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A model proposed for sustainable accessible tourism (SAT)☆

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Abstract Accessible tourism is an under-researched area in tourism studies. There are also problems regarding its definitions and concepts because of different approaches within the scientific world. It is crucial to understand this theme using a multidisciplinary approach. This could mean bringing all stakeholders to common solutions in the future. In this study, a model of sustainable accessible tourism (SAT) will be introduced. This helps to understand how disabled people can intensively join in tourism activities and have the highest level of experience. Exploratory research will be used in order to develop a universal model combining sustainable tourism approaches. This proposal represents different layers of SAT's understanding and it will be discussed from various perspectives of recommendation series.

1. Introduction

The tourism sector has become more important compared to the past if it is observed from an economic, environmental and socio-cultural perspective. The number of people travelling with physical, hearing and/or cognitive problems has increased in recent times because of the help of latest technological developments. It is clear that technology could not get rid of all problems but it can soften disability

problems and bring better travel experience (Yıldız, 2010). Research and development departments of land, air, sea and railway transportation industries have developed technological solutions for disabled people. However, sustainability is not seen as an integral part of these solutions (Rosenbloom, 2007).

The UN-Commission in 1987 defined sustainability as follows: 'Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Social, economic, political and ecological objectives, the involvement of different factors and the responsibility of developed and less developed countries play important roles for a sustainable tourism (Polat, 2010). The tourism industry internalizes the

sustainability day by day and it has direct or indirect relations with 30 different industries. This will also create the opportunity to recognize and meet the needs and desires of disabled people in the future. Sustainability knowledge will be the motor of conscious development for all and it helps the accessible tourism model to not become static.

2. Methodology

This study is based on secondary research – such as reviewing available literature and/or data as a part of the exploratory research. Therefore, libraries, Internet and data banks were first used and brochures, organization intern directories and Internet data were analyzed and commented on. In this study, a wide-scope model for accessible tourism is developed using a sustainability approach. It is clear that there are different related research disciplines that should be considered. The idea of a model for accessible tourism is to process, analyze and develop data as well as share results in the model as knowledge (Schertler & Rohte, 1995). The Academic research in accessible tourism has been growing. However, current literature shows that it is still an under-researched area. The concepts that will be explored in the following paragraphs will give some idea about accessible tourism literature and the state of art in the research. Their relationship with the proposed model will be exactly underlined.

3. Integrated approaches of disability and accessible tourism related concepts

3.1. Terminology

It is widely observed that accessible tourism is defined within different approaches such as disability studies, leisure constraints theory, tourism systems and human rights approaches (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). A whole-life approach is gaining importance, which is a collaborative process that helps to satisfy needs of disabled people having impairments regarding mobility, vision, hearing and cognition. Permanent and temporary disabilities have been both considered as disability; moreover, needs of seniors, obese, families with children are also taken into consideration in different studies creating some confusion about the definition (Yıldız & Polatoglu, 2013). It is possible to mention some important concepts and definitions according to the EU financed study as follows (EC, 2014).

3.1.1. Access needs
People want to enjoy their tourism experience and there are certain groups of requirements (EC, 2014):

- Care or assistance requirements gain importance.
- Compatibility of the environment for people with assistive tools or treatment is necessary.
- Avoiding obstacles in while using and finding tools and communication problems with staff or machines become a matter of importance.

Therefore, it is possible to have a concept of physical solutions to cover those requirements.

3.1.1.1. Physical solutions. Age-friendly cities, general infrastructure and accessible tourism are evaluated under the concept of *disability policies* (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). The quality of infrastructure mostly depends on where the cities are found, i.e. in developed or less developed countries. Less developed countries have different perspectives and policy instruments on accessible tourism compared with developed countries. It is necessary to evaluate every country with differentiated indicators (Worldbank, 2013). Accessible tourism can exist when there is an appropriate infrastructure for all. In many regions of the world, cities are changing, old buildings are being demolished and new living areas are opening with new hotels (Gotham, 2005). Accessibility must be taken as a central topic for a sustainable development before the change starts. As our model covers accommodation/infrastructure under terms of sustainability, this concept can play an important role in order to create accessibility indicators for hotels and other tourist attractions.

