



Role of People with Disabilities (PWDS) Towards the Sustainability of the Tourism Sectors in Malaysia

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Abstract. Traveling is something people with disabilities love just as much as other tourists. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicts 1.8 billion international visitor arrivals globally by 2030, with people with disabilities contributing a portion of that figure. We could better understand the factors influencing People with Disabilities (PWDs) travel choices as a consequence of our study. Aside from that, this research investigated the influence of travel agents on travel choices. This research also looks at the ineffectiveness of current policies to enhance the accessibility of facilities for disabled visitors. This study's outcomes might be helpful in both the short and long term. In the short term, an accessible strategy may reconcile the requirements of disabled users with the limits of the current situation and the limited resources available. In the long term, this study would give a more comprehensive strategy to encourage restructuring and overhauling the hospitality and tourist sectors with equitable access for Malaysians. Apart from recovering tourism industries after the COVID-19 epidemic, it is a new chance to expand the number of travellers.

Keywords: People with disability (PWDs) · Tourism · Malaysia

1 Introduction

A person unable to do routine daily tasks is considerably and permanently impeded by a physical or mental disability (Ozturk et al., 2008). According to a World Bank analysis, 15% of the world's population is expected to have at least one disability (McClain-Nhlapo et al., 2018). Malaysia has 592,856 disabled individuals as of January 2021. (Department of Social Welfare, 2021). A total of 34437 of these persons are from Penang

state, including 3461 with vision impairment, 2662 with hearing impairment, 118 with speech impairment, 14472 with physical impairment, 10267 with learning impairment, 2164 with mental impairment, and 1293 with other impairments. As we all know, travel and tourism are fundamental human rights that may improve everyone's quality of life and living conditions (Skarstad, 2018). By introducing the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, the UNWTO emphasizes that everyone should exercise their right to freely enjoy tourism within a sustainable framework (Pololikashvili, 2020). It implies that everyone has equal access to it regardless of social, physical, or financial situations. A sizable community, such as people with disabilities (PWDs), remains. However, they are mostly excluded from many tourism-related activities (Benjamin, Bottone, & Lee, 2021).

Furthermore, critical issues like quality, sustainability, image, innovation, and accessibility are moving to the forefront of tourism development criteria (Garca-Caro, de Waal, & Buhalis, 2012). In 2019, the tourist industry performed well, contributing RM 240.2 billion to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 15.9% of the GDP, and 27.9% of the overall service sector. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021), the COVID-19 epidemic reduced Malaysia's tourist earnings in 2020 to RM52.4 billion, a 71.2% decline from 2019. During the pandemic crisis, those with disabilities suffer greatly (De Pascale et al., 2022). Furthermore, Hashim et al. (2018) contend that prejudice and hurdles prevent Malaysians with disabilities from fully participating in society. As a result, to recover from the pandemic's consequences, the recovery should incorporate and improve accessibility from tourist attractions throughout the globe while also promoting an accessible and competitive offer (UNWTO, 2020).

According to Tutuncu (2017), persons with disabilities face considerable challenges due to a lack of accessibility in the tourist industry. The ease with which facilities and services may be obtained will impact their availability. Psychological impediments, such as staff members' unfavorable attitudes toward disabled individuals, substantially influence people's satisfaction with leisure time (Babik & Gardner, 2021). As a result, motivation among a set of wants and situations that push individuals to behave in ways they feel will benefit them is critical. Because PWDs' travel experiences vary from those of non-disabled visitors, these aspects must be considered. As a result, our study is doing preliminary research on this topic. As a result, based on previous research, this study investigates the present situation of PWDs and the barriers they confront. Furthermore, theoretical explanations will be sought since they may be helpful to in explaining the data later on. Finally, a framework for future data analysis will be presented.

2 Literature Review

2.1 People with Disabilities (PWDs)

Disability is defined as "any limitation or absence (due to any impairment) of capacity to do an activity in the manner, or range regarded normal for a human being" (World Health Organization (WHO)) (1980). The Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 defines a disabled person as "someone who has a physical or mental disability that has a significant and long-term detrimental impact on their capacity to carry out routine day-to-day activities" (The National Archives, 1995). Disability is defined as "an umbrella word

embracing impairments, activity limits, and participation constraints” by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF). An impairment is a problem with physical function or structure, an activity limitation is a difficulty faced by a person in carrying out a task or action, and a participation restriction is a problem encountered by an individual in participating in life circumstances.

