

THE ACCESSIBILITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN ROMANIAN TOURISM

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Abstract

The development of tourism as a whole consists of the development of all the existing tourism categories in an economy, including tourism for people with disabilities. We address this issue given the fact that the number of people with disabilities is increasing and those willing to practice tourism are growing. These aspects constrain tourism service providers to adapt their infrastructure to be accessible to all categories of people with disabilities; whether we talk about people with hearing, seeing or talking problems, with locomotory problems, with various chronic conditions, these people have the right to practice tourism and benefit from special accessibility conditions. So we have to discuss in terms of equal opportunities for all in the practice of tourism. If in other areas such as Scandinavia, the world leader in wheelchair accessible places, there are extensive services and facilities tailored for people with disabilities, as well as transport especially dedicated to people with disabilities, or Denmark that has implemented a new system tourist labeling for the accessibility of hotels, attractions and other places that can be visited by people with disabilities, or the UK where there is a wide diversity in choosing an accommodation unit from country cottages to hotels, caravan camps, houses from beams, accommodation units provided to be accessible to the seats, adequately equipped with lifting equipment, electric beds, specially adapted kitchens, as well as sanitary units, in Romania the situation is somewhat different.

Through this paper we aim to investigate the degree of development of tourist facilities for people with disabilities in the accommodation and catering establishments, the development of special tourism at national and international level. At the same time, through the research methods we use, we will analyze available statistical data.

Keywords: disabilities, Romania, tourism, social tourism,.

JEL Classification: E 21, L83, Z32

INTRODUCTION

Persons with disabilities have the right to practice tourism, which brings to the forefront the necessity of accessibility concerns from the tourist accommodation structures but also to the other categories of units providing tourist services (travel agencies, restaurants, transport units, units entertainment, museums, etc.). According to the legislation in force, persons with disabilities are entitled to a spa treatment fee per year and from 1st December 2018 they also benefit from a vacation allowance of LEI 1900 (Law No. 153/2017, art. 26, paragraphs 4, 5). These issues provide additional arguments for the equity and benefits that people with disabilities can benefit.

Mentalities have evolved in the way it is considered the person with a disability: from an object of charity, to society, to a person who holds rights, active and respected in society, which forces to adopt

attitudes to the recognition of fundamental rights and freedoms and assistance and support measures, where appropriate, for the full exercise of these rights (Nitescu A., etc., 2016)

Among the categories of tourism with the greatest openness to this category of people are social tourism which together with balneary and treatment tourism are requested by people who have a "physical, mental or mental state, which limits a person in the movement, activity, reception" as disability is defined by the Dex dictionary.

As it is mentioned in the specialized literature that approached this topic - "Social tourism is a socialization tool, improving the relations between people (social cohesion) and allows the integration of those with disabilities (social disabilities) in the social life - tourism allows the contact with different realities, different cultures and traditions, and, above all, allows relationships with others who otherwise would not have been possible. All of these lead to that "personal development" for both tourists and members

of the local community. But perhaps the most important aspect is given by the social integration of people with disabilities, for whom life is suffering, monotony, routine ... and a few days of vacation gives a new breath to them. "(Dumitru N., Negricea, 2011)

People with disabilities have the right to social and professional integration, so they have the right to participate in tourism activities just like any of the healthy people, an aspect that is considered to be of utmost importance at European level and implicitly at the level of Romania.

This situation of low development of leisure activities for disabled people is connected to various types of constraints. The personal barriers concern the individuals directly, such as their physical, psychological and cognitive state. Other barriers arise from interactions and from interpersonal connections of disabled people in societal contexts. (Christofle, S., & Massiera, B. (2009).