3.1.2. Accessibility
Environment, product, service or information items should have the quality to be reachable and/or usable by everyone not depending on their ability. Social, disability and architectural fields refer to the concept of accessibility. Civil engineering uses this term as connectivity of a city or place (EC, 2014). Universal design is one of the concepts of accessibility as follows.

3.1.2.1. Universal design. Worldwide, there are one billion disabled people, of whom 80% live in developing or less developed countries (UN, 2015b). This concept of universal design is partially the base of the sustainable accessible model and the concept emphasizes the triple-bottom line approach. It has common points with the Sustainable Development Goals. Technically, it recommends equitable, flexible, simple and intuitive use, perceptible info, tolerance for error, low physical effort, size and space for approach and use (Center for Universal Design, 2009). According to Darcy and Dickson (2009), universal design will make life easier for people with disabilities (20%), seniors with access considerations (8%) and families with small children (3%). They imply that it will offer a general solution for all less sustainable living conditions. Universal design indicators will be used as main indicators for the accessible tourism model in designing man-made or purpose-built tourism attractions.

3.1.3. Disability studies
According to the World Health Organization, disability is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. 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 during involvement in life situations. Thus, disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives (EC, 2014; WHO, 2002). The UN Convention on the Rights

of Persons with Disabilities defines people with disabilities as people 'who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.' It also states the following: 'Disability is an evolving concept and results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (EC, 2014; UN, 2006). Therefore a person is rendered disabled when the physical and social environments are not catering for people with access needs.

3.1.3.1. Leisure constraints theory.   This approach stems from the disability studies theory. It became a categorization of barriers to leisure travel for disabled people with the help of the *leisure constraints theory* (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). It reminds us about the basic relationship between tourism and leisure as follows: Tourism can be seen as leisure activity but leisure cannot always be seen as tourism activity. Related studies may answer this following question: How is it possible to attract disabled people from home-leisure-related activities to tourism-destination activities? There is a need to carry out more studies about this process (Moore, Cushman, & Simmons, 1995). As there are studies exploring links between tourism and leisure, our model proposal will have a more operational capacity in a larger space.

3.1.4. Accessible tourism vs. tourism for all

The European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT) refers to Accessible Tourism as the set of 'services and facilities (such as physical environment, transportation, information, communication) which enable persons with special access needs, either permanent or temporary, to enjoy a holiday and leisure time with no particular barrier or problem' (EC, 2014). Accessible Tourism is inclusive of all people with access needs, that is people with disabilities but also all other people who may benefit from accessible infrastructures, such as elderly people, people carrying heavy luggage or parents with small children.

Tourism for all provides tourism experience that anybody can enjoy regardless of their abilities, age, height, race, gender, sexual orientation, beliefs, ideology or cultural background. The concepts of Accessible Tourism and Tourism for All are often misused. There is a tendency to seek to go beyond the idea of mere accessibility for disabled people and to stress the need to fulfill the expectations of any potential guest (Nordiska Handikappolitiska Rådet, 2002). Accessible tourism approaches to problems with more technical solutions but Tourism for All concept approaches with more cultural aspects.

At this point, it is possible to mention the following definition: '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, 2011).

3.2. Theories of accessible tourism

According to Loi (2015), there are some studies about accessible tourism theory but they are not connected. They focus mostly on micro-issues such as physical barriers or accommodating accessibility in tourism facilities. He also mentioned that research on disabled tourists must be part of wider studies of disability; the health, tourism and disability sector must act together; motivational and activity factors have to be taken into consideration for a better understanding of accessible tourism. At this point, three different theories will be introduced according to our model proposal, which helps to develop cross-disciplinary research in this area. Social and medical models underline importance of disability as a personal and social issue. Human right approaches add more sense of disability understanding from the perspective of political approaches and solutions, which are created by different actors. Lately, it is impossible to have solutions for accessible tourism without initiatives of corporates. There should be common work between medical, social, political and business actors in order to develop more accurate solutions for disabled tourists.

