

**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PwD) IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY -
CONCEPTS AND ISSUES**

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Abstract:

Tourism destinations are in an increasingly globalised and challenging market. The new standards of tourism development are moving towards new critical issues such as quality, sustainability, image, innovation and accessibility. Social sustainability is with a focus on alleviating poverty, the promotion of human rights, equal opportunity, political freedom and self-determination. It follows that the tourism industry has been paying more attention on the needs and requests of tourists with disabilities, recognising that those people have the same needs and desires for tourism as others.

United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) also states that accessibility is a key area of UNWTO's work in sustainable tourism development and recommends the idea of "Accessible Tourism for All". It declares that the benefits of tourism participation can help the economic growth and prosperity of destination societies. The facilitation of tourist travel for people with disabilities is a vital element in sustainable tourism development policy. It emphasises the need of providing clear information on accessible tourism facilities, the availability of support services in destinations for people with disabilities, and the training of employees on the special needs of these individuals. The academic interest in the field of accessible tourism has been growing. However, current literature seems insufficient to address what this group of travellers may need and desire. It is still relatively an under-research area in tourism research. Tourism researchers need to develop a broader conception of disabled people's experience and activities. Through an extensive literature review, this paper represents an initial attempt to widen the research agenda on disabled people and holiday taking and to suggest important links among disability, charity and accessible tourism that could be made with broader studies of disability. Based on these findings research attention can be directed to fill potential void.

Keywords: PwD, Disability, Charity, Accessible Tourism, Research Agenda

Introduction

Tourism destinations are in an increasingly globalised and challenging market. The new standards of tourism development are moving towards new critical issues such as quality, sustainability, image, innovation and accessibility (García-Caro, de Waal, & Buhalis, 2012). Sustainability includes economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability while social sustainability is with a focus on alleviating poverty, the promotion of human rights, equal opportunity, political freedom and self-determination (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). From the point of view of promoting human rights and equal opportunity, the tourism industry has been paying more attention to the needs and requests of tourists with disabilities, recognising that those people have the same needs and desires for tourism as others, thus leading to the concept of accessible tourism (Yau, McKercher, & Packer, 2004). The academic interest in the field of accessible tourism has been growing in the recent decades. However, current literature seems insufficient to address what this group of travellers may need and desire. It is still an under-researched area in tourism research and tourism researchers need to develop a broader conception of disabled people's experience and activities (Richards, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010). This paper represents an initial attempt to widen the research agenda on disabled people and their holiday taking. In this context, the paper has sought to suggest implicit links that could be made with broader studies of disability. Based on the findings from this research review activity, future research agenda can be provided and research attention can be directed to fill potential void.

Literature Reviews

People with Disabilities (PwD)

Based on the definition stated in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (The National Archives, 1995), 'disabled person' is someone who "has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal

day-to-day activities'. Disability means that person may have physical, cognitive/mental, sensory, emotional, developmental impairment or some combination of these. In the tourism area, this group of people are always assumed to be not interested in traveling. Tourism is one activity that many PwD feel must be sacrificed when in fact they hold the same tourism desires and needs as other social groups (Yau et al., 2004). The PwD want to visit more destinations whenever possible before their physical condition deteriorated (Crompton, 1979). Moreover, involving PwD in tourism activities also has important implication for their family members. It gives a time for carers within the family to be partly relieved of their duties. It can also promote the escape from normal routines, strengthening of family relationships and improvements of general well-being (Shaw & Coles, 2004). Since this group of people may be more prone to social exclusion and inequality, their rights and voices are often less heard in many mainstream tourism studies. Fortunately, with the constant call for attention globally, the basic needs of PwD have been reinforced (Darcy & Pegg, 2011) in the recent years. There are over 650 million people with disabilities living in the world, equivalent to around 10% of the total world's population (Pagán, 2012). Helander (1993) mentions that the severe and moderate disability is 5% in less-developed regions of the world and 7% in more-developed regions. China is home to 60 million people with disabilities while 11 million are people with physical disabilities (Bi, Card, & Cole, 2007). In Hong Kong, there are at least 103,500 people (around 1.52% of the population) with mobility problems and 73,900 people with visual impairment (1.09%) (McKercher, Packer, Yau, & Lam, 2003). From the statistics above, one can see that addressing to the need of the PwD is not only a means to fulfil social responsibility, but the large number of people with disabilities around the world can at the same time bring economic incentive as they can generate new business opportunities for the tourism industry (Bi et al., 2007). Another reason for the industry to include individuals with physical disabilities is because they are such a large market and will continue to grow as the baby-boom generation ages, lifespan increases and medical technology improves (Burnett & Baker, 2001). The number of people with higher level of disabilities and age 65 or above is also moving in the same growing direction (Genoe & Singleton, 2009). Another market segment related to PwD is seniors with access needs (Darcy, 2010). People may be disabled either temporarily or

