

# TOURISM INDUSTRY IN ROMANIA AND THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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*Internationally, elaborated research about the tourism of people with disabilities are rather limited, and they focus more on the lack of physical access to certain services in hotels. But very few studies have been published on the issue of tourism and people with disabilities. In this context, this paper draws attention to the issue of the tourism of people with disabilities in Romania. The aging population is a growing phenomenon worldwide and it leads to the shaping of a new market segment with a visible and complex dynamic, namely that of persons with disabilities. The purpose of this study is to identify other potential external barriers related to the development of tourism of people with disabilities in Romania, such as hotel infrastructure. At the same time it has been tested the degree to which managers of these hotels are aware of the phenomenon itself and their opinions on the development of this area.*

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- **People with disabilities a new market segment for tourism and hospitality industry**

**The percentage of people** with disabilities (impairment) in the world, according to UN documents and statistics is on average 10%. In the USA it is estimated that the number of these people represent 20% of the population, and in the European countries there are 37 million people with disabilities - which means that a family out of four has a disabled person. The percentage of these people in the UK is of 15%, in Spain, Germany and Poland of 9-10%. According to the official data, Romania has a percentage below 10% of the population, which requires a serious analysis of this aspect (Babaita, 2008).

There are enough reasons for that segment of people with disabilities to require special attention from both the service providers of any kind, and the researchers in management, marketing, tourism, law, computer science, etc. The most important thing is the fact that this phenomenon is more and more present, and should be given special attention.

To identify this market, we have to use the classification of the **World Health Organization** (WHO), which defines disability as “*any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in a way that is considered normal for a human being*”.

The first classification was made by the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH), established by Philippe Woods, an English rheumatologist. This classification was revised in 2002, when it became the International Classification of ICIDH -2. Disability can mean impaired, hearing, mobility, intelligence or mental health. Physical disability may mean inability to work or move freely and may extend to the inability to perform normal movements in a timely manner at a reasonable level (Ozturk, Y, Yayli, A, and Yesiltas, M., 2008).

According to the **European Commission** (1996), a physical disability often involves reduced mobility, disabled people often using wheelchairs, canes, crutches or other means of mobility. In a study conducted by Daniel Rodgers and Wiggins (2005), it has been stated that it is necessary to include patients with diabetes in the category of persons with physical disabilities, as this condition can affect patients' mobility.

**In Romania**, analyzing the official terminology frequently used, Law. 519/2002 suggests the following **definition** in Article 1: *Persons with disabilities are people whose social environment, inappropriate for their physical, sensorial and mental deficiencies, prevent them totally or limit their access to equal opportunities to social life, according to their age, gender, material factors, social and cultural ones, requiring special protection measures to support their social and professional integration.*

The official definition emphasizes **the social barriers raised for people with disabilities**. The emphasis is still on the presence of failures and less on the need to change the environment according to the needs of these persons or the right to an independent living, which must provide free access to exercise the citizen rights and eliminate the current situation in which many people with disabilities are considered “*passive recipients of services and benefits*” (statement made by the signatories of the *Country Report on Disability in Romania*, 2011)

The European Year of People with Disabilities - 2003 - boosted in Romania too the movement towards unity and cohesion of organizations of disabled people to increase the level of consultation with organizations of such persons. In the spring of that year, with the initiative and financial support of the **European Disability Forum (EDF)**, seven national organizations have joined their forces setting up The INITIATIVE GROUP FOR SETTING UP THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF DISABILITY IN ROMANIA (GIC-NDRC) and drew up a document called ***The Manifest of disabilities***. This is a document through which people with disabilities, organizations and representatives of their interests, communicate their problems and expectations to public authorities, other organizations, society in general. In this document, the signatories are trying to define disability in several ways, such as: disability (impairment) is a legal issue, about human and citizen rights, it is a matter of ethics, part of human experience, affecting one or more essential functions of the human being, such as to diminish freedom of expression or action of it. In case of people with disabilities, the exercise of human rights should lead to full elimination or reduction of the incidence of disability, according to its nature and extent of work undertaken on this topic etc. Humans are moral beings, free and responsible, thus having the power to overcome their disability.

According to Article 2, para. (1), Chapter I, of **Law 448/2006 on protection and promotion of disabled persons**, disabled persons are those persons whose social environment, inappropriate to their physical, sensorial and mental deficiencies and / or associated to, entirely prevent or limit their access to equal opportunities in society, requiring protective measures in support of integration and social inclusion.

It is certain that, so far, within tourism literature it has not been set up a social model of people with disabilities. The natural question is whether tourism can meet the needs of such persons. However, it is important to note that a number of researchers have realized that this phenomenon is a global one, but focused very much on the definition of disability and less on finding real solutions to support this segment of consumers.