3.2.1. Social and medical models

Two main concepts are widely accepted as starting point to understand the accessible tourism issue by the scientific community (Lang, 2001). Medical and social concepts deserve to be discussed for future structuring of our sustainable accessible tourism model. The medical model underlines the actual development as a personal problem and insists that medical intervention is needed. The social model implies that the problem is socially constructed and it can be solved by the help of the environment, new techniques and another type of behavior. According to these arguments, the two models seem contrasting to each other (Table 1). As a matter of fact, both models can cover each other with their own characteristics (UN, 2006; WHO, 2002). It is possible to combine the positive elements of the two models: the personal problem is partly a social issue, medical care helps for social integration and professional help cannot be successful if individual and collective responsibility is neglected. After every environmental manipulation there comes a personal adjustment and individual adaptation. Health care policy is a part of politics as well. Are both models opposite to each other? Not exactly, they can

Table 1   Medical and social model comparison.

Medical	Social
Personal problem	Social issue
Medical care	Social integration
Individual treatment	Social action
Professional help	Individual and collective responsibility
Personal adjustment	Environmental manipulation
Behavior	Attitude
Care	Human rights
Health care policy	Politics
Individual adaptation	Social change

Source: Buhalis and Darcy (2011).

be easily integrated and a new proposal can be moved on the agenda for developing a new model (Table 1).

3.2.2. Human rights approach

Special attention is given to human rights by supra-national organizations and NGOs. This concept has some difficulties to be understood in different countries and cultures because of different perceptions. There are definitions and conventions of the United Nations about human rights for disabled people but differences about implementation methods still exist (UN, 2006). Even if accessibility is seen as a human rights issue, there is a difference in understanding of implementation methods between developed and less developed countries (UN ESCAP, 2008). The Millennium Development Goals ended with an insufficient reduction level of worldwide poverty and there are still targets to be reached (UN, 2011). The majority of the world population still lives under the poverty threshold, facing hunger, illnesses, lack of medical services and barriers at primary school entrance. 1 billion disabled people even suffer more. In September 2015, the Millennium Development Strategies UN-resolution has been replaced by Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015a). With this resolution, new targets for poverty fighting have

been concretized and themes such as inclusion of people with disabilities and barrier-free approaches, which have been neglected for a long time, were made explicit. It is a positive development that accessibility is higher on the agenda, but as one German NGO states, there are implementation problems at different levels both in developed and less developed countries (BEZEV, 2015). A sustainable accessible tourism model offers a global thinking and local acting model within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals.

