

## A RESEARCH TO ASSESS THE SUITABILITY OF HOTEL ENTERPRISES FOR ACCESSIBLE TOURISM<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** It is difficult for people with disabilities to participate in tourist activities. Therefore, the accessibility of hotels is becoming increasingly important. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the accessibility of three-, four- and five-star hotels in the Turkish provinces of Mardin, Şanlıurfa and Hatay in terms of accessible tourism. A survey was conducted to collect the data and a total of 50 hotel managers participated. Using a questionnaire emailed to the hotel managers, they were asked about the physical structure of the hotels, tourism policies, room facilities, staff support for disabled guests, and local authorities' views on accessibility. After the survey was completed, the data were analysed using statistical methods. The survey shows that hotels in these provinces are poorly adapted to the needs of the disabled. While there are some regulations for wheelchair accessibility, many hotels ignore the needs of people with visual or hearing impairments. Although hotel operators do not consider the accessible tourism market a profitable one, they are willing to participate. Even though these hotels have some shortcomings in terms of accessibility, they can appeal to people with disabilities if some improvements are made. Based on the results, suggestions were made to the hotel managers to facilitate the access of disabled customers to the services.

**Key Words:** Tourism, Accessibility, Hotel Managements, Disabled, Barrier-Free Tourism

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The number of travellers is increasing and the competitive conditions in the field of tourism are changing with the technological developments in the world. With more than one billion tourists travelling to international destinations each year, tourism has become a leading industry contributing 10% to global GDP and 6% to total world exports. It is estimated that between 7 % and 8 % of travelers worldwide have a disability, which directly contributes to the increase in GDP (Dwyer & Darcy, 2008: 36).

According to the data from the International Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), approximately 15% of the world's population consists of people with disabilities. In other words, approximately 1 billion of the world's population consists of people with disabilities. (World Report on Disability 2011). For this reason, people with disabilities are seen as the "the minority with the largest population" in the world. In Turkey, this figure is 12.29% (Turkey Disability Report, 2002).

Tourism, within the scope of the service, is an industry that has become important today and is constantly growing. Therefore, especially developing countries use the tourism sector to close their balance of payments deficits. From this point of view, the number of tourism activities in a country can give an idea about the economic development in that country. Tourism, which is thought to be the world's largest industry in the future, has become one of the most rapidly growing industries worldwide with the entry of local, regional, and national governments as well as international businesses into this industry (Günel, 2006: 28).

Hotel businesses are an important and an effective factor in the development of the tourism industry. Hotel businesses, which carry out service practices within the framework of certain standards, aim to meet the different needs and demands of tourists coming to the region (Olalı and Korzay, 1993: 25; Kozak et al., 2001: 3). People with disabilities cannot participate in social and economic life and integrate into society because the physical conditions are generally not suitable. Both travel conditions and the physical structures of touristic destinations are problems for disabled visitors and are barriers to accessibility. Although some touristic places have slightly improved their physical structure for disabled people, there are still serious deficiencies. Adaptation of disabled people in all areas of life is an extremely important indicator in the creation of a modern society. Disabled people need to travel, see different places and take a vacation just like other people (World Disabled Foundation, 2003). In Europe alone, the demand for general accessibility exceeded 120 million people in 2005, making up more than 27% of the European population. It is estimated that the demand for accessibility will reach approximately 160 million people by the end of 2025 (Bowtell, 2015: 203). There is a disabled group with a purchasing power of 175 billion dollars in the United States and the amount that this disabled group spends on tourism activities on an annual basis is 13.6 billion dollars (Akıncı and Sönmez, 2015: 98). In Spain, the share of income from accessible tourism in total tourism income is between 5.87% and 11.77% (Domínguez et al., 2013: 1390). There are 5 million disabled individuals in Japan and approximately 50 million disabled individuals in China, which has grown rapidly in recent years and has become one of the largest economies in the world (Akıncı and Sönmez, 2015: 98).

