

An effort to develop accessible tourism in Greece and Turkey: the MEDRA project approach

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to develop accessible tourism in two areas of Greece and Turkey. The areas of Drama in Greece and Mersin in Turkey have cooperated in the frame of MEDRA project to assess their potential and set up a plan for developing accessible tourism.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The choice of the two areas was not random. Mersin currently enjoys continuous development, as one of Turkey's biggest ports and a free trade zone. Drama is a developing area in agricultural manufacturing and high-tech sectors with a rich physical environment which aspires to develop a healthy alternative tourism industry.*

Findings – *The findings include, amongst others, the identification of needs of tourists with disabilities, and the relevant historical evolution, legislative framework, international good practices, policy-improvement proposals, accessibility assessment in Mersin and Drama, and suggestions for developing accessible infrastructure together with the training of stakeholders.*

Practical/implications – *Greece although made a lot of progress regarding the issues of disability and accessibility still is not on the same level as many European countries, while Turkey has a lot to learn in order to deal with accessibility from a holistic point of view.*

Social/implications – *Both countries owe a large percentage of their national income, to the tourist industry and seek ways to gain advantages in this highly competitive sector.*

Originality/value – *The successful implementation of the MEDRA project constitutes an example worthy of a wider application in the development of accessible tourism, not only in the two countries but also to countries with similar characteristics.*

Keywords *Greece, Disability, Turkey, Qualitative research, Accessible tourism, MEDRA*

Paper type *Research paper*

1. Introduction

According to the Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations (UN), 2006), access to tourism is a right of everyone. Nevertheless, there is still a great gap between demand and supply, i.e. access needs and access provisions.

Apart from a human right, accessible tourism is also a great opportunity. According to the European Network for Accessible Tourism (2010) “the potential market for accessible tourism in Europe is estimated at 130 million people, with annual spending power of over 68 million Euros [...]”. And this number is growing as the aging population increases”.

Currently, accessible tourism is considered to be a niche market. Nevertheless, the numbers tell a different story: it is the supply that does not meet the demand, not the other way round. According to the University of Surrey (2014) “if European destinations were fully accessible, this

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demand could increase up to 44 per cent a year, which would result in an additional 142 billion Euros GDP and 3.4 million jobs for the European economy". This is not just a niche!

Both Greece and Turkey are tourist countries, i.e. they owe a large percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP) to their tourist industry and seek ways to gain an advantage in this highly competitive sector. Moreover, both countries have faced serious financial crises and try to strengthen their competitive advantages. Therefore, accessible tourism seems to be a great opportunity for both countries, especially for their less developed regions.

"Accessible tourism is an evolving area of academic study" (Darcy and Buhalis, 2010, p. 1) but not yet mature, especially considering the less touristic developed regions. In such regions, tourism is still a developing industry and, therefore, it can be more easily developed towards accessible tourism.

In Greece and Turkey, such regions are Drama and Mersin, respectively. For both of these regions, accessible tourism could be a great opportunity and special academic research is required to examine their particularities, in relation to accessible tourism. On the grounds of this necessity the idea of MEDRA project was founded.

The MEDRA project (Mersin and Drama municipalities' cooperation on accessible tourism) was a research project, realised from 2008 to 2009. It was co-funded, following a competitive evaluation of proposals, by the Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU), which was established by a Memorandum of Understanding between the EU Commission and the Turkish Government. The main issue addressed by MEDRA project was the lack of accessibility for people with disabilities in tourist activities and the development of the notion of "accessible tourism" in Greece and Turkey.

Despite recent efforts and good practices regarding the issues of disability and accessibility, e.g. the New Building Regulation (Hellenic Republic, 2012), Greece still is not on the same level as many of the European Union countries in terms of accessible tourism, while Turkey has a lot to learn, from Greece and other European countries, both dealing on accessibility from a holistic point of view and on accessible tourism. The choice of the two areas was not a random one. Mersin currently enjoys continuous development, mostly due to its economic importance, as one of Turkey's biggest ports and a free trade zone. Drama, on the other hand, is a developing area in agricultural manufacturing and high-tech sectors with a rich physical environment which aspires to develop a healthy alternative tourism industry.

