

Rural Tourism for All; Opportunities, Experiences and Examples

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Abstract

Travel and recognize the natural landscape features of different geographies and cultures are all human right in tourism. Nowadays with the increase in number of individuals traveling around the world, there are rising statistics of disabled and elderly people in the population who are traveling or experiencing different geographies. Research results also show that 70% of the world's population with disabilities travels. It is accepted that tourism is an important market in terms of disability population travels. During this the disabled trip which has an important role in this market, there are difficulties in terms of service, access of requirements and information, accommodation, transportation. "Rural Tourism for All", "Accessible Tourism" or "Barrier Free Tourism" is a form of tourism refers to a design concept that offers safe environment to all individuals according to the universal design rules including not only for disabled people, but also temporarily disabled (pregnant etc.), elderly individuals, and families with children, and also employees in tourism sectors. In this context, the paper explains the aim of minimizing the difficulties encountered by disabled and elderly individuals in their rural tourism experiences and the appropriate examples and experiences on design and planning. Study explores the examples of arrangements and practices that will make it possible for everyone in the world and in our country, especially in the areas of nature tourism such as nature parks, national parks, ecotourism, and culture tourism within the scope of rural tourism. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Turkey has to develop tourism policies and practices for all. In this context, the studies also find out a different perspective for our country.

Keywords: Accessible tourism for all, barrier free tourism, tourism for all

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the tourism sector is developing with social, economic and technological changes in worldwide. Travelling and recognizing the natural landscape features of different geographies and cultures are all human right in tourism. It should been considered the promotion of human rights, equal opportunity in social sustainability. Tourism industry has been paying more attention on the needs and requests of tourists with disabilities. 'Tourism for all' is a concept that needs to be explored with a broad understanding of the experiences and activities of disabled people today [1]. Accessibility should been provided not only for people with disabilities, but also for elderly people or who have temporary or chronic illnesses. In order to reduce the disabled and elderly people difficulties, the study examines the opportunities and examples in design and planning. It also explores the examples of arrangements and practices especially in the areas of nature tourism that will make it possible for everyone in the world and in our country, such as nature parks, national parks, ecotourism, and culture tourism within the scope of rural tourism.

The concept of rural tourism has emerged with attractive rural life, lack of stress or pressure conditions, opportunities for people to feel free and also people's intense interest to visits rural areas at weekends and seasonal holidays [2].

This activity takes place in rural areas in which the people rests in the natural environment and coexists with the different cultures, where they stay and attend the activities specific to the locality. In the mid-1980s, the European Commission reported that at least one-third of the general population in the country, which has developed rural tourism in a survey of tourism habits in Europe, goes to rural areas to

spend their holidays and this number is increasing [3]. It is necessary to ensure everyone's participation in rural tourism which has intensive using.

Contrary to the widespread belief that disabled people usually do not pay enough attention to tourism, it is an area of activity that responds to the different needs of individuals in different social groups. Disability means that person may have physical, cognitive/mental, sensory, emotional, developmental impairment [4]. According to the World Health Organization's definition, disability refers to lack of organs that cause loss of function and vision in a certain way and continuously from physical, mental and spiritual characteristics is the condition that the disordered person does not meet the normal life requirements of the end resultant person [5].

With the rise in the number of people with disabilities in the world, there is also an increase in people with disabilities traveling. According to statistics, the number of people with disabilities has exceeded 600 million in 2008, reaching 1 billion in 2014, about 15% of the world's population, and 70% of this number is traveling [6]. On the other hand, according to the results of the 2002 Disability Survey conducted in cooperation with the State Administration of Statistics in Turkey, the percentage of disabled population is determined as 12.29% [7]. The disability rate is increasing with the addition of disabled elderly people, pregnant women and children who are restricted in this number movement. When people with disabilities are generally thought to be traveling accompanied by one or more people, the potential number traveling in Europe is estimated to be 130 million people and their tourism expenditure of more than 80 billion euros [6]. Because of increasing these people population, we

should consider accessibility issue in tourism activities.

The tourism industry has been paying more attention to the needs and requests of tourists with disabilities in terms of promoting human rights and equal opportunity, so this leading to concept of accessible tourism [8]. It provides 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 [9]. In this context, activities should be developed that respond to the needs of people with disabilities in different social groups. It can also promote their family relationships and improvements of general well-being [10].

Accessibility is often described as a chain of many connections. In the barrier-free tourism chains include booking/providing information, transportation, accommodation, catering, activities and experiences [11]. Researches need to develop a broader conception of disabled people's experience and activities in tourism area. For this reason, the suitability of the elements containing tourism should be assessed. Elements of the accessible tourism chain include as follows [12]:

- a. Tourism destination management
- b. Tourism information and advertising (Preparation, information and booking)
- c. Urban and architectural environments
- d. Modes of transport and stations
- e. Accommodation, food service and conventions
- f. Cultural activities (museums, theatres, cinemas, and other)
- g. Other tourism activities and events

Accessible tourism for all, ensures equal rights for people and contributes to sustainable development by providing relevant strategies, policies and practices. According to Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Law No. 5825 signed by Turkey in 2008, the title of "Participation in cultural life, recreation, entertainment and sports activities" changes the point of view of tourism. It should be developed tourism policies and practice examples for all. Barrier-free tourism is an important step in terms of the development of travel rights of the disabled people.

