

ACCESSIBLE TOURISM IN GREECE: A SATISFACTION SURVEY ON TOURISTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

People with disabilities make up a large, ever-increasing percentage of the world's population. Today, after many efforts of global and national organizations, they are institutionally treated as equal members of society. One of these activities in which they have the right but also the need to participate, is tourism. Accessible tourism is about making it easier for them to enjoy tourism experiences. Making tourism more accessible is not only a social responsibility – there are also economic benefits through an expanding of potential tourism market. Accessible tourism presupposes a tourism offer that shapes accessible tourism products, infrastructure and services, both from the public and the private sector. Greece successfully complies with international standards in the legislative field, incorporating the decisions and directives of international organizations and the European Union. It makes every effort to facilitate the disabled people, adopting the principles of a universal design, a "design for all". The purpose of the research of this paper was to investigate the satisfaction of tourists with disabilities from the existing infrastructure, tourist products and services they used during their holidays in various places in Greece. In addition, it is investigated to what extent and in which sectors there are prospects for improving accessible tourism in Greece. In practice, the present research has shown many weaknesses and shortcomings in some areas of accessible tourism. The evolution of this form of tourism has not reached the level to achieve unimpeded transportation, accommodation and entertainment in general, so that the tourists can fully enjoy their holidays. Regarding the service of the staff in general in the accommodation areas and in the tourist areas, tourists are quite satisfied with the services they provided. Greece may make efforts to improve these infrastructures, but as the responses of people with disabilities show, they are not enough to move around safely and comfortably. It seems there is a lack of mechanism in Greece for certifying, monitoring and evaluating accessibility standards.

Keywords: People with disabilities, accessible tourism, Greece

1. INTRODUCTION

Disability, according to medical science, refers to the existence of damage to the functions of the individual that are either congenital or acquired. Disabilities can be the result of an illness or an accident. Taking a brief look at the history of disability, we will observe that people with disabilities have existed since the human species appeared on the planet. In each era, there was a different treatment of people with disabilities, depending on the prevailing interests and groups. People with disabilities over the centuries have received many different methods of treatment, mainly negative (abandonment, isolation, incarceration, experiments, mockery, exploitation, etc.), but also positive through charity, protection and care of public bodies and individuals.

Leisure and tourism are an important activity and expression of the modern way of life, contributing significantly to the improvement of the quality of life of all people, without or with a disability. Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to participate in all activities of life, including tourism. It has therefore been established as an alternative to tourism, "Tourism for All" or "Accessible Tourism", for People with Disabilities.

According to ENAT (2007), accessible tourism takes into account the complexity of accessibility, which should be integrated throughout the chain: information, reservations, transportation, accommodation, food, attractions, services, etc. Lack of accessibility even in one link, can have a huge impact across the chain.

Various researches carried out in this field, try to identify common needs of people with disabilities, in order to properly shape the environment and the services provided by the tourist offer. The needs of people with disabilities can be classified into: internal needs (escape from everyday life), leisure needs, socialization needs, financial needs, information needs, accommodation needs (Wang et al. 2017; Zsarnoczky, 2017; Patterson et al. 2012; Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011; Oladokun et al 2014).

In Greece, Law 4067/2012, par. 33, with the "universal design" provides for the design of products of a structured environment, which can be used by all people, without the need for adaptation or specialized design to the greatest extent possible. These needs are what the tourist offer should try to cover, so that the seamless participation of people with disabilities in tourism becomes possible. The aim of the research of this article is to demonstrate, whether the needs of people with disabilities are met by the tourism products and services offered in Greece.

2. CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF DISABILITY

Studying the topic, it becomes clear that over time different terms have been heard and different definitions have been formulated. The most prevalent is that of the World Health Organization (WHO): "Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Disability is thus not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives."¹

Definitions of disability fall into two models: the medical and the social ones. Until the 1980s, the dominant model in the field of disability was the individual / medical, which treats people with disabilities as a special category of patients who face difficulties due to their own individual functional limitations. Therefore, the person with a disability is considered to be in need of medical treatment, which can only be provided by specialists, thus significantly reducing the role of society itself in the "construction" of the disability (Oliver, 1996). The medical model has been criticized for its one-sided medical approach to disability by creating an alternative disability model, which was formed with the help of people with disabilities and activists with disabilities (Aitchison, 2003). The social model perceives disability as socially constructed, according to which the responsibility for disability lies with society and not with the individual (Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1996). The central doctrine of the social model is that disability is created by society itself, which, with the values, standards, rules it imposes, makes people with disabilities unable to use all their potential due to the oppressive impact of a non-disabled society (Thomas, 2003).

People with disabilities are not a homogeneous group with the same needs. There are various disabilities, obvious or not, mild or severe, permanent or temporary, each with its own particular characteristics. People with disabilities face barriers to widespread access to services, which are characterized by stigma and discrimination and include negative attitudes and behaviors, lack of services, insufficient funding, lack of accessibility, inappropriate technologies and forms of information and communication, and lack of participation (WHO, 2011; WHO, 2013).

¹https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1

Over a billion people, about 15% of the world's population, have some form of disability, of whom 2–4% experience significant difficulties in functioning. The rates of disability are increasing due to population ageing and increases in chronic health conditions, among other causes. Many of these people require assistive technologies such as low-vision devices, wheelchairs or hearing aids. This number is expected to double to 2 billion by 2050 (WHO, 2018).

Disability is an evolving issue. It would be impossible to talk about improving the quality of life of the world's disadvantaged populations without understanding and responding to their particular needs. Disability is a human rights issue. Disability legislation, at the international level, has been influenced by declarations and international conventions, which seek to establish regulatory rules that improve and protect the lives of people with disabilities in the best possible way.

The general principle that applies in any democratic society is the right of every citizen to autonomous, equal and secure access and participation in all areas of activity (productive, political, cultural, etc.) of society. Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, introducing the perspective of the interaction between people with disabilities and environmental barriers, is a holistic approach to the definition of disability. It moves away from the historically dominant medical model, at the same time introducing the social dimension to the approach to disability. Key features of the Convention are the recognition of the importance of accessibility to the natural, social, economic and cultural environment, health and education, information and communication to enable persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The contract highlights the horizontal nature of accessibility by referring to it directly or indirectly in many articles (Nikolaidis, Mizamtsi, Mourouzis, 2012).

The European Union has taken special care of people with disabilities, for which purpose the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 has been developed. The main goal is the successful integration of People with Disabilities into social and economic life through a series of initiatives that it puts forward, for the implementation of which the Member States are responsible. The main objective of the European Disability Strategy is to create the right conditions for people with disabilities to enjoy their full rights and to reap as much benefit as possible from their participation in society and the European economy, in particular through the single market. The European Commission has identified eight key areas for action (accessibility, participation, equality, education and training, social protection, health, external action and employment) (EC, 2010).

Universal design, according to the Center for Universal Design, is the design of products and environments so that they can be used by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design». It is based on the philosophy of simplification and modification of design standards with a view to optimal savings and with the aim of absolute functionality and ease of use by all people and includes the corresponding design of products, services, and natural environment (Mace et al. 1996).

We can easily distinguish from the above the emergence of the dominant role of accessibility for the autonomous, equal and safe participation of people with disabilities in all areas of activity (economic, political, cultural, etc.) of society. Accessibility is achieved by creating appropriate conditions and facilities to remove the barriers created by disability. This is especially true for Tourism, which requires information, transportation, accommodation, food, services etc. outside the usual place of residence of these people. Then we talk about Accessible Tourism.

The travel and tourism industry must act at every level to create better conditions for travelers with disabilities. As characteristically stated in the ITB World Travel Trends Report (2012-2013), "People with disabilities want to participate in the travel process just like other people. They do not want to stay at home."

