The map is quite easy to use and contains useful information.

Shrine of Our Lady of Sanctuary of Aljmaš

The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Refuge in Aljmaš is a contemporary sacral object with a unique appearance that offers a handful of accessible contents, although it can be even more accessible with a little judicious adaptation. Near the church there is a municipal parking lot with marked spaces for people with disabilities, and the somewhat dangerous access road is flat in the central part, while the rest of the site is surrounded by a curb. The small paved square in front of the church is completely flat and has benches to rest on, as well as surfaces of varying textures leading up to the church that serve as tactile indicators for visitors with visual impairments.

On the square there are also two accessible, attractive and somewhat steeper viewpoints (14 to 15 percent gradient) facing the Danube, which can also be reached by visitors in wheelchairs with a little help. The entrance to the church, its interior and the confessional are flat and lined with marble, but there are no tactile indicators or aids. The facility also has an accessible restroom, but it is a bit run down and has some drawbacks: The door does not open fully due to the handle, there is no longer a handrail, and the copper bar under the sink makes access difficult for people with higher wheelchairs.

Figure 15. Sanctuary of Our Lady of Refuge in Aljmaš

Source: Authors

Eight hundred meters south of the church, there is also a paved, winding Calvary path with roughly the same gradient as the church's viewpoints, so all visitors can reach the top with a little help. The parish management has plenty of experience of welcoming visitors with a wide range of disabilities, but has little understanding of their differing needs. The pilgrimage church website provides sufficient information and content, but would benefit from modernization and could be made more accessible for all users.

Swimming Pool Kantrida

During the design and construction of the Kantrida swimming pool, great attention was paid to adapting the facilities for people with disabilities, and associations for people with disabilities were also involved in the search for the best solutions during construction.

Access to the square and the restaurant with terrace on the roof of the garage building is via ramps. Access for people with disabilities to the Kantrida Pool is possible from the public

garage, where there are 8 parking spaces for people with disabilities. Access to the square in front of the main entrance to the swimming pools is possible with an elevator that has built-in buttons with floor numbers in Braille.

Figure 16. Kantrida swimming pool

Source: Authors

At the level of the main entrance to the Kantrida swimming pools there is a reception and changing rooms with sanitary facilities. Special markings on the floors of the swimming pool complex are also intended to facilitate movement for blind and visually impaired people. All directions of movement are marked with white or yellow stripes, which stand out not only in colour but also in their structure from the surrounding floor, so that visually impaired people can follow them more easily.

The Kantrida swimming pools have fixed and mobile elevators that allow people with disabilities and people with reduced mobility to enter and exit the pools. Kantrida Swimming Pools staff are trained to operate the elevator and are always available to assist people with reduced mobility. There are also specially marked seats for wheelchair users in the spectator stands. There is also a toilet adapted for people with disabilities in the stands.

Access to Ploče beach is possible for people with disabilities via external platforms. The first platform is located on the outdoor terrace of the café next to the reception, which leads to the sun terrace, and the platform at the end of the sun terrace leads down to the beach, where it is possible to continue along the promenade and ramps. In the eastern part of the beach, another platform has been installed from which you can walk directly down to the beach. On the western part of the beach there is a ramp for descending into the sea and a sunbathing area for people with disabilities. The platform is easy to use - you just need to hold down the button while driving.

Training sessions for people with disabilities are regularly held in the swimming pools of Kantrida, organized by the Forca Swimming Club and the Sunce Association of Parents of People with Disabilities. Such an accessible swimming pool complex not only facilitates daily use for people with disabilities, but also enables the organization of swimming competitions for people with disabilities at the highest level in Croatia. The quality of the construction and

the functionality of the complex have been confirmed by a special award at international level. The sports complex in Rijeka received the IPC award of the International Paralympic Committee, which is awarded to sports facilities for people with disabilities.

These are only few of accessible tourism examples in Croatia, others include numerous cultural institutions, accommodation facilities and other examples.

5.4. Polish examples

Examples of good practice regarding accessible tourism activities in Poland are diverse. This chapter discusses selected practices relating to:

1) institutional activities at the country level (Ministry of Sport and Tourism) and region level (Wielkopolska Tourist Organization),
2) tourist guides to the most popular urban tourist destination in Poland, which is Krakow ("A Guide to Krakow for Tourists with Disabilities"), tourist information about the availability and facilities on tourist trails ("Karkonosze for Everyone", Piast Trail in Greater Poland),
3) tourist attractions (Invisible Street in Poznań, Brama Poznania ICHOT [Poznan Gate], Museum of the First Piasts in Lednica, Museum of the Archdiocese of Gniezno),
4) open spaces, such as parks and sensory gardens (Spatial Orientation Park in Owińska),
5) an event aimed at educating integration and social inclusion, organized periodically by the community of people with disabilities (OzN) during the International White Cane Day.

The Ministry of Sport and Tourism (MSiT) in Poland promotes accessible tourism in the context of social tourism as "a priority in the activities of tour operators, travel agencies and tourist information points". The Accessibility Plus 2018-2025 Program is being developed on a national scale, focused on universal design of public space, products and services in terms of architecture, information and communication. This program is included in the activities of the Polish Tourist Organization and Regional and Local Tourist Organizations. Accessibility is understood as the possibility of independent and independent use of: tourist attractions, information (guides, maps, information points), transport and communication in tourism, routes, paths, tourist trails, and catering, accommodation and sanitary infrastructure.

Figure 17-18. Program of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism in Poland - accessible tourism; Accommodation Without Barriers portal

Source: https://www.gov.pl/web/sport/turystyka-dostepna-dla-wszystkich (access: 15.04.2024)
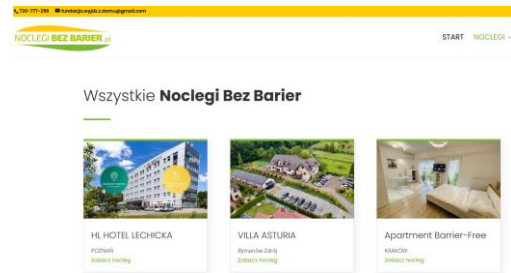
Source: https://noclegibezbarier.pl/noclegi/ (access: 15.04.2024)

„Tourism for people with special needs" („Turystyka osób ze szczególnymi potrzebami", 2023, Figure 17.) – according to the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, over 4 million Poles (14%) are people with disabilities, and people aged 60+ constitute approximately 10 million people, i.e. 25% of the Polish population. The purchasing power of seniors is growing - by 2035, its share in the total value of purchases will increase to 37%. MSiT recommends a guide titled: "Textbook: Tourism for people with special needs. Guide for tour operators, travel agencies and tourist information points" (Figure 18.).

Figure 19. Textbook: Tourism for people with special needs. Guide for tour operators, travel agencies and tourist information points, 2023

Source: https://www.gov.pl/web/sport/turystyka-dostepna-dla-wszystkich (access: 15.04.2024)

The MSiT website also includes a list of examples of good practices and solutions, including a database of guides, standards, guidelines, references to legal acts, programs and portals containing data on the availability of e.g. accommodation facilities (Figure 19.)

Since 2020, the Wielkopolska Tourist Organization (WOT) has been conducting free training in the field of accessible tourism on the e-learning platform, addressed to all people professionally involved in tourism (Figure 20.). The training is addressed both to employees

directly serving customers, as well as to managers and people making strategic decisions. Each course ends with a test verifying the acquired knowledge, and the training participant who obtains a positive result receives a certificate. Users can return to the course content any number of times - to supplement or verify information. The platform also offers full flexibility in acquiring knowledge, so there is no time limit in which the entire training must be completed.

Figure 20. Accessible tourism – a free e-learning course addressed to the tourism industry
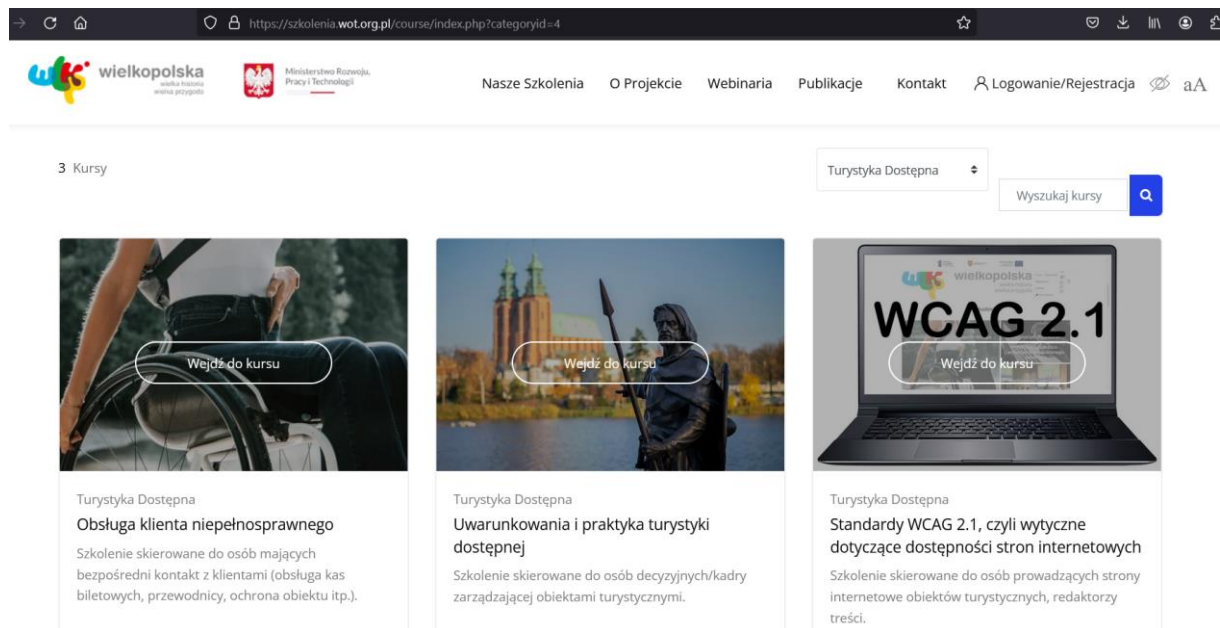
Source: https://szkolenia.wot.org.pl/ (access: 15.04.2024)

The courses were prepared by a professional team of trainers. Its members included practitioners and scientists specializing in a given field. This guarantees quality and compliance with the latest knowledge. Additionally, it is possible to use additional materials: webinars, conferences and manuals (Figure 21.). The WOT e-learning platform was created as part of the implementation of a public task entitled: "Improving the safety of tourist services for people with disabilities in the Greater Poland Voivodeship", co-financed by the Ministry of Development, Labor and Technology in 2020.

Figure 21. „Accessible tourism" manual – recommendations for the tourism services sector.

"A Guide to Krakow for Tourists with Disabilities" (Figure 22.) is a compendium of knowledge on the accessibility of the main attractions for people with disabilities. Its second edition, released in 2023, was expanded to include the Nowa Huta route and made available in 4 language versions (Polish, English, French and Russian). The publication can be obtained free of charge from the Department for the Issues of Persons with Disabilities of the Department of Social Policy and Health of the Krakow City Hall, as well as at municipal tourist information points, and can also be downloaded from the website and via QR as an application for mobile devices.

Figure 22. "A Guide to Krakow for tourists with disabilities" – free to download in paper form, PDF and application for mobile devices
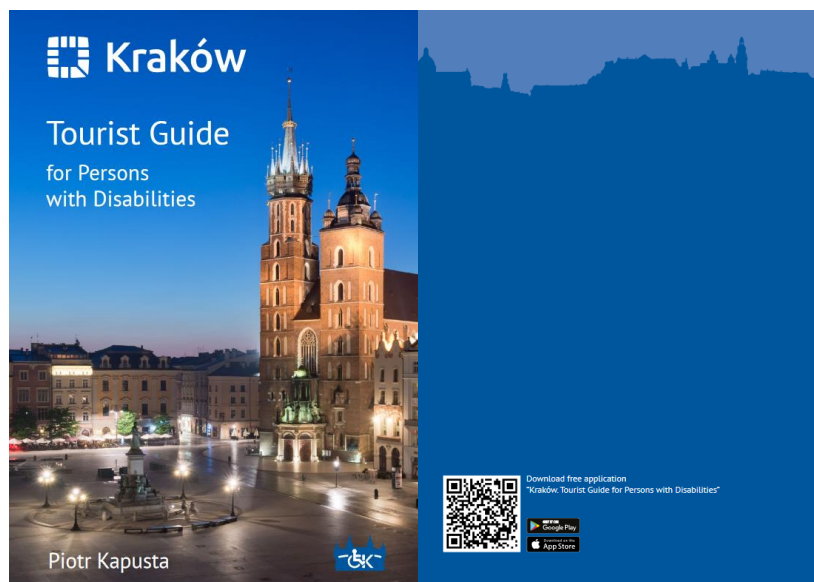
The Piast Trail is one of the main cultural trails in Poland, related to the history of the first royal dynasty – the Piast dynasty. In 2019, the local government of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship commissioned an analysis of its accessibility for health care centres (motor, visual, hearing), seniors and families with children in all (33) facilities of the Piast Trail in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship. The purpose of the audit was not to collect current knowledge about the availability of individual attractions on the trail. A catalogue of criteria for assessing the accessibility of facilities was developed, based on which each tourist attraction was assessed and described in an information card posted on the trail's website. The material prepared by experts is a reliable source of information for tourists and all people visiting the Piast Trail facilities. It also includes recommendations for facility owners regarding useful, universal amenities (Figure 23.)

Figure 23. The Piast Trail

Source: szlakpiastowski.pl (access: 15.04.2024)

"Karkonosze for All" is a project implemented in Polish-Czech partnership, on the Polish side developed by the Karkonosze Sejmik of people with disabilities (KSON). KSON employees tested tourist trails and places available to people with disabilities on the Polish side of the mountains and in the nearby foothills: tourist trails, tourist attractions and for competitive tourism (Figure 24.).

Figure 24. Path to the Szklarka Waterfall in the Karkonosze National Park, adapted to the needs of wheelchair users

Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

Invisible Street (Poznań, ul. Matejki 53) is a place that can be visited in absolute darkness, and the guides are blind people. You can experience not only moving around the street without the aid of sight, but also travelling on a tram and sensory experiences (through smell, touch). The guide explains how blind people function in everyday life (Figure 25-27.). You can also take part in workshops explaining facilities for blind and visually impaired people, such as: Rubik's cube (Figure 25-27.), board games (Figure 25-27.), tourist guides with convex (relief) drawings and a reference scale, such as a human figure placed in each lower right corner of the page (Figure 25-27.).

Figure 25-26-27. Invisible Street. Rubik's Cube for the blind; Invisible Street. Game for the blind; Travel guides with relief drawings and reference scale (human figure)
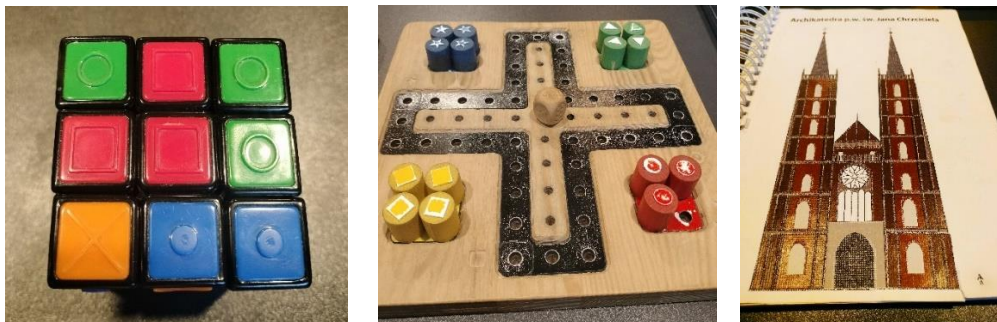
Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

The Invisible Street also offers the Whispering Theater (Figure 28-29.) – performances performed live in complete darkness and received only in the audio sphere.

Figure 28-29. Braille tablets; "Whispered Theater" poster
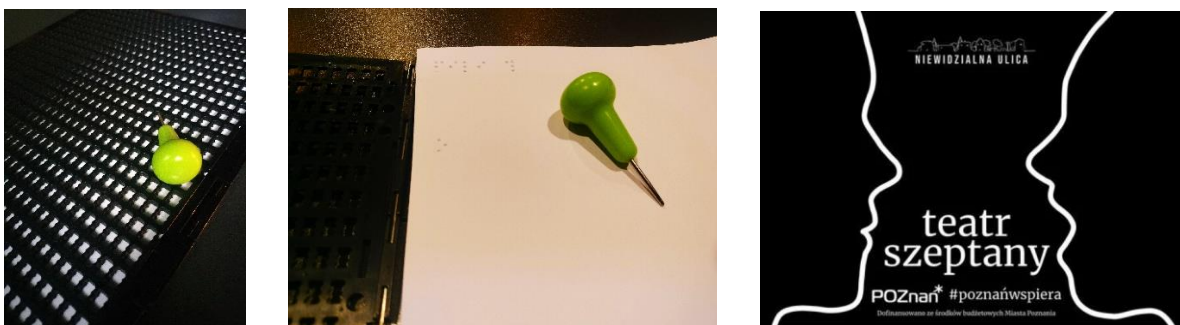
Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

The Sound Panorama of the Łazarz Housing Estate (the part of Poznań where the Invisible Street is located) is available on the Invisible Street website. Panorama is a project financed by the Department of Culture of the City of Poznań and includes an interactive audio map with the most characteristic places of the district. To listen to the recordings, simply click on any marker on the map (Figure 30.).

Figure 30. Invisible Street - Sound Panorama of the Łazarz Housing Estate
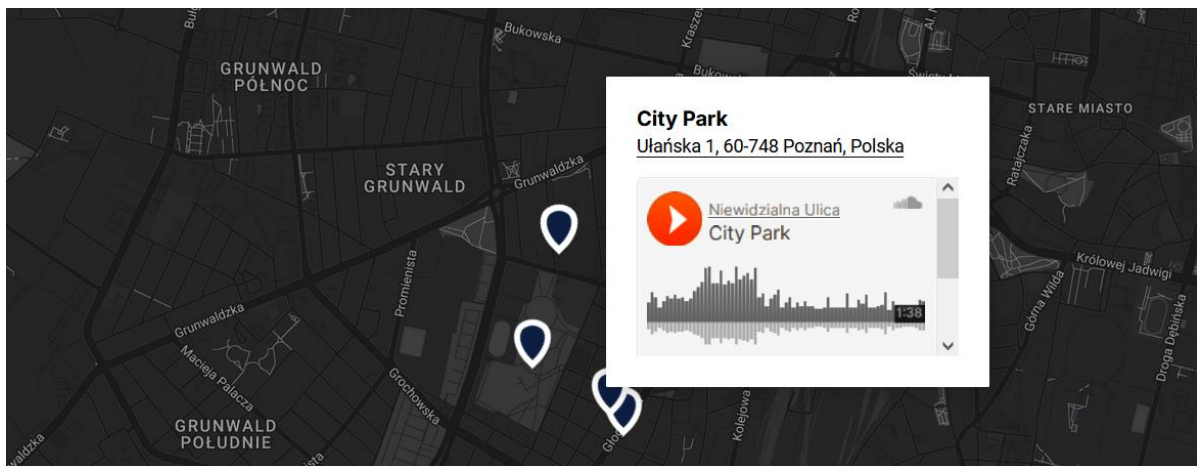
Source: https://niewidzialnaulica.pl/panorama-dziekowa-osiedl-lazarza/ (access: 15.04.2024)

Brama Poznania ICHOT [Poznan Gate] (ul. Gdańska 2, Poznań) is a modern, multimedia heritage interpretation center. Compared to other tourist attractions not only in Poznań, Greater Poland, but also in Poland, it is one of the facilities well adapted to the needs of people with disabilities, the elderly and visitors with children (Figure 31.).

Figure 31. Brama Poznania ICHOT [Poznan Gate]

Source: https://bramapoznania.pl (access: 15.04.2024)

Brama Poznania offers many events addressed to people with disabilities, the elderly and families with children. With children in mind, a separate audio guide tour path has been created, including fun elements and leading through yellow markers to places adapted for children. Seniors can visit the Gate with a guide in their age group, for blind people there are aids, tactical exhibition elements and audio description. All films have been equipped with translation in Polish Sign Language (PJM), at the checkouts you can also connect with a Polish Sign Language interpreter in real time via video transmission. The facility has an elevator and an evac chair (an evacuation chair in case the elevator is out of order), and outside there is a lift enabling wheelchair access to the grassy beach by the river. During the tour, you can use

comfortable seats, as well as portable, light chairs available at the entrance to the rooms (Figure 32.).

Figure 32. Brama Poznania [Poznan Gate] – examples of good practices in the field of accessibility
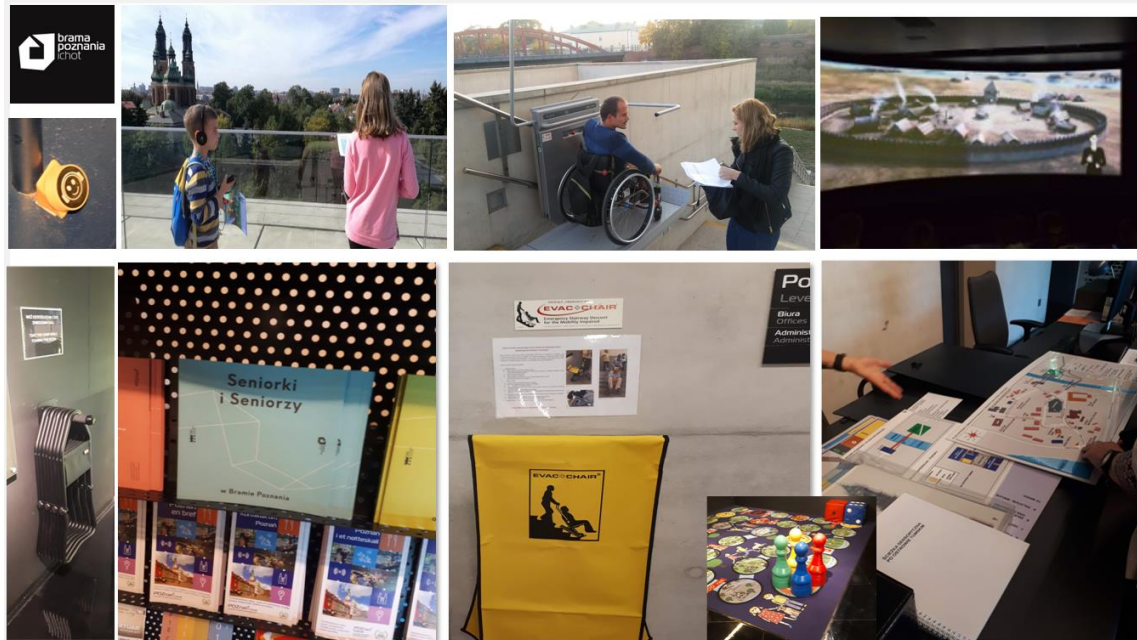
Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

All amenities, as well as events addressed to people with disabilities, elderly people and families with children, have been presented in detail and in an accessible way (including PJM and audio description) on the website (Figure 33.).

Figure 33. Brama Poznania - information on the website regarding accessibility, including: in Polish Sign Language and audio description
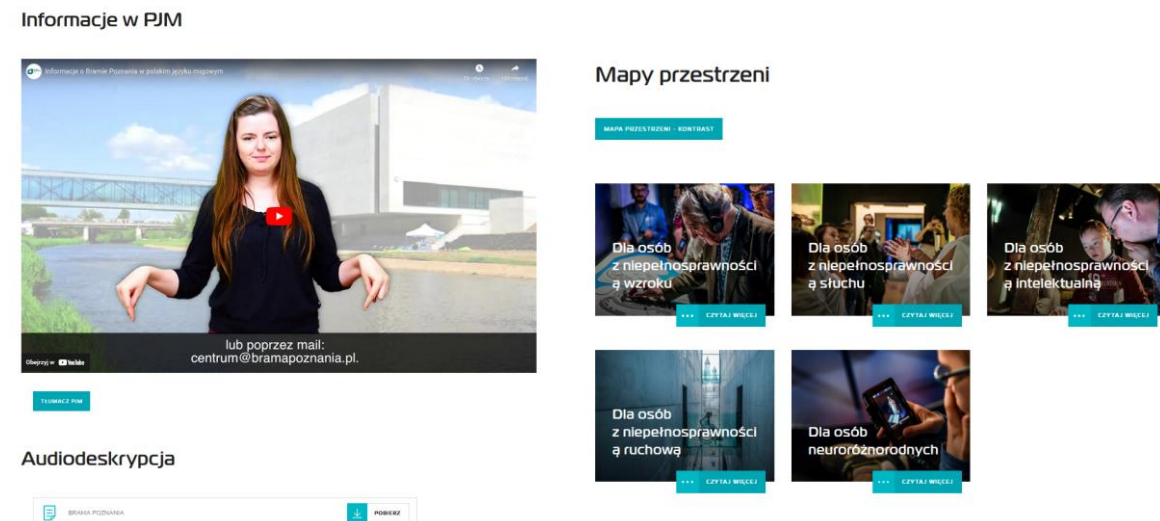
Source: https://bramapoznania.pl/dostepnosc (access: 15.04.2024).

Brama Poznania has won many competitions related to accessibility. In 2016, it received the title of Accessible Municipal Cultural Institution in Poznań. It was awarded the Golden Roar in the Innovation category in the Accessible Poznań 2019 competition, and in 2020 the title of Accessibility Leader 2020 in the Public Space category.

The Museum of the First Piasts in Lednica (Dziekanowice, Lednogóra) is a good example of making historical places available both outdoors, in buildings, including the historic buildings of open-air museums, and through the organization of integration events (Figure 34.).

Figure 34. Museum of the First Piasts in Lednica

Source: https://www.lednicamuzeum.pl (access: 15.04.2024)

The Museum provides comprehensive services. During the ferry crossing to the island of Ostrów Lednicki, employees help wheelchair users enter the ferry. The paths are gravel, paved, and there are ramps leading to the huts with exhibits. The boards at the exhibitions were placed at a height and at an angle convenient for reading by people in wheelchairs, and there were viewing places for rest in a multisensory environment by the water, next to fragrant flowers (Figure 35.).

Figure 35. Museum of the First Piasts in Lednica - good practices in the field of outdoor amenities in Ostrów Lednicki
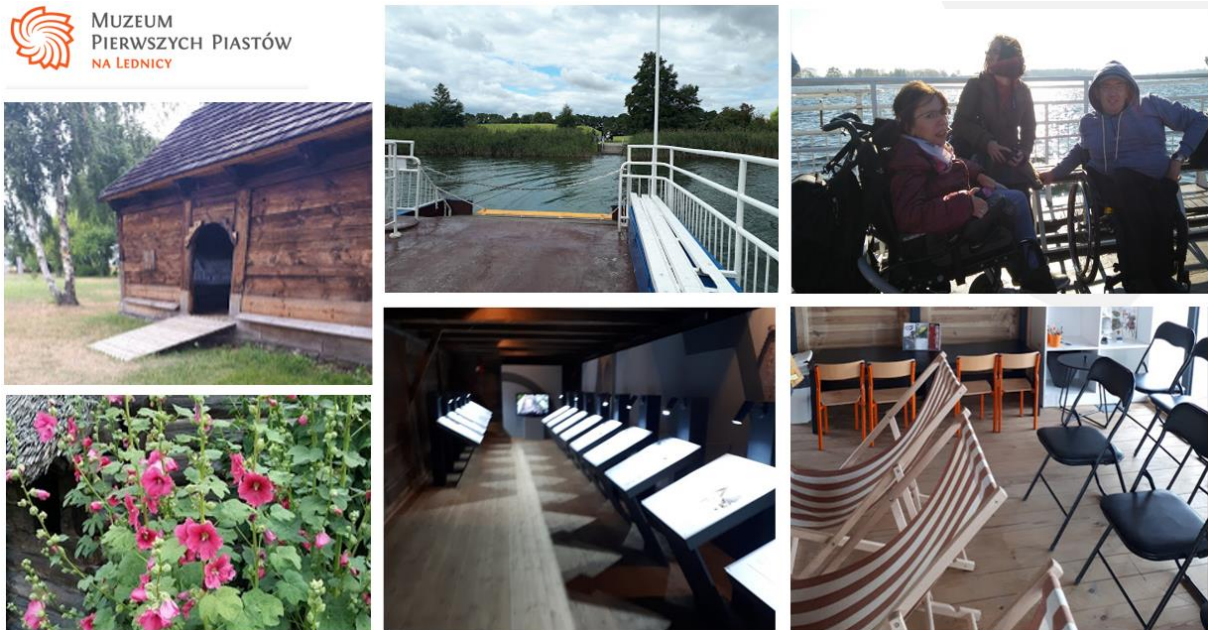
Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

The historic architecture of the cottages in the open-air museum in Dziekanowice uses a simple solution of portable ramps that level thresholds. This allowed to avoid interference with the original structures, and at the same time allowed people in wheelchairs to overcome stairs and thresholds (Figure 36.).

Figure 36. Museum of the First Piasts in Lednica - good practices in the field of amenities in the historic architecture of the open-air museum in Dziekanowice

Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

All outdoor facilities have light, portable seats, eagerly used by visitors (Figure 37.).

Figure 37. Museum of the First Piasts in Lednica - good practices in the field of mobile seats

Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

The museum organizes many events and integration workshops, including a cyclical event titled "Through the thresholds of folk culture" in the open-air museum in Dziekanowice. On this day, part of the open-air museum will become an open place for people with disabilities movement, trained educators conduct both tours and integration activities. One of the most important goals of the event is to make the museum a place accessible to the widest possible audience. The event program is based on the principles of social inclusion. It is addressed mainly to people struggling with movement and vision problems and seniors (Figure 38.).

Figure 38. Museum of the First Piasts in Lednica – Cyclical events – "Through the Threshold of Culture"

Source: https://www.lednicamuzeum.pl (access: 15.04.2024)

In the Museum of the Archdiocese of Gniezno (ul. Kolegiaty 2, Gniezno), an example of good practices addressed to deaf and hard of hearing people are tour guides (Figure 39.), equipped with recordings in Polish sign language, regarding all the exhibits visited both in the museum,

as well as the Gniezno Cathedral (the coronation place of the first rulers of Poland and the center of the cult of Saint Adalbert).

Figure 39. A guide with PJM recordings in the Museum of the Archdiocese of Gniezno

Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

On the Lech Hill website, a virtual tour of the main historical objects is available, as well as a catalog - Digital Collections of the Oldest Cathedral Treasury in Poland. People with mobility disabilities can drive directly to the entrance to the Museum of the Archdiocese of Gniezno, and there is a driveway to the Cathedral.

The Spatial Orientation Park was established in 2012 at a school for blind children (Special Educational Center for Blind Children, Plac Przemysława 9, Owińska). It serves mainly children and teenagers, but is also open to visitors during designated hours when there are no classes. It has an area of over 2.5 hectares and includes, among others: vegetable garden, recreation area, specially designed toys and teaching aids. The park is a safe space, designed with the participation of blind people. There is always a staff member at the entrance to help if needed (Figure 40-41.).

Elements that facilitate orientation in space include: a clear layout of paths – wide, gravel paths, narrow dirt paths with raised edges; different texture of the path surfaces (Figure. 45-47.); a playground for games and cycling surrounded by a guide for a wooden cart (Figure. 42-44.); green zones with flower beds dominated by one species of vegetation; tips from other people – there is security in the garden, helpful if blind people visit it on their own, and blind people can work together with the gardener; sounds occurring naturally in the landscape: the sound of water, the creaking of gravel, acoustic devices: stairs playing, sound amplifying cables; benches, tables; curbs (as guides); balustrades; the terrain is flat, does not require ramps; characteristic points that facilitate orientation in space - brick houses, a zoo, a gazebo, sculptures, taps with figurines of various animals (Figure 40-41.).

Figure 40-41. Spatial Orientation Park in Owińska – clear layout of paths; Spatial Orientation Park in Owińska - signs with descriptions of plants in Braille

Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

Figure 42-43-44. Spatial Orientation Park in Owińska – different surface textures of paths; Spatial Orientation Park in Owińska – diversity – shapes perceptible by touch; Spatial Orientation Park in Owińska – a playground for games and cycling surrounded by a guide for a wooden cart
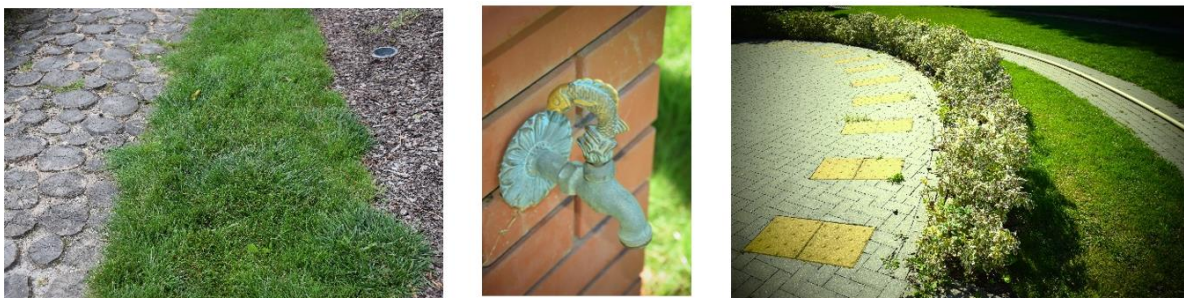
Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

Tools for educating blind and visually impaired people in the Spatial Orientation Park in Owińska include: Braille signs (Figure 41.); a herb zone, a vegetable garden where you can plant and care for plants; blind people can pick vegetables and fruits and taste them (Figure 42-44.); a playground with educational toys, e.g. a globe (Figure 45-47.); numerous interactive toys, e.g. an earthen carillon or a special cage with a system of sound-conducting pipes; tactile graphics, sensory path. Sports equipment includes: a treadmill, a climbing wall, trampolines, swings, and a secured area for e.g. cycling (Figure. 42-44.). The Park has taken care of small architectural elements, e.g. mini houses made of various materials: wood, stone, brick - enabling people to learn about the construction of houses by touch (Figure 42-44.).

Source: photo by A. Zajadacz

Elements for recreation and entertainment of blind and visually impaired people in the Spatial Orientation Park in Owińska include: benches; park vegetation, extensive playground with numerous toys and equipment; bridges, gazebo, zoo.

International White Cane Day, celebrated on October 15 since 1969, is intended to remind everyone of the needs of blind and visually impaired people. The aim of the campaign is to shape social attitudes based on openness, tolerance, empathy and understanding the needs of visual impairments. In 2023, its celebration, organized by the Special Educational and Educational Center for Blind Children in Owińska, took place at the Collegium Geographicum of the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań. Presented, among others: history of the Center, nature of classes, teaching aids (Figure 48-49.). During the meeting, students and lecturers learned about, among others: Braille writing system and electronic devices supporting blind people. They could also play tactile chess and sound table tennis and see the typhlomap exhibition. The idea behind organizing the meetings is social inclusion through sharing knowledge and experiences in the field of universal design.

Figure 48-49. White Cane Day. Teaching aids; White Cane Day. Sound table tennis

Source: photo by J. Zwoliński

Figure 50-51-52. White Cane Day. Chess for the blind; White Cane Day. Braille writing; Learning spatial orientation

Source: photo by J. Zwoliński

The presented examples of good practices refer to the "three pillars of accessibility" related to universal architectural and information design, as well as developing appropriate competences of staff serving tourists. Moreover, they draw attention to the need to take systemic actions by institutions responsible for social and tourism policy at the national, regional and local levels, as well as education in the field of social inclusion and universal design.

5.5. Romanian examples

In Romania, since the early 2000s, a number of social tourism programmes have appeared, which are also closely linked to social policies at the national level (Simon et al., 2017). According to a study by Simon et al. (2017), it can be generally stated that social tourism, including tourism for people with disabilities, is at a low level in Romania. This mainly means that the pool of tourism opportunities in the country is under-dimensioned compared to the real needs of the population categories that benefit from tourism activities at lower prices. At the same time, statistically there is a lack of complete information on social tourism, including tourism data for the disadvantaged. The tourism associations that run social tourism programmes do not have annual analyses of participation data, participating businesses, accommodation, venues, number of tourists, etc., so we cannot get a realistic picture of how many people from disadvantaged groups are currently benefiting from existing but scarce opportunities at national level (Simon et al., 2017).

Another study by D. Mihaela (2019) provides a detailed overview of accessibility tourism efforts in Romania in recent years. Since 2013, Motivation Foundation Romania has been providing certified training courses for professionals based on the curricula developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). At the same time, it has created the first online platform, a national map of accessible places, where public institutions, places of entertainment and leisure, accommodation and facilities and their surroundings can be found. The map is available at www.accesibil.org and is designed for people with disabilities. The map can also be used by tourism operators who want to develop tourism services for people with disabilities (Mihaela, 2019). Another initiative of Motivation Foundation Romania is the assessment of the accessibility of buildings, which allows a building to obtain an accessibility mark from the State Office of Inventories and Trademarks. Among the few tourism and hospitality service providers, it is worth highlighting that the Băile Felix complex and the Royal Courtyard in Piatra Neamț meet the accessibility criteria (Mihaela, 2019).

Nowadays, the number of people with disabilities is increasing in Romania (and worldwide), which is reason enough for people with disabilities to be given special attention by different segments of society, such as service providers (including tourism), entrepreneurs and researchers. Babaita (2014) researched the specific field of tourism in Romania that deals with the issue of tourism for people with disabilities. In her research, she highlights the need to develop a social model for people with disabilities, which has not yet been formulated in the tourism literature. The aim of her questionnaire survey was to find out whether Romanian society is open and ready to accept this new segment, i.e. whether the needs of consumers with special needs are taken into account in the tourism market. The research examined the attitudes of Romanian society towards this issue, namely the attitudes and behaviour of people without disabilities towards people with disabilities. In addition, the research was aimed at exploring the reasons that lead to negative feelings towards persons with disabilities (reticence or indifference) (Babaita, 2014).

The main conclusion of her research is that the majority of people with disabilities are accepted in Romanian society and support the integration process. In addition, respondents believe that, as in all modern societies, there should exist in Romania a system that provides certain material benefits and psychosocial assistance to these persons. It also highlights the fact that, although progress has been made in removing certain barriers to transport, there is still much to be done in terms of access to accommodation, restaurants and attractions, and

that the participation of people with disabilities in tourism programmes is limited. According to research participants, there is a need to promote the participation of people with disabilities in tourism (Babaita, 2014).

Erdeli et al. (2011) summarizes the difficulties and changes over time in Romanian spa tourism. The study delves into how the industry has transformed from its communist roots to the post-communist era. Despite being significantly impacted by the major political and socio-economic changes following the 1989 Revolution, this industry continues to thrive alongside emerging forms of tourism that cater to the preferences of modern leisure consumers. They emphasize that the National Pension and Other Social Insurance Funds have a vital role in facilitating social tourism by providing subsidized or complimentary spa treatment vouchers to retired individuals and disabled adults. The special Spa Social Tourism Program, run by the national pension fund and the social insurance fund for individuals affected by work accidents and occupational diseases, caters to retired and people with disabilities. The program distributes "free vouchers" for retired individuals with disabilities and "subsidized vouchers" for other retired individuals.

Regarding physical barriers, the findings indicate that although there have been improvements in accessibility, the sample members still perceive the presence of such barriers for disabled individuals.

The authors also concluded that genuine change in societal attitudes towards people with disabilities can only be achieved through education. Consequently, incorporating topics aimed at improving attitudes towards disabled individuals in the primary school curriculum could serve as an impetus for attaining the UN's sustainable development goals.

Munteanu et al. (2014) investigate competitive strategies that can be adopted by hotel managers in resorts on the Black Sea coast of Mamaia, Romania, taking into account consumer expectations and best practices in the tourism industry. Among other important infrastructure and service elements, they pointed out that facilities for tourists with disabilities can be found in four sampled hotels as follows: either the rooms are adequately equipped for these people, or there is adequate wheelchair access in the hotel surroundings and public areas, and there is ramp access to different buildings of the hotel complex. Iaki is the only Romanian hotel in the sample with facilities for people with disabilities.

Crismariu's (2017) study highlights the growing interest in accessible tourism in Romania in recent years and the growing importance of this market. However, for the time being, awareness raising and early stages are taking place in the country. In fact, the aim of the awareness phase is to raise awareness of the importance of accessible tourism in the relevant sectors among businesses and public administrations. In the early phase, the aim is to lay the groundwork in this area, such as training the right staff and formulating the principles and actions that will be needed in the development phase.