"In Romania, the issue of the employment of people with disabilities is a priority in the public strategies that concern employment in general as well as in the strategy for the integration of people with disabilities. At national level, the priority of specialists working in the social field is to improve the quality of life and respect for the rights of people belonging to vulnerable groups." (Orean, I. and Rebeleanu A., 2016)

At European level, research has been carried out on people with disabilities and on tourism development, and since 1993 it has been concluded that the increasing number of people with disabilities can represent a huge potential for European tourism. However, tourism's exploitation of this potential is closely linked to the accessibility of disabled people to suitably equipped tourist destinations. An even bigger issue for tourism operators is the notion of accessibility that differs according to the type of disability. That means that the tour operator has to adapt its unit for all categories of disability or for the most part, be it locomotor disabilities, hearing deficiencies, sight, mental problems or more. It should also be noted that each person is unique in his own way, so even the same category of disability involves a different approach.

The General Secretary of the World Tourism Organization, Taleb Rifai, on the occasion of the World Tourism Day 2016 said: "Accessibility for all must be at the heart of tourism policies and business strategies, not just as a human right but also as a greater market opportunity. With an increasingly aging population, each of us will sooner or later be the recipient of universal accessibility to tourism. World Tourism Day 2016 let us remind ourselves that all citizens of the world have the right to experience the incredible diversity that the planet offers. "

The relationship between tourism and accessibility needs to be explored further, particularly in the context of the specific requirements of people who are disabled in any way. Accessibility should be

understood as the ability to enter and use buildings, leisure facilities and other types of infrastructure independently. While an estimated 120 million people in Europe would welcome improvements in access to tourist sites, few tourism operators are aware of these potential customers or have an understanding of their specific needs and expectations. Research has shown that 48% of disabled people would travel more often if they could find accessible sites, while 62% would be prepared to travel more widely outside their region if more sites were accessible. (Heinen, H., 2005).

"Accessibility" is defined as the possibility for people with disabilities to access, in equal conditions with others, to physical, transport, information and communication (ICT) systems and technologies, as well as other infrastructures and services. The 2010-2020 European Disability Strategy: a renewed commitment to a barrier-free Europe (Nitescu A, 2018).

The necessity of social integration of this category of the Romanian population entails the necessity of massive investments in the field of tourism in order to allow it to be practiced. Whether we are talking about accommodation units, train stations, bus stops, transportation facilities, restaurants, recreation areas, aerial tramways or playgrounds, all this must offer equal opportunities to everyone and thus the possibility of the people we are discussing about in this paper to gain access and use space to meet their own needs.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Objectives

The objective of the study was to determine the degree of tourism development for people with disabilities in Romania, given the need for this category of people to use certain forms of tourism. In order to achieve this, we have pursued the following:

1. the number of people with disabilities in Romania and its dynamics over time;
2. the rights and needs of people with disabilities in the use of leisure time to engage in different forms of tourism;
3. offers on the possibilities of using leisure time and specific facilities for increasing the accessibility of persons with disabilities;
4. the development stage of tourism for this category in Romania.

Method

In this paper, in order to respond to the proposed objectives, we analyzed the opinions of those interested in this subject through fundamental and theoretical research. However, the many opinions expressed by the authors in the specialized papers competed against a unanimously accepted idea, namely that people with disabilities should be treated, by virtue of the principle of equal opportunities, as

well as other persons, so they should be integrated into the most diverse tourism activities. Of course, this can not be achieved without significant investments in the tourism infrastructure and its architecture in order to increase accessibility.

The evaluative research was used when we used statistical data on the number of people with disabilities in Romania and assisted us in establishing the state of affairs regarding the objectives of the paperwork.

After establishing the theme and its objective, we analyzed the specialized bibliography and deduced the most representative opinions on tourism for people with disabilities, with accessibility to some forms of tourism, rights and tourism needs.

In order to conduct the study, we also appealed to the collection of the necessary statistical data from official statistics at national level and we proceeded to analyze them. Both qualitative data analysis and quantitative analysis were used.

