



**JOURNAL OF ADVANCED
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

ISSN: 0976-9595

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Standardization of inclusive tourism: experience of the European Union and the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Abstract.

Inclusive tourism is an integral part of the modern tourism market of the European Union. The main purpose of this article is to analyze the standards of inclusive tourism in European Union and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Authors highlighted the present state of European inclusive tourism market as well as the national markets of the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Uzbekistan. The development, improvement and implementation of inclusive tourism standards in different countries were studied. The concepts of "inclusive tourism" and "accessible tourism" were considered and interpreted.

The research is mainly based on the works of domestic and foreign scientists in the sphere of inclusive and accessible tourism. The article provides statistical indicators of the number of people with disabilities on the total number of tourist arrivals. As a result of the research, authors were able to identify positive experience of the European Union countries in creating better environment for people with disabilities. Same practices can be adopted by any other countries of the world.

A comparative analysis revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the existing standards of inclusive tourism. Suggestions were made on how to improve the quality of services provided to people with disabilities and thereby enhance their travel experience. Recommendations for future researchers were proposed.

Keywords: quality of services; standardization; sustainable development, tourism market.

Introduction

As global awareness of accessibility and inclusivity continues to rise, the tourism industry is undergoing a significant transformation to cater to diverse needs and preferences. This article highlights main standards that guide accessible and inclusive tourism, ensuring that individuals of all abilities can partake in enriching travel experiences.

The purpose of the article is to conduct a comparative analysis of the standards of inclusive tourism in the countries of the European Union, in particular the Republic of Latvia, with the standard of inclusive tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan. By studying and comparing regulatory approaches in these regions, we will be able to identify common features and differences of these standards and thus facilitate the exchange of positive experiences and the creation of effective strategies for the development of inclusive tourism.

In addition to this, article will pay attention to laws and regulations, government support programs and measures to stimulate the development of inclusive tourism in these countries. By examining key principles, challenges, and innovative solutions within this realm, we aim to shed light on the importance of creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all travelers.

The conducted research will help to reflect the relevance of the problem of inclusive tourism, highlight the prospects for the development of this sector in various countries, and also contributes to the enrichment of scientific discourse in this area.

Theoretical framework

There are several interpretations of the term "inclusive tourism". In European countries, the tourism segment for people with disabilities is called "accessible tourism" or "tourism for all". This term was finally fixed in 2009 at the 18th session of the UN Tourism General Assembly in Astana (Kazakhstan) and is prescribed in the "The Declaration on the Facilitation of Tourist Travel". It is suggested that UN Tourism member countries should create tourist facilities and institutions on their territory that would be accessible to people with disabilities and publish clear and accessible information about existing services and problems that tourists they may encounter during travels. [1].

According to the Head of the Ethics, Culture, and Social Responsibility Department at the UN Tourism Organization Marina Diotallevi, the lack of consistency and clarity in different countries on how to make tourist facilities and services accessible continues to create barriers for various groups of visitors. [2].

"These barriers are often caused by a lack of knowledge and training in the industry, which usually means that well-intentioned efforts are wasted," she said.

"There is a clear lack of guidance in the tourism sector on the application of appropriate accessibility-related standards, and existing standards often differ from country to country or even within the national borders of the same country."

In 2021, the International Organization for Standardization published a standard that will help the industry make travel accessible to everyone. The ISO 21902 standard, "Tourism and Related Services - Accessible Tourism for All - Requirements and recommendations", contains requirements and recommendations for ensuring equal access and opportunities for people of all ages and abilities. This includes anyone who may face accessibility issues or has special access requirements, such as people with disabilities and the elderly. [3].

Jesús Hernández, ISO 21902 Project Manager and Director of Universal Accessibility and Innovation at Fundación ONCE, added: "In some countries, there are no relevant standards at all, as a result of which travel service providers are left without guidance on adapting their facilities and travel offers to meet the needs of each of their residents. ISO 21902 is the first international standard aimed at eliminating this serious gap, thereby improving accessibility throughout the entire tourism product chain." [4].