The analysis (Crismariu, 2017) also shows that the first organisations interested in the development of accessible tourism in Romania have started to appear. In Romania, the study mentions 3 key actors registered in ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism): the Motivation Romania Foundation, ADR - Regional Development Agency and Sano Touring travel agency. Sano Touring is a Romanian travel agency specialised in accessible tourism that has been operating since 2015 and aims to attract foreign tourists with special needs to the country.

The services offered by the agency are: selected and tested tourist programs, tours, medical treatments (spas, which are important for tourism for all) and recreational programs. For these programmes, the travel agency will provide suitable transport, accommodation, guides, public transport, restaurants with such facilities, and qualified staff who are familiar with your needs. In Romania, the main places contributing to the provision of accessible tourism in the category of spas are: Felix Baths, Covasna Baths, Spa of Covasna, Spa of Sovata, Eforie Nord resort of the Black Sea.

In terms of accessible tourism, it is of paramount importance to sensitise society and develop an inclusive attitude, which will enable tourists with disabilities to benefit from the experience of tourism services. Many tourist destinations and the accommodation, restaurants and entertainment facilities within them are promoting themselves as accessible destinations for people with disabilities. In the vast majority of cases, although the services offered are advertised as accessible, the persons concerned still face various barriers due to inadequate facilities, lack of accurate assessment of needs and insufficient experience. Operators of facilities in different destinations often forget that each type of disability requires a specific approach, due to the different problems of the persons concerned. This means that people with disabilities continue to represent a new target group in tourism, requiring non-templary tourism services, and their growing role in the industry must be taken into account. The worldwide Covid-19 epidemic in 2020 has contributed to the effective use of modern technologies, as it has resulted in audio materials, various accessibility and smartphone apps that have made it possible for people with disabilities to navigate services. Increasing accessibility requires knowledge of the diverse needs of people with disabilities and the ability to apply this knowledge in practice (Eusébio et al., 2023).

In order to ensure that tourists with disabilities are included in the tourism experience and in tourism itself, various initiatives are needed to set an example for society and for the businesses that make up the tourism sector. To this end, the authors of the book have collected 13 good practices (as shown in Table 4.) aimed at the inclusion of tourists with disabilities in Romania, which contribute to the development of a significant segment of tourism. The good practices include initiatives that are specifically useful for visually impaired people, people with intellectual disabilities and people with reduced mobility, but there are also a number of good practices that are informative for all and can be widely used.

Table 4. Good practices collected by the authors for the social inclusion of people with disabilities in Romania

No.	Name of good practice	Primary target group	Location	Implementers, promoters
1.	The Terra Mirabilis project	Persons not able to see	Cluj-Napoca and surroundings	Babilon Travel Association, Cluj-Napoca Town Hall, Cluj-Napoca Tourist Information Centre
2.	Square sculpture of Șumuleu	Persons not able to see and people with reduced mobility	Miercurea Ciuc, Șumuleu	Transylvanian Roads Association, Orbán László, Tövissi Zsolt, Berze Imre
3.	Original trail for people with disabilities in the Retezat Mountains	Persons not able to see and people with reduced mobility	Retezat National Park, Nucşoara Visitor Centre	Retezat Tourism Association

4.	Internet accessibility map	People with reduced mobility	Online platform	Motivation Foundation Romania
5.	Hiking guide for families with children and people with disabilities	People with reduced mobility	Mountains around Brasov	Marian Anghel, AECO Romania, Outdoor Education and Cultural Association
6.	Valea Fagilor Agropension	People with reduced mobility	Tulcea County, Luncavita municipality	Valea Fagilor Agropension
7.	Sea and beach for all	People with reduced mobility	Pupa Beach, Mamaia	M24Seven Europe, RAPTronic, RAP Develoment, RAP Instal, Petroterm SRL., Sorla and Dobra, AQUA Carpatica, Martin Eughenia, Gabriel Voitis
8.	Peat bog	People with reduced mobility	Harghita County, Praid municipality	Korond-Parajd Nature Conservancy, Korond Tourist Association
9.	Nurture in nature. The movement is for everyone	People with reduced mobility	Harghita County, Harghita Madaras	Nurture in Nature
10.	We bring Accessible Romania to the world	People with reduced mobility and people with hearing impairment	More destinations (Brasov, Sibiu, Bucharest, etc.)	Accessible Romania by Santo Touring
11.	Skiing for people with mobility disabilities	People with reduced mobility	Mountains of Romania	CaiacSMile
12.	Special Olympics	People with intellectual disabilities	Sports competitions, school education, courses in Romania	Special Olympics Foundation
13.	AUDARA (Audit Accessibility Romania)	All people with disabilities	Online platform	CED Romanian Exceprience Center, Accessible Romania by Sano Touring, Accessible Romania

Source: own editing (2024)

1. "*The Terra Mirabilis project*" is an initiative for visually impaired people, created jointly by the Babilon Travel Association of Cluj-Napoca, Cluj Town Hall and the Cluj Tourist Information Centre. The project is educational, mobility enhancing and aims to involve the people concerned in the tourism process. The relevance of the initiative lies in the documentation of itineraries in exchange for financial support, and in the training of eight volunteers able to accompany visually impaired people or groups of people with this problem along the routes developed. The financial support will finance various guides, maps, information and promotional materials to make Cluj-Napoca accessible to visually impaired people, both national and foreign tourists. The itineraries will include plans of the most important sights, monuments and places of worship that can highlight the multicultural and multi-ethnic dimension of the city. The guides are in Romanian and English, in a format suitable for the visually impaired, i.e. audio guides in large print. These materials are also available in digital format as MP3 audio documents and PDF documents. The aim of the project is to encourage the integration of visually impaired people into the community, access to tourist destinations and the development of interactions between visually impaired people, who in many cases

have to step out of their comfort zone, which can be a difficulty. The innovative nature of the initiative lies in the fact that it offers visually impaired people the opportunity to discover the city's features, attractions and history. This good practice can be transferred without modification to other cities in the country, if the municipality and NGOs of the city concerned consider it important. The project is not harmful to the environment, and the production of more visible signage, maps for expansion, information and promotional material will be produced at a fixed financial cost.

2. The "*Square sculpture of Şumuleu*" is a joint initiative of the Transylvanian Roads Association, László Orbán, Zsolt Tövissi and Imre Berze, which is intended to sensitize society and to provide information to visually impaired people. The sculpture is specifically designed to make the Şumuleu Church of the Cross and other landmarks in the area tactile for visually impaired and visually impaired people, and informative for visitors in wheelchairs, due to the difficult accessibility of the area. Located in the car park next to the Church of Şumuleu, the sculpture models the relief of a circle 900 metres in diameter as the crow flies and the buildings on the site on a bronze relief (Figure 53.). The innovative character of the initiative lies in its alternative way of presenting the area. From a sustainability point of view, the bronze relief can be expected to retain its function for a long time without any additional expenditure, and visitors to the area can access and learn about it free of charge. The initiative could be adapted to any destination using different sculptural techniques and 3D printing, which could showcase the major tourist attractions of the site, not only for the visually impaired but also for wheelchair users.

Figure 53. The design sculpture of Şumuleu

Source: https://felvidek.ma

3. The initiative "*Original trail for people with disabilities in the Retezat Mountains*" was created by the Retezat Tourism Association to provide information about the mountain area

and the possibility to travel to the site, in addition to the visitation of the site by people with disabilities. The trail is open to all, but was created primarily to serve the disabled and the visually impaired. The trail is located at the foot of the Retezat Mountains, in the Retezat National Park, at the Nucşoara Visitor Centre, which offers an experience for adults with disabilities and children with disabilities. The trail is 36 metres long and is equipped with ramps and handrails. Along the trail, visitors can observe the footprints of animals living in the mountain range and information about the species has been placed. The trail has been designed to be wheelchair accessible.

The area is easily accessible by car, is barrier-free and there is relatively little traffic in this zone. The initiative will bring nature closer to people with disabilities. The design of the area has sought to provide a well thought-out and detailed infrastructure network. The plant species on site are tactile and the footprints of animals are visible from wheelchairs. The animal footprints, mainly of otter, deer, jackal, wild boar, wolf, bear and chamois, are placed on wooden panels in relief to allow visually impaired people to feel their way around and are an interesting sight for all visitors. The itinerary has been implemented by the Retezat Tourist Association in collaboration with the Romanian Wilderness Association and the Retezat National Park Directorate, with the support of the Romanian-American Foundation and the Partnership Foundation. The maintenance of the initiative does not entail any additional costs for the Retezat National Park Administration, so it can remain operational in the long term. The good practice can be adapted without modification in the visitor centres of the national parks in the country, but can also be developed and sustained in schools, kindergartens and educational institutions.

4. The "*Internet accessibility map*", an initiative of Motivation Foundation Romania, located in the municipality of Buda, Ilfov County. The map was created for information and mobility of tourists. It is mainly aimed at people with disabilities who use wheelchairs for transport. The accessibility map is a tool that provides a useful source of information and centralises data on accessible sites in Romania. Motivation's accessibility trademark is registered at the State Trademark and Design Office under registration number M2012 02770. Accessibility to accommodation, museums and cultural sites is essential for people with reduced mobility, as for all travellers, when planning their trip. The aim of the initiative is to provide wheelchair users with information on the accessibility of accommodation, city spaces and tourist attractions. Today, access to information on the web is increasingly important, so it is also an important factor that people with disabilities are informed at home before visiting a destination or an establishment they wish to visit. This is the purpose and innovative role of the website. In terms of the financial sustainability of good practice, it is worth noting that resources are needed to continuously survey the sites and facilities and to update the database on a regular basis. The initiative could be adapted to other countries if they have the necessary information.

5. The initiative "*Hiking guide for families with children and people with disabilities*" is a hiking guide available in Romanian and English, written by Marian Anghel with the support of AECO Romania and the Outdoor Education and Cultural Association. The guide is designed to sensitise and inform. The project is aimed at a specific target group, first of all people with reduced mobility, wheelchair users, and mainly at the routes available in Brasov County. The guidebook contains descriptions of almost 60 routes in six mountain ranges in the Brasov area, classified according to difficulty. The routes are accompanied by explanatory maps, pictures and useful information, as well as a wealth of information on what mountain hiking is all about.

The book also describes the trails of Postăvaru Mountain, along with the routes of Piatra Mare Mountain, Piatra Craiului Mountain, Bucegi, Ciucas Mountains and Baiului Mountains. The guide is a very useful tool for people with disabilities, but also for families with children, teachers, associations, NGOs, to help them find their way around the mountains around Brasov. The information contained in the guide will help adults to choose the right routes for their children, depending on their age, equipment and experience. The development is justified by the need to provide information on the safety of the routes for people with disabilities, families and children. Provide safe and comfortable access to some mountain attractions for people with disabilities. The publication is sustainable and does not have a significant environmental impact. It is sent free of charge by post to people with disabilities. The guide can be adapted to mountain attractions in other counties or countries, in different languages, but it is advisable to assess the origin of visitors beforehand.

6. The "*Valea Fagilor Agropension*" is an agrotourism pension in the municipality of Luncavita, Tulcea County, which has been developed with the support of the National Rural Development Programme. It operates as a certified accommodation and can accommodate tourists in three bedrooms. The initiative has a sensitisation, mobility improvement and tourist attraction character. The guest house is designed with special attention to people with disabilities. The manager of the pension is a wheelchair-bound disabled person, which adds to the good atmosphere and special charm of the pension. The pension therefore caters for this special target group, with well thought-out equipment, elimination of thresholds, special bathrooms, comfortable and spacious spaces. The accommodation is adapted to the characteristics of the area, with the cultural traditions of Dobrudza in addition to the recipes of the Danube Delta. The traditional environment, the natural attractions, the leisure activities (hiking, fishing, cycling, astronomy, participation in agricultural work) nourish the soul and offer unforgettable experiences to those who come here. Visitors are welcome to discover the local cultural heritage and participate in local events and festivities. The guesthouse's rooms, bathrooms and dining room are adapted to specific needs, in addition to being easily accessible by car. The special feature of the agritourism guesthouse is the special design of the space and an orchard where visitors can discover different varieties of apples, apricots, cherries and plums, and take part in the work around the farm. The pension's own income ensures its financial sustainability, and the administration provides funds to improve the quality of its services. The good practice can be adapted to other destinations, taking into account local possibilities.

7. The "*Sea and beach for all*" initiative is a set of activities for sensitization, education and mobility improvement on the Romanian coast, the result of a joint collaboration between M24Seven Europe, RAPTronic, RAP Develoment, RAP Instal, Petroterm SRL, Sorla and Dobra from Constanta, AQUA Carpatica, Martin Eughenia and Gabriel Voitis. The event is accessible to all people with disabilities, with dedicated efforts to provide a unique beach experience tailored specifically for these travellers. The "Sea and Beach for All" initiative took place in August 2017 and August 2021, when the first disabled beach in Romania opened in Mamaia. With the agreement of the tourism operator that owns the "Pupa Beach" part of the beach, a part of the beach was built right next to the lifeguard tower, for safety and to ensure easy access for people with disabilities. The "Pupa Beach" section is located directly at the entrance to the Mamaia resort, which is properly signposted and accessible from the street by a ramp for disabled persons. A wooden access road leads to the accessible part of the beach, where three floating Mobi-chairs are available for disabled bathers to enjoy the bathing experience. The beach is equipped with six special sunbeds with umbrellas, special toilets and changing

rooms adapted to the needs of the disabled. Mobi-chairs (Figure 54.). float in the sea and provide safe bathing for people with reduced mobility. Smaller chairs have a maximum weight limit of 115 kg, while larger chairs can support up to 136 kg. Special sun loungers for people with disabilities are provided free of charge by the association. The initiative had a budget of €7000, provided by Romanian businesses, organisations and individuals. The good practice can be adapted without modification to other coastal beach locations or resorts with lakes. The mobility of the floating chairs will facilitate bathing in places with easy access to the waterfront.

Figure 54. The floating chair in the "Sea and beach for all" project

Source: https://www.romania-insider.com

8. The "*Peat bog*" in Fântâna Brazilor is Romania's first disabled-friendly trail, created jointly by the Korond-Parajd Nature Conservancy and the Korond Tourist Association for education and information, while facilitating mobility and making the attraction accessible. The initiative is designed to serve all people with disabilities. The trail was opened in 2013 in the area's nature reserve to attract wheelchair visitors. The Korond-Parajd Nature Reserve inaugurated the Peat Bog Trail in the Pine Mountains, which has been designed to allow people with disabilities to move around unhindered. The trail is part of a Natura 2000 nature reserve. Visitors can gain an insight into the typical flora and fauna of the taiga and the threats they face. The trail was built with grant funding and generous donations from the local community and was renovated again in 2022. Nearly 85% of the timber needed to build the trail system was donated by individuals in the area. The peat bog in the village of Corund is accessible by bicycle and can be visited free of charge, but only by local student volunteers. The trail is interactive, with educational and interactive panels along the trail providing information about the plants and animals that live there. The information panels are available in three languages,

Hungarian, Romanian and English, and inform visitors about the characteristics of the peat bog. The initiative could provide a special educational and learning experience for people with disabilities, in addition to the attraction of hiking in nature. The innovative nature of the trail lies in the fact that it offers a unique opportunity for people with disabilities to learn about the plant species in the area by making it accessible. In addition, the different species of moss, which offer a unique spectacle, deserve special mention. In terms of the financial sustainability of the initiative, maintaining the trail at an adequate level of quality requires regular monitoring to ensure safe use, which is a cost factor. The primary objective of the tourist destination is environmental education and awareness-raising. Interactive signage in the peat bogs here will play this role. This is a key element in promoting environmental protection. The good practice can be adapted to other parts of the country with minor or major modifications according to local conditions.

9. The initiative "*Nurture in nature. The movement is for everyone*" is an educational and mobility development tool for active recreation for people with disabilities. The team implementing the exercise is composed of ski instructors, mountain guides and a number of active and mobile people, primarily engaged in the Harghita Madaras, Harghita County. The initiative offers accessible outdoor activities, including summer tours with specially designed bicycles for off-road use, which allow people with disabilities to participate. These bicycles are equipped with a front seat for the disabled participant, while a companion controls the equipment and assists with mounting and dismounting. In winter, individuals with disabilities can learn to ski using special ski chairs (Figure 55.), which provide varying degrees of independence based on the type of chair. A guide is needed, but individuals with less severe disabilities can use the equipment with greater autonomy, offering different levels of challenge for interested participants. The aim of the activity is to make active recreation available to people with disabilities and all nature lovers, both in winter and summer. The initiative is innovative in that it uses special equipment to provide a physical activity experience that a certain segment of society cannot otherwise experience. The services provided are sustainable and do not require significant energy or other material inputs and have a negligible ecological footprint. The main prerequisite for sustainability is the involvement of a sufficient number of paying customers and support staff in the organisation and ongoing operation. The good practice can be applied in all locations where ski slopes, hiking trails and other outdoor activities are available, with varying terrain conditions. The provider of the activity currently only sees the possibility of extending it to certain locations in the Romanian County of Harghita, possibly in the surrounding counties.

Figure 55. The special ski chairs in the " Nurture in nature. The movement is for everyone " project

Source: https://www.facebook.com/NiNadventuresWorld/

10. The project "*We bring Accessible Romania to the world*" has been created by the travel agency Accessible Romania by Sano Touring to make it easier to visit the different attractions. The travel agency targets a variety of disabled target groups, such as people with reduced mobility or hearing impairments, but not all services are clear about whether or not they are accessible to wheelchair users or other people with disabilities. The service provider promotes various tourism products and destinations in Romania, mostly in English. Thematic tours include accessible Transylvania tours, wine and gastronomy tours in Romania. City visits are organised to Brasov, Constanta, Sibiu and Bucharest. Bathing holidays are offered in Băile Felix, Covasna and Sovata. Personal transport is provided in Romania, using a special vehicle called Crafty. The innovative nature of the initiative lies in the fact that, with the help of special equipment, all people with disabilities can participate in different tourist programmes like any other person in society. With the aim of putting Romania on the map of tourism for people with disabilities, the Accessible Romania by Sano Touring travel agency has been created to make adventure and discovery accessible to all. From an adaptability point of view, it can be used in other countries and in other cities and destinations in Romania where special infrastructure is available for wheelchair users to access certain attractions.

11. The "*Skiing for people with mobility disabilities*" is an initiative to improve mobility that can be tried by all people with disabilities. The activity has been launched by the CaiacSMile organisation in Cluj-Napoca, as they believe that sport does not discriminate, so that everyone can enjoy active recreation. For the winter period 2021-2022, CaiacSMile launched the project "Skiing for people with mobility disabilities", where special equipment was purchased to make the ski slopes accessible for people with mobility disabilities (Figure 56.). Events have been organised on the ski slopes and supervisors and mountain guides have been trained to use the equipment. Accessible ski slopes offer people with disabilities the opportunity to practise independently. The association has already taken a big step in this direction with the support of Euroski Vatra Dornei - National Training Centre for Instructors. Three of the CaiacSMile club's flagship members became accredited ski instructors in the winter of 2022. The organisation provided skiing opportunities for 1000 people during the winter of 2022-2023. During the 2022-2023 ski season, eight camps, each lasting six days, were organised at different times and

in different locations on accessible ski slopes in the previous season, where people with disabilities skied together with the members of the club. More than 50 disabled participants learned to ski independently using the Monoski device. They were joined by hundreds of people with various disabilities who enjoyed the skiing experience. In Romania, natural conditions allow the practice of winter sports, but people with disabilities were not able to try these activities until 2021. Exercise therapy is one of the most effective ways to overcome anxiety and improve quality of life, both physically and mentally. People with disabilities should be the first to have access to these forms of therapy, yet they are the first to be denied this right because they do not participate in traditional or adapted competitive sports. In terms of the financial sustainability of the project, the basic cost of the lift chairs is approximately €6,500, but these lifts can be transported to different ski resorts around the country, so that they can be used in several locations on a cyclical basis. The activity is not harmful to the environment and relies on the use of the ski slopes that have been constructed. The good practice can be adapted to the country's ski slopes without modification, provided that they are equipped with appropriate equipment and trained staff.

Figure 56. The The "Skiing for people with mobility disabilities" project

Source: https://www.caiacsmile.ro

12. The "*Special Olympics*" initiative was created by the Special Olympics Foundation, a foundation based in the town of Bragadiru in Ilfov County. The good practice is aimed at sensitising and educating society, while contributing to the mobility of the tourists concerned. The Special Olympics (Figure 57.) is a movement that helps people with intellectual disabilities to be accepted and included in society as active members of their communities, but is accessible to all people with disabilities. The movement seeks to challenge passivity, injustice and intolerance. In Romania, since 2003, Special Olympics has helped more than 27,000 children, young people and adults with intellectual disabilities to become active members of their communities. The Foundation's goal is to enable people with disabilities and their families to participate in various sports competitions, educational activities in schools, training, condition assessments and sustainable solutions to increase the employability of adults with disabilities. The innovative character of the project lies in its ability to increase the employability of adults with intellectual disabilities, their participation in competitions and

training courses. As regards the financial sustainability of the activity, it can be concluded that the Foundation needs permanent funding, which is provided from foreign sources. The good practice could be adapted to other cities, provided that there are sufficient financial and human resources available to organise events, competitions and training courses.

Figure 57. The "Special Olympics"

Source: https://specialolympics.ro

13. The "*AUDARA (Audit Accessibility Romania)*" project is a joint initiative of the CED Romanian Experience Center, Accessible Romania by Sano Touring and Accessible Romania. The information service software, which is basically intended for the transmission of barrier-free institutions and events, provides assistance to all persons with disabilities, which contributes to the sensitization of society, education and information of the affected persons. The creators of the software developed the application for people living with a wide range of disabilities, who can choose the locations, facilities and events they want to visit based on various information, as well as find out about the accessibility of each program. According to the estimates of the World Health Organization, 16% of the world's population has some type of disability, the proportion of which increases in parallel with the aging of the population. From November 2022, different information will be available in the application for people with disabilities. AUDARA allows the preparation of accessibility reports for institutions where cultural activities are taking place throughout Romania at the time of the visit. These reports provide an opportunity to become transparent about how to improve the access and participation of people with various special needs in each event. As a result, cultural institutions will be more inclusive for the relevant target group of the population. The innovative nature of the software lies in the fact that it facilitates the creation of an online

database of cultural destinations in Romania, where accessibility-related information is presented in a structured way. AUDARA develops around 300 parameters based on accessibility criteria provided by the Romanian legal framework, analysis of good practices from around the world, and theoretical and practical experience of accessibility and accessible tourism experts.

Recognizing the importance of accessible tourism and the empowerment of disabled individuals, Romania has started taking steps to improve the situation. Efforts include the development of accessible accommodations, transportation services, and the promotion of inclusive travel experiences. Various organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, are working to raise awareness, provide training, and advocate for policy changes that support the rights and needs of disabled travellers.

The accessibility of travel and tourism services for disabled individuals in Romania remains a work in progress. By addressing the challenges and investing in accessible infrastructure, Romania has the potential to become a more inclusive and welcoming destination for travellers of all abilities. This exploration of accessible good practices in Romania sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the current situation and the ongoing efforts to ensure that disabled individuals can explore and enjoy the country's treasures with ease and dignity.

6. Characterising the demand for accessible tourism and their specific needs in their tourism activities

6.1. The beneficiaries of accessible tourism and their specific needs in tourism activities

6.1.1. The market role of people with disabilities as a tourism segment

The tourist sector is changing to be more inclusive and accessible, focusing on meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities as part of a larger cultural trend. This group's increasing importance in the tourism industry reflects a significant shift towards recognizing their economic and social impact, as well as their essential entitlement to dignified and rewarding travel experiences. Implementing accessible tourism practices demonstrates the industry's dedication to catering to a market segment with substantial economic potential, all while upholding the principles of sustainable and responsible tourism (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; Darcy, McKercher, & Schweinsberg, 2020).

In terms of economic importance, we can state that individuals with disabilities are an important segment of the tourism industry, possessing significant financial influence commonly referred to as the "purple pound" or "disability dollar." The significant economic potential for locations and businesses that focus on accessibility is emphasized by this financial influence (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). The growing number of tourists with disabilities is influenced by society's acknowledgment of their economic importance and the ethical obligation to provide fair tourism opportunities. This change is not just necessary for business success but also a key factor in standing out in the market and gaining a competitive edge, providing organizations with a distinct approach to set themselves apart in a saturated market.

There is also a growing need for tourist experiences tailored to the specific requirements of travellers with impairments. This request goes above the fundamental accessibility standards required by the law, aiming for travel experiences that are smooth and completely engaging (Poria, Reichel, & Brandt, 2011). The tourism industry's initiatives to accommodate tourists with disabilities not only directly benefit them but also enhance the overall quality and attractiveness of tourism products, making locations more appealing to a wider range of customers.

To adequately cater to visitors with disabilities, a comprehensive approach to accessibility is necessary, including physical access, clear information, and customized services (Burnett & Bender Baker, 2001). Extensive accessibility efforts highlight the crucial need to promote an inclusive attitude among service providers and the public, creating an environment where all tourists feel accepted and appreciated.

Taking into consideration market differentiation and competitive advantage and so emphasizing accessibility in tourism allows firms to establish a unique position in a fiercely competitive sector. Accessible tourism offerings serve as distinctive marketing points, appealing to both individuals with disabilities and a wider demographic that prioritizes diversity and corporate social responsibility (Benjamin, Dillette, & Alderman, 2018). Strategic difference improves a company's reputation and builds client loyalty, creating a strong basis for long-term success.

Incorporating accessible tourism practices is also crucial for promoting sustainable and ethical tourism goals. Accessible tourism supports global initiatives for sustainable and fair tourist

economies by promoting social inclusion, equity, and universal access to leisure and travel (McCabe, Joldersma, & Li, 2010).

Although progress has been made in include those with disabilities in the mainstream tourism industry, there are still obstacles to fully realizing this potential. The constraints are the requirement for universally implemented accessibility standards and thorough staff training on disability awareness (Ray & Ryder, 2003). Facing these difficulties directly provides distinct chances for creativity, cooperation, and leadership in the tourism sector, advancing the goal of inclusion.

Ultimately, the increasing involvement of individuals with disabilities in the tourist sector reflects the industry's overall dedication to inclusivity, acknowledging the significant economic and social impact of this demographic. The tourist industry can realize the vast potential of the accessible tourism market by fully embracing its difficulties and opportunities. This initiative benefits both tourists with disabilities and enhances the tourism experience for all, representing a significant advancement towards a more inclusive, sustainable, and responsible tourism sector.

6.1.2. People with physical and locomotor disabilities

Given the emergence of all-inclusive travel, efforts should be made to include individuals with physical and locomotor disabilities in the travel sector. The chapter analyses the unique requirements and difficulties faced by the population in relation to accessible tourism. The purpose is to promote accessibility and enjoyment of tourism for individuals with physical difficulties by raising awareness for inclusivity.

Physical and loco-motor impairments encompass a diverse range of issues, including difficulties in movement, coordination, and physical performance. Congenital disabilities like cerebral palsy or disabilities acquired through conditions such as spinal cord damage or amputation. The World Health Organization emphasizes the importance of prioritizing physio-disability-oriented development for inclusive tourism (2011).

Essential components of accessible tourism

- Accessibility: Accessibility in tourism focuses on providing unrestricted access to all tourism facilities. This includes transportation, lodging, and tourist sites, making sure that doors, elevators, and bathrooms are completely accessible to anyone facing mobility difficulties (European Network for Accessible Tourism, 2014).
- Accommodation Adaptations: Accommodations should include adjustable beds, emergency call buttons, and accessible toilet fittings to improve comfort and safety beyond baseline accessibility standards (Poria, Reichel, & Brandt, 2011).
- Transportation Solutions: It is crucial to provide accessible transportation choices such as modified vehicles and assistance services to enable those with disabilities to move freely (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).
- Inclusive Activities: Tourism activities should be flexible to ensure complete involvement of those with physical and locomotor limitations. This involves offering adapted equipment and providing accessible trips and excursions (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011).

- Information and Communication: Accessible information regarding tourism products and services is crucial for effectively planning and enjoying travel experiences. This involves guaranteeing that webpages, brochures, and signage are clear and easily accessible (McKercher & Darcy, 2018).
- Staff Training and Awareness: Training and raising awareness among tourism sector staff about the requirements of tourists with physical disabilities is essential for fostering an inclusive and hospitable atmosphere (Darcy, McKercher, & Schweinsberg, 2020).

Although there has been improvement, there are still some obstacles such as insufficient infrastructure, biased attitudes, and lack of knowledge. To address these difficulties, it is necessary to implement thorough measures such as regulatory changes, building infrastructure, and running awareness initiatives to promote inclusivity in the tourism industry.

Meeting the requirements and overcoming the barriers faced by tourists with physical and locomotor disabilities is not only an issue of rights but also a chance to improve the inclusion and attractiveness of the tourism sector. The tourism sector can enhance experiences for all tourists, including those with disabilities, by prioritizing accessibility, lodging, transportation, and information, fostering a more inclusive and welcoming travel environment.

6.1.3. People with sensory disabilities

Sensory disabilities impact an individual's capacity to interpret sensory input, such as hearing, vision, or both. This section delves into the particular requirements of individuals with sensory impairments in the context of accessible tourism. The tourist industry must modify its services and environments to be more inclusive, enabling those with sensory difficulties to enjoy travel completely and independently.

Travellers with sensory disabilities are an important component of the tourist business and have unique requirements that need to be met to guarantee their complete engagement in tourism activities. The tourism industry may provide inclusive and enjoyable experiences for those with sensory disabilities by establishing specific accessible measures, training workers, and adopting new solutions. Committing to accessibility benefits travellers with disabilities and enhances the tourism sector by fostering diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of travel (Darcy et al., 2018).

Sensory disorders can vary from slight to extensive hearing loss, low vision to complete blindness, or a combination known as deafblindness. Individuals with sensory disabilities encounter distinct obstacles when navigating and enjoying tourism activities, necessitating specific attention. Accessible tourism for individuals with sensory disabilities encompasses physical environment accessibility and the provision of information in accessible formats, as stated by the World Federation of the Deaf and the World Blind Union in 2012 (World Federation of the Deaf & World Blind Union, 2012).

Accessibility for people with hearing impairments

Travellers with hearing impairments need accommodations to overcome communication obstacles and protect their safety. Key adaptations consist of:

- Visual Alert Systems: Installation of visual alert systems in hotels and public areas in order to notify individuals of emergencies, doorbells, or telephones ringing.
- Sign Language Interpretation and Captioning: Provision of sign language interpreters or captioning services during tours, performances, and informational sessions.
- Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs): Availability of ALDs in museums, theatres, and guided tours can enhance the experience for hearing-impaired visitors.
- Accessible Communication Channels: Ensuring that information desks, booking services, and customer support are accessible via text messaging, email, or live chat options (Eichhorn & Buhalis, 2011).

Accessibility for people with visual impairments

Travelling can be difficult for individuals with visual impairments due to challenges in navigating new surroundings and obtaining information. Key modifications consist of:

- Tactile Maps and Braille Signage: Provision of tactile maps, models, and Braille signage in accommodations, tourist attractions, and public transportation can aid navigation.
- Auditory Information Systems: Use of audio guides and descriptive tours in museums, galleries, and outdoor sites to provide context and information.
- Accessible Digital Content: Websites and digital platforms should comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to ensure that information is accessible through screen readers.
- Orientation and Mobility Assistance: Offering personalized orientation and mobility assistance in hotels and at attractions can significantly enhance the travel experience for blind or low-vision guests (Hayhoe, 2017).

Specific needs in tourism activities

Accessible tourism is crucial for those with sensory disabilities in the following areas:

- *Information accessibility:* Accessing information in many formats is essential. This encompasses providing audio descriptions, Braille, large print, and sign language interpreting services to guarantee that all travellers have access to information regarding tourism services, emergency protocols, and cultural activities (Hayhoe, 2017).
- *Communication support*: Including sign language interpreters or assistive listening equipment, is crucial in tours, attractions, and customer service interactions to guarantee complete participation (Eichhorn & Buhalis, 2011).
- *Adapted experiences*: Tourism operators should provide tailored experiences that meet the sensory preferences of guests, such offering tactile tours for persons with visual impairments or providing visual aids for guests who are deaf or hard of hearing (Smith, 2012).
- *Technology and innovation*: Technology, such as mobile apps providing navigation aid, audio descriptions, or captioning, can greatly improve the accessibility and enjoyment of tourism for people with sensory disorders (Goggin & Newell, 2003).
- *Training and awareness*: Staff training on the requirements of individuals with sensory disabilities and effective communication techniques is crucial for establishing an inclusive and hospitable setting (Darcy et al., 2018).

Although there has been improvement, obstacles still exist in fully integrating those with sensory disabilities into the tourism sector. These factors consist of a lack of knowledge among tourist operators, inadequate training on disability inclusion, and the necessity for broader use of accessible technologies and information formats (Rains, 2013).

As an example, it is worth mentioning that various venues and organizations have become pioneers in providing accessible travel for individuals with sensory disorders. The British Museum offers for instance tactile tours and audio-described tours for visitors with visual impairments. The Smithsonian Institution conducts sign language tours and captioned videos for visitors who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Ensuring tourism is accessible for those with sensory disabilities is both a moral obligation and a chance for the tourist business to expand its market and improve the travel experience for everyone. To enable equal access to travel experiences for individuals with sensory disabilities, the tourism sector can integrate accessible practices and technologies, train workers, and adjust services to meet various needs.

6.1.4. People with intellectual disabilities

Individuals with intellectual disabilities are a heterogeneous population on the disability spectrum, with varying levels of limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour. This subchapter examines the specific requirements and obstacles that persons with intellectual disabilities confront in the context of accessible tourism. It strives to highlight the need of developing inclusive tourism experiences that address these needs, ensuring that travel is enjoyable and accessible to all.

Intellectual impairments refer to a variety of conditions that cause cognitive limits, impairing an individual's capacity to learn, communicate, and do daily duties. These diseases, such as Down syndrome, can be either congenital or acquired. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) highlights the need of providing assistance that improve an individual's functioning in all parts of life, including participation in tourism activities (Schalock et al., 2010).

To allow inclusive tourist experiences for people with intellectual disability, three major demands must be addressed:

- *Simplified information*: Clear and straightforward language should be used to communicate information about tourism services, facilities, and activities (Weiler & Black, 2015). Symbols or visuals can also enhance understanding.
- *Social inclusion*: It's important to make people with intellectual impairments feel welcome and included in tourism activities. This can be accomplished through inclusive programming and by cultivating a culture of tolerance and acceptance among staff and visitors (Darcy & Pegg, 2011).
- *Safety and security*: Individuals with intellectual impairments have various levels of independence, making travel safety and security a top priority. This includes offering information and assistance as needed, as well as making sure accommodations and activities are safe and supportive (Devile & Darcy, 2016).
- *Adaptive programs*: Tourism companies should provide adaptive programs tailored to the interests and abilities of travellers with intellectual disabilities. This includes

flexible activities that can be tailored to specific requirements and preferences (Huh & Singh, 2017).

- *Staff training*: Training tourism staff on recognizing intellectual disabilities and appropriate communication strategies is crucial for offering quality service and support to passengers with these disabilities (Figueiredo et al., 2012).

People with intellectual impairments frequently experience hurdles to full participation in tourism, such as societal attitudes and preconceptions, a lack of accessible information, and physical barriers inside tourist destinations. Furthermore, the difficulty of travel preparations and the necessity for support services might be substantial impediments (Darcy, McKercher, and Schweinsberg, 2017).

Several groups and venues have made efforts in accessible tourism for people with intellectual disability. For example, Special Olympics events show how sports tourism may be made accessible and enjoyable for athletes with intellectual impairments, providing insights into best practices for broader tourism accessibility (Special Olympics, 2020).

Providing accessible tourism experiences for individuals with intellectual disabilities is not just a legal need, but also a moral duty and an opportunity to increase the tourism industry's inclusivity and richness. By meeting these passengers' special needs, tourism providers can ensure that everyone has the opportunity to explore and enjoy their surroundings.

6.1.5. People with mental or physical illness

Individuals with mental or physical diseases make up a distinct and significant demographic in the context of accessible tourism. This subchapter, under the heading of "The Beneficiaries of Accessible Tourism and Their Specific Needs in Tourism Activities," seeks to clarify the unique requirements and obstacles that visitors with mental or physical health impairments encounter. By creating an inclusive tourism environment, the industry can ensure that these people have meaningful and barrier-free travel experiences.

Mental and physical illnesses refer to a wide range of ailments that can impair people's movement, sensory perception, cognitive ability, and mental health. Depression, anxiety disorders, chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, and mobility disabilities require special concerns in the tourism industry (World Health Organization, 2011). To be inclusive of these passengers, specialized techniques that address both apparent and unseen problems are required (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011).

Accommodations should be tailored to this group's different needs, such as quiet rooms for individuals with anxiety problems or accommodations near amenities for those with mobility issues (Poria et al., 2011).

- *Supportive transportation options*: Supportive transportation options include preferential seating for those with chronic pain or weariness, as well as help for those with cognitive impairments (European Network for Accessible Tourism, 2014).
- *Accessible information and communication*: Clear and concise information on tourist and emergency health services is essential for effective communication. This includes easily available websites and pamphlets outlining the level of physical activity required in tours and attractions (McKercher & Darcy, 2018).

- *Inclusive activities*: Tourism providers should plan inclusive activities that cater to all abilities, including people with physical disabilities and mental health concerns (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).
- *Mental health support*: Providing mental health assistance and quiet locations for decompression can enhance the safety and enjoyment of travellers with mental illnesses (Vlachos, Siomkos, & Cerit, 2018).

Travellers with mental or physical diseases confront a number of challenges, including societal stigma, a lack of empathy from care providers, and inadequate accommodations. To address these issues, tourist operators should provide ongoing staff training centred on empathy and support for travellers with health difficulties. Furthermore, working with health professionals can provide useful insights into establishing more accessible and helpful tourism experiences.

Several venues and service providers have established standards for inclusion. Some resorts, for example, provide wellness retreats expressly tailored for those with mental health disorders, which include therapeutic activities and support services. Similarly, cities that have established comprehensive accessibility measures for people with physical illnesses serve as examples of industry best practices.

Providing accessible tourism for those with mental or physical illnesses is critical to the industry's commitment to diversity. By meeting these passengers' special demands, the tourism industry may not only improve their travel experience but also demonstrate a greater commitment to social responsibility and diversity. This subchapter emphasizes the necessity of understanding and catering to the unique needs of tourists with health issues, paving the way for a more inclusive and compassionate tourism industry.

6.1.6. People with age-related disadvantages

As the world's population ages, the tourist sector will face an increase in demand to meet the special demands of older adults, including those with age-related difficulties. This subchapter, located inside "The Beneficiaries of Accessible Tourism and Their Specific Needs in Tourism Activities," investigates the obstacles and requirements of delivering accessible tourism experiences for the elderly. Addressing these demands not only corresponds with the principles of inclusivity and equality, but also creates new opportunities for the tourism industry to cater to a broad clientele.

Age-related disadvantages cover a wide range of problems that might impair mobility, sensory capacities, cognitive functioning, and overall health. Conditions such as arthritis, limited mobility, impaired hearing and vision, and cognitive illnesses such as dementia must be carefully considered in the context of tourism (World Health Organization, 2015). Recognizing and addressing these diverse issues is necessary for creating an environment that encourages older individuals to participate in tourism activities.

Older travellers require physical accessibility as one of their primary needs. Physical access to all tourism facilities is essential. This includes hotels, transportation, attractions, and public areas that have ramps, elevators, and handrails to help those with mobility difficulties (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011).

- *Sensory accessibility*: To improve the travel experience for older adults with hearing and vision impairments, tourism services should offer sensory aids like hearing loops, large print materials, and clear signage (European Network for Accessible Tourism, 2014).
- *Cognitive accessibility*: Tourism with cognitive disabilities, such as dementia, requires clear information and orienting aids. Staff training to recognize and support individuals with cognitive problems can significantly improve their travel experiences (Gibson & Singleton, 2012).
- *Comfort and convenience*: Priority seats, extended check-in periods, and rest spaces can provide comfort and convenience for senior travellers, making their journey more enjoyable and less strenuous (Poria et al., 2011).
- *Healthcare accessibility*: Older visitors, particularly those with chronic diseases, require easy access to healthcare services and emergency medical support. Information about local healthcare facilities and services should be easily accessible (Vlachos et al., 2018).

The primary hurdles in facilitating tourism for people with age-related disadvantages are overcoming physical infrastructure barriers, societal attitudes, and a lack of information about older adults' special needs. Opportunities include training employees to be sensitive to these needs, investing in universal design principles, and leveraging technology to deliver new solutions that improve accessibility and enjoyment for older travellers.

Successful efforts, such as age-friendly city programs and resorts specializing in senior tourism, show how the sector can adapt to better serve older adults. These examples show the need of comprehensive planning, from infrastructure to service design, in building inclusive environments for travellers with age-related disadvantages.

