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Identifying quality gaps in tourism for people with disabilities: Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to assess the significance (importance) and level of inconvenience of selected attributes of tourist services provided at particular stages of the supply chain in tourism (information, accommodation, transport, organization and intermediation) in relation to people with various types and degrees of disability. The survey conducted among the disabled helped to identify quality gaps in the provision of tourism services, taking into account their complementarity and accessibility at every stage of delivery. The method of Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) and basic measures of descriptive statistics were used to analyze empirical data. The study will help to indicate to what extent the tourist experience of a disabled person and the type of disability affect the assessment of the significance (importance) and inconvenience of selected attributes of tourist services. The results of the research can be used by entrepreneurs to analyze the quality and reliability of services provided by their partners and the behavior and needs of the disabled in tourism. They will also be useful for local and regional authorities responsible for ensuring the competitiveness and inclusiveness of tourism regions.

KEYWORDS

tourism of people with disabilities, Importance-Performance Analysis, quality gaps

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1. Introduction

The universal accessibility of tourism facilities, products and services is increasingly becoming a subject of interest to authors of research and academic publications, as well as organizations responsible for tourism policy and service providers. New normative instruments and recommendations are formulated regarding accessible tourism ("tourism for all", "universal design"), which is an important part of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy, and which should cover the entire tourism value chain (UNWTO, 2022). It is strongly emphasized that although the problem of accessibility is understood primarily in the context of human rights, nevertheless, the inclusion of those with disabilities in tourism is also a business opportunity for tourist regions and companies, allowing the attractiveness of the offer to be increased, the scale of the demand and, consequently, revenues (Dwyer, Darcy, 2011). Accessibility is seen as one of the four pillars in the development of smart cities and smart destinations, alongside innovation, technology and sustainable development (Porto, Rucci, Ciaschi, 2018). It is worth noting, however, that among those with disabilities, discussion on the conditions for full participation in social life, the inclusiveness of tourism areas and services in particular, often goes

beyond the architectural and urban barriers that have so far dominated public discourse. On the other hand, there is a growing problem of IT exclusion, experienced not only by people with registered disability, but also by the elderly, less educated and poor (Vila, González, Darcy, 2018). Therefore, the question arises whether technological progress and the use of modern digital communication tools facilitates mainstreaming into social and economic life, or if it is becoming another barrier that is difficult to overcome?

Taking into account the fact that new quality gaps have appeared in the chain of tourist services (for example due to the expansion of modern technologies), the aim of the article is to assess the significance (importance) and level of inconvenience of selected attributes of tourist services provided at the most important stages of the tourist product supply chain (tourist information, accommodation services, transport, organization and intermediation) in relation to people with various types and degrees of disability. Opinion surveys conducted among this group of consumers has made it possible to identify quality gaps in the provision of tourist services, taking into account the problem of their complementarity and availability at every stage of the provision. For the analysis of empirical data, the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) method was adopted and the basic measures of descriptive statistics were used.

Different types of disabilities impede the use of travel services to varying degrees and extents; they can also involve different areas of life. Independent functioning, as referred to in the applicable provisions of national law, UN guidelines and European Union regulations (e.g. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006), refers not only to access to the physical environment, means of transport, but also information and communication, including information and communication technologies and systems. Naturally, a person with disabilities becomes more and more involved in such market phenomena as online promotion and distribution, the impact of social media, mobile marketing, online contracts and payments, or artificial intelligence. New technologies in travel services, from the consumer's point of view operating primarily in the realm of the smartphone, are both mobile internet, but also interactive communication, or the ability to provide comments and feedback to guests in real time. They enable not only easier trip planning, but also a variety of services before, during and after the trip (Van Wee, 2016). Accessibility in terms of technology should therefore be compatible with the main elements of accessibility to accommodation, transportation, or recreational services. Such access to tourism services is also expected by those with disabilities, otherwise they will be increasingly marginalized as consumers. In this situation, the question of whether individual countries, institutions or companies apply appropriate standards, both within the framework of their own laws and United Nations regulations, on the accessibility of online tourism information and supporting more sustainable tourism, is becoming the subject of numerous analyses (Akgül, Vatansever, 2016; Benckendorff, Sheldon, Fesenmaier, 2014; Enamorado, 2017; Mayordomo-Martinez et. al., 2019; UNWTO, 2022; Vila, González, Darcy, 2020).