Universal design standards have to be assessed in the field of tourism. Because universal design expresses design products and results that all people, who is in different abilities, gender, age; it provides equal conditions and it also requires all users to enjoy the same rights [13]. It should be placed on design issues that will prevent the isolation of different groups from society in order to provide social benefits, especially in rural areas. It is essential to develop tourism activities that serve all individuals in the community, instead of applications that make the impression that the individual is different, special or privileged. Barrier-free tourism, tourism for all concepts or accessible tourism is particularly important in the creation of accessible places for all individuals in rural areas.

Examples of Rural Tourism for All

Within the scope of the research, examples of arrangements and applications that will enable use for all in the world and in our country especially in the areas of rural tourism, which are national parks, eco-tourism, culture

tourism, are examined. Good practice examples for all around the world in tourism are classified as follows [14]:

Accessible nature reserves: Italy and Germany have done some projects that include actions to ensure that disabled people can visit protected natural areas easily.

- Accessible reserves - actions to promote the visit of protected natural areas by people with disabilities project in Italy: The aim of the project was to promote the visit and enjoyment of the nature reserves of the region by people with disabilities and people with special needs, by training, actions of sensitizing and knowledge of the environment in certain natural areas developing the social and economic growth of natural areas through social tourism.

- Association of Nature Reserves of Germany: The project aim to guide that collects all the information about the level of accessibility of the nature reserves of Germany.

Guided tours

Cultural tours in sign language

- Cultural guided tours in Spanish Sign Language (Government of the Balearic Islands, Spain)

- 'Very quiet Munich': The official guides in sign language (Germany)

Guided tours for two of more types of disabilities

- Tours to hearing, sight and physical disabilities (Erfurt, Germany)

- Tours for individuals with movement disabilities in Italian sign language (Siena, Italy)

Certification Systems: There are different grading systems in terms of the possibilities and limitations of accommodation and tourism activities.

- "National Accessible Scheme", England
- "Tourisme et Handicaps", France
- "Danish Accessibility Label", Denmark
- "Mindeststandards", Germany
- "Towns and Cities for All", Spain

Online guides and databases on tourist information:

Tourism in rural areas is realized by creating technological database and information platform in Spain, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Denmark.

Transport

- Accessible Taxis (Spain)
- Accessibility Policy in the Train "Die Deutsche Bahn" (Germany)

Tourist accommodation: Hotel Chain Confortel (Spain)

Travel agencies and tour operators: Travel Agency Viajes 2000, in Spain

Accessible beaches: Approximately 84 beach accessible protections were introduced in Spain in 2000. The district beaches, Valencia (Spain) and PACA (France) are examples of good practice.

Cultural offer: Museums; National Museum "Centro de Arte Reina Sofia" (Madrid, Spain)

When we look at other examples of accessible tourism in rural areas, it is seen in Figure 1 that the application area for 30 adapted bicycles in 10 Spanish highways for disabled people along with the Green Roads Department in the Railways Foundation was established in Spain [15].



Figure 1. Bicycle routes designed for the handicapped in rural areas, Spain [15]

One of the other applications in the rural areas, Gaves Greenway and Saône-et-Loire Greenways, which are long greenways in France, provide to different social groups of people cycling, riding and walking activities (Figure 2a-b).



Figure 2.a Gaves Greenway, France [15]



Figure 2.b Saône-et-Loire Greenways, France [15]

Within the scope of the project, realized in green areas accessibility and natural tourism areas for everyone, 12 green roads are defined in Spain. This project includes deep studies in the infrastructure area (tunnel, viaduct, bridge, rest area). Services like dining, biking, accommodation are also offered to increase accessibility. The purpose of these projects provides a comprehensive tourism approach by creating accessible services for disabled people. Vias Verdes, an example of tourism practice in rural areas in Spain [15] (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Vias Verdes, Spain [15]

The green way project in Spain that include Girona, Terra Alta, Montes de Hierro, The La Sierra greenways, is an important example of barrier-free tourism roads design with harmonious equipment's, information centers for different types of disabled. Since 2003, the "European Green Roads Society" has been organizing a mobility week in Europe. Disabled people do various activities such as riding a bicycle, playing games, speaking, and observing nature. With the participation of different municipalities and institutions, the benefits and possibilities in the field of accessible tourism are discussed so individuals meet with nature and provide social benefits. In addition to this, employment for disabled people is also created in rural areas. Various activities have also been developed tourism for all in urban areas. First World Tourism Organization Congress in San Marino, some applications on Accessible Tourism in Europe is as follows [16]:



Figure 4. The Sozopol Foundation, Bulgaria [16]

The other activities are being carried out in Portugal to create accessible beaches, guidance and educational policies. Disabled people are given guidance services to raise their environmental awareness (Figure 5) [16].