People with disabilities from Romania in statistical data

"Persons with disabilities include people with long-lasting physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which, in interaction with various barriers, can limit the full and effective participation of people in society into equal conditions with others"

A disability is a condition that can be genetically caused by an accident, a disease or a trauma, a condition that can limit a person's abilities such as sight, hearing, speech, mobility or cognitive

function. Some people with disabilities have one or more limitations. A disability is a physical constraint or an attitude that is imposed on a person, whether or not that person has a disability. Steep ramps, stairs, lack of elevator in a building that has more than one level, narrow doors, are just a few examples of barriers imposed on disabled wheelchair users (Oancea R. and Van Maanen C., 2013)

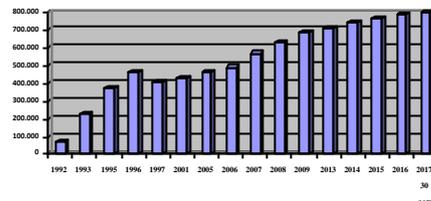
According to the National Strategy "A barrier-free society for people with disabilities" 2016-2020, on June 30, 2015, the disability rate, calculated for the population of Romania, was 3.38%.

Also from the above mentioned source we find out that 174,386 persons with physical disability were registered at the same time, out of which 4,931 children, 148,318 persons with somatic disabilities, out of which 12,149 children, 23,415 hearing disability persons, out of which 1,654 children,

103,214 persons with visual disabilities, out of which 2,978 children, 121,518 persons with mental disabilities, out of which 11,230 children, 89,245 persons with psychiatric disabilities, out of which 10,731 children, 81,923 persons with associated disabilities, of whom 15,339 children, 6,778 HIV-positive persons / AIDS, of which 181 children, 4,018 persons with rare diseases, of which 1,032 children and 116 deafblind people, out of which 24 children. Women account 53.34% of the total number of people with disabilities. 52% of all disabled people live in urban areas and 48% in rural areas. Of the total number of persons with disabilities, those with severe disabilities represent 35.64%, those with accentuated disabilities represent 52.68% and those with average and slightly handicap -11.68%.

On September 30rd, 2017, the total number of persons with disabilities communicated by the National Authority for Disabled Persons within the Ministry of Labor and Social Justice, through the general departments of social assistance and child protection of the county, respectively of the local sectors of the municipality of Bucharest, was 791,761 persons. Of these, **97.73%** (773.773 persons) are in the care of families and/or live independently (non-institutionalized) and **2.27%** (17,988 persons) are in residential social institutions for disabled adults (institutionalized) coordinated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Justice through the National Authority for Persons with Disabilities¹.

The number of persons with severe disabilities represents 37.73% of the total (compared to 36.81% on September 30rd, 2016), with



accentuated disabilities 50.99% (compared to 51.71% on September 30, 2016) and slightly/medium disabilities 11.28% (versus 11.49% on September 30rd, 2016).

Here is the evolution of the number of people with disabilities in Romania during the period 1992-2017:

Figure 1. The number of people with disabilities in Romania between 1992 and 2017

Contribution of authors according to the data found here: <http://anpd.gov.ro/web/transparenta/statistici/trimestriale/>

The ascendant evolution of the number of people with disabilities is primarily due to the constant increase of diagnoses that can place a sick person in

¹ <http://anpd.gov.ro/web/transparenta/statistici/trimestriale/>

the category of people with disabilities but also by the poor health situation of the Romanian population that inevitably leads to the degradation of the quality of life and implicitly to the more and more often appearance of diseases such as those that lead to the inability of people to move or stand alone, cancer or transplantation that leave behind people with disabilities.

For the purpose of helping people with disabilities, the Romanian state offers social indemnities of several categories depending on its severity, as summarized in the table below:

Table no. 1. Persons receiving the allowance for each degree of disability and the paid amounts

	Monthly allowance for accompanying persons with severe visual disabilities		The monthly allowance for adults with severe and accentuated disabilities		Supplementary budget for persons with severe, accentuated and medium disabilities	
	Average monthly number of beneficiaries	Paid amounts Mil Lei	Average monthly number of beneficiaries	Paid amounts Mil Lei	Average monthly number of beneficiaries	Paid amounts Mil Lei
2011	44373	273	543266	1156	661311	564
2012	43818	287	542156	1161	658677	565
2013	43836	316	552344	1181	671143	576
2014	43252	331	565990	1213	681279	593
2015	41546	374	597779	1468	716566	721
2016	41530	477	617394	1546	739794	750