3. ACCESSIBLE TOURISM. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature tends to show that people with disabilities face a number of barriers to participation in social becoming and that because of these barriers they have more difficult access to tourism opportunities than people without some form of disability do. Over the last 20 years, however, progress has been made in removing obstacles, so that today areas such as transport, accommodation, attractions etc. are largely

accessible. However, a disproportionately small number of people with disabilities are fully involved in the various forms of tourism (Darcy, 1998). Consequence of the above was the creation of a theoretical framework for the accessible tourism.

According to Buhalis and Darcy (2011), accessible tourism is a form of tourism that includes processes of cooperation between tourism professionals, which allow people with access needs including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive disorders, to operate with independence, equality and dignity through the provision of globally designed products, services and environments, in terms of tourism. The social groups targeted by accessible tourism include not only people with permanent or temporary disabilities but also other categories such as the obese, the elderly, and families with young children.

These are people, who have common needs and desires with other social groups, however, they often perceive tourism as an activity to be sacrificed. The tourism industry, recognizing these needs, has attached great importance to meeting the demands of the above groups and based on the promotion of human rights and equal opportunities has developed the idea of Accessible Tourism (Yau et al. 2004). Accessible Tourism, therefore, is approached as a process governed by values, such as independence, equality and dignity, which guide its development and determine the required functional elements of the individual products and services that contribute to the integrated tourism experience of to whom it is addressed (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011; Leiper, 2004).

Facilitating the tourist movement of people with different access difficulties is a vital element in formulating effective tourism development policies (Loi and Kong, 2015). This facility is not only about providing accessible infrastructure, which is in fact the basis for tourism participation, but also about overcoming the information barriers that people with disabilities may face. For these individuals, providing information about the current accessibility characteristics of a destination represents a key operational need (Eichhorn et al. 2007; Yau et al. 2004). Their information needs usually include the provision of clear information on accessible tourism facilities, the availability of support services for people with disabilities in various destinations and the training of tourism workers on their special needs (Loi and Kong, 2015). Without sufficient information, people with disabilities doubt the ability to meet their physical needs in each tourist destination and therefore choose not to travel, thus failing to meet their significant social and psychological needs (Shaw & Coles, 2004). Since the satisfaction of information needs is a catalyst in the final consumer decision, it is necessary to both identify and understand the different information needs of these tourists, as well as to develop specific sources of communication that meet the requirements of stakeholders (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). One such source is the Internet, which has become the dominant means of disseminating global information and is the most popular means of seeking information related to health and care (Doxiadis, 2012). With the introduction of the internet, people with disabilities have acquired a powerful and independent source of information, which through a simplified search process provides them with access to complete, reliable and up-to-date data that allows them to better plan their vacation (Eichhorn et al. 2007; Buhalis, 2003). All the useful information that the interested parties receive from the internet helps them to prepare and organize their trip and accommodation, having the same rights as all tourists. One of these rights is the need for travel and activities, which will lead them to social integration and acceptance. However, unfortunately, despite the efforts of public and private bodies, the tourist offer for people with special needs is insufficient and limited. Finally, the size of the tourist market for people with disabilities is quite large and is a new challenge for professionals.

Financial background is an equally important factor in determining accessibility and behavioral barriers, as it determines a travel experience such as, for example, length of stay, mode of transport, place of residence and can therefore be a significant barrier for travelers with disabilities (Darcy & Daruwalla, 1999). For example, travelers with mobility disabilities may need to spend more money for the expenses of an attendant, for auxiliary devices, for accessible hotel rooms and in addition for means of transport. In general, people with disabilities have a much lower income than people without disabilities (Smith et al. 2001), which limits both their choices and their experiences.

