

ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

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Abstract. *Accessible tourism defines concepts such as disability, person with disabilities, accessible tourism for all, disability discrimination, reasonable accommodation and universal design and is defined as a form of tourism that involves a process of collaboration between stakeholders that allows people with disabilities access, to operate independently, equitably and with dignity by providing products, services and tourist environments with universal design. Accessible tourism for all can be developed on the basis of public-private partnerships and good management practices through international cooperation actions, training of human resources, use of heritage in practicing this form of tourism and improving accessibility to destinations by diversifying transport systems. The form of classic tourism has a future for those who dream of another world and hopes to have other opportunities by improving the accessibility of facilities, adapting means of transport, diversifying attractions and destinations.*

Key words: *tourism, accessible tourism, good practices*

INTRODUCTION

Accessible tourism is not yet defined, although there is an internationally agreed and approved definition of the term accessible tourism - initially, tourism for all, but also inclusive tourism. Accessible tourism means not only the construction of accessible ramps and paths, but also:

- building products and services for a larger and rapidly growing market;
- conditions in which this type of tourism is no longer a niche but, rather, a segment that approaches of 25% from total tourist expenses. [2]

Accessible tourism came to the attention of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) only two decades ago, the first recommendations on accessible tourism were made in 1991 by the UNO General Assembly, revised recommendations in 2005 and 2013, followed by other documents fundamental in 2015, 2016 and 2020.

Accessibility must be present along the entire tourism chain: [5,6,7,8,11,12,15,18,20]

- cultural activities: cinemas,
- buildings of tourist interest,
- museums, theaters and others;
- other activities and tourist events: excursions in the surroundings, natural environments, beaches, green spaces, sports; accommodation,
- food services;
- conventions: accommodation facilities;
- facilities for organizing conferences;
- tourist information and publicity (information, training and booking);
- management of tourist destinations and staff training);
- urban and architectural environments: communication (easy access to information and communication technology, text display, audio, Braille);
- public hygiene facilities, horizontal movement, vertical movement (elevators, ramps, stairs), prices, signaling, parking areas;
- modes of transport and stations: important arteries, facilities, means of transport, stations, passenger terminals.

According to the World Tourism Organization, 2013, seven principles of universal design are defined for accessible tourism:

- Fair use;
- Flexibility in use;
- Simple and intuitive use;
- Perceptible information;
- Tolerance for error;
- Reduced physical effort;
- Size and space for approach and use: coverage, handling and use, body size, posture or mobility of the user. [3,7,8,9,28]