Difficulties for people with disabilities, but also seniors, in using modern communication technologies relates to both the equipment (computers, tablets, smartphones, message boards) and the services provided through such media. This is a new dimension to the limitations and barriers observed in social participation, including tourism. Most of the websites that make available the numerous services related to tourism and provided online are designed with the aesthetic needs of sighted people in mind and with a focus on marketing purposes that require an attractive application design. More often than not, this does not go hand in hand with their accessibility for the visually and hearing impaired using specialized software, as well as for the elderly; this definitely limits, or in extreme cases prevents, access to information. In turn, it seems that among people and institutions responsible for the proper application of new technologies there is a lack of full awareness and knowledge of the specific needs of those at risk of IT exclusion, and often the inappropriate form of applications used online is the result of haste or underestimation of the seriousness of the problem.

The concept of disability can refer to various spheres of human functioning: activities of daily living, orientation in the environment (including the acquisition of information and knowledge) and physical environment (spatial orientation), professional work and economic independence, and the ability to participate in various manifestations of social life, i.e. social integration. Activities that are increasingly encroaching on the world of modern technology include the range of activities necessary to use an air transportation service using modern technology, with the result that a journey should be smoother, faster and more stress-free (online check-in, Common Use Self-Service kiosk (CUSS), self-back drop (baggage drop), self-tagging (baggage self-tagging), and smartphone apps, such as those used for check-in or baggage location. This raises the question of how to use the all-encompassing capabilities of the smartphone as a source of tourist information, service reservation or audio guide in cooperation with those with disabilities.

2. Methodology

The article uses an analysis of existing data and the results of a diagnostic survey carried out using the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) method among

610 randomly selected people with disabilities from all over Poland; as a tool, questionnaire interviews were used, containing three groups of issues allowing for the assessment of the indicated attributes of tourist services and seven personal questions, allowing the correlation between the respondents' opinions and their selected socio-demographic characteristics to be determined. The interviews were conducted with people with disabilities aged 15 and over, declaring mobility disabilities (49.7%), visual impairment (17.7%), hearing and/or speech impairments (18.4%) and other disabilities (14.3%). Among the respondents, nearly 52% were women, and about 45% of the respondents were disabled, aged 26–54. The aim of the survey was to obtain the opinions of those with disabilities regarding the significance (importance) and individual inconvenience of a number of services related to tourist travel. The research questionnaire contained four substantive parts relating to tourist information, travel agency services, services provided by accommodation facilities, as well as other aspects of tourist travel (including catering and transport). The respondents assessed 50 attributes of a tourist trip in two ways (in terms of the importance of services and the level of perceived difficulties in using them). Both expectations and limitations have been described in detail, taking into account the needs of people with four basic types of disability: mobility impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment and other disabilities (including intellectual).

The results obtained were used to conduct an analysis of the discrepancy between the assessment of the importance of the indicated attributes of tourism services and their inconvenience for respondents. A modified Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) method, frequently applied in tourism service quality research (Djeri et al., 2018) and used to identify quality gaps, was used to perform this task. The first time this analysis was proposed was by Martilla and James (1977), and its main assumption was to measure two variables, i.e. the importance of individual criteria and their fulfillment in relation to a product or service. The analysis provides information on what is important for the respondents and to what extent it meets their expectations, and its graphical (matrix) form enables the identification of factors that for example require immediate improvement (Biesok, Wyród-Wróbel, 2015). The use of this method, sometimes referred to as importance-performance analysis (Lotko, 2018), allows the creation of a two-dimensional matrix, enabling the illustration of quality gaps and what the suggested directions of strategic action in the context of quality improvement are (Kusterska-Jefmańska, Jefmański, 2011). According to Tucki et al. (2018), the IPA method "used in satisfaction surveys aims to analyse customers' expectations and assessments of the actual state of affairs achieved in terms of the product offered" and, as such, is well suited to the study of discrepancies between perceptions and assessments of the quality of tourism services from the perspective of tourists with disabilities (Tucki et al., 2018). This method is used not only to assess the quality of services, but many authors also use it to measure the importance and relevance of various service attributes in relation to their quality (Martilla, James, 1977; Zhang, Chow, 2004). Modification of the method and its adaptation to the research goal consisted in introducing two important dimensions of tourism services for people with disabilities: significance (importance) and inconvenience. This shows whether all attributes considered burdensome are equally important for people with disabilities, and therefore shows which services should be treated as the most urgent. By adapting the IPA method to the research objective, the place of quality was replaced with importance (significance) for respondents with disabilities. The results of the empirical study were therefore used to create an IPA matrix, in which the 'importance-inconvenience' relationship was taken into account. The scatterplot of the level of importance and inconvenience made it possible to distinguish four quadrants, from which:

1. the bottom left refers to attributes that do not require urgent action, as there are services/products that, in the opinion of the respondents, are relatively less onerous, but also the least important;
2. the upper left shows slightly less favorable situations due to greater inconvenience but less seriousness;
3. the lower right quadrant, on the other hand, shows less favorable situations due to greater importance but minor inconvenience;
4. the upper right quadrant contains those attributes that require the most urgent action because they relate to situations that were assessed by respondents as both important and burdensome.