Another key condition for the development of accessible tourism is global planning, which is a challenge for the tourism industry, which is called upon to adopt the principles of universal planning as a foundation for achieving greater social sustainability. „Design for all“ is aimed at people of all ages and abilities. It is defined as the

design of products and environments that can be used by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need adaptation or special design. The philosophy of universal design focuses on simplifying everyone's life by designing products, forms of communication and natural environment, to make it easier for most people to use with little or no extra cost. In many countries, the framework for developing accessible tourism or implementing universal design can be found in building codes and accessibility standards (Ronald, Graeme & Jaime, 1999).

4. ACCESSIBLE TOURISM IN GREECE

There are three main reasons why providers offer affordable accessible tourism products and services. First, compliance with the various laws and treaties (e.g. the United Nations Convention on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities). Second, the compliance of accommodation belonging to international chains with the company's policy. Third, the incentive for a possible expansion of their clientele through the accessible services they offer, as both the disabled and the elderly and families use these services with young children. Finally, any subsidies are an additional incentive for providers of tourism products and services (Patterson et al. 2012).

In Greece, the rights of people with disabilities are constitutionally guaranteed (article 4 and 21, par. 2, 3 and 6). In addition, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, signed by both the European Union and Greece, can help better implement the above principle. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was signed on 13 December 2006, entered into force on 3 May 2008 and is the first legally binding text on the rights of persons with disabilities (UN, 2006). The European Union signed it on 23 December 2010 and formally concluded it in January 2011. Greece ratified this convention by law on 10 April 2012. Guiding principles of the convention are respect for the dignity, autonomy, choices and independence of non-discrimination, full participation in society, respect for diversity, equal opportunities, etc.

According to Greek law (Law 4067/2012, paragraph 2) "accessibility is the characteristic of the environment, which allows all people - without discrimination of gender, age and other characteristics, such as physique, strength, perception, nationality to have access that is, to be able to independently, safely and comfortably access and use the infrastructure but also the services (conventional and electronic) and the goods available in the specific environment".

Greece has a legal framework to support the implementation of accessibility in building infrastructure and public spaces. With the enactment of Law 1577/1985 (General Building Regulation) for the first time the existence of access for the disabled to all special buildings and residential buildings in which it was mandatory to install an elevator in public areas became mandatory. Gradually, a remarkable and strong legislation was enacted, as well as specifications and planning instructions for the enforcement of the access and service of the disabled to the natural environment (including now the buildings of the pre-heads of Law 1577). In Law 2831/2000, which is an amendment of the provisions of Law 1577/1985, article 28 includes special regulations for the service of persons with disabilities or persons with disabilities regarding accessibility (Ziombiloudi et al. 2015).

On the occasion of the Olympic and Paralympic Games of 2004, important interventions and projects were implemented in Athens and other Olympic cities of Greece to ensure the accessibility of facilities, infrastructure and services for all visitors and spectators. Providing the necessary conditions for the successful organization of the Paralympic Games in 2004 left a significant legacy in the country for people with disabilities, through a project called 'ERMIS' (Buhalis et al. 2005).

Subsequently, Greek National Tourism Organization has created projects for all provisions, while hotel accommodation is obliged by law 4030/2011 to ensure the conditions of accessibility and accommodation in all their premises. Under the "Tourism for All" program, an eight-day vacation plan is provided each year for all people with disabilities over 67% and their protected members, regardless of income, while there is a corresponding care for the elderly. In those hotels that meet all the modern conditions for the access of people with disabilities, a special signal is granted, with law 4276/2014 to confirm the relevant infrastructure they have.

Finally, according to the Ministerial Decision 216 on 09.01.2015, Article 5, the minimum number of rooms for people with disabilities in hotels is set at 5% of the total capacity of the facility. The application of this rate is obligatory until the number five total rooms for disabled persons (Dimou & Velissariou, 2016).

