

Summary of Key Results:

Attitudes of the Polish Population on People with Disabilities and Their Travel Habits



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Introduction

This study was conducted under the Erasmus+ Project, titled "The Development of the Innovative Educational Method of ACCESSIBLE Tourism in Central Europe - ACCESSIBLE," (2022-2-HU01-KA220-HED-000099410 number) which is being implemented in four countries (Hungary, Croatia, Romania, and Poland). The project primarily focuses on the needs of people with disabilities (PwD), examining their opinions on the current state and organization of accessible tourism. Research among PwD was conducted during the period October 2023 - January 2024. They included a total sample of 1,175 people across 4 countries (300 PwD in Poland). The aim was to understand the conditions for the development of accessible tourism, the travel behavior patterns of PwD, 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 PwD 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 PwD.

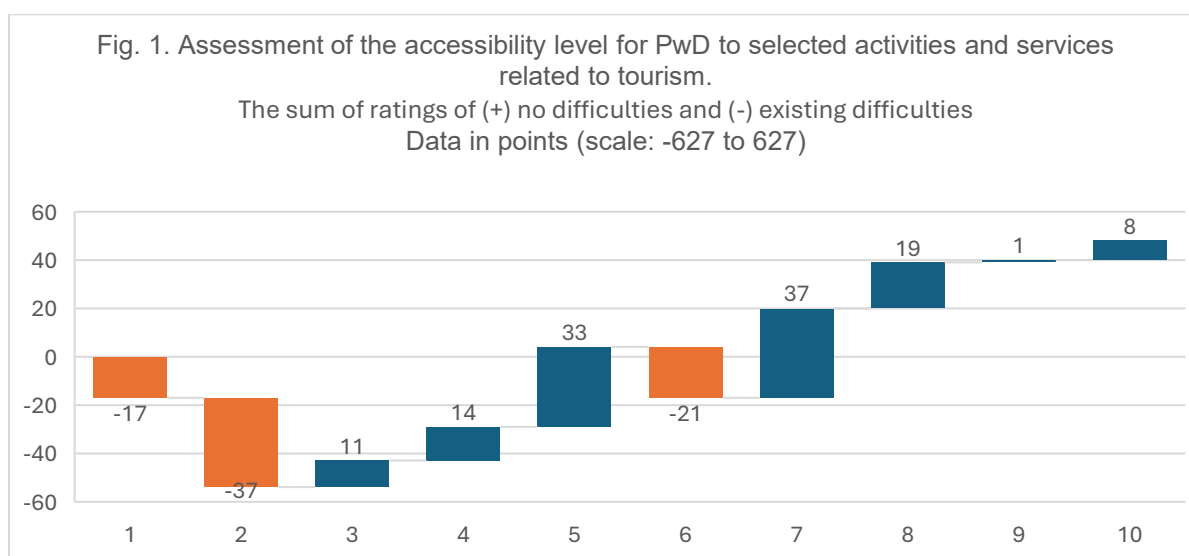
The research showed that non-disabled people are aware of many difficulties that people with disabilities may encounter during travel. The issues listed in the survey (items 1-10)

were rated on a scale from 1: no difficulties at all to 7: very serious difficulties faced by PwD (Tab. 1).

Table 1: 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

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).



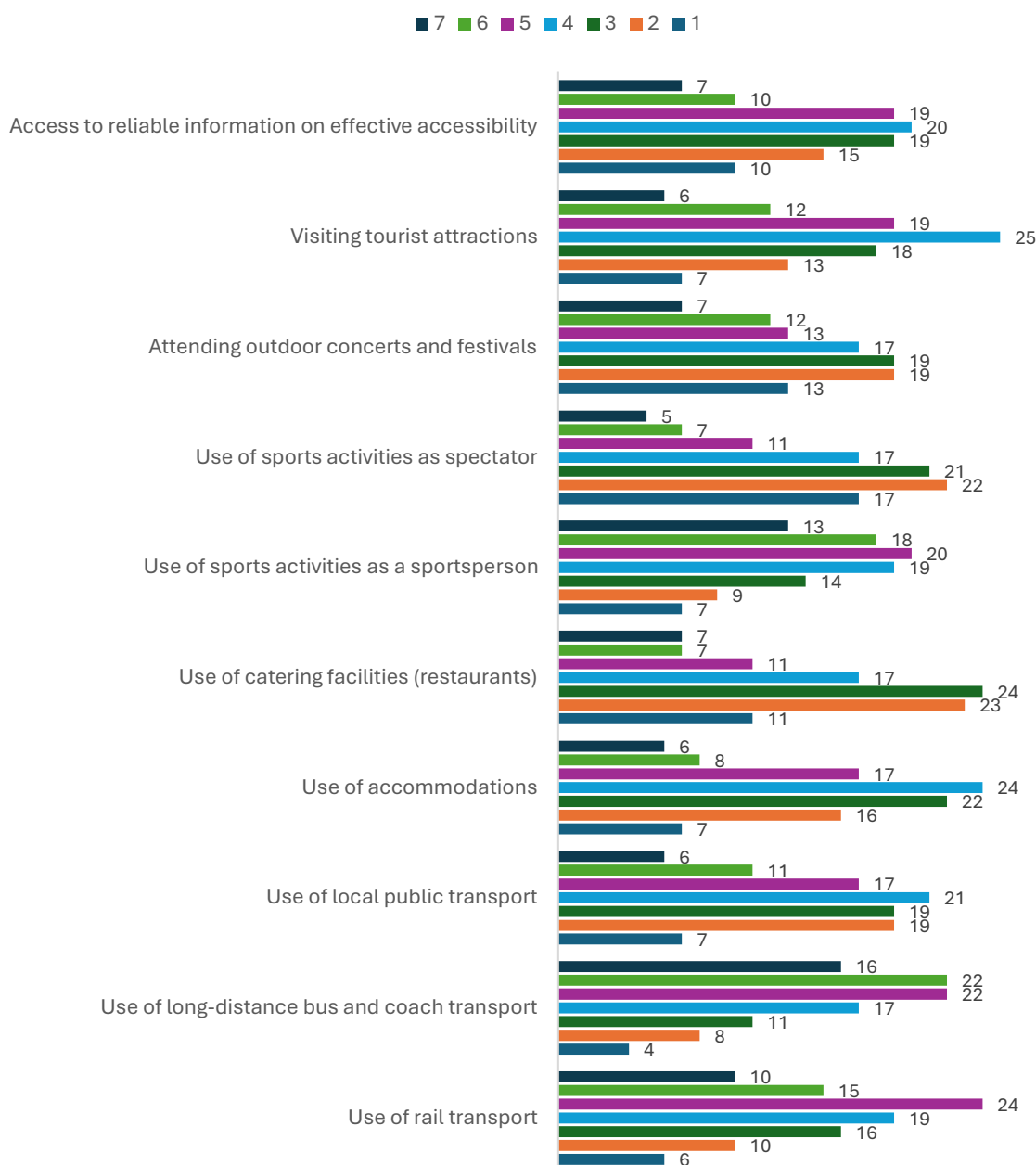
Categories 1-10 according to Table 1. Source: Survey results, n=627

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 (Fig. 1). Detailed assessments of the level of difficulty in utilizing specific categories related to the organization and execution of tourism, as encountered by PwD from the perspective of non-disabled people, are presented in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. Assessment of the accessibility level for PwD to selected activities and services related to tourism
data in %

Scale: 1: No difficulties at all; 7: very serious difficulties faced by PwD



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 leveling the playing field for people with disabilities (PwD) 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 (PwD) 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 (PwD). 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 PwD 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 PwD. 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 PwD, 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.