PWDs is an abbreviation for a person with a disability impacted by one or more forms of impairment that prevent them from living an ordinary life like others. According to the United Nations, people with disabilities “include long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, when combined with other impediments, may prevent them from participating fully and effectively in society on an equal footing with others.” Burnett and Baker (2001) distinguish three types of PWDs: impairment, disability, and handicap. The impairment is a difficulty with physiological, psychological, or anatomical function. While disability limits an individual’s capacity to execute an everyday activity, it may be classified into four types: hearing impairment, sight disability, physical disability, and intellectual deficit (Daniels et al., 2005). A handicap is a situation in which a person’s body or mind has been permanently harmed or is not normally functioning. PWDs might be born with congenital impairments, become impaired over time, or become incapacitated abruptly due to an accident or illness. According to WHO (2020), the number of people living with disabilities in the country is growing due to an ageing population and chronic health issues. According to Disabled World (2020) research, persons in nations with life expectancies over 70 years old spend an average of eight years, or 11.5% of their life span, living with impairments.

According to Yau et al. (2004), even though PWDs aspired to engage in tourism like other social groups, they compromised their aspirations and requirements for tourist activities. It is mainly owing to their physical state, in which they rely on others to complete a task. According to Crompton (1979), people with disabilities prefer to visit as many places as possible before their physical condition deteriorates.

2.2 Barriers for People with Disabilities (PWDs)

Many works of literature have investigated the challenges that prevent people with disabilities from traveling. Darcy and Pegg (2011) agree and indicate that PWDs have begun to contribute to the economy but cannot enjoy leisure activities owing to the limitation and are also unsupported by tourist providers. Meanwhile, Takeda and Card (2002) found that PWDs are hampered by the primary problem of accessible tourism, which restricts travel.

Walls et al. (2011) provided a conceptual framework better to understand the customer experience in the tourist setting to support the prior studies. Walls depicts four significant variables contributing to travel obstacles for people with disabilities, and the researcher has conducted a study on the subject. These conceptual frameworks should also be used in situations involving people with disabilities. These frameworks proposed elements that influence the tourist experience. The first framework is the physical environment, which includes facilities and the surrounding area. The second framework is a component of this, in which the human interaction environment between tourists and service providers is also essential in boosting travel among PWDs. According to Wall, individual traits such as personality type and environmental sensitivity impact visitors’

enjoyment of their vacation. Finally, situational circumstances such as the purpose of travel may considerably influence PWDs' decision to travel.

A portion of that (Seow & Shalini, 2015) demonstrated three major hurdles influencing a tourist's decision-making process: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural barriers. They concluded that motivation to travel would be affected by travel constraints, whether participation or nonparticipation. Accessibility will be a critical factor to consider in the tourist destination-building process. Other individuals will benefit from accessibility, including pregnant women, persons with temporary impairments, people with hidden disabilities, and parents using a baby pram. As a result, accessibility must be a precondition in any development process to be a future investment, encouraging and inspiring PWDs to travel. According to the research, a lack of disability knowledge among employees would result in a lack of respect and decency for PWDs. Some travel businesses may not comprehend the needs of disabled visitors since they are inexperienced in dealing with people with disabilities.

Simultaneously, Ang (2019), in his study on how contentment prevents individuals from participating in tourism activities? A case study of disability tourism in Kuala Lumpur found that people with disabilities actively engaged in tourist activities in the city. They recommend that infrastructure or services and an information map be established to improve accessible tourism. They also agreed that education is critical to the long-term viability of accessible tourism. PWDs also urge hotels, public restrooms, transit, and other establishments to cater to disabled persons. Service personnel should get training and adopt a more affable demeanor to offer pleasant settings for PWDs.