The successful implementation of the project, the completion of an assessment of the current situation concerning accessibility of tourist facilities, the proposal of appropriate solutions in infrastructure and policy level as well as the importance that the development of accessible tourism has both for Greece and Turkey, constitute MEDRA project as an example worthy of a wider application in the development of accessible tourism, not only in the two countries, but also to countries with similar characteristics.

2. Methodology

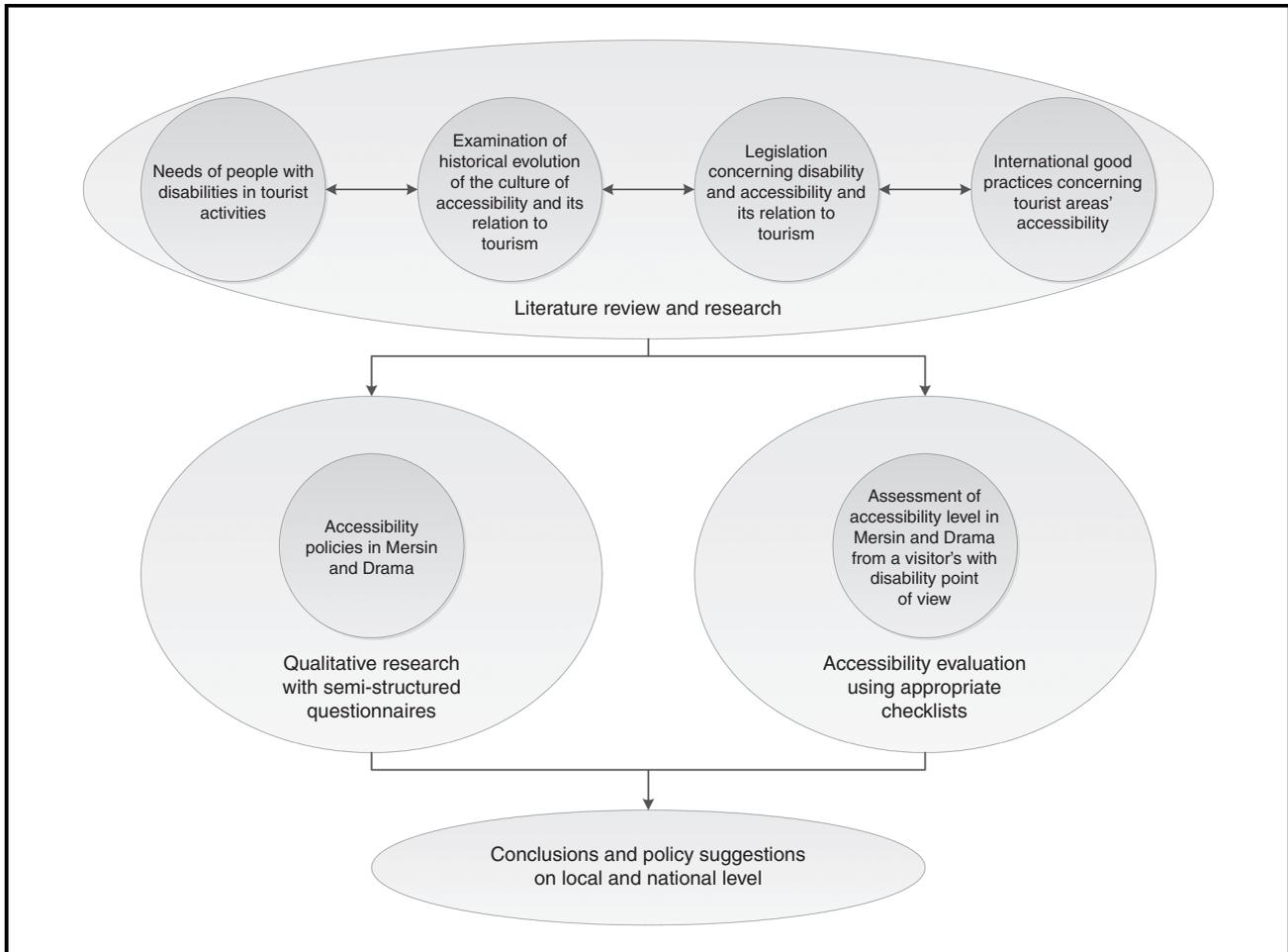
The research included both literature and *in situ* research (accessibility assessments with the utilisation of checklists, semi-structured questionnaire surveys, etc.).