permanently through the result of ageing (Richards et al., 2010). As a consequence of the modern society's aging process, a continuous growth in the number of PwD is to be expected. Aged individuals frequently encounter similar constraints and obstacles and have needs that are also similar to people with disabilities (Figueiredo, Eusébio, & Kastenholz, 2012). Age-related factors account for the disability categories. From the tourism industry's point of view, the market potential of the PwD group seems to be large, since about 10% of the world population possesses some type of disability (Israeli, 2002; World Health Organization, 2011). Despite this important potential market, the global tourism seems to marginalise or even discourage people with disabilities from buying its products (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2004).

Studies on Accessible Tourism and the PwD Market

Since accessibility barriers can be considered as one major determinant that can affect the travel incentive and experience of the PwD, the term "accessible tourism" has been advocated in many tourism studies. Accessible tourism is a form of tourism that involves collaborative processes between stakeholders that enable people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments (Buhalis & Darcy, 2010). Accessible tourism can be implemented if more details are allowed for understanding of the needs of PwD (Darcy, 2010). Furthermore, tourism for PwD is not only removing physical barriers (Yau et al., 2004), it should provide a meaningful experience to ensure their quality of life. PwD and researchers around the world have contributed to a growing change in social perceptions about disability. Even though the academic interest in the field of the disabled travellers has been growing, the studies for understanding the PwD as a consumer of tourism products are only a very recent phenomenon (Burnett & Baker, 2001). PwD remains as a group which is to explore in relations to their interests in travelling and their attitudes towards their involvements in the tourism activities. Most of the scholarly studies attempt to look at this market from the general perspective, that is, they are seen as a market group with low differentiation and little distinct needs. Most

studies have an explicit or implicit focus on the mobility disabled group. However, as previously mentioned, the group of PwD that need accessibility as a requirement for participation include those with physical impairments (e.g., mobility and manual dexterity conditioned and / or wheelchair users), sensory, learning and mental impairments. Subsequently this market group come with various sub-segments, all of which have their own distinct needs and requirements. In addition, even people with the same disability may not have the same level of functioning. Burns, Paterson and Watson (2009) point out that people with disabilities are quite diverse group in terms of experiences, views and needs and nature of the disability. People with specific impairments may encounter specific barriers. As a result, it is necessary to identifying different customers' needs and provides more detailed information about accessible facilities. The tourism practitioners should be taken into consideration when designing and promoting various accessible tourism activities. Future studies should be more diversified and investigate various disability groups to determine the discrepancy in accessibility. The tourism practitioners should provide the tourism products that are accessible to this market by understanding well for the constraints and need of people with disabilities.

Social Tourism

All people should have the right to enjoy tourism activities. Society should not be divided between able and disabled people. Thus, the relationship between disability and tourism can be analysed within the broader literature on "social tourism". Social tourism is defined as the inclusion of groups in society who are economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged in tourism participation (Haulot, 1981). Some people with disabilities want to travel but are constrained through illness or lack of money (Shaw & Coles, 2004). Social tourism initiatives offer tourism experience to the people who are excluded to access tourism; it is concerned with barriers and other issues affecting participation (Pagán, 2012). It can facilitate the changes in the living of the participants. Although these changes may be small, they are fundamental and a stepping stone for maintaining social networks with the world (Minnaert, Maitland, & Miller, 2009). Tourism studies for

