

УДК 338.242
JEL Classification: Z310

DOI: 10.37332/2309-1533.2023.4.2

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ACCESSIBLE TOURISM: EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE AND UKRAINIAN ASPECTS

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ДОСТУПНИЙ ТУРИЗМ: ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИЙ ДОСВІД ТА ВІТЧИЗНЯНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ

Formulation of the problem. Accessible tourism is an important but under-researched area in tourism studies. There are also problems regarding its definition and concepts because of different approaches within the scientific world. However, the accessible tourism is the basis of the modern tourism because of the common generally accepted trends of equality and tolerance of modern world. Accessible tourism is extremely important for Ukraine in the context of its integration into the European Union.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The group of domestic and foreign scientists, such as D. Buhalis, T. Coles, S. Darcy, T. Dickson, O. Ivanova, E. Michopoulou, L. Naumenko, M. Senkiv, G. Shaw, L. Slatvinska, M. Zsarnoczky and others made a significant contribution to the study of the issue of barrier-free environment and accessible tourism. However, the issue of forming a model of accessible tourism for affected by the war groups of tourists remains relevant.

Setting objectives. The purpose of the article is to systematize the approaches to defining the concept of “Accessible Tourism” and to develop the model of accessible tourism for affected by the war groups of tourists that can be the basis for the integration of domestic tourism into accessible tourism of Europe.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks were solved: to study the genesis of accessible tourism category; to establish the peculiarities of accessible tourism; to outline the benefits of accessible tourism; to classify the groups of tourists with special needs; to identify the complementary components of the proposed model.

Presentation of the main research material. The tourism sector has become more important compared to the past if it is observed from an economic, environmental and social perspective. The number of people travelling with physical, hearing and cognitive problems has increased in recent times because of the help of latest technological developments. Life expectancy has also increased due to advances in modern medicine, which means an increase in the number of tourists over the age of 65. An estimated 1,3 billion people – or 16% of global population worldwide – experience a significant disability today [1]. On the January 1, 2021, that is, a year before the full-scale invasion, there were 2 million 703 thousand people with disabilities in Ukraine, according to the Ukrainian State Statistics Service. During the year and a half of the full-scale invasion, the number of Ukrainians with disabilities increased by 300,000 and now this figure has reached 3 million [2].

The European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT) refers to Accessible Tourism (also known as “Access Tourism”, “Universal Tourism”, “Inclusive Tourism” and in some countries such as in Japan “Barrier-

free Tourism”) tourism and travel that is accessible to all people with disabilities or not, including those with mobility, hearing, sight, cognitive, or intellectual, psychosocial disabilities, older persons and those with temporary disabilities [3].

Accessible tourism is a transformative approach that aims to ensure travel and recreational activities are accessible to everyone, regardless of physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities. This inclusive form of tourism not only broadens the horizons for individuals with disabilities but also fosters a more diverse and welcoming global travel industry.

Accessible tourism transcends the conventional boundaries of leisurely exploration, weaving together strands of social science, urban planning, technology, and policy-making. It is a subject that demands rigorous investigation, considering not only the immediate impact on individual travellers but also the broader implications for communities, industries, and the global landscape.

While there are not universally agreed-upon definitions of “Accessible Tourism” provided by specific scientists, researchers, or scholars, the concept has been explored and discussed in academic literature. Different experts emphasize various aspects of accessible tourism, and their definitions reflect their specific perspectives and areas of focus.

S. Darcy and T. Dickson emphasize the multifaceted nature of accessible tourism. They define it as “tourism that takes into account the needs of everyone, regardless of their age, physical, intellectual or sensory abilities” [4, p. 33].

D. Buhalis and E. Michopoulou consider accessible tourism within the broader context of information and communication technologies. They interpret it as “a process that enables 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 environment” [5, p. 181].

G. Shaw and T. Coles approach accessible tourism from the perspective of destination management. They determine it as “the ongoing endeavour to make tourist destinations, products, and services accessible to all people, regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities, or age” [6, p. 399].

H. Gibson addresses the economic implications of accessible tourism. He clarifies it as “a niche market that involves providing travel services and facilities for persons with disabilities” [7, p. 594].

These definitions highlight the diverse perspectives within the academic community on what constitutes accessible tourism. While the emphasis may differ, common threads include the importance of creating inclusive and equitable tourism experiences for individuals with diverse abilities and needs. The interdisciplinary nature of accessible tourism is evident in these definitions, incorporating aspects of social inclusion, technology, destination management, and economic considerations.

Consequently, beyond the conventional paradigms of tourism, accessible tourism encapsulates a vision where every individual, regardless of physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities, has the opportunity to engage in the rich tapestry of global adventures.