Figure 5. Environmental awareness education, Portugal [16]

There are also many practices in rural tourism such as mountainous areas of Europe using technological methods. One of these applications is carried out by establishing technological databases and information platforms in stations in mountainous areas in Europe's different countries. Small villages are being built in rural areas to revitalize tourism, and people come to this area because of developing new products and services. In addition, many national and regional institutions are participating in the festival of cooking local products [17]. Thus, tourism contributes to the economy by increasing purchasing power. These practices, which are carried out by different entrepreneurs in rural areas, will be useful for future generations.

The Alberta Park is one of the accessible tourism applications in Canada. This park is designed to increase the impact of nature on physical, mental, visual and emotional learning and to develop environmental awareness of people. This application area gets together all people in rural areas with accessible campsites, barrier-free paths and other accessible arrangements [18] (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Alberta Park, Canada [18].

The Accessible Tourism Center in the Ise-Shima region of Japan, which is established to inform about rural areas, offers recommendations for accommodation and sightseeing for disabled tourists, elderly and their families. There are many applications such as giving route maps of rural areas, sports activities (canoe, bicycle, sailing, marathon), guiding, etc. within the scope of consultancy services [18] (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Barrier-free Tourism Center, Osaka, Japan [18]

Disabled people experiences in rural areas are also important for accessibility. It seems that various institutions have made some applications in reducing the obstacles to accessing these areas. In this context, the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks has designed facilities for the accessibility of disabled people in services and facilities of recreational areas that have been protected since 2010 for disabled access. The "Disabled Friendly National Park" presented to the grant program of the "Development of the Social Integration of the Disabled" (IDP), supported by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey in 2013, that is "Küre Mountains Project", initiated

to make a visitor center and park in the national park suitable for disabled accessibility [19]. The project scope is as follows:

- The park is organized as visitor and training center for all people. In this center, fields for information, arts-culture and recreation, meeting and accommodation building were established. There are some applications for increasing public awareness in this center [19] (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Disability visitor center materials and equipment [19]

- Hiking trail and the observation area which is 1500 meters length long in Çatak Canyon, was also designed for disabled people accessibility [19] (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Çatak Canyon disability park (existing and arranged state) [19]

There are various camping activities organized by the Turkish Invalids Association and some local governments for disabled people in the rural areas [20]. Standards of accessibility are also taken into consideration in tourism areas. Barrier-Free Tourism Town Alanya project is based on accessibility for all, and it has been provided information and training services in Barrier-free Park and Life Center. Consequently, it is seen that the developing applications conducted within the scope of tourism for all in Turkey and worldwide.

CONCLUSION

Accessibility for disabled people, which constitute 15% of the world's population, is essential for participation in social life. People with disabilities need to travel like any other people and make equal use of all activities. In this context, limiting factors for disabled people in tourism should be reduced. In addition, accessible tourism applications in rural tourism should be developed. There are many examples of accessible tourism practices in our country and in the world. Some of the approaches that need to be developed in this context are as follows:

- Firstly, the scope, philosophy and content of the barrier free tourism or tourism for all concept should be internalized starting from the first stage of the chain in the applications with planning, design education, training, relevant implementing institutions and organizations, tour operators. It is important to have vision within concept for designing and planning of the rural tourism activity areas by all relevant actors in the field of application from the

technical team training to implementation.

- Regulations for disabled people in rural tourism require legal obligations, increased audits, and local governments to develop policies on these areas.

- The universal design standards should be considered in applications for the disabled in the field of tourism.

- The recent technological methods and the creation of a database on this issue are an important opportunity to be involved in rural tourism.

- Accessible routes in rural areas are necessary for the use of different social groups. The development of eating, accommodation, observation and various sporting activities in these areas prevents the inactivity resulting from disability. It is important to planning tourism where alternative services such as alternative accommodation, routes, etc. can be held together in different physical and cognitive characteristics (such as disabled, elderly people) of people.

- It should be organized various meetings and trips to ensure that the disability benefits socially in rural areas.

- It should be developed guidelines for the promotion and development of cultural tourism within the scope of accessible tourism in urban areas.

- National park and nature conservation areas, information centers should be organized with alternative routes and different communication informing facilities (visual, auditory, touch, etc.). The activities related to managerial and financial sustainability of these activities should be supported.

- It is necessary to arrange roads, landscape units in order to make suitable natural spaces and accessible for the disabled to gain experience.

- Applications for disabled people have an important role in disability tourism market. Providing active participation of the disabled people in the tourism field and creating employment for them will also contribute to the country's economy.

- Non-governmental organizations, local governments, ministries should develop various projects, programs and activities for raising awareness about tourism for all.

In order to provide social cohesion in communities, accessible tourism should be seen as one of the essential steps to provide social sustainability.

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