

## **Opinions of tourists regarding the accessibility for people with disabilities in the area of Braşov County**

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to present tourists' opinions on the touristic destination - Brasov County, regarding accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Accessibility of disabled individuals is an actual subject, keeping in mind that in the European Union 1 of 6 persons has a disability. Results of the quantitative research conducted on a sample of 1119 tourists can be used by tourism stakeholders in order to develop facilities that allow increased accessibility for people with disabilities.*

**Key words:** *accessible tourism, persons with disabilities, quantitative research.*

### **1. Introduction**

Accessibility of tourism products currently represents an extremely important issue considered not only on national level but also internationally, and at European Union level. This is due to statistical data, which indicates, for example, in the European Union, the existence of almost 80 million disabled people (1 in 6 people has a disability) (European Commission, 2010).

In Romania, at the end of 2015, the total number of persons with disabilities was of 766.153, the growth in 2006-2015 being of 50% (ANPD, 2015). Social inclusion and the full participation of these persons in the society is a concern of the EU, which is a signatory of the ONU Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (European Commission 2016). Law no. 448/2006 specifies that "persons with disabilities are those persons who, because of physical, mental or sensory lack of the skills to carry out normal daily activities, requiring protection measures in support of recovery, integration and social inclusion" (law no 448/2006).

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According to European Commission, the "European Disability Strategy 2010-2020", must be activated in the following directions: to ensure the *accessibility* of goods and services and promote the market of assistive devices; to ensure the participation, those people must enjoy all benefits of EU citizenship; to ensure equality (combat discrimination); to raise the employment rate; to promote inclusive education and lifelong learning; social protection; access to health and external action (promote this rights in the EU enlargement and international development programmes) (European Commission 2010).

This paper is structured as followed: the second section shows a brief theoretical background; the third section covers the objectives and the research method used; in the fourth section there were presented research results; the work ends with conclusions and discussions.

## **2. Theoretical background**

The development of tourist destinations is a complex goal, the implications and interests being numerous and difficult to reconcile because they are the expression of the objectives of public and private institutions, in action at that destination (Baltescu, Bratucu and Boscor, 2013). In addition to natural and anthropic heritage and to human resource, the development of an attractive touristic destination is conditioned by the material conditions – improvements regarding accommodation, catering, sports, leisure, public services, transport system (Tescasiu and Micu, 2015).

In the literature the problem of accessibility in tourism activities for people with disabilities has been studied in terms of potential employees capacity (Gröschl 2007, Geng-Chi and Qu Qing 2003) but as well as potential tourists. This argues that if it were taking into account people with disabilities at every level/ component of a tourism product, this would lead to the provision of tourism services improved for all tourists (Daniels et al., 2005).

Understanding the stages that a person with disabilities has to go through in the attempt to access tourism services is also extremely important. These stages were identified as a personal re-connection, tourism analysis, physical journey, and experimentation and reflection (Kwai-sang Yau, McKercher and Packer, 2004). At the same time, the literature reflected the need for information, being identified five interrelated components: information richness and reliability, appropriate sources, communication tools, and customer-oriented services (Eichhorn et al., 2008).

The results of a qualitative study conducted on persons with reduced mobility have highlighted five dimensions of accessibility in tourism: tourism access to physical features, access to service procedures, ease of access to physical and service features, upkeep of accessible physical and service features, and access to accurate and reliable information (Yeon Woo, Cole and Zhang, 2015). Accessibility in the hospitality industry is being considered extremely important for the competitiveness of destinations in emerging countries as Bangladesh (Das and

Rudra, 2015). Research has revealed that for any destination it is recommended to improve the access for people with disabilities, to introduce more bus lines that allow wheelchair access, easier entrance to the touristic attractions and accommodation units (Brătucu, Chițu and Demeter 2015).