Meanwhile, Ye et al. (2012) found in their research on characteristics significant to the tourist experiences of individuals with mobility impairments that convenience, security, service efficiency, personality type, sensitivity to the environment, and situational elements were newly discovered. These newly discovered will discourage PWDs from traveling. The research also discovered that if PWDs had positive human interactions with service providers such as travel companies, they would have a good tourist experience.

Travel agencies are essential in encouraging travel and tourism among people with disabilities. According to Bob et al. (2002), travel agencies remain the principal supplier of travel items for individuals with disabilities. PWDs think that competent travel agents who provide specific packages tailored to their requirements and desires will encourage PWDs to travel since most PWDs believe that the travel agency has overlooked them.

A study conducted by Chia-Hsin, (2020) in Taiwan's famous tourist areas to review the design of barrier-free environments revealed that PWDs are dissatisfied with the barrier-free physical environment, which refers to the space allotted in parking lots, restroom accessibility, and the slipperiness of floors, because only 44% of barrier-free physical environments were provided. Furthermore, research on the time allotted for activities for persons with disabilities conducted by Pagán (2012) found that individuals with disabilities who are constrained in their everyday activities are less likely to engage in tourist activities. In addition, there is little evidence for guys with disabilities (modified or not) engaging in tourist activities in this research. Furthermore, zcan et al. (2021) discovered that owing to a lack of travel surroundings; wheelchair users had less desire to wish-for travel during the holidays. The wheelchairs that disabled passengers use

regularly are not suitable for use on solid surfaces such as the beach, sand, or water. Overall, the basic tourist service supplied in the tourism region falls short of PWD's travel requirements.

2.3 Critical Disability Theory (CDT)

Critical disability theory (CDT) is one of the theoretical approaches within Disability Studies that focuses on disability by linking norms and values to their actualization in the everyday lives of impaired people. This theory emphasizes persons with disabilities' lived experiences in order to understand their position in the world and as a social and political definition based on society power relations. According to Ellis et al. (2018), CDT may be utilised to engage in transformational, intersectional, and coalitional critical work that challenges orthodox disability studies. Critical disability theory evolved from a critical theory provided by Max Horkheimer in his 1937 article *Traditional and Critical Theory*. Since then, critical theory has grown widely and taken on a pluralist appearance. According to Burghardt (2011), CDT is devoted to "an in-depth examination of the structural and as-yet incompletely known psychological bases of oppression."

According to Hosking (2008), CDT is founded on a critique of established ideas and conversations about disability to oppress people with disabilities and violate their rights. The critical theory of disability is built on seven assumptions: the social model of disability, multidimensionality, valuing variety, justice, voices of disability, language, and transformational politics (Hosking 2008).

Furthermore, Meekosha, Helen, and Shuttleworth (2009) emphasize that CDT must include four primary principles of study: "critical social theory is irreducible to facts," "critical social theory links theory with praxis in the struggle for an autonomous and participatory society," "critical social theory is self-aware of its historicity," and "critical social theory engages in dialogue among cultures."

2.4 Critical Disability Theory (CBT) and Tourism

Most tourism locations throughout the globe continue to discriminate against travelers with impairments. As a result, in the mid-1970s, a social model of disability was developed: UPIAS 1976 (Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation) (Benjamin, Botton & Lee, 2021). This approach was created to give disabled people a voice in politics. Consequently, Devlin and Pothier (2006) established a CBT approach stating that handicapped individuals face discrimination due to uneven economic, social, political, legal, and citizenship status, as well as cultural and structural systems.

The approach seeks to recognize the disabled as citizens. The phrase citizenship is used as a method to put persons with disabilities in the greater society and build a unified and integrated population in this model, which is comprehensive (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). Despite discrimination against the disabled by many parties, the introduction of regulations such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 has established a fairer and more equitable tourist business and effectively enhanced accessibility to tourism services and regions (Benjamin, Botton & Lee, 2021).