Bowtell analyzed the participation of travel and entertainment companies in barrier-free tourism and the potential of accessible tourism in a study conducted in 2015. The research focused on providing an estimate of the market value using data from 2005 and with it forecasting the tranche to 2025. The study revealed that the accessible tourism market can grow extensively in the future, offering a potentially important and lucrative market to tourist

service providers, with a revenue of 88.6 billion euros by 2025. From the data obtained in the research, it has been revealed that the tourism industry provides insufficient service to disabled individuals and it is stated that accessibility should be understood as a social right before accessible tourism products are put on the market (Bowtell, 2015: 203-215).

Dwyer and Darcy conducted a study on the contribution of disabled people's participation in touristic activities to the national economy in Australia in 2011. According to the visitor survey data used in the research, it has been shown that disabled individuals are still an important part of the tourism market, although they spend less than healthy individuals do. It has been revealed that there is a hidden demand in this market and if the barriers to the participation of people with disabilities in tourism are removed, this market has a chance to grow to meet the demand (Dwyer & Darcy, 2011). Different studies have shown the potential of the market represented by disabled people, as disabled people have more time and opportunities (Domínguez, González, & Darcy, 2019). Countries are trying to find new alternatives to attract more tourists and strengthen their economies. The more the impact of tourism on the country's economy is understood, the more investments are made in tourism.

By dint of studies carried out in the international arena, it has become clear that the efforts to integrate people with disabilities into society are not only social rights or rehabilitation problems, but also a fundamental "human rights" problem. The main point of this approach is that individuals with different types of disabilities have the same human rights as other people. What disabled people need is not the feeling of pity, but the equality of opportunity, technology, education, health, cultural and social rights, and services offered to all individuals, as well as the preparation of a supportive and accessible environment and encouragement of disabled people to do so.

Disabled people who cannot participate in social and economic life live only as consumers in society and constitute the disadvantaged part of society. Along with the right to work, the right to travel is also restricted. Because the disabled, who constitute a significant proportion of society in social and economic terms, can travel and visit touristic places, and the situation that each disabled person takes a companion with them, it will both accelerate tourism throughout the country and ensure the integration of the disabled with the society.

In the national literature, it has been observed that the studies on barrier-free tourism in Turkey are limited (Kahveci, 2016: 5). Accessible tourism has a larger market than one might think, and these developments are also in the interest of tourism service (Gondos and Nárai, M, 2019: 55). Accessible tourism provides products, services, and environments designed universally, enabling individuals with vision, hearing, and access needs to function independently and equally (Luiza, 2010: 1154-1157). Universal design has become a fundamental concept in the understanding and development of accessible tourism. Universal design is defined as the design of products and environments so that all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or special design, can use them. (Darcy et al., 2010: 519).

In a workshop funded by the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism (STCRC) in Australia in 2005, barrier-free tourism was defined as: Accessible tourism is the process of ensuring that the elderly and disabled people receive services with dignity, independence, and equality through the provision of universal tourism services and products, as well as touristic environments.

Kasimati and Ioakeimidis defined accessible tourism as an emerging type of tourism related to the tourist activities of the disabled and elderly groups worldwide in a study they conducted in 2019 (Kasimati and Ioakeimidis, 2019:33-42).

Disabled individuals, who cannot continue their lives like other individuals due to congenital or subsequent reasons, have to live differently. These individuals have lost their mental, physical, social, and spiritual abilities. Several auxiliary tools can be used to make up for these lost deficiencies. This situation differentiates the human needs of the individual according to the disability situation. For this reason, it is seen that the user dimension in universal design should be considered versatile and appealing to everyone. The universal design approach aims for each individual to benefit from the products activities and services offered in the living environment. In other words, the universal approach is defined as an approach that allows all products and services in a destination to be used by all individuals without any distinction (Dostođlu et al, 2022).

The concept of universal design aims to make products and the environment more useful, at least cost or free of charge, to be reached by more people and to simplify life for everyone. The concept of universal design targets people of all ages, groups and abilities, and develops solutions that can be used by everyone to the greatest extent possible (Aslaksen et al., 1997: 4).

Universal tourism is considered an important component of accessible tourism and must be understood in detail for its successful implementation. Disability, which was previously handled only with its medical aspect and classified accordingly, is now also discussed with its social aspect. Universal design, which is not only a driving force for accessible tourism, is also an important support tool in the management of activities and in reducing functional costs (Darcy et al., 2011: 302-311).