Source: www.insse.ro

From Table no. 1 we find that the number of allowances for the persons with severe visual disabilities has decreased, but the value increased, in 2016 being 477 mil lei with over 100 mil lei more than in 2015 and with 200 mil lei more of 2011, which brings to the fore the increased attention given to these categories of people. We can not say the same thing about adults with severe and accentuated disabilities, whose number increased significantly over the period 2011-2016 by more than 63,000, and the amounts paid did not have a spectacular increase.

It can be argued that tourism can not be practiced by these people with a small budget, even if the spare time is great for such people, many of them not being employed. So even if the infrastructure would allow, revenues would contribute to the development of tourism, but it can be compensated by stays and treatment tickets offered free of charge or with facilities by the state authorities.

Romanian tourism for people with disabilities

Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports is guaranteed by the Constitution, along with the freedom of the person to develop their spirituality and to accede to the values of national and

universal culture. The state must ensure the preservation of the spiritual identity, the support of the national culture, the stimulation of the arts, the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage, the development of the contemporary creativity, the promotion of the cultural and artistic values of Romania in the world. The special law obliges the competent authorities of the public administration to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to the values of culture, heritage, tourism, sports and leisure².

However, in Romania accessible tourism is still a rare reality. At a search for this term, we found that accessible tourism is currently a small part in Romania in the sense that it is a country that can offer unique cultural, historical and natural experiences for people with disabilities to a very limited extent. Sano Touring is the only tour operator in Romania that offers affordable travel services, but there is also the Centre for Excellence through Diversity (www.accessibleromania.com), whose member is also the tour operator mentioned. Their purpose is to promote accessible tourism, which implies the existence of a generous infrastructure with access for all, transport facilities tailored to special needs, several tourist attractions that can be comfortably visited by people with special needs or elderly people, accommodation and restaurant services tailored to as many tourist locations as possible, education to create accessible travel deals and responding professionally to affordable travel requests.

The statistical data available in Romania on tourism for people with disabilities is quite low. Starting with 2015, in Romania's Tourist Brewery the data on the number of rooms for this category of persons in the establishments of tourists' reception with the function of tourist accommodation appeared:

Table no. 2. Rooms for persons with disabilities in Romania

	number			
	2015		2016	
	Total	Specific	Total	Specific
Hotels	95359	236	95186	318
Motels	3962	7	3976	3
Hostels	4529	18	4836	19
Tourist villas	6744	3	6576	5
Tourist halting places	15122	30	15305	31
Agro Tourist halting places	16512	29	17449	28
Total		323		404

Source: [www.insse.ro/Breviarul turistic al României](http://www.insse.ro/Breviarul_turistic_al_Rom%C3%A2niei)

Table no. 2 shows that in Romania the number of rooms for people with disabilities, specified in statistics starting in 2015, is small for the needs of the members of this group of people, ie 323 rooms in 2015 and 404 rooms in 2016. These numbers show

² <https://www.prostemcell.ro/social/o-societate-fara-barriere-pentru-persoanele-cu-dizabilitati-2015-2020.html> accessed to 12.02.2018

poor development accommodation infrastructure dedicated to people with disabilities. Most of the rooms are located in hotels, 73% in 2015 and 78% in 2016. An approach to the opportunities given by the large number of people with disabilities can be noticed also in the case of tourist and agrotouristic pensions that have invested in special furnished rooms.

Regarding the number of tourist facilities that have logistical facilities to allow wheelchair users or other categories of people analyzed here, it is not very generous. We can mention here the Palace of Parliament and the Village Museum in Bucharest, which organizes special tours for people in wheelchairs; The Art Museum of Romania and the Patriarchal Palace, and the great parks in the capital of Romania have straight alleys that allow for safe and comfortable running. Also more accessible should be spa resorts, treatment and recovery, rich in natural factors, recommended in the physical and mental recovery sessions of people with disabilities. An example of good practice is the Calimanesti Caciulata resort where hotels such as Caciulata, Cozia and 3-star Olt hotel, Traian hotel, provide access for people with disabilities.