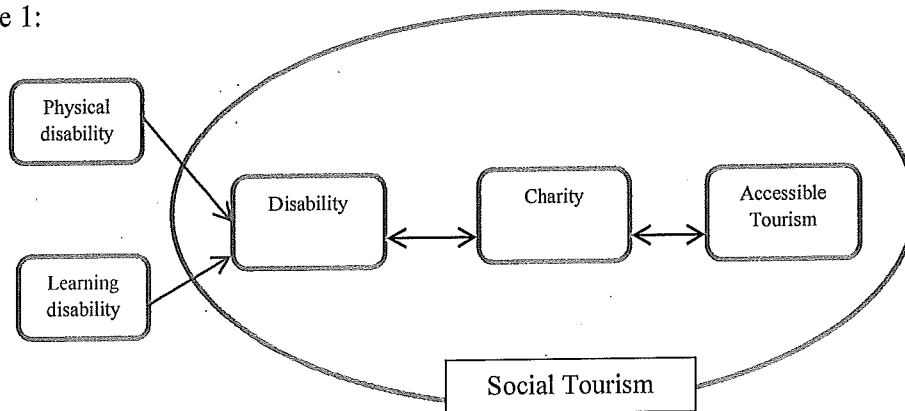
the people with disabilities should not be concerned only with removing the barriers to access the tourism sites and attractions; it is also a diversity area for revealing of tourism's full capacity as a social driving force. Sometimes, PwD could not travel because lack of partners or incomes. PwD can use travelling as a means of escape from their daily life, they can become more independent, confident and "able" people (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011). It can balance the social and personal development. Involving people with disabilities in tourism activities does not only create revenue, it is also a legal obligation (Takeda & Card, 2002). It can be said that providing travel service for people with disabilities is an ethical obligation of the tourism industry practitioners (Bi et al., 2007). There are many researches exploring barriers for encouraging the PwD participation to tourism but the linkage between social tourism and disability is also suggested (Smith, 1987). The reason is that social tourism is related to social justice and ethics. Unfortunately, the reality is that the concept of social tourism is not being implemented globally because many developing countries are still unable to meet their citizens' basic need and not to mention the fulfilment of right to travel (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006).

Proposed Future Research Agenda

Despite the ample studies reviewed on this area, there is relatively little discussion in theorising research agenda on the issues of PwD and tourism. Specifically, these studies are unconnected. In order to achieve the goal of "Tourism for All", many destinations attempt to increase the participation in tourism for PwD in society. However these efforts have been limited because most of them only focus on more micro issues such as removing the physical barriers (Lee, Agarwal, & Kim, 2012; Richards, Morgan, Pritchard, & Sedgley, 2010) and accommodating disability in specific facilities such as hotels and other tourist facilities (Darcy, 2010; Murray & Sproats, 1990; O'Neill & Knight, 2000; Poria, Reichel, Brandt, Buhalis, & Darcy, 2011). Relatively less scholarly attention has been put on the broader issues such as research linkages and future agenda with only a

few exceptions. Shaw and Cole (2004) argue that the needs of the disabled are far more complex than is currently being debated and research on the disabled tourist should be part of wider studies of disability that encompass the social model of disability. Packer, Packer, Mckercher, and Yau, (2007) acknowledge the complexity of the issues and suggest that health, tourism and disability sectors all have a role to play in the development of accessible tourism. Kim and Lehto (2013) identify motivational and activity factors and the relationship between the two. Drawing from the existing literature and to further extend the research agenda and as an attempt suggest potential research linkages, the following conceptual framework is proposed by adding the notion of “charity” into the existing tourism literature body and aiming to enhance the development of cross-disciplinary research in tourism area (See Figure 1 below). The framework tries to call for the attention from the public into the wider social and tourism research. It mainly attempts to link three schools of thoughts together, namely (1) both physical and attitude barriers encountered by the PwD; (2) the impact of encompassing the notion of charity on PwD and (3) the particular relationship between motivational factors and activity factors that drive accessible tourism.

Figure 1:



The construct of disability can be divided into physical disability and learning disability. Physical disability is related to mobility, visual and hearing impairments while learning disability is about cognitive, sensory, emotional and developmental impairments. As

previously mentioned, many researches investigating barriers and experience of PwD focus on mobility/physical disability. Few previous studies have specifically examined different groups of PwD separately. It is clear that barriers exist in PwD when travelling; each group of PwD might encounter different travel-related barriers. Consequently, each type of PwD should be studied as a distinct tourism market and in-depth understanding of their barriers can assist tourism practitioners to better attract PwD. It is suggested that future studies should identify different disabled groups who are interested in travelling and focus on those groups' specific barriers in tourism participation. It is important to provide detailed and accurate information regarding the tourism products such as transportation, accommodation, food and beverage services and so on. Then, removing the barriers can be considered as the factor for influencing their destination choices. It is through such information that PwD can plan their trips well and avoid any inconvenience caused by different types of inaccessibility.

On the other hand, the construct of accessible tourism should ensure equality of access to tourism activities by all people, including PwD. In doing so, since much of this may be related to development of infrastructure and society-wide policies, the public sector should take up a more active role in this construct of accessible tourism. Public sector can develop policies and legislations providing a commitment to ensure all people's accessibility to tourism. On the other hand, PwD encounter the tourism service providers and local residents in the destination while travelling. They may communicate or interact with them, their attitudes and behaviours can determine whether PwD have the opportunity to benefit from tourism activities. Spiritual elements such as local residents' attitude and behaviours towards PwD should be considered as the factor for influencing their desire for travelling. Disability-oriented initiative can be seen as a tool for the tourism industry to achieve the wider social-cultural sustainability in tourism development and help diversify tourism product offerings and provide a unique and authentic tourism experience. To promote mutual understanding between the local residents and the disabled tourist group, education may be key element. Once the promotion of the equality and rights of the disabled travellers is built into the general

educational context it may improve the attitudes and behaviours of the staff in tourism industry and local residents in tourism destinations. Tourism is not just a group of "abled" people moving from one place to other place. It is for all people in the world and involves the interaction of local/tourists and the abled/disabled.