For tourism and hospitality industry (if we refer to it in a broader sense) a correct definition of disability is very important because it helps shaping a profile of the consumer with disabilities, which the tourism industry, and others must take into account when they have to adjust their offer to the demand of the tourists with disabilities. Among all the industries, tourism is perhaps the one that should respond more quickly to the needs of consumers of this segment. By the nature of tourism products designed, it may even improve health conditions or disabilities that limit their access to daily activities and achieve social inclusion.

Taking as a starting point the analysis of this research findings on the issue of disabled people in the tourism and hospitality industry internationally, in our opinion **the profile of customer with disabilities** can be outlined as follows:

- *he/she is a person who has specific consumer needs according to the the type of disease (permanent or temporary), the type of disability which gives a certain limit or prevent performing*

certain activities) or the type of disability that limited him to perform an activity in a manner or range considered normal for a human being;

- he/ she is a person who has a lower income limit but if the offer is adapted to their needs he/she can become a loyal consumer of these products and services;

- very loyal to places (hotels, motels, restaurants) and destinations that prove to be sensitive to their needs so that they can have access to tourism and healthcare services.

- **The objectives of this research**

Trying to meet these challenges, we have focused on the following research objectives: to learn if the infrastructure of the hotels is adapted to this market segment, to conduct a research in the hotels in Timisoara and Arad., to analyze the opinions of these hotel managers on travel opportunities for people with disabilities (impairment); to analyze managers opinions about hiring persons with disabilities (impairment) in the tourism industry.

- **The research method used**

To reach our target, we have used as a research tool the telephone survey based on questionnaires. The sample under investigation was determined randomly and was made up of managers of 60 hotels in Timisoara and Arad (Romania). We have to underline the fact that we encountered a number of impediments in the process of data gathering. Firstly, questionnaires were distributed to hotels in Timisoara which helped us to evaluate in details the facilities (ramps size, room size, the facilities, etc.) But, these were not filled in, people answering that “we don not know what to write” , “we are not allowed to provide information”, “we do not know how the rooms for these people are supposed to look like”, etc.

#### 4 Interpretation of results

The sample was structured according to the classification of the hotels: 2 \*\* 7 hotels, 42 hotels 3 \*\*\* , and 11 hotels 4 \*\*\*\*(Table 1).

Table 1.

**Hotels according to their classification**

Hotels in Timișoara			Hotels in Arad		
Category	Frequenc y	%	Category	Frecuenc y	Percentage (%)
2 **	5	11,90	2 **	2	11,11
3 ***	28	66,67	3 ***	14	77,78
4 ****	9	21,43	4 ****	2	11,11
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>

The managers were asked if they provided services to customers with disabilities and what kind of disability those people had. Analyzing the centralized data, one can see that the majority (88%) answered negatively and furthermore that they had no database of those persons. Among those who answered YES, have indicated for 2010, a total of about 53 people with disabilities who were provided services in the hotels , out of which 58, 40% were physically disabled, 18, 86% with hearing loss, 11, 32% with deaf-blindness. Because there were not found any databases, we can say that the managers of the hotel were not aware of that market segment and that they must adapt their services according to the needs of these persons.

To determine the reasons of reduced travel opportunities for people with disabilities, there were interviewed managers of these hotels on: the quality of infrastructure, environmental conditions,

the training of the staff office, the interest shown by the organizations involved (governmental and non-governmental) and hotel architecture, at least for travelers with physical disabilities.

Analyzing the data on managers' opinions, presented in Table 2, we draw the following conclusions: the sample under research shows that 75% of the managers of these hotels are not aware of the existence of this market and 78.33% believe that staff is not well prepared for this market segment. On the other hand, they feel that reception facilities are ready in terms of tourism infrastructure (61, 66%) and hotels architecture is prepared (88, 33%) for the access of people with physical disabilities. What is remarkable is the fact that 55% of these managers consider that governmental and nongovernmental organizations are not concerned enough with these persons, and on the other hand 65% of them consider that local governments are involved in some way in solving problems of this market segment.

To find out if these hotels are equipped for people with physical disabilities, managers were interviewed on the existence / lack of facilities at the receptions entrances, lifts, stairs, parking, reception, rooms, bathrooms, toilets, restaurants, bars, pools and saunas. By analyzing the answers, one can notice that the proportion of 93.33% hotels have marked special parking places for disabled persons, 88.33% have entrance ramps, 71.67% said that place in their restaurants is large enough for wheelchairs, and 63 managers, 33% said that elevators are large enough to allow transport to higher levels. There are areas where the facilities is very low as: stairs (100%), rooms and bathrooms (76.66%), reception (71.66%) and toilets (53.33% ).

