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# **E-Accessibility Policy for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Tourism Marketing. Case Study from Regional Hotel Units in Greece**

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**Abstract.** Nowadays, there is a growing interest for social inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in tourist industry. Tourism is vital part of modern lifestyle and is considered beneficial for individuals with disabilities enhancing personal development and promoting quality of life. This project aims to investigate policies implemented and kind of services offered in tourist industry concerning persons with disabilities who have barriers for leisure time, not only physical but also internal, cultural and social. Research is being carried out on hotel units of four and five stars in Greece. Given the fact that tourism is considered as an important sector in the economy which improves the standard of living in a country, its adaptation to web tourism with innovations in technology and development of social policies appropriate for persons with disabilities, that can facilitate travelling, can promote tourist movement and also can offer a travel motive for them.

**Keywords.** E-Accessibility, Web Tourism Policy, Disability, Tourism Marketing, Social Inclusion

## **1. Introduction**

Due to the changes in political but also in social scene towards individual with disabilities there is a growing academic interest for the social inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in tourist industry. According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2010, p.69), “assess to recreational, tourism, leisure and sporting activities” is a right for all human beings. The convention indicates that under the social and bio-psychosocial model approach of disability-according to the bio-psychosocial model (BM) social and personal factors leads people to several levels of disability: individual, institutional, social, (ICF 2002), the society is responsible for creating disability if it doesn't predict full access in all the aspects of life. Tourism and leisure are beneficial for individuals with disability not only for their social inclusion but also to their general quality of life and personal development.

## **2. Literature Review**

In the past, research attempted to examine the interrelation of the reality of accessible tourism through different visions like human rights and universal design (Buhalis, et. al., 2012). Current research is aiming to reflect on the future perspectives of the disability in relation with tourism from the aspect of accessibility for disabled individuals. As an emerging area of academic study,

accessible tourism can have a broad range of developing and enriching opportunities through the vision of a dynamic social context. In order to have a broader view of the notion of accessible tourism we need to rely on a multidisciplinary approach based on psychology, economy, geography, technology, architecture as well as disability studies. However, the emerging opportunities accessible tourism needs to overcome fundamental adversities in cultural, social, economic and information level so as to be expanded and become beneficial for individuals with disabilities.

Accessible tourism for individual with disabilities should be expanded, involving all stakeholders so as to obtain a set of ground rules and code of practice which can facilitate the emergence of a new era of inclusive accessible tourism. Service providers could be positively influenced by conscious for their rights customers so as to follow accepted rules of service quality involving the local culture and the given resources. Success of the accessible tourism will be determined by the ability of tourism providers to recognize the human rights for all.

Given the inclusive nature of tourism as a promoting form of a new ‘industry attitude’, tourism could be a new transformational force that could influence the notion of acceptance of difference in the society and produce positive side-effects like creating more works, resulting in economic growth (Michopoulou, Darcy, Ambrose, & Buhalis, 2015).

As Naniopoulos et al. (2016) mention in order to define assessable tourism we have to focus on accessibility in information, in transportation, in accommodation, in accessible services in hotels and accessibility in open spaces (museums). According to Kagermeier (2017) accessible facilities are only adequate for the target groups (such as people with disabilities) if the entire tourism service is included such as:

- Organization (preparation, information, booking)
- Trips at the destination
- Other services
- Leisure and sports activities
- Cultural activities / sightseeing
- Arrival & departure
- Post-visit feedback
- Orientation
- Mobility at the destination
- Accommodation
- Shopping
- Catering & gastronomy

Also, disability involves a variety of situations such as mobility issues, visual or hearing impairments, cognitive difficulties, chronic illness etc. That means stakeholders should be able to meet all these different needs. In their study Cloquet et.al. (2018), they found out that in a specific place in England (Cornwall) after a qualitative and quantitative analysis of brochures and websites, that inclusion for tourists with disability was very weak.

In their study in Italy Agorino et. al. (2017), tried to investigate if tourism in Italy is accessible. They found out that several environmental (access to buildings) and information barriers (e.g., web sites not adequate for the different types of disabilities) prohibit inclusive practices in tourism.

In their research project (Naniopoulos, Tsalis, & Nalmpantis, 2016) called MEDRA (Mersin and Drama municipalities' cooperation on accessible tourism), they examined the accessibility in tourism for persons with disabilities in Greece and Turkey. They concluded that in Greece there is still a lot of work to be done in order Greece achieve the same levels of accessibility as it is in other European countries.

In another study (Tutuncu & Lieberman, 2018), accessibility for persons with visual impairments was examined through semi-structured interviews. They emerged the need for hotel industry in changing attitudes and policies and implementing an accessibility check list to identify the certain barriers that persons with visual impairments may face during their accommodation (such as use of braille and signage).



*Image 1: Disable Access*

This particular project aims to investigate the policies implemented and the kind of services offered in Hellenic tourist industry concerning persons with disabilities who have particular barriers existing for their holiday/leisure time, not only physical but also internal, cultural and social.

Given the fact that tourism is considered as an important sector in the economy which improves the standard of living in a country, its adaptation to web tourism with the innovations in technology and the development of social policies appropriate for persons with disabilities and their families, that can facilitate travelling, is a cover stone and can promote overall tourist movement and also can offer a travel motive for persons with disabilities to visit Hellenic hotel units.

### **3. Methodology**

Electronic accessibility refers to the ease of use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by people with disabilities. Websites of Hotel Units should be developed and / or updated in such a way that users with disabilities have access to information such as:

- For people who are blind, sites must be able to interpret by programs that read the text loudly and describe any visual images,
- For people with low vision, websites need adjustable large fonts and brightly contrasting colors,
- For people who are deaf or deaf, the audio content must be accompanied by text editions of the dialogue. The language of the spotlight can also help make audio content more accessible.