To assess the quality gaps the SERVQUAL method, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithamlai and Berry (Łopatecka, Żarski, 2020), was adapted. The SERVQUAL method highlights five quality gaps (Łopatecka, Żarski, 2020), of which – from the point of view of the tourist with a disability – three should be considered particularly relevant: (1) the gap created by a misunderstanding of the customer's expectations, (2) due to a lack of correspondence between the quality of the service provided and the information available to the consumer, (3) resulting from the difference between the level of expectation met and the customer's perception of the service.

In selecting for study the attributes related to tourist travel, it was assumed that the need to ensure access relating to all links of the tourist service is made with particular emphasis on tourist information, which plays a very important role at each stage of the tourist services chain and is often the key to success. The

tourism chain was understood as a consecutive and interrelated service: organization of the trip (planning, preparation, booking, information), arrival/departure/transfer, accommodation, familiarization with the visited site and the immediate surroundings, moving around the visited area, catering services, shopping opportunities, sightseeing and cultural activities, sports and physical recreation, services in the visited area, medical assistance, opportunities to participate in optional excursions, other tourism activities. Some of the attributes adopted were of a tangible nature (e.g. hotel room facilities), some were intangible (e.g. staff willingness to help). With regard to tourist information services, 17 attributes were assessed, with regard to travel agencies 18, accommodation facilities 15. As mentioned above, the survey additionally covered other services that tourists use during their trip, including restaurants, transport, museums, tourist attractions. In constructing the questionnaire, a 10-point quantitative scale was used to assess the importance of a given attribute to the respondent (1 – attribute not important, 10 – attribute very important). The study proposed a scale by which respondents rated the importance (significance) of a given service attribute on the one hand, and its inconvenience, understood as the level of difficulty a tourist encounters when using a given service, on the other. It can be assumed that the higher the level of inconvenience, the higher the dissatisfaction with the quality of the service. To summarize: the respondents evaluated a number of sub-services, starting with the marketing activities undertaken prior to the sale of services (initial information about the tourist service, promotion, place and method of selling the service, method of payment), through the journey to the place visited by the tourist, the stay at the place visited and the return home.

3. Research findings

The research allowed the identification of the types of service with the greatest limitations and those which are perceived as the most important by people

Table 1. Average assessment of significance (importance) and inconvenience level (on a scale of 1–10): selected service attributes

Selected attributes of tourist services	Assessment of significance (I)	Assessment of the level of inconvenience (U)	Difference (I-U)
Tourist information			
Special materials for the blind	6.75	7.07	–0.32
Materials in enlarged print	6.74	6.99	–0.25
Website for the blind	6.83	7.19	–0.36
Applications for the deaf	6.95	7.15	–0.20
Parking space at IT points	6.90	6.96	–0.06
Average overall	6.71	6.92	–0.21
Travel agency services			
Promotion in special leaflets, flyers, etc.	7.28	7.20	0.08
Promotion on TV, radio	7.37	7.28	0.09
Promotion at tourism trade fairs	7.38	7.22	0.15
Promotion through non-governmental organizations	7.28	7.24	0.04
Promotion in magazines for persons with disabilities	7.14	7.04	0.10
Promotion within general promotional campaigns	7.39	7.30	0.09
Total average	7.09	7.03	0.06
Accommodation services			
The possibility of booking and purchasing on-line	8.42	7.94	0.48
Architectural barriers in hotels	7.38	7.21	0.17
Adapted bathrooms	7.36	7.28	0.08
Access to recreational services	7.20	7.31	–0.11
Personal help, reluctance of staff	7.31	7.25	0.06
Total average	7.13	7.10	0.03
Other aspects of the trip			
Accessible health care (while traveling)	7.61	7.77	–0.16
The opportunity to purchase tickets on-line	7.71	7.67	0.04
The hardships of travel	7.25	7.30	–0.05
Average overall	7.21	7.10	0.11
Total survey average	7.035	7.037	–0.002

Source: own research.

with disabilities. Service providers must pay special attention to these difficulties. It should be clearly emphasized that the most burdensome services are not always perceived by the respondents as the most important (most significant) – Table 1, Figure 1. For example, poor access to applications for the blind was rated 7.6 on a scale of 1–10, but considered to be much less important (6.5).

