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## **THE SIGNIFICANCE AND NEED OF TOURISM FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

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### **Introduction**

*Relevance of the topic.* In modern Lithuanian society, next to various social groups, there is also a very specific and sensitive group - the disabled. It is distinguished by its status and inherent problems that exist in all areas of social life: education, living conditions, communication, social life and work system. After the change in the ideology of social integration of the disabled, integration of the disabled into society is an officially declared aspiration. In order to integrate a disabled person into society, his needs must be taken into account. One of the needs of a disabled person is the adaptability of public and private environments. Disability is a societal problem that arises because society itself limits the activities of a disabled person. And only social measures and society's actions can remove the obstacles for the disabled person to function as a member of society.

*Purpose:* To analyze the attitude of researchers to the organization of tourism services for persons with disabilities. *Working methods:* analysis, synthesis and generalization of scientific literature

### **The significance and necessity of tourism for people with disabilities**

Since the 1950s, tourism has been one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy, accounting for a tenth of the global market and 9% of the labor market. From a classical point of view, the tourism market is only a relationship between service providers and service recipients. The social policy of the European Union seeks to ensure basic tourism products and services for all groups of society. EU Parliament October 25, 2011 the resolution encouraged the development of products and services for the growing population of elderly and disabled Europeans. The programs «Calypso» and «Cosme» should be mentioned (Panasiuk et. al., 2021). Tourism plays an important role in the economy of many countries, and in some it is even the engine of the entire economy. Tourism is not only travel, places of interest or accommodation, but is also one of the stimuli for the growth of the branches of construction, transport and professional services (Švagždiene et. al., 2021). Tibor Gonda also mentions the growing tourism market for the disabled (Gonda, T, 2021). The main problem identified is accessibility. The latter for the disabled is determined by the issue of accommodation, special meals, adaptation of places of interest, transport and communication (Gonda, T, 2021).

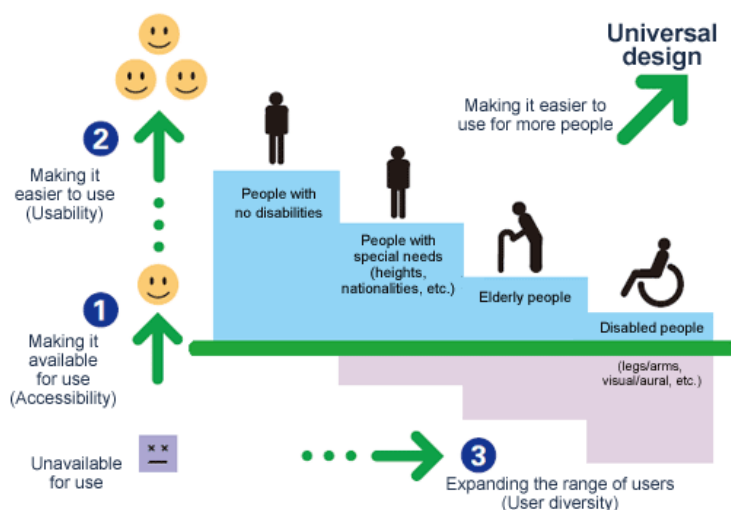
Since tourism is an important part of the economy, we are trying to find solutions to address the new needs that have arisen. One of the most popular solutions is the application of universal design, but so far it is applied only in the economically strongest countries (Švagždiene et. al., 2021). The COVID 19 pandemic has shown that the accommodation sector is able to quickly adapt to new requirements, and entrepreneurs could apply the same flexibility in improving the accessibility of accommodation services to people with disabilities, so that they can independently use all accessible services. In 2016, the United Nations also drew attention to this problem. It was concluded that there is no need to create separate services for the disabled, but it is necessary to strive for the availability of common services for all groups of society. Disability tourism has been observed to grow in countries that ensure accessibility for all (Martin-Fuentes et al., 2021). Tourism provides special benefits for the quality of life of disabled tourists. This has been observed in the policy of sustainable development, where tourism occupies an important place and, despite its economic benefits, can contribute to nature protection and social development. In the EU, disabled tourism occupies 9% of the market and is an unexploited niche that can contribute to the

creation of additional jobs. Cooperation of the tourism sector with sustainable development policies can bring mutual benefits. A partnership filled with good management, coordinated participation, leadership, management experience can ensure the success of cooperation and positive results (De Matteis et al., 2021).