The importance of the disability phenomenon will increase in the coming years, as this concept is becoming more vital every day. The reason for this is that the risk of disability increases with the aging of populations around the world, and some chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, mental health disorders, and cancer increase worldwide" (WHO, 2011: 27). Disability, which is a natural part of human life and can happen to every individual, has often been evaluated by people as a state of poverty or weakness (Eryilmaz, 2010: 1). Disabled individuals have different needs during their participation in touristic activities. For this reason, arrangements should be made to meet the needs of disabled individuals to participate in touristic activities (Olca y et al. 2014: 117).

This study aims to assess the suitability of three, four, and five-star hotels in Mardin, Őanlıurfa, and Hatay provinces in terms of barrier-free tourism and to determine whether the current regulations and practices meet the demand and expectations of disabled tourists. All three provinces have a strong potential in terms of being similar in terms of different religions, languages, beliefs, multiculturalism, and historical structure. For this reason, another aim of this study is to reveal the issues related to the accessibility of the three, four and five-star hotels in these provinces in terms of the visit of disabled tourists and to ensure that the disabled tourists, which are thought to accelerate the tourism activities here, by enabling them to use their right to travel, which is their most natural right, to interact with the society. to ensure their integration. Several studies related to the disabled population have been performed in Turkey, but in these provinces, there are no studies performed related to the accessibility of hotels.

It is expected that the arrangements to be made as a result of this study will make a difference in terms of tourist visits and create awareness for the disabled who constitute the disadvantaged part of society. In addition, it is thought that there will be a serious increase

in the number of tourists, especially with the visit of physically disabled tourists to these provinces.

It is thought that the data to be obtained in this study will shed light on the studies aiming to use the freedom of travel of disabled people, to integrate with society and to raise awareness about barrier-free tourism.

## **2. The Concept of Disability and Accessible Tourism**

Disability, which is as old as the history of humanity, has always affected the approach of societies to disabled people and education and health services for disabled people. Although these approaches differ according to societies, they have provided positive developments together with cultural and scientific developments. One of the most striking of these approaches was that during the period of paganism (polytheistic religions), a disabled individual was thought to be a punishment given to the family to which he belonged. It was accepted that helping a disabled person in such a situation meant taking the punishment of God. Accordingly, it has been difficult for them to communicate with society since the social environment is not easily accessible for disabled people. No one would help the disabled and they were left alone (Öztürk, 2012: 7).

Disability is a condition that negatively affects the life of the individual due to congenital or subsequent reasons and causes the person to be excluded from society, and thus to have a difficult work and social life. However, as a result of the change and transformation of social life over time, the perspective toward disabled individuals has also changed. It has started to be evaluated within the scope of basic human rights that disabled people have a place in business and social life like other healthy members of society. With this understanding, employment obligation has been introduced for disabled individuals under certain conditions in the labor laws. (Yıldız et al., 2017: 74).

With the development of scientific studies in Western society, biology and other branches of science have begun to be used to scientifically explain the situation of disabled people. Especially in the United States, hospitals were opened for mental and neurotic patients, and these studies have spread to other European countries (Similar, 2017: 8). In parallel, as new information is discovered, new technologies are invented, and the expectations of people with disabilities rise, this does not mean that the problem has been resolved, as there are evolving expectations regarding accessibility among people with disabilities (Darcy & Taylor, 2009: 437).

The current tourism literature on disability has recently increased in the scope of current issues and rigor in methodological approaches. However, there is still a reluctance to explore tourism experiences in families with children with disabilities, and the wider relationships between families with disabilities are to some extent neglected (Kim and Lehto, 2013:). Disability harms an individual's self-esteem, self-confidence, and mental health. For this reason, the disabled individual moves away from society and reduces the quality of life, and this creates an obstacle for the disabled individual to continue his life like other healthy people (Albayrak, 2014: 62).

According to the disability discrimination law in the UK, a person with a disability; is "A person with a mental or physical disorder that has a long-term impact on his or her ability to perform normal daily activities". Long-term here means that the effect of the disorder lasts or is likely to last for at least twelve months (DDA, 2005: 6).