Adapting tourism methods to accommodate the requirements of people with age-related disabilities is not just an ethical issue, but also a strategic opportunity for the tourism sector. By prioritizing accessibility and inclusivity, the industry can ensure that older persons not only participate in but also profit considerably from travel experiences. This subchapter underlines the significance of knowing and meeting the specific requirements of older visitors, so contributing to a more equal and diverse tourism landscape.

6.2. Increased participation of people with disabilities in tourism

In recent years, the tourist sector worldwide and in Central Europe has seen a considerable change toward inclusion, notably in terms of increasing engagement of individuals with disabilities. This chapter digs into the comprehensive approach taken to promote accessible tourism, with international project cooperation playing an important role. Such joint efforts demonstrate the value of stakeholder collaboration in breaking down barriers and creating a universally accessible tourism experience.

People with disabilities are increasingly participating in tourism, a positive trend that reflects broader cultural shifts towards inclusivity and accessibility. This increase can be linked to a variety of factors, including legal advances, technical innovations, and shifting perspectives of disability in the tourist sector and society as a whole.

Legislative frameworks have an important role in making tourism more accessible. The 2006 adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(UNCRPD) is a key milestone in pushing for handicapped people's rights to participate in all parts of society, including tourism. Following the treaty, numerous countries enacted national legislation to improve accessibility to tourism services and infrastructure (United Nations, 2006). The European Union's approval of the European Accessibility Act in 2019 demonstrates the legal commitment to removing barriers and increasing participation in tourism for individuals with impairments (European Union, 2019).

Technological improvements have also played a crucial role in increasing the engagement of people with disabilities in tourism. Innovations such as accessible websites, mobile applications designed for people with different disabilities, and virtual reality tours have made the sector more accessible. These technologies help with planning and navigation, but they also improve the travel experience for people with impairments (Goggin & Newell, 2003). For example, the creation of apps that provide audio descriptions of landmarks and exhibitions improves the experience of visually impaired visitors.

The tourist industry's changing perspective of handicap has resulted in more focused attempts to appeal to this group. Accessible tourism is now viewed as an integral element of the mainstream tourism sector, rather than a niche market (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011). This is mirrored in the growing number of tourist operators providing unique packages and services for disabled travellers, ranging from adaptive adventure activities to customized cultural tours. These services demonstrate the industry's acknowledgment of the economic and social benefits of making tourism accessible to everyone.

Empirical research supports the idea that persons with disabilities should participate in more tourism activities. According to research undertaken by the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), there is a growing demand for accessible travel services and experiences, which is being driven by an aging population and increased activism for disability rights. Furthermore, McKercher and Darcy (2018) found that locations and enterprises who invest in accessibility reap benefits in terms of tourist happiness, loyalty, and market differentiation.

Barriers to Participation

Despite improvements, people with disabilities still face difficulties to full participation in tourism activities. This includes:

- *Physical barriers*: Inadequate infrastructure, including transportation and tourism sites, continues to be an issue (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011).
- *Informational barriers*: Inaccessible and unreliable information about tourism services and locations can deter potential travellers (McKercher & Darcy, 2018).
- *Attitudinal barriers:* Attitudinal barriers, such as prejudices and stereotypes, can impact the quality of service provided to travellers with disabilities (Vlachos et al., 2018).

Strategies for Enhancing Participation

Efforts to improve the engagement of individuals with disabilities in tourism have focused on five important strategies:

- *Legislative measures*: Legislative measures to ensure accessibility in tourism facilities and services.

- *Technology and innovation*: According to Goggin and Newell (2003), utilizing assistive technologies and digital platforms can increase information access and travel convenience.
- *Education and training*: Programs to raise awareness and understanding of accessibility concerns among tourist personnel.
- *Collaborative projects:* International collaboration programs share best practices and resources to increase accessibility across boundaries. Examples include EU-funded projects that promote accessible tourism through collaborations between member states, NGOs, and business stakeholders.

As for case studies of success we can mention Accessible Poland Tours. This effort demonstrates how specialized tourism packages and services may accommodate travellers with varied disabilities, resulting in a seamless and joyful experience. Another example would be Barrier-free destinations in Austria: Austria's dedication to building barrier-free places demonstrates how regulatory frameworks and stakeholder participation may improve accessibility.

While progress has been made, the journey to completely accessible tourism is ongoing. Future efforts must address remaining infrastructure gaps, promote cross-sector collaboration, and capitalize on technological improvements to provide more intuitive and user-friendly travel experiences for individuals with disabilities.

To summarize, the increased participation of persons with disabilities in tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon fuelled by governmental assistance, technical innovation, and a shift in industry perspectives. These improvements not only improve the travel experience for people with disabilities, but they also contribute to a more inclusive and equitable tourism industry.

The rising participation of individuals with disabilities in tourism reflects the collaborative efforts of governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the corporate sector, and the disabled population itself. Central Europe's experience provides significant insights into the complexity of developing an inclusive tourist industry that welcomes all visitors. As the region continues to pioneer accessible tourism practices, it establishes global norms for inclusivity, equity, and universal access.

6.3. Higher standards for accessibility in tourism, accessibility as a positive tool for quality tourism

The incorporation of accessibility in tourism has transitioned from a basic legal or ethical need to an essential component of delivering a superior travel experience. Accessibility, formerly seen as a need just for those with disabilities, is increasingly recognized as a means to improve the quality of tourist services for a wider audience, including the elderly, families with small children, and those with temporary limitations. This transition illustrates that accessibility beyond just legal compliance; it enhances the whole visitor experience, promotes inclusion, and provides a competitive edge in the tourism sector.

The Development of Accessibility Standards in Tourism

The notion of accessibility in tourism has evolved considerably over time. The initial emphasis on eliminating physical obstacles for those with disabilities has broadened to include a diverse array of accommodations, services, and experiences designed to make tourism accessible to everyone, irrespective of physical or sensory limitations. Darcy and Dickson (2009) assert that the perspective on accessible tourism has transitioned from seeing it as a niche market to acknowledging it as a fundamental component of mainstream tourism, hence serving a far broader audience.

This transition is shown by the growing implementation of universal design principles, which seek to create settings accessible to all individuals, irrespective of their physical capabilities. Universal design guarantees that tourist infrastructure, lodgings, and services are accessible to the widest possible demographic. By integrating these concepts, destinations not only adhere to regulatory mandates but also elevate the overall quality and attractiveness of their offers.

Advantages of Accessible Tourism in Economic and Competitive Contexts

Accessible tourism encompasses not just inclusion but also economic rationale. Studies indicate that individuals with impairments constitute a substantial and expanding market segment. In Europe, around 80 million individuals have a handicap, a figure that rises when including the aging population and those with transitory or situational impairments. McKercher and Darcy (2018) assert that locations and enterprises that prioritize accessibility often have advantages, including enhanced consumer loyalty, elevated satisfaction levels, and improved market distinction.

Moreover, accessible tourism corresponds with the overarching objectives of sustainable and responsible tourism. By enhancing accessibility to locations, companies address the requirements of tourists with disabilities while promoting social fairness and inclusion, essential components of sustainable tourism. This strategy fosters a more resilient tourism sector, adept at accommodating the varied requirements of all passengers (Lőrincz et al., 2023).

Improving Tourism Quality via Accessibility

Integrating accessibility into tourism services and infrastructure significantly improves the overall quality of the visitor experience. Enhancing the accessibility of hotels and tourist destinations assists those with disabilities while also fostering a more comfortable and pleasurable experience for all visitors. Attributes such as ramps, elevators, accessible facilities, and sensory-friendly surroundings are valued by diverse visitors, including families with strollers, senior travellers, and those recuperating from injuries.

Accessible tourism also tackles informational and attitudinal obstacles that may inhibit those with impairments from vacationing. By offering transparent and accessible information on tourist services and destinations, and by educating staff to be more inclusive and empathic, the tourism sector may enhance service quality for all patrons. Inclusive marketing and communications, which highlight accessible characteristics, are essential for acquiring and keeping a diverse consumer base.

The Function of Legislation in Advancing Accessibility

Legislation is essential for promoting elevated standards of accessibility in tourism. International frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the European Accessibility Act have significantly advanced accessible tourism. These legislative frameworks require that public areas, including tourist sites, be accessible to all persons, establishing a baseline norm for accessibility in tourism services.

In summary, elevated accessibility requirements in tourism are crucial for promoting inclusion and act as a beneficial mechanism for improving the quality of tourist experiences. By using universal design principles, adhering to regulatory regulations, and mitigating both physical and informational obstacles, the tourist sector may foster a more inclusive and pleasurable experience for all passengers. Consequently, accessibility is a fundamental catalyst for great tourism, advantageous to both enterprises and travellers. As an increasing number of locations acknowledge the significance of accessible tourism, the sector will persist in its evolution, providing enhanced experiences and possibilities for everyone.

6.4. The responses of tourism marketing to the challenges of accessible tourism

The developing discipline of accessible tourism has resulted in a substantial paradigm shift in how tourist marketing tactics are conceived and implemented, with a strong emphasis on meeting the unique needs of disabled guests. This development in the tourism sector is profoundly anchored in a better understanding of this special market segment, which is distinguished not only by its diversity but also by the unique problems it poses. The purposeful shift to incorporate inclusive marketing materials, emphasizing the accessibility aspects of travel products, and actively engaging with accessibility advocates and organizations represents a substantial change from traditional marketing tactics. These initiatives are intended to build a more inclusive tourism environment in which accessibility is not simply an add-on but a core component of the tourist experience.

Understanding the marketplace

A thorough examination of the demographic of tourists with disabilities is a critical component in adapting marketing tactics for accessible tourism. This method necessitates extensive market research to identify their travel preferences, accessibility requirements, and preferred communication channels (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011). Gaining these insights is critical for creating marketing initiatives that not only resonate with this demographic but also address their individual requirements in an effective and empathic manner. Understanding the market entails more than just collecting data; it also entails empathizing with the lived experiences of disabled travellers, ensuring that marketing strategies are not just informed but also shaped by this demographic's actual needs and goals.

Inclusive marketing communication

The shift to more inclusive marketing materials has helped coincide with the ethos of accessible tourism. The application of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) for digital platforms exemplifies this trend by ensuring that marketing communications are accessible to a wide range of people, including those with disabilities (Goggin & Newell, 2003). Furthermore, including photos and tales of travellers with impairments in marketing materials

promotes a more inclusive narrative. This technique not only challenges prevalent assumptions, but also develops a sense of belonging and representation among this group, adding authenticity and inclusivity to the marketing narrative (McKercher & Darcy, 2018).

Highlighting accessibility features

In response to rising demand for accessible tourism, marketing techniques are increasingly emphasizing the accessibility elements of tourism offers. This includes giving extensive information regarding the physical accessibility of buildings and services, such as wheelchair ramps, accessible restrooms, and sensory-friendly environments (Darcy et al., 2010). Tourism companies can attract disabled tourists who would otherwise be unsure about the suitability of the place or service by transparently advertising the existence of accessible features. This kind of transparency not only helps potential travellers with disabilities make decisions, but it also promotes destinations and service providers as inclusive and accommodating, increasing trust and loyalty in this vital market group.

Engaging with accessibility advocates and organizations

Strategic collaboration with accessibility advocates and organizations is a best practice in the marketing of accessible tourism. These collaborations provide vital insights into the demands of disabled passengers and help to confirm tourism operators' accessibility promises. Such collaborations go beyond mere advice to include a co-creative process in which accessibility advocates help shape marketing tactics that authentically address the needs of disabled travellers. These relationships not only improve the legitimacy of tourism products, but they also widen the reach of marketing messages by tapping into established networks and groups in the field of disability advocacy.

Training and sensitisation

The value of training and sensitizing marketing teams about accessibility challenges cannot be emphasized. This training process is critical for developing greater empathy and understanding in marketing communications (Poria et al., 2011). Training programs are designed to educate marketing and customer service teams on the language of accessibility, the range of disabilities, and the importance of taking a compassionate approach to all communications. Furthermore, such programs provide teams with the knowledge and skills they need to successfully respond to requests from passengers with disabilities, ensuring that all encounters are knowledgeable, respectful, and helpful.

Using social media and user-generated content

The rise of social media and user-generated content has created new opportunities for marketing accessible tourism. Travellers with disabilities are increasingly sharing their travel experiences online, providing honest insights regarding the accessibility of places and services. Tourism marketers are leveraging these platforms to share real-life tales and testimonials, fostering a sense of community and trust among potential passengers (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). Engaging with user-generated content not only boosts marketing efforts, but it also allows for immediate feedback and continual improvement in accessibility options.

Conclusion

The tourism marketing response to the introduction of accessible tourism demonstrates a greater industry-wide commitment to tolerance and diversity. The tourism industry can better

reach and serve visitors with disabilities by using new marketing techniques, engaging key stakeholders, and capitalizing on the transformative power of digital platforms. These collaborative efforts not only improve the travel experience for people with disabilities, but also contribute to the general growth and sustainability of the tourism industry. Furthermore, they emphasize the inherent benefit of accessibility as a key component of modern tourism marketing, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future in travel.

7. Specific characteristics of the countries involved in the research. Focus and results of country-specific research on accessible tourism (Based on a literature summary)

Accessible tourism is an increasingly common subject of research, the results of which have significant cognitive and application significance. Qiao et al. (2022) in the article: *Accessible tourism: a bibliometric review (2008–2020)* presented an overview of publications on this topic published in English-language journals. The following overview of studies in countries such as Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Romania complement the information on studies whose results have been largely published in national languages. It thus broadens knowledge about the actual state of research in the field of accessible tourism.

7.1. Croatia

Although accessible tourism is receiving more and more attention in national policy and is becoming increasingly important in the planning of tourism products and the removal of access barriers, academic research has not progressed at the same pace. Indeed, after an extensive search in all relevant databases (the search terms used were "accessible tourism", "inclusive tourism", "people with disabilities", "tourists with disabilities", "Croatia", "limitations", "inclusion"), only six papers were found that deal with this specific topic, all of which have been published since 2019. Their topic and main findings are discussed below.

Gonda (2021) discusses the specifics of the travel demand of people with disabilities, with a special focus on analysing the most popular tourism product from the perspective of people with disabilities. The survey is conducted in Hungary and compared with the results of studies in Germany, Italy, Spain and Croatia. The research results show that people with disabilities are strongly in favour of the policy of inclusion, their frequency of travel is higher than the average of the total population and therefore it seems reasonable for tourism stakeholders on the supply side of the market to pay adequate attention to this segment of tourism demand. Although this study provides a valuable insight into the current level of satisfaction of people with disabilities in Croatia, it should be noted that the sample is quite small and therefore not really representative, as Croatia was only one of four markets analysed for comparison with Hungary. The research results should not be generalised.

Gregoric et al. (2019) aimed to identify the need for adaptation of tourism facilities for people with disabilities in the Republic of Croatia. The authors emphasise that although tourists and travellers with disabilities want to be equal members of the community and enjoy all tourist facilities without restrictions, there are precisely those tourists who are often restricted due to the inadequacy of tourism facilities. The results show that the offer should be significantly improved to meet the needs of tourists with different types of physical disabilities. The authors also propose several recommendations for improvement, including creating appropriate plans and knowledge for the management of tourism destinations; focusing on new forms of tourism that are better adapted to the needs of people with any type of disability; encouraging collaboration between health facilities, tourism communities, family businesses, small business owners apartment renters, who would offer a joint range of resources for disabled individuals; working to remove the so-called mental barriers and training tourism staff about people with disabilities. As the sample is representative, the results can be considered reliable and development policies should be adapted to these findings.

Pókó (2022) analyses accessible tourism as a new and fast-growing segment of the tourism market. In contrast to previous research, this is an exploratory study that expands the body of knowledge by highlighting the circumstances and difficulties that people with disabilities face during their travelling experiences. The study is conducted in Hungary and Croatia and identifies the objectives of the motivation of people with disabilities for travelling. The contribution of this article lies in emphasising the need for new travel services for people with disabilities at both national and international levels. In particular, the author proposes the following recommendations to improve accessible tourism services: a reliable online database of trips and accessible facilities in neighbouring countries – Croatia and Hungary – would encourage more people to opt for trips and cultural programmes or trips to nature; more products and programmes (gastronomy, concerts, sports) should be accessible in tourism that do not primarily target people with disabilities but meet their needs; with more reliable and diverse online information about accessible tourism, about the places that are easily accessible by wheelchair, more people would opt for a trip to nature, sports and extreme sports.

Popović et al. (2022) point out that people with disabilities encounter various challenges when travelling and that many of them do not travel at all. The theoretical framework of this paper provides an overview of the necessary conditions for designing tourism products that are accessible and usable for all. The authors emphasise that, contrary to popular belief, accessible tourism goes beyond mobility to include people with intellectual, mental, visual, speech, hearing, stroke and other conditions. The study covered five towns and municipalities in Istria County – Rovinj, Poreč, Medulin, Umag and Pula, i.e. the five most important tourism destinations in terms of the number of overnight stays. The aim of this research was to examine the following elements of destinations in terms of their accessibility: a) physical planning and other relevant documents of municipalities; b) activities of organisational units or individuals; c) participation in projects; d) being informed on activities caried out in the city by third parties (collaboration, coordination and networking). The results have indicated the following – none of the selected cities and municipalities has a study or programme for the purpose of equalising the opportunities of people with disabilities, but activities and measures are an integral part of any town's development strategies, social programmes, spatial plans and health plans, some of which are from past planning periods. Although this particular study does not include people with disabilities in the sample, it is worth noting that its contribution lies in the fact that it is one of the few to look at local government units and their role in accessible tourism. One of the authors' conclusions is that consideration of accessibility should be included as standard in any responsible tourism policy in order to recognise these vulnerable groups and create revenue streams for accessible destinations.

Škaja et al. (2019) - even though this particular research is not primarily focused on accessible tourism, it deals with the topic of accessibility in Zagreb for power wheelchair users, with transportation being one of the key elements for people with disabilities when deciding about the destinations which they are going to visit, as pointed out in the previously discussed research by Gonda (2021). The research conducted by Škaja et al. (2019) examines the physical barriers that power wheelchair users encounter while moving around Zagreb. A participatory approach was applied and wheelchair users were included in the part of the research where navigability of the streets was assessed and the barriers which made moving difficult of impossible were also assessed and mapped. Based on the conducted research, accessibility maps were created and a corresponding interactive GIS map was uploaded online. In conclusion, the authors believe that the prospects for utilising the work on the issues

presented in this study lie both in the further elaboration of the navigation methodology and in the development of a mobile application that would direct wheelchair users to the optimal routes to their desired destination. In addition to information on the accessibility of pavements and the physical barriers on them, it would be very beneficial if the application also included information on the accessibility of public facilities and public transport, thus creating an integral system of support for people in wheelchairs moving around the city of Zagreb. The results of this research could be used for the development of inclusive solutions for transport, that would also be used for tourism purposes to remove the barrier for people with disabilities and enable them to participate in tourism experiences specifically in the city of Zagreb.

Tubic et al. (2022) emphasise that the tourism offer must be adapted to people with disabilities, who must be treated as an integral part of tourism demand. An accessible infrastructure, a multidisciplinary approach to the guest and the understanding of vulnerable groups by all actors involved in tourism are important factors in the creation of a specific tourism offer. Considering that communication in tourism is based on direct access to the guest, it is necessary to use different methods and tools to address people with disabilities. With regard to the necessary adaptation of tourism content for these individuals, this paper aims to show to what extent there are tools for easier interpretation of content in the national parks of the Republic of Croatia. The empirical research focuses on identifying and analysing people with disabilities, lines for easier orientation, tactile digital sensors, adapted mobile applications, audio descriptions in places, adapted sanitary facilities and others. The research instrument was an in-depth interview, and the research was conducted on a convenience sample of directors of Croatian national parks. The contribution of the research is reflected in the overview of the current state of equipment of national parks for the needs of accessible tourism development. The study carried out shows that accessible tourism in national parks is not yet established and is only in the process of adapting its content to people with disabilities.

As there is virtually no statistical monitoring of this segment in national parks, it is difficult to imagine the actual number of people who would need certain assistive technologies to facilitate the interpretation of tourism content. From the description of the represented assistive technologies, it is clear that there is still a lot of room for improvement in the interpretation of tourism content for this segment, of which the respondents are aware. Considering that the population with disabilities predominantly obtain information from internet sources, it is disappointing that only a small number of respondents have edited websites. This results in the segment being poorly informed and at the same time not deciding to visit the National Park. If the population with disabilities decides to travel, they should first and foremost make a request for the organisation of a tourist tour, while the individual NPs do not even have the possibility to adapt a tour for this segment. The problem continues in the training of staff.

7.2. Hungary

From the last decade of the 20th century we cannot find any study dealing specifically with accessible tourism, and it was only at the end of the first two decades of our century that Hungarian researchers started to deal with this issue more intensively. In 2004, a short study entitled "Tourism opportunities for people with disabilities in Hungary" was published in the pages of the periodical Turizmus Bulletin (Tourism Bulletin) (Végh, 2005, p. 26), in which the author makes statements that are still valid today, ranging from the (unfortunately still)

unfavourable situation of people with disabilities in Hungary to the fact that their travel needs are basically no different from those of their 'healthy' counterparts. She analyses the needs and problems of those involved in "paratourism" in the areas of transport, accommodation, spas and animators. Also published in the Turizmus Bulletin is a study by Gálné Kucsák on the situation and opportunities for visually impaired people in tourism in Hungary (Gálné Kucsák, 2008, p. 55), in which she explains that while more and more places are becoming accessible for the disabled, when thinking about accessibility we tend to forget the visually impaired, perhaps because they are a less "conspicuous" target group, whose vulnerability is a major deterrent to both every day and leisure travel. The study concludes that the main reason why visually impaired people are not offered accessible tourism is the lack of information. One year later, in 2009, Csesznák and co-authors in their paper entitled 'Ensuring fuller access for people with disabilities,' published by the Szentendre Ethnographic Museum, edited by the Centre for Museum Education and Training, discuss the problems of accessibility in a specific area, namely museums (Csesznák et al., 2009). The study describes professional cooperation between institutions for people with disabilities and museums in order to create equal opportunities.

Since 2010, the number of articles on the subject has been increasing. Among them we can find a book (tangentially) dealing with the issue: Beatific travel – Hungrian aspects of the relation of tourism and quality of life (Michalkó, 2010); a book (book chapter) written as a research summary: Accessible Tourism in some European countries – findings and results of an empirical survey, Peer-AcT Project (Raffay & Gonda, 2020); The Primacy of Technical accessibility in tourism product development (Farkas, 2019); doctoral theses: Performance sport for people with disabilities and its impact on different sport arenas (Dorogi, 2012), Special needs in tourism – the place, role and potential of people with disabilities in the tourism sector (Gondos, 2020), The potential for fulfilment in existential disability – Insights into the meaning of the concept (Farkas, 2020); thesis: The central importance of information accessibility in barrier-free tourism (Mező, 2019); papers published in Hungarian academic journals: Paratourism and conflict management in the hotel industry (Kovács & Kozák, 2016), The potential of equal opportunities for people with disabilities in tourism (Gondos, 2019), Innovative good practices in barrier-free tourism (Raffay & Gonda, 2020), Accessibility and parasport tourism opportunities in the European Union (Zsarnóczky, 2018a). A study on a legal approach by the authors Farkas and Nagy, entitled "One possible way to achieve fuller accessibility through the use of trusts", has been published in the journal Legal Theory Review (Farkas & Nagy, 2020). The articles of Hungarian authors published in international journals improve the international visibility of Hungarian research on the topic, such as The Future Challenge of Accessible Tourism in the European Union (Zsarnóczky, 2018b) in the Vadyba Journal of Management in Lithuania, The impact of tourism on the quality of life and The impact of tourism on the quality of life (Gonda, Nagy & Raffay, 2019), Travelling Habits of People with Disabilities (Gonda, 2021) published in the Romanian Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites, The Phenomenon of European Accessibility as a Special Niche in Active Tourism (Zsarnóczky & Zsarnóczky-Dulházi, 2019), also published in the Romanian Journal of Tourism Challenges and Trends. In 2018, the Polish Journal of Management Studies published An empirical study on the influences of management's attitudes towards employees with disabilities in the hospitality sector by the trio of authors Sharma, Zsarnóczky & Dunay.

The topic has of course also appeared in conference presentations, more and more frequently towards the end of the decade: The relationship between tourism and quality of life for people

with reduced mobility (Gondos, 2017), Accessible tourism in the European Union (Zsarnóczky, 2017), The evolution of accessibility, or the path(s) of travel. Tourism security: on the field of practice and theory (Farkas, 2018), Can't make it on my own – an analysis of travel habits of people with disabilities in the light of the results of an international survey (Gonda & Raffay, 2020b), Accessibility as a tourism niche opportunity in the European Union (Zsarnóczky, 2018), Accessible tourism as a rehabilitation "tool" (Dulházi & Zsarnóczky, 2018).

In recent years, the study of this issue has entered the mainstream of tourism research. One of the triggers for this was the Erasmus+ project Peer Act, which included a major and influential research project (Gonda & Raffay, 2020a; 2021), exploring some good practices of accessible tourism in Hungary and internationally in five countries (Raffay & Gonda, 2020) and conducting a questionnaire survey among people with disabilities. A short research summary and a workshop paper presenting the full research results (Gonda & Raffay, 2021). The results have generated considerable national and international interest.

Besides the questionnaire survey, an initiative was taken in 2020 to bring together all Hungarian tourism researchers interested in the topic. For this purpose, a scientific conference was organised in September 2020 in Orfű, which was attended by most of the Hungarian researchers working on accessible tourism. The conference speakers were given the opportunity to publish their articles in the first issue of the periodical Turisztikai és Vidékfejlesztési Tanulmányok, TVT (Tourism and Rural Development Studies) in 2021. At that time, it was already clear that a wide range of research had begun in the field of accessible tourism. In addition to examining more general issues such as travel frequency (Gonda & Raffay, 2021), the authors also reported on relatively narrow but also important sub-areas. In addition to the study of accessibility of cultural facilities (Angler, 2021; Máté, 2021), for example, the exploration of barrier-free possibilities in wine tourism was presented (Slezák-Bartos et al., 2021) and the issue of river cruise holidays and barrier-free tourism was also addressed (Pókó, 2021). Of course, the study of accommodation, the most important service sector of tourism, was not left out of the scope (Horváth, 2021). The sensitivity of the journal to this topic remained even after the 2021 thematic issue of TVT. The authors Raffay-Danyi and Ernszt (2021) examined the issue from the perspective of Veszprém, European Capital of Culture in 2023, and in 2022 the well-known authors on the topic (Farkas & Raffay, 2022) tried to approach the issue of equal access from a new angle and from new perspectives using the method of investigation of the discipline of philosophy. It can also be noted that among the Hungarian journals, only TVT has developed a strong workshop on equal access in tourism. After 2020, only one study on the topic was published in the other leading Hungarian tourism journal, Turizmus Bulletin (Farkas, Raffay, & Dávid, 2022b). A further result of the Peer Act research mentioned above was that Hungarian researchers were able to make international contacts. In this context, a scientific volume published in Germany was produced, in which several Hungarian authors published (Gonda & Raffay, 2020a).

The quality and depth of research results in Hungary has reached a level of international scientific interest. This is also supported by the fact that, in addition to WoS-qualified conference proceedings, several Q1 and Q2 journals have enabled the publication of research results in recent years (Farkas et al., 2023; Farkas, Raffay, & Petykó, 2022). Temporary collaborations were created for the better use of synergies between research activity and publications. Among these, the collaboration between colleagues from the Faculty of Business Economics to the University of Pécs, the BGE Budapest Business School, BGE and the

Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences is noteworthy, also resulting in prestigious international publications (Farkas et al., 2022b; Farkas et al., 2022).

7.3. Poland

The literature review includes scientific publications and tourist manuals that have been developed mainly in the last ten years, in relation to tourism available in Poland. The selected publications focus primarily on tourism for people with disabilities and the elderly, and, in broader contexts, also on the needs of people travelling with children.

Publications devoted to the tourism of people with disabilities are very diverse, from theoretical approaches (a.o. Zajadacz, 2015), review studies (a.o. Lubarska, 2018), empirical research (a.o. Popiel, 2014; Żbikowski, Siedlecka, & Kuźmicki 2019; Magiera, 2020; Trybuś, 2023) to practical tourist guides addressed to this group of recipients (a.o. Kapusta, 2018). The paper: *Evolution of models of disability as a basis for further policy changes in accessible tourism* (Zajadacz, 2015) presents a new, critical perspective on the selected models of disability, the key to which is the search for optimal solutions in the development of accessible tourism. The analysis performer indicated the need for a synthesis of paradigms at the core of the conceptualisation of particular models, including those often regarded as being contrary (medical and social). The results of studies would give tourism providers important data on an increasingly competitive tourism market, and also affect changes in how people with disabilities, the elderly, are viewed, from the category of "relatively poor" to "attractive, using a wide range of services".

Lubarska (2018) in the chapter entitled: *Overview of the classification of barriers and constraints to tourism for people with disabilities* attempted to answer the question what classifications of barriers to tourism for people with disabilities are used by researchers. Author „described the differences in classification and to determine the most frequently used ones. For this purpose, the classifications of barriers to tourism for people with disabilities proposed and used by Polish and foreign researchers have been included" (Lubarska, 2018: 71).

Popiel (2014) referred to one of the most popular tourist cities in Poland - Krakow. Their results are presented in the article under the title *Pawing the way to accessible tourism on the example of Krakow*. This paper generated relevant knowledge about the travel needs and barriers of people with disabilities, in order to assess the current level of accessibility in the tourism sector in Krakow, especially in accommodation options, museums, offered services on selected examples. „The research was carried out based on literature review and a questionnaire and interviews with disability tourists in Krakow. Most the tourist were satisfied with the level of customization of services and attractions to their needs, however they also drew attention to the lack of common regulations regarding accessibility, especially in the private sector" (Popiel, 2014: 55).

Żbikowski, Siedlecka and Kuźmicki (2019) in turn, focused their research on rural areas and discussed their results in a paper titled *Determinants of tourist activity of people with disabilities living in rural areas.* The aim of the conducted research and analyses was the attempt to assess the impact of selected factors over tourist activity of people with disabilities and factors related to the immediate environment of people with disabilities. A total of 5 000

respondents were subjected to the quantitative research. Participants of the research were adults with legally recognized disabilities. In the conclusions, the authors presented, that "factors stimulating participation in tourism are the level of education and professional activity of respondents. In the assessment of respondents the important factor is also a general family situation" (Żbikowski, Siedlecka, & Kuźmicki, 2019: 401).

Magiera (2020) in the paper: Leisure time of people with disabilities presented a broader context of the determinants of tourism for people with disabilities, which is free time. The purpose of this study was to identify forms of free time and the possibility of their use in terms of the needs and preferences of people with disabilities. It was important to show the forms of leisure time, which are used and willingly chosen by the people with disabilities, as well as the important role of tourism and theater in the lives of people with disablements.

Trybuś (2023) also referred to the broad context of determining the tourism of people with disabilities in her article under the title: *the Influence of Personal Qualities of Disabled People on Their Tourist Activity.* „The purpose of the study conducted by the author was to determine the impact of a group of selected characteristics on the tourist activity presented by people with disabilities. The method of a diagnostic survey and the technique of distributed and electronic questionnaire were used in the study. The analysis of the research questionnaire content allowed selecting questions describing the specific aspect of tourism activity performed by the disabled for which a procedure based on analysing correlations between these variables and the characteristics of the respondents will be carried out" (Trybuś, 2023: 162).

Tourism of people with sensory disabilities (including deaf people, blind people) was the subject of research. Its results can be found in publications such as (Manczak & Bajak, 2020; Zajadacz, 2012; Zajadacz, 2014; Zajadacz & Szmal, 2017; Zajadacz & Lubarska, 2019).

Manczak and Bajak (2020) presented the results of their research on deaf and blind people in an article entitled: Beacons in museums: the case of people with disabilities sensory**.** The authors have identified the importance of beacons in the market communication of the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów and the Princes Czartoryski Museum in Krakow with people with sight and hearing impairment. In-depth interviews were carried out in the listed museums using the analysed solution The authors confirmed the accepted thesis "that beacons support the process of market communication with sensorically disabled tourists visiting museums." (Manczak & Bajak 2020: 83).

Zajadacz presented the results of her ten-year research[15] in a monograph entitled *Tourism of Deaf People. A Geographical Perspective* (2012) and the issues of tourist information adapted to the needs of deaf people are discussed in detail in the articles: *Sources of tourist information used by Deaf people. Case study: the Polish Deaf community* (2014) and *Accessible Tourism for Deaf People in Poland:The SITur and SITex Programs a s Proposals for Accessible Urban Information* (Zajadacz & Szmal, 2017). From the theoretical, cognitive and practical aspect, the book (Zajadacz, 2012) deals with the issue of accessibility of tourism to deaf people using sign

[15] Research study financed from resources allocated for scientific purposes in the years 2008–2010, carried out as part of the "Tourism of Deaf People and possibilities of its stimulation through a multimedia Tourism Information System" project grant (N N114 208334).

language. It presents the results of the author's research into particular traits of tourist activity of deaf people, analysed against the background of the reference group of hearing individuals in Poland, with the social model of disability taken into consideration.

Tourism and recreation of the blind was the subject of research of, among others Zajadacz and Lubarska, the results of which are published in the monograph entitled: Sensory gardens as universal places of recreation adapted to the needs of blind people in the context of human-environment relations (Zajadacz & Lubarska, 2020). Its main conclusions are also presented in the article: *Sensory gardens in the context of promoting well-being of people with visual impairments in the outdoor sites* (Zajadacz & Lubarska, 2019). The aim of the study was to define the conditions that have to be met to ensure that a sensory path or a sensory garden is a universal space, which supports well-being in the outdoor sites to the blind and partially sighted. The study confirmed the usability of previous recommendations in the field, especially regarding stimulation of the senses of hearing, smell and touch. The access to the place and the composition of the garden as well as the choice of plants must be planned in a way that allows the independent usage of the blind and partially sighted, which includes contrasting colours and elevated elements. Basic facilities in terms of spatial orientation, safety and information must be provided. However, the attractiveness of the garden in terms of entertainment and the well-being of visitors is also of great importance (Zajadacz & Lubarska, 2019:1).

Tourism of older people has been presented in numerous studies (Bąk, 2012; Grzelak-Kostulska & Hołowiecka, 2012; Kunysz et al., 2017, Markiewicz-Patkowska, 2018; Żmuda-Pałka & Siwek, 2019, Borzyszkowski & Michalczak 2021).

Bąk (2012) in the article entitled Tourism in the face of an aging society" drew attention to the demographic changes taking place in European society and their consequences on the tourism services market. The author identified the specific characteristics of tourism of elderly people. In her conclusions she emphasized that the increasing number of elderly people in the population structure is not only a challenge for economic and social policies, but also a powerful new challenge for market of goods and services.

Grzelak-Kostulska and Hołowiecka (2012) also analysed „*Senior tourism in Poland – socio-demographic conditions*". The authors have attempted to analyse the factors which significantly influence tourist activity of the elderly in Poland. „The scope of the analysis included the selected conditions, both of a global character (demographic modernization, social modernization, globalization and technological progress) and individual determinants of tourist activity (age, health, professional activity and financial situation)" (Grzelak-Kostulska & Hołowiecka, 2012:108).

Kunysz et al. (2017), conducted detailed research on a local scale among the inhabitants of the city of Rzeszów, located in the eastern part of Poland. Their results were discussed in the article entitled *Participation in Tourism and Physical Recreation of Elderly People Rzeszów Inhabitants.* The authors focused on to show participation of elderly people in tourism and physical recreation as well as the motivations affecting their behaviour at one's leisure. The conducted research showed „that pensioners are most often motivated to exercise physical recreation by the desire to rest in the contact with nature and to improve one's health. Through movement they feel joy, relax and peace of mind as well as, what is very important, they matter an effective spending their free time and regeneration of their psychophysical strengths. Practical

implications: analysing the research findings one may conclude which forms of physical activity and tourist trips are preferred by seniors from Rzeszów" (Kunysz et al., 2017:217).

Markiewicz-Patkowska et al. (2018) in her article entitled *Senior tourism in the context of the economic status of the retired in Poland* defined the notion of a senior, presented the changing forms of tourist activity undertaken by seniors in various periods of the 21st century in the context of their economic situation. The conclusions stated that one should expect that the conviction of the seniors with reference to the benefits of active recreation and tourism will translate into the popularisation of the healthy, active lifestyle (Markiewicz-Patkowska et al., 2018:106).

Żmuda-Pałka and Siwek (2019) presented the results of their research in the publication entitled *Senior Tourism – Opportunity and Challenges of Accommodation Facilities in the Context of an Aging Population, Based on the Example of Krynica-Zdrój in Poland.* The article noted that „demographic changes related to the aging of the population affect many aspects of our lives. The prolonged life expectancy, the decreasing number of births and the development of medicine and universal access to medical services mean that the age structure of the population is changing. A wide group of recipients is a chance for development for many enterprises connected with senior and spa tourism" (Żmuda-Pałka & Siwek, 2019:177).

Borzyszkowski and Michalczak (2021) in the article entitled *Tourism policy for seniors. An overview of selected practices* analysed models of impacting the senior tourism market. The article contains a review of activities resulting from tourism policy that have been undertaken at various levels and by different entities. „In particular, the authors describe selected activities aimed at increasing tourist activity of seniors in Europe in order to determine to what extent these experiences can be useful in other settings and why such initiatives should be implemented in Poland. Based on the results of their desk research, the authors formulate recommendations for tourism policy in Poland" (Borzyszkowski & Michalczak, 2021:81).

The topic of accessible tourism in a broad context relating to the needs of people with disabilities, the elderly, and those visiting with children has been addressed in many publications (a.o. Zajadacz, 2017; Zajadacz & Lubarska, 2019; Szał, et al., 2021). Zajadacz (2017) in the paper: *Attitudes of Future Tourism Sector Employees Towards Organise Accessible Tourism* drew attention to the very important role of the tourist services sector in the implementation of the principles of the development of accessible tourism.

Several articles, including: titled as *Development of a Catalogue of Criteria for Assessing the Accessibility of Cultural Heritage Sites* (Zajadacz & Lubarska, 2019) and titled: *Assessment of the adaptation of tourism supply of cultural heritage objects for the elderly in the context of accessible tourism (*Szał et al., 2021) also present the criteria for assessing the accessibility of cultural heritage sites as tourist attractions from the point of view of the needs of several social groups: persons with disabilities, elderly people and visitors with children. In this catalogue three basic components are of key importance: physical/technical preparation, tourist information system and the skills and competences of the staff serving guests. The first part of the article is a review, discussing the concept of accessibility as well as the barriers and constraints that may exist in cultural heritage sites from the perspective of the groups of visitors concerned. The second part focuses on the presentation of the postulates for the development of a catalogue of criteria for the assessment of accessibility on the example of the case study of the Piast Trail – main historical thematic route in the Wielkopolska region. The contents of the article constitute a knowledge base useful in the process of equal

opportunities in access to historical and cultural heritage. They also serve as guidelines for improving the quality of services in tourist facilities. The catalog of these criteria was used in practice to prepare an audit of the accessibility of tourist attractions on the main cultural tourism route in Wielkopolska, which is the Piast Route (https://szlakpiastowski.pl/dostepnosc[16]).

For many places, towns and regions, tourist guides addressed to the environment of people with disabilities have been developed. An example is the author's guide Kapusta Guide to Krakow for disabled tourists (2018), updated many times.

Recently, many textbooks, collections of good practices in the field of social accessible tourism, addressed to the tourism industry, have also been published. Examples include monographs edited by: Głąbiński (2020): Efficiently for the disabled, Zajadacz (2020): Accessible tourism. Recommendations for the tourist services sector (2020) or Stasiak (2021): Social tourism in Poland. Good practice guide. These publications are most often the effects of projects financed from public funds or regional tourist organizations.

The publications are of a diverse nature, ranging from theoretical approaches, through presentations of the results of empirical research of cognitive and applied importance, to guides to good practices and tourist guides addressed to the tourism industry and tourists themselves.

Over the last decade, a change in nomenclature has been observed, related to the evolution of the perception of the needs of people with disabilities. Availability has become a common term in Polish language in the context of meeting these needs. In relation to tourism, there was also an adaptation of the term taken from English "accessible tourism", in favor of previously used names such as "tourism without barriers", "tourism for disabled people" or "tourism for all".

