



# PROCEEDINGS BOOK

of the International scientific and  
practical conference

CURRENT TRENDS AND PROSPECTS  
OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

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**INTERNATIONAL TOURISM**



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## ACCESSIBLE TOURISM: EXAMPLES AND GOOD PRACTICES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES FROM EUROPE

### Abstract

*Tourism is an activity of people who travel outside their permanent place of residence, and today is a phenomenon that is present in all countries of the world and is growing more globally. Inclusion, disability, world aging and tourism are important fields of research, as they have implications for the supply and demand of tourism products and services. The subject of this paper is accessible tourism and a review of good examples and practices in selected European countries. The paper presents the basic aspects of accessible tourism and various initiatives related to this type of tourism in Europe. For the purposes of the paper, research methodology and secondary data sources were used by consulting relevant literature related to accessible tourism as well as the Internet. An analysis and review of examples of accessible tourism was made, based on a systematic evaluation of their content and activities. The concluding observations refer to the use of successful examples and practices from the developed tourist countries in Europe, in order to improve the conditions for accessible tourism in other countries.*

**Keywords:** *tourism, accessibility, disability, Europe*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the activity of people traveling outside their permanent place of residence, the industry that meets their needs and the impact that people and industry have on the socio-cultural, economic and physical environment of the host. Tourism today is a kind of phenomenon, an activity that is present in all countries in the world and is growing more globally. There is no country in the world that does not develop some type of tourism or a

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country where the population is not involved in tourist travel and movement outside its permanent place of residence. The involvement of tourists in travel occurs for various reasons such as business, pleasure, religion, sports and recreation or other reasons. The great role that tourism has, both in terms of cultural prosperity and economic benefits for destinations, will be supported by data provided by the World Tourism Organization at the United Nations: tourism accounts for about 10% of global gross domestic product and every tenth employed person in the world, is employed in this sector. The number of tourist arrivals in 2019 internationally reached the figure of 1.460 million, and tourist consumption amounted to 1.481 billion US dollars<sup>5</sup>.

The COVID-19 crisis has contributed to major travel restrictions and a reduction in international tourism. Health protocols and travel bans to prevent the spread of the pandemic negatively affect tourism in 2020. According to research by the World Tourism Organization at the United Nations, the arrival of foreign tourists globally is reduced by 74% or 1.1 billion tourists in 2020 travel less compared to 2019. The number of foreign tourists in the world in 2020 is 381 million, which is the lowest number of tourists in the world in the past 30 years. It is predicted that the revitalization of tourism and the positive growth of the number of tourists will be achieved in the next 5 years. In the past, due to the COVID-19 crisis, international health certificates for travel, as well as certificates for safe destinations and facilities have been accepted internationally.

Tourism today is an integral part of the way of life of modern societies. It plays a significant role in the economic activities of many countries and is one of the leading elements of international trade. In addition, tourism has great importance in communication and knowledge exchange. Given its nature and impact, tourism should be accessible to all people in the world. Thanks to the universal application of the principle of equal opportunities, guidelines and resolutions created by international institutions, as well as positive legislation in many countries, tourism and travel are considered the right of all citizens and therefore the removal of barriers should be guaranteed to enable exercising those rights. Tourism is accessible to all is a widespread social imperative, which should be made possible by public authorities and the tourism industry. People with disabilities are full citizens in the countries, becoming an increasingly important segment of the demand for tourism, acting as a generator of business activities in the tourism industry and a factor for diversification of destinations and products, as well as strategies for tourism development.

The aim of this paper is to review good practices and present examples of successful accessible tourism in selected countries in Europe. For the purposes of the paper, secondary data sources were used by consulting relevant literature in the field of accessible tourism, as well as the Internet. A review of the literature has shown that there are several authors internationally dealing with the issue of accessible tourism, and tourist destinations are increasingly working to adapt their infrastructure to the needs of people with disabilities. Using the Internet, materials related to accessible tourism are collected, which we analyze in the paper. The main method used in labor research is content analysis<sup>6</sup>. Content analysis is a research method used to systematically analyzes the content of the phenomenon being researched, in our case accessible tourism initiatives in different countries in Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> UNWTO (2020) Tourism highlights. Madrid: UNWTO.

<sup>6</sup> Ritchie, B, Burns, P, Palmer, C. (2005) Tourism research methods: Integrating theory with practice. Oxfordshire: CAB International.