Given all these considerations this paper aims to present a number of issues regarding the availability of touristic destination of Brasov County for people with disabilities. These issues are considered useful in management decisions of both tourism operators and destination management organizations, this paperwork is part of a scientific research project entitled Destination Intelligent Management for Sustainable Tourism (DIMAST). This project aims at designing and developing an original technical procedure for testing the European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Destinations (ETIS, 2013) in Brașov County, by the aid of an innovative information system to support decision-making of GDSS type (functional model), that should directly and actively support the participative management of a sustainable tourism development within the destination - Brașov County (DIMAST 2016).

The underlying questionnaire was carried out based on ETIS questionnaire that was proposed to be applied on tourists by the European Commission Guidance in the *Guidebook on the European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Destinations* (ETIS, 2013).

### **3. The objectives and the research method used**

The present study was undertaken among the Romanian and foreign tourists who visited the tourist destination of Brașov County during the period of research (2015), and was aimed at quantifying some opinions regarding accessibility for people with disabilities, being based on a quantitative research, namely opinion survey.

**The sample** was validated in accordance with the following rules that might ensure its representativeness: it should be made up by using a random sampling method, it should have a size that is large enough as to cover the entire diversity of existing behaviors and attitudes and to ensure a reasonable margin of error of the results for the entire population and it should reflect the structure of the researched population in terms of relevant characteristics such as the type of the facility, classification, etc. For interviewing the subjects, the tool used was a questionnaire including 18 questions.

The main objectives aimed to identify the countries of residence of the tourists, their opinion on the existence of concerns for travellers with special needs, identifying the components of the tourism product in terms of poor accessibility of persons with disabilities (accommodation, units of public alimentation, etc.).

**The sampling method** selected for this research is the multistage sampling combined with simple random sampling. Taking into account the fact that tourists were accommodated in hotels and guesthouses, option has been made to collect data

by placing the questionnaires in the reception area of certain facilities included in the sample. The stages were established as follows:

- the primary sampling units: localities of Braşov County;
- the secondary units: classification of the researched units.

For the last stage, the systematic sampling was used.

After selecting the accommodation facilities that were included in the sample, the simple random sampling method was selected for them, as at the reception of the hotel a list of the accommodated tourists was available.

After the questionnaires were filled in, they were collected from the tourist facilities, gathering a total number of 1119 complete questionnaires. The recomputed value of the maximum permissible error was of 2.92%.

#### 4. Research results

After carrying out the market research on a sample made up of 1119 subjects, the most important and relevant results related to the theme are presented below.

##### **Question No. 1. What is your country of residence?**

In order to make a demographic assessment of the visitors included in the sample, they were asked to indicate the name of *their country of residence*. The responses of 1119 visitors were distributed as follows: the majority of respondents, 85.8%, answered Romania, 5.4% Germany, 3.6% were visitors from Italy, 3.5% from Switzerland and 1.8% from Israel (see Figure 1).

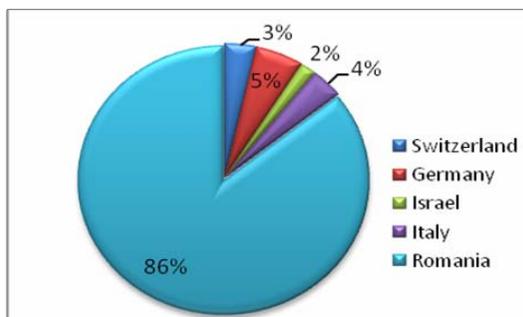


Figure 2. Country of residence of tourists

##### **Question No. 2. Do you or a person travelling with you have a disability or reduced mobility?**

From the sample of 1119 visitors, 98.2 %, respectively 1099 people have no disability or reduced mobility, but 20 people, respectively 1.8 % have one of these problems (disability or reduced mobility). In figure 3 a graphical representation of the responses is displayed.