7.4. Romania

This introduction delves into the situation of disabled individuals in Romania concerning their access to travel and tourism services, shedding light on the challenges they face and the efforts being made to enhance their travel experience. Despite the beauty and allure of Romanian destinations, disabled individuals often encounter obstacles when seeking to engage in travel and tourism activities. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of accessible accommodations, limited transportation options, and insufficient awareness of the needs of disabled travellers contribute to these challenges. Such barriers not only restrict disabled individuals' ability to experience the country's cultural and natural wonders but also hinder the growth of an inclusive tourism industry.

Research papers published in Romania about the situation of access of disabled persons to tourism services

Pașcalău-Vrabete and Băban (2018) focus on the experiences of individuals with mobility impairments in terms of disability and inclusion/exclusion, as well as their identity formation and efforts to challenge disabling societal constructs in the context of post-socialist Romania. The research involved a phenomenological analysis of 11 semi-structured interviews, leading

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[16] Access: 10.09.2023

to the identification of five major themes: feeling different, redefining normality, being perceived as part of a 'different regnum,' facing physical barriers, and grappling with the impact of the past while envisioning a desired future. The participants' narratives emphasize the urgency of challenging medical-productivist perspectives of disability at the social, individual, and institutional levels. The study underscores the crucial role people with disabilities play in promoting such transformative social changes.

Oreian and Rebeleanu (2016) present a comprehensive examination of the social economy's role in facilitating the socio-professional integration of individuals with disabilities. It analyses an institution that has successfully established social economy structures, with a particular emphasis on the functioning of its protected units. Moreover, the study delves into the gender-specific aspects of employability for individuals with mental disabilities, while also highlighting the influence of the institution's services on their ability to secure and retain employment. In essence, the social economy serves as a complement to the efforts made by duty bearers in facilitating the professional integration of people with disabilities. It enables their access to the job market by adapting workplaces to accommodate their specific needs and abilities.

Social tourism and accessibility

The new tourism market of the future is a market segment called social tourism. Social tourism has been created to make travel tourism accessible to consumer groups such as disadvantaged people and people with disabilities. The aim is to improve accessibility and accessibility of travel options, which in fact creates opportunities for new business development (Mihaela, 2019).

In Romania, since the early 2000s, a number of social tourism programmes have appeared, which are also closely linked to social policies at the national level (Simon et al., 2017). According to a study by Simon et al. (2017), it can be generally stated that social tourism, including tourism for people with disabilities, is at a low level in Romania. This mainly means that the pool of tourism opportunities in the country is under-dimensioned compared to the real needs of the population categories that benefit from tourism activities at lower prices. At the same time, statistically there is a lack of complete information on social tourism, including tourism data for the disadvantaged. The tourism associations that run social tourism programmes do not have annual analyses of participation data, participating businesses, accommodation, venues, number of tourists, etc., so we cannot get a realistic picture of how many people from disadvantaged groups are currently benefiting from existing but scarce opportunities at national level (Simon et al., 2017).

James Bowtell, in his study (Bowtell, 2015, pp. 203-204), points out that Europe is expected to see a large increase in demand for accessible tourism. This means that we need to be prepared for this growing demand, as only a very small proportion of the market currently meets the needs of accessible tourism.

A study by Mihaela (2019) provides a detailed overview of accessibility tourism efforts in Romania in recent years. Since 2013, Motivation Foundation Romania has created the first online platform, a national map of accessible places, where public institutions, places of entertainment and leisure, accommodation and facilities and their surroundings can be found. The map is available at www.accesibil.org and is designed for people with disabilities. The map can also be used by tourism operators who want to develop tourism services for people with disabilities (Mihaela, 2019). Another initiative of Motivation Foundation Romania is the

assessment of the accessibility of buildings, which allows a building to obtain an accessibility mark from the State Office of Inventories and Trademarks. Among the few tourism and hospitality service providers, it is worth highlighting that the Băile Felix complex and the Royal Courtyard in Piatra Neamţ meet the accessibility criteria (Mihaela, 2019).

Babaita (2014) researched the specific field of tourism in Romania that deals with the issue of tourism for people with disabilities. In her research, she highlights the need to develop a social model for people with disabilities, which has not yet been formulated in the tourism literature. The aim of her questionnaire survey was to find out whether Romanian society is open and ready to accept this new segment, i.e. whether the needs of consumers with special needs are taken into account in the tourism market. The research examined the attitudes of Romanian society towards this issue, namely the attitudes and behaviour of people without disabilities towards people with disabilities. In addition, the research was aimed at exploring the reasons that lead to negative feelings towards persons with disabilities (reticence or indifference) (Babaita, 2014).

The responsible tourism and the access of disabled persons

Văduva et al. (2021) analysed the main obstacles that exist today by studying the international literature on accessible tourism, and made some suggestions for improving this tourism activity, taking into account the recommendations of the World Tourism Organization. In their study, they highlight the need to raise awareness of the need for accessibility at world level.

As already mentioned in the previous literature references, the study by Văduva et al. (2021) shows that the demand for accessible tourism services is increasing, mainly due to the growing number of people with disabilities (reaching 1 billion people worldwide in 2019). This has led to the creation of international symbols, but there are still many problems in the field of accessible tourism. These may be environmental (participation in activities in tourist destinations, lack of communication), infrastructural (accessibility of buildings, transport, booking facilities) or social (attitudinal barriers, low level of specific training for accessible tourism) (Văduva et al., 2021).

A study by Văduva et al. (2021) on the specific circumstances of tourists with disabilities also shows that tourism in this area is still in its infancy, with much to be done to make more tourism services accessible to people with disabilities. However, advocates of accessible tourism believe that it can be done by improving accessibility of facilities, improving transport, accessibility of attractions and destinations, and cooperation between stakeholders (Văduva et al., 2021).

The study by Văduva et al. (2021) makes recommendations for better implementation of accessible accessible tourism. These recommendations include: the creation of public-private partnerships, international cooperation, human resources training, improving accessibility to destinations by diversifying transport systems, adapting transport modes, and diversifying attractions and destinations. They also stress the importance of making more destinations accessible to people with disabilities and of promoting this type of niche tourism (Văduva et al., 2021).

The main objective of the article by Butnaru (2010) is to identify the challenges faced by customers, especially those with disabilities, when choosing a tourist accommodation. In addition, the article seeks to highlight measures and solutions aimed at eliminating these

obstacles. As it is well noticed in the study mentioned above, unfortunately these barriers exist in rural tourism, some are independent of the tourism industry, being the effect of the policy of the respective country, others depend on the perception of the manager of the accommodation tourist agency, tourist area, the term hospitality.

Tudorache et al. (2017) presented the challenges encountered in applying European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS) in the context of Brasov County, situated mostly in the Romanian Carpathians. ETIS was configured initially with a total of 27 core indicators and 40 additional (optional) indicators.

The accessibility infrastructure and services for disabled persons in Romania

Tecau et al. (2019) wrote about issues regarding the intention of responsible tourism to increase the accessibility of tourist destinations for children with disabilities and their families. The aim was to identify and analyse the obstacles encountered by families with disabled children during their tourism experiences. They carried out a qualitative research via focus group interviews, with a total of 32 participants, specialized in the education of disabled children and regular schools where these children are studying (managers, specialists and parents/foster parents).

The primary finding of this study is that in Romania, there is a lack of sufficient preparation among authorities, tourists, and employees to include atypical tourists, such as disabled children and their families, in tourism activities. Comparing the results to previous studies mentioned in the analysis, this research unveiled that the participation of families with disabled children in tourism activities is limited in Romania. Cultural and economic factors, such as low family income, are considered the main reasons behind this limitation.

In Romania, attitudinal barriers pose significant challenges, arising from both individuals with disabilities (where having a disabled child is still perceived as a source of shame for many families) and society at large. The society is not adequately prepared, educated, or empathetic towards accommodating individuals with disabilities, contributing to the difficulties they face in engaging in tourism activities.

Munteanu et al. (2014) investigate competitive strategies that can be adopted by hotel managers in resorts on the Black Sea coast of Mamaia, Romania, taking into account consumer expectations and best practices in the tourism industry. Among other important infrastructure and service elements, they pointed out that facilities for tourists with disabilities can be found in four sampled hotels as follows: either the rooms are adequately equipped for these people, or there is adequate wheelchair access in the hotel surroundings and public areas, and there is ramp access to different buildings of the hotel complex. Iaki is the only Romanian hotel in the sample with facilities for people with disabilities.

About the accessibility of tourism in Romania, there is another article treating this problem, written by Rabontu (2018). It claims to examine the level of development of tourist facilities catering to individuals with disabilities in both accommodation and catering establishments, considering the growth of inclusive tourism on a national and international scale. It employs research methods to analyse the existing statistical data pertaining to this topic. After a statistical data analysis, the author concludes that in Romanian tourism the accessibility of people with disabilities is at very low level.

A research (Tecău, 2017) was conducted with the primary aim of confirming the need for a software platform in Romania to help people with disabilities to navigate accessible and safe tourist routes and facilities. Using a focus group method, the research sought to identify safety issues that may affect persons with disabilities or their companions while travelling. According to the opinion of the interviewed subjects, people with disabilities would like to go on excursions, and the majority of them have a greater need for such experiences, so a software product could help to ensure travel safety and information communication. The respondents highlighted the need to organise an information campaign for the members of the society to raise awareness of the problems faced by people with disabilities when travelling, thus sensitising people to this issue.

The study by Cernaianu-Sobry (2011) focuses on people with disabilities, including sports tourism, in two countries, Romania and France. In the study published in 2011, the authors' research revealed that in Romania the majority of hotels, transport, facilities and tourist sites are not accessible to people with disabilities. At the same time, the law is quite different, according to Article 21 of the Romanian Law 448/2006: 'The competent authorities of the public administration are obliged to facilitate access for people with disabilities to cultural values, heritage and tourism, sports and leisure activities'.

Despite Romania's abundant natural and anthropogenic resources, if the Romanian tourism infrastructure is not adapted to people with disabilities, this market segment and business opportunity will remain untapped (Cernaianu-Sobry, 2011).

The study by Simon et al (2018) assesses the existence of camps for students in Romania, including facilities for people with disabilities. The data of the study show that there are basically a shortage of places for such camps at the national level (4,600 boarding places in 2017), while there were 1,600 boarding places registered for children with disabilities. For example, on the coast, in the County of Constanta, there were only 236 boarding places in camps for children with disabilities in 2017 (Simon et al., 2018).

Epuran et al. (2020) conducted qualitative research to identify the main barriers faced by people with disabilities in Romania when travelling, especially when travelling for tourism. The results of the research showed that people with disabilities like to and do travel for tourism purposes, but that they usually inevitably encounter obstacles during their trips. The majority of the respondents in the survey prefer the Romanian coast (the destination visited by more than half of the respondents).

The short survey conducted in Brasov County shows that the issues faced by people with disabilities are still not given much attention. The research also highlights that those accompanying individuals with disabilities also face difficulties due to a lack of information about tourist destinations. Accessibility problems are particularly faced by people with physical and mobility impairments, such as location, accessibility of different tourist attractions and access to public transport (e.g. lack of space for wheelchairs or lack of ramps) (Epuran et al., 2020).

Brătucu et al. (2016) conducted a study on tourists' perceptions of tourist destinations in Brasov County in terms of accessibility for people with disabilities. The respondents in this study also mentioned the following as the biggest problems: accessibility of destinations for people with disabilities, access to transport, inadequate infrastructure and problems with facilities.

In their previous research, Bratucu et al. (2015) have already highlighted that it would be recommended to improve accessibility for people with disabilities in destinations, such as the introduction of bus services that allow wheelchair access and easier access to tourist attractions and accommodation (Brătucu, Chiţu, & Demeter, 2015).

The study by Babaita (2012) reveals, through a survey of 60 sample hotels (in the cities of Arad and Timisoara), the extent to which the infrastructure of hotels is adapted to the needs of tourists with disabilities, and insights into the opinion of hotel managers on the travel opportunities for this segment. Babaita et al. (2011), examining the barriers to tourism for people with disabilities in Romania, state that Romanian society does not provide sufficient assistance to people with disabilities in Romania, but there is also a problem with respect for fundamental rights.

Crismariu's (2017) study highlights the growing interest in accessible tourism in Romania in recent years and the growing importance of this market. However, for the time being, awareness raising and early stages are taking place in the country. In fact, the aim of the awareness phase is to raise awareness of the importance of accessible tourism in the relevant sectors among businesses and public administrations. In the early phase, the aim is to lay the groundwork in this area, such as training the right staff and formulating the principles and actions that will be needed in the development phase.

Accessibility in tourism is an important pillar of sustainable transport and is now central to tourism policy (Bordeianu, 2015). In his study, Bordeianu (2015) found that in Romania, legislation on disability is not well understood, and the legislation is uncertain and not well enforced in practice. It can be said that the majority of people working in the tourism sector are unaware of accessibility. In fact, this means that even today in East-Central Europe, the majority of tourism workers and tourism enterprises have a superficial knowledge of how to develop accessibility for their business (Bordeianu, 2015), but on the other hand, they do not consider it important enough.

The Motivation Foundation Romania aims not only to inform people with disabilities, but also to develop a system to control buildings. For this purpose, they created the so-called Motivation Accessibility Brand. This accessibility audit, which is divided into three parts: controlling access to outdoor spaces (parking, driveways and entrances), controlling access to indoor spaces (indoor movement, space for wheelchair manoeuvring, toilets) and other facilities available according to the specificities of each site (e.g. based on this, the assessment is basically divided into three categories: accessible, moderately accessible and inaccessible. As of June 2013, Motivation Foundation Romania has assessed 796 buildings in Romania (60% of which are hotels, restaurants, cultural or entertainment venues). Of these, only 205 were accessible, 229 partially accessible and 362 inaccessible (Bordeianu, 2015, pp. 47). Considering that there are thousands of accommodation facilities in Romania, the above statistics suggest that around half of them are completely inaccessible for wheelchair users.

In 2016, the Sano Touring association launched the website AccessibleRomania.com, which provides information on accessible accommodation, food and beverage services and tourist sites for people with special needs in Romania and abroad (Visionary Analytics, 2021). However, according to a study by the European Commission (2021), the actual conditions should be carefully checked for each destination because, as the study says, "for example, hotels marked as accessible on Booking.com are often in reality only partially adapted for wheelchair users, and in the case of restaurants the most common problem is lack of space in

the restrooms. Museums and cultural venues need to adapt to all types of disability, not only in terms of infrastructure (parking spaces, ramps, flooring) but also in terms of the activities on offer (descriptions, adapted lighting, special programmes for the mentally disabled, etc.)." In order to overcome these problems, the Sano Touring agency carries out careful field surveys and, on the basis of these surveys, produces accessible guides such as the "Accessible Romania" and "Accessible Bucharest" publications.

The accessibility of travel and tourism services for disabled individuals in Romania remains a work in progress. By addressing the challenges and investing in accessible infrastructure, Romania has the potential to become a more inclusive and welcoming destination for travellers of all abilities. This exploration of accessible tourism literature in Romania sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the current situation and the ongoing efforts to ensure that disabled individuals can explore and enjoy the country's treasures with ease and dignity.

8. The technical solutions for accessibility in tourism

The market for disabled customers is emerging as a crucial and growing segment in the global tourism industry. The right to travel for leisure, enjoyment, and mobility is a fundamental human right for individuals with disabilities, just as it is for those without disabilities. Adequate facilities and well-trained personnel are essential prerequisites to cater to the needs of this market (Ozturk et al., 2008).

Individuals with disabilities face various challenges while travelling, and these challenges can impact their willingness to engage in travel activities. Travelling for any purpose is a universal human right that should be recognised globally. Denying anyone this right should be considered a form of discrimination. Governments must implement measures to ensure accessibility in travel for all individuals. The literature highlights four primary barriers to the travel activities of people with disabilities: intrinsic, economic, environmental, and interactive (McKercher et al., 2003). When tourists lacked internal readiness to visit tourist sites, engaging in recreation became impracticable (Arawindha & Fitrianita, 2018)

In recent years, several studies have been conducted to explore the willingness of people with disabilities to integrate into tourism, which have shown that people with disabilities typically travel with family and friends, and less often with an accompanying person who helps to overcome barriers (Zaluska et al., 2022). For people with disabilities who require the constant presence of a caregiver to carry out daily tasks, the positive and helpful attitude of the caregiver is important, in addition to the fact that in many cases they require constant presence (Eusébio et al., 2023). In case of the travel of people with reduced mobility, not only physical presence and emotional support are key, but also the availability of financial resources to go with the change of location, as attention must be paid to the quality of the place to be visited, the availability of specialised infrastructure, the cost of the means of transport and the cost of the travelling companion (Friman & Ollson, 2023). In the case of transport, unhindered access to public transport is essential. It is key to provide transport facilities that accommodate wheelchair users and to design stations with accessibility in mind, thereby creating a barrier-free public transport infrastructure (Park & Chowdhury, 2022).

Access to information is a key issue in the tourism sector, as it can help people with various limiting physical or mental disabilities in the planning process by helping them to find places to visit, taking into account their specific needs. This information gives them the opportunity to find out about accessible accommodation, transport and tourist attractions. Information on accessible accommodation is essential for people with disabilities (Apostolidou & Fokaides, 2023). This information should include the accessibility of the different rooms (such as doors without thresholds, positions of light switches and handles accessible from wheelchairs, appropriate design of bathrooms and public spaces), but also information on the availability of specific facilities relevant to them on online booking platforms. Smart devices can also enable automated control of hotel rooms, if the hotel management believes that these advances can improve equal opportunities for people with disabilities (Cassia et al., 2020). In this case, it may be appropriate to implement smart lighting, smart temperature and climate control, automatic flushing of toilets in bathrooms, automatic control of water pressure and water temperature in showers. Access to information on public transport is also an essential part of the planning process for travellers, as it is at this stage that they can decide on the most optimal travel options and alternatives for them, with a sufficiently accessible infrastructure. In both tourist accommodation and public transport, there are initiatives to develop interactive

control units, often based on voice control or motion detection (Joyojeet, 2015). Voice-activated and motion-activated accessible infrastructures are particularly beneficial for people with reduced mobility, as they can greatly facilitate the opening and closing of doors, thus facilitating access to buildings and boarding and alighting from public transport.

The most optimal place to find out about the accessibility of tourist attractions is also in this case the online space, where it is useful to find out about the accessibility of different museums, parks, restaurants, events, but in this respect, quick and easy access to the necessary information is essential (Zaluska et al., 2022). Accessible cultural venues can contribute to the comfortable and safe viewing of different exhibitions and exhibits. Museums, galleries and other culture-related facilities usually have accessible entrances, ramps, lifts, spacious exhibition halls, which usually facilitate transport. At the same time as providing access to the building, it is also useful to provide audiovisual aids and tactile surfaces to help visitors find their way around and gather information.

Nowadays, innovative technologies and inventions have come to light that can significantly facilitate the lives of both people with disabilities and people without disabilities and their integration into society (Mensah-Gourmel et al., 2022). For innovative solutions, it is essential to achieve technical accessibility in order to ensure that all potential users have sufficient access to the information they need (Bigham et al., 2010). In this respect, the user must have different digital competences, which together can achieve technological accessibility (Farkas et al., 2022). Every day, inventions are emerging that have an impact on improving our quality of life, as well as supporting and simplifying our everyday tasks. The widespread use of artificial intelligence is having an impact on our private lives, at work, in education and in many cases it is also making our travel easier, whether it is finding our way around, gathering information or planning our travel financially.

With this in mind, it is important to note that the whole travel industry needs to integrate the progressively evolving technology into the service delivery by facilities. The gradual development of the internet, social media and smartphones, which provide easy and rapid access to these, has enabled businesses and consumers alike to access information quickly and to maintain in constant contact with each other, resulting in a significant increase in the flow of information, both real and unreal (Apostolidoi & Fokaides, 2023). The free flow of information allows services to be personalised, taking into account individual preferences, thus bringing tourism services closer to people with disabilities.

Most mobile devices have embedded functions that allow the reading of written materials and messages, thus helping visually impaired people to find their way around. This functionality also helps them to navigate between tourist accommodation and other facilities, in case they want to find information relevant to them (Alves et al., 2022).

In addition to online accessibility information, websites have been created to give potential travellers an insight into the nature of a tourist attraction. These websites can provide an experience not only for ordinary tourists, but also for people with disabilities and reduced mobility who are unable to visit tourist sites of interest to them. These online platforms provide an insight into the different localities through virtual reality, but in this case the street view of the map developed by Google can also help to get to know the different destinations. In order to achieve barrier-free travel, it is advisable to use different navigation tools and applications, as these can help to find accessible locations and to know their accessibility in advance. There are initiatives to help visitors to discover a cultural heritage site, usually by

highlighting buildings that are important attractions for the area (Farkas et al., 2022c). Websites and applications that provide useful information content for people with disabilities and help them to navigate through various accessibility solutions can contribute to their social inclusion and tourism experience (Cassia et al., 2020).

Virtual reality and augmented reality contribute to enabling people with disabilities to learn about the destination and the accommodation they want to visit before they actually travel. Virtual reality enables people with disabilities to take virtual tours that approximate reality and can be viewed despite their mobility barriers. These tours are often detailed and can provide interactive experiences for the user. Applications developed to communicate augmented reality enable up-to-date and stationary accessibility information to be communicated, helping travellers to find the entrances, lifts and assistive devices designed for them. These applications and initiatives can help potential visitors to avoid inconvenience surprises and facilitate the process of planning their journey.

In addition to digital, innovative developments, there are also tools to help people with disabilities, not to help them find their way around, but rather to help them with their mobility and alleviate the symptoms of their disability. Examples of such devices include wheelchairs, which are available in motorised form. This may be an optimal choice, particularly for people who are limited not only in the use of their lower limbs but also in the adequate mobility of their upper limbs. In this case, motorised wheelchairs that can be controlled by the various muscles of the mouth may be mentioned. Persons with speech impairments can also be assisted by features that allow them to emit voice messages, also using their oral muscles (Joyojeet, 2015). These devices can assist movement and communication through a combination of a computer and software (Laabidi et al., 2014). The proper usability of wheelchairs also depends on the buildings they visit having infrastructure that allows for barrier-free access. Among the disabled, especially those who have lost a limb, it is possible to use prostheses that can replace the limb to some extent, but can help them to perform basic movements (Aleksandrova & Nenakhova, 2019). People who live with hearing loss have the possibility to use various hearing aids designed to amplify the sound fragments they encounter in their environment. For people with visual impairment, glasses and contact lenses of varying strengths, depending on their condition, can help to improve their vision, but nowadays medical interventions are also common which can improve the performance of the eye, but it is still essential to assess the condition of this organ. These devices are essentially intended to increase the equality of opportunity of the persons concerned, thereby contributing to the achievement of a relatively normal daily life.

8.1. Specific solutions in tourism for accessibility

The insufficient availability of tourist offers and specific infrastructure for individuals with disabilities can be attributed to various factors. There may be a lack of awareness among tourism providers about the specific needs and requirements of individuals with disabilities. This lack of awareness can result in a failure to prioritise and invest in accessible infrastructure and services. Creating and maintaining accessible infrastructure can involve additional costs. Businesses and destinations may be hesitant to invest in modifications or new facilities, especially if they perceive a limited demand or face financial constraints. While some regions have regulations and guidelines regarding accessibility for individuals with disabilities, enforcement may be inconsistent. In areas where regulations exist, the lack of strict

enforcement can reduce the incentive for businesses to invest in accessible infrastructure. Designing infrastructure and tourist offers that cater to a wide range of disabilities can be complex. Achieving true inclusivity may require innovative design solutions and a commitment to accommodating diverse needs. Societal attitudes and stigmas surrounding disabilities can also contribute to the neglect of creating accessible tourist offers. Negative perceptions may result in a lack of motivation to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. Collaboration among various stakeholders, including government bodies, tourism operators, disability advocacy groups, and architects, is essential for creating accessible tourism. The absence of effective collaboration can impede progress in developing inclusive infrastructure and services.

On the other hand, businesses may underestimate the potential market for accessible tourism. Improving accessibility can not only cater to individuals with disabilities but also attract a broader customer base, including families and older individuals who may benefit from accessible features. Tourism staff may lack the necessary training to assist individuals with disabilities. Proper training is crucial to ensure that staff can provide the appropriate support and services required for a positive travel experience.

Efforts to address these challenges involve raising awareness, promoting inclusive design practices, providing training for tourism professionals, and fostering collaboration among various stakeholders to create a more accessible and inclusive tourism industry. As societal awareness and expectations evolve, there may be an increasing demand for accessible travel options, encouraging the industry to invest in and prioritise inclusive tourism offerings.

Improving accessibility in tourism involves various technical solutions aimed at ensuring that individuals with disabilities can enjoy travel experiences comfortably. Here are some technical solutions commonly employed:

1. **Accessible accommodations**: Implementing ramps, elevators, accessible rooms, and bathrooms equipped with grab bars and lowered fixtures. Smart technologies like voice-activated controls and adjustable bed heights also enhance accessibility.
2. **Accessible attractions and experiences, museums and exhibits**: Implementing features like tactile exhibits, Braille signage, audio descriptions, and accessible seating options in theatres, museums, and other tourist spots. Interactive exhibits using touchscreens and tactile displays for visitors with visual impairments.
3. **Accessible transportation**: Designing transportation modes (buses, trains, planes) with ramps, lifts, priority seating, and adequate space for wheelchairs. Some places have introduced wheelchair-accessible taxis or ride-sharing services.
4. **Accessible pools and spas:** Accessible pools and spa-type facilities not only serve an enjoyment function, but can also play an important therapeutic role for people with various disabilities, e.g. in the case of therapeutic pools or special equipment. It is very important for all facilities to have several pools providing an aquatic experience that can be safely used by people with reduced mobility and other disabilities.
5. **Accessible outdoor recreational facilities:** an important component of the tourist experience is the use and "consumption" of the landscape and nature. This can be experienced authentically by people with disabilities if there are accessible routes, transport and transport solutions available.
6. **Other technological solutions:** different technological solutions can be a good complement to tourism offer, a valuable experience or a good way to explore and understand other attractions. Nowadays, the range of tools and innovative solutions is

constantly expanding, and tourism is also implementing them, with some elements being adapted for people with disabilities.

8.1.1. Accessible accommodations solutions within accessible tourism[17]

Accessible accommodation is a basic element of the offer for of promoting inclusive tourism. There is a difference between the assisted wheelchair- and independent wheelchair-friendly environments. There can be a number of aspects and solutions to ensure that accommodation is really accessible in the context of accessible tourism, as follows:

- Accessible room design: spacious rooms are needed with enough space to allow easy manoeuvrability for wheelchair users and people with mobility aids. Electrical outlets at waist height, shelves, cabinets and landline telephones with low heights, adjustable beds, movable furniture are just a few of them. Sometimes suites are a desirable option for people with disabilities since they often travel with caregivers.
- Bathroom accessibility: roll-in showers with grab bars and a folding shower seat are built in for people with mobility impairments. Non-slip flooring materials should be used in these areas.
- Accessible washbasins: sinks with space underneath for wheelchair users and adjustable height options are needed.
- Visual and audible alarms: including visual fire alarms and emergency signs for the hearing impaired is a must. Audible alarms provide an extra safety measure for people with visual impairments.
- Assistive technology integration can bring connectivity features, for this the accommodations should be equipped with Wi-Fi and connectivity features to support the use of assistive technologies. Charging stations for electronic mobility devices and assistive technologies will be available to provide accessible charging.
- Accessible routes and entrances: ramps and elevators must be designed to ensure that all routes and entrances are easily accessible to wheelchair users, without any thresholds or other barriers. Automatic doors can also be a good solution in certain situations.
- Clear signage: the use of clear and visible signs showing accessible routes and facilities is also important. Large print materials provide large print versions of written materials for guests with low vision.
- Accessible parking and other outdoor spaces of the hotel: specially designed and signposted parking areas should be available spaces close to the entrance with adequate width and adjacent access aisles. Drop-off zones and access areas for visitors with mobility impairments facilitate access. Wheelchair-accessible paths, paved, wheelchair-accessible walkways will serve all the areas of the hotel, where tourists can visit.
- Intelligent technology in rooms: special room control technology can be operated via mobile apps or voice commands for people with mobility or dexterity challenges. Included closed captioning on televisions ensures that televisions offer solutions for guests with hearing impairments.

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[17] See also: https://www.hoteliga.com/en/blog/making-your-hotel-ada-accessible-and-other-ways-to-be-more-inclusive; https://www.mews.com/en/blog/accessible-hotel-rooms

- Staff training: training personnel for disability issues should be included so that staff will be aware of the needs of guests with disabilities and can provide assistance when required. Staff should possess adequate communication skills to interact respectfully and efficiently with guests of all abilities.
- Accessible common areas of the hotel: the lobby and other shared spaces will also include seating options for people with disabilities. Ensuring that lounges, restaurants and meeting rooms are designed to be accessible is also part of the accessible solutions.
- Emergency evacuation plans: accommodations establish personalised emergency evacuation plans for guests with disabilities. There is also specific staff training on emergency procedures, staff need to be prepared and instructed in emergency situations.

Hotels and other accommodations also should consider providing specific services for guests with specific needs: service dogs are essential for the physical and mental well-being of people with disabilities. On-site laundry facilities, some grocery and other shopping services also can offer areal help in certain situations, etc. By using these solutions, accommodations will create an environment that is welcoming and accessible to all guests, regardless of their abilities. This not only meets legal requirements, but also improves the overall experience for people with disabilities, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse tourism industry and this way offer a special product for a niche market.

8.1.2. Accessible attractions and experiences, museums and exhibits[18]

Creating accessible museums and exhibitions is fundamental for ensuring that individuals with disabilities have equal chances to engage with cultural and educational experiences. Attractions based on vision are especially a great challenge for visually impaired people. For this, there are some good solutions around the multisensory technologies. Many considerations and solutions for making museums and exhibits more accessible are nowadays available, making the cultural experience accessible for all:

- Accessible building design: ramps and elevators should be installed with appropriate slope ratios to ensure wheelchair access to all areas, if possible, even without assistance.
- Clear pathways: ensure wide and barrier-free pathways for easy navigation, with curb-cuts, especially for individuals using mobility aids.
- Accessible seating and viewing areas: the design and construction of specific spaces with better visibility or perspective for individuals with disabilities in spectator areas, concert halls, or other visitor zones ensures they have an optimal experience. The offer should include a variety of seating options, including benches and chairs with armrests for individuals who may need additional support. Rest areas with comfortable seating throughout the museum are important to host visitors with mobility challenges.

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[18] See also:
How to Make Museums More Accessible for People with Disabilities? (inclusivecitymaker.com)
Best practice in making Museums more accessible to visually impaired visitors - MuseumNext
How Museum and Attraction Operators Can Deliver Accessible Tourism Experiences - tiqets.com
ADA Readily Achievable Barrier Removal Checklist for Existing Facilities

- Accessible tours and guides: offering specialised tours led by guides trained to accommodate different disabilities can enhance the experience. This might include tours with sign language interpreters, audio guides, or guides well-versed in accessibility needs. Museum staff is trained to provide assistance and guidance to visitors with disabilities. Museums often offer guided tours specifically designed for individuals with visual or hearing impairments, with trained guides providing detailed descriptions.
- Adaptive equipment: providing equipment like wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids for visitors who may require them during their visit to ensure they can access and enjoy attractions comfortably (see at 4.).
- Tactile and braille signage: tactile maps and models can deliver a good experience for people with visual impairments to understand the layout of the museum or other attractions.
- Audio descriptions: these are audio guides which offer detailed vocal descriptions about exhibits for visitors with visual impairments. Multilingual options ensure that audio guides are available in multiple languages to serve diverse visitors. Captioning and subtitling for videos and multimedia presentations make content accessible to people with hearing impairments. Transcripts of these texts provide written versions of audio content for additional accessibility.
- Accessible restrooms and facilities: universal design is needed for restrooms, including adequate space for manoeuvrability and support bars, including changing rooms for individuals with disabilities, especially those who require assistance.
- Sensory-friendly spaces: quiet areas are designated for individuals with sensory sensitivities, for autistic persons, who may need a break from the stimulation. Sensory-Friendly Exhibits include elements that appeal to various senses.
- Online accessibility information: the museum's website needs to provide information on exhibits, accessibility features, and virtual tours. A good website offers online resources, such as digital guides and pre-visit materials, to help visitors plan their visit.
- Educational programmes for all: inclusive workshops develop educational programmes are accessible to individuals with disabilities, at all levels. Learning materials provide accessible information, such as digital textbooks, large-print captions and multisensory materials.

By implementing these technical solutions and services, museums, exhibits and other cultural attractions can create an inclusive, friendly environment where individuals with disabilities can fully participate in cultural and educational experiences. This inclusive approach not only enhances accessibility but also enriches the overall visitor experience for everyone.

8.1.3. Accessible transportation solutions within accessible tourism[19]

Accessible transportation is an indispensable element of tourism in general, and in almost every travel experiences for individuals with disabilities. There are several solutions to be

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[19] See also: https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/accessible-transport-tourism.pdf World Bank (2013): Improving Accessibility to Transport for People with Limited Mobility (PLM) A Practical Guidance Note. Sustainable Development Department.
https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/575221468278939280/pdf/Accessibility0Report0Final.pdf

implemented to make transportation more accessible, covering different modes of travel. Here are some detailed accessible transportation solutions within the context of accessible tourism:

- Footways and sidewalks, parking: Footways and sidewalks are a basic part of the transport system because most people start and finish their journeys using these facilities in some way. The design of these facilities should take into account the needs of all potential users. Measures are needed to make sure that footways and sidewalks are not obstructed by garbage, construction debris, tree roots, or other objects. Obstructions created by street vendors, parked cars, and utility poles may also prevent people with limited mobility from using the footway. In order to deliver universal accessibility, there are certain minimum dimensions that need to be observed. A footway or sidewalk should be at least 2000mm wide in areas with moderate to heavy pedestrian traffic, or 1500mm in less heavily trafficked areas. Around shops and bus stops, the footway will ideally be at least 3000 – 3500mm wide. Designated accessible parking spaces and drop-off zones near transportation hubs and tourist attractions should be incorporated, to facilitate convenient access to transportation services for individuals with mobility impairments.
- Vehicles accessible with wheelchairs: vehicles modified with ramps or lifts to accommodate wheelchair users are the basic elements, especially in short range transportation. Taxis, rideshare services and public transportation are the main transportation modalities within cities, these need to have wheelchair-accessible components to ensure that individuals with mobility challenges can travel conveniently. The urban systems of transportation should include low-floor buses, ramps, and designated spaces for wheelchairs. Long-range bus and train services need to have additional services, such as proper toilet and resting times, assistance for people with disabilities, low counters at desks etc.
- Real-time tracking and alert apps: mobile apps and online platforms provide real-time information on the location and accessibility status of public transportation services. Using these software, travellers can plan their journeys more effectively, knowing the accessibility features of upcoming transportation options.
- Audio and visual announcements, on-board information: public transportation systems equipped with audio and visual announcements inform passengers of stops and other important information. Individuals with visual or hearing impairments can navigate public transportation independently with the help of clear announcements.
- Air travel: airports need to be provided with assistive technologies, such as curb cuts, boarding ramps, accessible restrooms, and visual or auditory navigation aids. These elements ensure a smoother experience for travellers with disabilities from check-in to boarding and deplaning. Airplanes can include various accessibility features to make it easier for people with limited mobility to travel by plane. Persons with disabilities should be able to take on board mobility aids such as walking frames, crutches or foldable wheelchairs, free of charge, and should be stored within the confines of the cabin. Battery powered wheelchairs are usually carried in the hold of the aircraft, while airlines are required to store the batteries, particularly wet-cell batteries which may be "spillable"

UNDP (2010) 'A review of international good practice in accessible transport for persons with disabilities,. Available at: http://www.undp.my/uploads/Int%20Best%20Practice%20Transport%20Disabilities%202010.pdf, cited October 2011.

- Accessible cruise ships, ferries and other marine vessels: cruise ships with accessible cabins, elevators, and other facilities can accommodate passengers with mobility challenges. A number of circulation elements should be built in, that individuals with disabilities can enjoy cruise vacations with the same level of comfort and convenience as other passengers. The maximum slope of ramps for wheelchairs should be 1:20. There should be at least one entrance/exit that is accessible for people with limited mobilities without stairs and steps and be marked with the international symbol for disabled installations.
- Accessible rental cars, shared transportation: car rental services can offer vehicles with features like hand controls and wheelchair ramps. They allow individuals with certain disabilities the flexibility to explore destinations independently. Some shared mobility options can also be open for people with certain (light) disabilities. Bike-sharing and scooter-sharing, with accessible options for individuals with diverse needs.
- Training for transportation personnel: training programmes for transportation staff will be conducted regularly, to enhance their awareness and skills in assisting passengers with disabilities, which ensures that transportation personnel are prepared to provide assistance and support to individuals with diverse needs.

Assistive technologies in tourism, especially rental services for devices like wheelchairs, mobility scooters, hearing aids, but also assistance services play a crucial role in enhancing the travel experience for individuals with disabilities. Rental services for assistive audio-visual or digital devices contribute make tourist destinations more accessible for individuals with disabilities. Tourists who may require mobility devices or hearing technology can access the necessary devices to explore attractions comfortably. Wheelchairs and mobility scooters provide individuals with mobility impairments opportunities tourist sites independently, creating a sense of autonomy and self-reliance during their travels.

The integration of these accessible transportation solutions elevates a more inclusive travel experience, allowing individuals with disabilities to participate in tourism activities with greater ease and independence. New advancements in technology and increased awareness of accessibility needs continue to drive improvements in this area.

8.1.4. Accessible pools and spas[20]

Accessible pools and spas are part of the recreational experience, but they can go beyond mere recreational facilities. They usually have a positive impact on physical health, social inclusion, empowerment and educational awareness, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Allowing accessibility to these services aligns with the principles of universal design, making possible that everyone can participate and enjoy the benefits of health and spa tourism.

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[20] See also:

https://www.accessibleaccommodation.com/make-a-splash-accessible-pools/

https://www.ada.gov/resources/accessible-pools-requirements/

United States Access Board (2003): Accessible swimming pools& spas. A summary of accessibility guidelines for recreation facilities. https://www.access-board.gov/files/ada/guides/pools.pdf

To ensure that pools and spas are accessible for people with disabilities, various features and technical elements should be considered, such as:

- Access areas with installed ramps or sloped entries to provide wheelchair users with easy access to the pool or spa area.
- Pool elevators or other transfer systems to assist individuals with mobility challenges in entering and exiting the pool or spa safely.
- Accessible changing rooms and restrooms need to have sufficient space for wheelchair users and include elements like grab bars and accessible seating. People with disabilities may visit an aquatic facility with family, friends or caregivers. An emerging best practice for these and other types of recreation and entertainment facilities is the provision of family or unisex restrooms.
- Poolside circulation zones ensure that pathways around the pool and spa are wide, level, and slip-resistant, allowing individuals with mobility devices and reduces mobility (e.g. seniors) to navigate easily.
- Zero-entry or beach entry pools have a gradual slope, creating a beach-like entry that is accessible for people with mobility impairments.
- Handrails and grab bars should be installed in strategic locations around the pool and spa areas to provide support and assistance, but also in changing rooms, toilets and other wellness areas.
- Adaptive equipment offers an extra safety and comfort in certain situations, such as pool wheelchairs, floating devices or transfer benches to enhance accessibility.
- Signage and information provide clear and visible indications about accessible routes, accessible features, and information about available accommodations.
- Temperature control features offer an option for everybody to ensure that the temperature of the water is comfortable for individuals with sensory sensitivities or conditions affected by temperature fluctuations.
- Accessible seating can be built in pools or resting areas, with proper back support for individuals who may need a break or rest between activities.

These technical solutions not only enhances the experience for individuals with disabilities but also promotes a more inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone.

8.1.5. Accessible outdoor recreational facilities[21]

In the Czech Republic the most accessible routes, cycle routes, etc., are found in regions with national parks or attractive natural sites (Linderová & Janeček, 2017). Building accessible outdoor recreational facilities is fundamental to ensuring that individuals with disabilities can enjoy outdoor activities and spaces. But accessible outdoor places can bring easy use for other categories as well: families with small babies in a stroller, for example. Some of the accessible solutions for outdoor recreational facilities are:

- Accessible trails and paths usually ensure that trails and paths are paved or have a firm, stable surface to facilitate easy movement for individuals using wheelchairs or mobility

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[21] See also:
https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/resources/resource/outdoor-accessibility-guidance-download
https://www.americantrails.org/resources/improving-accessibility-on-public-lands

devices. In the same time, the use clear and visible signage that includes symbols and tactile information for individuals with visual or cognitive impairments is also important. Providing smooth transitions between different surfaces and gradients to avoid obstacles for wheelchair users makes a journey comfortable. Some exact indications regarding the standards of outdoor paths can be found in Table 5.