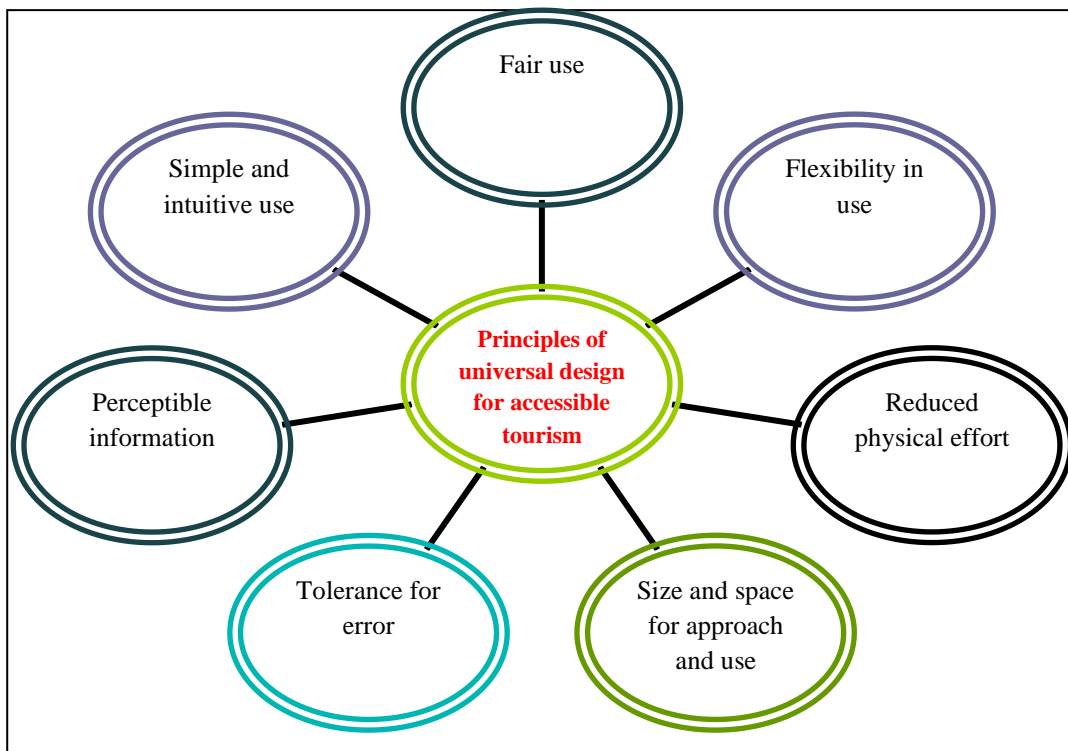


Figure 1. Principles of universal design for accessible tourism

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Accessible tourism, for good management, must be developed on the basis of good management practices and public-private partnerships and through international cooperation that contributes to the improvement and qualification of human resources for the development of tourist resources of interest. For these reasons, in this scientific approach, based on studies undertaken and published in the literature, we have analyzed the main barriers to the practice of this form of tourism in order to propose relevant solutions to improve tourism activity accessible at destinations, in normal and pandemic conditions, taking into account the recommendations of the World Tourism Organization and the awareness of the need for accessibility in as many places as possible.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The World Tourism Organization, 2015, [27] develops a handbook regarding accessible tourism for all based on public-private partnerships and good management practices in which it presents, in addition to the theoretical framework on tourism for all and public-private partnerships and good practices related to: cooperation international training, human resources training, historical and architectural heritage, accessible heritage

and sports in accessible tourism, accessibility in historic centers, museums and hotel chains, historic and tourist cities, parks and gardens and transport systems.

The Handbook on Accessible Tourism for All Principles, Tools and Best Practices - Module I Accessible Tourism - Definition and Context [23] returns to the definition of accessible tourism and the principles of universal design, delimits accessible tourism from tourism for all, presenting in detail its position on accessible tourism, the demand for accessible tourism and the main barriers in accessible tourism and accessible tourism as a business opportunity. [5]

The growing demand for accessible tourism services is due to the growing number of people with disabilities reaching one billion in 2019 [2] and the elderly for whom international symbols have been created (Figure 2). The main barriers in accessible tourism are:

- environment - activities in tourist destinations, buildings, communication, infrastructure and transport, planning and reservation;
- social - attitudinal barriers, low degree of awareness of the need for accessibility, low level of special qualification for accessible tourism.



Figure 2. International symbols for different types of disabilities

Source: [2, 11]

The document Handbook regarding Accessible Tourism for All Principles, Tools and Best Practices - Module V Best Practices in Accessible Tourism [24] presents some examples of good practice in specific activities:

- travel agencies;
- accommodation;
- research;
- tourist destinations;
- staff training;
- tourist information;
- promotion and transport in accessible tourism.

The document Reopening tourism for travelers with disabilities: providing safety without unnecessary obstacles [25] makes a number of recommendations to various stakeholders along the tourism chain to help them adapt to the new hygiene protocols, and

of health. Regarding planning and information on new travel protocols, the following is recommended:

1. making web pages and applications accessible;
2. the inclusion of all information related to the accessibility of these platforms;
3. COVID-19 travel warnings;

It is necessary to update the information, all instructions and alerts in accessible and clear language formats, so that each tourist knows how to proceed in order to make it easier to find the access way. The Tourist Information Offices will have to take into account in the design of all protocols in order to provide transparent and up-to-date instructions for any disabled visitor by installing ticket machines, touch-free and button-free technologies and interface terminals. Taking in consideration the specific positions and signaling of hand sanitizers and clear separators, so that customers with different disabilities to enjoy a smooth travel experience by maintaining effective communication between tour operators, travel agencies and other suppliers services so that customers with specific requirements can be advised on their travel decisions.