Today, the design of the built and natural environment and the drafting of international accessibility rules are based on the principle of "Universal Design for All". The wheelchair user is taken as the anthropometric model, because what serves the needs of the wheelchair user serves usually the needs of every other citizen, so that all citizens and tourists are served in the same way. In addition, tourism businesses operating in accessible tourism need to meet other requirements in order to claim a leading position in the accessible tourism market, and these are: • Focused marketing mix • Appropriate modifications of buildings and other infrastructure • Provide detailed and accessible information on Company characteristics • Trained and informed staff about accessible facilities, and generally, good customer service.

These conditions are required to be considered in the research of this article conducted on tourists with disabilities, inviting them to assess the status of the accessible tourist offer. It should be noted here, that there is a relative lack of studies on this subject in the literature. Three published surveys are worth mentioning. In the first of these, Ikos (2006) states that accessible tourism in Greece has only weaknesses and presents many problems. This is due to the fact that most public spaces, transport, buildings, etc. do not meet the requirements of universal design. This a natural for 2006.

Dimou and Velissariou (2016) in their research on accessible tourism in Crete came to opposite conclusions. They found high levels of satisfaction of disabled tourists in most areas of their service, as many hotels, archeological sites and other sites met many accessibility standards. Only the field of transport and urban planning for tourism use lagged behind in this research. Therefore, they concluded that Crete with a little attention and investment in this direction could become an important accessible tourist destination.

Finally, the research of Kasimati and Ioakeimidis (2019) is the most recent, and examines whether accessible tourism in Greece can become the new promising tourism activity. The article provides an overview of the general situation in the country and investigates the level of supply and service to customers with disabilities. Their results show that, first the "accessible tourism product of Greece is not entirely satisfactory; therefore, demand for accessible tourism in Greece remains low, as the Greek tourist destinations lack the appropriate infrastructure and easy access to public transport; and second the dynamics and size of the accessible tourist market is not fully understood by the Greek tourist industry".

5. THE RESEARCH AND ITS RESULTS

5.1. Purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to demonstrate the satisfaction of disabled tourists in various tourist infrastructures that they have visited in Greece. Many places are considered accessible, but the question is whether the accessibility provided by each service meets and facilitates the needs of a person with a disability. Specifically, in the present study, the image of these people for Greece is investigated, regarding the existing infrastructure and the corresponding services of the country that are provided to the disabled tourist.

The research questions are related to the infrastructure of both the tourist areas and the transport and accommodation of people with disabilities in Greece. Their degree of satisfaction with the existing infrastructure, the provision of services is examined and finally it is investigated to what extent and in which sectors there are prospects for improving accessible tourism in Greece.

5.2. Research design

Regarding the research method to be followed, it was deemed necessary to conduct a survey, in the framework of which the satisfaction of people with disabilities in tourist destinations is investigated. A sample survey could be described as the most suitable method for collecting data from a large population. Still, these surveys are the most appropriate tools for measuring the perception of the views of a population. Typical areas of research

included in this area are the existing infrastructure, accessibility to tourist sites and service. To conduct the research, the method that was followed and judged as the most appropriate, is the creation of a questionnaire. It is the most common instrument for collecting primary information, which must be carefully designed, tested and adapted before being distributed to respondents.

The research population was defined as all people with some form of disability who have been tourists in recent years and their companions-assistants in the greater area of the city of Thessaloniki, while the final sample is 144 people. The disability-related organizations that contributed to the research were mainly:

- SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND THESSALONIKI - (Center for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind (KEAT) - <http://www.keat.gr/index.php/gr/> Center for Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind
- ELEPAP (Hellenic Society for the Protection & Rehabilitation of Disabled People) <https://elepap.gr/>
- KENG THESSALONIKIS (Greek Sign Language Center) <https://www.keng.gr/> Center of Greek Sign Language
- NINA SERVICE DOGS <http://www.ninaservicedogs.com>

The questionnaire was compiled in the online form of Google docs in Greek, which was forwarded to people with disabilities and their helpers. The questionnaires were promoted to various associations and organizations in Greece that concern people with disabilities, sports teams and individuals whose relatives have some form of disability. The results of the survey were measured using the Google Spreadsheet (excel) form.