- Wheelchair-accessible seating areas incorporate designated seating areas with ample space for wheelchair users to comfortably enjoy the surroundings. Picnic tables can be installed with spaces designed to accommodate wheelchairs.
- Adaptive sports and recreation equipment offer sport experience for disabled persons. These can be: handcycles, adaptive bicycles or kayaks that can be used by individuals with various abilities. All-terrain wheelchairs can be rented for use on trails or uneven surfaces.
- Accessible playgrounds are covered by rubber or another accessible ground material, to ensure a safe and comfortable play area for people using mobility devices. Installing inclusive play structures that cater to children of all abilities, including those with physical and sensory impairments – another extra safety feature.
- Accessible fishing and boating facilities assumes construction of fishing docks with accessible features such as lowered railings and spaces for wheelchair users. Water recreation can be ensured if adaptive equipment is available for boating activities.
- Accessible restrooms and changing rooms (if necessary)- just like in other cases - ensure that restroom facilities are wheelchair accessible, with proper space, support bars, and accessible fixtures.
- Sensory gardens are self-contained garden areas that allows visitors to enjoy a wide variety of sensory experiences, for individuals with visual or sensory impairments. A sensory garden is designed to provide opportunities to stimulate the senses, both individually and in combination, in ways that users may not usually encounter[22]. Sensory gardens, as a form of horticultural therapy can be used in the education of special-needs students, including autistic people, dementia etc.
- Inclusive event spaces are designed with accessible seating areas during outdoor events and performances.
- Accessible parking is also important, with good placement and clearly marked indicators, close to the entrance of the recreational area.
- Community engagement is also necessary to establish feedback systems for gathering inputs from individuals with disabilities, ensuring ongoing improvements and inclusivity in outdoor recreational spaces.

These elements make a difference but may be not enough in specific natural attractions. The tourism industry must create environments that are welcoming and inclusive for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. This is not only for the benefits people with disabilities but also enhances the overall experience for all visitors, fostering a more diverse and inclusive tourism sector.

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[22] https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/guidance/sensory-gardens-planning

Table 5. Path and route management zone standards in the UK

	A	B	C
Barriers	No stiles, steps or physical barriers restricting access. No gates narrower than 1100mm (1500mm in Scotland).	No stiles, steps or physical barriers restricting access. No gates narrower than 1100mm (1500mm in Scotland).	No stiles, steps or physical barriers restricting access. No gates narrower than 1100mm (1500mm in Scotland).
Surface	Firm and even in all weathers, clear of loose stones and debris.	Firm, with a few loose stones and debris.	Path not firm in all weathers, loose materials, occasional tree roots, potholes and stretches of rutting.
Width	Meets recommended widths in Section A.3. No passing places needed.	At least 1200mm wide with passing places at least every 50m.	At least 1000mm with passing places at least every 150m.
Width restrictions	Narrower sections are limited to 1200mm wide.	Narrower sections are limited to 900mm wide.	Narrower sections are limited to 850mm wide.
Resting points	At least every 100m.	At least every 300m.	Not formalised. Resting points make the most of existing features.
Gradient	Maximum 1:20 (5%) with level areas for gradients over 1:60 (1.7%).	Maximum 1:12 (8%) and any gradients steeper than 1:20 (5%) detailed as ramps.	Maximum 1:10 (10%) over very short distances (600mm).
Crossfall or camber	1:50	1:50	1:35
Surface breaks of the path.	Maximum 5mm gap measured across the line	Maximum 5mm gap measured across the line of the path.	Maximum 12mm gap measured across the line of the path.
Distance	Route includes shorter loops or easy return options.	Route includes shorter loops or easy return options.	Route is lengthy with no shorter loops or easy return options.
Clarity	Route is clearly defined by its surface.	Route is clearly defined.	Route may be undefined, but it is still clear enough to follow.

Source: Outdoor Accessibility Guidance, 2023

8.1.6. Other technological solutions

Technological innovations play a crucial role in enhancing accessible tourism for individuals with disabilities. A number of innovative solutions have been proposed to address the challenges faced by people with special needs in the tourism sector. For instance, the development of web platforms like access@tour by action aims to increase knowledge transfer and collaboration among stakeholders in accessible tourism (Alves et al., 2022). Additionally, projects such as ICHT focus on creating digital tools and content in sign language to improve accessibility to cultural heritage sites for deaf tourists, utilizing technologies like holography and mobile applications (Escudeiro et al., 2022). Moreover, smart technologies are being

utilized in destinations like Breda to provide accessible transportation and destination information through platforms such as websites, mobile applications, and virtual reality. These technological advancements are crucial in promoting inclusivity and enhancing the overall tourism experience for individuals with disabilities (Zabłocki et al., 2022).

There are several new developments serving communication and services in accessible tourism:

- Augmented reality (AR) applications provide travellers with visual impairments with audio descriptions of surroundings, navigation assistance, and information about nearby landmarks or attractions.
- Mobile apps for navigation and other smart navigation and wayfinding tools, like Google Maps or specialised ones provide information on auto, public transportation and walking routes, wheelchair-friendly paths, and locations of accessible facilities (restrooms, entrances, etc.). Indoor navigation systems help better navigation within in airports, hotels, and public spaces for individuals with visual impairments.
- Websites and online resources - if complied to accessibility standards (like WCAG) - ensure navigation for users with disabilities. Screen reader compatibility, text alternatives for images, and clear navigation are crucial. Some features need to be like adjustable text size, high contrast modes, and simple navigation.
- Virtual tours and 360-degree videos offer self-controllable tours or pre-recorded films of attractions, allowing individuals with mobility challenges to experience places they might find difficult to visit physically.
- Wearable technologies like smart bracelets or tags interact with infrastructure (such as beacons), they can guide visually impaired tourists by providing location-based information and directions.
- Online booking platforms allow users to specify their needs and preferences, but also can be integrated with assistive technologies to facilitate the booking process for individuals with disabilities.
- Communication apps designed for special needs (e.g. individuals with communication disorders), help them to express their needs and preferences. Language translation apps facilitate better communication in diverse environments. These digital solutions aim to create an inclusive environment, making tourism accessible and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of their physical abilities or disabilities.

Equality of persons is of increasing importance today, whether it is about creating equality between genders, nationalities or even accessibility to different everyday activities. Societal expectations and the way modern man thinks demand that everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity or health status, should enjoy the same rights. We face many difficulties in the field of education and employment, as each person has different characteristics, acquired knowledge, skills and health conditions. A significant part of society is made up of a community of people who live with congenital or life-long disabilities and are therefore also affected by the issue of equal opportunities. People who live with a disability of some kind often face barriers, whether in learning, employment or transport. The governmental sector, the business community and society have a shared responsibility to promote the inclusion of people with a physical or mental disability (Eusébio et al., 2023).

In the light of constantly evolving technological innovations, it can be concluded that these factors facilitate access to accessible information, help the integration of people with

disabilities into society, improve their communication with the people around them, and contribute to their quality of life and their easier integration into society. These issues are of growing importance for modern tourism management, not only in terms of the size of the untapped market sector, but also in terms of meeting the ESG criteria that businesses, including tourism service providers, will have to report on in the near future. The introduction of these initiatives will be a potential attraction for investors and financing organisations.

9. Invisible walls: the issue of language barriers

It is not only physical obstacles that can keep us from travelling but also communication and language barriers that can hinder a successful and happy tourist experience. Language allows for the expression of emotions, the sharing of feelings, the telling of stories and the communication of complex messages and knowledge. Language is our greatest intermediary, enabling us to connect with and understand each other – and it can also separate us from each other if we do not speak each other's language: language barriers are an important barrier to transcultural communication. In addition to the physical "impairments" – mobility, sight, hearing – there is also a cognitive dimension to disability, and those who are unable to communicate can perhaps be placed, without exaggeration, in the latter group (fortunately only temporarily and "curably").

Overcoming language barriers is essential for the tourism sector. In the words of Cohen and Cooper: "Language barriers are, as everyone knows, an important obstacle to transcultural communication." (Cohen & Cooper 1986, p. 534) Studies have shown that language barriers affect tourists' destination choice and spending decisions (Cohen & Cooper 1986); the tourism industry is therefore making great efforts to overcome language barriers between hosts and tourists (Gillovic et al., 2018).

Tourists are very much aware of this difficulty, which has a significant impact on the choice of destination, the preparation for the trip, the scope and content of their interaction with the locals, and the quality of their experience (Cohen & Cooper 1986). An online and face-to-face survey of more than 3,000 Hungarian residents aged 15-74 years, representative of age, gender and region of residence (Csapó et al., 2018), conducted in 2018, in the pre-Covid-19 pandemic, included a survey of the travel behaviour of the Hungarian population, including the reasons for not travelling. It is possible that the non-traveller lacks one – in the worst case, more than one – of the three basic conditions of tourism (motivation, discretionary income, leisure time), but the lack of language skills is also a serious barrier for many people, even if the barrier is only mental, since, as it is explained below, it is possible to travel even without language skills, even though the experience will be somewhat less (which cannot even be said for a domestic trip). For classic drop-outs, the main reason is the lack of financial means, but the reluctance to travel can also be due to a lack of language skills. Among the specific answers to the question "What are your reasons for not travelling?", lack of money and lack of time rank first and second, while the other reasons are negligible, but lack of language skills is in third place, slightly ahead of lack of company (Figure 58.).

Figure 58. Reasons for not travelling among respondents to a questionnaire survey in Hungary, 2018 (n=1085)
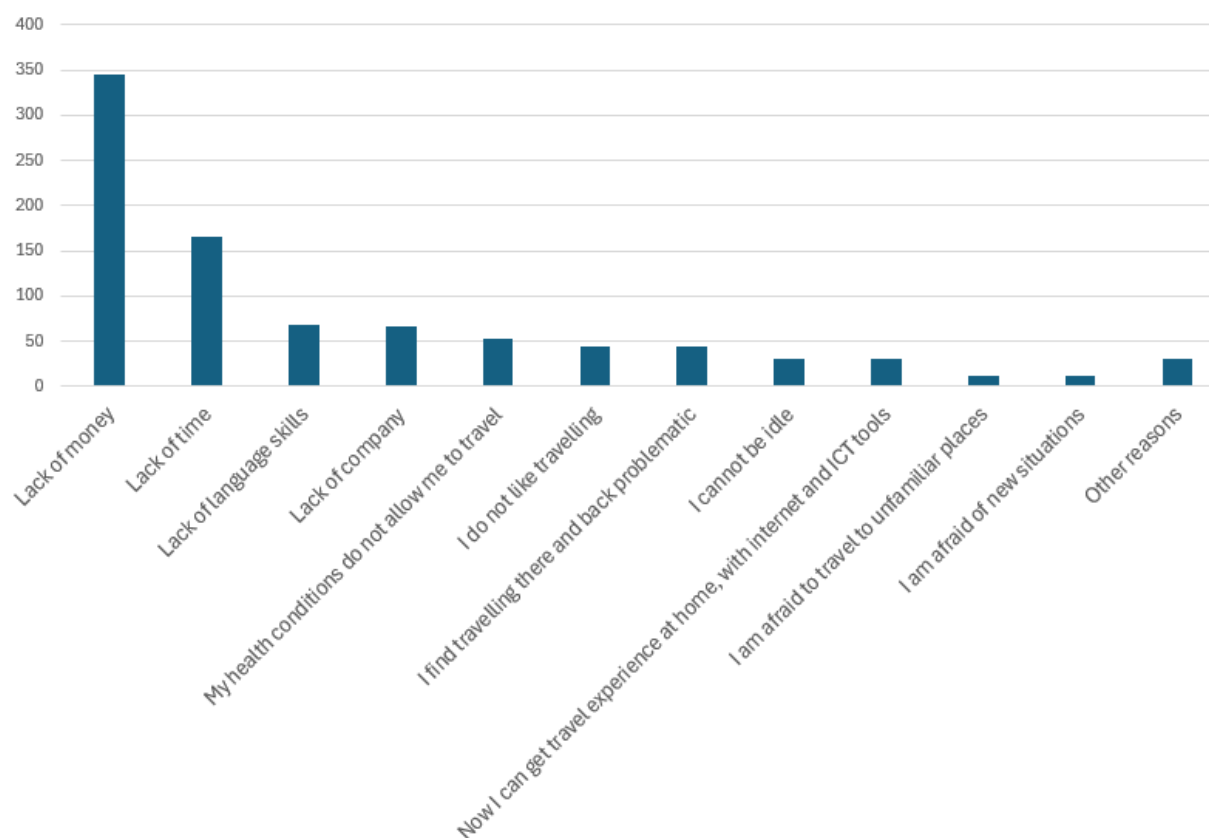
Source: Csapó et al. (2018), p. 24.

With more than 7 000 living languages in the world – of which nearly a thousand are on the verge of extinction[23] – it is very likely that the language of the tourist will be different from that of the host. Fortunately, the situation is simpler, considering in that more than half of the world's population uses "only" 23 languages[24]. We need to distinguish between languages according to the number of people who speak them as a native or as a learnt language, so it is possible that although Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken native language in the world, the most widely spoken language in the world in 2024 was English (Table 6.). Like Latin or Greek in the classical world, English is now the world's common language, the lingua franca, the basic language of international business, technology and many other areas of tourism, but if we look only at native speakers, China's large population makes Mandarin the most widely spoken language in the world (which is not really a language in its own right – the name combines dialects whose speakers understand each other); indeed, English is relegated to third place behind Spanish, which is second.

The order in 2024 is as follows (the comments below the table indicate in themselves the role of the confusion in the Babel, due to the diversity of languages, in making communication difficult and creating obstacles):

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[23] www.linguisticsociety.org

[24] www.berlitz.com

Table 6. Most widely spoken languages in the world, 2024

Language	Total number of speakers (million)	Number of native speakers (million)
English	1.452	372.9
Mandarin	1.118	929
Hindi	602	343.9
Spanish[1]	548	474.7
French	280	79.9
(Modern Standard) Arabic[2]	274	0
Bengali	272.7	233.7
Russian	258.2	154
Portuguese[3]	257.7	232.4
Urdu	231.3	70.2
Indonesian[4]	199	43.6
German	134.6	75.6
Japan[5]	125.4	125.3
Nigerian pidgin[6]	120.7	4.7
Marathi	99.1	83.1
Telugu	95.7	82.7
Turkish	88.1	82.2
Tamil[7]	86.4	78.4
Yueh Chinese	85.6	85.2
Vietnamese	85.3	84.6

Source: www.berlitz.com

[1] Spanish is the second most widely spoken language in terms of native speakers.
[2] Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the only language that has no native speakers. As a language, Arabic is made up of countless dialects and all Arabic speakers actually speak a local version, but the media (newspapers, films, televisions) use MSA, which is also an academic language used in literature and politics.
[3] The most widely spoken language in the southern hemisphere.
[4] It is not the mother tongue of the majority of speakers – rather a second language for mutual understanding in a country where more than 200 languages are used.
[5] The first language on the list that is spoken in only one country. 99% of the Japanese population are native speakers.
[6] By 2050, Nigeria will be the fourth most populous country in the world, so the pidgin language could move up the rankings.
[7] With over 5000 years of history, it is the oldest living language in the world.

For websites, English is even more dominant. The lack of knowledge of English, which is today the only true world language, is also an information and communication handicap, because a large part of the information on the World Wide Web (and therefore, by definition, international tourism information) is available in English. There are currently more than 1 billion websites in the world, but only 18% of them are active (https://siteefy.com). 53% of the 10 million most visited websites in the world are in English, while Chinese accounts for only 1.8% of these sites (Figure 59.). There is also a big gap for Spanish: Spanish is the first language of nearly half a billion people, compared to 5.1% of websites in this language. It is also interesting to note that while German is the second most spoken language online, in live speech it is not even in the top ten.

Figure 59 a, b. Languages most commonly used in real life and online

a) Estimated number of speakers of a given language in the world, 2022
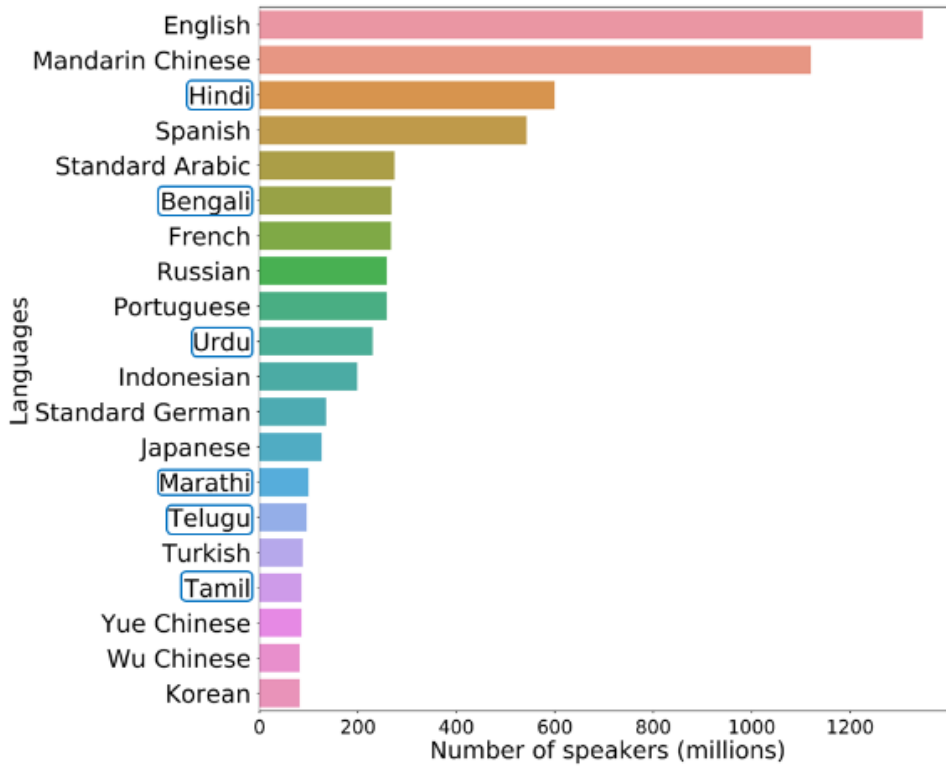
Source: Dey et al. (2022), p. 3.

b) Percentage of websites using each language
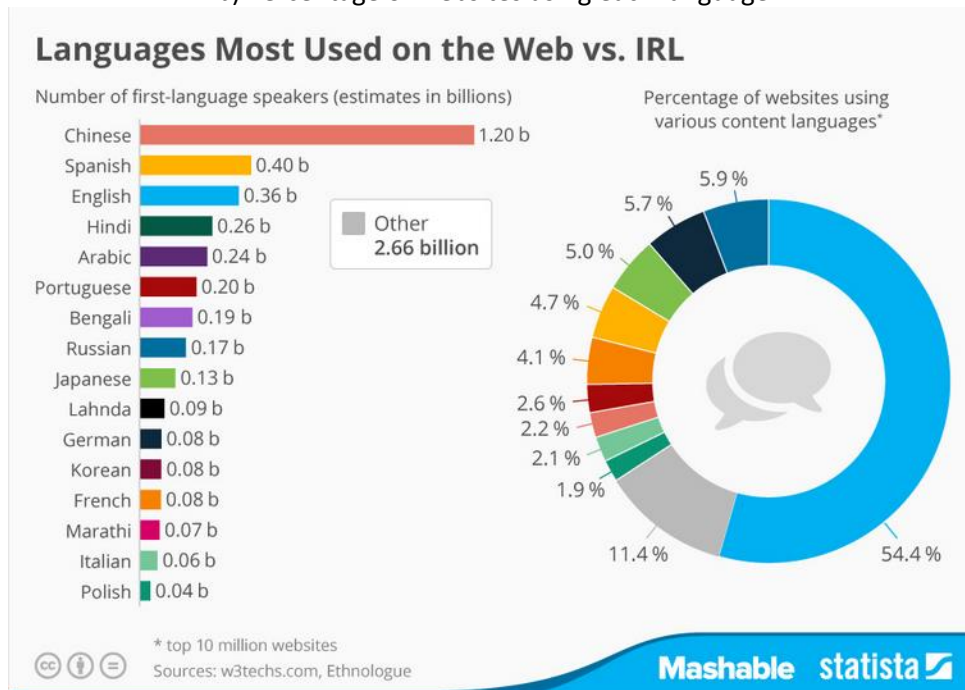
Source: www.statista.com

Communication barriers arise when a tourist visits a country and does not understand the language of the local population. (In countries with several languages or widely differing versions, dialects of the same language, this problem can arise within borders, even without travelling abroad – there are countries in the world where dozens, even hundreds of languages are spoken, the record keepers being Papua New Guinea and Indonesia with no less than 840 and 711 languages, respectively (https://www.statista.com).

English is the language spoken or at least minimally understood in most destinations around the world. The problem arises when either the tourist or the local inhabitants do not know each other's language or a third language such as English. Technological advances are helping to overcome communication barriers, but not all of them are fully developed yet, and all of them require adequate financial resources, internet access and translation time. Signs with basic information on buildings or attractions are usually written in several languages. Of course, it is almost impossible to translate all of them into all languages, so this obstacle will be very difficult to overcome without ready access to the internet, Google Translate or similar applications (Marinovic & Simić, 2018).

The problem does not affect different types of tourists in the same way. Taking Cohen's approach, where the two basic types of tourists are institutionalised and non-institutionalised tourists (Cohen, 1984), organised and individual mass tourists typically live in the environmental bubble of their own society, from the safety of which they observe and experience the alienation of the host environment. This bubble contains a linguistic component in addition to the familiar environment, food and other services. Most or all employees of tourist establishments who come into contact with tourists are expected to have a relatively high level of language proficiency. This language proficiency is usually a prerequisite for employment in standard tourist establishments such as hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, travel agencies and car rental agencies. In the most developed countries in terms of tourism, at least some of the staff, such as receptionists and tour guides, are multilingual and are thus able to communicate with tourists from all the main countries of origin in their own language. Similarly, guided tours to major attractions are organised by language group so that each tourist can be guided in his or her own language. Institutionalised tourists rarely dare to step outside their own environmental bubble, and even when they do, they are accompanied by a guide. They therefore typically encounter virtually no communication problems with locals that would require even minimal linguistic adaptation.

In contrast, the well-travelled explorers and travellers (i.e. the non-institutionalised type of tourist, with significant travel experiences) make limited or almost no use of the services provided by tourist facilities (including the use of language intermediaries – guides, tour guides, interpreters)[25], and are therefore more exposed to the host environment's alienness than the typical mass tourist discussed above. They do not seek the protection of the bubble

[25] The most important characteristics of cultural mediators are: communication skills, compassion, careful and active participation in the conversation, knowledge of the local population, knowledge of the tourists' country, knowledge of cultures, traditions and laws. In addition to formal mediators, there are also informal mediators who do not have the responsibilities of mediators, are not prepared for the role of mediator and their role is often invisible but very subjective and important. Informal mediators include the media, friends, relatives, souvenirs, photographs, as well as tourism workers, other tourists and members of the local community (Marinovic & Simić, 2018). Other types of linguistic mediators, such as self-proclaimed local guides, taxi drivers and others lurking around hotels and offering their services, may be even more unscrupulous mediators than professional guides in mediating communication between tourists and locals – that is, they may not promote barrier-free services but are more likely to generate linguistic barriers and other obstacles even reaching beyond language barriers (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

of the tourist establishment and are well beyond the periphery of the tourist system within which the individual mass tourist operates. In exchange for a more authentic experience, they also take a higher level of risk in terms of language.

In international tourism, various tools are available to reduce cultural and communication barriers. Some of these are supply side, the use of certification by tourism operators and destination management organisations, the use of signs, pictures, pictograms[26] instead of written communication (Figure 60.), education of local people and encouraging community participation in tourism (local people interested in tourism are much more likely to learn the language of visitors than their counterparts who do not benefit from tourism).

Figure 60. Some (travel) symbols that are easy to understand even without knowledge of a foreign language

Source: https://www.alamy.com/
Note: thee symbol of accessibility (person in a wheelchair) is at the very beginning of the list.

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[26] If you do not speak the language, pictograms in a restaurant can help you avoid problems with food allergies and intolerances, for example, but unfortunately these signs are not necessarily standardised yet. More work needs to be done on real accessibility...

On the demand side, tourists themselves can actively help to reduce language barriers:

- the use of non-verbal communication – non-verbal communication is the way people communicate without spoken words (tone of voice, gestures, posture, touch and sight), intentionally or unintentionally. In non-verbal communication, decoding the message requires a thorough knowledge of the sender's and receiver's culture, situation and circumstances. When people from culturally different countries meet in a tourist interaction, barriers can arise if they are not familiar with each other's culture (Marinovic & Simić, 2018). For example, some hand gestures can be positive but also highly offensive depending on where on the globe you are, and even on the direction in which you turn your palm (https://telex.hu);
- communicating in writing – if the tourist or host has at least a minimum knowledge of the other language, written communication can reduce some of the misunderstandings that come with being verbal (accents, fast speech);
- learn English – it seems obvious that everyone should learn the most important world language today, so that it can be the intermediary language in tourism (too), but not everyone may have the motivation and the opportunity to do so;
- learn the language of the destination country – very few tourists make the effort to learn the language of the host country for a trip of a few days or weeks at most a year[27]. Also, it narrows down the range of potential destinations. It is more common and simpler to purchase and use language books or simplified dictionaries as a tool to ensure minimum language competence;
- go on holiday to a place where they speak the language or a foreign language spoken by the tourist – but this again narrows the range of potential destinations;
- apps: including language ones (Google Translate, Duolingo, iTranslate, Memrise, Busuu); other apps that make communication unnecessary, such as journey planners (Citymapper, MAPS.ME, Roadtrippers, Google Maps, see Figure 61.), Uber, etc. It should be noted, however, that dependence on apps can also create barriers: they can make a user who is unilaterally dependent on them vulnerable in the event of a phone running out of battery, breaking down, being damaged or stolen; no signal; no internet connection; expensive roaming, etc.

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[27] The German traveller and ethnographer Adler (1980, cited in Cohen – Cooper 1986), based on his experience of language adaptation during his trip to New Guinea, argues that it is not necessary to have perfect command of a language; for everyday communication, the knowledge of guest workers (i.e. the German language skills of foreign workers in Germany) is quite sufficient. In his experience, a tourist needs to learn around 200 words and concepts (which does not seem a disproportionate effort in exchange for making communication more accessible).

Figure 61. Find a restaurant using Google Maps

Source: https://centersmarttourism.world
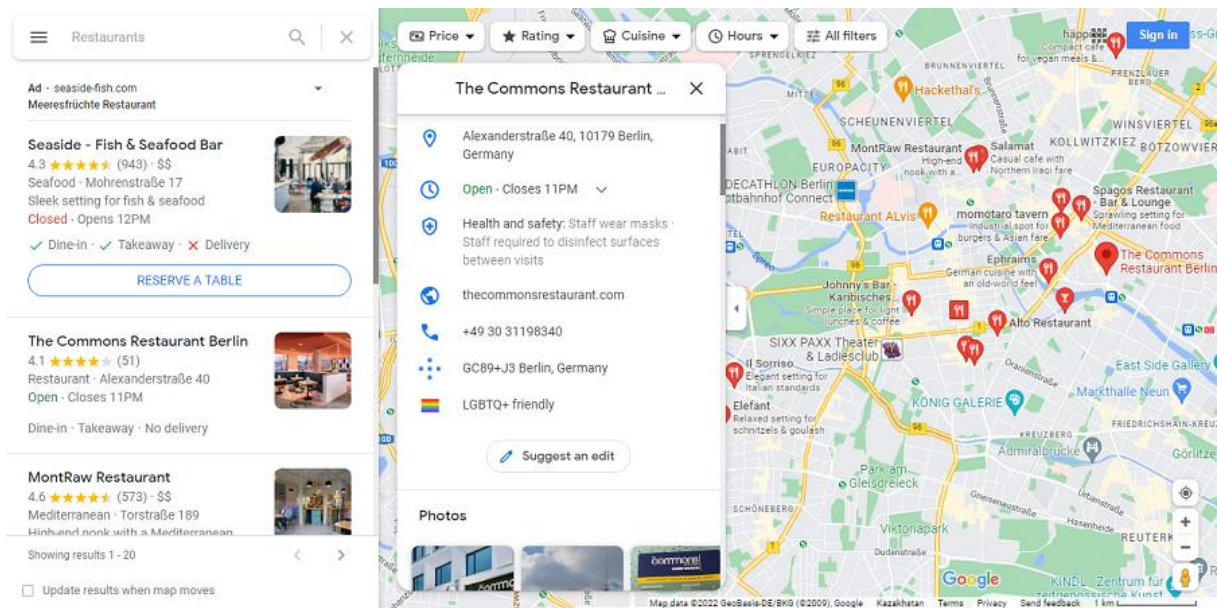
Some travel portals provide practical tips for tourists who do not speak the language of the destination but want to learn the basics:

- sign up for a beginner's course: locals working in the destinations have often seen others struggling with language barriers, are used to dealing with the needs of tourists and often run beginner's courses. By taking just one or two classes tourists can learn the most common phrases and questions, such as how to order in a restaurant, ask where the toilet is, etc.;
- learn the basic rules of pronunciation: this often overlooked aspect can be incredibly important when learning a language, as speaking with an incorrect accent or intonation is unlikely to be understood;
- look for situations where you need to use the language: the best way to get used to dealing with language barriers is to start using the language little by little: for example, by going out for dinner or shopping alone;
- check out Gabriel Wyner's list of common words: the language guru has compiled lists of the 625 most common words (Wyner, 2014) – remember that Adler came in at 200 (Adler (1980, cited by Cohen & Cooper, 1986);
- don't feel uncomfortable if you feel you have failed: accept the discomfort, because venturing outside your comfort zone is in itself respectable. Instead of being held back by mistakes or lack of language skills, consider it a strength that we are able to communicate at all at any level;
- use the power of body language as a means of communication across all borders, continents and cultural differences. For example, when asking for directions, people usually point and gesture while explaining the route. A waiter who asks if we want more coffee usually nods towards the empty cups on the table. Use these actions and non-verbal cues, and if you cannot communicate with words and sentences, relax and see how far you can get with non-verbal communication;

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- keep your phone charged and with enough data traffic: a smartphone is a reliable tool that can help you out of any awkward situation that may arise (map apps, translation apps, etc.). However, it is advisable not to rely too much on technology (https://www.gadventures.com/blog/language-travel/.

10. Ensuring info-communication accessibility

The tourism industry, which enables and serves travel, thrives on connecting people across geographical and cultural boundaries, but one critical aspect of this connection, despite the undoubtedly impressive technological advances in recent years, remains a barrier: this is communication.

Effective communication accurately conveys information, emotion and nuance; clear, effective communication builds trust (https://languageio.com). If a potential traveller approaches a tourism service provider in a language whose staff speak a language other than their own, inadequate communication can lead to a failure to use that service or, in the worst case, to the cancellation of the entire trip. (The issue of language barriers is dealt with in a separate chapter of this book.)

Communication in tourism, however, is not just about using language, but also about exploiting the opportunities – and avoiding the pitfalls – of ICT in an increasingly digitalised industry. The digitisation of tourism services is transforming the structure of the sector by changing barriers to entry, facilitating price comparisons – a major accessibility benefit for consumers, the demand side –, and revolutionising sales channels via the internet, optimising costs and improving production efficiency – an invaluable benefit for the supply side, the service providers (Gutierriz et al., 2023). Thus, the use of information technology in tourism (also) seems to be of a fundamentally barrier-free nature, as it removes obstacles such as lack of information, language barriers in some cases (booking accommodation, flights, cars, etc. can be done via the Internet without language barriers, possibly in one's own mother tongue in most of the cases). It greatly facilitates decision-making, as, for example, when choosing an accommodation or other service provider, user reviews can be an orientation in themselves (making the lengthy and uncertain process of repeatedly collecting information about the service providers through other communication channels unnecessary), but also allowing specific factors to be searched for through booking platforms, such as accessibility, which is a key priority for our topic, thus greatly reducing the uncertainty associated with travel.

On the website of the largest accommodation mediator, booking.com, only wheelchair accessibility can be entered under Facilities as a criterion for narrowing down the search results, but the more attentive traveller can scroll down and find a Property accessibility tab and a Room accessibility tab, with no less than seven and eleven aspects, respectively (with overlaps of course):

- Property Accessibility:
    - Toilet with grab rails
    - Raised toilet
    - Lowered sink
    - Bathroom emergency cord
    - Visual aids (Braille)
    - Visual aids (tactile signs)
    - Auditory guidance
- Room Accessibility
    - Entire unit located on ground floor
    - Upper floors accessible by elevator
    - Entire unit wheelchair accessible

- o Toilet with grab rails
- o Adapted bath
- o Roll-in shower
- o Walk-in shower
- o Raised toilet
- o Lower sink
- o Emergency cord in bathroom
- o Shower chair

The largest Hungarian accommodation booking site, szallas.hu, also includes accessibility as a search criterion, but the portal does not offer any more detailed search than this, only allowing searches for amenities. The existence of a lift (which can also be a factor in narrowing down the results) is not a guarantee of accessibility in itself, as it is not certain that the lift is wheelchair accessible.

A serious issue is raised in this place concerning real accessibility: the information on accessibility is made available by the self-assessment of accommodation (and other service) providers, who may not have the necessary expertise to decide if their service facility is actually accessible or not, and even with the best intention (let us be benevolent and not suppose deliberate misinformation on the side of the service providers), they may falsely communicate accessibility, which in turn may create serious problems with a disabled traveller. (The very existence of the service called Access4you, described in detail in another part of this book, is due to such a situation – the founder of the website during a travel found himself in an unmanageable situation, having arrived at an accommodation advertised as wheelchair friendly but actually being wheelchair-inaccessible. This gave him the idea of creating and updating a database of really accessible accommodations and other facilities so that the problem he had faced should not be a problem for others.)

Tourism management has by now become completely inseparable from information technology (reinforced by the Covid-19 pandemics), so having the right digital skills is of paramount importance for tourism businesses. Digitalisation and Web 4.0 are redefining jobs and creating new ones, requiring new competences and skills. Digital literacy of consumers is also becoming increasingly important. History seems to repeat itself again: every improvement creates new barriers as well – those who are unable to use the latest info-communication tools may find themselves in a handicapped situation, e.g. if the planning and implementation of the travel can only be done through info-communication tools and solutions.

The most important future digital skills on the side of the supply side include online marketing and communication skills, social media skills, MS Office skills, skills in using operating systems and skills in monitoring online reviews (Carlisle et al., 2021). The largest gaps between current and future skill levels were found for artificial intelligence and robotics skills, as well as augmented reality and virtual reality skills, but these skills, together with computer programming skills, are the least important digital skills.

In the post-Covid environment, as employment continues to return and as the digital connectivity of the population has increased significantly, the need for digital skills has become increasingly important. The need to virtualise work in the wake of Covid-19 has accelerated the digital transformation and deepened the digital skills gap between people and companies.

This indicates that a significant proportion of employees also in the tourism industry need new digital skills in the workplace (e.g. through in-house training).

It is a two-way street: it is not enough for employees to be digitally literate; it is also needed by consumers. As more and more of the travel organisation activities is done by the travellers themselves now, as opposed to previous decades (when the hard work of organising a trip was usually assigned to professional travel agencies), and more and more functions by service providers are delegated to tourists, in order to save time and money (e.g. self-check in at airports), digital literacy is becoming a more and more essential need for travels, and the lack of such skills leaves traveller handicapped, disabled in a way. Of course, one can find guides on the use of such self-service solutions, e.g. airport self-check in (www.tripsavvy.com), but finding and using these guides also needs at least basic digital skills.

One would expect that the majority population is digitally literate in the European Union, but the fact is that in 2021 far less than two-thirds of the total population of the Union aged 16–74 had at least basic digital skills, and in about a third of the countries concerned this share remained below 50% (https://data.europa.eu) (Figure 62.).

Figure 62. Proportion of people possessing at least basic digital skills and the EU and the EEA, 2021
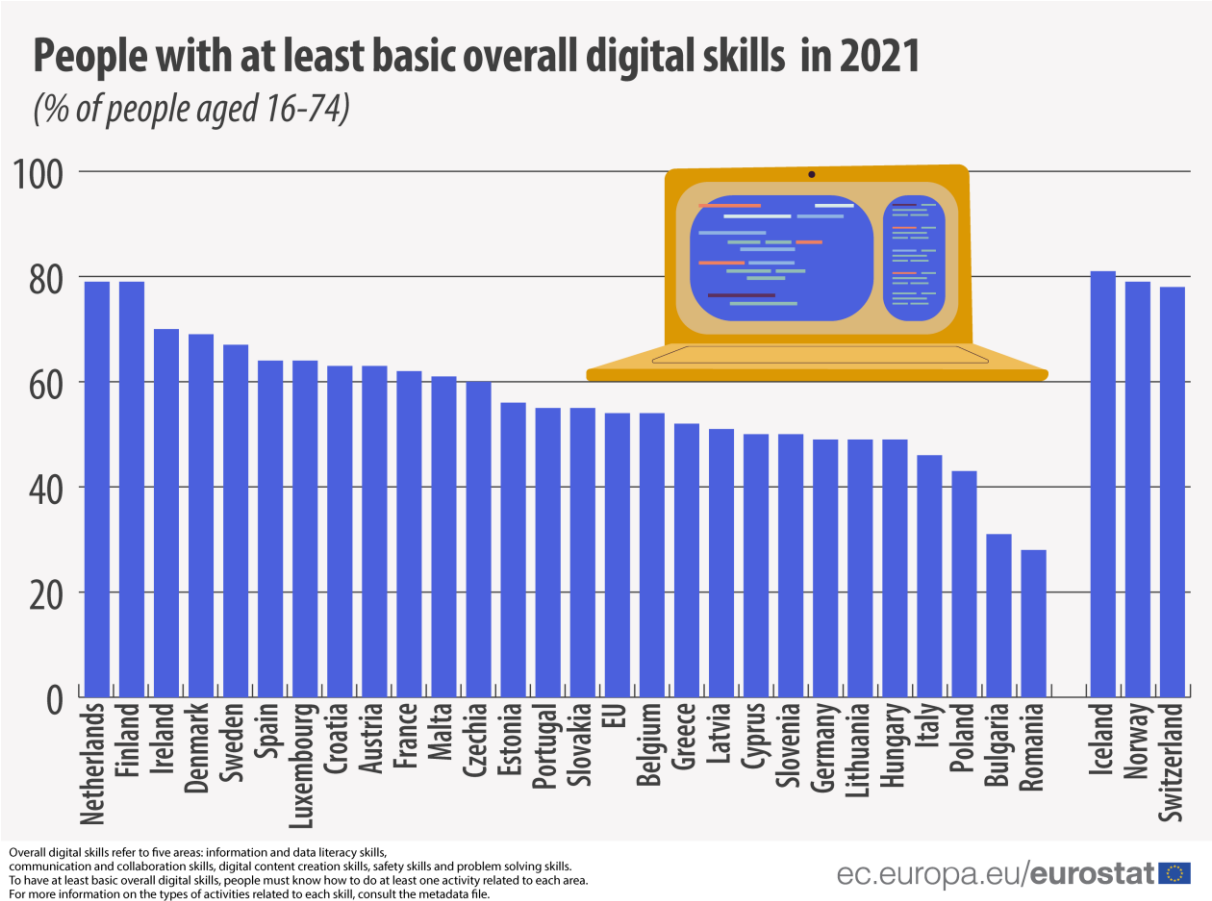
Source: e.europa.eu/eurostat

So we are living in an era of digital travel management and delivery, which at first glance seems to be designed to be barrier-free and undoubtedly demonstrates such characteristics. It is true

that it makes the gateway to the world of tourism and travel extremely fast and relatively easy to access, but the multitude of communication platforms that have been used for decades and are becoming increasingly attractive and convenient are acting as a consumption generator based on superficial stimuli.

For example, the actors in the world of travel on these portals communicate almost exclusively in the national language(s) of the country concerned, or almost exclusively in English. However, our fellow human beings in need and search of tourist experiences are extremely diverse in terms of both age and, for example, education. If the majority of them cannot use English, the world's number one transfer language, *lingua franca*, at least at a minimum level[28] , they will find themselves in a world of obstacles which will (or could) affect the quality of their tourism experience. One might say that with the rise of so-called artificial intelligence, free translation algorithms can be used with relative ease on the digital platforms associated with the world of travel we are considering (Figure 63.), but on the one hand they are far from perfect and are unlikely to become so in the next decade (Csepeli, 2020), and, even if they do become so, the excessive dependence on them might even create further obstacles in travels (in case of technical failures, lack of signal etc.).

