



Problems Encountered in the Development of Accessible Tourism for People with Disabilities and Solution Suggestions

Seda Kınıklı *¹

¹ Pamukkale University Faculty of Education, Türkiye, sedakinikli@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article analyzes the fundamental problems restricting the tourism experiences of individuals with disabilities and presents comprehensive solution strategies for the development of accessible tourism. Accessible tourism, which plays a critical role in the context of the full and equal participation of individuals with disabilities in social life and their enjoyment of fundamental human rights, faces significant challenges in practice. Foremost among these challenges are infrastructural and environmental inadequacies, barriers in information and communication, deficiencies in service quality, negative societal attitudes, and shortcomings at the policy level. The study emphasizes the necessity of a holistic, rights-based approach—which adopts Universal Design principles, is supported by strong legal regulations, relies on effective inter-stakeholder collaboration, and includes comprehensive training and awareness initiatives—to overcome these multidimensional problems. It is concluded that the implementation of accessible tourism should be regarded as a strategic goal that provides significant social and economic benefits not only for individuals with disabilities but also for the entire society and the tourism sector

Article

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1. Introduction

Tourism is defined as a global-scale sector that enriches individuals' cultural perspectives, offers opportunities for rest and rejuvenation, and also creates noteworthy added value for local and national economies (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2011, Kızılgöçü, 2023). The worldwide increase in international tourist mobility and tourism revenues increasingly emphasizes, in both academic platforms and international policymaking processes, the imperative of offering these experiences to all segments of society with an accessible and equitable understanding (UNWTO, 2023; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). In this framework, the accessible tourism approach, which aims for the full, autonomous, and dignified participation of individuals with disabilities, elderly persons, and other individuals with mobility limitations in tourism activities, is increasingly being adopted as an essential element of sustainable and inclusive tourism policies (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). Beyond merely targeting a specific market segment, accessible tourism is also accepted as a fundamental philosophy that contributes to achieving goals such as, in particular, reducing inequalities (SDG 10) and promoting inclusive societies (SDG 11) within the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2017).

1.1. The Concept and Importance of Accessible Tourism

Accessible tourism, often referred to by terms such as "Tourism for All" or "Barrier-Free Tourism," is a holistic approach that aims for tourism infrastructure, products, services, and information systems to be equally, autonomously, and honorably usable and experienceable by everyone, irrespective of their individual differences such as disability status, age, or temporary or permanent limitations (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; UNWTO, 2016). This approach extends beyond merely ensuring physical access to encompass multidimensional components such as access to information (e.g., accessible websites, materials in alternative formats), accessibility in communication (e.g., sign language interpretation, easy-to-understand language), and inclusiveness in service processes (Buhalis et al, 2012; Kınıklı, 2024, Kızılgöçü, Ç. (2023)). It is acknowledged that accessibility benefits not only individuals with disabilities as defined by the United Nations but also a much broader range of users, including families with strollers, those with temporary mobility limitations, elderly individuals, or those carrying heavy luggage, and that this situation shows strong alignment with "universal design" principles aimed at providing better-designed environments and services for everyone (Imrie & Hall, 2003; Preiser & Smith, 2011).

The significance of accessible tourism is based on profound and multi-layered justifications that extend far beyond a superficial understanding of social responsibility or a niche market strategy. In the social dimension, accessible tourism practices strengthen social inclusion by supporting the full and active participation of individuals with disabilities in societal life, alleviate isolation, reinforce individuals' self-confidence and sense of autonomy, and significantly improve their overall quality of life (Daniels et al., 2005; Köksal, 2024). From an economic perspective, considering that the World Health Organization (WHO) states that approximately 16% of the global population (1.3 billion people) lives with a significant disability, individuals with disabilities and their accompanying family members, friends, and caregivers, who often travel with them, present a considerable and yet largely untapped market potential for the tourism sector (WHO, 2023). Research indicates that this market generally has longer-than-average stays, a tendency to travel during off-peak seasons, and a high level of per capita expenditure (European Commission, 2021). Consequently, strategic investments in accessibility enable destinations and tourism businesses to enhance their market diversity and competitiveness, positively affect their brand image, and contribute to economic sustainability (Dwyer & Darcy, 2011). On an ethical and legal plane, accessibility should be regarded as a tangible reflection in the tourism sector of respect for fundamental human rights, equality of opportunity, and the principle of non-discrimination, and legal regulations and practices in this direction should be encouraged (United Nations, 2006; European Commission, 2014; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011).