"Inclusive tourism should be perceived as social integration," says Scott Ryan, one of the promoters and founders of affordable tourism. [5].

Moreover, as it was said by Secretary-General of the UN Tourism Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili: "UNWTO is devoted to the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism geared towards the achievement of the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, based on the principles of the 2007 International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNWTO works to promote Accessible Tourism for All. We believe that enabling people with disabilities to travel is an essential element of any sustainable and responsible tourism policy. "

Methods

The theoretical and methodological basis of research was the works of domestic and foreign scientists in the sphere of inclusive tourism and statistical information from UN Tourism Organization, Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Scientific-Research Institute for Tourism Development under the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Statistics agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The research used a set of scientific methods: analysis, synthesis, comparison. Additionally, researchers used content analysis tools to analyze online reviews, social media posts, and other forms of digital communication to gain insights into the perceptions and experiences of tourists

with regards to inclusivity in the tourism industry.

Overall, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research tools helped to provide a comprehensive understanding of inclusive standards in tourism.

Results

Having inclusive tourism standards is important for several reasons. First of all, inclusive tourism standards contribute to creating a comfortable and friendly environment for all tourists, regardless of their specific needs or limitations. Thus inclusive tourism standards ensure that all tourists, including people with disabilities, have equal access to the services offered by tourism enterprises. Moreover, businesses that follow inclusive tourism standards manage to attract more customers, including those who previously avoided travel due to possible access problems. Adhering to inclusive tourism standards can help travel companies improve their reputation through their attention to the needs of different tourists. Last but not least, inclusive tourism allows travel enterprises to increase revenues by expanding their clientele and attracting new categories of tourists.

Accessible tourism enables all people to participate in and enjoy tourism experiences globally. According to the World Health Organization, accessible tourism is an umbrella term that covers physical impairments, activity limitations and restrictions to participation. The UN Tourism Organization has developed a toolkit for tour operators and other related leisure businesses. In addition, ISO certification is available for quality assurance.

In addition to people with disabilities, accessible tourism applies to all other people who may benefit from accessible infrastructures, including elderly people, those carrying heavy luggage and parents with small children. Accessible tourism is thus relevant for anyone who needs special support when travelling, including senior citizens. Like everyone else, people with disabilities have the right to travel anywhere in the world. As shown in figure 1 below, global Sustainable Development Goal 10 aims to 'reduce inequality within and among countries'.



Figure 1. UN Sustainable development goals. Source: [E 2018 Sdg Poster With Un Emblem2-01 - Infographic Un Sustainable Development Goals, HD Png Download - kindpng](#)

According to recent UN Tourism estimates, the potential market of people with disabilities in the European Union comprises more than 80 million people, and even 130 million when including senior citizens and their travel companions. The overall number of people with disabilities is likely to grow, especially as baby boomers age. Most people with disabilities in the EU do are financially and physically able to travel.

There are several standards and initiatives in the European Union aimed at developing inclusive and affordable tourism. The following standards should be noted as the most significant of them:

ISO 21902, Tourism and related services – Accessible tourism for all – Requirements and recommendations, provides requirements and guidelines to facilitate equal access and enjoyment of tourism by people of all ages and abilities. This includes anyone who might face accessibility issues or have specific access requirements, such as those with disabilities and the elderly. [6].

ENAT (2007) Study Report no. 1 Rights of Tourists with Disabilities in the European Union Framework. [7].

ENAT (2007) Study Report no. 2 Services and Facilities for Accessible Tourism in Europe. [8].

ENAT (2007) Study Report no. 3 Towards 2010: Disability Policy Challenges and Actions for the European Tourism Sector. [9].

CEN / AFNOR Report. Mandate 371. Accessibility of Services in Transport and Tourism (2009) [10].

ISO 18513:2003 Tourism services — Hotels and other types of tourism accommodation – Terminology. Defines terms used in the tourism industry in relation to the various types of tourism accommodation and other related services. [11].