The survey was conducted in the period October - December 2019.

5.3. Research results

This section describes the results gathered from the research. The total number of answers collected is from 144 people with motor and mental difficulties but also with vision and hearing problems. At the same time, part of the answers came from escorts-assistants of the above individuals.

Responses from the male population number 37.5%, while 62.5% from women.

Of the respondents, 55.6% concern ages ranging from 19-34 years, after 35-49 years 28.5%, while 10.4% people from 50-64 years. The percentages were lower than the younger ones, i.e. up to 18 years old with 3.5%, but also the older ones from 65 years old and over with 2.1%.

Most respondents come from urban centers with a rate of 63.2%, while the percentage of permanent residence is lower from a province of 27.1% and from an island of 9.7%.

To the question, "when you move, what is the reason that leads to the need for some form of assistance", the majority, i.e. 61.8% answered due to mobility difficulties, immediately followed by 14.6% of people with visual impairments and small difference 13.9% of people with hearing problems. Finally, 9.7% correspond to people with mental disabilities.

Regarding the escort of disabled tourists during their visit to another place of residence, we observe that the difference is almost 20%. 59.7% answered that they have an escort-assistant with them while 40.3% stated that they do not choose an escort, but prefer their autonomous movement.

The largest percentage of 53.5% of tourists with disabilities choose to travel to the destination by car either alone or with an attendant. The immediate next option is 27.1% preferring the plane, 10.4% the bus, 5.6% the ship and 3.5% the train.

The means of transport preferred by 66% of travelers with disabilities is their own vehicle. 20.8% choose the taxi or a private company, while 13.2% choose public transport.

43.1% travel in Greece 1-2 times a year, 34.7% 2-5 times, while more than 5 times 18.1%. 4.2% do not travel at all for personal reasons.

We observe that the hotel is the choice of 60.4% of people with disabilities, 20.1% live in a relative's house, while 19.4% choose a rented room.

Regarding the satisfaction from the service of the employees in the public transport, the majority, i.e. 39.6%, answered that the service is mediocre. 25% answered below average while 19.4% said they were not at all satisfied. In contrast to the 13.9% who answered that, they are a little above average satisfied, while only 2.1% showed that they are completely satisfied

The satisfaction from the service of the employees during the stay was much better, since 45.8% answered that it was above average, while 30.6% answered mediocre. 13.2% were very happy in contrast to 9.7% and 0.7% which was below average to not at all.

In general, we notice that when it comes to staff service, most of the answers range from moderate to very high. 36.1% and 34% answer moderately to a little respectively. 13.2% are very happy and immediately after 11.8% choose as a degree of satisfaction a little, while 4.9% not at all.

Following the research, the respondents were asked for their opinion on whether they consider it necessary and important for the employees in various tourist areas to know sign language. Only 49.3% said it was very important and 22.9% had a mediocre answer. 22.2% considered it as important and 5.6% considered it a bit necessary. It is important to note that there was no answer for none at all, thus showing how necessary the knowledge of sign language is.

In terms of the satisfaction of accessible infrastructure in Greece, the numbers were disappointing for its data. 40.3% answered that they are a little satisfied while 36.1% that they are not at all. Following, 18.8% have answered their satisfaction is moderate and 3.5% with the answer stating that they are very happy. Last percentage of 1.4% as very satisfied, which shows the dissatisfaction of people with disabilities towards the country's infrastructure.

When asked if your disability has ever been a reason to cancel your vacation, 62.5% said yes. The remaining 37.5% answered no, stating that their disability did not cause them any problems in this area.

Those who answered that their disability was the reason for the cancellation of the holiday were then asked what the reason for the cancellation was. Due to lack of infrastructure was answered by 58.9%, due to the impossibility of transport to the destination 25.6% and finally 15.6% due to burdened costs.