For the realisation of the project, the collection of the required data, the accessibility assessments and the cooperation of the municipalities with the researchers of the academic institutions, several meetings took place both in Mersin and Drama with the participation of all the involved stakeholders (academic researchers, local authority representatives, members of local associations of persons with restricted mobility, etc.).

In the general frame of the methodology developed and applied in MEDRA project (see Figure 1), the main project outcomes, in terms of deliverables are as follows:

- D1: needs of people with disabilities in tourist activities;
- D2: examination of historical evolution of the culture concerning disability and tourism;
- D3: legislation concerning disability and accessibility and its relation to tourism;

Figure 1 The methodology developed and applied in MEDRA project



- D4: international good practices concerning tourist areas' accessibility;
- D5: accessibility policies in Mersin and Drama – proposals for improvement based on EU and international experiences; and
- D6: assessment of accessibility level in Mersin and Drama from a visitor's with disability point of view.

A qualitative research with the utilisation of a semi-structured questionnaire took place that was used to interview six members of the local authorities of Drama and Mersin. The questionnaire included subjects such as:

- policies and planning: the questions asked included the presence of a municipal disability policy, the persons who created it, the specific measures it proposes, whether it takes into account the needs of different disability groups, the local associations of people with disabilities of the area, etc.;
- auditing: the questions asked referred to the presence of an auditing methodology, the people involved in it, etc.;
- technical division: the questions asked included how many people are involved in the division, whether they are engineers, whether they are trained on accessibility issues, etc.;
- actions related to disability: municipality's projects, actions, etc.;

- accessibility office: the approach it uses, whether it has the right to certify the accessibility of new constructions, etc.;
- creation of accessible infrastructure: the plans the municipality has, its strategy, the maintenance of existing infrastructure, etc.;
- transportation: the presence of municipal transportation and its accessibility was examined;
- information: dissemination actions, media, etc.;
- people with disabilities occupied at the municipality;
- personnel training;
- support services provided by the municipality to citizens with disabilities;
- cultural activities that citizens with disabilities can participate;
- tourist activities that are focused on citizens with disabilities;
- legislation related to municipalities and disability;
- relations of the municipality with local associations of people with disability;
- provision of health care; and
- rehabilitation programs.

Finally, an evaluation of the accessibility level of Mersin and Drama from a visitor's with disabilities point of view took place with the utilisation of special checklists that were previously developed in the frame of the CFCU project "ACTUS" (Accessibility Network for Turkish Greek societies) (Tsalis and Naniopoulos, 2008), that included the evaluation of transportation infrastructure, accommodation and hotels, touristic open spaces (such as beaches, natural parks and recreational areas), museums and cultural spaces, and tourism support facilities (such as restaurants, shops, and cafes) in the two cities.

The conclusions and data derived from all the previous actions were next utilised to propose measures and policies on local and national level.

3. Results

3.1 Identification of needs of people with disability in tourist activities

As both the terms "disability" and "impairment" are commonly used, some clarification on their definitions should be provided.

"Impairment is a loss or abnormality in body structure or physiological function (including mental functions). Abnormality here is used strictly to refer to a significant variation from established statistical norms (i.e. as a deviation from a population mean within measured standard norms) and should only be used in this sense" (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2001, p. 213).

In general, the term "disability" "is an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. It denotes the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual's contextual factors (environmental and personal factors)" (WHO, 2001, p. 213).