The European Union recognizes the importance of inclusive tourism and supports the development and implementation of appropriate standards in member countries. Many EU countries are taking active measures to develop inclusive tourism at the national level and, in this regard, create and apply appropriate local standards. Below are some examples of standards implemented in different EU countries:

1. There is a system of international accreditation of accessibility of enterprises and facilities, called the "Accessible Britain Standard" in the United Kingdom. This system provides certificates to businesses that meet accessibility standards. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which has

now been replaced by the Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against people in respect of their disabilities in relation to employment, the provision of goods and services, education and transport.

2. Germany has developed special standards for inclusive tourism, including accessibility requirements for hotels, restaurants and other tourist facilities. The standards describe the necessary conditions to ensure a comfortable stay for all tourists, including the disabled people. Among such standards, for example, the “Gesetz zur Gleichstellung behinderter Menschen” standard in Germany can be distinguished.

3. France has developed a labeling system for tourist sites called "Tourisme et Handicap" (Tourism and Disability). The marking distinguishes businesses and facilities that provide accessibility and services for the disabled people.

4. Italy has developed the “Marchio Ospitalità in Forma” certification program for hotels and other inclusive tourism facilities. It provides certification for businesses that offer special services for tourists with disabilities.

5. In the Netherlands, there is a special "Access Tourism" label for various tourist sites. It confirms that the facility provides sufficient access for the disabled people and has appropriate services and facilities.

6. In Finland (the Porvoo region) there are several small travel agencies offering services for organizing water tourism on pleasure boats, where people in wheelchairs can go (Bielousova N. V., 2019).

7. In Austria, The Tyrol mountain resort has become one of the most wheelchair- accessible areas in Europe, where you can not only walk the streets of Tyrol and see the sights without interruption, but also climb certain mountain heights and, most importantly, to engage in all the active sports available to them at recreation centers (Bielousova N. V., 2019).

These are just some examples of inclusive tourism standards in European Union countries. Each country has its own approach and system designed to ensure accessibility and convenience for all tourists. The level of infrastructure adaptation within the country often indicates the development of inclusive tourism. The table below provides information in which EU countries inclusive tourism is most developed.

Spain	All elements of the tourist infrastructure have been adapted by almost 90%
Finland	All elements of the tourist infrastructure have been adapted by almost 70%
Germany	All elements of the tourist infrastructure have been adapted by almost 95%
France	All elements of the tourist infrastructure have been adapted by almost 85%
Great Britain	All elements have been adapted

Table 1. EU countries where inclusive tourism is most developed

In the Republic of Latvia, inclusive and accessible tourism standards aim to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their abilities, have equal access to travel and tourism opportunities. These standards are in line with Latvia's commitment to promoting social inclusion and equality for all members of society.

Accessibility is a civil right and its establishment is based on the currently applicable legal

provisions and standards. A broad categorization of persons with disabilities and real firms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms is adopted by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol (A/RES/61/106). The UN Convention works to change attitudes and approaches to people with disabilities. It is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit, social development dimension that clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to those people while also indentifying the areas where adaptations have to be made to effectively exercise their rights.

The Convention was a new height from which the tendency to view people with disabilities as "objects" of charity, medical treatment and social protection changed towards viewing them as "subjects" with rights to access tourism products and services.

In addition to this, some key aspects of inclusive and accessible tourism standards in Latvia include important requirements for:

Accessible transportation: Ensuring that public transportation options are accessible to individuals with disabilities, including the availability of accessible buses, trains, and taxis.

Accessible accommodations: Hotels, guest houses, and other types of accommodations are required to provide accessible rooms and facilities for guests with disabilities.

Accessible tourist attractions: Popular tourist attractions, such as museums, parks, and historical sites, are expected to provide accessible facilities and services for visitors with disabilities.

Information accessibility: Tourism information, including websites, brochures, and maps, should be accessible to individuals with visual impairments or other disabilities.

Training and awareness: Tourism industry professionals are encouraged to undergo training on inclusive and accessible tourism practices, and to raise awareness about the importance of accessibility for all travelers.