The percentage of 60.4% answered that their disability prevented them from entering a tourist area while the remaining 39.6% did not face any problem. The next question that followed was whether they ever had to leave a declared accessible historic site due to lack of accessibility. 55.6% answered yes while the remaining 44.4% answered no.

Regarding the information provided by the tourist offices and the managers of the tourist areas, 41% state that the information is mediocre and 25.7% that it is little in relation to their expectations. 18.8% are more satisfied while 9.7% are not at all. Only 4.9% answered that they are very happy with the information provided to them.

Regarding the level of comparison of Greece's infrastructure with abroad, 72.9% answered that they have traveled abroad while 27.1% have not. Following the questionnaire the percentage who answered yes to whether he has traveled abroad, was asked to answer about how much he is satisfied with the infrastructure there. 48.6% showed that the infrastructure abroad is much better than in Greece. This was followed by 41% being very happy, 6.7 moderate, 2.9 not at all and 1% less satisfied with the infrastructure abroad.

One last question contained in the questionnaire is whether the respondents believe that Greece will improve in the future in terms of accessible tourism. The majority, i.e. 41%, answered that Greece will remain in an average situation, 21.5% believe that it will change a lot, 17.4% and 16% indicate that accessible tourism in Greece will not improve, while only 4.2% believe that there will be big changes.

In order to improve accessible tourism in Greece, at the end of the questionnaire those of the respondents who wanted to add their own suggestions were asked to answer openly. Through these proposals, it becomes clearer how people with special needs view the infrastructure and the services they receive.

Suggestions

Some suggestions made by the respondents and aimed at the development of accessible tourism in Greece are:

- Creation of elevators in archeological sites. (2 answers)
- Construction of ramps in all areas. (3 answers)
- Sign language knowledge and staff training. (10 answers)
- Installation of sound lanterns in all parts of Greece. (1 answer)
- Observance of laws and respect for the needs of people with disabilities. (12 replies)
- Adopt the latest building standards from the most advanced countries and create more infrastructure. (13 replies)
- For summer tourism in Greece, trained groups could also be created which would help people with disabilities to dive, so that they can see the underwater beauties of the country.
- Theatrical performances adapted to any kind of disability.

5.4. Difficulties and limitations of research

This research required a sample from the wider region of Greece in order to have a more correct result. Something that can be done in a large nationwide research in the future.

During the process of collecting the answers, the difficulty of each respondent to complete the questionnaire was mainly addressed. Due to the fact that the research referred to people with disabilities - whether they were motor, mental, or hearing or vision problems - the degree of difficulty of completion increased or decreased. In fact, there were cases where the questionnaire was completed by companions with the guidance of the person due to its inability to complete it independently (e.g. in cases where the person was blind and did not have the ability to read and answer questions). It is worth noting, however, that the prejudices of our society from the beginning to the end of the research were an obstacle. Unfortunately, people with such disabilities find it difficult to open up to a third party who wants to delve into the problems of the social group. This resulted in the non-completion of some questionnaires and therefore a large and important part of the sample audience was lost.

6. CONCLUSIONS

People with disabilities make up a large, ever-increasing percentage of the world's population. According to the UN, an estimated 650 million people in the world live with disabilities. Together with their families, this means that approximately 2 billion people – a third of the global population – are directly affected by disability (European Commission). Dealing with them has gone through many stages, in terms of how they are viewed. Today, after many efforts of global and national organizations and bodies, they are institutionally treated as equal members of society. One of these activities in which they have the right but also the need to participate, is tourism. For those people, travelling can be a challenge. Finding information on accessible services, checking luggage on a plane, or booking a room with special access needs often proves to be difficult, costly, and time consuming. In order for people with disabilities to be able to participate freely or at least with the least possible difficulty, the public and private sectors need to design accessible products, infrastructure and services. Accessible tourism is a form of tourism that aims at the above. Certainly, the tourist offer does not only do this as an obligation and solidarity, but also aims at the economic benefits, as the market of potential tourists expands.