3.2.3. Corporation approach

There is a huge research potential for accessible tourism from the perspective of corporates and companies (Loi, 2015). If accessible tourism can be categorized as an affinity group under mixed interest tourism, tour operators can use individual tools of strategic marketing for disabled tourists. Our model will use strategic marketing as a tool of corporate approach to give new roles to companies as well. The following model shows that destinations of special interest tourism can evolve into general interest tourism destinations as well (Fig. 1). After this approach, it is possible for corporates to make more investments for accessible tourism
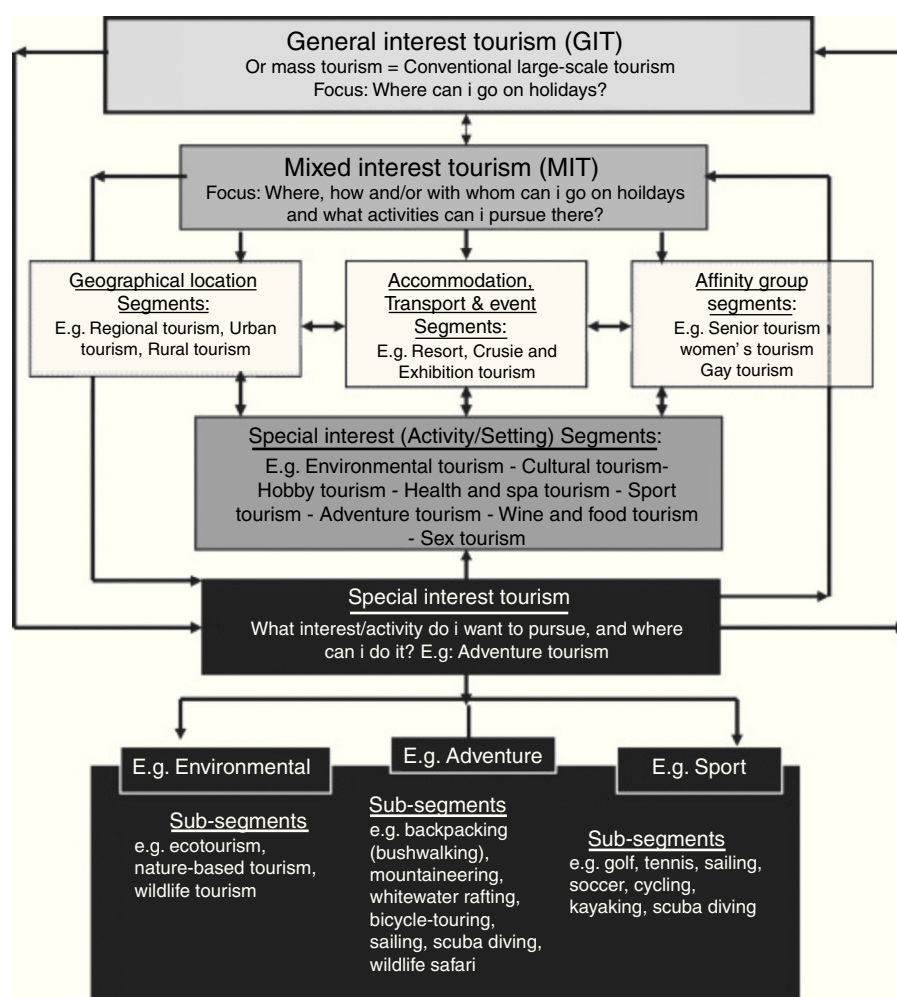

Figure 1   Special interest tourism cycle.
Source: Trauer (2006)

Relationship between governments/Intergovernmental organizations/NGOs

Terminology

Sustainable development goals

Economics

(Sustainable development)
Sustainable accessible
Destination experience

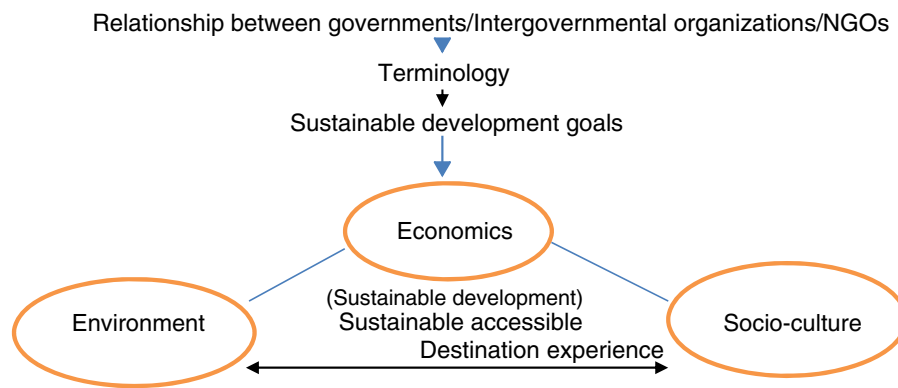Environment

Socio-culture

Figure 2   Sustainable accessible tourism model (macro level).

activities, which make them more responsible under terms of corporate social responsibility.

4. Description of the author's proposed model

The model consists of two levels. At macro-level, the relationship between governments, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs is underlined. At micro-level, sustainable accessible destination experience is revealed by sustainable accessibility factors at the destination and travel restrictions/advantages per mode.