To summarize, the essential elements of accessible tourism include:

– Universal Design: accessible tourism promotes the concept of universal design, which involves creating spaces, products, and services that are usable by everyone, regardless of age, ability, or status. This includes designing hotels, transportation systems, and attractions that are accommodating for people with varying levels of mobility;

– Adaptive Technologies: the integration of adaptive technologies plays a crucial role in making tourism more accessible. From wheelchair ramps and elevators to assistive listening devices and accessible websites, technology plays a pivotal role in breaking down barriers to travel;

– Inclusive Information and Communication: Accessible tourism emphasizes providing information in formats that are accessible to all. This includes offering materials in braille, providing sign language interpreters, and ensuring that websites are designed to be navigable for individuals with visual or cognitive impairments;

– Training and Awareness: The success of accessible tourism relies on the training of hospitality staff and the broader community. This involves fostering awareness about the needs of individuals with disabilities and equipping service providers with the knowledge and skills to offer inclusive services.

The benefits of accessible tourism extend far beyond the immediate advantages for individuals with disabilities. Embracing accessibility in the travel industry yields numerous positive outcomes for destinations, businesses, and society as a whole. Here are some key benefits:

– Economic Impact: accessible tourism expands the customer base, tapping into a market that was previously underserved. This results in increased tourism revenue, as individuals with disabilities and their companions contribute to the economy through accommodations, transportation, dining, and attractions;

– Employment Opportunities: the growth of accessible tourism generates demand for skilled and empathetic professionals who understand the needs of diverse travelers. This not only boosts employment opportunities in the tourism sector but also fosters a more inclusive and diverse workforce;

- Global Reputation: destinations that prioritize accessibility enhance their global reputation. Positive experiences shared by individuals with disabilities contribute to a destination's appeal, attracting a broader range of tourists and positioning the locale as a welcoming and inclusive place;
- Social Inclusion: accessible tourism promotes social inclusion by providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to engage fully in cultural, recreational, and leisure activities. This fosters a sense of belonging and breaks down societal barriers, fostering a more inclusive society;
- Innovation and Universal Design: the focus on accessibility encourages innovation and the implementation of universal design principles. This not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also improves the overall user experience for everyone, creating more user-friendly and adaptable environments;
- Legal Compliance and Risk Mitigation: adhering to accessibility standards helps businesses and destinations comply with legal requirements. It also mitigates the risk of legal challenges related to discrimination, ensuring a safer and more inclusive environment for all;
- Sustainable Tourism: accessible tourism aligns with the principles of sustainable tourism by promoting responsible practices that benefit both the environment and the community. It encourages long-term thinking and planning that considers the needs of diverse populations;
- Enhanced Customer Loyalty: businesses that prioritize accessibility often build strong relationships with customers. Meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities fosters loyalty and positive word-of-mouth, leading to repeat business and increased customer satisfaction;
- Cultural Exchange and Understanding: accessible tourism fosters cultural exchange and understanding by encouraging interaction between individuals with diverse backgrounds and abilities. This contributes to a more tolerant and inclusive global society.

In essence, accessible tourism is a catalyst for positive change, offering economic, social, and cultural benefits that extend far beyond the individual traveler. By embracing inclusivity, the travel industry not only enhances its economic viability but also plays a pivotal role in shaping a more equitable and interconnected world.

The European experience of accessible tourism reflects a dynamic landscape where efforts are underway to create a more inclusive travel environment. European countries have made significant strides in recognizing the importance of accessible tourism and have implemented various measures to ensure that individuals with disabilities can fully participate in and enjoy the diverse offerings of the continent.

For instance, **Germany** has been actively working to enhance accessible tourism, recognizing the importance of providing inclusive travel experiences for individuals with disabilities. Germany has implemented comprehensive legislation to ensure accessibility. The Federal Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (BGG) and the Equal Treatment Act (AGG) are crucial pieces of legislation that address accessibility in various domains, including tourism [8, p. 185]. German cities and tourist destinations are increasingly investing in accessible infrastructure. Many public spaces, transportation systems, and tourist attractions have been adapted to accommodate individuals with disabilities. Efforts include the installation of ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. Germany boasts an extensive and well-connected public transportation system, and efforts have been made to make it more accessible. The hospitality industry in Germany has made strides in providing accessible accommodations. Many hotels offer rooms with features like widened doorways, accessible bathrooms, and other amenities to cater to the diverse needs of travelers with disabilities.

France has been making strides in the realm of accessible tourism, recognizing the importance of creating an inclusive environment for individuals with disabilities. France's diverse landscapes, from mountains to coastlines, are becoming more accessible for nature tourism. National parks and outdoor recreational areas are working on providing accessible trails, viewpoints, and facilities to enable individuals with disabilities to enjoy the country's natural beauty. Coastal regions in France are taking steps to make beaches more accessible. Wheelchair-friendly access points, adapted beach equipment, and trained staff contribute to a more inclusive seaside experience [9, p. 196]. Major cities in France, such as Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse, are working towards improving urban accessibility. This includes accessible public spaces, tactile paving, and efforts to ensure that tourist attractions and services are welcoming to all visitors.