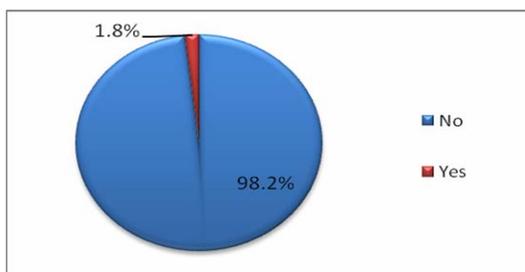


Figure 3. The percentage of persons with disabilities

**Question No.3.** This destination takes into account, in all areas of activity, the special needs of visitors with disabilities (accommodation, public transport, touristic attractions, etc).

The answers are the following: 12.5 % fully agree with this statement, 37.5 % agree with the statement, 24.9 % are neutral and 1.8 % do not agree with the above statement. 23.2 % of respondents did not answer this question (See Figure 4).

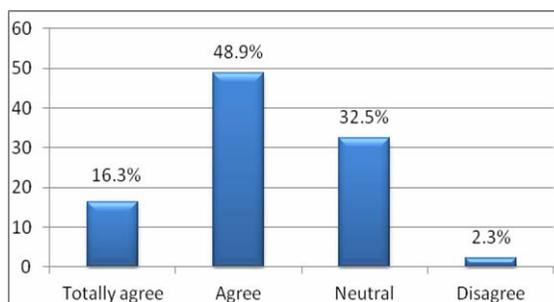


Figure 4. Level of accessibility for people with disabilities

**Question No. 4.** Which locations do you consider are the biggest problems, regarding access, taking into account the accessibility for people with disabilities/ special needs.

The biggest problems regarding the destination accessibility for people with disabilities/ special needs, regarding access are found in 27.4% of cases in sightseeing, 17.9% of visitors believe that problems are encountered by the means of transport, 16% of visitors believe that the problems are regarding general infrastructure, 15.1% of answers found the problems to be at the accommodation structures and the same percentage considers that the problems are in leisure facilities. 7.5% of the problems are encountered in eating structures (See Figure 5).

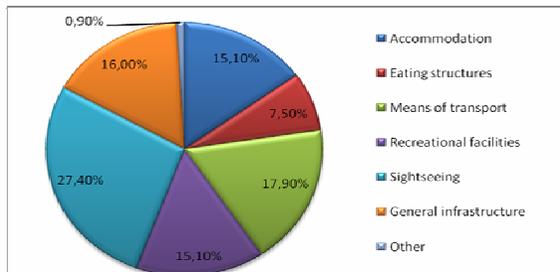


Figure 5. Frequencies for accessibility problems

**Question No. 5. Are you aware of the sustainability efforts and initiatives taken in this destination?**

Asked if they noticed the sustainability efforts and initiatives taken by those responsible in tourist destination, 71.5% answered affirmatively, while 19.7% answered negatively. A percentage of 8.8% of the subjects did not answer this question (see Figure 6).

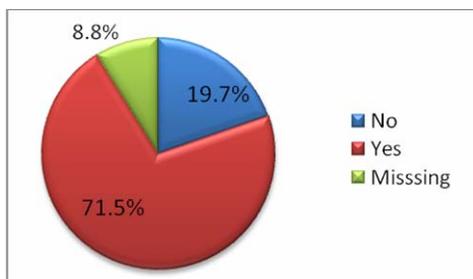


Figure 6. Sustainability initiatives

**Question No. 6. Your gender is:**

Regarding the gender of the respondents taking part in this research, there were analysed the responses of 585 women, representing 52.3%, and 534 men, representing 47.5% (see Figure 7).

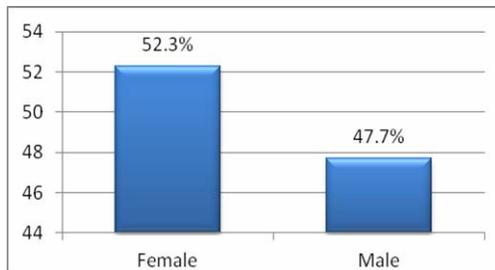


Figure 7. Tourist structure by gender

**Question No. 7.** Your marital status is:

Depending on the marital status of tourists from the tourist destination of Braşov County, there were analysed the answers of 125 persons who travelled alone, namely a percentage of 11.2%. Out of all the respondents, 656 (58.6% of the total) said they visited the destination as a couple/family without children, while 338 respondents (30.2% of the total) visited Braşov County as a family with children (see Figure 14).