## ASPECTS OF ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

Data from the United Nations World Health Organization<sup>7</sup>, show that 15% of the world's population has some form of disability, and these percentages are increasing due to the aging population in the world. Disability can be cognitive, developmental, intellectual, physical, sensory, or combined, but in all cases it significantly affects daily activities and can be present from birth or occur throughout life. Disability is a broad concept that can have different meanings in different approaches. When refer to the medical or health condition of the person, then it is a medical model of disability. It can also refer to the restrictions that the community (environment) imposes on people, in this case it is a social model of disability. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides the following definition: Persons with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments who, in interaction with a variety of disabilities, can prevent their full and effective representation in society on an equal footing with others<sup>8</sup>.

Developed countries have various programs for inclusion of people with disabilities in tourist travel. State institutions create legislation, develop and adapt their infrastructure, and conduct promotional campaigns. The non-governmental sector is also involved in these activities. In addition, catering facilities, restaurants, hotels, cruise ships have serious attention to people with disabilities, access to their facilities is made, ramps and elevators are installed, guide dogs are rented for the blind, menus are adjusted in Braille alphabet et cetera.

In recent decades, there has been an increasing volume of scientific literature concerning accessible tourism internationally. A number of studies are being conducted worldwide and various researches are being published related to the accessibility in tourism and travel of persons with disabilities. Accessible tourism can be defined as a form of tourism that includes cooperation between several stakeholders through which accessibility is provided to tourists with disabilities, so that they can function independently and with dignity, through universally created tourism products, services and environment. The word cooperation in the definition of accessible tourism is of great importance, because accessible tourism is a chain of interrelated values. All aspects of accessible tourism are interconnected in order to successfully serve tourists with disabilities. This means that hospitality facilities, transport, cultural facilities, the entire infrastructure should be interconnected in the value chain. Sometimes there is a "break" in the value chain in accessible tourism, such as in the destination there is access transport and hospitality facilities, but entertainment and recreation facilities or beaches are not accessible to people with disabilities. Besides the technological development, increase of investments and participation of the countries and the tourism economy in the development of accessible tourism, there is still room for many more improvements in this field<sup>9</sup>.

Many studies analyze accessible tourism, explicitly or implicitly, only from the aspect of physical accessibility of the contents<sup>10</sup>, ie the needs of only one category of persons with

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>

<sup>8</sup> Конвенција на ОН за правата на лица со попреченост во Законот за ратификација на Конвенцијата за правата на лица со инвалидност и Факултативниот протокол кон Конвенцијата за правата на лица со инвалидност (2011) Службен весник на Република Македонија бр. 172.

<sup>9</sup> Jafari, J. (2016) Encyclopedia of tourism. Gabler Verlag: Springer.

<sup>10</sup> Kim, IL., Wnng, HK. (2021) People with disabilities (PwD) in the tourism industry - concepts and issues. Critical Tourism Studies Conference VI "10 years CTS: Reflections on the road less travelled and the journey ahead", Opatija, Croatia, 26-30 June 2015 2015 pp.14 ref.41.

disabilities are covered - the physically disabled persons. Accessible tourism does not only mean the removal of physical barriers, but should provide significant experiences that will generally improve the quality of life of tourists with disabilities. The category of persons with disabilities is characterized by a particularly heterogeneous composition, it includes persons with different disabilities, different challenges and needs for exceptionally individual adaptations for accessibility. Even in a one category of people with disabilities, ie people with the same diagnosis in practice, there are individuals with different functional abilities, experiences, attitudes and different needs for adaptation.

In terms of terminology, accessible tourism, by number of authors is named inclusive tourism<sup>11</sup>, disability tourism<sup>12</sup>, barrier-free tourism, tourism for all, and some authors include it as a subset of social tourism. Social tourism means the inclusion of groups in society that are economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged to participate in tourism<sup>13</sup>.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, accessibility is a central element of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. It is an imperative for human rights and an exceptional business opportunity. Accessible tourism does not only benefit people with disabilities, but also benefits everyone. The Organization's commitment to accessible tourism began in 1991, when it adopted a Resolution entitled "Creating Opportunities for Handicapped People in the Nineties"<sup>14</sup>.

According to the European Network for Access Tourism (ENAT), accessible tourism includes<sup>15</sup>:

- Destinations without barriers: infrastructures and facilities.
- Transport: air, land and sea, more accessible to all passengers.
- High quality services: delivered by trained staff.
- Activities, events and attractions: enabled access and participation in tourism by all.
- Marketing, booking systems, websites and services: information available to all.