In its more common uses, the term disability may involve physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive or intellectual impairment, mental disorder, or various types of chronic disease. According to the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (WHO, 2001, p. 17) disability is defined as "the outcome or result of a complex relationship between an individual's health condition and personal factors, and of the external factors that represent the circumstances in which the individual lives". Impairments are defined as "problems in body function or structure such as significant deviation or loss" (WHO, 2001, p. 12). Thus, it is obvious that disability "results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that

hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other” (UN, 2006, p. 1).

In the frame of MEDRA project, the needs of hindered people were taken into account. These include not only people with disabilities, but also other groups which face difficulties in their everyday activities as a consequence of the inadequacies of their environment. Where the first group includes conventional disabilities, the second one also includes pregnant women, small children, elderly people, etc. According to the design guidelines “Designing for all” (Greek Ministry of the Environment, Physical Planning, and Public Works (GMEPPPW), 1997) “people with mobility constraints reach around 48% of the total population, while people with disabilities constitute around 9.3%”.

Hindered people often face barriers while performing tourist activities. Barriers can be physical, perceptual and social in a tourist’s environment that limit functioning and create disability through their absence or presence. These include aspects such as an inaccessible physical environment, lack of relevant assistive technology, negative attitudes of people towards disability, as well as services, systems and policies that are either non-existent or that hinder the involvement of all people in all areas of life.

According to Muller (2008) there are “50 million people with disabilities in Europe who want to holiday with family and friends, and [...] as many as 130 million people in Europe alone will benefit from improved access to travel and tourism services. Accessible tourism is not a niche market; it’s a demographic explosion and we will all feel the effects. We have to improve access now”.

The concept of accessible tourism requires actions addressed to various areas such as:

1. accessible for all information:
 - information about accessible infrastructure and accessible transport chain; and
 - information provided in an accessible format.
2. accessible for all transport chain:
 - accessible origin to destination transport chain; and
 - accessible transport chain for every point of interest at the destination.
3. accessible for all, barrier-free accommodation and points of interest;
4. high-quality accessible services for all, delivered by appropriately trained staff; and
5. activities, exhibits, attractions which allow the participation of all.

As far as social and cultural activities are concerned, the Article 30 of the Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities states the following:

- “1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:
- a. Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;
 - b. Enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;
 - c. Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance” (UN, 2006, p. 22).

Therefore, two major components of accessible tourism were examined in the frame of MEDRA project. The first one relates to infrastructure and covers the accessibility of transport chain and built environment for people with disabilities and the provision of equal services to hindered people in general. Within these definitions the accessibility of the following was examined:

- open spaces;
- public transport;

- buildings;
- information concerning mobility; and
- provided services.

The second one relates to activities of tourist interest and involves the active participation of people with disabilities and hindered people.

At the deliverable D1 of MEDRA project (Tsalis and Naniopoulos, 2009), the “needs” of major groups of people with mobility constraints in accommodation, transport, moving through open spaces and services related to tourist activities were examined and described, as well as their “tasks”.

The main “tasks” tourists with disabilities perform were examined and they were divided into various subtasks. The problems tourists with disabilities face in each task were recognised and particular requirements of each disability were presented.

“Needs” were examined in relation to:

- hotels/accommodation;
- tourism support facilities;
- cultural sites;
- transportation;
- open spaces in urban environments;
- open spaces in natural environments; and
- general requirements.

Each one of the above areas/issues was considered in relation to the following main disability groups:

- wheelchair users and those with restricted mobility;
- people with sight problems;
- people with hearing problems; and
- people with cognitive impairments.

For each main disability group the following issues were examined:

- problems they may face; and
- provisions requirements.

Of course, only the general categories of needs, groups and issues are presented above since in the relevant deliverable D1 each one was split in so many subcategories that is not possible to be presented in the present paper.