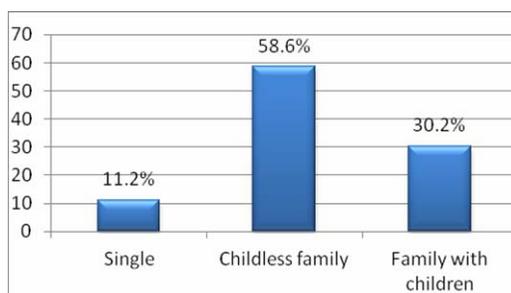


Figure 8. Tourist structure by marital status.

**Question No. 8.** Your age group is:

The age of visitors included in the sample is structured as follows (see figure 9): 290 persons, namely 25.9%, were in the 18-29 age group; 177 persons (15.8%) were in the 30-39 age group; 153 tourists (13.7%) fell in the 40-49 age group; 204 visitors, namely 18.2%, were in the 50-59 age group; 295 of the respondents were aged over 60 years (26.4%).

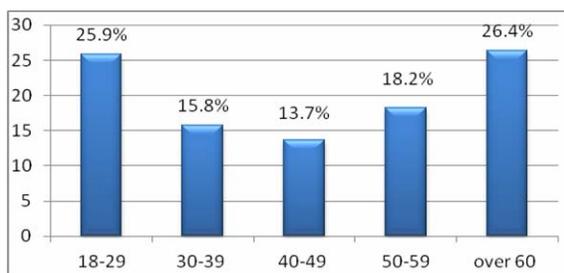


Figure 9. Tourists structure by age

**5. Conclusions and discussions**

Among the interviewed subjects, 1.8% consider that the destination does not ensure, in all areas of activity, the accessibility required by the special needs of visitors with disabilities (accommodation, public transport, touristic attractions, etc.)

The biggest problems regarding the destination accessibility for people with disabilities or special needs, regarding access are found in 27.4% of sightseeing cases, 17.9% of visitors believe that problems are encountered by the means of transport, 16% of visitors believe that the problems are in relation with general infrastructure, 15.1% of answers found the problems on the accommodation structures and the same percentage considers that the problems are in leisure facilities. 7.5% of the problems are encountered in eating structures.

Regarding the efforts and initiatives on sustainability 71.5% of visitors noticed and appreciated the developments, while 19.7% haven't noticed the initiatives mentioned above.

Making a cross analysis, it is observed that among persons identified with disabilities or reduced mobility, more women were found. It was also found that the age of visitors who have disabilities or reduced mobility is within the ranges 18-29 and over 60 years.

A further analysis reveals the fact that all persons who were identified in the category of persons with disabilities or reduced mobility are from Romania, and they all responded affirmatively on the question regarding the sustainability initiatives and efforts made by the destination.

The responses distribution for people with disabilities or reduced mobility depending on marital status, were also analysed, and it has been found out that: 20%, travelled alone, 50% travelled as a couple/family without children and 30% have travelled as a family with children.

Regarding the correlation between the accommodation structures and leisure facilities, it can be said that there is a medium direct correlation, which has a coefficient of 0.559 points. 1.8 % of interviewed subjects consider that the destination does not ensure the accessibility required by the special needs of visitors with disabilities, and all these people belong to the category of tourists from Germany.

In conclusion, the touristic destination of Brasov County makes efforts to become a sustainable tourism destination and its initiatives are visible and appreciated by some of the tourists. In addition, this destination takes into account the special needs of persons with disabilities or reduced mobility, but there are a significant number of problems regarding accessibility for this category of tourists.

## **6. Acknowledgements**

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