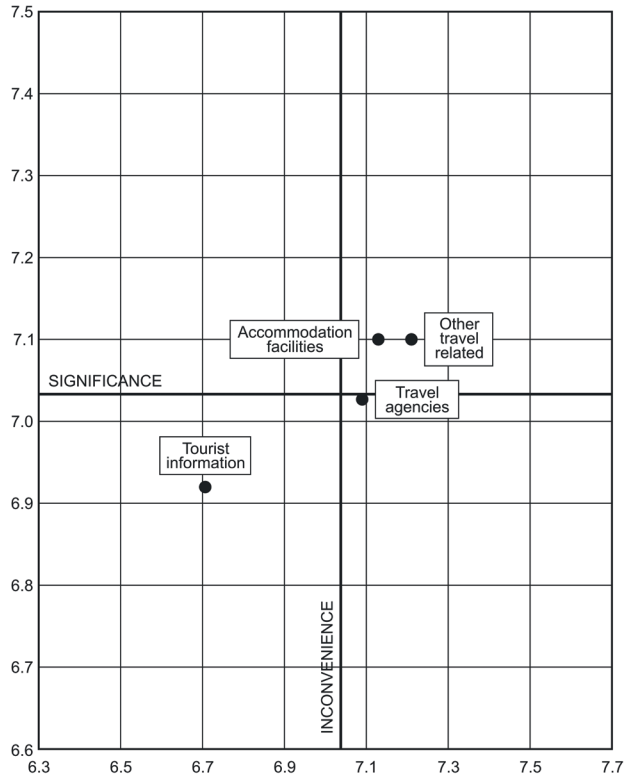

Figure 1. IPA (significance – inconvenience) analysis: main areas for the provision of tourism services
Source: own research

The research shows that the inconvenience of various attributes of tourist information clearly increases with the increase in tourist activity (Table 2) and the degree of disability (Table 3).

Table 2. Assessment of the inconvenience of selected tourist information services according to the frequency of trips (on a scale of 1–10)

Tourist information attributes	No trips	3 and more trips
Information about trips	6.4	7.0
Information on tourist events	6.1	7.1
Information on the availability of tourist services	6.6	7.2
Entry to the IT point	6.6	7.2
Online information for the blind	6.4	7.2
Online information for the deaf	6.7	6.8
Parking space at the IT point	6.5	7.0
Lowered counter at IT point	6.8	7.2
Special materials for the blind	6.4	7.7
Information in braille	6.7	7.0
Convex maps, diagrams, mock-ups, etc.	6.4	7.2
Large print materials	6.9	7.2
Website for the blind	6.9	7.5
Guidebooks for people with disabilities	6.7	7.2
Knowledge of sign language	6.9	7.3
Applications for the blind	6.8	7.6
Applications for the deaf	7.1	7.2

Source: own research.

Table 3. Assessment of the inconvenience of selected tourist information service according to the degree of disability (on a scale of 1–10)

Tourist information attributes	Slight disability	Moderate disability	Severe disability
Information about trips	6.7	6.7	7.1
Information on tourist events	6.6	6.7	6.7
Information on the availability of tourist services	6.8	6.7	7.1
Entry to the IT point	6.8	6.8	7.6
Online information for the blind	6.7	6.7	7.2
Online information for the deaf	6.7	6.6	7.5
Parking space at the IT point	6.8	6.9	7.6
Lowered counter at IT point	6.7	6.9	7.8
Special materials for the blind	7.1	6.9	7.5
Information in braille	6.8	6.8	7.1
Convex maps, diagrams, mock-ups, etc.	6.7	6.8	7.1
Large print materials	6.9	7.0	7.3
Website for the blind	7.3	7.0	7.4
Guidebooks for people with disabilities	6.9	6.9	7.2
Knowledge of sign language	6.9	7.0	7.6
Applications for the blind	7.0	7.1	7.6
Applications for the deaf	7.2	7.0	7.8

Source: own research.