1.2. The Right of Individuals with Disabilities to Participate in Tourism

Tourism is a significant socio-cultural activity that meets universal human needs such as rest, recreation, acquiring new experiences, and social interaction (Ryan, 2002, Kızılgöçü, 2025), and enhances individual well-being. In this framework, the participation of individuals with disabilities in tourism activities is recognized internationally as a fundamental human right and is guaranteed through various conventions. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which is prominent among these conventions, explicitly recognizes the right of individuals with disabilities "to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport" (United Nations). The aforementioned Convention imposes an obligation on States Parties to take all appropriate and effective legal, administrative, and other measures to ensure that individuals with disabilities can fully exercise these rights, by ensuring the accessibility of touristic venues,

facilities, services, and events (United Nations, 2006; Ferri et al., 2022). These obligations encompass access to information and communication as well as physical access.

The restriction or complete obstruction of access to tourism opportunities and experiences due to various barriers should be considered not merely as a deficiency in service provision, but also as a violation of the rights of individuals with disabilities to full and equal participation in social life and as a substantial form of discrimination (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Shaw & Coles, 2004). Given the proven positive contributions of tourism experiences to individuals' psychological well-being, self-esteem, feelings of autonomy, and the strengthening of their social connections, barriers to access also mean the elimination of these vital benefits (Daniels et al., 2005; Packer et al.; Unur & Kınıklı, 2020). Therefore, reshaping tourism policies and industry practices with a proactive, inclusive, and rights-based approach that centers on the rights of individuals with disabilities is not only a legal obligation but also an indispensable step for the realization of the principles of social justice and equality (Page & Connell, 2020).

1.3. Aim and Scope of the Research

The primary objective of this article is to analyze, through an in-depth and systematic method, the intricate and multifaceted problems encountered in the process of globally advancing accessible tourism for individuals with disabilities; and to develop strategic, practicable, and sustainable solution proposals directed towards the elimination of these problems. This study will examine the impediments to accessible tourism within a broad spectrum—ranging from physical environmental and infrastructural inadequacies (transportation, accommodation, touristic sites, etc.) to accessibility problems in information and communication systems, from personnel attitudes and deficiencies in knowledge and skills in tourism services to gaps in national and international level policies and legal regulations, and from low societal awareness and prejudices to individual factors affecting the travel motivations and experiences of individuals with disabilities—all within the framework of main categories frequently emphasized in the literature.

In terms of scope, this article, rather than focusing on a specific geographical area, a particular disability group, or a singular type of tourism, aims to present a theoretical framework and a practical roadmap that could have general applicability for common problems encountered in accessible tourism and their solutions. In this vein, the proposed solution strategies will reflect a holistic and integrated approach, in a manner that is meaningful and practicable for policymakers and public institutions, tourism industry stakeholders (accommodation businesses, transport companies, tour operators, destination management organizations, technology suppliers, etc.), as well as civil society organizations and individuals with disabilities themselves. Ultimately, through this study, it is aimed to contribute to the development of an understanding geared towards the simultaneous and coordinated improvement of all components of the accessible tourism ecosystem, thereby creating more inclusive tourism experiences for everyone.

1.4. Significance of the Research and Contribution to the Literature

Accessible tourism is a significant field of study that has garnered increasing attention in both policy agendas and academic inquiries, particularly over the last two decades (Buhalis et al., 2012; Domínguez et al., 2024). Studies conducted in this field have made valuable contributions in identifying the various aspects of accessible tourism, and the travel experiences, motivations, and impediments faced by individuals with disabilities. However, upon

reviewing the existing literature, it is observed that a significant portion of studies predominantly focuses on specific types of disability (e.g., physically disabled, visually impaired), particular destinations, or a singular dimension of accessibility (e.g., physical access, access to information) (Michopoulou et al., 2015; Qiao et al., 2022). It is also underscored in various literature reviews that there is still a substantial need for comprehensive and synthesizing studies—supported by current data and offering concrete action plans for different stakeholders—that address accessibility problems and solution proposals for these problems with a broad perspective encompassing different disability groups, all links of the tourism supply chain, and policy development processes, through a systematic and holistic method (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; Small et al., 2012).

