

UDC 338.48-6:364-325.8:005.962

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/hst-2025-23-100-27>

TOURISM SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISSABILITIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SERVICE PROVIDER

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Abstract

The tourism industry has huge potential to bring huge socio-economic benefits by providing services to disabled travellers (Michalska and Kaczmarek, 2023). There is a need to create more offers for this demographic group, as the needs of people with disabilities are the same as those of all other customers, but organizing tourism for people with disabilities requires more investment and brings fewer economic benefits. The provision of tourism services for people with disabilities poses specific challenges. Depending on the type of disability, there are requirements for the adaptation of infrastructure, the competencies of employees, and measures to ensure the quality of services. Actors in the tourism industry need to recognise these different needs and strive to create a more inclusive and accessible environment. The main tasks for tourism service providers are to improve the infrastructure and adapt it to the needs of different groups of people, to train and prepare employees to serve customers with special needs, to create specially tailored services for the disabled and to integrate into the increasingly growing sector of tourism for the disabled. This is particularly important when the provision of tourism services to people with disabilities will have to be adapted to higher requirements in accordance with the principle of universal design, in order to create tourism conditions adapted to different types of disabilities, be it physical, sensory or mental disabilities. **The aim of the study** is to examine the tourism services for disabled people through perspective of the service providers. Analysis of scientific literature and documents and qualitative research-interview **methods** were used to conduct the research. Six persons who organize or are involved in the organization of tourism services for people with disabilities participated in the study, Their practical experience is more than ten years. **Results.** The analysis of the interview was carried out using the Content analysis, identified the categories of the research: types, motives and applications for the provision of services for people with disabilities market for Tourism Services for People with disabilities regulation of tourism services for people with disabilities; problems in organizing tourism services for people with disabilities. Subcategories describing the categories have been identified, problems in the provision of services for people with disabilities have been identified. **Conclusion.** In the provision of services for the disabled, problems arise in the adaptation of transport, accommodation establishments, the adaptation of visited and other service objects and the need to introduce into the adaptation of infrastructure. Another problem is the lack of a skilled workforce and the additional costs of hiring specialists to provide quality services to people with disabilities. However, despite the additional costs, providers receive a lower profit margin in return and are less motivated to provide services to people with disabilities.

Key words: Tourism sector, service providers, people with disabilities.

Introduction. The relevance of the topic became on official policy and aspiration after changes have been made in the social integration ideology for inclusion of people with disabilities into society. When integrating disabled people into society it is imperative to listen to the needs of those with special needs. Firstly, there is a need for easier accessibility of public and private surroundings. For example, in 2016, the United Nations Organization showed great interest in the matter. After numerous discussions, it came to a conclusion that there is no need to create separate services for the disabled people, rather,

there must be universal access for everyone in public and private spaces. Furthermore, evidence showed that countries which provided universal access for all had seen an increase of tourism by people with disabilities. (Martin-Fuentes et al., 2021). Tourism can benefit the disabled people enormously and have an exceptional impact for their quality of life. One of the most popular solution for integration of people with disabilities into the tourism sector is a universal design. Although, unfortunately, it is only applied in the most economically strong countries (Švagždienė et. al., 2021) In the EU, tourism of disabled people makes up 9% of the market and is an area which is not commonly explored, which could bring additional value to whole of the society. **Problem statement.** Problems that providers encounter when organizing tourism services for people with disabilities. **The aim of the researches.** Examine the tourism services

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for disabled people through perspective of the service providers. **The research objectives:** highlight the features of organising tourism for people with disabilities, evaluate the complexity when providing such specific services; reveal the attitude of service providers towards the needs of people with disabilities and their possibilities to participate in tourism activities. **Methodology of investigation:** Analysis of scientific literature and documents; qualitative investigation – interview. Qualitative research conducted using the interview method. Šuminas (2020) argues that qualitative research methods allow for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives by providing contextual information. A semi-structured interview questionnaire was used, which includes four groups of questions and suggestions submitted by the subjects. The questionnaire has been compiled on the basis of the authors' studies indicated in the table 1 and the documents regulating tourism for people with disabilities.

Six persons who organize or are involved in the organization of tourism services for people with disabilities participated in the study. The practical experience of the respondents from the age of 10 and more provided an opportunity to answer the research questions, allowing them to draw logical and consistent conclusions.

Results. The analysis of the interview was carried out using the Content analysis. Table 2 shows the categories and subcategories of the research.