Greece is a popular tourist destination. The percentages of its incoming tourism are constantly increasing. Nevertheless, one of the social groups - people with disabilities - seems to face difficulties in organizing and carrying out its travels. The resulting obstacles result in a slow increase in accessible tourism in Greece. The course of the legislation is judged to be in line with the social requirements and institutionally Greece has succeeded. Certainly, the evolution is obvious and the innovations keep pace with them in the rest of the developed EU countries. However, in practice, the present research has shown many weaknesses and shortcomings in some areas of accessible tourism.

The questionnaire included people with motor difficulties, mental difficulties, vision and hearing problems. The questions were addressed to men and women of all ages, coming from urban centers, provinces and islands. In Greece, although apparently accessibility seems to be at a satisfactory level, the answers collected from the questionnaire show that there is a serious lack of infrastructure. In the following analysis, the conclusions are based on the material gathered from the research.

The majority of responses ranged from 19-34 years old and 35-49 years old. Every peculiarity has difficulties in transportation, especially when one is going to organize one's own journey. The main form of difficulty of these people in the majority, 61.8% are mobility difficulties. 59.7% of people with any disability have a helper with them, without this meaning that the infrastructure should not facilitate the accessibility of these people. The mode of transport that most people choose is the car when moving, compared to other means of transport that are chosen with a lower frequency. This is because public transport service is not adequate. According to the degree of satisfaction with the service of the staff stated by the respondents, 39.6% answered that it is moderate and below average, while only 2.1% stated that they are completely satisfied. Regarding the service of the staff in general in the accommodation areas and in the tourist areas, 50% and more answered that they are quite satisfied with the services they provided.

For their stay, people with disabilities choose the hotel more (60.4%) as a more comfortable option during their vacation. However, some of the infrastructure is not fully accessible both in terms of infrastructure and in terms of staff - many are those who do not know sign language and the hotel does not provide trained assistants for people with any disability. When disabled tourists were asked how important they consider the knowledge of sign language by the staff in the field of tourism, 71.5% answered that it is very important and necessary, so that everyone can at any time offer any help and for the tourist to be facilitated. It is encouraging that no one considered it unnecessary or useless.

The largest percentage of the participants of the survey answered that they travel every year to different parts of Greece, from 1-2 times and more, so they were able to express their opinion about its accessible tourist infrastructure. The result was disappointing; with 76.4% answering that, they are not so satisfied with the infrastructure they encounter during their holidays. In addition, 58.9% of the total was forced to cancel his vacation at some point, due to lack of infrastructure.

When asked about those who have traveled abroad, 89.6% answered that the infrastructure there is much better compared to the infrastructure in Greece. Regarding the improvement of accessible tourism in the future in Greece, 41% believe that the situation will remain stagnant while only 25.7% are more optimistic about the improvement of the accessible infrastructure of the country.

According to the research, some results emerged that highlight the problems that people with disabilities face during their vacations. The evolution of this form of tourism has not reached the level to achieve unimpeded transportation, accommodation and entertainment in general, so that they can enjoy their holidays. Greece may make efforts to improve these infrastructures, but as the responses of people with disabilities show, they are not enough to move around safely and comfortably. It seems, there is a lack of mechanism in Greece for certifying, monitoring and evaluating accessibility standards.

Greece, being in the European Union, does not respond properly to the needs of people with disabilities, consequently in terms of accessible tourism. In order for people with disabilities to be able to perform daily processes, obligations and travels, there must be appropriate education and change of mentality by all Greeks and the cultivation of a receptive attitude towards people with disabilities by the citizens. We all have a responsibility to facilitate the disabled in their daily lives and with small steps each time, accessible tourism can thrive in our Greece as well. If there is proper development, then there will be an immediate increase in revenue from this form of tourism.

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