Figure 63. Voice translation with Google mobile application – a seemingly barrier-free communication allowed by developed ICT solutions

Source: hvg.hu/360/hetilap360

One example for the accessibility nature is the concept of so-called easy-to-use and understand websites. The concept of such websites for people who are in need of them emerged in the late nineties. It means the development of a truly easy-to-understand and manageable, mostly visual and graphical structure, in fact as part of a central portal, which makes central messages and information that the website provider considers important understandable and accessible to people with mental disabilities. Unfortunately, this type of accessibility solution, which includes accessibility elements, is very limited in scope, not only

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[28] www.linguisticsociety.org

in Hungary but in almost all regions of the world. Furthermore, where it is available, it is almost exclusively part of the online pages of NGOs representing the disability group concerned (https://topdisabilitywebsites.co.uk).

The concept of easy accessibility, combined with some creativity, could be implemented, for example, as a layer of sites operated by the tourism industry to attract visitors and make services available. This would be necessary, firstly, to enable a new segment of people with functional disabilities to become potential travellers in the world of travel, and secondly, to make it easier to overcome the above-mentioned language gaps, which are usually English language gaps, without the need for any other digital translation aids. This is not to say that language skills gaps are suddenly forgotten, but merely that the nature of human accessibility can and could contribute to the organisation and implementation of travel, an activity that is now quite commonplace.

As we can see, the rapidly widening and deepening flow of information that digitalisation is creating and carrying with it, in addition to an almost untapped wealth of opportunities, is generating at least as many sources of danger. Impersonalisation, for example, can in many cases generate distortions and inequalities of experience which can prevent the development of a genuine traveller's attitude and the desire to become one. This is true not only for people who have a strong need for classic accessibility, but also, for example, for the over-65 generation, the so-called "silver generation travellers".

The tourism sector has become more sensitive to accessibility issues in recent years. Nevertheless, most of the studies published on the subject are based around the technological paradigm of accessibility, i.e. the existence of accessibility is considered satisfactory with simple technical solutions such as ramps, Braille signs, sufficiently wide corridors and doors, sufficiently low switches accessible for people in wheelchairs, etc. (Inger & Per, 2016; Farkas et al., 2022). On the one hand, it is welcome that the topic is becoming more frequent and that there are more and more technically accessible tourist facilities, but on the other hand, the issue of correct information for travellers requiring accessibility, i.e. travel safety and communication correctness, has so far received much less attention.

The serious responsibility of accommodation portals in terms of communication correctness must be emphasised. This is a complex issue, as accessibility parameters seem to be "perfectly" solved in the case of the largest accommodation portal, booking.com. However, the lack of accessibility and accessibility parameterisation still depends, in a large part of the cases, on the personal abilities and possibilities of the traveller and his/her assistant, and sometimes even on luck, and in the worst cases, such as in case of a communication gap between the accommodation provider and the user: what the accommodation provider may in good faith and with conviction consider to be accessible, in reality may not be fully accessible, in fact, it may be completely unusable for a wheelchair user (Figure 64.) – and this communication gap may even lead to the impossibility of the trip. In many cases, portal operators and advertisers do not intentionally misinform the travelling public, but simply the lack of factual knowledge causes accessibility and safety problems (Michalkó et al., 2022).

Figure 64. Accommodation advertised as accessible – with wheelchair-inaccessible stairs
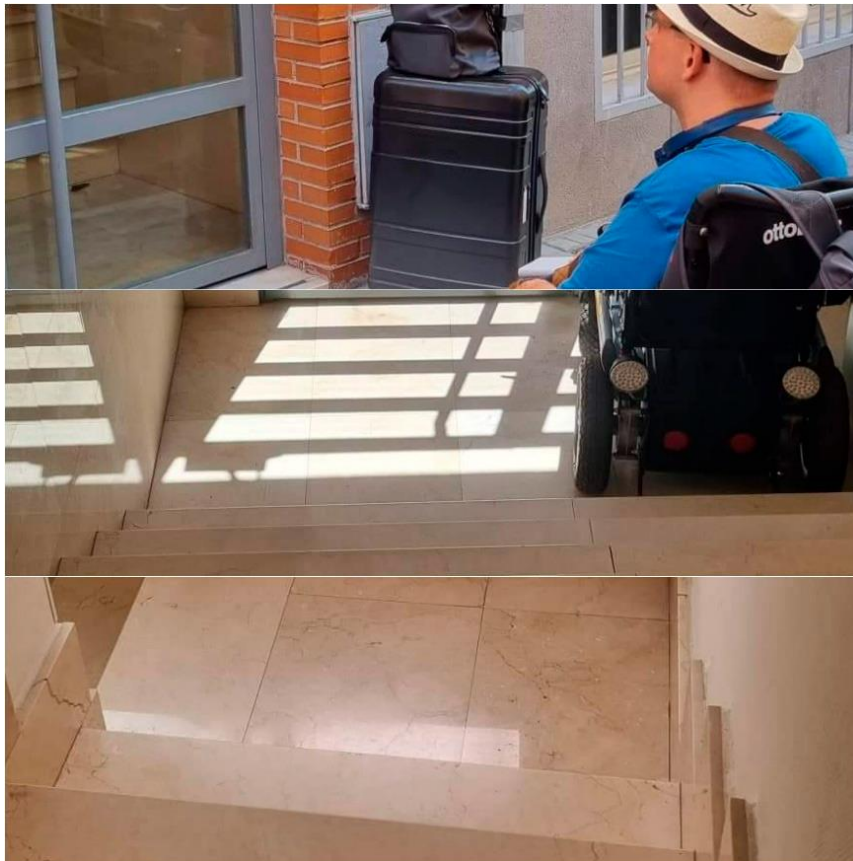
Source: Farkas et al. (2023)

The problem is caused by the fact that accommodation providers and operators of giga-portals hosting their advertisements have a superficial approach to the existence and quality of accessibility and its interpretation and control (Martin-Fuentes et al., 2021), as supported by the results of a recent empirical study (Farkas et al., 2023).

Although operators and beneficiaries of the tourism industry are aware of the increasing number of travellers with accessibility needs, in the vast majority of cases there are serious shortcomings in both information and implementation with regard to accessibility. On the one hand, there is a need for clarification of information obligations on the part of the legislators and, on the other, for constant monitoring of the consistency between reality and the promises made by images and descriptions on the part of service providers and intermediaries. People who want to travel and experience travel, especially if they have accessibility needs, can be in a vulnerable position, also in the world of online travel (Michalkó et al., 2022).

A combination of technical accessibility and fundamental accessibility must therefore be achieved, where the truthfulness of the communication of conditions and its verification also includes a component of proposals to resolve any anomalies that may exist. It is essential to involve experts from NGOs representing the travellers concerned, like PeopleFirst of Access4you.

Recent empirical research (Farkas et al., 2023) conducted in early 2023 found that accommodation facilities claiming and advertising themselves as accessible are not in reality accessible in all cases, and definitely not in the way that would be expected. The authors of

the study examined the extent to which, in the case of accommodations offered by online travel agencies that are labelled as accessible according to certain criteria, the actual accessibility of the accommodation can be verified on the basis of photographs uploaded by the accommodation owner or manager.

A specific database of 885 accommodation providers offering rooms through booking.com platform and claiming that their accommodation is suitable for disabled guests was created. In addition to being the largest global player in this market, booking.com offers a number of opportunities for accommodation providers to display their accessibility features. The database was created using a method other than web scraping to automatically extract data from websites: the research objective required each accommodation to be assessed by means of photos uploaded to the portal in a way that would have been rather inaccurate without human interaction, given the current state of technology. For this reason, the data collectors visited the booking.com pages of the hotels and manually collected the requested characteristics, and then evaluated the photos according to the criteria that had been specified.

Accommodations from a total of cities 9 were included in the survey, selected based on guest-night data from 2019, the last year before the Covid-19 epidemic. Based on data from statista.com, the ranking for this year in decreasing order was London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Istanbul, Madrid, Barcelona, Vienna, Prague, Amsterdam, Munich and Hamburg (Istanbul, as a city that is only partially European, and the last two cities, Munich and Hamburg were not included in the analysis).

On booking.com, hotels can self-define almost twenty pre-defined accessibility criteria, which they can choose to meet and thus which they would like to display on the accommodation portal. In the analysis, authors excluded aspects related to non-disabled "accessibility" (i.e. easy access from city centre, accessible by public accommodation etc.) and those that were too small in number to be analysed (e.g. the existence of a shower chair was only claimed by one accommodation provider in the sample). Finally, they were able to use the following six accessibility-related aspects:

- wheelchair accessible,
- toilet with handrail,
- raised toilet bowl,
- low bathroom sink,
- an alarm in the bathroom,
- the upper floors are accessible by lift.

The ex-ante verifiability of the six aspects by visitors to the portal was measured along a total of eight questions during the data collection. These were assessed by the research team with a 'yes' or 'no' answer based on what they saw on the accommodation's data sheet and photographs. The eight questions used were as follows:

- Is there a photo of the entrance on the accommodation details page?
- Can one find a photo of the common dining room on the accommodation details page?
- Do the photos show the beds in the rooms?
- Can one see in the photos whether or not there is a threshold in the rooms?

- Are there photos of the bathroom on the accommodation's profile?
- Do the photos show whether or not there is a grab rail or a lifting device in the shower?
- Is there a lift in the building? (The only question that had to be checked not based on the photographs, but on the description.)
- Is there a photo of the lift on the accommodation details page?

In the analysis, Chi-square tests were used to demonstrate whether the proportion of accommodation facilities that claim to be accessible according to the given criteria is significantly higher than the share of those that do not provide accessibility according to the given criteria, in terms of the proportion of accommodation facilities that display a photograph of essential parts of the accommodation facility (bathrooms, bedrooms, common dining area) that show that they are really accessible.

Specifically, the sample was limited to hotels that had satisfied the main criterion on booking.com, i.e. their accommodation provided facilities for disabled guests. By far the highest proportion of the sample (92.3%) self-declared wheelchair accessibility, followed by lift accessibility to upper floors (64.2%) and the availability of a toilet with a handrail (61.7%). On the other hand, only around a quarter of accommodation establishments had a low toilet (27.9%) and an emergency alarm in the bathroom (21.9%), while a high toilet bowl was only found in less than a fifth of establishments (17.5%) according to self-report.

Almost all of the sampled accommodations (99.2%) displayed photos of their beds, 96% had a lift in their building, 93.8% had a photo of the bathroom and 87.9% a photo of the common dining area on their profile. A smaller proportion (65.1%) displayed photos of the entrance and only 54.2% of accommodations declared whether the rooms had a threshold or not. Bathroom photos showed that there was a handrail or grab rail in the shower in 29% of accommodation units and only 9.7% of accommodation units showed a photo of an elevator. In relation to the lift, 96% of accommodation establishments had a lift, 64.2% of which provided access to the top floors, but only 9.7% of them allowed wheelchair users to check from the photos whether the lift is spacious enough for them – an absolute must for a wheelchair user, without which the use of the facility is impossible.

In the research, Chi-square tests were used to see in which cases a relationship can be found between the existence of a given barrier-free aspect and its verifiability by photographs. A significant relationship was found in only four cases. Those hotels that claimed to be wheelchair accessible had a significantly (p=0.000<0.05) higher proportion of 89.4% of their data sheets showing a photograph of communal dining areas, compared to those that did not have accessibility criteria and only 70.6% of their data sheets showed a photograph of communal dining areas. A significant relationship (p=0.017<0.05) was also identified between wheelchair accessibility and the visibility of the presence of a threshold in the photographs: 55.3% of wheelchair accessible accommodation established from the photographs that there is or is not a threshold in the accommodation rooms, compared to only 41.2% of accommodations that were not wheelchair accessible. Similarly, a significantly higher proportion (p=0.000<0.05) of accommodations with a toilet equipped with a handrail had photographs of bathrooms (33.2% compared to 22.4%), and a significantly higher proportion (p=0.017<0.05) of accommodation with lifts to upper floors had a significantly higher

proportion (p=0.017<0.05) of accommodation with lifts ticked on the data sheet that there was a lift in the building at all (99.6% compared to 89.6%).

It is worrying that it was impossible to identify significant differences in eight of the twelve pairs of variables examined. Thus, it can be concluded that the hotels that declare themselves as accessible in these aspects do not make extra efforts compared to the average to verify the fact of accessibility by photographs from the point of view of the issues that were investigated.

A relatively new phenomenon in information and communication technologies that may benefit accessible tourism is Virtual Reality, VR (Calisto & Sarkar, 2024; Andziak, 2024). It has dominated technology headlines in recent years with its ability to immerse users in a virtual world – including users whose immersion in the real, physical world is hindered by bodily disabilities. This technology seems to be changing the tourism industry dramatically. Previously, VR has been used mainly as a marketing tool to promote services and tourist destinations, but nowadays it is almost becoming an essential technology, used in many tourism organisations to provide customised services and add value to tourism experiences. VR enables people to travel and visit the most remote areas on the planet from the comfort of their homes – which may be one option for those who would be able to travel, anyway, but can be the only option for those are unable to travel, due to their physical disabilities.

We do not want to discuss in this place whether VR will boost or kill the tourism industry (there are advocates for both outcomes), but there is an indication that VR contributes to creating a more accessible tourism model. Virtual reality travel may never replace traditional travel in the future because travellers cannot experience real sensations like smell, taste, and touch in a VR setting, but VR technology has shown enough potential in contributing to overcoming some existing travel barriers on a smaller scale. Sometimes traditional travel is not possible due to economic, geopolitical, physical, and psychological barriers – including disabilities. Consequently, it is important to perceive value in VR travel, which promotes barrier-free tourism. Virtual travel allows users to perceive many value types, specifically: efficiency, excellence, aesthetics, play, ethics, and status value – and the ability of travel without physical movement. This result contributes to the consumer value theory to understand consumer behaviour better in a VR setting (Akesson & Ahmed, 2022).

11. Good practices in accessible tourism at international level and in the countries participating in the project

11.1. Certification system

The main problems that prevent tourists with disabilities from spending their vacation include a poor attitude of staff towards disabilities, poor customer service and a lack of information about the services available (Europe Without Barriers, n.d.). From this point of view, certifications and labels are a valuable source of information for consumers. By definition, certification is the process of officially or legally recognizing a person, company, product, etc. that has achieved a certain standard (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). It can be argued that although some important steps have been taken in recent years, much remains to be done to make Europe a truly accessible destination, attractive to millions of international customers who today still prefer destinations that have been best tested from an accessibility point of view (Europe Without Barriers, n.d.).

Soret, Ambrose and Vicens (n.d.) have identified several barriers faced by different groups of stakeholders in the development and experience of accessible tourism products. On the demand side of the market, these issues are reflected in the fact that:

- "travel for people with disabilities is unpredictable; difficult or impossible;
- quality of infrastructure, transport, services and information varies widely both within and between EU member states; and
- lack of standards increases uncertainty, reduces travel options and allows a lack of accountability to prevail" (Aoret, Ambrose & Vicens, n.d., p. 3).

The tourism industry, on the other side, faces another set of obstacles, such as:

- "accessible tourism market is relatively unknown and seems difficult to attract with existing channels;
- visitors' needs and requirements are unknown or misunderstood – therefore avoided;
- investment costs are misunderstood and exaggerated;
- access is seen as a problem rather than a golden opportunity" (Aoret, Ambrose, & Vicens, n.d., p. 4).

For all these reasons, it was important for ISO to develop the first International Standard that provides requirements and guidelines to enable equal access to tourism for people of all ages and abilities - ISO 21902 (ISO, 2021). This new standard is aimed at "national tourism administrations and tourism boards, municipalities and public bodies responsible for infrastructure policy, development and the legal/regulatory framework" (ISO, 2021). This standard is of great importance as it enables standardisation and ensures the quality and reliability of services provided to people with disabilities.

Furthermore, ISO has emphasised several standards that could be helpful in reaching accessibility for everyone and everywhere:

Table 7. ISO standards that could be helpful in reaching accessibility for everyone and everywhere

Step	Standard	Description
The tourist office	ISO 14785 *Tourism information offices – Tourist information and reception services – Requirements*	Considers elements such as access to the door, but also access to the information they distribute, taking into account hearing and sight
Accessibility at every step of the journey	ISO 21902 *Tourism and related services – Accessible tourism for all – Requirements and recommendations*	The aim is to help travel and tourism businesses improve their current accessibility arrangements, covering information on all areas of policy making, strategy, infrastructure, products and services that are highly relevant to the entire tourism value chain
Beaches for all	ISO 13009 *Tourism and related services – Requirements and recommendations for beach operation*	Outlines recommendations such as the design of access ramps and walkways as well as on-site facilities, including toilets, showers and drinking fountains
Tourism for all the senses	ISO 17409 *Accessible design – Application of braille on signage, equipment and appliances*	Enables visually impaired travellers to access information wherever they are
	ISO 23599 *Assistive products for blind and vision-impaired persons – Tactile walking surface indicators*	Helps in visiting new places more easily and safely
Accessibility in all standards	ISO/IEC Guide 71 *Guide for addressing accessibility in standards*	Recommends that ISO technical committees consider the needs and challenges of people with disabilities when developing standards, especially those related to systems that people use, interact with or need to access

Source: ISO (2019)

The UNWTO (n.d.) has issued recommendations for tourism providers, particularly for the accommodation, food & beverage and MICE sectors, emphasizing that "by incorporating accessibility and universal design principles from the outset, investment costs can be kept to a minimum; by committing to equality, tourism businesses become more sustainable, attract new audiences and can employ people with functional diversity, creating business opportunities and greater product differentiation" (UNWTO, n.d.a). From the perspective of service providers, the ISO Standard 21902 provides them with tools to (UNWTO, n.d.a):

- Eliminate all kinds of access barriers for tourists and locals
- Ensure the integrity of the tourism value chain
- Raise awareness among the general public
- Train tourism official and professionals
- Analyse the offerings of competitors and understand the market
- Gain knowledge on the benefits and business opportunities that accessible tourism entails
- Optimise customer service at tourist information centres
- Improve product design, marketing and promotion
- Deliver quality accessible experiences
- Design economic and fiscal incentives for companies to implement accessibility
- Save on costs for improvements in coordination by including accessibility in the planning stage

There are several areas in which public administrations and/or tourism destinations should engage in the development of accessible tourism standards – awareness raising and training, planning, accessibility management, research and innovation, legislation and standardisation, investment, product development, information provision, monitoring and evaluation, dissemination of success stories and ongoing consultation (UNWTO, n.d.b).

Another certification programme was developed and implemented by the Belgian Accessibility Office, Toegangelijkheidsbureau (TGB), in Lousã, Portugal. "The Accessible Tourism Destination Certification Programme (ATDCP) is based on a comprehensive audit of the Destination Management Organisation's accessible tourism measures, infrastructure, transport, services and visitor information and includes assessments of the accessibility of the outdoor environment, accommodation, attractions, activities and services for visitors, including people with disabilities, older people and families with young children." (ENAT, 2011)

The certification process is important for standardisation and providing accurate information to consumers. The main obstacles to more intensive development of accessible tourism in destinations were listed at the beginning of the chapter. In light of these barriers, it is extremely important to establish labelling within the industry so that both customers and service providers can agree on accurate and reliable information about the quality of accessible tourism facilities.

11.2. Physical accessibility

Physical accessibility of destinations highly depends upon Universal Design (UD) is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be used as widely as possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. An environment (or a building, product or service within that environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement that only benefits a minority of the population. It is a basic requirement of good design. When an environment is accessible, usable, comfortable and pleasant to use, everyone benefits. By considering everyone's different needs and abilities throughout the design process, universal design creates digital and built environments, services and systems that meet people's needs (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, n.d.). In order to facilitate such design, there are several suggestions how environments can become more accessible:

- Principle 1 – equitable use
- Principle 2 – flexibility in use
- Principle 3 – simple and intuitive use
- Principle 4 – perceptible information
- Principle 5 – tolerance for error
- Principle 6 – low physical effort
- Principle 7 – size and space for approach and use

Common universal design features in public spaces are, for example drinking fountains grouped with other facilities to make them easier to find, consistent signage/wayfinding, lighting along perimeter paths, nodes directly connected by paths, rest areas throughout the site, restrooms sized to accommodate large numbers of users simultaneously, signage within sight, signage in other languages and in English, visual and tactile warning surfaces and walls, fences and landscape features that serve as wayfinding to key destinations (Maisel & Ranahan, n.d.).

Accessibility is a central element of any responsible and sustainable development policy. It is both a human rights imperative and an exceptional business opportunity. In this context, accessible tourism benefits not only people with disabilities, but society as a whole. To ensure that accessible tourism is developed in a sustainable manner, destinations must go beyond ad hoc services and apply the principle of universal design, which ensures that all people, regardless of their physical or cognitive needs, are able to use and enjoy the available amenities in an equitable and sustainable manner. This approach avoids preferential or segregated treatment of people with different disabilities and enables the unhindered use of facilities and services by all, at all times and with the same outcome (United Nations, n.d.).

11.3. Sport facilities for people with disabilities

"The type of disability may have a specific medical name but whether it really needs to be a disability in everyday life often depends on external factors such as the design of buildings, other people's attitudes, the tools provided to do a task. For people with disabilities, sport can either be a source of frustration and exclusion or it can provide a remarkable opportunity to shine and thrive. In fact, sport can be the moment when people who live in a world that usually makes life especially difficult for them, suddenly find they can achieve the same as others and, often, even more" (Sport Safe, n.d.).

Various organisations are more than happy to provide ideas on how to adapt sports provisions to include everyone. For example, Get Out Get Active (GOGA) is a programme that supports people with and without disabilities to enjoy being active together.
They suggest that before joining a club or venue you could ask (Sport Safe, n.d.):

- if the sessions are disabled-only or mixed
- what equipment and kit you'll need and if you can hire it
- how accessible the venue is
- if they can meet your needs and any reasonable adjustments
- what facilities are nearby
- if the session is outdoors
- if the activity is appropriate for your age group

- what policies are in place, for example safeguarding or equality and diversity
- if the instructor is aware of your condition or willing to learn about it
- if first aid is available if they offer free taster sessions

Inclusion in and through sport means that every person in every role - whether athlete, coach, official, administrator or spectator - is treated with full respect, dignity, value and belonging. Inclusion includes all populations, regardless of ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion and disability. Sport for inclusion is important because it promotes the values, ideals and visions of acceptance, human rights and non-discrimination. Sport for inclusion questions and challenges the notion of exclusion (The International Platform on Sport and Development, 2020).

Although sporting opportunities for people with disabilities have improved significantly across the EU over the last 20 years, barriers still exist. According to a 2018 Eurobarometer report, disability or illness is the third most common reason – cited by 14% of respondents – for not taking part in regular sport, along with lack of time and lack of motivation or interest (European Parliament, 2021, p. 6). Such circumstances require appropriate facilities that would meet the needs of all potential tourists. In line with the idea of universal design, and the benefits of sport activities for each individual, sport for inclusion should be in the focus of development strategies worldwide. Either outdoor or indoor, sport activities enhance the quality of life and add value to the overall satisfaction (or frustration as a basis of improvements) of individuals. From that perspective sport is a valuable addition to a person's life.

11.4. Sensitisation, awareness raising

According to Dunn (2022), psychologists believe that increased contact between people who are different from each other can lead to more harmonious feelings and behaviour. Changing people's minds happens positively when:

- *Interaction is personal*: contact is personal, so people without disabilities can interact with people with disabilities.
- *People are equal*: People from each group are seen as equal in status or value.
- *There are social norms*: Expected behaviour in a given situation encourages contact between respective group members.
- *Cooperative activities take place*: Individuals from each group work together on a project to achieve common, specific goals.

Furthermore, Rau Barriga (2023) argues that the disability rights movement, increasingly led by people with disabilities, has rallied behind the principle Nothing about us without us, calling on governments and international organizations to include people with disabilities in planning and decision-making. In recent years, disability advocates have changed this slogan to Nothing without us, recognizing that many challenges affect us all and demanding a seat at all tables. Social justice, equality and inclusion are buzzwords heard in the human rights movement and in business alike. But these buzzwords alone do not make a meaningful difference for people who are historically marginalized and isolated. Everybody should stand in solidarity with people with disabilities and older people around the world as they demand equal human rights.

It is possible to imagine that tourism in the future will not be defined primarily by different target groups, as the principles of responsibility, sustainability and accessibility will determine the quality criteria that all destinations should be guided by and that will be assessed as part of the competitiveness of destinations in an increasingly global context. Customers will become more aware of their individual rights and also of the need to protect and preserve communities and the natural environment, prompting tourism service providers to follow generally accepted rules of service quality, genuine interactivity and commitment to local culture, people and resources (Michopoulou et al., 2015, p. 180).

While accessible tourism generates around 400 billion euros a year, equivalent to 3% of the EU's total GDP, only 9% of tourism services in the EU are accessible. The lack of accessibility is a cost factor for the tourism industry (European Commission, 2019, p. 6).

11.5. Providing jobs for people with disabilities in the tourism sector

Discrimination on the basis of disability means any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including the denial of reasonable accommodation (UNWTO, 2013, p. 4-5).

Potentially, the employment of people with disabilities could be used as a revenue enhancing strategy if customers are willing to pay more for this type of CSR practices. Furthermore, companies could use the employment of this segment as a brand-building strategy. Many customers might be more willing to visit hotels that employ people with disabilities than those that do not (Köseoglu et al., 2021, p. 51).

Case study 1: Lemon Tree Hotels Limited, India

As winners of the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards 2019 in the "Investing in People" category, Lemon Tree Hotels have focused on creating a socially inclusive working environment that brings people of different backgrounds, abilities and ethnicities together to work as a unified team with a common goal. Lemon Tree supports "opportunity-less" workers, including people with physical, social or economic disabilities, by creating and providing opportunities to realize their full potential and live with dignity (Heng, 2023).

Case study 2: Croatia

During the 2022, according to the records of the Croatian Employment Service, a total of 131,938 persons were employed, of which 3,065 were persons with disabilities. Compared to the previous year, that stands as an increase of 11.9 %. Of the total number of employed persons with disabilities, 1,587 were men (51.8 %), and 1,478 were women with disabilities (48.2 %). Share of employed persons with disabilities in the total number of all employed persons from the records of the Croatian Employment Service was 2.3 % (the share of employed men with disabilities is 2.9 %, and women 1.9 %), which is an increase compared to the previous year (by 0.5 %). Of the total number of employed persons with disabilities, 2,965 persons (96.7 %) are employed at on the basis of establishing an employment relationship, and 100 persons (3.3 %) on the basis of other business activities (registration of a trading

company, trade, employment contract, etc.). According to employment activity, the most persons with disabilities in 2022 were employed in the manufacturing industry (15.2 %), followed by the activities of providing accommodation and preparing and serving food (12.4 %) and public administration and defence; compulsory social insurance (12 %) (Croatian Employment Service, 2023, p. 1).

Table 8.

Year	Employed by 31 December	Index of employment trends	Unemployed on 31 December	Index of unemployment trends
2015	2,613	139.2	7,303	107.7
2016	2,853	109.2	7,204	98.6
2017	3,366	118.0	6,497	90.2
2018	3,231	96.0	5,843	89.9
2019	2,820	87.3	5,948	101.8
2020	2,475	87.8	6,231	104.8
2021	2,740	110.7	6,179	99.2
2022	3,065	111.9	7,196	116.5

Source: Croatian Employment Service (2023), p. 1

According to the type of disability, the largest number of employed persons with disabilities are persons with intellectual disabilities (28.4 %), followed by persons with multiple combined disabilities (22.5 %) and persons with physical disabilities (21.1 %) (Croatian Employment Service, 2023, p. 6). Furthermore, in 2022, people with disabilities were mostly employed in the following occupations: maintenance worker, assistant cook, cleaner, administrative officer, domestic worker, gardening worker, manual packer, kitchen worker, worker on the production line and economic administrator (Ibid, p. 8).

To be able to expect people with disabilities to be included in the labour market, it is necessary to develop some sort of active employment policy measures.

Table 9.

Intervention	Active		Newly included		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Public work	249	123	237	165	486	288
Education	24	39	73	66	97	105
Preservation of jobs	18	7	1	1	19	8
On-the-job training	16	6	23	21	39	27
Subsidies	121	73	155	85	276	158
Subsidies internship	10	7	2	2	12	9
Subsidies internship in public service	4	4	25	9	29	13
Self-employment	14	10	6	6	20	16
Permanent seasonal worker	20	9	23	14	43	23
Training	11	0	20	9	31	9
Total	**487**	**278**	**565**	**378**	**1,052**	**656**

Source: Croatian Employment Service (2023), p. 16

11.6. Education and training

Looking at the general training environment for SMEs, accessibility training is often very low on companies' training and skills priorities. For example, a survey of tourism businesses carried out by VisitEngland in 2009 found that 21% of businesses that do not currently offer disability awareness training to their staff stated that 'nothing' would prompt them to offer this training. Similarly, the Accessible Tourism Stakeholders Forum in the UK asked businesses about the likelihood of attending training in the next 12 months. 69% of respondents answered that it was very unlikely or fairly unlikely (Elevator project, 2018, p. 15).

The objectives that a proposed and developed training programme should pursue are (Navarro García-Caro, de Waal, & Buhalis, 2012, p. 371):

- Provide knowledge to staff working in the tourism industry to take accessibility issues into account when renovating, building and designing tourism activities, products and services.
- Provide knowledge on the care of customers with special requirements to staff working in the tourism sector.
- Identify the main barriers to accessibility of tourism destinations and facilities and provide alternatives for improvement.
- Familiarise them with the use of technical aids.
- Disseminate the existing legal provisions.

The entire tourism industry is on a journey to become more accessible and inclusive, and tourist guides play an important role in this, as they are representatives of the cities, regions and countries in the area for which they are qualified and have a major impact on the overall success of the trip and visitor satisfaction. Inclusive tourist guides are also the way to maintain and improve the quality of guiding services, which is seriously threatened by the deregulation of professional tourist guides at European level. For these reasons it is important to have a manual developed specially for educational purpose for tourist guides, enabling them to obtain knowledge about specific skills required to communicate with this segment of tourists (Elevator project, 2018).

Makuyana and du Plessis (2023, p. 161) have identifies several interactive success factors that enhance accessible tourism education:

- the co- creation of disability-inclusive skills and knowledge (content),
- concepts for disability-friendly educational planning,
- disability-friendly legal framework conditions,
- marketing and communication of education providers that promote the inclusion of people with disabilities, using accessible language and media,
- networking and cooperative relationships between the education sector and the disability sector,
- investment in ongoing research to understand the needs of people with disabilities in tourism, and
- disability-friendly teaching and learning methods, processes and procedures in the tourism education environment.

12. Analysis of travel patterns of people with disabilities based on primary research experiences in partner countries

12.1. Research methodology

Research among people with various disabilities was conducted in parallel in four countries: Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Romania in the period October 2023-January 2024 on a total sample of 1,175 people. Their goal was to begin the development of accessible tourism, patterns of tourist behaviour of people with disabilities, their limitations in tourist travel, as well as important directions of education of staff working in tourist services in the field of accessible tourism.

The basis for conducting the research was a survey form developed jointly by teams representing the 4 countries involved in the project - initially in English, then translated into national languages. The research was conducted face to face and based on an electronic form. The selection of the sample was based on availability. After collecting the responses, the results were prepared in English and in simple statistical summaries (number, percentage of indicated responses), enabling further, in-depth statistical analyses. Before discussing the research results, **the characteristics of the respondents** were presented, including such features as:

- gender
- age
- marital status
- the level of highest finished school education
- employment conditions
- type of settlement - place of residence of the respondent
- the respondent's country of residence.
- type of disability

The respondents' characteristics also included the following variables by type of disability:

- limitations in everyday functioning
- limitation of individual mobility
- disability from birth
- and leaving home to deal with everyday matters

The answers to all questions included in the interview questionnaires (Appendix 1) were summarized in numbers and percentages to enable further analyses using the presented data bank.

12.2. Results

12.2.1. Characteristics of respondents

In terms of gender - in the group of respondents (n=1175), a slight majority were women (54%) compared to men (43%). Some people did not want to answer this question or indicated the other category. Research participants most often described their limitations in everyday functioning as "am slightly limited in my daily activities" and "intermittently need assistance with daily activities". A small group of men (7%) and women (5%) "need constant supervision". The largest group of participants in the research "can travel on all means of transport without any assistance" (36%) and "need assistance to get around on some public transport" (31%). Nearly half of men (49%) and women (47%) indicated their disability from birth. Taking age into account - the study involved adults aged 18 to over 66. The most numerous groups were aged 36-50 (29%), 51-65 (19%) and 26-35 (19%) (Table 10.). It can be noticed that the highest percentage of respondents stating that they "need constant supervision" are people in the youngest age group 18-25 years (14%). The largest part of this, the youngest group also indicated: I "cannot get around without an assistant person" (24%).

Table 10. Age and limitations in everyday functioning (Q2)

Age Q28	Q2 (do not want to answer)	Q2 (am slightly limited in my daily activities)	Q2 (intermittently need assistance with daily activities)	Q2 (permanently need assistance with daily activities)	Q2 (am very much limited in my daily activities)	Q2 (need constant supervision)	Row (Totals)
18-25	4	57	30	24	8	20	143
	3%	40%	21%	17%	6%	14%	
26-35	9	98	48	32	15	19	221
	4%	44%	22%	14%	7%	9%	
36-50	20	146	75	42	37	15	335
	6%	44%	22%	13%	11%	4%	
51-65	7	123	36	23	31	8	228
	3%	54%	16%	10%	14%	4%	
Older than 66	5	89	51	20	22	3	190
	3%	47%	27%	11%	12%	2%	
Do not want to answer	4	25	8	4	2	6	49
	8%	51%	16%	8%	4%	12%	
All Groups	49	538	248	145	115	71	1166

Q2: What is the statement you most agree with? Q2.1. am slightly limited in my daily activities, Q2.2. am very much limited in my daily activities, Q2.3. intermittently need assistance with daily activities, Q2.4. permanently need assistance with daily activities, Q2.5. need constant supervision, Q2.6. do not want to answer

Source: survey results n= 1175, no answer: 9

The majority of respondents in the youngest age groups are people with disabilities from birth. In the group of 18-25 years old, they constituted 74% of respondents, and in the group of 26-35 years old - 69%. In terms of **marital status**, the most numerous indications included the categories of "single" (44%) and "married" (29%). The most common limitations: "I can't get around without an assistant person" were mentioned in the group of singles (23%) and divorced people (22%). The largest number of people with disabilities from birth were in the single group (44%). In the "married" group it was 29%. To the question "What is your highest finished school education? The most common answers were "Secondary school" (32%) and "Vocational school" (20%). The percentage of people with a university or bachelor's degree decreases with the increase in limitations in everyday functioning from 59% in the am slightly limited in my daily activities group to 2% in the need constant supervision group, but there is no such relationship with regard to the limitation of individual mobility.

People with disabilities from birth predominantly indicated "maximum 8 classes of primary school" - 83% compared to 17% in the group with disabilities acquired after birth. They were also less likely to have higher education. The most frequently answered questions about "Your employment conditions" were: Pensioner (20%), White-collar employee (18%) and Disability pensioner (18%). However, in the case of the White-collar employee group, there is a noticeable tendency for the percentage of employees to decrease as the limitations in everyday functioning increase. Also, the smallest percentage of people from the group that indicated their mobility limitations at the highest level (I can't get around without an assistant person) are employed as white-collar employees.

In the case of people with a disability from birth or acquired after birth, there were no differences in the indications in the Disability pensioner category (50% of indications in each group, while people with a disability from birth more often declared the "Dependant" variant (79%). To the question: What is the type of settlement where you live? The largest group answered village (22%), followed by medium-sized city: up to 25,000 – 100,000 people (21%), capital city (14%) and international regional center: up to 500,000 – 1 million people (11%). To the question "In which country do you live?" most people answered: Romania (29%), Hungary (27%), Poland (25%) and Croatia (17%). The answers provided by the respondents were analysed according to the declared types of disability, as an answer to the question Q1: What disability do you live with? Multiple choice is possible! Q1.1. Sight, Q1.2. Hearing, Q1.3. Locomotors, Q1. Speech Q1.5. ASD (Autism spectrum disorder), Q1.6. Intellectual disability, Q1.7. Psychosocial disability, Q1. 8. Multiple disabilities, Q1.9. Obstacle related to my age, Q1.10. Temporary disability (after an operation or illness, accident etc.), Q1.11. Other (please specify…). The number of groups according to the types of disabilities is presented in the Table 11.

Table 11. Type of disability and limitations in everyday functioning (Q2)

Type of disability Q1	Q2 (do not want to answer)	Q2 (am slightly limited in my daily activities)	Q2 (intermittently need assistance with daily activities)	Q2 (permanently need assistance with daily activities)	Q2 (am very much limited in my daily activities)	Q2 (need constant supervision)	Row (Totals)
Temporary disability	9	35	6	1	2	0	53
	17%	66%	11%	2%	4%	0%	
Obstacle related to my age	0	59	18	3	2	1	83
	0%	71%	22%	4%	2%	1%	
Sight	11	58	35	6	4	0	114
	10%	51%	31%	5%	4%	0%	
Hearing	3	35	11	0	1	2	52
	6%	67%	21%	0%	2%	4%	
Locomotory	7	149	64	68	65	5	358
	2%	42%	18%	19%	18%	1%	
Multiple disability	5	116	66	47	31	45	310
	2%	37%	21%	15%	10%	15%	
Intellectual disability	1	18	19	14	4	7	63
	2%	29%	30%	22%	6%	11%	
Speech	3	20	3	0	2	0	28
	11%	71%	11%	0%	7%	0%	
Other	6	19	4	0	2	1	32
	19%	59%	13%	0%	6%	3%	
ASD	1	25	17	6	1	10	60
	2%	42%	28%	10%	2%	17%	
Psychosocial disability	2	4	5	0	1	0	12
	17%	33%	42%	0%	8%	0%	
All Groups	48	538	248	145	115	71	1165

Q2: What is the statement you most agree with? Q2.1. am slightly limited in my daily activities, Q2.2. am very much limited in my daily activities, Q2.3. intermittently need assistance with daily activities, Q2.4. permanently need assistance with daily activities, Q2.5. need constant supervision, Q2.6. do not want to answer

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 10 respondents.

12.2.2. Travel arrangements for people with disabilities and older people and the main purpose of their trip

A very important aspect of travelling are organizational issues, which may be more difficult in the case of tourism for people with disabilities and the elderly. In order to identify the needs and model of travel organization, respondents were asked in the survey about the issue of travel preparation, organizational and financial support, form of trip organization and the main goal. One of the important aspects of travelling are companions. To the question 'Who do you usually travel with?' (Q14), respondents mostly answered *with family (including spouse and children)* (517 responses) and *with friends and relatives* (489 responses). They least frequently mentioned *colleagues from work* (122 responses), as travel companions and on *independent trips* (212 responses) (Table 12.). In this question, respondents could indicate several answers.

Table 12. Travel companions (Q14)

Type of disability Q1	Q14 (I travel on my own)	Q14 (family ((spouse and children))	Q14 (col-leagues)	Q14 (parents)	Q14 (organized group)	Q14 (assisting person)	Q14 (friends, relatives)	Q14 (other)	Row (Totals)
All Groups	212	517	122	333	333	183	489	32	2221

Q14: Who do you typically travel with? Multiple choice is possible! Q14.1. I travel on my own, Q14.2. family (spouse and children), Q14.3. colleagues, Q14.4. parents, Q14.5. organised group, Q14.6. assisting person, Q14.7. friends, relatives, Q14.8. other (specify).

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 8 respondents.

Next, respondents were asked 'Who organizes the tours typically?' (Q15). Respondents indicated both people from their immediate environment - *other family member* (424 responses), *independent organization of trips with the help of e.g. booking platforms* (372 responses), and *NGO (non-governmental organization) assisting people with disabilities* (357 responses) (Table 13.). In this question, respondents could indicate several answers.

Table 13. Travel organiser (Q15)

Type of disability Q1	Q15 (I do, using booking.com or other similar sites)	Q15 (travel agency)	Q15 (NGO (non-governmental organisation) assisting people with disabilities)	Q15 (spouse)	Q15 (Other family member)	Q15 (assisting person)	Q15 (attractions organising tours, e.g. museums, castles etc)	Q15 (other)	Row (Totals)
All Groups	372	130	357	143	424	108	76	57	1667

Q15: Who organises the tours typically? Multiple choice is possible! Q15.1. I do, using booking.com or other similar sites, Q15.2. travel agency, Q15.3. NGO (non-governmental organisation) assisting people with disabilities, Q15.4. spouse, Q15.5. other family member, Q15.6. assisting person, Q15.7. attractions organising tours, e.g. museums, castles etc, Q15.8. other (specify).

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 37 respondents.