The following model offers a sustainable development policy with a sustainable tourism's triple-bottom line approach (Polat, 2010). The government, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs are found at the top of the model and different stakeholders will have new responsibilities in the development of accessible tourism.
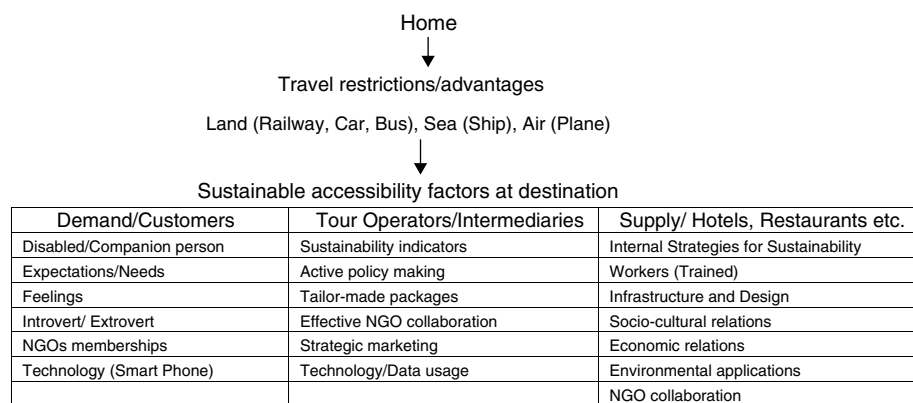
Since the end of World War II, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have been created by states for political cooperation and NGOs by private individuals trying to influence government's policies. Globalization has an enormous effect on the relationship between state and non-state actors. Governments, IGOs and NGOs benefit from more collaboration. In fact, governments give responsibilities to IGOs for coordinating efforts, funds and administrative activities and IGOs in turn entrust some of these activities to NGOs (Berg, 2014). The sustainable accessible tourism model sees this development as a chance to raise the question of accessibility to governments, IGOs and NGOs and propose steps for reaching new accessibility infrastructure (Fig. 2).

Different terminologies exist for accessible tourism according to chapter 3 (Loi, 2015). An interdisciplinary approach especially is needed. Researchers from different disciplines should come together and develop a clear definition for sustainable accessible tourism. Sustainability indicators can cover the whole tourism sector and these indicators can be used to formulate indicators for sustainable accessible tourism. After defining indicators with the private sector for accessible tourism, lawmakers can review regulations regularly. Law and regulations with their sanction tools are important aspects that can be helpful for implementing accessible tourism (Malhotra, 2005). Legislations that are older than 5 years must be reviewed and renewed according to new developments under a more responsible society (Viegas, 2015).

According to the *Sustainable Development Goals*, it is very important to not only consider the problem to be relevant for developed countries because 80% of the disabled people live in developing or less developed countries (Sachs, 2015). Moreover, certain accessible solutions or programs intended for specific groups in developed countries cannot be a solution for disabled people in less developed countries because the full adaptation of them can sometimes be costly without efficient results and might create disappointment among the target groups (Worldbank, 2013). Accessible tourism can be directed into the wrong direction because of the imbalanced power between developed and less developed countries (Ministero Affari Esteri, 2010).

The *sustainability* concept, which is becoming more important day by day all over the world, was developed as a result of the increasing number of adverse effects in developing areas. This concept requires taking environmental and social impact of development into consideration as well as economic impact (Polat, 2010). Sustainability's relationship with the tourism sector can be widened and this has a great potential to create accessible destination experience.

Fig. 3 consists of three elements within the tourism sector, i.e. accommodation facilities, restaurants and tour operators with sustainability applications, which also serve disabled people. Supply, demand and intermediary (tour operators) elements have a close cooperation within this model. Expectations of different stakeholders from decision-making to after-sales services are analyzed according to the research, which is designed and implemented in Antalya (APGEM, 2012). *Customers* are not alone and mostly with a companion person and they have different expectations from their holidays. These must be distinguished from the beginning. Disabled people can be introvert or extrovert as other holidaymakers but they need more attention and motivation to plan their holidays. Their feelings must be taken into account more than those of other holidaymakers. Collaboration between *tour operators* and specialized-NGOs can help disabled people to organize their holidays with accurate information. Tour operators can play a dual role as part of *strategic marketing*. Firstly, they can interact with *governments/intergovernmental organizations/NGOs* and secondly they prepare indicators, legislations and regulations for accessible tourism (Richter, 2001). After all, they can share results as part of product development. These can be offered to disabled people as tour packages (SETUR,