At the international level, the Web Accessibility Guidelines, developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), provide standards for Web accessibility. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force on 3 May 2008, draws attention to the need to ensure equal access for people with disabilities to ICTs in relation to others and will help to remove barriers to information, Internet. At national level, laws and regulations can promote compliance with accessibility standards.

The use of ICT, such as the Internet, is quickly becoming an essential part of the economic, educational and social life of many people today. Therefore, it is vital that Websites can be used by everyone, so that people with disabilities have the same access to information as everyone else.

The creation of a website that is fully compliant with the new WCAG 2.0 provides a wide range of benefits for the company as well

- Ensure future operation
- Easy-to-Use Websites
- Optimization of search engine ranking
- Faster loading of the page
- Enhancing Public Image
- European Union and national government subsidy programs

The new WCAG 2.0 covers all the disabilities that affect Internet access and includes: visual, acoustic, physical, speech, cognitive, and neurological disabilities. Additional features - text reading, letter size, color, contrast, keyboard navigation - are installed in all sections of the web page and are unaffected by editing or creating new content. So, they do not add extra load to the page managers, and they do not exclude any of the new or renewed content.

### ***Accessibility Bar - Accessibility of Disabled People***

The addition of the accessibility bar to the WCAG 2.0 update frameworks as well as the operations it provides does not affect the aesthetics of the site and has been developed with the appropriate technology for optimal viewing on Desktop, Tablet, and Smartphones.

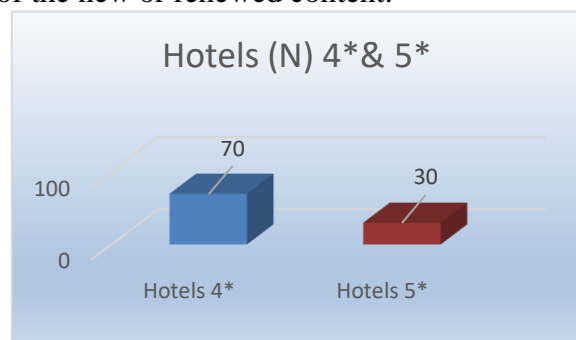


Figure 1

### ***Sample***

In the present study, data were collected from 5-star and 4-star hotel websites in the Region of Attica, Greece. The sample consists of 100 Hotel Units, of which N = 70 is 4 \*, and the remaining N = 30 belong to Category 5 \* (fig.1).

## **4. Results**

The results showed that the sites of these Hotel Units followed the WCAG 2.0 standard in a very small percentage (5%) although their websites in most cases had up-to-date content and were greatly optimized with new web technologies. Regarding the provision of information to the public by the Hotel Units on the infrastructure for disabled people supporting their establishment, the following findings were found:

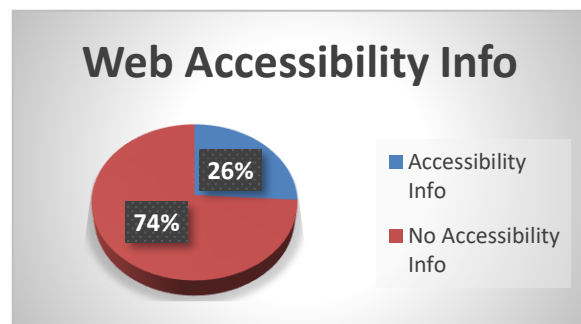


Figure 2

From the total of 100 Hotel Units in the Attica region, it was found that 26% (N = 26) reported accessibility infrastructures for disabled people, while the remaining 74% (N = 74) did not report any relevant information about provision of services related to the accessibility of the respective population (fig. 2). It was also found that 4 Star Hotels were superior to 5 Star Hotels in updating facilities infrastructure for people with disabilities. The present research will continue for the rest of the areas of Greece in order to make more secure conclusions regarding the information infrastructure of facilities for people with disabilities and how these infrastructures will be presented.

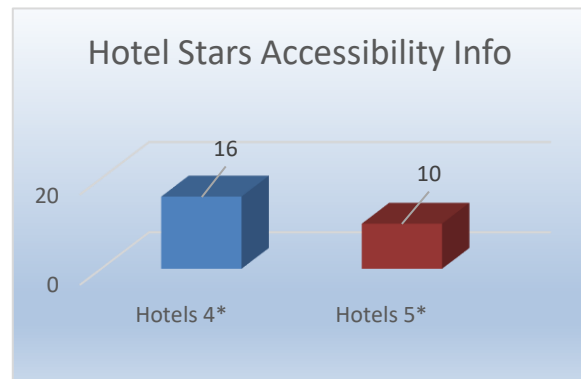


Figure 3

## 5. Conclusion

According to Zajadacz (2015) in future research education and training programs for all the workers in the tourism industry in issues relating to disability, the creation of new products and services that provides accessibility in all levels (information, transportation, environment), taking into account the views and suggestions of persons with disabilities could help in restricting barriers and achieving full participations in all aspects of the society for persons with disabilities.

Creating a broad interdisciplinary alliance of architects, historians, economists, policy makers, and travelers with disabilities can produce a major improvement in the accessibility of facilities, transportation, attractions and destinations. When this alliance work in harmony and the developed strategies target the accessible tourism market only then 'socializing' tourism access can be granted.

That broad alliance is crucial factor so as to develop accessible tourism solutions and same time emphasizing the value of the market.

In conclusion a collaborative attitude can highlight the complementary nature of the different scientific approaches and can influence the tourism industry therefore can transform the horizons of the accessible tourism. The quality of the collaboration of all parties can play a major role for beneficial future developments equally shared for all parties. In addition, tourism should be developed as industry that promotes understanding, inclusion and well-being for all in an equitable way (Michopoulou et al., 2015)

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