With the change in social life, the need to make new definitions of disability or disability arises. (Yörük, 2003: 18). The concept of disability is defined in the dictionary of the Turkish Language Institution as "person with a disability", "person with a defect or deficiency in his body" (TDK, 2005). From this point of view, it will be tried to evaluate the inadequacies of the hotel businesses in meeting the special needs of disabled people, the problems they encounter, and the solution proposals.

The Council of Europe established a committee of experts, bringing together representatives of 14 countries and five observers, to determine the definition and classification of disability according to international standards. This definition and classification were made according to the disease and health status of the individual and divided into three classes.

**Impairment:** It is defined as a permanent or temporary, psychological or physical disability, and refers to disorders related to the physical organ.

**Disability:** It refers to the restriction or loss of the ability to do a job, within the limits of what is normal for a person, caused by a deficiency. In a personal sense, this definition refers to the loss of mental and physical competence.

**Handicap:** The inability of an individual to perform some normal behaviors or the restriction of these behaviors as a result of a disability or handicap. This expression also explains the situation of people with disabilities. Disability is a health-related condition. Disability puts individuals at a disadvantage in terms of social norms (WHO., 1980: 27; Şahin, 2012: 15; (Balci, 2021)).

The prevalence of the indicators varied considerably. This variability may reflect a real difference in the prevalence of disabilities, disabilities, and disabilities, or may be due to different factors (Barbotte, Guillemin, F, & Chau, N, 2001: 14).

**Table 1. International Classification of the Concept of Disability, Impairment, and Handicap**

Concept	Impairment	Handicap	Disability
Degree	Organ	Individual	Social Environment
Disability	Physical Structure And Function	Activity	Role
Example	Lack Of an Eye	Limited Deep Vision	Not Getting a Driver's License

Source: World Health Organization, (WHO), Genova, 1980

The concept of disability is very difficult to define clearly because it refers to different areas of human functioning. There is no common definition of disability in EU countries. In most European countries, disability is defined by referring to the obstacles faced by the disabled person (Najmiec, 2007: 5).

### 3. Classification of People with Disabilities

It has become necessary to establish a database with the information obtained from the studies carried out by official institutions and academics in many countries to inform the disabled about the legal regulations regarding disabled individuals, to enable them to exercise their legal rights, and to create a conceptual framework (Balci, 2021: 20). In 1980, the World Health Organization (WHO) organized a multidimensional classification system for the disabled within the framework of certain standards. This system, which was developed for the disabled, was later transformed into the "International Classification of Function, Disability, and Health" and the disabled were classified under eight headings:

1. Individuals with physical and mobility disabilities
2. Blind
3. Brain damage resulting from a head injury
4. Spinal cord disability
5. Mental disability
6. Deaf
7. Invisible disability
8. Psychological disability

Like other individuals living in society, disabled individuals also benefit from tourist products and services by participating in tourism activities, reducing their exclusion from society, and ensuring their integration with society. Disabled individuals, who are very willing to participate in tourism activities, do not participate in tourism activities due to the negativities they experience in their holiday experiences despite these desires. For this reason, necessary legal and structural arrangements should be made to enable disabled individuals to participate in tourism activities that destroy these negative perceptions. Because the barrier-free tourism market, which is accepted as a special market in terms of the tourism industry, is an important and alternative tourism type with its social and cultural aspects as well as the contributions it provides to the economies of the countries (Tellioglu, 2018: 4).

The Polish law of 1997 on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities divides degrees of disability into three groups:

- Mild Disability
- Moderate Disability
- Significant Disability

Disabled hotel guests are mostly first or second-degree disabled people (Bładek, 2001: 193). Krynska, on the other hand, states that the disabled can be divided into two basic groups. The first group is people with disabilities who have a document indicating their degree of disability, and the second group is people who do not have disability documents but have significant limitations in performing basic tasks and mobility (Krynska, 2013: 7).

Data on disabled individuals were obtained in the Population and Housing Survey conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute in 2011 in Turkey. The distribution ratios of disabled individuals according to age group and gender in the study are shown in Table 2.

