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A Review on Challenges and Solutions to Accessible Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Accessible tourism is the continuing attempt to make sure destinations, products, and services for the tourists with disabilities are available irrespective of their incapacities or limitations and inability due to age related disability. It is a social right which is concern of all the people. Tourism centres should have been equipped with those amenities which can support the persons with disabilities, as it has been the objective of the tourism department to ensure that all tourism centres and the services provided by them to become disabled-friendly. Accessibility in tourism is an endeavour to ensure that the tourist places and destinations are accessible to all people including the persons with disabilities. As per WHO stats globally 15 percent of the population has some kind of need in accessibility. It is necessary to have accessible space for these people to carry out their activities including their leisure time and the other activities. Challenges faced by tourists with disabilities include websites which are frequently used by tourists are not accessible, unavailability of wheelchair, transport system is not accessible, there are no adapted hotel rooms, there is no professional and trained staff who are capable of dealing with accessibility issues, there may be Lack of reliable and important and necessary information on the level of accessibility of a specific attraction, also there are negligible accessible restaurants, bathrooms or toilet rooms are not adopted. The ultimate goal of barrier free design is to provide an environment that supports independent living and functioning of individuals with limitations so that they can participate fully without assistance.

This paper is focused to provide a critical review on challenges of accessible tourism and strategies to enhance its availability and access to foster a better quality of life for Persons with Special Needs.

Key Words: Universal design, persons with disabilities, universal access,

INTRODUCTION

ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

Accessible tourism is a process of collaboration between all stakeholders including Governments, tour agencies, international agencies, and the end-user which are persons with disabilities. A successful and accessible tourism product requires effective partnerships, collaboration and cooperation among many sectors at the regional, national, and international levels. An idea of a single destination visit normally involves so many factors, like accessible information, accommodation which is disable friendly, accessible shopping, and dining. The scope of tourism which is accessible thus goes beyond the tourist beneficiaries to the wider society, establishing accessibility into the social and economic values of society. The wellbeing and the rights of people with various types of disabilities are becoming nowadays a more urgent, necessary and global priority. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities calls on states to ensure that the populations with disability must have equal access to reliable information, various public services and the environment in which they reside in physically. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' goal number 11 talks about cities to be more accessible. The way to advance toward these objectives is to ensure that the people with disability have equal access to tourism.

Accessible tourism is the addition of some specific services to a typical travel experience, to enable people with a physical or intellectual disability or any other type of disability to travel with equity. This may include accessible information available in finger tips for them and ticket or any other reservation or booking systems accessible to them, ensuring barrier-free and dedicated infrastructure at destinations, transport services and hotels and trained support system including staff and facilities that allow everyone to participate. While people with disability still comprise the most non served or underserved population within tourism industry, many countries are now taking efforts to accessible tourism seriously to some extent. Amongst emerging economies, Singapore has seen the most first and have taken most initiatives. The Government of Singapore has chalked up a list of FAQs to help tourists

with disabilities to plan their own trips. One of its initiatives of Mass Rapid Transit network, it has ensured places of barrier-free access, available wheelchair-friendly toilets and train carriages, wider fare gates, Braille-friendly elevators, tactile paving for persons with blindness.

Thailand, a global popular tourism hot-spot, has taken similar steps like that of Singapore. Thailand has designated some tourism places in some regions of the country which are completely accessible to tourists with disabilities. For awareness, it launched a website called 'tourism for all' and for people with blindness a Braille-inclusive guidebook.

As for as other side of the Indian ocean is concerned, South Africa is the most accessibility and disability friendly tourism destination in Africa. There are 'Braille trails and ramp access in nature reserves, boardwalks for the wheelchair access at tourist attractions, and a dedicated website to assist and help travellers with disability. Across the Atlantic in Chile, the Chilean National Tourism Board with partnership of National Disability Service to produce a comprehensive guide for accessible travel. The country introduced wheelchair access in all metro stations, in all trains and some buses, and also launched tactile versions of its famous Chilean street art. Businesses is also involved in accessibility. A Chilean start-up 'wheel the world' made a wheelchair specially designed to navigate the uneven terrain of Patagonia.

International action and normative frameworks on Disability

International convention named "The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December of 2006.

Article 9 of this convention talks about an Accessibility and calls for member Nations to take appropriate action and measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to the physical environment, reliable information, transportation and other necessary facilities and services which are open and are provided freely to the general public.

Barriers to accessible tourism

Persons with disabilities, travelling can be a challenge, as finding the information on accessible services, checking luggage on a plane, booking a room to fulfil access needs, often prove to be difficult, costly and time consuming.