### The practice of development of disabled tourism - successes and failures

Social tourism cannot be left to develop on its own in the market. This does not ensure the ability to effectively meet the needs of all service recipients. Regulation is introduced through socioeconomic policy, but leaving the necessary market freedom. Market control is necessary to prevent a sudden collapse of the market and to preserve competition. The national or supranational goal in the tourism sector is to set economic and non-economic goals and to provide businesses in the market with the tools to achieve those goals. Although the European Union declares that it has a social tourism policy and aims to regulate the market with it, everything is practically left to the deregulatory market. Only properly applied economic, legal and administrative instruments of tourism policy can achieve the set economic and social goals (Panasiuk et. al., 2021).

Since the tourism economy in the EU is not regulated, member countries have complete freedom to form their own tourism policy. In the Union, only tourism events and services are regulated in order to protect consumer rights and create a harmonized tourism market. Social tourism, including for disabled people, is addressed through sustainable development policies in order to ensure today's needs and leave a chance for future generations to receive the same services. Sustainable and general tourism planning must ensure the availability of services for all and help avoid seasonality of services and congestion during them. Increased attention is paid to the introduction of new technologies that allow ensuring tourism for all. The concept of universal access is also proposed as the main criterion for providing economic support to new tourism facilities (Panasiuk et. al., 2021). How the main problems of disabled tourism are raised - transport, accommodation and adaptation of classes/activities. According to Tibor Gonda, 2/3 of disabled tourists do not want separate, specialized, but integral services, together with other groups of society. All the main problems of disabled tourism can be reduced to accessibility (Gonda, T, 2021). Historically, accessibility has been associated with adapting products, events, services and environments to people with disabilities. According to the World Bank, almost a fifth of the world's population suffers from one form of disability or another. In 2014-2020, the European Union investment program promoted universal design, which is especially important for groups of tourists with disabilities.



1 Figure. Universal Design Mechanism (Source: Morsey, 2015)

The principles of universal design are equality, flexibility, simple and intuitive use, error tolerance, noticeable and relevant information, minimal physical effort, optimal size and space.

Universal design is not adaptation for the disabled but is intended for all groups of society and promotes their integrity (Švagždiene et. al., 2021).

Universal design has a great advantage over simply specialized services. For example, according to research, disabled-friendly rooms in hotels are not attractive to other customers. This leads to another problem, the lack of availability information. According to research, only 23.91% of hotels in the world provide information about accessibility for disabled people. What's more, mobility disability is considered the main accessibility and other disability groups are completely forgotten.

An excellent example of disabled tourism and integration is the Porto Cesareo Marine Protected Area (Porto Cesareo MPA). It is almost 17 ha of sea and 32 ha of coastal territory. It is not only a protected and conserved coastal area, but also an example of excellent socio-economic tourism implemented through environmental education and research projects. Anthropogenic management is implemented in this zone, which improves the quality of environmental and social tourism in the region and raises the awareness and competencies of participating institutions and bodies. With the initiative and cooperation of local institutions, a new method of training blind divers was invented, which was recognized at the global level by international diving organizations. Not only in the protected area, but tourists with special needs were enabled to engage in diving, which was impossible until then (De Matteis et al., 2021).

### **Conclusions**

The instruments presented by the European Union do not seek to increase the demand for tourism, but seek to use the tourism opportunities of national states more efficiently. As the number of disabled people in the world increases, caring for their well-being is not only a moral obligation, but also a good business opportunity. It is not enough to create a material base to ensure tourism for the disabled, but also to change the public's attitude towards the needs of such people and prepare specially trained tourism personnel. Accessibility means equal and equal conditions for everyone, but from the point of view of disabled people, tourist places, transport, accommodation and catering establishments, travel agencies are not able to ensure equal conditions for everyone. Even in economically strong countries, where accessibility is most ensured for the disabled, only 30% of hotels are adapted for people with mobility disabilities, and less than 5% for people with other disabilities. If accessibility is promoted and considered only in the construction of new buildings, the situation will not change for many years. Only cooperation and shared values between institutions and bodies can ensure full equality and accessibility for all, as was achieved in the discussed Porto Cesareo protected area.

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