**Tablo 2. Proportion of the Population with at Least One Disability by Gender and Age Group in the General Population**

<b>Disabled Individual Age Group</b>	<b>Population Ratio (%)</b>	<b>Male (%)</b>	<b>Woman (%)</b>
<b>All age groups</b>	<b>6,9</b>	<b>5,9</b>	<b>7,9</b>
3-9	2,3	2,5	2,1
10-14	2,1	2,4	1,8
15-19	2,3	2,6	2,0
20-24	2,7	3,4	2,0
25-29	2,6	3,0	2,3
30-34	3,2	3,4	3,0
35-39	4,0	4,0	4,1
40-44	5,1	4,7	5,6
45-49	6,9	5,9	7,8
50-54	8,8	7,1	10,7
55-59	12,1	9,12	15,0
60-64	16,5	12,3	20,4
65-69	23,0	18,3	27,2
70-74	31,9	26,3	36,3
75+	46,5	40,9	50,3

Source: Population and housing survey (TUIK), 2011, Turkey.

Most women over 75 years of age are among those with at least one disability. While the rate of women in the whole population is 7.9 percent, it is seen that men are 5.9 % (table 2).

One of the most important indicators of being a modern society is the correct understanding of the needs and expectations of disabled individuals in society, eliminating the factors that prevent them from participating in economic and social life, and the adaptation of these individuals to society in all areas (Akıncı & Sönmez, 2015: 97).

One of the most important elements of society being a modern and social state is to ensure that all individuals benefit equally from the products and services offered and that all people have the same rights, without any discrimination. The World Tourism Organization sees rest and travel as a right and a need for people's happiness and supports this (Eryılmaz, 2010: 2). In a study by Mc Kercher et al. in 2003, they stated that depriving any person or

group of the right to travel or restricting these rights should be seen as discrimination and marginalization among people. For this reason, countries or local governments should evaluate accessible tourism within the framework of universal human rights and take measures to facilitate travel and circulation for everyone with an active approach by combining infrastructure, superstructure, and legal regulations (Darcy et al., 2009: 37).

Although there are laws and regulations and some standards for disabled people in many countries, they are not at a sufficient level for the participation of disabled people in social and economic life and the development of accessible tourism. For this reason, disabled individuals have to live with many problems and troubles in their daily lives with their families. These problems experienced by disabled individuals are present in the field of travel and tourism during the holiday (Darcy et al., 2010: 518). An unhindered, facilitated and well-planned holiday can improve the social communication of individuals with disabilities and their families, create new learning opportunities and cause behavioral changes in individuals (Kim & Lehto, 2013: 21).

It is seen several legal arrangements have been made to facilitate the participation of disabled people in social and economic life worldwide, especially in developed countries where developed human rights and freedoms are given importance. Among these regulations made to facilitate the lives of disabled individuals, the laws enacted in the United Kingdom and the United States are regulations that can be considered important in participating in tourist activities, traveling, and integrating with society (Eryılmaz, 2010: 22).

80 % of the world's disabled people live in developing countries and are among the poorest in developed countries. Economic, political, social, environmental, and cultural factors that can create widespread barriers to the realization of the right to education of persons with disabilities are effective. Disabled individuals cannot provide adequate access to many services, especially transportation, education, health, and work (Iriarte, McConkey, & Gilligan, 2016: 134). These disabled individuals, who cannot access the products and services offered by the tourism industry, generally consist of low-income individuals and because they do not have a permanent job and income, they continue their lives with social and economic support, especially through their families. This situation shows that the biggest obstacle for disabled individuals to participate in tourism activities is economic or financial obstacles (Packer et al, 2007: 282).

The tourism industry should embrace and promote 'Tourism for All'. The inadequacy of existing and accessible facilities, transportation, accommodation, and attraction centers has an impact on the travel habits of people with disabilities. Tourism marketing should include information for disabled people. The government and local authorities have important duties to implement a universal design in touristic places and facilities, to serve tourists, a universal design needs to be incorporated into the current and future developments of tourism products. Existing facilities and tourist attractions need to be evaluated to provide quality service and experience to people with disabilities (Snyman, 2002: 4).

The main point that the tourism industry should know and remember is that just because an individual has a disability does not mean that that person is unable or unwilling to travel. Although the exact number of disabled tourists traveling is not known, it can be said that there is a large disabled tourism market. It was stated in a study conducted by TÜRSAB in 2008 that the travel market in European countries produced 630 million overnight stays (Bulgan, 2015: 19).