Belgium, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, has been actively working towards making tourism more accessible for individuals with disabilities. Belgium has established legal frameworks and regulations to promote accessibility. The Belgian Disability Act of 2003, along with subsequent amendments, outlines measures to improve accessibility in various sectors, including tourism. These legislative efforts provide a foundation for making public spaces, transportation, and services more inclusive. Technology is playing an integral role in making travel more accessible in Belgium. Websites, mobile apps, and navigation tools are incorporating accessibility features to provide individuals with disabilities the necessary information for planning and navigating their trips [10, p. 585].

Poland hosts a myriad of events and festivals throughout the year. Event organizers are increasingly considering accessibility factors, such as providing accessible seating, sign language interpreters, and other accommodations to ensure that individuals with disabilities can participate fully. Tourism initiatives in Poland actively promote accessible travel. Awareness campaigns seek to educate both the tourism industry and the

public about the importance of inclusivity, fostering a more welcoming environment for travelers with diverse needs.

While progress has been made, ongoing efforts and collaborations between the government, businesses, and advocacy groups are essential to continue advancing accessibility in tourism throughout Europe. The commitment to inclusive tourism reflects a broader global trend toward creating travel experiences that embrace diversity and cater to the needs of all individuals.

Since **Ukraine** is on the way to join the EU, it is important to consider its achievements in the field of accessible tourism. First of all, it is important to consider that in addition to the already known groups of people with special needs, **Ukraine** has its own group of tourists – people affected by the war (Fig. 1).

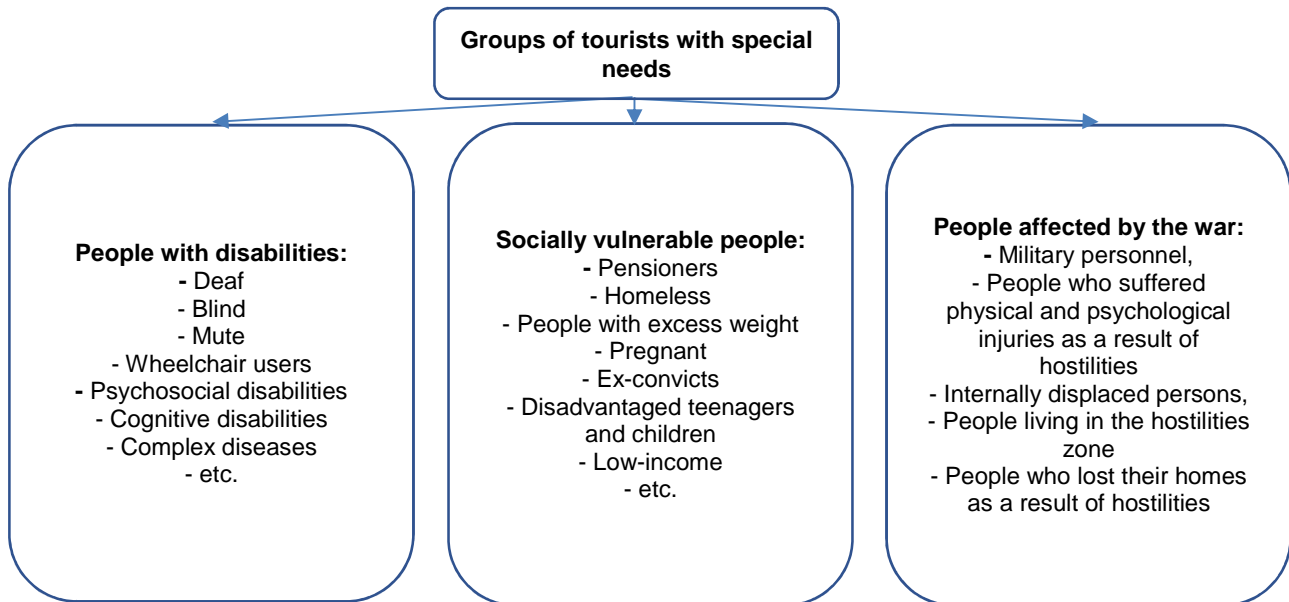


Figure 1. Typing groups of tourists with special needs in Ukraine

Source: created by the authors

The first and second groups of tourists have been studied in detail in the works of many scientists, so let's analyse in more detail the third group of special needs tourists. In our opinion, a tourist (a person who in one way or another suffered from russia's armed aggression), is under the mutual influence of three institutions: the Government, Society and Enterprises in the field of hospitality (including tourist destinations) (Fig.2).