### **GOOD PRACTICES OF ACCESSIBLE TOURISM IN SELECTED COUNTRIES FROM EUROPE**

There is almost no country in Europe that does not pay attention to the travels of people with disabilities and does not take initiatives and activities to improve them. For the most part, urban destinations are the ones that best improve the travel and residence conditions of people with disabilities, as the benefits are also used by the local population.

Copenhagen (Denmark) is a city that has a rich offer of activities for people with disabilities. The official website of the city offers a guide to visit Copenhagen which is specially made for the needs of people with disabilities staying in this city<sup>16</sup>.

In Switzerland, serious attention is paid to travel without barriers, ie travel for people with disabilities, the elderly and families with young children. If tourists are in a wheelchair, need help, support or medical care during their holiday or the tourists are looking for information

<sup>11</sup> Human Kinetics (2010) Inclusive recreation: programs and services for diverse populations. Human Kinetics.

<sup>12</sup> Papathanassis, A. (2011) The Long Tail of Tourism: Holiday Niches and their Impact on Mainstream Tourism. Gabler Verlag: Springer.

<sup>13</sup> McCabe, S., Minnaert, L., Diekmann, A. (2012) Social Tourism in Europe: Theory and Practice. Bristol: Channel View Publications.

<sup>14</sup> UNWTO (2013) Recommendations on Accessible Tourism. Madrid: UNWTO.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.accessibletourism.org/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/copenhagen/planning/accessible-attractions-copenhagen>

on accessible tourist activities in Switzerland, they can be found on the official website for accessible tourism in Switzerland<sup>17</sup>.

In Spain, the accessibility of the destination for people with disabilities is promoted. On the website of the Tourist Organization of Spain, there are informations on organizing a trip and some tools and tips that are useful for enjoying an affordable vacation in the country<sup>18</sup>.

The city of Paris and the region on its official website provides comprehensive information on the services offered to people with disabilities such as transport, access to monuments, attractions and museums, activities, accommodation, food and more<sup>19</sup>. For the needs of tourists, a tourist guide "Accessible Paris" has been prepared, which contains important information about the city which is one of the most important tourist destinations in the world<sup>20</sup>. Like Paris, other destinations in France offer and promote accessible tourism<sup>21</sup>.

The Doge's Palace and Piazza San Marco in Venice are fully accessible for wheelchair users. The Colosseum in Rome is also wheelchair accessible<sup>22</sup>. In general, in Italy as a tourist destination a number of activities have been made in order to improve the conditions for accessible tourism<sup>23</sup>. The National Tourism Agency of Italy successfully implements several campaigns for accessible tourism and produces guides for the needs of tourists<sup>24</sup>.

The city of Mechelen (Belgium) has prepared a promotional video for the opportunities it offers for the accessibility of visitors. The video shows available hospitality facilities, transport, museums, activities, etc.<sup>25</sup>

Salzburg (Austria) invests in improving accessibility in the city through four aspects: accessible environment and public spaces; transport and infrastructure; information and communication channels; and public institutions and services<sup>26</sup>.

The Sozopol Foundation has implemented projects that provide infrastructure and services that enable tourists with disabilities or reduced mobility to access the Black Sea city of Sozopol in Bulgaria. The infrastructure includes the installation of ramps, elevators, accessible toilets and tactile paving of paths for the blind. In addition, an urban park, a central beach, a panoramic lookout, the Archaeological Museum and streets in the old town are accessible. In 2013, the city of Sozopol joined the League of Historic and Accessible Cities (LHAC) through which several projects for accessible tourism have been implemented<sup>27</sup>.

**Accessible tourism in Germany.** Germany is a developed tourist country for both active and passive tourism. A number of initiatives and activities have been undertaken in Germany to improve accessibility in tourism. The official website for visiting Germany<sup>28</sup>, contains a lot of information about the offer of accessible tourism in the country. For the needs of people with

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.myswitzerland.com/en/planning/transport-accommodation/barrier-free-travel/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.spain.info/en/discover-spain/accessible-tourism-spain/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://en.parisinfo.com/what-to-see-in-paris/visiting-paris-with-a-disability>

<sup>20</sup> <http://fr.zone-secure.net/42102/890944/#page=1>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.france.fr/en/holiday-prep/coming-to-france-by-train-0>

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Guide-g187791-k4548-Rome\\_Lazio.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Guide-g187791-k4548-Rome_Lazio.html)

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wis81eUts\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wis81eUts_I)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.italia.it/en/useful-info/accessibility.html>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoQGIhP9nhQ>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.stadt-salzburg.at/barrierefreierklaerung/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://sozopol-foundation.com/?p=318&lang=en>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.germany.travel/en/ms/barrier-free-travel/experience-barrier-free-travel-in-germany.html>



disabilities traveling and staying in Germany, a specialized travel guide "Travel without barriers - enjoy with ease" has been developed, which refers to holidays for everyone in the eight regions of Germany<sup>29</sup>.