#### **4. Legal Regulations Regarding Disabled Persons**

In modern societies, important responsibilities are imposed on all countries to ensure that individuals and groups with disabilities have the opportunity to live independently with equal participation in every stage of life, and that the rights of disabled individuals are legally secured (Şişman, 2011: 171). Tourism cannot be considered independent of city policies and legislation (Yıldız, 2019: 344).

Although it is accepted by everyone that disabled people have basic rights and freedoms like other normal individuals, it is difficult to say that this understanding is applied in daily life. The United Nations and the Council of Europe have guaranteed human rights in the agreements they have signed with the member states they have determined. Since Turkey is a member of these organizations, it has the same commitments. These agreements, which protect all human rights, are valid for all individuals without any discrimination. However, it has been observed that disabled individuals do not effectively benefit from the rights recognized in these conventions for different reasons (Quinn et al., 2014: 14). It states that all individuals have the right to roam and travel freely in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, research shows that disabled individuals do not actively and adequately benefit from their right to travel (Kaygısız and Bulgan, 2015: 98). This issue was also emphasized in the United Nations Report published in 1991 and it was stated that people with disabilities live in unacceptable conditions due to the social and physical barriers that prevent them from adapting to social life (UNESCO, 1991: 9).

The United Nations General Assembly, convened in 1993, determined 22 standard general rules on providing equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Within the scope of the 5th Rule, it has been stated that countries should be aware of the importance of barrier-free tourism and make the environmental and physical environments accessible to ensure the accessibility of disabled people for equal opportunities (Telliöđlu, 2018: 70).

To increase the applicability of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the framework of the European Union, the 2010-2020 European Union Disability Strategy has been prepared. This framework is aimed to ensure that disabled individuals and their families can participate in cultural activities on an equal basis with other individuals in all areas of economic and social life, use their right to free travel, and participate in tourism activities. Therefore, this strategy, it is aimed to eliminate the obstacles faced by disabled individuals as social and economic factors (Boyacıođlu and Çađlar, 2014: 95).

As stated in Article 90 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, international agreements on fundamental rights and freedoms that have been duly accepted and entered into force have the force of law, and the provisions of international agreements shall be taken as basis in disputes that may arise since the laws contain different provisions on the same subject.

The adoption of the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995 increased the social and economic interest of the tourism industry in the plight of persons with disabilities (Shaw & Coles, T, 2004: 397). The problems faced by tourists with disabilities were revealed with increasing awareness, especially from the 1970s to the 1990s, but what could be done in this regard was limited due to the lack of existing legislation (Shaw & Coles, T, 2004: 398).

Looking at the historical background regarding the legal rights of disabled individuals, positive behaviors toward disabled individuals have been shown in terms of social structure (Bulgan & Çarıkçı, 2016). Despite this, legal regulations on this subject were introduced later. Article 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, adopted in 1982, on freedom of settlement and travel, states that "everyone has the right to settle and freedom of travel". As

can be understood from this expression, disabled individuals, like other healthy individuals in society, have the right to travel and participate in tourist activities (Birdir & Karacaoğlu, 2014: 1567). However, the fact that they have these rights does not mean that they can use these rights. Because for people with disabilities to be able to travel and participate in tourist activities, appropriate environmental and physical arrangements must be made and these arrangements must be legally secured. The first legal regulation in Turkey for disabled individuals was brought with Decree-Law No. 572, which was added to the zoning law in 1997. According to this legal regulation, it is obligatory for all kinds of buildings, urban technical infrastructure areas, zoning plans, urban roads and pavements to be made following the requirements of the Turkish Standards Institute for easy access of disabled people (İmar Law, 1985: Additional article 1) ( Akdu & Akdu, S, 2018: 111).

## 5. Methodology

The research intends to increase knowledge and raise awareness about accessible tourism, which is the subject of the research. In line with these intentions, the main subject area of the research is disabled individuals. In this context, the accessibility of hotel businesses for people in the disabled segment was evaluated.