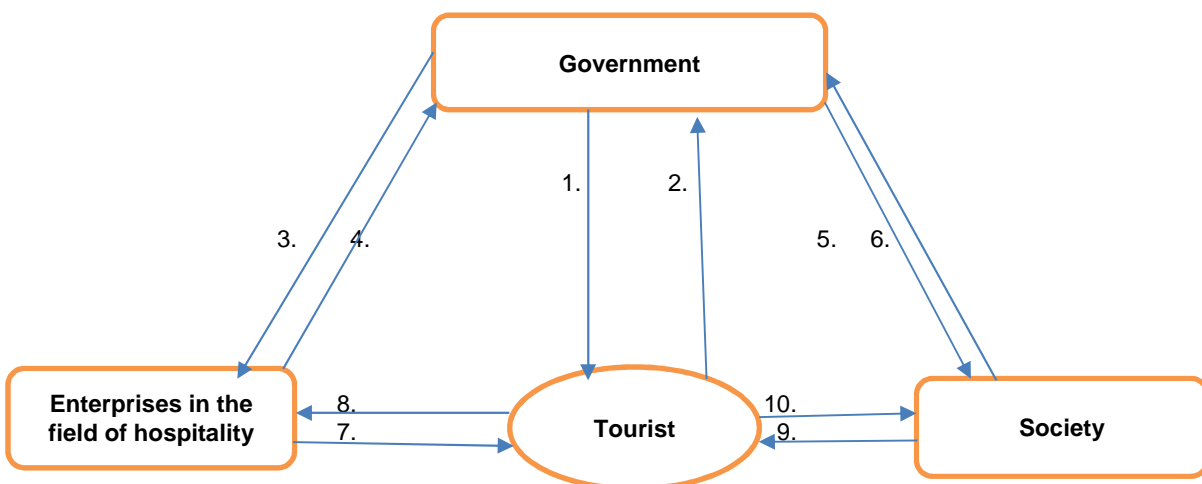


Figure 2. Model of accessible tourism for affected by the war groups of tourists

Source: created by the authors

1:

– Creation of government programs for physical and psychological rehabilitation through the using of recreational resources of Ukraine;

- Building of recreation centers equipped for people with disabilities;
 - Creation of retraining programs for work in the tourism sector;
 - Creation of information centers where you can find out about the programs of physical and psychological rehabilitation.
- 2:
- Initiating appeals to the government regarding the needs of tourists;
 - Creating petitions.
- 3:
- Allocation of funds, creation of benefits for hospitality enterprises that create barrier-free environments.
- 4:
- Initiating appeals to the government regarding the needs of hospitality enterprises;
 - Creating petitions.
- 5:
- Advocacy and advertising of barrier-freeness through mass media;
 - Implementation of educational programs on accessibility in the tourism sector.
- 6:
- Initiating appeals to the government to create support programs for both tourists affected by the war and hospitality businesses that provide barrier-free access.
- 7:
- Transport accessibility of tourist destinations;
 - Staff training to work with tourists affected by the war;
 - Ramps;
 - Elevators;
 - Equipping tourist facilities with technical means that will allow people with disabilities to visit them (audio guides, Braille);
 - Benefits and discounts for this category of tourists.
- 8:
- Advertising of barrier-free hospitality enterprises in social networks;
 - Employment of people with disabilities in the field of tourism.
- 9:
- Volunteering;
 - Distribution of information about tourist offers for people with disabilities;
 - Promoting tolerance;
 - Marking of objects that can be visited by people with disabilities on Google Maps;
 - "Cancellation culture" in relation to business that are intolerant of people who have suffered as a result of the war/
- 10:
- Refusal of the role of "victim";
 - Refusal of resentment towards society and aggression towards it.

Using of this model will allow Ukraine to work with tourists affected by the war comprehensively and at all levels. It will allow creating a barrier-free environment for this category of tourists. Model of accessible tourism for affected by the war groups of tourists can become the basis for the integration of domestic tourism into accessible tourism of Europe.

Conclusions from the conducted research. To summarize, it should be mentioned, that the research through the barrier-free environment of accessible tourism reveals a paradigm shift that transcends traditional notions of travel. As we navigate the key features, benefits, and experiences across various countries, it becomes evident that accessible tourism is not merely a concept but a transformative force shaping the future of the travel industry. As the world collectively embraces the values of diversity and inclusivity, accessible tourism stands as a testament to the transformative power of travel to unite, inspire, and enrich the lives of all individuals, regardless of their abilities. The path forward is clear – a future where every journey is an invitation for everyone to explore and savor the beauty of our shared global heritage.

The presented results can serve as a basis for further theoretical and methodological studies related to accessible tourism and be a foundation for the formation of inclusive strategy, improvement of practical tools for making relevant decisions in the field of accessible tourism at different management levels.

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