Home

↓

Travel restrictions/advantages

Land (Railway, Car, Bus), Sea (Ship), Air (Plane)

↓

Sustainable accessibility factors at destination

Demand/Customers	Tour Operators/Intermediaries	Supply/ Hotels, Restaurants etc.
Disabled/Companion person	Sustainability indicators	Internal Strategies for Sustainability
Expectations/Needs	Active policy making	Workers (Trained)
Feelings	Tailor-made packages	Infrastructure and Design
Introvert/ Extrovert	Effective NGO collaboration	Socio-cultural relations
NGOs memberships	Strategic marketing	Economic relations
Technology (Smart Phone)	Technology/Data usage	Environmental applications
		NGO collaboration

Figure 3   Sustainable accessible destination experience (micro level).

2014). SETUR is a well-known Turkish tour operator that had meetings with NGOs before it opened a new special booking channel for blind people (Emlakkulisi, 2014). TUI and other important German tour operators can be given as a second example. They signed UNWTO's Private Commitment to the Code of Ethics and took important initiatives for developing sustainable solutions for disabled tourists (UNWTO, 2012). The private sector can do more in order to manage accessible tourism in a responsible manner. There must be collaboration under Public–Private partnership.

Tourists take more responsibility for their holidays with the help of *technology* such as with smartphones and tablets (Benckendorff, Sheldon, & Fesenmaier, 2014). But this will not weaken traditional processes within the tourism industry in the long term for disabled tourists. The tourism sector must operate with multi-level service understanding because of new customer types. Information creation for disabled customers and understanding of their expectations can be realized with the help of collaborative work between different stakeholders like telecommunication companies, tourism research centers and tourism boards. In the Czech Republic, smart telephone usage behavior of tourists and auxiliary services are analyzed and statistics are produced regularly for tourism boards of tourist cities (Acır, 2014). This can help to determine operational indicators at policymaking level and manage the process with strategic marketing elements for accessible tourism.

From the perspective of hotels, internal and external strategies for sustainability can be implemented. Workers should be specially trained in order to meet the needs of disabled visitors. Infrastructure and design can be covered by universal design principles. As an external strategy, interaction between hotels and NGOs (e.g. the Turkish Federation of the Deaf) can create new collaboration possibilities such as the example of sign language training of hotel workers in Antalya (TIEF, 2015). Accessible tourism applications can be realized by economic, environmental and socio-cultural indicators according to our model.

In order to make our model more operational, a development process can be adopted as the summary discussion of the paper (Neumann & Reuber, 2004). All the stakeholders should be involved, they can decide about the timing and necessary steps can be taken according to different phases. These are listed as follows:

1. Awareness Phase for Accessible Tourism.
2. Starting Phase for Accessible Tourism.
3. Developing Phase for Accessible Tourism.
4. Consolidating Phase for Accessible Tourism.

Each phase offers the best option to move forward in order to realize sustainable accessible tourism at different stages. Every stage shows the evolution of success factors for decisionmakers, sustainability, networking, strategic planning, technological and knowledge management, resources and communication with recommendations relevant to their own characteristics (Table 2).

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Sustainable accessible tourism is a *concept* that relates to different approaches and benefits from an interdisciplinary approach. A clear and common definition can be obtained if all stakeholders work collectively. Latter studies will give more insight to prepare a widely accepted definition.

Policies must focus on the sustainable development goals if there is an attempt to stop the negative impacts of tourism in the future. This will also help to create mutual understanding among different actors. People in developed countries with severe disabilities can still join tourism activities with limitations. On the other hand, the lack of infrastructure and political instability in less developed countries bring social barriers and weak economic development to disabled people. If there is no direct political interaction between developed and less developed countries, there will be only one-sided development projects (Ministero Affari Esteri, 2010). As a result, the powerful side imposes its rules on the less developed counterpart. This would be possible if developed and less developed countries are aware of their disabled people and want to fulfill their needs according to their standards. These projects can eventually stop oppression, exclusion and marginalization of disabled people of all countries.