This article, precisely at this juncture, aiming to remedy the aforementioned lack of a holistic perspective in the current literature, seeks to present a comprehensive synthesis of the multifaceted impediments encountered in the advancement of accessible tourism and the strategies aimed at overcoming these impediments, in light of current academic discussions, international best practice examples, and relevant policy documents. The significance of the study stems from its potential to serve not only as a theoretical contribution to academic discourse but, beyond that, as a practical guide and strategic framework for all stakeholders actively involved in the process of developing accessible tourism – policymakers, public institutions, private sector representatives, civil society organizations, and individuals with disabilities themselves. In this regard, it is anticipated that the findings and proposals of the article will lay the groundwork for the development of more effective and inclusive accessibility policies and legal regulations at national and local levels, and for tourism businesses, the adoption of innovative and accessible service practices that will enable them both to fulfill their social responsibilities and to gain a competitive advantage. Ultimately, this study aims to make a meaningful contribution to the improvement of the travel freedoms and tourism experiences of individuals with disabilities, thereby promoting the global dissemination and internalization of a more just, equitable, and accessible tourism paradigm for all.

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

2.1. The Concept, Models, and Classifications of Disability

Disability is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon, described as a consequence of the intricate interaction between an individual's health condition and environmental and personal factors (WHO, 2001). This understanding associates disability not with an individual problem, but rather with the barriers encountered in societal participation. States of disability generally encompass variations in motor, visual, auditory, mental, and psychosocial abilities.

Approaches to disability have essentially crystallized around three main models:

- 1. Medical Model:** This model, which perceives disability as an individual's illness or deficiency, seeks solutions in medical treatment and rehabilitation processes (Barnes & Mercer, 2010). It is oriented towards the goal of 'normalizing' the individual and tends to disregard societal barriers; this situation can lead to individuals with disabilities being perceived as passive recipients.
- 2. Social Model:** Developed as a critical response to the medical model, the social model advocates that disability essentially stems from physical, attitudinal, and institutional barriers created by society (Oliver, 1990; Oliver, 2013). The solution is to eliminate barriers in society rather than to modify the individual. This model forms the basis of the accessible tourism paradigm, as it emphasizes the necessity of organizing tourism infrastructure and services to include everyone (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

- 3. Biopsychosocial Model and Human Rights Approach:** The World Health Organization's (WHO) International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (WHO, 2001) present a biopsychosocial framework that explains disability through the interaction of medical, individual, and social factors. More recently, the human rights-based approach, reinforced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations, 2006), regards disability as a form of human diversity and advocates for individuals with disabilities to equally benefit from all rights (Degener, 2016). This approach also defines accessible tourism as a right.

The comprehension of these models pertaining to disability, particularly the social model and the human rights approach, is of vital importance for developing inclusive and equitable strategies aimed at the advancement of accessible tourism.

2.2. The Concept and Dimensions of Accessibility

Accessibility, in its most fundamental sense, is the quality of products, environments, programs, and services being perceivable, understandable, usable, and reachable by everyone in an equal, autonomous, and dignified manner, without regard to disability status or other individual differences (United Nations, 2006; ISO, 2021). This phenomenon is directly related to the elimination of societal and environmental barriers emphasized by the social model and encompasses not only physical barriers but a much broader spectrum.

The primary aspects of accessibility can be listed as follows:

- 1. Physical Accessibility:** The design of buildings, transportation vehicles, open spaces, and other physical environments in a manner usable by everyone (e.g., ramps, elevators, accessible toilets).
- 2. Information and Communication Accessibility:** The presentation of information and communication in formats perceivable and understandable for different disability groups (e.g., accessible websites (WCAG standards), sign language interpretation, Braille alphabet, easy-to-understand language).
- 3. Economic Accessibility:** Products and services being reasonably priced and economically affordable for individuals with disabilities.
- 4. Service Accessibility:** Service delivery processes and personnel attitudes being inclusive in nature, and personnel being conscious and well-equipped regarding disability.
- 5. Social and Behavioral Accessibility:** The elimination of societal prejudices, discriminatory attitudes, and stigmatization to promote the full participation of individuals with disabilities in social life.

All these aspects are in close conjunction with the principles of Universal Design (Universal Design), which is a proactive design philosophy. Universal Design aims for products and environments to be usable by the widest possible range of users from the outset, without the need for special adaptation or design (Story et al., 1998; Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012; Center for Universal Design, 1997).