The initiative for certification of accessible tourism facilities in Germany is significant. Germany has developed different criteria for accessibility of tourism products and services. The "Tourism for All" label is an information and evaluation system that ensures high standards. This designation certifies travel and hospitality companies by trained certifiers. Once a tourist facility has passed the certification process, it can set up pictograms to let guests know if the facility meets the criteria for multiple groups of people with disabilities.

This certification system was implemented in 2014 by the German National Tourism Board and hundreds of tourist facilities have already been certified in the country. Germany is developing a central database of all accessible tourism products and services in the country. The database is available online, and travelers through it can search for detailed information on the accessibility of hotels, restaurants, museums, airports and more.

**Accessible tourism in Czech Republic.** In the Czech Republic, in recent years, activities have been implemented to improve the accessibility of tourism. Various destinations in the country, such as the famous Karlovy Vary spa, are adapting their infrastructure for accessible tourism. Prague City Hall, in cooperation with experts and local stakeholders, is implementing a long-term project "Accessible and Open Prague", which includes a number of activities and products that improve the accessibility of this city, such as<sup>30</sup>:

- An expert group was created based on the experiences of citizens' associations and individuals. Four years later the expert group was transformed into the Prague City Council Committee, a permanent advisory body to improve accessibility conditions;
- Collecting citizens' proposals for improving the public space, cooperation with foreign organizations, applying for projects and requesting "best practices" from abroad;
- Approval of the policy for removal of barriers in the public transport system in Prague and improvement of the use of public transport services by persons with disabilities (fully accessible public transport without barriers is planned until 2025);
- Online accessibility map - research and review the accessibility of buildings and public spaces for people with reduced mobility. The result of the research is a map that contains detailed information about the accessibility of the object or place, including a photo gallery. There are more than a thousand objects on the map, and it is optimized for tablets and mobile phones;
- Raising awareness of accessibility problems among employees and employers;
- Investment measures - removal of barriers in public space - reconstruction of bus and tram stops, pedestrian crossings, sidewalks and paths, installation of elevators to metro stations, etc.;
- Providing grants to the private sector to remove barriers to entrances, toilets and facilitate access to buildings or space intended for the general public;
- Media campaign (planned activity) to inform the public about the issue of barriers in public space and activities aimed at their removal. One of the goals of the campaign is also to educate the residents to be friendly towards their environment and not to create (unconscious) barriers for others.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.tripability.net/admin/resources/germany-all-in-one.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.praha.eu/jnp/cz/o\\_meste/zivot\\_v\\_praze/praha\\_bezbarierova/index.html](https://www.praha.eu/jnp/cz/o_meste/zivot_v_praze/praha_bezbarierova/index.html)

**Accessible tourism in Slovenia.** Slovenia is a destination that in recent years has made great progress in the field of accessibility in tourism. The new buildings and facilities are adapted and constructed to accommodate people with disabilities. On the official website of tourism in Slovenia, information about accessible tourism in the country can be found <sup>31</sup>. Activities in urban centers, nature holidays, visits to thermal baths, sea vacations, visits to historical sites and cultural sites are part of the offer of accessible tourism in Slovenia.

Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia (second place award, EU access city in 2018) is recognized as an accessible city, actively developing accessibility with a strong commitment at both the political and operational levels. Accessibility is integrated into the overall city development policy and work. The following activities were undertaken by the city of Ljubljana to improve accessibility:

- The city center is closed for motorized traffic, tactile paths have been created and lowered passages and sidewalks, the gaps between the granite cobblestones have been filled;
- Free service for transportation by electric vehicles in the city center;
- Access network for public transport (vehicles and infrastructure);
- Specialized transport service on request for people with disabilities;
- Free travel in the city for residents with disabilities and those who travel with them;
- Elevators to public garages and to the city castle (most visited tourist attraction);
- Accessible public toilets;
- Protected buildings and cultural and historical heritage are fully accessible;
- Tactile model of the city and the castle;
- Access offices of tourist info centers, designed tours / routes for people with disabilities;
- Mandatory training to meet the needs of people with disabilities for all bus drivers in public / public transport;
- Open days - meetings with the mayor every month to listen to people's suggestions for improving accessibility;
- Direct involvement of the elderly and disabled people in the creation of city policies through advisory bodies of the mayor in order to improve accessibility.