With regard to transport, it is recommended to adjust the new protocols in airports and stations for passengers with access or disability requirements, and to maintain routine hygiene and disinfection of all areas, regularly disinfecting mobility equipment used for access, guiding customers to purchase direct travel where possible, in order to reduce exposure to obstacles and risks by keeping places reserved or with priority access for women, people with disabilities, seniors, etc. without compromising anyone's safety. It is necessary to improve the employees in order to be able to properly inform customers with disabilities about the new rules and to announce the opening hours of repair shops and rental companies of mobility devices at the destination.

Regarding accommodation and public catering establishments, it is recommended for accessible tourism, ensuring the physical distance between meals so that all users can move safely, ensuring the thorough and regular cleaning of all areas, equipment and service areas for customers, the clearing of sidewalks and pedestrian alleys from bar and restaurant furniture to allow their use by people with disabilities and by all other tourists. Facilitate full access to fully accessible reception desks, adjust counter height, separator position, and signaling, magnetic loops and provide chairs for guests so that all users can make a normal comfortable check-in, guaranteeing the individual use of the sets sealed cutlery and/or disposable equipment by customers with disabilities and seniors and their assistance, upon request. Staff training to provide services without problems to customers with disabilities by introducing automatic check-in/-out processes, QR code service catalogs/menus, card key systems, accessible web pages/applications and touch-free hand dryers and restricting the use of accessible toilets for those who need them and disinfecting them after each use.

Regarding the activities in the tourist destination, it is recommended to pay special attention to:

- potential risks in amusement parks and gyms and fitness rooms;
- observance of sanitary instructions for frequently handled equipment;
- adapting itineraries/routes from travel guides;
- taking into account the size of groups and the safety of customers with disabilities and the elderly;
- providing information and planning the visit;
- adapting protocols for disabled visitors to museums;
- unsealing the features of accessibility to natural facilities and ensuring security for all;
- keeping access equipment to swimming pools and beaches disinfected;

- compliance with the ratio of seats reserved for visitors with disabilities at cinemas, monuments, concert halls and theaters.

The UNWTO's Inclusive Recovery Guide to the Socio-Cultural Impact of Covid-19 on People with Disabilities was developed in pandemic conditions. This document complements the recommendations on adapting protocols to different special needs, assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, inclusive training and work for all, including accessibility in tourism business planning, improving accessibility through new technologies and social innovations and inclusive policies in post-COVID-19 tourism.

The analysis of globally accessible tourism must be done:

1. from the point of view of tourist promotional materials, analyzes were made on different continents, in different countries and at different levels. Thus, it is found [14] that in the decision-making process of travelers with disabilities they are dissatisfied with the official tourist information on accessibility. Many of the interviewed tourists mentioned accessible travel forums and travel bloggers as good sources of information, but it is found that the official communication is missing. [4]

2. of the special conditions of tourists with disabilities, studies show that tourism is still far from being accessible based on an examination of the attitudes and experiences of tour operators towards people with disabilities, finding that although the macro policy environment is favorable to a built environment accessible, the transport and services sector and the level of involvement of the tourism industry are still in the trial and error phase. [1, 16]. Tourists with special needs complained about the lack of information on accessibility, special parking spaces, ramps, toilets and routes specially designed for them in tourist attractions.

However, accessible tourism has a future for those who dream of another world and hope to have other opportunities:

- improving the accessibility of facilities;
- improving transport;
- diversification of attractions and destinations;
- collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders.

CONCLUSIONS

Accessible tourism and the principles of universal design, delimit it from tourism for all, through its position on the tourism market, the demand for this form of tourism and the main barriers that delimit its practice as a business opportunity.

The demand for accessible tourist services is due to the growing number of people with disabilities and the elderly and involves special arrangements at destinations equipped with international symbols for this form of classic tourism which is accessible tourism. In pandemic conditions, it is necessary to improve the sociocultural guide of Covid-19 on people with disabilities by adapting the protocols to different special needs and assistance during the pandemic, through new innovative technologies in post-COVID-19 tourism. For these reasons, accessible tourism must be analyzed globally in terms of tourist promotional materials and the special conditions of tourists with disabilities in order to make it accessible to as many destinations as possible. Taking in consideration these aspects, we consider it is necessary to promote and expand this type of niche tourism by increasing the level of knowledge and by creating educational and training opportunities in this field.

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