According to the discussions in this paper, there are some recommendations for decision makers and tourism actors from the *economic* perspective (European Commission, 2014):

Table 2 Action domains of the sustainable accessible model.

	Awareness phase	Starting phase	Developing phase	Consolidating phase
1. Decision-makers (Government-IGO-NGOs)	Investing in accessible tourism and its economic and social benefits	Support by means of education, training and direct financial aid	Standardization, better information and integration in mainstream offers	Think locally, act globally
2. Sustainability	Sensibilization of stakeholders	Assignment of personal within organizations	Public–private partnerships	Whole of life model
3. Networking	Network analyses	Knowledge transfer within professional networks	Meetings, conferences	Guarantee accessible offers across all categories at destinations
4. Strategic planning	Raise awareness for the diversity of access and address them	Creating an inventory	Improving the offer and feedback tools	Improve marketing and advertising strategies
5. Technological and knowledge management	Using technological tools	Knowledge management of staff	Regular training	End-user friendly tourism products
6. Optimization of resources	Using existing infrastructure	Basic changes for improvement	Using resources for strategic development	Resource-base management
7. Communication	First step to inform the public	Accessible tourism messages	Information within mainstream through social media	Sustainable communication

Source: Adopted from European Commission (2014).

Suggestions for economic activities

- Accessible tourism can be successful when it can be taken into account with general tourism and integrated in mainstream offers. From the perspective of *marketing*, there is a possibility to approach barrier-free tourism within special interest tourism. According to Trauer (2006), accessible tourism can be seen as part of affinity groups. As more disabled people join tourism activities, this segment will be an integral part of general interest tourism and will play an effective role in our model.
- Hotels, restaurants and tour operators do not mainly know how to implement accessibility. There are many different standards across different countries. There needs to be a harmonization of legislation in order to give standard information to customers and sector members around the globe.
- Strong and on-going support of state administration for business is very important. In some countries tourism depends on public money. Accessibility must be taken into public funding.
- Accessible tourism is an important business opportunity and public–private partnerships can offer opportunities to improve the future development of accessible tourism.
- It is important to share important practices with the help of professional networks of experts and tourism service providers. It is necessary to offer accessible services among all types of products and prices.
- Strategic marketing planning is very important for developing sustainable accessible tourism. There must be a differentiated approach to different groups and citizens of various countries.
- Price offers have to be taken into account. Many potential tourists cannot travel easily because of economic reasons. There is a need for accessible services for tourists with a restricted budget.

Suggestions for further scientific and academic researches

- Relationship between sustainability concept and sustainable accessible tourism concept must be questioned and mutual interaction should be provided.
- New scientific researches are needed in order to create more broad and detailed sustainable accessible tourism criteria.
- Regional sustainable accessibility criteria can also be created with the help of criteria that were designed at organization level.
- Difference of regional, geographical and weather conditions must be taken into consideration during the creation of criteria for accessibility.
- This study had its own problems such as lack of studies about accessible tourism and difficulties to find academic literature. There is a need to have more studies about accessible tourism. Understanding of this concept and its place in academic literature can be widened with the help of incentives for scientific publications.
- Application areas in scientific research are being chosen among the tourism-focused regions. However, the potential tourist areas, which will gain importance in tourism in the mean time, will also be taken as a study subject,

so that the potential problems of accessible tourism in the future can be evaluated and recommendations can be made in this regard.
- In order to increase the sustainability level according to the continuous improvement feature of the concept, first of all there is need for realization of accessible tourism quality standards and then the integration of these standards with sustainability criteria.

As summarized above, *sustainable accessible tourism* is based on sustainable tourism applications with developing tasks under new conditions. This model will be visualized, developed and fine-tuned with open discussions and recommendations at local and global level as follows: 'We are all time-travelers, journeying together into the future. But let us work together to make that future a place we want to visit' (Hawking, 2015).

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