In addition to the issues discussed above, the aspect of support in organizing travel is also important. To the question: 'To whom can you turn for help if you need assistance in organizing and implementing your travel?' (Q16), respondents answered that *to the family* (655 responses), and then to *NGO (non-governmental organization) assisting people with disabilities* (351 responses), they also *organize trips themselves* (342 responses) (Table 14.). In this question, several answers could be indicated.

Table 14. Support with travel arrangements (Q16)

Type of disability Q1	Q16 (I can make it on my own, without assistance)	Q16 (family)	Q16 (NGO assis-ting people with disa-bilities)	Q16 (Public state organisa-tion)	Q16 (travel agency)	Q16 (TDM (tourism destina-tion manage-ment) organisa-tion)	Q16 (tourist informa-tion offices)	Q16 (Other)	Row (Totals)
All Groups	342	655	351	25	248	5	188	98	1912

Q16: To whom can you turn for help if you need assistance in organising and implementing your travel? Multiple choice is possible! Q16.1. I can make it on my own, without assistance, Q16.2. family, Q16.3. NGO assisting people with disabilities, Q16.4. public state organisation, Q16.5. travel agency, Q16.6. TDM (tourism destination management) organisation, Q16.7. tourist information offices, Q16.8. other (specify).

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 16 respondents.

Finances are also an important issue in organizing travel. To obtain the answer on this issue, respondents were asked the question: 'To whom can you turn for help if you need assistance in organizing and implementing your travel?' (Q17). Most respondents finance their trips *based on their own budget* (613 responses) and *use help from family* (379 responses). They also *use several sources of financing mentioned in the survey* (261 responses) (Table 15.). Several answers could be indicated.

Table 15. Travel financing (Q17)

Type of disability Q1	Q17 (Own income)	Q17 (family)	Q17 (support ((e.g. from NGO-s))	Q17 (state support)	Q17 (I use several of the resources specified above)	Q17 (TDM (I have no resources for travels)	Row (Totals)
All Groups	613	379	80	61	261	83	1477

Q17: What resources do you typically finance your travels from? You can mark more than one answer! Q17.1. own income, Q17.2. family, Q17.3. support (e.g. from NGO-s), Q17.4. state support, Q17.5. I use several of the resources specified above, Q17.6. I have no resources for travels.

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 14 respondents.

The study also touched upon the issue of the form of travel, i.e. the type of group with which respondents would most like to go on a trip. They were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the given statement, i.e. what form of travel organization and group structure

suited them best: 'Please, indicate on a scale from 1 to 7 to what extent you agree with the following statements (1: do not agree at all; 7: fully agree)!' (Q18). The statements were as follow: *I prefer to travel with programs for people with disabilities* - Q18.1; *I prefer to travel with integrational programmes (designed for both disables and non-disabled travellers)* – Q18.2; *I prefer to travel with programmes that are not specifically designed for people with disabilities)* – Q18.3; *I prefer to travel without any assistance* – Q18.4.

Taking into account only the last result, i.e. 7 - fully agree, it can be concluded that the respondents equally prefer *travelling with integrational programs* (Q18.2) (207 answers, 19%) and *individual travelling, without any assistance* (Q18.4) (203 responses, 18.9%), slightly less respondents indicated *travelling with programs that are not specifically designed for people with disabilities* (Q18.3) (117 responses, 16%) and *travelling with programs for people with disabilities* (Q18.1) (165 responses, 15%). Taking into account the last 3 results, from 5-7, the scores are also distributed evenly in all groups, with the least emphasis on the first of the mentioned variants: Q18.1. *I prefer to travel with programs for people with disabilities* – 350 answers, 32%, Q18.2. *I prefer to travel with integrational programs (designed for both disables and non-disabled travellers)* – 381 responses, 35%, Q18.3. *I prefer to travel with programs that are not specifically designed for people with disabilities* – 373 responses, 34%, Q18.4. *I prefer to travel without any assistance* – 373 responses, 34.7%. However, taking into account only the result 1 - do not agree at all, respondents generally indicated trips *organized without any assistance* (388 responses, 36%).

Analysing the results in terms of individual types of disabilities, it can be noticed that in *programs for people with disabilities* (Q18.1), respondents with intellectual disability (39%) and with multiple disabilities (21%) would be most willing to participate (result 7 - I fully agree), the least willing, though (result 1 - I do not agree at all) respondents with temporary disability (42%) and with obstacles related to age (38%). *Integrational programs (designed for both disables and non-disabled travellers* (Q18.2), would be most willingly chosen (score 7 - I fully agree) by respondents with multiple disability (24%) and intellectual disability (27%) and the least willingly (score 1 - I do not agree at all) by respondents indicating other disabilities (27%), with temporary disability (25%), locomotive disability (24%) and with obstacles related to age (23%). *Programs that are not specifically designed for people with disabilities* (Q18.3), are preferred (result 7 - I fully agree) by respondents with ASD (22%), other disabilities (21%) and locomotive disabilities (20%). On the other hand, this form of travel corresponds least (score 1 - I do not agree at all) to people with intellectual disability (29%), with multiple disabilities (25%) and those indicating other disabilities (25%). Respondents with other disabilities (40%) and hearing problems (29%) would prefer to travel (score 7 - I fully agree) *without any assistance* (Q18.4). This form of travel would not be chosen (score 1 - I do not agree at all), by respondents with intellectual disability (70%) and with multiple disabilities (47%).

An important issue in organizing the trip and preparing an appropriate offer is also information about the main purpose of the trip. To obtain the answer, respondents were asked to rate how often they travel for each of the following 12 purposes - cultural, wellness, medical, active (sport), business, religious, nature trip, shopping, city sightseeing, visiting relatives and friends, visiting a concert, sporting event, exhibition, culinary, on a 4-point scale, 1 means -never, 2 - rarely, 3 - often, 4 - very often (Q19). Generally speaking, the respondents mostly (score 4) indicated visiting relatives and friends - Q.19.10 (393 responses out of 1083, 35.92%), nature trip - Q19.7 (298 responses out of 1094, 27,23%) and culture – Q 19.1 (271 answers out of

1088, 24.9%) as the main purpose of their trips. The least common (result 1) is a business goal – Q19.5 (750 answers out of 1053, 71.22%).

12.2.3. Travel frequency and characteristics of the tourist supply preferred by people with disabilities

A very important aspect in research related to accessible tourism is the frequency of trips for recreational purposes by people with disabilities and the need to travel in the company of assistants. Table 16. presents the results regarding the answers to the question 'Do you travel for recreational purposes?'. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,166 answered this question, of which 15% of respondents do not travel for recreational purposes, 49% travel with assistance, and 36% travel alone. The most "No" answers for a given type of disability were given by participants who had Multiple disability (22%), Obstacle related to my age (18%) and Psychosocial disability (17%). The fewest answers were "No" given by people with disabilities from the Speech (3%), Hearing (6%) and Sight (8%) groups. Those who most often travel for recreational purposes with assistance are people with Intellectual disability (73%), Sight (59%), Locomotor and ASD (58%). The least likely disabled individuals to travel for recreational purposes with assistance are those with Obstacle related to my age (12%), Speech (21%), and Hearing (24%). Those who most often travel alone for recreational purposes include individuals with Speech (76%), Obstacle related to my age (70%), and Hearing (70%). In contrast, individuals who travel least often for recreational purposes on their own are those with Intellectual disability (18%), Locomotive disability (28%), and Multiple disability (28%).

Table 16. Travelling for recreational purposes (Q6)

Q1. Grouped Disability	Q6 (No)	Q6 (Yes, with assistance)	Q6 (Yes, on my own)	Row (Totals) No. of respondents
Temporary disability	8	17	27	52
	15%	33%	52%	
Obstacle related to my age	15	10	58	83
	18%	12%	70%	
Sight	10	70	38	118
	8%	59%	32%	
Hearing	3	12	35	50
	6%	24%	70%	
Locomotory	51	208	99	358
	14%	58%	28%	
Multiple disability	67	157	85	309
	22%	51%	28%	
Intellectual disability	6	45	11	62
	10%	73%	18%	
Speech	1	6	22	29
	3%	21%	76%	
Other	3	9	21	33
	9%	27%	64%	
ASD	7	35	18	60
	12%	58%	30%	
Psychosocial disability	2	6	4	12
	17%	50%	33%	
All Groups	173	575	418	1166

Q6: Do you travel for recreational purposes? Q6.1. Yes, on my own, Q6.2. Yes, with assistance, Q6.3. No

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer - 9 respondents

Another important aspect related to travelling for people with disabilities is determining the level of difficulty in performing specific activities or obtaining reliable information related to the availability of tourist attractions during travel (tourist supply). The activities that can be performed by people with disabilities while travelling that have been analysed in the next six paragraphs include:

- use of transportation
- use of accommodation
- use of catering facility
- sport activities
- visiting attractions
- lack of reliable information on real accessibility.

The level of difficulties related to the use of transportation encountered by people with disabilities, divided into types of disabilities. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,103 answered this question, of which 21% of all respondents did not encounter difficulties related to the use of transportation, while 17% of respondents very often encountered difficulties during the use of transportation. Analysing the data in terms of types of disabilities, it should be stated that the types of disabilities that encounter the least problems during the use of transportation are: Other, Obstacle related to my age, Temporary disabilities. However, the types of disabilities that encounter the greatest problems during the use of transportation are: Locomotive, Multiple disability, ASD.

The level of difficulties related to the use of accommodation encountered by people with disabilities, broken down by type of disability. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,093 answered this question, of which 26% of all respondents did not encounter difficulties related to the use of accommodation, while 13% of respondents very often encountered difficulties during the use of accommodation. Analysing the data in terms of types of disabilities, it should be stated that the types of disabilities that encounter the least problems during the use of accommodation are Other, Obstacle related to my age, Temporary disability. However, the types of disabilities that encounter the greatest problems when using accommodation are: Locomotive, Multiple disability, Intellectual disability and ASD.

The level of difficulties related to the use of catering facilities encountered by people with disabilities, divided into types of disabilities. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,085 answered this question, of which 28% of all respondents did not encounter difficulties related to the use of a catering facility, while 9% of respondents very often encountered difficulties when using a catering facility. Analysing the data in terms of types of disabilities, it should be stated that the types of disabilities that encounter the least problems when using a catering facility are: Obstacle related to my age, Temporary disability, Intellectual disability. However, the types of disabilities that encounter the greatest problems when using a catering facility are: Multiple disability, ASD, Intellectual disability.

The level of difficulties related to sport activities encountered by people with disabilities, divided into types of disabilities. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,063 answered this question, of which 21% of all respondents did not encounter difficulties related to sport activities, while 18% of respondents very often encountered difficulties when using sport activities. Analysing the data in terms of types of disabilities, it should be stated that the types of disabilities that encounter the least problems when using sport activities are Psychosocial disabilities, ASD and Obstacle related to my age. However, the types of disabilities that encounter the greatest problems when using sports activities are: Locomotive, Multiple disability and Intellectual disability.

The level of difficulties related to visiting attractions encountered by people with disabilities, divided into types of disabilities. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,085 answered

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this question, of which 20% of all respondents did not encounter difficulties related to visiting attractions, while 12% of respondents very often encountered difficulties during visiting attractions. Analysing the data in terms of types of disabilities, it should be stated that the types of disabilities that encounter the least problems during visiting attractions are: other, obstacle related to my age, temporary disability. However, the types of disabilities that encounter the greatest problems during visiting attractions are: Locomotive, Multiple disability, Intellectual disability and Sight.

The level of difficulties related to the lack of reliable information on real accessibility faced by people with disabilities, broken down by type of disability. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,099 answered this question, of which 20% of all respondents did not encounter difficulties related to lack of reliable information on real accessibility, while 19% of respondents very often encountered difficulties related to lack of reliable information. on real accessibility. Analysing the data in terms of types of disabilities, it should be stated that the types of disabilities that are least likely to encounter problems related to lack of reliable information on real accessibility are: psychosocial disability, other, temporary disability and obstacle related to my age. However, the types of disabilities that are most likely to encounter problems related to lack of reliable information on real accessibility are: Locomotive, Multiple disability and Sight.

Next question analysed in the questionnaire was as follows 'Do you need to use some aid during your travels?'. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,141 answered this question, of which 45% of respondents did not need assistance while travelling, 55% of respondents declared that they used assistance while travelling. Analysing this question in terms of the types of disabilities, it should be stated that the types of disabilities that need the least help while travelling are: speech, intellectual disability and psychosocial disability. However, people who need the most help are those who have disabilities such as: Locomotive, Sight and Multiple disability.

Table 17. presents the results regarding the answers to the question 'How many times did you travel in your country in 2022?'. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,143 answered this question, of which 9% did not travel in 2022, 10% travelled only once, 12% travelled twice, 11% travelled three times and as many as 58% of respondents declared that they had travelled more than three times during the specified period. Analysing this question in terms of types of disabilities, it should be stated that the types of disabilities that did not travel within their own country in 2022 are: obstacle related to my age (21%), ASD (14%) and multiple disabilities (10%). However, people with: Other (71%), Sight (68%) and Temporary disability (64%) travelled the most within their own country.

Table 17. Frequency of respondent's travels within her/his homeland in 2022 (Q9)

Q1. Grouped Disability	Q9 (Not once)	Q9 (Once)	Q9 (Twice)	Q9 (Three times)	Q9 (More than three times)	Row (Totals)
Temporary disability	3	5	5	6	34	53
	6%	9%	9%	11%	64%	
Obstacle related to my age	17	10	12	6	37	82
	21%	12%	15%	7%	45%	
Sight	8	8	14	7	80	117
	7%	7%	12%	6%	68%	
Hearing	1	5	8	6	31	51
	2%	10%	16%	12%	61%	
Locomotory	32	34	46	43	198	353
	9%	10%	13%	12%	56%	
Multiple disability	29	30	29	30	179	297
	10%	10%	10%	10%	60%	
Intellectual disability	4	11	9	5	30	59
	7%	19%	15%	8%	51%	
Speech	1	2	3	7	16	29
	3%	7%	10%	24%	55%	
Other	1	2	3	3	22	31
	3%	6%	10%	10%	71%	
ASD	8	11	5	8	27	59
	14%	19%	8%	14%	46%	
Psychosocial disability	0	2	1	2	7	12
	0%	17%	8%	17%	58%	
All Groups	104	120	135	123	661	1143

Q9: How many times did you travel in your country in 2022? Q9.1. Not once, Q9.2. Once, Q9.3. Twice, Q9.4. Three times, Q9.5. More than three times.

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer - 32 respondents

Table 18. presents the results regarding the answers to the question 'How many times did you travel abroad in 2022?'. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,143 answered this question, of which 58% did not travel abroad in 2022, 14% travelled only once, 13% travelled twice, 6% travelled three times, and 9% of respondents declared that they had travelled more than three times abroad in 2022 Analysing the answers in terms of types of disabilities, it should be stated that people with the following types of disabilities did not travel abroad in 2022: psychosocial disabilities (83%), intellectual disabilities (77%) and multiple disabilities

(63%). However, people with temporary disability (30%), Speech (21%) and Hearing (12%) travelled abroad the most.

Table 18. Frequency of respondent's travels abroad in 2022 (Q10)

Q1. Grouped Disability	Q10 (Not once)	Q10 (Once)	Q10 (Twice)	Q10 (Three times)	Q10 (More than three times)	Row (Totals)
Temporary disability	20	4	12	1	16	53
	38%	8%	23%	2%	30%	
Obstacle related to my age	46	13	16	0	7	82
	56%	16%	20%	0%	9%	
Sight	66	18	10	12	11	117
	56%	15%	9%	10%	9%	
Hearing	26	10	7	2	6	51
	51%	20%	14%	4%	12%	
Locomotory	201	57	46	19	28	351
	57%	16%	13%	5%	8%	
Multiple disability	188	29	37	26	18	298
	63%	10%	12%	9%	6%	
Intellectual disability	46	7	1	2	4	60
	77%	12%	2%	3%	7%	
Speech	10	4	7	2	6	29
	34%	14%	24%	7%	21%	
Other	15	9	4	2	1	31
	48%	29%	13%	6%	3%	
ASD	35	14	6	3	1	59
	59%	24%	10%	5%	2%	
Psychosocial disability	10	1	1	0	0	12
	83%	8%	8%	0%	0%	
All Groups	663	166	147	69	98	1143

Q10: How many times did you travel abroad in 2022? Q10.1. Not once, Q10.2. Once, Q10.3. Twice, Q10.4. Three times, Q10.5. More than three times

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer - 32 respondents

To analyse travel frequencies in a broader time horizon we asked two more questions. First one 'How many times did you travel in your country in 2018-2021?'. In the analysed sample of

1,175 respondents, 1,139 answered this question, of which 6% did not travel within their country in 2018-2021, 5% travelled only once, 6% travelled twice, 7% travelled three times and 76% of respondents declared that they had travelled more than three times within their country in 2019-2021. Analysing the answers in terms of types of disabilities, it should be noted that the largest group of people with disabilities who did not travel within their own country in 2018–2021 included those with Psychosocial disabilities, ASD, and Obstacle related to my age. However, the largest group of people with disabilities who travelled within their own country during the indicated period included those with Other types of disabilities, Sight, and Temporary disability.

Second question was as follows 'How many times did you travel abroad in 2018-2021?'. In the analysed sample of 1,175 respondents, 1,143 answered this question, of which 37% did not travel abroad in 2018-2021, 14% travelled only once, 15% travelled twice, 10% travelled three times, and 24% of respondents declared that they travelled abroad more than three times between 2018 and 2021. Analysing the answers in terms of types of disabilities, it should be stated that the biggest group of disabled individuals with the following types of disabilities did not travel abroad in 2018-2021: Intellectual disability, Obstacles related to my age, Multiple disability and Psychosocial disability. However, in 2018-2021, the biggest group of disabled individuals with Temporary disability, Hearing, Locomotive and Other travelled abroad the most in 2018-2021.

12.2.4. The impact of accessibility improvements on accessible tourism

Respondents – people with disabilities – were asked to determine the extent to which they agreed with various statements about travelling and tourism. They could mark their answers on a rating scale from 1 to 7, where 1 meant "I do not agree at all" and 7 meant "I completely agree with the statement." Respondents have very divided opinions on whether available tourism opportunities are improving in their countries of residence. The group that does not notice any improvement is more visible – 52% of ratings from 1 to 3. It is worth noting here that every tenth person definitely sees an improvement in the availability of tourism (12% of ratings "strongly agree" – 7).

Accessible tourism may become more common. This will require improving accessibility by introducing facilities, eliminating barriers and changing the attitude of third parties towards the needs of people with disabilities. The research conducted indicates problems that need to be overcome to make tourism more accessible. It is worth noting that strictly technical actions (improving infrastructure) will not always be needed. A number of barriers are non-physical - the approach to other people, the level of empathy, the ability to communicate with another person. The respondents' statements show that a number of inconveniences during travel could be avoided if they received help from the staff (bus, train, tram) or from fellow passengers.

A critical assessment of the improvement of accessible tourism may result from a poor assessment of the tourism service providers themselves (Table 19.). More than half of the respondents indicate that the level of preparation for service and openness to receiving guests with disabilities is low (51% marked ratings from 1 to 3).

Table 19. Readiness of tourism service providers to receive guests with disabilities (Q20.2)

Q1. Grouped Disability	Q20.2 (1)	Q20.2 (2)	Q20.2 (3)	Q20.2 (4)	Q20.2 (5)	Q20.2 (6)	Q20.2 (7)	Row (Totals)
Temporary disability	6	10	9	7	7	3	6	48
	13%	21%	19%	15%	15%	6%	13%	
Obstacle related to my age	4	5	16	10	10	6	12	63
	6%	8%	25%	16%	16%	10%	19%	
Sight	13	20	20	19	16	12	9	109
	12%	18%	18%	17%	15%	11%	8%	
Hearing	4	5	9	3	12	3	9	45
	9%	11%	20%	7%	27%	7%	20%	
Locomotory	40	57	75	60	47	28	21	328
	12%	17%	23%	18%	14%	9%	6%	
Multiple disability	28	42	72	44	34	19	27	266
	11%	16%	27%	17%	13%	7%	10%	
Intellectual disability	3	6	13	16	8	5	4	55
	5%	11%	24%	29%	15%	9%	7%	
Speech	1	10	13	1	3	0	0	28
	4%	36%	46%	4%	11%	0%	0%	
Other	3	5	5	6	4	3	3	29
	10%	17%	17%	21%	14%	10%	10%	
ASD	2	9	13	13	7	4	4	52
	4%	17%	25%	25%	13%	8%	8%	
Psychosocial disability	0	3	2	2	1	1	1	10
	0%	30%	20%	20%	10%	10%	10%	
All Groups	104	172	247	181	149	84	96	1033
	10%	17%	24%	18%	14%	8%	9%	

Q20.2: Please, specify how much you agree with the statements below! Mark 1 if you do not agree at all, and 7 if you totally agree with the given statement! "Tourism service providers are more and more prepared and open to receive guests with disabilities".

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 142 respondents

Respondents note a constant problem with false information about accessibility by accommodation providers and other facilities. Clearly over half (54%) believe that this phenomenon is still common. It is worth noting that only slightly over ¼ of respondents report improvement in this area (27% of ratings from 5 to 7). Almost half of the respondents (48% of ratings from 1 to 3) do not share the opinion that the society in their country is becoming more tolerant and open to the problems of people with disabilities (Table 20.). Positive changes in this area are noticed by 37% of respondents (scores from 5 to 7).

Table 20. Openness of the society for the problems of people with disabilities (Q20.4)

Q1. Grouped Disability	Q20.4 (1)	Q20.4 (2)	Q20.4 (3)	Q20.4 (4)	Q20.4 (5)	Q20.4 (6)	Q20.4 (7)	Row (Totals)
Temporary disability	8	7	16	5	7	3	5	51
	16%	14%	31%	10%	14%	6%	10%	
Obstacle related to my age	6	8	18	8	8	10	13	71
	8%	11%	25%	11%	11%	14%	18%	
Sight	9	14	28	10	17	16	17	111
	8%	13%	25%	9%	15%	14%	15%	
Hearing	3	5	9	9	7	10	6	49
	6%	10%	18%	18%	14%	20%	12%	
Locomotory	36	67	57	57	56	36	26	335
	11%	20%	17%	17%	17%	11%	8%	
Multiple disability	28	45	58	40	48	27	29	275
	10%	16%	21%	15%	17%	10%	11%	
Intellectual disability	5	10	11	11	6	8	3	54
	9%	19%	20%	20%	11%	15%	6%	
Speech	1	8	8	4	3	4	1	29
	3%	28%	28%	14%	10%	14%	3%	
Other	2	2	4	9	6	4	2	29
	7%	7%	14%	31%	21%	14%	7%	
ASD	7	12	10	10	10	4	2	55
	13%	22%	18%	18%	18%	7%	4%	
Psychosocial disability	1	1	3	3	2	0	1	11
	9%	9%	27%	27%	18%	0%	9%	
All Groups	106	179	222	166	170	122	105	1070
	10%	17%	21%	16%	16%	11%	10%	

Q20.4: Please, specify how much you agree with the statements below! Mark 1 if you do not agree at all, and 7 if you totally agree with the given statement! "Society in my country is more and more tolerant and open to the problems of people with disabilities".

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 105 respondents

Definitely more than half of the respondents (55% of ratings from 1 to 3) notice that people are bothered by spending their holidays in places where there are also people with disabilities. Every third respondent has the opposite opinion (29% of ratings from 5 to 7). As many as 75% of respondents (scores from 5 to 7) believe that if trains and buses in their country were more accessible to wheelchairs, more people with disabilities would travel on them (Table 21.). This opinion is shared by as many as 41% of respondents (score 7 marked). Only every fifth respondent (19% of ratings from 1 to 3) does not consider it a significant problem.

Table 21. Dependence between wheelchairs accessibility level of trains and coaches and frequency of travel of people with disabilities (Q20.6)

Q1. Grouped Disability	Q20.6 (1)	Q20.6 (2)	Q20.6 (3)	Q20.6 (4)	Q20.6 (5)	Q20.6 (6)	Q20.6 (7)	Row (Totals)
Temporary disability	2	5	4	2	4	16	16	49
	4%	10%	8%	4%	8%	33%	33%	
Obstacle related to my age	4	0	5	5	8	18	29	69
	6%	0%	7%	7%	12%	26%	42%	
Sight	10	5	10	8	12	32	30	107
	9%	5%	9%	7%	11%	30%	28%	
Hearing	0	2	1	7	3	11	20	44
	0%	5%	2%	16%	7%	25%	45%	
Locomotory	20	15	21	21	27	56	169	329
	6%	5%	6%	6%	8%	17%	51%	
Multiple disability	23	11	17	15	25	73	104	268
	9%	4%	6%	6%	9%	27%	39%	
Intellectual disability	3	2	6	7	5	9	21	53
	6%	4%	11%	13%	9%	17%	40%	
Speech	1	5	2	3	1	13	3	28
	4%	18%	7%	11%	4%	46%	11%	
Other	2	0	1	2	3	7	13	28
	7%	0%	4%	7%	11%	25%	46%	
ASD	2	4	2	4	3	20	21	56
	4%	7%	4%	7%	5%	36%	38%	
Psychosocial disability	0	0	0	0	3	4	3	10
	0%	0%	0%	0%	30%	40%	30%	
All Groups	67	49	69	74	94	259	429	1041
	6%	5%	7%	7%	9%	25%	41%	

Q20.6: Please, specify how much you agree with the statements below! Mark 1 if you do not agree at all, and 7 if you totally agree with the given statement! "If trains and coaches were more accessible by wheelchairs in my country, more people with disabilities would travel."

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 134 respondents

The vast majority of respondents – 77% of respondents marked ratings from 5 to 7 (including as many as 39% of respondents marked rating 7), believe that the existence of tourist paths in forest parks, at least near cities, would make more people with disabilities go on trips. Only 16% do not share this opinion (select ratings from 1 to 3).

Information about accessibility is important – as many as 73% of respondents (scores from 5 to 7) note that the existence of a reliable online collection of tourist trails accessible to people in wheelchairs would make more people choose nature hikes. Only every fifth person surveyed does not share this opinion (19% of responses range from 1 to 3). Slightly more than half of the respondents (53% marked ratings from 5 to 7) note that providing appropriate assistance and safety to people with disabilities would attract them to practice extreme sports and activities. Respondents agreed with the thesis that tourism is an important part of their lives - 61% marked ratings from 5 to 7. For 23% of respondents, tourism is less important (ratings from 1 to 3). As many as 64% of respondents (scores from 5 to 7) believe that tourism significantly affects their well-being. Every fourth respondent has a different opinion (24% of ratings from 1 to 3). More than ¾ of the respondents (77% with ratings from 5 to 7) claim that

experiences related to tourism make them happier (Table 22.). As many as 52% of respondents marked a rating of 7 – the highest possible rating. Only 14% of people disagree (ratings from 1 to 3).

Table 22. Impact of tourism experiences on the level of happiness (Q20.12)

Q1. Grouped Disability	Q20.12 (1)	Q20.12 (2)	Q20.12 (3)	Q20.12 (4)	Q20.12 (5)	Q20.12 (6)	Q20.12 (7)	Row (Totals)
Temporary disability	3	2	4	3	3	17	18	50
	6%	4%	8%	6%	6%	34%	36%	
Obstacle related to my age	4	2	3	11	7	7	40	74
	5%	3%	4%	15%	9%	9%	54%	
Sight	4	3	5	6	16	15	63	112
	4%	3%	4%	5%	14%	13%	56%	
Hearing	1	1	3	3	8	9	25	50
	2%	2%	6%	6%	16%	18%	50%	
Locomotory	13	19	27	28	29	46	174	336
	4%	6%	8%	8%	9%	14%	52%	
Multiple disability	14	11	19	14	31	40	146	275
	5%	4%	7%	5%	11%	15%	53%	
Intellectual disability	2	2	4	4	4	6	30	52
	4%	4%	8%	8%	8%	12%	58%	
Speech	0	0	2	2	3	8	11	26
	0%	0%	8%	8%	12%	31%	42%	
Other	0	2	1	3	4	4	16	30
	0%	7%	3%	10%	13%	13%	53%	
ASD	0	3	1	11	5	6	28	54
	0%	6%	2%	20%	9%	11%	52%	
Psychosocial disability	1	0	0	1	1	1	7	11
	9%	0%	0%	9%	9%	9%	64%	
All Groups	42	45	69	86	111	159	558	1070
	4%	4%	6%	8%	10%	15%	52%	

Q20.12: Please, specify how much you agree with the statements below! Mark 1 if you do not agree at all, and 7 if you totally agree with the given statement! "My experiences from tourism make me happier".

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 105 respondents

Respondents claim also that tourism improves their relationships with others – as many as 71% give ratings from 5 to 7. Only every fifth respondent thinks differently (20% of ratings from 1 to 3). The vast majority of respondents are not interested in the potential of virtual/digital tourism – 64% of respondents gave ratings from 1 to 3 (Table 23.). Every fourth respondent is interested – 24% of ratings from 5 to 7.

Table 23. Interest in the potential of virtual/digital tourism (Q20.14)

Q1. Grouped Disability	Q20.14 (1)	Q20.14 (2)	Q20.14 (3)	Q20.14 (4)	Q20.14 (5)	Q20.14 (6)	Q20.14 (7)	Row (Totals)
Temporary disability	19	4	6	11	6	1	3	50
	38%	8%	12%	22%	12%	2%	6%	
Obstacle related to my age	34	7	3	8	7	3	7	69
	49%	10%	4%	12%	10%	4%	10%	
Sight	55	13	10	11	7	5	5	106
	52%	12%	9%	10%	7%	5%	5%	
Hearing	13	7	7	4	6	2	9	48
	27%	15%	15%	8%	13%	4%	19%	
Locomotory	119	50	37	37	35	26	19	323
	37%	15%	11%	11%	11%	8%	6%	
Multiple disability	97	48	26	29	25	15	27	267
	36%	18%	10%	11%	9%	6%	10%	
Intellectual disability	24	8	5	7	1	4	3	52
	46%	15%	10%	13%	2%	8%	6%	
Speech	11	4	2	2	5	1	1	26
	42%	15%	8%	8%	19%	4%	4%	
Other	11	2	4	4	2	1	4	28
	39%	7%	14%	14%	7%	4%	14%	
ASD	18	8	6	10	5	3	3	53
	34%	15%	11%	19%	9%	6%	6%	
Psychosocial disability	6	0	0	1	2	0	2	11
	55%	0%	0%	9%	18%	0%	18%	
All Groups	407	151	106	124	101	61	83	1033
	39%	15%	10%	12%	10%	6%	8%	

Q20.14: Please, specify how much you agree with the statements below! Mark 1 if you do not agree at all, and 7 if you totally agree with the given statement! "I have an increasing interest in the potential of virtual/digital tourism".

Source: survey results, N= 1175, no answer: 142 respondents

As many as 75% of respondents (scores from 1 to 3) did not use online tourism services, e.g. "visiting" a museum using an online application or participating in virtual tours. Only 17% have different experiences in this area (ratings from 5 to 7). Only 8% of respondents (scores from 5 to 7) own or plan to purchase a device that makes virtual experiences more enjoyable, e.g. VR glasses. As many as 88% of respondents have the opposite opinion. The situation is similar with the use of modern technological tools (applications, AR, i.e. augmented reality, VR glasses when visiting the city and VR, i.e. virtual reality devices that facilitate and/or improve the travel experience) – here, too, the majority of respondents are not interested (77% of ratings from 1 to 3). Only 18% of respondents use these tools (ratings from 5 to 7). The experience of discrimination due to one's disability while travelling is a very subjective feeling of the respondents. Each person has their own way of understanding the concept and feeling of discrimination.

It should be noted that not all respondents answered this question – almost one third of respondents (340 respondents, i.e. 29%). In fact, the same number of people (340) said they had not experienced discrimination. However, the largest group were those who encountered discrimination while travelling – 42% of respondents. Each person who reported discrimination

had the opportunity to describe what it was. A wealth of data was created from 489 people, which can be analysed in many aspects. One of them is an attempt to assess whether the discrimination had a technical or human basis? That is, to what extent it resulted from the lack of appropriate infrastructure, and to what extent it resulted from an unprofessional approach to the client (a person with a disability as a client of a trip, hotel, restaurant) or inappropriate behaviour towards people with disabilities on the part of other people travelling or using tourist services (staying in same hotel, train, beach).

The predominant form of discrimination was unpleasant and unfriendly treatment by other people, often of a very offensive and degrading nature. This is as much as 58% of the responses, which shows the scale of the problem. Especially if you compare it to architectural and infrastructural barriers, which were mentioned by 15% of people who said they experienced discrimination. Every tenth respondent from this group indicated refusal of service and failure to provide the service. These results show that discrimination against people with disabilities when travelling has a very strong social basis. It is not the architectural barriers that are the main obstacle, but the lack of empathy among the people you travel with.

Respondents were also asked two open questions:

- based on your experience, which country or countries should your country follow in the field of accessible tourism? and

- in which countries and/or in your country, in which tourist destinations/attractions have you seen good examples of supporting the participation of people with disabilities in tourism? Please provide a country/town/attraction, a good example!

In both the first and second questions, respondents had trouble giving examples (45% and 40% respectively) without mentioning any. Of the countries mentioned to be imitated, the top three were: the Netherlands 14%, Germany 7% and Austria 5%. In turn, respondents noted good examples of supporting the participation of people with disabilities in tourism in Austria (20%), Poland and Hungary (4% each).

The vast majority of respondents (52%) declared their willingness to help as volunteers in activities related to travel and tourism for people with disabilities. Every third respondent did not know what to answer or was not sure whether they would cope with such actions (33%). The entire group of respondents is in favor of taking into account the specificity, problems and possible solutions in tourism for people with disabilities in the curricula of subjects related to tourism in higher education (97%). The same percentage believe that it would be useful to make university educational materials available online to increase knowledge about tourism available to people with disabilities.

12.3. Summary

The results of the conducted research allowed for the diagnosis of the main challenges related to the development of accessible tourism (Figure 65.), as well as the formulation of recommendations for its development (Figure 66.).

Figure 65. Main challenges regarding accessible tourism
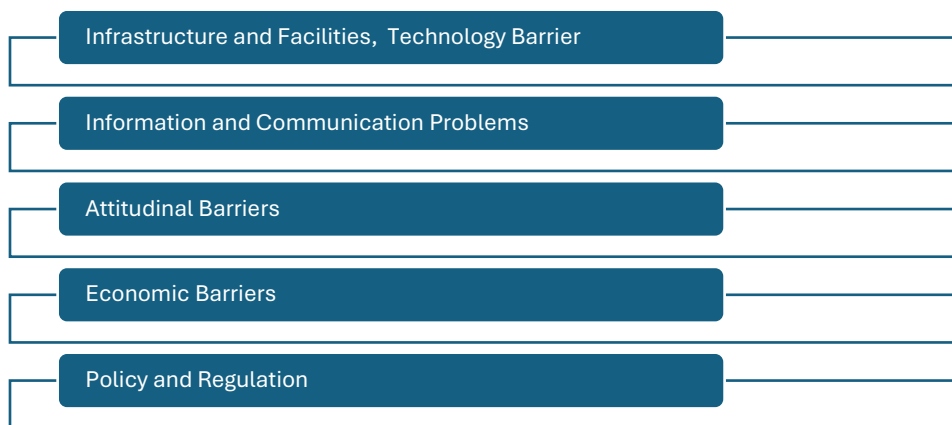
Source: own editing

Infrastructure and facilities barriers include: **inadequate physical infrastructure** (many destinations still lack basic accessibility features such as ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and wide doorways), transportation barriers (public transportation, taxis, and rental vehicles often lack the necessary adaptations for individuals with disabilities). Moreover, there are numerous technology barriers, to which they belong: lack of assistive technologies (not all destinations are equipped with the necessary assistive technologies, such as hearing loops, screen readers, or mobile apps that enhance accessibility), digital divide: (access to and familiarity with assistive technology can vary widely, with some individuals with disabilities lacking the resources or knowledge to utilize these tools effectively).

Information and communication difficulties concern: lack of information (there is often insufficient information available about the accessibility of destinations, accommodations, and attractions. This makes it difficult for travellers with disabilities to plan their trips confidently), inaccessible websites and booking systems: (many tourism-related websites and online booking systems are not designed with accessibility in mind, making it hard for individuals with visual or cognitive impairments to use them), form of information transfer (adapted to the needs of people with sensory disabilities, e.g. blind, deaf).

Attitudinal barriers refer to: lack of awareness and training (tourism staff and service providers frequently lack awareness and training on how to accommodate travellers with disabilities. This can lead to unintentional discrimination and inadequate service), negative attitudes (stereotypes and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities can create an unwelcoming environment and discourage travel), which may lead to feelings of discrimination.

Economic barriers related to difficulties such as: higher costs: (accessible travel often incurs higher costs due to the need for specialized equipment, services, or accommodations, which may not be covered by standard travel insurance), limited funding and investment (there is often insufficient funding and investment in accessible tourism infrastructure and services).

Policy and regulation determine the development of tourism at levels from local to global and cause challenges such as: inconsistent standards (accessibility standards and regulations vary widely between countries and regions, leading to inconsistent experiences for travellers. Compliance with international standards like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or the

European Accessibility Act is not uniform), **enforcement issues (e**ven where laws and regulations exist, enforcement can be weak, leading to poor implementation and maintenance of accessibility features). To overcome these challenges, a multifaceted approach is needed (Figure 66.).

Figure 66. Activities supporting the development of accessible tourism

Investment in Infrastructure

Training and Awareness Programs

Policy Harmonization and Enforcement

Inclusive Design and Technology

Accessible Information

Source: own editing

Action is needed on many levels: investment in infrastructure (governments and private sectors should invest in accessible infrastructure and transportation), training and awareness programs (training for tourism professionals on accessibility and inclusivity), policy harmonization and enforcement (consistent and enforced accessibility standards globally), inclusive design and technology (developing and promoting accessible websites, apps, and technologies), accessible information (providing detailed, accessible information about travel options and accommodations). By addressing these challenges, the tourism industry can become more inclusive, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can enjoy travel experiences.

13. Perceptions of the population of the country under study about accessible tourism (Analysis of the 1000 persons sample)

13.1. Summary of key results: attitudes of the Croatian population on people with disabilities and their travel habits

Introduction

A lot of attention has been paid to accessible tourism in Croatia recently, especially from the perspective of policy development. However, considerable efforts still need to be made to raise awareness of the importance of accessibility in general and in tourism in particular. After a literature review on this topic with a focus on Croatia, it can be concluded that there is a significant research gap in this field in terms of sample size and stakeholders included in the research. More specifically, the cooperation within the Accessible Project (No. 2022-2-HU01-KA220-HED-000099410, entitled "The development of the innovative educational method of ACCESSIBLE tourism in Central Europe – ACCESSIBLE") enabled the acquisition of much-needed knowledge about the legal framework, the demand for accessible tourism, but also about the attitudes of the general public towards the state of accessible tourism and the potential for development in Croatia.

The study was conducted with a purposive sample of 1,000 people from Croatia, so that a balanced representation of age and gender could be ensured. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes of the general public towards the state of development of accessible tourism in Croatia, their attitudes towards the needs and requirements of this specific demand segment, their knowledge about possible barriers for people with disabilities, but also about the social dimension of this tourism segment.

In general, it can be stated that the respondents have quite high awareness of accessibility in general and accessible tourism in particular, although the perception of the main challenges is slightly underestimated compared to the results of the primary research conducted within the same project among people with disabilities in Croatia.

Demographic representation and sampling

Great efforts were made to ensure that the national population was represented in Croatia. The main goal was representativeness in terms of age and gender distribution. The survey included 52% female and 47.6% male respondents, which corresponds to the national demographic structure (51.56% women and 48.44% men). The average age of respondents was 47.8 years, slightly higher than the average age in Croatia, but the difference is not so large as to affect the representativeness of the results.

The analysis of the respondents' level of education revealed that almost 50% of respondents had a university degree, while respondents with a vocational qualification made up a quarter of the sample. It could be argued that this distribution had an impact on the overall results, as it is quite plausible that those with a higher level of education were more exposed to various insights that allowed them to draw broader conclusions about the social aspects of accessibility in general, which is the basis for forming opinions about accessible tourism in particular. For this reason, they were probably much more aware of the specific aspects of accessible tourism policy and the need to implement different strategies with the aim of creating a more favourable development environment.

Awareness of difficulties faced by people with disabilities

One of the aims of this research was to assess the general population's knowledge of the barriers faced by people with disabilities, particularly in relation to their participation in tourism activities. From the results, it can be concluded that almost two thirds of respondents rate the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism as either unacceptably bad or quite poor. Only a small proportion of respondents consider the opportunities to be rather good or excellent.