3.2 Historical evolution of the culture concerning disability and tourism

The evolution of the accessibility culture in the wider area of modern Greek and Turkish state was examined at the deliverable D2 of MEDRA project (Nalmpantis *et al.*, 2009). Four distinct periods (namely, ancient Greece, Eastern Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire and modern Greek and Turkish state) were examined separately due to different religious, social and economic factors of each period. Moreover, a general disability history timeline was added to provide a general frame of disability history during the ages. Interesting conclusions for each period were derived and also the possible reason that kept Turkey from reaching an acceptable accessibility level. Conclusions for disability and culture relationships were drawn both at national, for Greece and Turkey, and international level.

The evolution of accessibility culture was not always progressive. Different cultures and civilisations gave more or less importance to accessibility and people with disabilities. The importance each society gave to people with disabilities was related to the religious, cultural and economic background of each one.

A general disability history timeline is presented, that does not focus on Greece and Turkey but it was greatly influenced by other timelines published on the internet (e.g. Disability Social History Project, 2003). As most timelines, its approach was evolutionary, i.e. it presupposed that things become better and better.

On the other hand, a closer examination of the situation about the evolution of accessibility culture in Greece and Turkey showed that this was not always the case. According to the religious, cultural and economic background of each society, there are different views that influence the attitudes towards disability and people with disability, not always in an evolutionary way.

The examination of the situation about disability and people with disabilities in ancient Greece showed that the individualistic, idealistic and heroic culture of ancient Greece did not have a good influence on the facing of disability. On the other hand, there were Gods with disability, e.g. Hephaestus who was lame, poets, e.g. Homer who was blind, etc., which seems that disability had gained certain acceptability (Sfakianou-Bealby, 2008).

However, in the Eastern Roman Empire, the Christian values created a more personalistic and social approach (Agoras, 2002) that seems to had a good influence on the facing of accessibility (Pentogalos, 1993). The same good influence seems that continued during the Ottoman Empire, although not supported by the state.

In modern Greek state and after some decades in modern Turkish state also, the new individualistic values of the French revolution seem that did not had such a good influence since disability was considered to be mainly a problem of the individual than the society as a whole. However, after the Second World War, the same values seen under another perspective had as a result a great change on the accessibility culture evolution, since accessibility was considered to be a non-negotiable human right of every citizen.

From all the above, it is easily understood that the evolution of the accessibility culture is closely related with the general culture and to the religious, cultural and economic background of each society. Thus, the examination of each society's background and culture has many to offer for a deeper understanding of the prevailing accessibility culture.

3.3 Legislation concerning disability and accessibility and its relation to tourism

The main laws governing the accessibility of both infrastructure and services were identified and presented at the deliverable D3 of MEDRA project (Tsalis and Ugur, 2009b).

Accessibility is a concern not only for a minority group with physical disabilities but also for everyone. Accessibility means that buildings, places, and services provided are designed and managed to be safe, healthy, convenient and enjoyable so that all members of the society can use these. Accessibility should be dealt with in a global and integrated way combining coherently all policy areas such as construction, information and communication technologies, education, transportation and tourism among others. Within this framework, accessibility is also a very important concern for the tourism sector and services.

In Turkey, until recently, there had been no major special regulations that ensured the rights of citizens with disabilities. While special arrangements in the form of recommendations started to appear in legislation in the past two decades, any sanction power was not clearly defined and therefore the application of these regulations could not be enforced. With the acceptance of the "Turkish Disability Act" (Republic of Turkey, 2005), Turkey is experiencing a shift from no law to a state where the rights of the citizens with disabilities are ensured.

The historical review of the legislation on disability in Turkey showed that the Republic of Turkey has accepted the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (United Nations, 1948), the "Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons" (United Nations, 1975), and also in 1989 the "European Social Charter" (Council of Europe, 1961). In 2005, the Turkish Disability Act (Republic of Turkey, 2005), was approved and put into action that enforces arrangements in all public areas and services for people with disabilities.

