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## ARTICLE

# A model proposed for sustainable accessible tourism (SAT)<sup>☆</sup>

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**Abstract** Accessible tourism is an under-researched area in tourism studies. There are also problems regarding its definitions and concepts because of different approaches within the scientific world. It is crucial to understand this theme using a multidisciplinary approach. This could mean bringing all stakeholders to common solutions in the future. In this study, a model of sustainable accessible tourism (SAT) will be introduced. This helps to understand how disabled people can intensively join in tourism activities and have the highest level of experience. Exploratory research will be used in order to develop a universal model combining sustainable tourism approaches. This proposal represents different layers of SAT's understanding and it will be discussed from various perspectives of recommendation series.

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## 1. Introduction

The tourism sector has become more important compared to the past if it is observed from an economic, environmental and socio-cultural perspective. The number of people travelling with physical, hearing and/or cognitive problems has increased in recent times because of the help of latest technological developments. It is clear that technology could not get rid of all problems but it can soften disability

problems and bring better travel experience (Yıldız, 2010). Research and development departments of land, air, sea and railway transportation industries have developed technological solutions for disabled people. However, sustainability is not seen as an integral part of these solutions (Rosenbloom, 2007).

The UN-Commission in 1987 defined sustainability as follows: 'Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Social, economic, political and ecological objectives, the involvement of different factors and the responsibility of developed and less developed countries play important roles for a sustainable tourism (Polat, 2010). The tourism industry internalizes the

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sustainability day by day and it has direct or indirect relations with 30 different industries. This will also create the opportunity to recognize and meet the needs and desires of disabled people in the future. Sustainability knowledge will be the motor of conscious development for all and it helps the accessible tourism model to not become static.

## 2. Methodology

This study is based on secondary research – such as reviewing available literature and/or data as a part of the exploratory research. Therefore, libraries, Internet and data banks were first used and brochures, organization intern directories and Internet data were analyzed and commented on. In this study, a wide-scope model for accessible tourism is developed using a sustainability approach. It is clear that there are different related research disciplines that should be considered. The idea of a model for accessible tourism is to process, analyze and develop data as well as share results in the model as knowledge (Schertler & Rohte, 1995). The Academic research in accessible tourism has been growing. However, current literature shows that it is still an under-researched area. The concepts that will be explored in the following paragraphs will give some idea about accessible tourism literature and the state of art in the research. Their relationship with the proposed model will be exactly underlined.

## 3. Integrated approaches of disability and accessible tourism related concepts

### 3.1. Terminology

It is widely observed that accessible tourism is defined within different approaches such as disability studies, leisure constraints theory, tourism systems and human rights approaches (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). A whole-life approach is gaining importance, which is a collaborative process that helps to satisfy needs of disabled people having impairments regarding mobility, vision, hearing and cognition. Permanent and temporary disabilities have been both considered as disability; moreover, needs of seniors, obese, families with children are also taken into consideration in different studies creating some confusion about the definition (Yıldız & Polatoglu, 2013). It is possible to mention some important concepts and definitions according to the EU financed study as follows (EC, 2014).

#### 3.1.1. Access needs

People want to enjoy their tourism experience and there are certain groups of requirements (EC, 2014):

- Care or assistance requirements gain importance.
- Compatibility of the environment for people with assistive tools or treatment is necessary.
- Avoiding obstacles in while using and finding tools and communication problems with staff or machines become a matter of importance.

Therefore, it is possible to have a concept of physical solutions to cover those requirements.

**3.1.1.1. Physical solutions.** Age-friendly cities, general infrastructure and accessible tourism are evaluated under the concept of *disability policies* (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). The quality of infrastructure mostly depends on where the cities are found, i.e. in developed or less developed countries. Less developed countries have different perspectives and policy instruments on accessible tourism compared with developed countries. It is necessary to evaluate every country with differentiated indicators (Worldbank, 2013). Accessible tourism can exist when there is an appropriate infrastructure for all. In many regions of the world, cities are changing, old buildings are being demolished and new living areas are opening with new hotels (Gotham, 2005). Accessibility must be taken as a central topic for a sustainable development before the change starts. As our model covers accommodation/infrastructure under terms of sustainability, this concept can play an important role in order to create accessibility indicators for hotels and other tourist attractions.

#### 3.1.2. Accessibility

Environment, product, service or information items should have the quality to be reachable and/or usable by everyone not depending on their ability. Social, disability and architectural fields refer to the concept of accessibility. Civil engineering uses this term as connectivity of a city or place (EC, 2014). Universal design is one of the concepts of accessibility as follows.

**3.1.2.1. Universal design.** Worldwide, there are one billion disabled people, of whom 80% live in developing or less developed countries (UN, 2015b). This concept of universal design is partially the base of the sustainable accessible model and the concept emphasizes the triple-bottom line approach. It has common points with the Sustainable Development Goals. Technically, it recommends equitable, flexible, simple and intuitive use, perceptible info, tolerance for error, low physical effort, size and space for approach and use (Center for Universal Design, 2009). According to Darcy and Dickson (2009), universal design will make life easier for people with disabilities (20%), seniors with access considerations (8%) and families with small children (3%). They imply that it will offer a general solution for all less sustainable living conditions. Universal design indicators will be used as main indicators for the accessible tourism model in designing man-made or purpose-built tourism attractions.

#### 3.1.3. Disability studies

According to the World Health Organization, disability is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action, while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual during involvement in life situations. Thus, disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives (EC, 2014; WHO, 2002). The UN Convention on the Rights

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