Despite the tourism practitioners in the destinations do the best in removing both the physical and learning barriers for PwD and the attitudes from local residents are becoming more positive towards PwD through education and government-led propaganda, PwD seem to feel the unknown and discomfort in leaving their hometowns for travelling. There still exists certain gap between removing barriers and developing accessible tourism in the application of disability studies in the context of tourism. To fill this gap the notion of charity is suggested to provide potential linkage between constructs of disability and accessible tourism. With the rise of tourism as one of the world's largest industries, Roekaerts and Savat (1989) believe that there is an important need for charity involvement in tourism. Charities aim to influence the individual values in society, and ultimately impact public policy decisions and the whole area of charity involvement in tourism is under-researched and that charities should operate "outside, within and above the tourism industry (Turner, Miller, & Gilbert, 2001). The broader role of charities involvement in tourism industry is also explored and acknowledged by Hunter-Jones (2011). A charity can exist for the advancement of health, citizenship and human rights and for the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage (UK Charities Act, 2006). While many charities operate in the same areas as the authorities, there is a perceived functional and qualitative difference that distinguishes them both from public and private sector bodies (Curson & Leslie, 1995) thereby can be considered as a suitable bridge between the two. The role that charities can play in tourism is offered clearly in the Manila Declaration on World Tourism where the official bodies state that tourism is to be practised to support and preserve the originality of culture, the liberation of people, and equality of destiny of all (World Tourism Organization (WTO), 1980). The traditional view of charity is only involving fund-raising activities and provide the financial assistance to the people in

needs. In fact, charity is not solely focusing on fund-raising; it can achieve various goals apart from financial assistance to PwD. Charity can be viewed as a channel to motivate and promote PwD to travel. The reason is that PwD do not trust the websites because they feel that the information is not sufficient or reliable on accessible facilities (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011) if they are run and maintained by private sectors who may have profit-making as their main objective. Non-profit driven charitable organizations may be more convincing and reliable information source for the PwD. In addition, charitable organizations can help identify the factors that exclude PwD from tourism activities so as to release the stress of PwD during visiting the tourism destinations. Accurate information can empower their decision-making process. PwD can choose the suitable tourism products for encouraging the access to tourism activities based on the advices of charity as non-profit charitable organisations are more trustworthy because they do not come with profit agenda. Also, charity can provide funding initiatives for PwD involving in tourism activities. Charity can stimulate the society's concern and attention to PwD, and eventually may influence the promotion of domestic tourism and international tourism. Finally, it helps to raise funds to support social tourism.

Concluding Remarks

Addressing disability issues in the tourism activities will significantly contribute to transform the inequalities of the past. The abovementioned three constructs can be categorised under the more holistic theme of social tourism which considers the interest of a broad spectrum of disability studies. This paper aims to deepen academic and practitioners' insights into the particular dynamics of disability as a niche market. The impetus of developing this model is to improve the position of tourism in disability area and therefore influence among public, private and charity sectors with the aim of increasing contribution in provision of funding and services. The role and significance of charity is highlighted in this model. This conceptual model can show the implications of the involvement of charities in tourism. While the charity-tourism relationship has been

suggested and affirmed by many scholars however focus is often put on the financially-disadvantaged group and much less on the disabled group. The current framework offers a broader perspective of highlighting the role of charity in mediating and encouraging participation of PwD in tourism activities, therefore providing a bridge between disability and tourism. Such suggestion echoes the study of Shaw and Coles (2004) to enrich the research on the need of the disabled travellers. Achievement of the goals should be developed at wider scope of social sustainable management. It will be changed not only through public-private operations; the role of charity can be carefully communicated and developed. This understanding, in turn, could lead to theoretical and managerial contributions that may assist in providing all people of society with the opportunity to be tourists. The changes can enhance the competitive advantages, social equitable and sustainable development.

Although this paper is purely conceptual in nature and relatively small in scale, it highlights the important issues within tourism research. It shows that the notion of charity can be potential link between disability and accessible tourism. It further argues that charity can be the mediator for removing the barriers and motivating PwD involving in tourism activities. Future studies can involve larger-scale researches with both quantitative and qualitative methods that could strengthen these relationships. Investigating using systematic methods also enhances reliability and validity of the conceptual model.

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