The Turkish Disability Act has two main parts. In the first part, definitions related with disability, basic principles in disability area, and regulations related with services for people with disabilities are given

(Republic of Turkey, 2005). In the second part, new regulations for solving the shortcomings in existing disability-related legislations are stated. The Act also addresses the accessibility issue. All public buildings, roads, pavements, zebra crossings, recreational areas and similar social and cultural infrastructural areas should be made accessible for people with disabilities. The Act gives some responsibilities to greater and local municipalities. They have to take measures in order to make public transportation accessible for people with disabilities and also establish "disability service units" that will provide information, awareness-raising, guidance, consultation facilities on disability issues. During the following years after the Act has been put into force, 16 regulations have been published to increase the implementation of the anticipated provisions of the Act.

In recent years, tourism for people with disabilities in Turkey has started to gain importance. The review carried out in the frame of MEDRA project showed that there are various regulations in Turkey related to people with disabilities but the regulations and arrangements in effect are separated across different categories and they are not integrated into a common legislative framework.

In Greece, the major breakthrough concerning accessibility issues was the creation in 1985 of the "Office for studies concerning people with disability" in the GMEPPPW.

Workshops were created which developed the first Greek accessibility guidelines, some elements of which became part of the General Building Regulation (Hellenic Republic, 1985; Hellenic Republic, 2000). The guidelines were published in a single volume in 1990 as the "Designing for all" guidelines of the GMEPPPW and since then, they are continuously updated (Greek Ministry of the Environment Physical Planning and Public Works, 1997).

The guidelines include chapters concerning:

- anthropometric elements;
- open spaces for pedestrian use;
- ramps;
- lifts;
- signage;
- entrances;
- public toilets;
- public buildings; and
- residences.

Up today an extensive legislation concerning accessibility provisions has been developed which is presented at the D3 deliverable of MEDRA project (Tsalis and Ugur, 2009b). The legislation takes into account the provisions necessary for people with disabilities in public buildings, accommodation, open spaces and all modes of transport.

Although there is sufficient legislation concerning disability and accessibility and its relation to tourism both in Greece and Turkey, there is no particular legal framework for accessible tourism.

3.4 International good practices concerning tourist areas' accessibility

Accessibility of the environment and services is essential in order to ensure the participation of individuals with disabilities in touristic activities. Given the numbers of these individuals facing different types of constraints in engaging in touristic activities all over the world, introduction of provisions in different areas of tourism is still a growing concern.

According to Ozturk *et al.* (2008, p. 383):

- eight million people with disabilities travel at least once every year in other countries in Europe;
- in all, 15 million Europeans with disabilities travel in their own country; and
- in total, 22 million people with disabilities participate in daily trips in their own countries.

According to Nayar (2011, pp. 21-2) “a study published in the framework of the OSSATE project estimates the market potential for tourists with accessibility needs at even 230 million people representing travel expenditures of about €160 bn”.

At the deliverable D4 of MEDRA project (Tsalis *et al.*, 2009), international and local good practices providing accessibility in different areas of tourism were reviewed. For this purpose, hotels and accommodations, open and natural areas, cultural and recreational areas, beaches of tourist interest, as well as their support facilities, such as availability of information, shops, restaurants, and transportation to these areas were reviewed, in terms of the accessibility they provide to people with disabilities.

3.5 Improvement proposals based on EU and international experience

Actions related to accessibility taken at municipal level in the two partners' respective areas, i.e. Mersin and Drama, were identified at the deliverable D5 of MEDRA project (Tsalis and Ugur, 2009a), through the use of the aforementioned semi-structured questionnaire.

The main results of this survey and interviews were the following:

- the municipalities of the examined areas stated that their policy takes into account the needs of citizens with disabilities, but could not provide the particular articles or decisions where these provisions are stated;
- their employees working at the planning and architectural divisions had not received any special training concerning the provision of accessible environments;
- even though some municipalities in Greece had a special accessibility division at their technical services, its employees had received limited special training;
- where social services were organised, they were cooperating with the local associations of people with disability;
- the municipalities did not operate public transport services;
- in general, the municipalities stated that they have plans to improve the accessibility of their infrastructure, although the majority of them do not have a specific timeframe;
- the municipalities provide some financial or technical support to local associations of people with disability; and
- the municipalities use their infrastructure to inform citizens with disability of actions or activities that might interest them.