After the investigation, the interview, the main tendencies have emerged. When interviewing the representatives of the businesses – no systematic discrimination or negative attitudes towards the disabled

people were discovered. The main divide between the businesses was their ability to adapt their services for disabled people. The bigger the business – the more it adapted. Also, the larger businesses showed greater knowledge and understanding for those with disabilities. Regardless, all of the respondents showed a universal level of understanding, that people with disabilities require the same services as people without disabilities and the importance of accessibility was highlighted and ensured mostly by the local governments and EU collaboration. In none of the interviews it was mentioned, that legal regulation would be an obstacle to participate in the tourism sector for people with disabilities. Again, the larger businesses were more acquainted with the activities of World Tourism Organisation and have implemented their recommendations into their activities. Another key point to highlight was that the larger the business – the more it depends on EU financing (directly or indirectly). Larger businesses also attract more attention and involvement from governments, science and transport sectors and associations of people with disabilities. Smaller businesses, generally, hold tourism of people with disabilities a sector in which one has to invest a lot, and in return there is little financial benefit, unless there is a financial incentive from governments or international organisations. The main reason the larger businesses invest in tourism for people with disabilities is diversification of the income and establishment of positions in the mentioned market. General problem in the market of tourism for people with disabilities is human resources. Some businesses try to attract potential employees and invest in their

Table 1

Structure of the questionnaire

| Question groups | Authors used to compile the questionnaire |
|---|---|
| Group 1 Types, motives and applications for the provision of services for people with disabilities | De Matteis et al., 2021; Gonda, 2021; Švagždienė et al., 2021; Martin-Fuentes et al., 2021; Darcy&Pegg, 2011; Zaluska, et al., 2022; Carneir, 2024; Kastenholz, 2015; Figueiredo&Silva, 2018; Zajadacz, 2015; Ozcan, et al., 2021; Zaluska et al., 2022; Truyols, 2023. |
| Group 2 Market for Tourism Services for People with Disabilities | Zaluska et al., 2022; Švagždiene et al., 2021; Martin-Fuentes et al., 2021; Michalska & Kaczmare, 2023; De Matteis et al., 2021; Figueiredo&Silva, 2018; Gonda, 2021; Gumelar, 2022; Bak&Krug, 2022; Arslan&Yildirim, 2021. |
| Group 3 Legal regulation of tourism services for people with disabilities | ISO, 2021; Popiel, 2016; Zajadacz, 2015; LRV, 2022; UNWTO, 2013; ENAT 2022; LRS Neįgaliųjų asmenų teisių apsaugos įstatymas (XIV-1722), 2023; LRS Neįgaliųjų socialinės integracijos įstatymo pakeitimo įsakymas (XIV-1722), 2024; Ponasiuk A. & Wszendybyl-Skulska E., 2021. |
| Group 4 Problems in organizing tourism services for people with disabilities | Arslan&Yildirim, 2021; Bak&Kruk, 2022; Domingues Vilaet al., 2024; Carneiro et al, 2022; Gonda, 2021; Gumelar, 2022; Krajewski&Kaczmarek, 2022; Martin-Fuentes et al., 2021; Matteis et al. 2021; Mischalska&Kaczmare, 2023, Švagždienė et al., 2021. |

Table 2

Categories and subcategories of the research

| Categories of the research | Subcategories of the research |
|--|---|
| Types, motives and applications for the provision of services for people with disabilities | Type of services provided |
| | Reasons for the provision of services for the disabled |
| | Adaptation of services according to the types of disability. |
| | Adaptation of public infrastructure for disabled tourism. |
| Market for Tourism Services for People with Disabilities | Market size |
| | Demand |
| | Government policy |
| Legal regulation of tourism services for people with disabilities | Legal obstacles |
| | WHO World Tourism Organization Recommendations and Guidelines |
| | Legal regulation in the Republic of Lithuania |
| | European Union support |
| Problems in organizing tourism services for people with disabilities | Cooperation proposals |
| | Involvement of service providers: additional funds and risks |
| | Service Provider Engagement: Benefits of Service Demand for Investment in Disabled Tourism |
| | Involvement of service providers : The scale of the requirements for a business providing this type of service. |
| | Reluctance to invest |
| | Adaptation of services for people with disabilities |
| | Staff training |

training, others are giving just an in-house training. The lack of competencies to serve people with disabilities is a challenge for service providers. Some comments and recommendations were received from the performed interviews. One of the most reoccurring themes was that there is lack of cooperation from the side of bureaucrats, who seemingly do not fully comprehend nor understand the expectations of the businesses, especially the businesses that work in a fast-paced market where speed is crucial when striving for profit.