As shown in Figure 2 below, when Europeans with disabilities consider a holiday, the five most important aspects are as follows: transport to and from the destination (53%), accessibility of booking services (53%), nature (48%), safety (48%) and the availability of information once at the destination (47%). The five most important accessibility aspects in buildings (e.g. hotels and museums) are the accessibility of restroom facilities; the accessibility of parking facilities; the ease of use of lifts; the ease of use of furniture, furnishings and lights; and mobility within the building.



Figure 2. Five things to consider when planning a holiday for people with disabilities. Source: UN Tourism reports.

Overall, inclusive and accessible tourism standards in Latvia aim to create a welcoming and

inclusive environment for all visitors, regardless of their abilities. By implementing these standards, Republic of Latvia is able to enhance its reputation as a destination that is accessible and welcoming to all travelers.

Discussion

The development of inclusive tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan is an urgent task, as it will help to attract more tourists and make the country more accessible and friendly for all visitors.

The main standard regulating inclusive tourism is the standard "O'Z DSt ISO 21902:2022 Tourism and related services. Affordable tourism for everyone. Requirements and recommendations" that is identical to the international standard ISO 21902:2021. [12].

Majority of Uzbek tourist attractions and hotels offer services and facilities for guests with disabilities. For example, most hotels are equipped with special rooms and showers that are accessible to the people with special requirements. Some famous attractions, such as the Samarkand Bibi-Khanym Mosque, are also equipped with lifts and other facilities.

Among other important documents, it is also necessary to note the President Resolution, dated 12.01.2024 No. PP-20 "On measures for the development of barrier-free tourism and its stimulation in the Republic of Uzbekistan". According to this resolution, the main measures to stimulate the development of barrier-free tourism are:

- creating the necessary conditions for the free movement of people with disabilities at tourist sites — elevators, ramps and handrails for people with limited mobility will appear at train stations, cultural facilities and public transport;

- stimulation of tourism entities — for each room equipped for people with hearing, vision problems and people with limited mobility, hotels will receive subsidies for 1-2 million soums;

- improving the quality of services for people with disabilities at tourism facilities — the Tourism Support Fund will cover 50% for the training of sign language guides and up to 500 thousand soums for one thousand citizens with disabilities of groups I and II to travel around Uzbekistan. [13].

However, the full and effective development of inclusive tourism in Uzbekistan requires a broader and more comprehensive approach from the government, travel companies and other stakeholders. This may include staff training, adaptation of tourist infrastructure, creation of accessible routes and designing special travel programs for people with disabilities.

Conclusions

The national inclusive tourism standard in Uzbekistan may focus more on accessibility for people with disabilities and promoting cultural diversity within the country. It may involve ensuring that tourist sites, accommodations, and transportation are equipped to accommodate individuals with different accessibility needs.

On the other hand, inclusive tourism standards in the European Union countries may have a broader scope, incorporating requirements for not only accessibility but also sustainability, social inclusion, and environmental protection. EU countries often place emphasis on promoting local economic development and enhancing the overall tourist experience for all visitors.

While both Uzbekistan and the EU countries aim to promote inclusive tourism, there may be differences in the specific requirements and focus areas outlined in their respective standards. These differences reflect the unique priorities and challenges faced by each region in promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism practices.

The following steps can be taken to improve the existing standards of inclusive tourism:

- Education: Providing training to the staff of travel companies and local operators on the needs of people with disabilities, as well as on methods to ensure a comfortable and safe stay for all categories of tourists.

Infrastructure assessment and adaptation: Carrying out an assessment of the existing infrastructure in order to determine its level of accessibility for people with disabilities and recommendations for its improvement, including the addition of ramps, lifts, assistants, etc.

Promotion and awareness: Development of information materials and advertising campaigns to draw attention to issues of inclusive tourism and the creation of specialized travel programs for various categories of tourists.

Partnership and cooperation: Establishing partnerships with specialized non- governmental organizations and government agencies and work together to improve the accessibility of tourism services for all.

Feedback and continuous improvement: Collecting feedback from tourists with disabilities to continuously improve the quality of services, as well as constantly updating the standards of inclusive tourism in accordance with changing needs and requirements.

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