In line with the purpose above, the main purpose of this study was to explore the accessibility of three, four, and five-star hotels in Mardin, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay provinces in Turkey in terms of barrier-free tourism. To determine the population of the research, the Provincial Directorates of Culture and Tourism in research provinces were contacted and the list of three, four, and five-star hotels in these provinces were obtained. Since all three, four and five-star hotels are easily reachable in the research provinces and included in the scope of the research and they constitute the entire research population, the need for a sample representing the research population was eliminated. The ideal situation regarding the research problem is that everyone, that is, the entire universe, is included in the research (Lin, 1976, 146). The places where the study was carried out are Mardin, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay, which are thought to be the richest provinces of Turkey in terms of history, culture, and faith.

Through a questionnaire, prepared by the "Accessible Tourism Commission" formed under the coordination of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Turkish, sent to hotel managers via electronic mail, they were asked to fill in the questionnaire, which included information about the location of the facility, barrier-free tourism policy, transportation to the facility, parking lot, marketing -reservation, the entrance of the facility, reception, entrance hall-lobby, public toilets, use of the facility, barrier-free bedrooms, emergency measures, building installation, management, personnel, and service". Questionnaire forms were distributed to the managers of the hotel businesses in the research provinces and their opinions and thoughts about the accessibility of the hotels they were managing were taken. In line with the information given by the hotel managers, it was tried to determine the suitability of the hotels for accessible tourism.

The survey was conducted in May and June 2022. Thirty-two 3-star, ten 4-star, and eight 5-star hotels in the research provinces participated in the survey. The answers given by the managers as 'appropriate' or 'not appropriate' to each statement in the questionnaire were taken into account and in line with the statements of the managers, a check was made to see whether the hotel businesses complied with the criteria of disabled customers. The collected data were entered into the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and the frequencies and percentages of the results were performed.

In this study, the hypothesis that three, four, and five-star hotels in Mardin, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay in Turkey are not suitable for the accommodation of the disabled was tested. Defining the concept of disabled people, accessible tourism, determining the types of disabled people, defining accessibility, and researching the suitability of the hotels within the scope of the research for the accommodation of disabled people is the focus of this study.

## 6. Limitations of the Research

The research population is limited to three, four, and five-star hotels in Mardin, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay. The research includes three provinces that show similarities in terms of history, culture, and faith tourism in Turkey. Obtaining the number of hotels in the research provinces from the Culture and Tourism Directorate of the province is another limitation of the research. Two of the 52 hotels in the research population did not fill out the questionnaire. However, this did not compromise the integrity of the study because unfilled questionnaires were not taken into consideration.

## 7. Result

50 of the 52 hotels within the scope of the research filled out the questionnaire. 2 hotels stated that they did not want to fill in the questionnaire due to confidentiality reasons. The results indicate that the majority of the hotel managers stated that their facilities were not suitable for accommodating disabled people. However, certain regulations made by hotels also reveal that they make an effort for Barrier-free tourism in terms of provided services.

It is useful to explain how suitable the three, four, and five-star hotels in the research provinces are in terms of disabled tourism and the comparison of these provinces based on fourteen criteria in the light of the data obtained.

- In terms of the location and immediate surroundings of the facility

According to the answers given by the hotel managers, from the point of view of the location of the facility and its immediate surroundings, while nearly half of the hotels in Şanlıurfa and Hatay are suitable, only 41 % of the hotels in Mardin are suitable. The main reason for this is thought to be that Mardin was established in a mountainous area and its streets are generally rough. In addition, it is understood that the local administration has not made any arrangements for disabled individuals to move freely in the city center.

- In terms of the Facility's Accessible Tourism Policy,

It has been determined that the hotels in all three provinces follow an appropriate policy in terms of barrier-free tourism policy. This result can be interpreted as the willingness of hotel businesses to serve in the field of disabled tourism. However, for the disabled tourism policy to yield results, it must be suitable for its physical conditions.

- In terms of Marketing-Reservation of the Facility,

He said that 67% of the hotels in Şanlıurfa are suitable, although nearly half of the hotel businesses in Mardin and Hatay are suitable for marketing the facility in the field of disabled tourism. This result can be interpreted as the hotels in Şanlıurfa investing more in the field of disabled tourism and are more willing to serve in this field.