Discussion. The aim of the research was to investigate the tourism services for people with disabilities from the point view of service providers. The need of the research from this point of view came from the lack of resources in the scientific field. The disregard for the scientific evidence often led to a tendency to conclude that there is a lack of involvement from the business side. The results of the scientific research help to understand the motivation of the businesses whether or not to participate in the tourism sector for people with disabilities; it highlights the difficulties encountered when organizing such services and provides the best practices which help business to grow. Previous cases raised the question why the participation of people with disabilities in the tourism sector is low and the answer was that no one takes into account expectations of the disabled people and it

causes negative experiences and opinions of tourism between the mentioned group (Darcy & Pegg, 2011). The results of the investigation provided insights of tourism sector of people with disabilities from the perspective of businesses that were not researched before. In the previous researches other authors went deeper into investigating physical barriers which were seen as the main obstacle for travel of the aforementioned (Kastenholz, Eusebio and Figueiredo, 2015). Another issues in some previous cases mentioned the high need of specially trained personnel, who had a lack of competencies for the needs of people with disabilities and that influences the quality of services. This was the main reason to investigate the problem from the view point of business, what issues they encountered when recruiting and educating employees. An investigation was conducted into the area of tourism of disabled people through the lens of social organisations as intermediaries between tourism industry and people with disabilities, its influence in improving accessibility. However, results in the conclusion had similar issues – financial difficulties, lack of trained personnel and infrastructure (Carneir, 2022). Researchers previously made a hypothesis, that the tourism sector for people with disabilities was ignored due to service providers' failure to implement an inclusion model and receive the profit if it were implemented (Buhalis&Darcy,

2011). The results from the interviews with business representatives has revealed that larger businesses are better prepared to apply an inclusivity model meanwhile gaining profit at the same time.

The economic benefit for the business was researched by Michalska and Kaczmarek (2023) who looked closer into the relationship between inclusive tourism and social development. The main argument of these authors is that the tourism industry has a great potential to bring great social and economic benefit when providing services for people with disabilities. As a result the previously mentioned authors state, that there is a need for services to create more services for the discussed group. During the performed interviews it was necessary to ask business representatives about the economic benefit and adaptation of services for people with disabilities. The result was, that business has the understanding of what services people with disabilities want, which are basically the same as the rest of society. But on the other hand, organising tourism services for people with disabilities require more investment and provide less profit.

This research concluded that the larger businesses had established their position in the tourism sector. Due to their strong financial standing, they were able to invest in and have obtained better position when providing services of people with disabilities. The future researches could be based on the question why smaller businesses lack of readiness to involve into tourism of people with disabilities and what challenges the governments and other organisations encounter when encouraging smaller businesses to involve into the aforementioned market. This problem is particularly acute due to the requirement for the application of universal design principles in the field of tourism. Universal Design seeks to create tourism conditions that are adapted to different types of disabilities, be they physical, sensory or mental disabilities. The provision of tourism services for people with disabilities will have to be adapted to higher requirements. The universal design principles implemented ensure that the environment, products and services are adapted for use by all individuals.

Conclusion. Organization of tourism services for people with disabilities looks the same as for the rest of population, but problems arise when trying to adapt services to specific forms of disabilities. The main problems start with organizing transport due to accessibility of buses, airplanes, ships and other forms of transportation. Service providers have to work additional hours to ensure there will not be any transport related issues for customers with disabilities. Even though the public

information states that accessibility for all is ensured, but there is always a risk that a service will not be suitable for the disabled. Similar misleading information problem occurs in hotel services, when infrastructure is not adapted properly for customers with different forms of disabilities. Accessibility issues remain in tourism destinations mainly due to historical heritage status of an area or other obstacles that inhibits every tourism destination to adapt for every form of disability, causing discrimination for those with disabilities in how they can access tourist attractions in comparison to those without mobility issues. Another problem is lack of qualified workforce and additional spending when hiring specialists. Some companies try to cut corners and provide short in-house training to tick a box for training given on the topic of disabilities reality, the lack of competences are felt greatly. Organizers of tourism services for people with disabilities encounter additional costs when ordering additional services to provide quality service for people with disabilities. Despite additional costs, service providers in return receive smaller profit margin and are less motivated to provide services to people with disabilities.