In terms of the general population's perception of barriers for people with disabilities, it is important to note that respondents are well aware of the various difficulties that are part of the lives of people with disabilities. For example, respondents cited using rail transport, using long-distance buses, using public transport, using accommodation, participating in sporting activities as an athlete, participating in sporting activities as a spectator and visiting tourist attractions as situations in which people with disabilities face the greatest difficulties when trying to engage in these activities. These results indicate a high level of awareness of all barriers, which is a good starting point for educating the general population and developing policies.

On the other hand, respondents noted that three situations in the lives of people with disabilities present fewer difficulties – accessing reliable information about actual availability, using catering facilities (restaurants) and attending outdoor concerts and festivals. This suggests that respondents have thought about the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in certain aspects of tourism activities with fewer barriers, but at the same time it should be noted that the general population perceives access to reliable information about actual availability as far less of a barrier than is actually the case. This is an aspect that still requires much improvement, both in terms of service providers' engagement and public awareness.

Public perception of accessibility in tourism

The results of the study show that the general public is well aware that continuous efforts are needed to improve the situation of accessible tourism in Croatia. Almost half of the respondents are aware of this need, while almost a third of the respondents believe that equal access to tourist services and attractions for all should be ensured as soon as possible, which requires substantial investment and a change in attitudes. These results are encouraging and represent a positive starting point for creating a public perception of accessible tourism. On the other hand, about a quarter of respondents believe that the current quality of accessible tourism in Croatia is satisfactory and that no significant improvements are needed.

Taking these results into account, it can be concluded that the public perception of accessibility in tourism in Croatia is quite high and that investments in improving accessibility would be met with public support, which is of great importance when discussing the concept of universal design as mainstream, especially in public facilities.

Defining the target groups for accessible tourism

People with disabilities make up around 16% of the Croatian population. When asked about the percentage of the local population that could be targeted by accessible tourism, respondents gave somewhat mixed results. In fact, there was no clear consensus on the percentage of the total population that could benefit from the development of accessible

tourism. 17.9% of respondents stated that between 16 and 20 % of the population could be considered as a target group. The majority of respondents (31.8%) opted for a proportion of the population between 10 and 15. However, these results must be interpreted against the background of general knowledge about the proportion of people with disabilities in Croatia. Although respondents were unable to determine this proportion precisely, it should be noted that potential answers tended to cover small ranges, so this could be the reason for their general indecision.

This finding is also important from a policy-making perspective, as such disagreement about the potential size of the market could also exist among service providers. Without a clear picture of the number of users who could directly benefit from investment in the accessibility of facilities and services, it is difficult to reach a general agreement among all stakeholders involved in this process.

Attitudes towards specific aspects of accessible tourism

A seven-point Likert scale was used to examine public opinion on various aspects of the development of accessible tourism. The statements were graded on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to gain a deeper understanding of the general public's attitude towards certain aspects of accessible tourism in Croatia. Respondents fully agree that people with disabilities do not travel much at home and abroad for leisure purposes. They also believe that people with disabilities should be given the same opportunities to use accommodation, hospitality facilities and public transportation as people without disabilities (the level of agreement with all statements is 7, with the standard deviation indicating that respondents have a general consensus on this matter).

The results suggest that people have a high awareness of the special needs of people with disabilities when travelling. For example, respondents are aware that communication is of great importance in this process, as is the ability to use communication spaces and facilities as easily as possible. The responses show that respondents are less certain when it comes to the question of which programmes are preferred by people with disabilities. The result is slightly above average for this statement, as respondents are not sure whether people with disabilities prefer programmes designed specifically for their needs or whether they want to participate in tourism experiences like all other tourists.

On the other hand, respondents showed a high level of empathy for the special needs of people with disabilities. They are aware that the level of communication and hospitality should be very high and that they should be treated with a lot of respect. The respondents believe that the tourism industry in general and tourism employees in particular should be very well aware of the specificities of this demand segment and that it is necessary to improve the attitude of tourism employees towards people with disabilities. This result is also very positive when it comes to the possibilities of improving the quality of accessible tourism in Croatia.

Social inclusion and empathy

Together with the previously elaborated results, the aim of the research was to determine the level of awareness of the general population about the possibilities of including people with disabilities in the tourism system. The results indicate that while public opinion shows some understanding of the special needs of this segment, there is still much work to be done to improve it. For example, respondents disagree (mode 2, scale 1-4) that other people do not

like to go on vacation with people with physical or severe disabilities. However, the level of agreement is 3 (4 means that I fully agree) when it comes to going on vacation together with people with intellectual disabilities.

Respondents do not believe that society is tolerant towards people with disabilities. This result indicates that although there is a high level of empathy in society, there is still a lot of room for improvement in this particular segment of the tourism offer. However, awareness of the needs and special requirements of people with disabilities is also an important social issue and stronger incentives to address this situation and increase awareness and tolerance should create a more inclusive society.

However, respondents have reflected on their answers as the results suggest that anything that is accessible and good for people with disabilities makes their lives easier, indicating that they have thought about the possibilities and benefits of universal design. They also believe that Croatian society supports social integration and inclusion and that the development of accessible tourism is very important.

The results in the area of social integration and empathy indicate that respondents are aware of the importance of these issues and show a high level of empathy for this demand segment and for people with disabilities. However, society as a whole should work to achieve a higher level of tolerance towards this segment and create a more inclusive environment that would enable a more intensive development of accessible tourism along the way.

Conclusion

This study provides information on the attitudes of the population towards the development of accessible tourism in Croatia, and these valuable results should be useful for the development of tourism policy and the general decision-making processes in this area. In general, the results show that the population in Croatia is aware of the importance of this segment and the issue of accessibility in general. In addition to this valuable insight, the results also show that the population is aware that some other aspects should be considered in the future development of accessible tourism in Croatia.

The general characteristics of the respondents indicate that the sample reflects the current demographic characteristics of the Croatian population and that the responses should be taken into account in future decisions and actions. The general population is aware of the specific needs of this segment in terms of accessibility, especially for certain aspects of the tourism offer. They are aware that people with disabilities have a high need for accurate, specific and reliable information. However, they note that the information provided to this segment is sufficient, i.e. of satisfactory quality, which is not in line with the results obtained by people with disabilities.

Society in general needs to be more strongly encouraged to accept tolerance and inclusion as a way of life so that all people who are part of society can have the same opportunities. Accessibility, as is often emphasized, is a matter of basic human rights and as such should be granted to everyone. By increasing the provision of accessible tourism, more facilities and attractions would be available not only for tourists but also for the local population.

It can be concluded that accessibility is a necessary requirement for the development of society and that there is strong support among the Croatian population for achieving this level of development. By incorporating tolerance and empathy into the core values of society, the

foundation for the development of accessible tourism will be strengthened and tourism policy will have a much greater potential to develop this specific product and provide equal access to tourism experiences for all tourists.

13.2. Summary of key results: attitudes of the Hungarian population on people with disabilities and their travel habits

Introduction

Accessible tourism, which focuses on providing equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate in tourism activities, has increasingly gained attention as an essential component of social inclusion. Traditionally, research in this field has concentrated primarily on the perspectives of individuals with disabilities. However, to fully understand the landscape and identify potential areas for development, it is crucial to also consider the attitudes of the general population. Recognising this research gap, the partners working on the Accessible project have undertaken to carry out an online survey of 1000-1000 people in the 4 countries concerned (Hungary, Poland, Croatia and Romania), covering the whole population. This study, conducted as part of the Accessible Project (No. 2022-2-HU01-KA220-HED-000099410, "The development of the innovative educational method of ACCESSIBLE tourism in Central Europe – ACCESSIBLE"), aims to fill this gap by surveying the general public in Hungary to gauge their perceptions and attitudes towards accessible tourism.

The research involved a comprehensive survey of 1,000 Hungarian participants, selected to reflect a balanced representation of the population in terms of gender and age. The study's findings provide invaluable insights into how the public perceives the current state of accessible tourism, the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, and the societal support for future improvements in this area.

As dedicated researchers on the subject, we are pleased to note that the vast majority of the population has a sufficient empathy with the issue and is supportive of the further development of accessible tourism.

Demographic representation and sampling

The Hungarian segment of the study was meticulously designed to ensure that the sample was representative of the national population, particularly concerning gender and age distribution. The survey included 52.5% female and 47.5% male respondents, mirroring the national demographic structure. The age distribution of the participants also closely aligned with the national averages, ensuring that the results accurately reflect the views of different age groups within the population.

However, it is worth noting that the sample was somewhat skewed towards individuals with higher educational attainment, who were overrepresented in the survey. This demographic detail is significant because individuals with higher education levels may possess greater awareness of social issues, including the importance of accessibility in tourism. This overrepresentation might therefore have influenced the findings, particularly in terms of the expressed support for accessible tourism initiatives.

Awareness of difficulties faced by people with disabilities

One of the central aspects of the survey was to assess the public's awareness of the specific challenges that people with disabilities encounter when engaging in tourism activities. The findings indicate a high level of public awareness regarding these challenges, with a significant proportion of respondents recognizing the substantial difficulties that individuals with disabilities face, particularly in the realm of public transportation.

Respondents identified long-distance bus and rail transportation as the areas posing the greatest challenges for individuals with disabilities. These transportation modes were rated as inadequate by a significant portion of the population, highlighting a critical area where improvements are urgently needed. This perception aligns with the broader issues faced by public transportation systems in Hungary, where accessibility remains a significant barrier for people with disabilities.

In contrast, the survey revealed that accommodation and dining services were perceived as less problematic. These sectors were rated more favourably, suggesting that they have made more significant strides in improving accessibility. This finding indicates that while there are areas where accessibility has been successfully integrated into services, there remain critical gaps, particularly in transportation, that need to be addressed to ensure a more inclusive tourism experience.

Public perception of accessibility in tourism

The survey results reveal a broad recognition among the Hungarian public of the need for significant improvements in accessible tourism. A substantial majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of accessibility in tourism, with over 60% viewing the situation as less than ideal. Notably, more than 20% of respondents considered the current state of accessible tourism to be entirely unacceptable, which underscores the urgency of addressing these issues.

An important result is that our survey shows that there is almost a social consensus on the need to improve the situation of accessible tourism. This widespread dissatisfaction suggests that the general public is not only aware of the barriers faced by individuals with disabilities but also perceives the current efforts to address these barriers as insufficient. The recognition of these shortcomings is an important step towards mobilizing public support for the necessary changes.

Furthermore, the survey highlighted strong public support for initiatives aimed at improving accessible tourism. Approximately 87.3% of respondents agreed that substantial investments and a shift in societal attitudes are necessary to ensure that everyone has equal access to tourism services and attractions. This overwhelming consensus indicates that there is a strong foundation of public support for efforts to enhance accessibility in tourism, which could be a critical factor in driving policy changes and encouraging investment in this area.

Support for enhancing accessible tourism

The data from the survey clearly demonstrate that there is a robust consensus among the Hungarian public on the importance of improving accessible tourism. The survey findings reveal that nearly nine out of ten respondents believe that significant improvements are necessary to ensure that individuals with disabilities can fully participate in tourism activities.

This consensus is reflected in the strong support for various initiatives aimed at enhancing accessibility.

Specifically, 36.4% of respondents expressed the view that significant investments and a fundamental shift in societal attitudes are needed immediately to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the tourism sector. Another 50.9% of respondents advocated for continuous efforts to improve accessibility, indicating a recognition of the long-term nature of this challenge. Only a small fraction of respondents (0,6%) believed that no further improvements were necessary, highlighting the widespread recognition of the importance of this issue.

This strong support for improving accessible tourism suggests that the Hungarian public is not only aware of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities but is also willing to support efforts to address these challenges. This public backing could be crucial in driving policy changes and encouraging both public and private sector investment in accessibility initiatives.

Defining the target groups for accessible tourism

One of the challenges highlighted by the survey is the difficulty in defining the target groups for accessible tourism. The survey results reflect a lack of consensus among respondents regarding the proportion of the population that could benefit from accessible tourism. This ambiguity is consistent with the broader challenges faced by experts in the field, where there is no clear agreement on the exact size of the population that requires accessible tourism services.

The survey responses were spread across all five categories provided, with no single category dominating, which underscores the uncertainty in defining the target demographic for accessible tourism. This lack of consensus points to the need for further research and clearer guidelines to help policymakers and industry stakeholders better understand the scope of the demand for accessible tourism services.

Attitudes towards specific aspects of accessible tourism

The survey also explored public attitudes towards specific aspects of accessible tourism using a seven-point Likert scale. For the answers to the general questions related to accessible tourism, a scale value of 1 indicates total disagreement and a scale value of 7 indicates total agreement. Acceptance of strongly agree (scale 7) is extremely high for all questions, so the results were overwhelmingly positive, with a large majority of respondents expressing strong support for various aspects of accessible tourism. For example, over 80% of respondents selected a score above the mid-point of the scale (4 or higher), indicating widespread support for accessible tourism initiatives (and disagreement is below 10% in all cases).

Among the specific aspects of accessible tourism, respondents expressed strong support for ensuring accessibility in public transportation, accommodations, and communication channels. For instance, a significant majority of respondents agreed that it is a legitimate expectation for public transportation systems to be fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. Similarly, there was strong support for the notion that accommodations and communication channels should be made accessible to all, reflecting a broad recognition of the importance of these elements in promoting inclusive tourism.

The results also indicate a high level of public empathy towards individuals with disabilities. Respondents generally expressed a positive attitude towards accessible tourism, with many recognizing the importance of making tourism experiences accessible to everyone, regardless of their physical abilities. This empathy is a critical factor in fostering a more inclusive society, where the needs of individuals with disabilities are considered and addressed in all aspects of life, including tourism.

Social inclusion and empathy: a complex picture

While the survey results paint a largely positive picture of public attitudes towards accessible tourism, they also reveal some complexities in the broader societal context. Specifically, while respondents expressed strong personal support for accessible tourism and empathy towards individuals with disabilities, they were less confident in the broader society's willingness to embrace these changes.

For example, while many respondents indicated that they personally support accessible tourism, they were more sceptical about the extent to which the wider society shares this commitment. This discrepancy suggests that while there is strong personal support for accessibility initiatives, there may be concerns about whether these values are widely shared across society. This finding points to the need for continued public education and awareness-raising efforts to ensure that the importance of accessible tourism is understood and embraced by all segments of society.

Moreover, the survey revealed that while respondents generally expressed empathy and support for individuals with disabilities, there were some areas where societal attitudes were perceived as less favourable. For instance, respondents indicated that while they personally might support accessible tourism, they believed that others in society might be less supportive. This perception of societal attitudes highlights the need for ongoing efforts to promote social inclusion and challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about individuals with disabilities.

Conclusion

The research provides a comprehensive overview of public attitudes towards accessible tourism in Hungary, offering valuable insights that can inform future policy and practice in this area. The findings suggest that there is a strong personal commitment among the Hungarian public to supporting accessible tourism, coupled with a broad recognition of the challenges that remain, particularly in the area of public transportation.

The widespread support for improvements in accessible tourism, as reflected in the survey results, provides a solid foundation for future initiatives aimed at enhancing accessibility in the tourism sector. This public backing is crucial for driving the necessary policy changes and encouraging both public and private sector investment in accessibility initiatives.

However, the research also highlights some challenges, particularly in terms of defining the target groups for accessible tourism and addressing the perceived gaps between personal support for accessibility and broader societal attitudes. These challenges underscore the need for continued research, public education, and awareness-raising efforts to ensure that accessible tourism is fully embraced by all segments of society.

In conclusion, the research findings indicate that while significant progress has been made in improving accessibility in some areas of tourism, there is still much work to be done. By addressing the areas of greatest concern, particularly public transportation, and continuing to foster a supportive environment for inclusive tourism, Hungary can make significant strides towards becoming a more accessible and inclusive destination for all travellers.

13.3. Summary of key results: attitudes of the Polish population on people with disabilities and their travel habits

Introduction

This study was conducted under the Erasmus+ Project, titled "The Development of the Innovative Educational Method of ACCESSIBLE Tourism in Central Europe – ACCESSIBLE," (No. 2022-2-HU01-KA220-HED-000099410) which is being implemented in four countries (Hungary, Croatia, Romania, and Poland). The project primarily focuses on the needs of people with disabilities, examining their opinions on the current state and organization of accessible tourism. Research among people with disabilities was conducted during the period October 2023 - January 2024. They included a total sample of 1,175 people across 4 countries (300 people with disabilities in Poland). The aim was to understand the conditions for the development of accessible tourism, the travel behaviour patterns of people with disabilities, their travel limitations, and the essential directions for training tourism service staff in accessible tourism.

To supplement the perspective on the needs related to accessible tourism, the study was also conducted among non-disabled people. The research was based on a survey form, developed collaboratively by teams representing the four countries involved in the project – initially in English and later translated into national languages.

Methodology and characteristics of the study sample

The sample including people without disabilities in Poland was 627 adults (i.e., aged 18 and over). Interviews were conducted from April to August 2024. The research was carried out using face-to-face interviews and electronic forms. The sampling method was convenience-based. Among the respondents, women were predominant (60%), while 39% were men; some respondents did not specify their gender. The respondents represented all age groups: 18-25 (29%), 26-35 (9%), 36-50 (25%), 51-65 (21%), and over 65 (16%). Most respondents had secondary or higher education. They came from a variety of locations, ranging from rural areas and small towns to large cities.

Awareness of difficulties faced by people with disabilities

The research indicated that fully abled individuals are aware of many difficulties that people with disabilities may encounter during travel. The issues listed in the survey (items 1-10) were rated on a scale from 1: No difficulties at all to 7: Very serious difficulties faced by people with disabilities.

The research showed that non-disabled people are aware of many difficulties that people with disabilities may encounter during travel. The issues listed in the survey (items 1-10) were rated on a scale from 1: No difficulties at all to 7: Very serious difficulties faced by people with disabilities (Table 24.).

**Table 24.** Evaluated Areas Related to the Organization of Accessible Tourism

1. Use of rail transport
2. Use of long-distance bus and coach transport
3. Use of local public transport
4. Use of accommodations
5. Use of catering facilities (restaurants)
6. Use of sports activities as a sportsperson
7. Use of sports activities as spectator
8. Attending outdoor concerts and festivals
9. Visiting tourist attractions
10. Access to reliable information on effective accessibility

Source: own editing

In the statements, ratings were predominantly in the middle ranges of the scale: 4 (196 responses), 3 (183 responses), and 5 (173 responses). Least frequently, in a similar range, were extreme ratings of 1 or 7 (89:83 responses).

Figure 67. Assessment of the accessibility level for people with disabilities to selected activities and services related to tourism.

The sum of ratings of (+) no difficulties and (-) existing difficulties. Data in points (scale: -627 to 627)
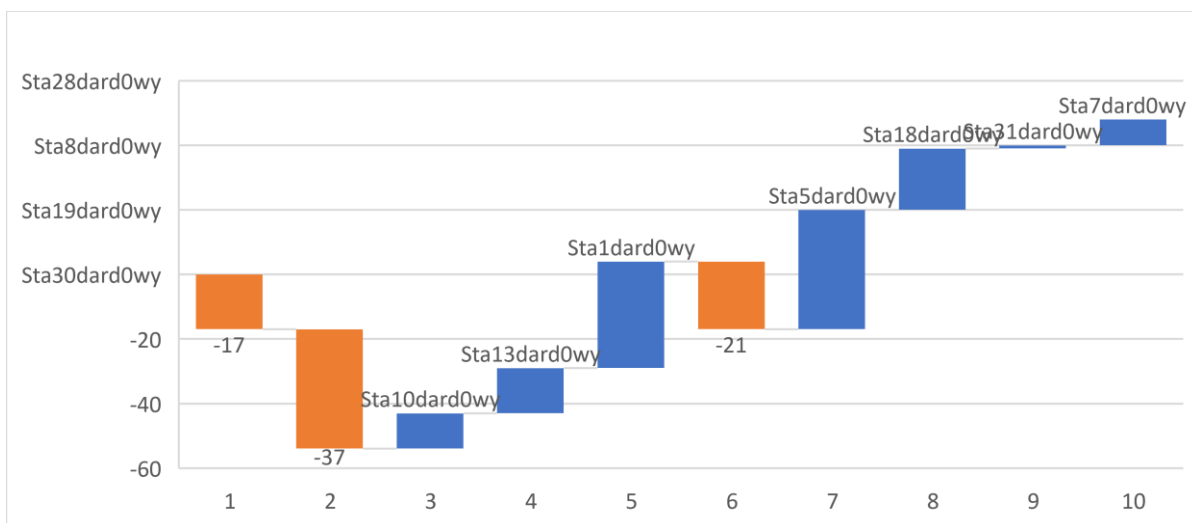
Categories 1-10 according to Table 1. Source: survey results, n=627

The sum of ratings of (+) no difficulties (scale: 1-3) and (-) existing difficulties (scale: 5-7) revealed that the greatest difficulties were perceived in the use of long-distance bus and coach transport (-37 points), sports activities as a sportsperson (-21 points), and use of rail transport (-17 points). Conversely, the least difficulties were noted in the use of sports activities as a spectator (+37 points), use of catering facilities (restaurants) (+33 points), and attending outdoor concerts and festivals (+19 points). In the case of visiting tourist attractions, the occurrence of difficulties and their absence were balanced (Figure 67.). Detailed assessments of the level of difficulty in utilizing specific categories related to the organization and execution of tourism, as encountered by people with disabilities from the perspective of non-disabled people, are presented in Figure 68.

Figure 68. Assessment of the accessibility level for people with disabilities to selected activities and services related to tourism

data in %. Scale: 1: No difficulties at all; 7: very serious difficulties faced by people with disabilities
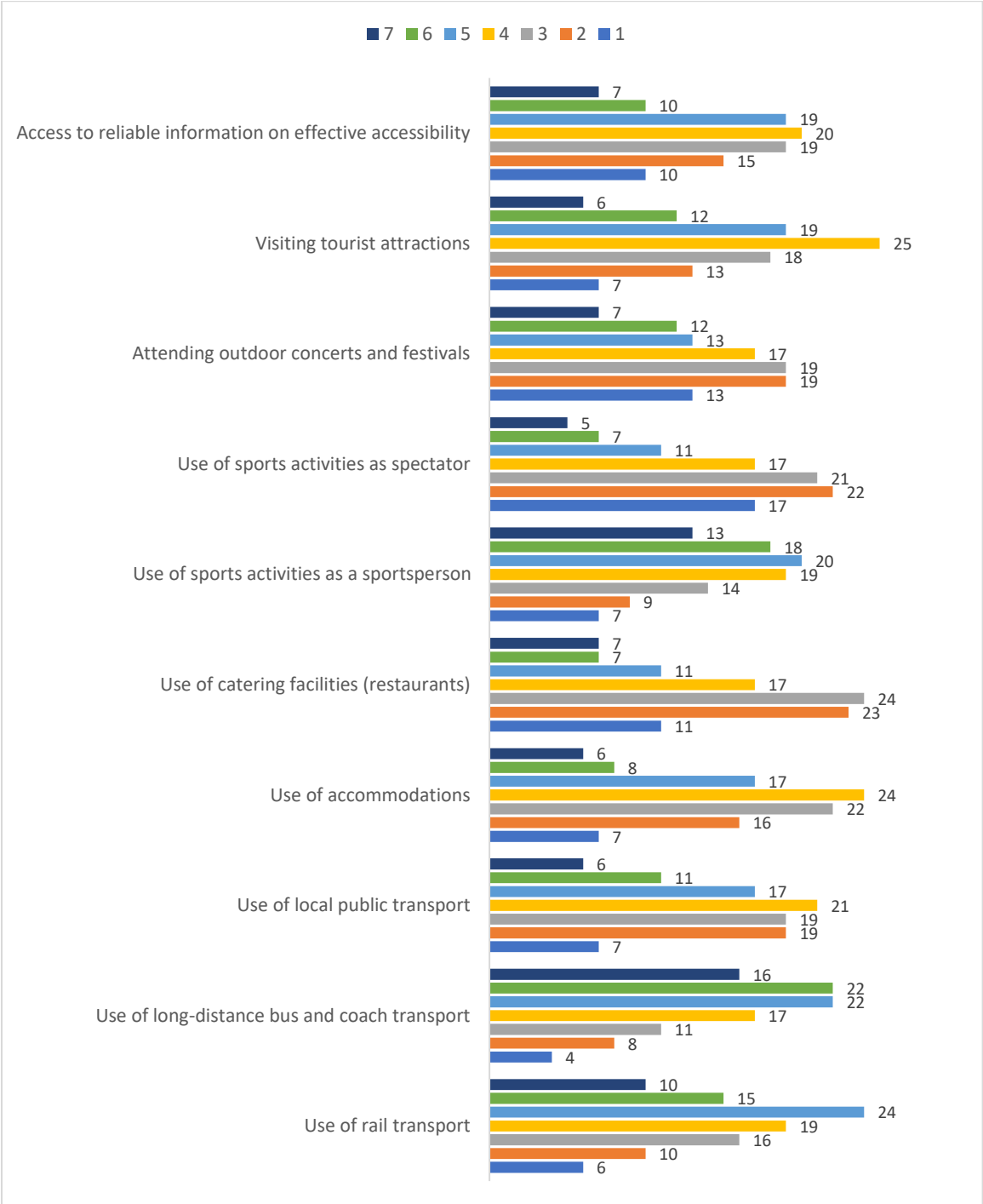
Source: survey results, n=627

Public perception of accessibility in tourism and support for enhancing accessible tourism

Regarding the question "What opportunities do you think people with disabilities in your country have for participating in tourism?" nearly half of the respondents (49%) perceive limited opportunities: somewhat limited (43%) and definitely limited (6%). Fewer responses were optimistic, with those who rated the opportunities as somewhat high (18%) and

definitely high (3%). A significant group of respondents also indicated that the opportunities are neither small nor large (30%). These results highlight the need for extensive efforts aimed at levelling the playing field for people with disabilities in terms of access to spaces, services, and tourist information. According to the social model of disability, these efforts should focus on several key aspects, such as: recognition of barriers, support for improved accessibility, legislative and cultural changes, as well as empathy, social responsibility, and inclusive action.

Defining the target groups for accessible tourism

Most respondents (63%) recognize that the social group requiring support in terms of accessible tourism comprises 10-15% of the population. This value aligns with statistical data regarding people with disabilities in Polish society. A small group of respondents (3%) identified a smaller target group: 1-3% of the population and 4-9% of the population (14% of respondents). A broader perspective saw the beneficiaries of accessible tourism as 16-20% of the population 13% of respondents, and more than 20% of the population 7% of respondents.

These results indicate a good awareness among non-disabled people regarding the number of people with disabilities in Poland and highlight that accessible tourism addresses the needs of many social groups: people with physical disabilities, people with sensory disabilities, elderly individuals, families with young children, people with chronic health conditions, people with psychological or cognitive disabilities, as well as low-income individuals.

Understanding these target groups helps in designing tourism experiences that are inclusive and accessible, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their physical, sensory, cognitive, or financial limitations, can enjoy travel and leisure activities.

Social inclusion and empathy: a complex picture

Despite numerous efforts in universal design and improving accessibility in public spaces and services, some respondents (13%) reported instances of discrimination against people with disabilities. These instances included: lack of access to buildings (e.g., absence of elevators or ramps), lack of access to public transportation (e.g., trains, coaches, buses, trams), inability to enter restaurants with a guide dog, ridicule, verbal humiliation, and avoidance of contact (e.g., lack of knowledge on how to behave). These comments highlight the need for continued efforts to combat social discrimination, particularly through broad education and increased awareness of diverse social needs, as well as through legislation, policy, and the promotion of inclusive actions.

Developing social inclusion involves creating environments and systems that ensure all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from societal activities.

Conclusion

Based on the research results conducted among non-disabled people in Poland, it can be concluded that there is a recognized need to develop actions aimed at improving the accessibility of tourist spaces for people with disabilities and enhancing the process of social inclusion.

Respondents are aware of difficulties. People without disabilities recognize a range of challenges faced by people with different disabilities during travel. The most significant difficulties are associated with long-distance bus and coach transport, sports activities as a

sportsperson, and rail transport. Conversely, fewer difficulties are noted in sports activities as a spectator, dining in restaurants, and attending outdoor events.

Analysis of public perception of accessibility in tourism revealed that nearly half of the respondents view these opportunities as somewhat or definitely limited. This underscores the need for significant efforts to enhance accessibility and address barriers in tourism.

Regarding target groups – most respondents estimate that 10-15% of the population requires support for accessible tourism, aligning with statistical data on people with disabilities. This reflects an understanding of the diverse needs across various social groups, including those with physical, sensory, cognitive disabilities, as well as the elderly, families with young children, and low-income individuals.

Statements about social inclusion and empathy revealed that, despite efforts to improve accessibility, there are still reports of discrimination against people with disabilities, such as barriers to buildings and public transportation, and negative social attitudes. This highlights the ongoing need for education, awareness, legislative changes, and inclusive policies to foster social inclusion and address discrimination.

In summary, the results indicate a continuous need for efforts to improve accessibility in tourism and ensure equal opportunities for all. They also highlight the necessity of addressing numerous barriers faced by people with disabilities and their companions during the planning and execution of travel.

13.4. Summary of key results: attitudes of the Romanian population on people with disabilities and their travel habits

Introduction

Accessibility is a contemporary tourism issue, and it is essential to understand the views of the majority of the population. Indeed, the social model of disability draws attention to the fact that negative attitudes towards people with disabilities can be a barrier to accessible tourism, and understanding these attitudes can help to deepen our understanding of the issue. To gather public opinion, an online self-completion questionnaire survey was carried out as part of the project among the adult population in Romania. The survey was conducted between 20 January and 21 February 2024, using paid targeted advertising to reach Facebook users. A total of 1,046 people responded to the questionnaire, 834 of whom completed it and 212 completed it partially but to a great extent.

Demographic representation and sampling

The sampling method was quota sampling, supplemented by sharing in public groups, which resulted in an over-representation of people with disabilities and their relatives in the sample. To increase the representativeness of the sample, the results were weighted by gender, age, and educational attainment, according to the distribution of the Romanian population aged 15 and over, based on the latest census data (1 December 2021).

Based on the weighted data, the sample is characterised by a slight female predominance (54.2%), proportionally corresponding to the gender distribution of the Romanian population aged 15 and over. The age weighting was done along three major age groups, distinguishing

between young (29 and under), middle-aged (30-59) and old (60 and over). The majority of respondents are middle-aged (52.4%), followed by old (28.3%) and young (19.3%), which is very similar to the distribution of the Romanian population aged 15 and over. We also distinguished three main groups for the highest level of completed education: low (less than primary, primary and lower secondary education), medium (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education) and high (tertiary education, including postgraduate education). Most respondents (54.1%) have completed secondary education, which aligns with the Romanian population aged 15 and over. This is followed by those with a low level of education (26.1%), and the lowest proportion, similar to the national figures, is among those with tertiary education (19.9%). The majority (63.4%) of respondents come from urban areas (urban settlements with a population of 25,000 or more), and one-third (36.6%) from rural (villages or urban settlements with a population of less than 25,000) areas.

Awareness of difficulties faced by people with disabilities

The research sought to determine the extent to which the majority of the non-disabled population is aware of the difficulties faced by people with disabilities in their various tourism-related activities. The results show that the majority of respondents are aware of the serious constraints faced by people with disabilities in this area, as even getting to their destination is a problem if they want to use public transportation. The respondents considered the use of rail transport, the use of long-distance bus and coach transport as the most difficult for people with disabilities. This is followed by using sports activities as a sportsperson and using local public transport. Therefore, three of the four most difficult factors were related to some form of public transport. Arriving at the tourist destination will not make life easier for people with disabilities, and respondents are aware of this. Indeed, respondents rated visiting tourist attractions and using accommodation facilities as having difficulty after travel difficulties. Of the mentioned difficulties, the least demanding part is using catering facilities (restaurants) and access to reliable information on effective accessibility, even though they are also rated above average, which means that they also pose difficulties for people with disabilities in their tourism activities.

Public perception of accessibility in tourism

The survey highlighted public dissatisfaction with tourism opportunities for people with disabilities. The majority of respondents (53.4%) consider the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism to be bad (somewhat bad or unacceptably bad). There is also a significant proportion of ambivalent respondents, with almost two-fifths (37.7%) saying that the situation is neither bad nor good, and only a few (7.9%) who think that the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism are quite good. Only 1% of respondents consider the country to have excellent opportunities for people with disabilities. The lack of satisfaction with accessible tourism is reflected in the fact that almost half of the respondents disagree that tourism service providers are becoming more prepared and open to accommodate people with disabilities, a further two-tenths only partly agree, and only one-third think that service providers are becoming more prepared and open to accommodate people with disabilities. The low average response rate to the statement 'The opportunities for accessible tourism are constantly improving in my country' also indicates a low level of public satisfaction with accessible tourism.

Support for enhancing accessible tourism

The survey results reflect a high level of public support for improving the situation of accessible tourism, with almost all respondents answering 'yes' to the question 'Do you think the situation of accessible tourism should be improved' and only 1% saying that it is not necessary. A closer look at the responses shows that the majority (50.3%) believe that continuous efforts must be made to improve the situation of accessible tourism, and a further third (31.0%) agree that equal access to tourism services and attractions should be provided to all as soon as possible, with significant investment and a change of attitude. A minority of respondents (13.2%) think that while it is important to improve the situation of accessible tourism in the country, there are more important things to do, and a much smaller proportion (4.5%) suggest that only minor improvements should be made. However, the high level of support is also reflected in the recognition of the importance of accessible tourism. The development of accessible tourism is considered very important by almost all respondents (95.0%).

Defining the target groups for accessible tourism

Defining the target group for accessible tourism is not without problems, as not only people with disabilities may need these services and facilities, but also other social groups such as families with small children, people with temporary injuries, elderly people and their fellow travellers. Taking these into account, the target group for accessible tourism in Romania is also much larger than the official percentage of people with disabilities, which is around 5%. The data show that this is also perceived by the non-disabled population to some extent, even if this overestimates the proportion of the target group. The majority of respondents (55.3%) think that the target group for accessible tourism is more than 20%. Almost two-tenths of respondents estimated the proportion between 16 and 20 per cent, a further 16.2 per cent estimated it between 10 and 15 per cent, and one-tenth estimated it between 1 and 3 or 4 and 9 per cent.

Attitudes towards specific aspects of accessible tourism

The survey also asked for opinions on various aspects of accessible tourism. The results show that the respondents believe that it is reasonable to expect people with disabilities to have access to a range of services. The mean scores for statements relating to this aspect are very high, up to a score of six on a scale of one to seven (where a scale value of 1 indicates total disagreement and a scale value of 7 indicates total agreement). Of these, access to public transport and the fairness of accessible places in commercial accommodation were the most strongly decided upon. This is followed by the expectation to help people with communication difficulties get their messages across with tools and trained staff. Respondents also agree that information on accessibility needs to be more reliable for people with disabilities and that the online space (e.g., facilitate access to booking services and related websites) needs to be accessible to people with disabilities. The lowest average value is for the statement catering establishments, which must be accessible, but this value is also close to six.

Expectations of reasonable access also apply to the expansion of tourism opportunities for people with disabilities. Respondents largely agree that making trains and buses more wheelchair accessible would help increase the number of people with disability who travel. A reliable online collection of wheelchair-accessible trails, as well as hiking trails in park forests, at least near cities, would help people with disabilities enjoy hiking in nature.

Social inclusion and empathy

Attitudinal barriers can also reduce the opportunities for people with disabilities to travel, so it is particularly relevant to explore public attitudes towards people with disabilities. The results show that there is still a long way to go to achieve an inclusive society, as more than half of the respondents had personally experienced negative discrimination against people with disabilities while travelling, such as rude behaviour, neglect, contempt, intolerance, humiliation, refusal of assistance, staring/pointing, mocking excommunication by peers or even payment fraud. Although respondents generally have no objection to being in the same place as a person with a disability, even if the disability is visible, there is still work to be done to change this mentality, as a small group of people are still reluctant to be in the same place as a person with a visible disability when travelling.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that on average, respondents strongly agree that goodwill and respectful behaviour towards people with disabilities should be improved. They also strongly agree that the attitude of tourism workers towards people with disabilities should be improved.

The need for a change in attitudes towards people with disabilities is also indicated by the fact that almost three-quarters of respondents disagree that Romanian society is very tolerant towards people with disabilities, as well as by the fact that the majority of respondents disagree that society supports integration and inclusion.

Summary

In conclusion, people in Romania are aware that the situation of people with disabilities in the country is not the best, as they believe that even basic things such as use of rail or long-distance bus transport are difficult for people with disabilities. The population is dissatisfied with tourist facilities for people with disabilities; they think there are shortcomings in accessibility, but the attitude towards people with disabilities is not the most favourable. Therefore, they support efforts to improve the situation of accessible tourism and consider it reasonable to meet expectations to make it possible for everyone to participate in tourism activities. Much remains to be done to improve the situation of accessible tourism, but it is not enough to invest in accessibility; it is also necessary to improve the attitudes of tourism workers towards people with disabilities and the helpful and respectful behaviour of the general public towards people with disabilities. Continued efforts are needed to ensure equal access to tourism services and attractions, with significant investment and attitudes changing. This is particularly important as tourism makes most people happy, contributes to their well-being and improves their relationships with others.

14. Summary, conclusions

This book analysed the present condition and future prospects of accessible tourism in Central Europe, specifically focusing on the implications of joint international initiatives such as the *Accessible Erasmus Project*. As elaborated and highlighted in the volume, accessible tourism is an inclusive approach and strategy designed to provide equitable travel possibilities for all persons, especially those with disabilities, by eliminating physical, social, and communicational obstacles.

The global tourism sector must progressively embody inclusiveness and equality to accommodate those with impairments. Central European nations, including Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, have acknowledged the need for inclusive travel and are engaging in international initiatives to guarantee that tourism is accessible to everyone, irrespective of physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments.

The authors emphasized that accessible tourism is not just a moral imperative but also an economic prospect. Accessible tourism may substantially improve travel experiences for varied demographic groups, including elders, those with mobility impairments, and others necessitating special accommodations. The economic effect is significant since heightened tourist involvement results in augmented national revenue and affords enterprises a competitive advantage.

An essential element of the book is its examination of legislative frameworks that facilitate accessible tourism. This includes international treaties such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, European Union measures like the European Accessibility Act, and national legislation in member states. These legislative mechanisms are crucial for guaranteeing that persons with disabilities have comprehensive access to tourist services, facilities, and opportunities.

Moreover, policy texts underscore the significance of sustainability and inclusion in tourism. These frameworks promote the use of standardized and transparent labelling systems for accessible tourism, enhancing consumer awareness and industry standards.

The book revealed a rising need for accessible tourism services, highlighting the increasing importance of those with disabilities and older visitors in the tourist business. The distinct requirements of diverse groups, including those with physical, sensory, intellectual, and age-related impairments, are emphasized to demonstrate the extensive considerations essential for achieving inclusion in tourism.

The volume explored technological solutions and optimal techniques to enhance accessibility in tourism. This includes the design of accessible hotels, attractions, transportation, and recreational facilities. For example, implementing accommodations as ramps, elevators, accessible bathrooms, and modified signs may significantly enhance the experience of travellers with mobility or sensory problems.

Case studies from Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania exemplified best practices in the implementation of accessible tourism across several nations. Furthermore, the significance of technology in facilitating accessible experiences, exemplified by mobile apps that provide audio descriptions for visually impaired individuals, is highlighted as a crucial instrument in enhancing inclusiveness.

While there has been progress in making tourism accessible, several challenges remain, including varying standards across nations, inadequate infrastructure, limited knowledge, and economic obstacles such as elevated expenses related to accessible travel. These issues are compounded by the lack of information about accessible services, often hindering prospective tourists with disabilities from visiting.

The authors proposed a multi-level approach and strategy to address these difficulties, which include enhanced infrastructure expenditures, professional training for tourist personnel, standardization of accessible criteria across nations, and the advancement of inclusive design and technology.

In conclusion, our book, *The Theory and Practice of Accessible Tourism in Central Europe* offered a thorough examination of the advancements, obstacles, and prospective trajectories for accessible tourism in the area. The collaboration of Central European nations in international initiatives, exemplified as the Accessible Erasmus Project, demonstrates the efficacy of cooperation in enhancing accessibility. By tackling the outstanding issues, especially in public transit and awareness, the area may further develop as an inclusive and hospitable destination for all visitors.

The book advocates for various measures to promote the advancement of accessible tourism: investment in accessible infrastructure, standardization of accessibility criteria internationally, ongoing innovation in accessible technology, and enhanced public awareness initiatives. Should these proposals be implemented, Central Europe might emerge as a pioneer in accessible tourism, establishing a worldwide benchmark for inclusion and economic development. Finally, this book not only outlined the current state of accessible tourism but also provided a roadmap for how the industry can evolve in the coming years, ensuring that the right to travel is accessible to all, regardless of ability.

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