**Accessible tourism in England.** VisitEngland<sup>32</sup> is an official public body (tourism board) that aims to develop and promote tourism in England, promotes the UK worldwide and supports the country's tourism industry. Accessibility is an important component of their activities. VisitEngland is one of the best examples of systematic support for accessible tourism, not only in Europe but also globally. As more significant activities of VisitEngland related to accessibility in tourism are following:

- Conducts research and provides data on the volume and value of the accessible tourism market in England;
- Prepares, often in collaboration with disability organizations, reports, tutorials and business tools that help participants in the tourism industry provide access for all, such as: cost-cutting tips to make the facility accessible; accessible tourism guide for facilities and destinations; an accessible tourism guide for tourists; tips on how to

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.slovenia.info/en/plan-your-trip/accessible-tourism>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.visitengland.com/>

- promote accessibility; tips on how to greet clients with hearing impairment, clients accompanied by guide dogs or clients with autism, etc.;
- Provides training for staff in travel companies, raising their awareness of disability, publishing learning materials;
- Awards for excellence, one of the categories is accessibility (Award for inclusive tourism);
- Presents best practices - accessibility case studies; and
- Implements its own projects with EU funding, usually in the form of public-private partnership.

Due to the activities of this organization, accessible tourism in the UK has created a rich base of facilities in the tourism and hospitality sector and an appropriate offer of accessible tourism has been created.

**Accessible tourism in Portugal.** Turismo de Portugal<sup>33</sup> is the central government body responsible for the promotion, improvement and sustainability of tourism activities in Portugal. Integrated within the Ministry of Economy, Turismo de Portugal is the national tourism authority responsible for the promotion, improvement and sustainability of tourism activities, aggregation within one entity of all institutional responsibilities related to stimulating tourism activities, from supply to demand. The mission of the tourism organization of Portugal is the following:

- Improvement and development of the tourist infrastructure;
- Development of training for human resources;
- Supporting investments in the sector;
- Coordinating the domestic and international promotion of Portugal as a tourist destination;
- Regulation and control of activities related to gambling.

Using its partnership with other public bodies and the tourism industry in Portugal and abroad, Turismo de Portugal is committed to meeting its goal of boosting tourism as one of the key drivers of growth for the Portuguese economy.

Turismo de Portugal has done a lot in terms of access tourism. As an example we will single out the initiative "All for all - Portuguese tourism", which refers to the tourism industry, through which the economy is mobilized and concerted action is taken to position Portugal as a tourist destination that is accessible to all. This initiative aims to adjust and improve the country's supply in terms of accessible tourism. Various promotional campaigns and videos are being prepared for the needs of the initiative. The "All for All" program also includes financial support for creating accessibility in tourist facilities, entertainment and recreation facilities, restaurants, travel agencies, as well as public spaces and cultural facilities. For the program in 2017, five million euros were allocated for financing projects of companies and public entities.

## CONCLUSION

Tourism is an activity of people who travel outside their permanent place of residence, a phenomenon that is present in all countries of the world and is growing more globally. The great role that tourism has, we find both in terms of cultural prosperity and because of the

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.visitportugal.com/en>

economic benefit for the destinations. The aim of this paper is to review good practices and present examples of successful accessible tourism in selected countries in Europe. For the purposes of the paper, secondary data sources were used by consulting relevant literature in the field of accessible tourism, as well as the Internet. A review of the literature has shown that there are several authors internationally dealing with the issue of accessible tourism, and tourist destinations are increasingly working to adapt their infrastructure to the needs of people with disabilities. Using the Internet, materials related to accessible tourism are collected, which we analyze in the paper.

Research for the purpose of this paper has shown that there is almost no country in Europe that does not pay attention to the travels of people with disabilities and does not take initiatives and activities to improve them. For the most part, urban destinations are the ones that best improve the travel and residence conditions of people with disabilities, as the benefits are also used by the local population. The paper examines examples of accessible tourism in selected European countries such as Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, England and Portugal. The initiatives of these developed tourist countries are taken as approved examples that can be applied by other destinations, in order to improve the conditions for the development of accessible tourism.

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