One strategy to combat prejudice against disabled persons in tourism is to promote tourism rights for all groups, including access to tourism facilities while encouraging

disabled individuals to participate in tourism activities as tour guides or tourist agents. Disabled persons, on the other hand, may work in the tourist industry. However, the CDT is a theoretical framework that policymakers may employ when developing PWD policies by connecting the connection between impairment, disability, and society. It can overcome all difficulties to ensure that disabled visitors are no longer marginalized.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Sampling Design

Tour guides are intermediaries between disabled visitors and the general population, often confronted with challenging events and life experiences. This research proposes applying a qualitative technique, a case study, and snowball sampling with a small number of respondents who have a close contact with disabled tourists. Before holding a focus group discussion with the Penang Tourist Guide Association, the study process must be completed. The data is gathered via focus group discussions among the heads of tourist guide organizations in Penang. The interview data is gathered through semi-structured interviews with respondents about their experiences using any tourist facility. Interviews were also conducted to investigate respondents' perspectives on their assessed accessibility in tourist areas, the main barrier among disabled tourists to getting facilities in tourist areas, and respondents' perspectives on existing policies related to disabled tourists in Malaysia. The information obtained from semi-structured group interviews will be transcribed and organized into relevant topics to provide study findings. The findings of this study will be used to strengthen current policies to boost tourist access among the disabled and make tourist places in Malaysia more accessible to the disabled.

Furthermore, case studies are a kind of in-depth phenomenological study conducted daily (Yin, 2018; & Farquhar, Michels & Robson, 2020). In the context of this research, a phenomenon is a theoretical framework that focuses on the study of how impaired tourists' daily experiences affect and shape their behavior when visiting a tourist area. It is the process through which people with disabilities comprehend and give meaning to things or events in their daily lives. The phenomena might be an event, condition, experience, or thinking. Many phenomena surround us in life, and although we are aware of them, we may not completely grasp them. This phenomenological method seeks to comprehend and study issues via their points of view or opinions (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Woodside & Wilson, 2003; Farquhar, Michels & Robson, 2020). The framework of his consciousness, which actively adds meaning to his daily experiences, produces the viewpoint. The researcher identified phenomena related to this study through focus group talks with respondents concerning impaired visitors. Respondents for this survey came from the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Penang (MOTAC Penang), MUTIARA, Tourism Malaysia Northern Region, Penang Global Tourism, Persatuan Orang Cacat Negeri Pulau Pinang, and the Malaysian Women Tourist Guide Association (MWTGA). These organizations play a vital role in the growth of Malaysia's tourist and PWD industries.

3.2 Research Procedure

This study will employ a qualitative methodology to examine the encounters faced by PWDs in terms of tourism participation, address the best strategy used by travel agencies to ensure the accessibility of facilities for tourists with disabilities, critique existing policies, and recommend a best policy to be implemented that is related to PWDs. To obtain information for this research, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted, which is one of the most often used strategies for gathering qualitative data (Grover & Vriens, 2006). Focus group discussion (FGD), according to Nykiel (2007), is a tourist marketing research approach that combines a series of organized questions with some personal viewpoints in the form of group discussion.

FGD was done in a group setting to understand the participants' thoughts better. Qualitative researchers do not agree upon the appropriate number of FGD participants. According to previous research, the number of studies should be between four and twelve (Mendis-Millard & Reed, 2007). There are eight participants in this research, five male and three female, from government agencies, commercial organisations, and associations. Before the debate began, all participants were notified that the conversations would be filmed and briefed on the purpose of this research and the questions posed. NVivo was used in this research to organise, analyse, and uncover insights in unstructured or qualitative data.

4 Conclusion and Discussion

According to statistics, tourism and travel significantly contribute to the national economy. Tourism destinations in Malaysia started to reopen in October 2021. Notably, although other tourists have reported higher rates of participation in travel, PWDs have reported lower rates of engagement in tourism. According to the United Nations, the main problem preventing PWDs from pleasantly enjoying their leisure time as guests and meeting too many impediments is accessibility. Furthermore, the tourist industry might increase accessibility and services for these guests. As a result, this study generated a preliminary debate on existing studies on PWDs and theories to grasp the gaps in current research. As a result, an approach for future study development has been presented. We expect this will enhance the desire to travel among people with disabilities. In a nutshell, this study will considerably boost future national tourism.

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