In the tourism context, the consideration of all these accessibility aspects as a whole (from infrastructure to information, from service to behaviors) is of vital importance for individuals with disabilities and other persons with limitations to be able to have uninterrupted, enjoyable, and equitable tourism experiences.

2.3. The Concept of Accessible Tourism

The purview of accessible tourism, rather than serving a limited niche market, is an integral component of responsible and sustainable tourism, encompassing all tourism activities and destinations. The primary objective

is to bring the tourism experience within the realm of possibility for everyone. To achieve this objective, the principal tourism elements where accessibility must be ensured are enumerated as follows (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011; UNWTO, 2013; European Commission, 2014):

- 1. Tourism Information and Marketing:** The provision of information presented before, during, and after travel (websites, brochures, maps, reservation systems, etc.) in accessible formats and with accurate content for different disability groups.
- 2. Transportation:** Ensuring the accessibility of transportation to the destination (airports, train stations, ports, etc.) and transportation means and infrastructures within the destination (buses, taxis, public transport, pedestrian ways, etc.).
- 3. Accommodation Establishments:** Hotels, holiday resorts, and other accommodation establishments possessing physically accessible rooms, common areas, and services.
- 4. Touristic Attraction Centers and Activities:** Enabling all touristic venues and activities, such as museums, historical sites, natural areas, beaches, restaurants, shopping centers, and entertainment and sports facilities, to be experienceable by everyone.
- 5. Human Factor and Service Delivery:** Tourism personnel being conscious, well-equipped, and sensitive regarding disability and accessibility issues; and presenting a respectful and inclusive service to all guests.

Ensuring accessibility in all these elements will remove the impediments to the full and active participation in tourism of individuals with disabilities and other persons with access needs, thereby creating more qualified and enriching tourism experiences for everyone.

2.4. Accessible Tourism Practices and Related Policies in the World and Turkey

Accessible tourism is a field of continually increasing importance on a global scale, with many countries and international organizations developing policies and strategies in this regard. Organizations such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the European Union publish guidelines for the dissemination of accessible tourism and promote examples of good practice. Some countries, like Australia, Spain, and the United Kingdom, have taken noteworthy steps concerning accessible tourism through legal regulations, standards, and awareness campaigns. However, ensuring full inclusiveness in practice and consistently implementing standards continues to be a global challenge (Richards et al., 2010; Scheyvens, & Biddulph, 2018; ICF Consulting, 2018; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017).

Turkey is a significant tourism destination with its rich cultural and natural heritage. The fundamental legal framework for the rights of individuals with disabilities and their participation in social life has been established by the Law on Persons with Disabilities No. 5378 (2005) and its ancillary regulations. This legislation mandates the application of accessibility standards in various areas, including public buildings, transportation, and information services (Resmî Gazete, 2005; Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2022). The Ministry of Culture and Tourism also introduces strategies and projects from time to time aimed at the advancement of accessible tourism (T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2020). Nevertheless, there is a need for ongoing efforts and more holistic approaches in Turkey concerning issues such as the dissemination of accessible tourism practices, the full implementation of existing standards in tourism facilities and services, personnel training, and raising societal awareness (Cavlak & Cavlak, 2019). For its potential to be fully realized, it is of vital importance for Turkey to

develop its accessible tourism infrastructure and service quality in a manner consistent with international standards.

2.5. Literature on Problems in the Development of Accessible Tourism

The impediments to the advancement and dissemination of accessible tourism have been a subject extensively examined in academic literature. Numerous studies conducted have identified various problems and barriers that restrict the participation in tourism of individuals with disabilities and other persons with access needs (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; Domínguez et al., 2024).

The primary problem categories continually underscored in the literature can be enumerated as follows:

- **Physical and Infrastructural Barriers:** The inadequate physical accessibility of touristic facilities, transportation networks, and the general environment is among the most frequently stated problems (e.g., deficiencies in the availability of ramps, elevators, suitable toilets) (Burnett & Baker, 2001).
- **Information and Communication Barriers:** The lack of reliable travel information in accessible formats (e.g., large print, Braille, sign language, easy-to-understand language) negatively affects the travel planning and experience of individuals with disabilities (Michopoulou et al., 2015).
- **Attitudinal and Behavioral Barriers:** Negative attitudes, prejudices, lack of awareness, and discriminatory behaviors within tourism personnel and the general public constitute a significant impediment for individuals with disabilities (Eichhorn, & Buhalis, 2011).
- **Policy and Legal Regulation Issues:** The inadequacy of accessibility standards, the ineffective implementation of existing laws, lack of inspection, and insufficient coordination among stakeholders are also problems frequently mentioned in the literature (Page & Connell, 2020).
- **Economic Barriers:** The high cost of accessible services and special equipment, or the general economic constraints of individuals with disabilities, can also hinder participation in tourism (Yau et al., 2004).
- **Service Quality and Personnel Training Issues:** The insufficient knowledge and skills of personnel working in the tourism sector regarding disability and accessibility is a significant factor that adversely affects service quality (Darcy, 2010).