Tourist facilities for people with disabilities

Given the data presented above, it is imperative to list the absolutely necessary aspects that tourist units must implement in order to meet the travel needs of people with disabilities.

Such large investments will have to be in complementary fields of tourism, namely in the street infrastructure and in the tourist objectives, in the transport infrastructure, etc. we refer here to certain services for the persons analyzed requiring the existence of facilities, ramps, audible loudspeakers for the blind, for the higher areas it is necessary to build escalators, teleferic, funicular etc.

ADA standards say that a tourist in the moment when is choosing a particular tourist product must be assured that it offers him the four major components of the basic product: transport, accommodation, food and fun without discrimination. Standards are designed to ensure the accessibility of people with different hearing, visual, locomotor disabilities. It includes architectural requirements that are customized to each type of disability. Every regulation must be respected, because even one centimeter can endanger the life of the customer. These standards are based in particular on the removal of architectural barriers. These barriers are physical characteristics that limit or prevent the person with disabilities from obtaining the goods and services offered. Changes can be simple and cheap for already built accommodation structures. When changing a particular area, account must also be taken of the way of access to that area and whether it is necessary to modify the access path. The law tries not to impose

measures that are administrative burdens or can not be made financially (Gina-Ionela Butnaru, 2010)

The removal of physical barriers to people with disabilities refers, as the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, to:

- the physical environment - buildings, constructions and public utility facilities
 - must allow unrestricted access for persons with disabilities;
- public transport - road, rail, air and water - must be adapted to the needs of people with disabilities;
- information and communication environment - information and documentation services accessible to people with disabilities;
- other infrastructures and services - social services designed and tailored to the individual needs of persons provided at home, in the community, in day centers and residential, public or private centers.

An important role in providing tourist services to customers with disabilities is the employees of the tourist units of the employees and their way of behaving. For example, if an accommodation unit is to be accessible to all categories of customers, the owner should also invest in staff training. They should be reminded that people with disabilities are as important, perhaps even more morally important than ordinary clients. It is advisable for employees to undergo training courses such as role-play training that puts them in the situation of their clients: sitting in a wheelchair, eye-catching, clutched or connected hands. By this way, he learns how to deal with a client who does not hear, does not see, can not move without help. (Gina-Ionela Butnaru, 2010)

The way in which the staff employed in the tourist units behave is defining in increasing customer satisfaction with certain limitations, which must be helpful, receptive to the specific needs. Verbal and nonverbal communication must be very well managed in dealing with people with disabilities, because not always the message to be transmitted is understood as such.

The tourist accommodation units should take into account that some people with special needs have a trained dog to help them, which should be mentioned in the code of the existing rules, it is necessary to receive such animals and their accessibility where their master is.

As far as the training of the employees is concerned, there should be at least one person who knows the sign language in each accommodation structure. To help communicate with people with disabilities, they can also use material: Braille brochures, audio tapes, video tapes.

CONCLUSIONS

From the above mentioned, we draw the conclusion that in Romanian tourism the accessibility of people with disabilities is extremely low, even if this category of people has a great potential for tourism development.

This is due primarily to the very high investments needed to properly equip accommodation, restaurant or entertainment facilities and to complement infrastructure and means of transport investments. Even if, for example, you can use a plane to transport a person in a wheelchair, what happens at

the destination is much more complicated. There is not everywhere the appropriate facilities that allow access to people with disabilities.

The reduced number of rooms dedicated to people with disabilities in Romania demonstrates the low interest of the tourist accommodation units for this progressively growing population segment.

However, the need to comply with European directives and the principle of equal opportunities is believed to contribute to a significant increase in investment in appropriate facilities and implicitly in an increase in the number of rooms appropriate to these special needs.

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