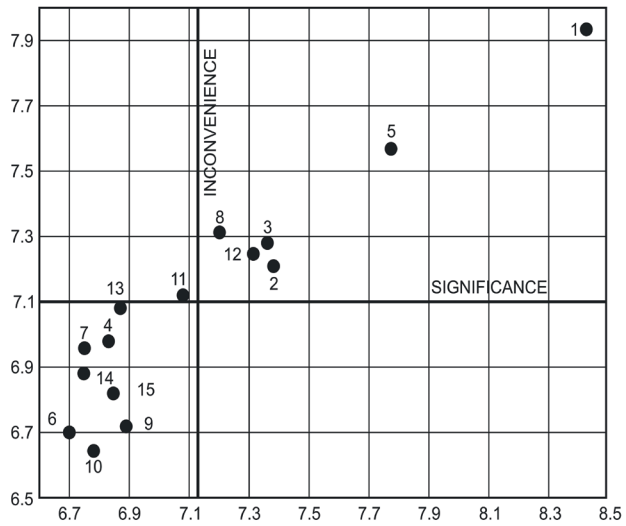

Figure 2. IPA analysis (significance – inconvenience): accommodation facilities
Note: 1 – Possibility for booking and purchasing online, 2 – Architectural barriers in hotels, 3 – Adapted bathrooms, 4 – Lack of necessary equipment, 5 – Availability and equipment of the rooms, 6 – Lack of a lowered counter at the reception, 7 – There is no parking for NP, 8 – No access to recreational services, 9 – There is no information in braille, 10 – There are no subtitles in enlarged print, 11 – There is no place for a guide dog, 12 – Reluctance of staff, 13 – Lack of preparation of personnel, 14 – Inability to communicate in sign language, 15 – No light signs in the rooms
Source: own research

Other studies also draw attention to limitations in access to tourist services related to tourist information. For example, the European Union report highlights such difficulties as the lack of accuracy, detail and credibility of information, misunderstanding of people's needs / requirements as to the form of access, lack of accessibility of websites of individual service providers, inadequate format, segregation of reservation systems for able-bodied and disabled people (European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013).

As mentioned above, research results show that the inconvenience of using a tourism service does not always go hand in hand with its importance (relevance) for the consumer (Figures 2 and 3). The existence of differences between the tourism services considered most important by tourists with disabilities and those with the most limitations was confirmed, among others, in a study by Neumann and Reuber (2004). Respondents ranked accommodation (82%), moving around in the immediate area (76%), arrival/departure (74%), excursions (71%) and travel arrangements (71%) as the five most important, while cultural activities (67%), moving around in the immediate area (65%), excursions (63%), sports (55%) and arrival/departure (52%) were ranked as those with the greatest limitations. Using sports services as an example, there is a clear difference between the importance of the service (19% of respondents considered it important) and the degree of inconvenience that is associated with it (55% indicated the use of sports services as being associated with major constraints).

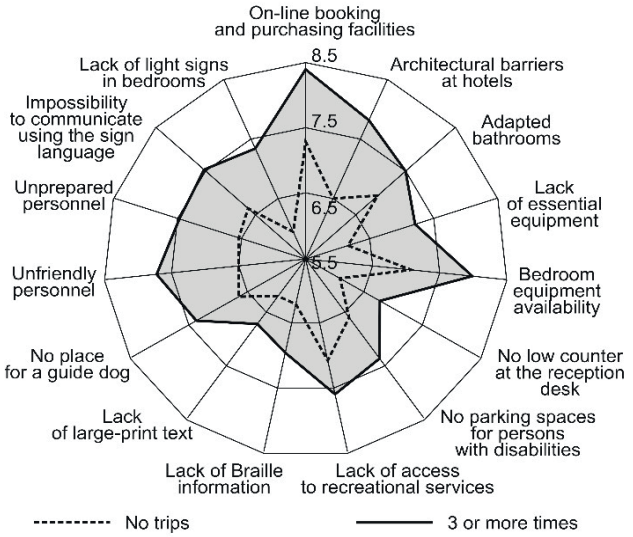

Figure 3. Assessment of the inconvenience of selected attributes of accommodation services by frequency of trips
Source: own research

4. Discussion

Authors dealing with the issue of barriers to access to leisure, including tourism services, agree that access can rarely – if ever – be unrestricted, mainly due to the high cost of fully adapting public spaces and personal services (e.g. Fundusze Europejskie, 2018). Hence the need to seek compromise solutions and to stagger the process of reaching fully satisfactory ones. When operating on the tourism market, it is worth considering how to adapt the services provided to the specific needs of those with disabilities and which ones to prioritise. As a rule, although usually out of necessity, people with disabilities accept that the level of accessibility of tourism services is very different from that expected. This is often due to financial constraints preventing service providers from removing barriers, but sometimes to, and sometimes more difficult to remove, organisational and social barriers, rooted in a lack of knowledge about how to help those with disabilities and inappropriate attitudes in the social environment.