*Table 2.*

Opinions of the managers of hotels in Timisoara and Arad on identifying barriers to people with physical disabilities in tourism

Opinions	Answer	Frecquency	Percentage %
1.The tourism infrastructure is suitable for people with physical disabilities	YES	37	61,66
	NO	23	38,67
2.Environmental elements are suitable for people with physical disabilities	YES	18	30,00
	NO	42	70,00
3.The management of tourist enterprises are fully aware of this market	YES	15	25,00
	NO	45	75,00
4.Hotels architecture is suitable for the access of persons with physical disabilities	YES	53	88,33
	NO	7	11,67
5.The staff is is well prepared to serve such customers	YES	13	21,66
	NO	47	78,33
6.Governmental and non-governmental associations in this area work effectively	YES	5	8,33
	NO	55	91,66
7.Local administrations are involved in solving the problems of these people	YES	39	65,00
	NO	21	35,00

The opinions of the hotel managers on improving the conditions for people with disabilities in the tourism industry were tested and evaluated using Likert Scale, also called the aggregate scale, which is classified by type ordinal scales, leading to information of nonparametric nature. Thus, a set of 10 sentences was designed (Table 3), positive a

nd negative statements.

Table3.

Managers' opinions on improving the conditions of disabled people in tourism

Opinions		1	2	3	4	5	$\bar{X}$
1. Tourist facilities should not do anything in this respect	F	22	14	11	4	9	<b>2,40</b>
	%	<b>36,66</b>	<b>23,33</b>	18,33	6,67	15,01	100
2. Tourist facilities should adapt	F	7	7	11	25	10	<b>3,40</b>
	%	11,66	11,66	18,33	<b>41,67</b>	<b>16,68</b>	<b>100</b>
3. Access infrastructure should be improved	F	1	3	12	13	31	<b>4,16</b>
	%	1,66	5,00	20,00	21,67	<b>51,67</b>	100
4. Authorities should become more involved	F	0	0	9	15	36	<b>4,45</b>
	%	0	0	15,00	<b>25,00</b>	<b>60,00</b>	<b>100</b>
5. Hotels must have a qualified staff	F	1	9	17	<b>24</b>	9	<b>3,52</b>
	%	1,66	15,00	28,33	<b>40,00</b>	<b>15,01</b>	<b>100</b>
6. Non-profit organizations should become more involved	F	0	3	5	10	42	<b>4,52</b>
	%	0	5,00	8,33	<b>16,67</b>	<b>70,00</b>	<b>100</b>
7. Local administration should be more involved	F	2	2	8	21	27	<b>4,15</b>
	%	3,33	3,33	13,33	<b>35,00</b>	<b>45,01</b>	<b>100</b>
8. These issues should be advertised more	F	0	1	2	19	<b>38</b>	<b>4,57</b>
	%	0	1,66	3,33	<b>31,67</b>	<b>63,34</b>	<b>100</b>
9. The segment of people with disabilities should be ignored	F	32	15	11	2	0	<b>1,72</b>
	%	53,33	25,00	<b>18,34</b>	<b>3,33</b>	0,00	<b>100</b>
10. There is no legislation in this respect	F	0	2	3	17	38	<b>4,52</b>
	%	0,00	3,33	5,00	28,33	63,34	100

Respondents were given to possibility to choose one of the five scaling (1-5), depending on their agreement or disagreement with the statement in the sentence. After calculating the average assessments, one can conclude that most managers have a positive opinion regarding this market, and I think we should have done something to improve the conditions offered to those customers with special needs.

• **Conclusions on the extent to which the tourism industry is ready to meet the needs of people with disabilities**

By the undertaken research, we have tried to support business environment in the tourism industry in Romania to find the best solutions to meet the consumption needs of this new and dynamic market segment, by improving accommodation, transport, food, recreation and adapting the services provided. It seeks to help policy makers, managers of travel companies, local governments, nonprofit organizations, foundations, associations of disabled people (handicapped), etc. take on real solutions to meet the needs of this market segment, even if the tourism industry in Timisoara and Arad is not adequately prepared for this market, having a of a lot **weaknesses**.

Firstly, governmental and non-governmental organizations do not seem to work effectively to help people with disabilities. Secondly, the facilities in terms of transport, is a very important problem in carrying out tourism for the disabled people. Inappropriate environmental conditions, quality of staff training within the industry and architecture of hotels is another very important issue, areas such as entrances, car parks, halls and receptions are equipped to some extent for this

group, while other areas of stairs, rooms and bathrooms, reception and toilets, most of the managers believe that this market has potential.

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