The business representatives that participated in the research unanimously expressed positive opinion for providing services to people with disabilities. Not even a single respondent discriminated the disabled people, they do not wish to discriminate or decline their services to them. Main problem arises from business adaptation to provide services to people with disabilities. Larger the business, like rehabs or tourism organizers, the better prepared to provide services for disabled people and have better knowledge of disabled people tourism market and follow World Tourism Organisation's recommendations and European Union's guidelines and use financial support given by the EU. As the research showed the smaller businesses have a lack of information and knowledge, they lack motivation and cannot see financial gains in adapting their services for people with disabilities. All of the business representatives agree that legal regulation is not a problem to get involved in the tourism sector for disabled people and on the contrary governments ensure accessibility to tourism locations and enable businesses to provide services to disabled people. Research also shows that people with disabilities request and desire same services as the rest of population. Larger business tend to respond better to the needs of disabled customers and show greater initiatives to involve disabled people in the tourism market, while there is, unfortunately, a lack of initiative from smaller businesses.

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ТУРИСТИЧНІ ПОСЛУГИ ДЛЯ ЛЮДЕЙ З ОБМЕЖЕНИМИ МОЖЛИВОСТЯМИ З ТОЧКИ ЗОРУ ПОСТАЧАЛЬНИКА ПОСЛУГ

Анотація

Туристична індустрія має величезний потенціал для того, щоб принести величезні соціально-економічні вигоди, надаючи послуги мандрівникам з обмеженими можливостями (Michalska and Kaczmarek, 2023). Існує потреба у створенні більшої кількості пропозицій для цієї демографічної групи, оскільки потреби людей з інвалідністю такі ж, як і у всіх інших клієнтів, але організація туризму для людей з інвалідністю потребує більших інвестицій та приносить менше економічної вигоди. Надання туристичних послуг для людей з інвалідністю ставить конкретні виклики. Залежно від виду інвалідності існують вимоги до адаптації інфраструктури, компетенцій працівників, заходів щодо забезпечення якості послуг. Суб'єкти туристичної галузі повинні визнавати ці різні потреби та прагнути створити більш інклюзивне та доступне середовище. Основними завданнями для постачальників туристичних послуг є вдосконалення інфраструктури та її адаптація до потреб різних груп людей, підготовка та підготовка працівників для обслуговування клієнтів з особливими потребами, створення спеціально адаптованих послуг для людей з обмеженими можливостями та інтеграція у все більш зростаючий сектор туризму для обслуговування клієнтів з особливими потребами. Це особливо важливо, коли надання туристичних послуг людям з обмеженими можливостями має бути адаптоване до більш високих вимог відповідно до принципу універсального дизайну, з метою створення туристичних умов, адаптованих до різних видів інвалідності, будь то фізичні, сенсорні або розумові вади. **Метою дослідження** є розгляд туристичних послуг для людей з обмеженими фізичними можливостями з точки зору постачальників послуг. Для проведення дослідження було використано аналіз наукової літератури та документів, а також якісні методи дослідження-інтерв'ю. У дослідженні взяли участь шість осіб, які організовують або займаються організацією туристичних послуг для людей з обмеженими можливостями, їх практичний досвід становить понад десять років. **Результати.** Аналіз інтерв'ю був проведений з використанням аналізу Контена, виявлено категорії дослідження: види, мотиви та сфери застосування послуг для людей з обмеженими можливостями, ринок туристичних послуг для людей з інвалідністю, регулювання туристичних послуг для людей з інвалідністю; проблеми організації туристичного обслуговування людей з інвалідністю. Визначено підкатегорії, що описують категорії, виявлено проблеми у наданні послуг для людей з обмеженими можливостями. **Висновок.** При наданні послуг для інвалідів виникають проблеми в адаптації транспорту, закладів розміщення, адаптації відвідуваних та інших об'єктів сфери послуг і необхідності впровадження в адаптацію інфраструктури. Ще однією проблемою є нестача кваліфікованої робочої сили та додаткові витрати на найм спеціалістів для надання якісних послуг людям з обмеженими можливостями. Однак, незважаючи на додаткові витрати, надавачі отримують натомість нижчу норму прибутку та менш мотивовані надавати послуги людям з обмеженими можливостями.

Key words: Tourism sector, service providers, people with disabilities.

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Received date 07.03.2025

Accepted date 17.04.2025

Published date 07.05.2025

How to cite: Andželika, Labutienė, Regina, Andriukaitienė. Tourism services for people with disabilities from the perspective of the service provider. HUMANITIES STUDIES: Collection of Scientific Papers / Ed. V. Voronkova. Zaporizhzhia: Publishing house «Helvetica», 2025. 23(100). P. 239–244.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.32782/hst-2025-23-100-27>