According to many experts in the field of tourism for those with disabilities, but also according to the people concerned themselves, there is a lack of appropriate marketing on the tourism market, including information on the accessibility of tourism services already prepared. Those with disabilities and older people are still not perceived as an important market segment, hence the lack of activities targeting this group of

tourists. Tourist region managers often do not analyse the degree of accessibility of services, and even if they do, these analyses usually concern accommodation facilities and are limited to architectural and urban accessibility. Until the tourism industry recognizes that barrier-free services are an indicator of quality, brand strength and an opportunity for competitive advantage, it will not attract a significant number of customers with disabilities (and their families) and become attractive to them. In addition, it should be remembered that the accessibility of tourism services should be considered not only in the context of people with permanent disabilities, but also in the context of the elderly, the temporarily ill and the temporarily disabled, and those accompanying them.

With regard to the most recent area of exclusion – new technologies – there is a need to include accessibility to tools using these technologies in the strategic planning of tourism-related businesses, including, for example, in the planning of new airport infrastructure, terminals and new handling systems. On the other hand, it is necessary to work towards the compatibility of various applications used by people with disabilities, including the creation of mobile applications aimed at providing up-to-date, accurate and reliable information on the accessibility of tourist attractions, as well as cultural institutions, closely related to tourism (interactive maps, electronic guides to places attractive to tourists), and then to create a system of gradually filling in databases on such accessibility. This is also the role of institutions operating at central, regional and local level, including local government units, which should consider it necessary to introduce issues related to access to information into relevant public policies as well.

It is worth noting that in the tourism market there is still a lack of competence of staff in terms of serving people with disabilities, and the need for such measures is great. Hence, actions to train, inform and instruct staff – both employees of public and private institutions – on the needs and ways to support people with disabilities should be considered as one of the key ones. With regard to the arrangement of spaces (both small and open), it would be worth paying more attention to the collision of expectations and needs of people with disabilities with different dysfunctions (e.g. people with disabilities who are very tall or very short, the blind and those in wheelchairs and similar examples).

5. Summary

The presented survey has allowed for an indication of the extent to which the tourism experience of a person with a disability, on the one hand, and the type of disability, on the other, influences the assessment of the relevance and inconvenience of selected attributes of tourism services. According to the survey, the necessary changes should not only go in the direction of adapting the physical tourism space for people with disabilities and seniors by eliminating architectural and urban planning barriers and by popularising accessible space design, but also the need to adapt the way services are provided, to skillfully support and mitigate technological limitations for seniors and those with disabilities. Consumers with disabilities should be able to influence the design of tourism services, yet it seems that tourists with disabilities are still too rarely in the role of a prosumer, co-creating the design of a tourism event; this applies to various tourism services, not only to "tailor-made" ones. There is a lack of adequate consultation mechanisms to allow those with disabilities and their organisations to assess the quality and usefulness of rational accommodation and universal design solutions introduced in the field of tourism. However, it is absolutely important to remember that people with disabilities are not a homogeneous group and that the type of limitation, their socio-demographic characteristics, and consequently their associated needs, influence attitudes and behaviors.

Summing up, it is worth emphasizing that not always does the difficulty of participating in tourism go hand in hand with its importance (significance) for the consumer. To explain the essence of the problem, an extreme example can be used: climbing K2 will certainly be extremely burdensome, almost impossible for people with mobility dysfunction, but it will not be a priority and important for the vast majority of them. When operating on the tourism market, it is worth considering how to adapt the services provided to the specific needs of people with disabilities and which should be considered as a priority, also taking into account the latest areas of exclusion – new technologies.

The results of the research can be used by entrepreneurs to analyze the tourism behaviors and needs of the disability segment, taking into account the main sub-segments, distinguished by type and degree of disability. They will also be useful for local and regional authorities responsible for ensuring the competitiveness and inclusiveness of tourism areas, especially considering that accessibility is increasingly taken into account as a variable in measuring the competitiveness of destinations. Knowledge of the real, changing expectations of tourists with disabilities will address the challenge of how to understand and measure accessibility as a determinant of the competitiveness of a tourism destination.

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