These problems, mostly interrelated and exhibiting a complex structure, constitute the fundamental challenges to the full realization of accessible tourism. This body of literature provides a foundation for the analysis of the problems to be addressed in the subsequent sections of the article.

2.6. Literature on Proposed Solutions for Accessible Tourism

In addition to the identification of impediments to accessible tourism, academic literature and reports from international organizations also present various solution proposals and strategies aimed at overcoming these barriers (Buhalis et al., 2012; UNWTO, 2016). These proposals generally necessitate a multi-stakeholder and holistic approach.

The primary solution proposals prominent in the literature can be classified under the following headings:

- **Policy, Legal Regulations, and Standards:** The development of comprehensive national policies and strategies on accessibility, the strengthening of legal regulations, the adoption of internationally accepted standards, and the effective implementation and auditing of these standards are frequently emphasized (Darcy et al., 2010).

- **Implementation of Universal Design Principles:** Planning and designing touristic infrastructure, facilities, products, and services from the outset in accordance with 'Universal Design' principles to encompass everyone is considered one of the most effective and sustainable solution methods (Preiser & Smith, 2011).
- **Education and Awareness Raising:** Organizing comprehensive training programs on disability and accessibility issues for tourism sector employees in particular, as well as for policymakers and the general public, and conducting awareness-raising campaigns, are of vital importance (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011).
- **Use of Information and Communication Technologies:** It is recommended that access to information and travel experiences for individuals with disabilities be facilitated through the use of accessible websites, mobile applications, digital information systems, and other technological innovations (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015).
- **Inter-Stakeholder Collaboration and Coordination:** Ensuring strong collaboration and coordination among government institutions, local authorities, private sector representatives, civil society organizations (especially disability organizations), and academics is regarded as a critical factor for successful implementations (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011).
- **Market Research and Data Collection:** Regular and reliable data collection on the size of the accessible tourism market, and the needs, expectations, and spending patterns of individuals with disabilities, is essential for strategic planning and investment decisions (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).
- **Financial Incentives and Support Mechanisms:** The establishment of financial support programs, tax reductions, and other incentive mechanisms to encourage tourism businesses to comply with accessibility standards is also among the proposals (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011).

These solution proposals demonstrate that accessible tourism is not merely a matter of social responsibility but also presents economic opportunities and plays a central role in achieving sustainable tourism goals. The literature reveals that the effective implementation of these solutions will ensure the full participation of individuals with disabilities in tourism and create a more qualified tourism experience for everyone.

3. Discussion

The process of advancing accessible tourism, as outlined in this study, necessitates a struggle against various profoundly interconnected impediments and the implementation of multifaceted solution strategies directed at these barriers (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011). Despite the ideal of full, equal, and dignified participation of individuals with disabilities and other persons with access needs in tourism activities, the current situation is observed to be considerably distant from this ideal. A chain of problems, extending from infrastructural inadequacies to barriers in information and communication, from deficiencies in service quality to political and managerial difficulties, and from economic constraints to societal attitudes and insufficient awareness, constitutes the fundamental challenges to accessibility (Pühretmair, 2004; Zychlinski et al., 2016). It is understood that these problems are not isolated cases but are structural issues that have permeated different layers of the tourism ecosystem and are mutually reinforcing. Consequently, this intricate structure can only be comprehensively addressed through holistic, coordinated, and sustainable solution approaches (Barnes & Mercer, 2010).