Challenges for persons with disabilities include:

- Non-professional staff not capable of informing and advising about accessibility issues.
- booking services and websites are not accessible.
- In airports there is a lack of proper accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- Non availability of accessible and specially adapted hotel rooms, restaurants, toilets, malls, and other places of public.
- Transport services are not accessible; there is no space to accommodate a wheel chair in buses etc.
- Streets, tourist spots are not accessible.

No information on accessible facilities, services, equipment rentals and tourist attractions.

Why is accessible tourism important

Accessibility is a important and central element of any responsible and sustainable developmental policy. It is both a human rights as well as an exceptional and developing business opportunity. In this context, accessible tourism does not only benefit persons with disabilities, but benefits all members of a society. To ensure that accessible tourism is developed in a sustainable manner, there is a requirement of accessible tourist destinations which will go beyond ad hoc services to adopting the principle of universal design, ensuring that all persons, regardless of their ability and strength like physical, cognitive needs etc. are able to use and enjoy the available amenities and facilities in an equitable and sustainable manner. This approach foregoes preferential treatment of persons with disabilities which constitutes the permitting uninhibited use of facilities and services by all, at any time, to equitable effect. And ultimately persons with disability will feel that they are not a person with an inability.

Accessibility is also an important and necessary aspect of realizing the rights of the world's elderly population. As people grow older, chances of experiencing a permanent or temporary disability may increase. A focus on accessibility can therefore ensure that people are able to participate freely and fully in the societies well in the later stages of the life. Accessible environment also benefits pregnant women and persons who are temporarily rendered immobile. The improvements to physical environment and service infrastructure that come with a focus on accessibility and also encourage a more multigenerational focus in planning for development. For families having children with special needs, there is a need of accessible infrastructure – particularly in transport system, planning of cities and buildings according to universal design which will improve the ability of these families to participate in social and cultural activities.

It is a reality of the present that transport system, motels, hotels, tourist destinations, etc. often fail to provide accessible and reliable information about accessibility in the advertisements, their websites and communication system. Implementing a safe travel, having a ramp for persons with locomotor disability, wheelchair accessibility, availability of sign language interpreters, audio guide for people with visual impairment, etc. are the basic needs of people with special needs. By failing to cater to these needs, it's really heart-breaking to see some travellers with challenges facing inaccessible services during their trip to different locations. Hotels, restaurants are also ill-equipped and under-trained to provide accessibility to the needy tourists and the related support to these people. This unavailability, inaccessibility will lead to negative consequences to the entire travel experience of persons with accessibility needs.

Accessible tourism is the continuing attempt to make sure destinations, products, and services for the tourists with disabilities are available irrespective of their incapacities or limitations and inability due to age related disability. Tourism centres should have been equipped with those amenities which can support the persons with disabilities, as it has been the objective of the tourism department to ensure that all tourism centres to become disabled-friendly. Accessible tourism should not to be treated as a burden but as an opportunity.

India is a country with reportedly more than 26.8 million people suffering from one disability or the other. This itself is a huge market which is unserved. There is an opportunity for India about a billion-dollar market at the cost of investing in making accessible destinations. According to a report by Open Doors Organization in the year 2015 accessible tourism industry was estimated to be worth 34.6 billion dollars in the United States. Similarly, the European Network for accessible tourism (ENAT) report 2015 valued the European accessible tourism market at 150-billion-euro dollars. Many destinations like London, Paris, there is even mix old and new infrastructure, but have been managed to improve accessibility while maintaining a sense of places and their identity. These are worth emulating examples and should 'guide' nations to take this up and promote it to an outstanding position. In an effort to tap the potential of persons with disability for promotion of tourist destinations in the country, the Ministry of Tourism in India has taken an initiatives and strategies to make tourist destinations an accessible and barrier-free. Guidelines have been issued by the ministries for making the tourist destinations and the facilities there as accessible through the central financial assistance.

Conclusion

Accessibility in tourism is an endeavour to ensure that the tourist places and destinations are accessible to all people including the persons with disabilities. As per WHO stats globally 15 percent of the population has some kind of need in accessibility. It is necessary to have accessible space for these people to carry out their activities including their leisure time and the other activities. People also have temporary difficulties such as pregnant women, patients in recovery from accidents and Children with special needs etc. Accessible tourism allows people with limitations like in movement, Vision, hearing and intellectual dimensions to function independently. Destinations or tourist attractions, infrastructure, transport system which are barrier free and the facilities, which are accessible. High quality devices delivered by qualified and trained staff, attractions, allowing people to participate in tourism activities. Inaccessibility in the streets and sidewalks. Some of the solutions include information which is accessible and reliable for them, accessibility of transportation like air, railways buses etc. is an important component, disable friendly accommodation and the accessible destinations developed as per the universal design. The ultimate goal of barrier free design is to provide an environment that supports independent living and functioning of individuals with limitations so that they can participate fully without assistance.

Conflict of Interest

I Declared there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to this research review.

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