- In terms of Transportation to the Facility,

Regarding transportation to the facility, Mardin has emerged as the province with the lowest accessibility with a rate of 54 %. Hatay 65 % and Şanlıurfa 75 % are the provinces with the best accessibility. It has been determined that the hotels in Şanlıurfa respond better to the needs of individuals with disabilities, and it is easier to reach the facility.

- In terms of Parking,

It has been determined that the hotels in all three provinces have a minimum level of parking space for disabled individuals, but the hotels in Şanlıurfa are at the highest level with 92%. From this point of view, it is understood that the accessibility of the hotels in Şanlıurfa for disabled people is in a good condition.

- In terms of Facility Entrance,

At the entrance to the facility, it is understood that the entrance to the facility is suitable for disabled individuals in most of the hotels in Mardin, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay. The fact that the entrance to the hotel is convenient does not mean that disabled people can easily come to the facility. There should also be arrangements to enable disabled people to reach the facility.

- In terms of the Entrance Hall-Lobby,

Although the entrance to the facility is suitable in the research provinces, it has been determined that the hotels in Mardin are not particularly suitable in terms of entrance hall and lobby. It has been determined that Mardin is the province with the lowest accessibility at 47%, Hatay at 64 %, and Şanlıurfa with the highest rate of 77 %.

- In terms of reception,

Considering the suitability of the reception area for people with disabilities, Mardin is the province with the lowest accessibility. It has been determined that the reception section of the hotels in Şanlıurfa is the most accessible province for disabled individuals, and Hatay ranks second.

- In terms of Public Toilets,

In terms of public toilets, it is seen that the hotels in all three provinces are suitable for disabled individuals, but it has been determined that the hotel businesses in Şanlıurfa are more suitable than the other two cities. It can be said that this criterion has been fulfilled because it is a compulsory need.

- In terms of the use of the facility,

It has been revealed that the hotels in all three provinces are suitable in terms of the features to be sought in the general use of the facility. However, the hotels in Şanlıurfa stood out as the hotels with the highest accessibility.

- In terms of Barrier-Free Bedrooms,

It has been determined that disabled hotel rooms, which are legally required to be kept in hotels, are highly suitable in all three provinces. From this point of view, it has been seen that Şanlıurfa is the most suitable province with the highest rate.

- In terms of other units,

It has been revealed that other units such as balconies, doors, windows, stairs, elevators, ramps, and pools are arranged to meet the needs of disabled people in all three provinces. The fact that these regulations are at a minimum level can be interpreted as a result of a legal obligation or that the hotels are willing to serve people with disabilities.

- In terms of Emergency Measures and Building Installation,

It has been determined that most of the hotels in Mardin, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay have made the necessary arrangements in terms of emergency measures and building installation. Since these criteria are directly related to security, it can be explained that the hotels take the necessary precautions.

- In terms of Business, Personnel, and Service

In terms of management, personnel, and service, the hotels in Mardin showed the lowest suitability with 58 % and Şanlıurfa the highest suitability with 76%. Hatay ranks second with 60%.

According to the results of the research, it has been understood that the hotels in all three provinces do not have trained personnel to assist the disabled individuals and do not invest in such trainings. The reason for this approach can be attributed to the fact that disabled guests who come to the hotel do not need hotel personnel, since they usually bring a companion with them.

## 8. Conclusions

Results of the research illustrate that three, four, and five star hotel businesses in the research provinces are not suitable for the accommodation of disabled people. This illustrated that the hypothesis in the introduction that "Mardin, Şanlıurfa and Hatay provinces do not generate sufficient income from the barrier-free tourism market despite having a large tourism potential" was confirmed. Arrangements for disabled guests in hotels often target guests who use a wheelchair due to their mobility impairments. Therefore, the usage areas of the hotels should be designed to meet the needs of guests with wheelchairs.

It is thought that the fact that the hotels are not at a level to meet the accommodation needs of disabled individuals is primarily based on economic reasons. It has been determined in this study that customers who call the hotel rarely ask whether there is a room suitable for disabled people. The low participation of disabled people in tourism activities makes investments in this area unnecessary (Szewczyk, 2015: 380). However, making sufficient investments and adopting the hotel to the needs of people with disability will attract the attention of people with disabilities who are economically well-off and will stimulate this industry to a small extent.

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