The solution proposals touched upon in outline in this study – from the strengthening of legal regulations to the adoption of Universal Design principles (Center for Universal Design, 1997), from personnel training to inter-stakeholder collaboration and the use of technological innovations – present a significant roadmap for the

transition to accessible tourism (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). However, for these solutions to be effectively implemented, a strong political will, adequate resource allocation, and a societal mindset transformation are required. In particular, the evolution of the perspective on disability from the narrow confines of the medical model to a social and human rights-based understanding will ensure that accessibility is perceived not as a gratuity but as a fundamental right (Shakespeare, 2010; United Nations, 2006). In this framework, accessibility is an investment that benefits not only individuals with disabilities but also a broad populace including the elderly, those with temporary disabilities, and families with children (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011).

The successful advancement of accessible tourism necessitates the active and coordinated participation of all stakeholders – public institutions, private sector enterprises, civil society organizations (especially disability organizations), academics, and individuals with disabilities themselves (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). In accordance with the principle of ‘Nothing About Us Without Us,’ the involvement of individuals with disabilities and their representatives at every stage of policy development, planning, implementation, and evaluation processes is of vital importance for the correct understanding of needs and the generation of effective solutions (Charlton, 1998). In light of these general discussions, it is considered that countries with high tourism potential, such as Turkey, and unique destinations within these countries, like Mersin, possess the potential to make significant strides in the field of accessible tourism by adapting the presented general solution strategies to their own local conditions and priorities (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013). However, recent studies on the region indicate that a substantial gap exists between this potential and the current reality. For instance, an assessment of historical sites within the Cilicia region revealed that major attractions, particularly in the districts of Tarsus and Silifke, lack the necessary infrastructure, such as ramps and accessible pathways, to accommodate visitors with physical disabilities, thus excluding them from a core part of the region's cultural offerings (Komşu & Aksay, 2023). This situation requires the adoption of a proactive, strategic, and inclusive vision instead of reactive and piecemeal approaches (UNWTO, 2016). Therefore, the implementation of the strategies discussed in this article, such as stakeholder collaboration and the adoption of Universal Design principles, becomes a critical and urgent task for local policymakers and businesses in Mersin to enhance both social inclusion and economic competitiveness.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In this article, the fundamental problems encountered in the process of advancing accessible tourism for individuals with disabilities and the solution proposals directed at these problems have been considered within a general framework. Although the right of individuals with disabilities to participate in tourism is a universal principle, it has been observed that multifaceted problems such as inadequacies in physical infrastructure, barriers in information and communication, deficiencies in service quality, negative societal attitudes, and difficulties at the policy level constitute a significant impediment to the full exercise of this right. Accessible tourism is not only a matter of human rights and social inclusion but also presents a significant economic potential for the tourism sector. The realization of this potential and the provision of an equitable tourism experience for all are only possible through holistic and proactive strategies that approach disability from a social and rights-based perspective, adopt Universal Design principles, and involve the active participation of all stakeholders.

In light of these general evaluations, it is recommended that various concrete steps be taken for the more effective advancement of accessible tourism in countries with rich tourism potential, such as Turkey, and in unique destinations like Mersin. Firstly, at the level of policymakers and local administrations, comprehensive strategies should be developed that make accessible tourism an integral part of national and regional development plans; the

effective implementation of existing legal regulations (e.g., Law on Persons with Disabilities No. 5378 and related standards) in the tourism sector must be ensured, and inspections should be tightened. Financial support mechanisms and tax advantages encouraging accessibility investments should be presented. Tourism sector enterprises, including all stakeholders from accommodation facilities to transportation companies, from tour operators to food and beverage venues, should make their physical and digital infrastructures accessible by adopting Universal Design principles, provide regular training to their personnel on disability awareness and inclusive service delivery, and ensure the provision of accurate, detailed, and accessible information about the services they offer.

The active participation of civil society organizations representing individuals with disabilities in policy development, implementation, and monitoring processes should be encouraged, and maximum benefit should be derived from their experience and expertise. Academics and researchers, in turn, should conduct more studies that reveal the potential of the accessible tourism market in Turkey, the unique needs and expectations of different disability groups (e.g., more specific groups such as individuals with special education needs), the economic and social impacts of accessibility implementations, and good practice examples or challenges at the local level (e.g., specifically in Mersin). Strategies developed in light of the collected data will be more target-oriented and effective. Finally, societal awareness campaigns conducted with the support of the media will contribute to overcoming negative perceptions and prejudices towards disability, thereby fostering a more inclusive and hospitable tourism understanding for everyone. These holistic efforts will enable Turkey to reach its deserved position in the field of accessible tourism and allow the enriching experiences offered by tourism to be shared by all segments of society.

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