Unfortunately, the two countries, i.e. Turkey and Greece, lack a clear policy on accessibility matters, both on national and regional level. Thus, the municipalities of both areas have not developed a relevant master plan concerning disability and accessibility of their infrastructure. The fact that the employees who occupy the special accessibility divisions had not received any special training reveals a lack of realisation of the importance of accessibility and disability issues, though it is well documented that the cost of accessibility rehabilitation, i.e. reconstructions, is much higher than the cost of original barrier-free design (Schroeder and Steinfeld, 1979, pp. 141-51; Ratzka, 1994).

However, there are some good practices in the two areas that facilitate the everyday lives of their citizens with disability and the common will of the municipalities participating in MEDRA project to move towards creating accessible environments and non-discriminating societies, realising improvement proposals based on EU and international experience.

3.6 Accessibility's level assessment in Mersin and Drama

According to Ozturk *et al.* (2008, p. 388) “the Turkish tourism industry is not sufficiently prepared for the disabled customers market. The industry has a number of weaknesses. First, governmental and non-governmental organizations do not seem to be working effectively to help people with disabilities. Second, transportation facilities are the second most important problem as a barrier for

physically disabled people's travel activities. Third, environmental conditions are also seen as a problem. The quality of the personnel of tourism enterprises is seen as a fourth problem. Finally, the architecture of hotels is not seen to be a problem for people with a disability. Service areas, such as entrances of hotels, parking areas, and lobby and reception areas, are more suitably equipped for physically disabled people than are areas such as bathrooms and lifts". Obviously, Turkey has a lot to learn in order to deal with accessibility from a holistic point of view.

In Greece the Olympic Games organised in 2004 provided an opportunity for extensively improving accessibility, particularly in the Athens area. Moreover, the Greek Ministry of Culture had a special office for the accessibility of cultural spaces which promoted various relevant projects in museums and archaeological sites. The interest of the Greek Ministry of Culture, as well as of the Ministry of Tourism, was proved by the direct participation in various MEDRA activities of certain high-level members of them.

An evaluation of the accessibility offered by Mersin and Drama cities from a visitor's with disabilities point of view took place at the deliverable D6 of MEDRA project (Ugur *et al.*, 2009).

Since it was not possible to fully evaluate the partners' respective cities, i.e. Mersin and Drama as a whole, through the actions of the project, the above action of MEDRA project mainly focused on the assessment of areas of tourist interest. However, the assessment aspired to provide a general view of the areas' infrastructure in order to have a holistic approach on the issue of accessibility. Thus, transportation infrastructure, accommodation and hotels, touristic open spaces (beaches, natural parks and recreational areas), museums and cultural spaces, and tourism support facilities (restaurants, shops, and cafes) in the two cities were evaluated.

The first part of the deliverable presents the main findings of the evaluation of Mersin area and the second part the main findings of the evaluation of the Drama area (see Table I).

Regarding Mersin, the findings of the cases used for the assessment of the accessibility level in Mersin (see Figure 2) suggest that in order to create a more accessible tourism environment for visitors with disabilities, accessible connections among the main attractions of the city and its environs should be created. Although current efforts include mostly visitors with mobility impairments, arrangements for other kinds of disability, such as sensory impairments, should be done as well, in cooperation with public legal entities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Moreover, efforts to increase awareness of the local tourism agencies and the stakeholders in tourism industry should be supported (Ugur *et al.*, 2009, pp. 28-9).

Regarding Drama, the assessment process indicated that reaching Drama for a visitor with disability is a major challenge, as there is no accessible intercity bus transport provided and rail services are also rather inadequate. The reconstruction of the city's major axis, with some improvements, could provide an accessible route to visitors with disabilities. However, the supplementary routes should be improved in order to create an accessible network that would connect all major tourist attractions. The poles of interest themselves lack in assistive infrastructure, but some small scale interventions could easily improve their accessibility level. Finally, there are no provisions for people with sensory disabilities. In essence, the cooperation of the local authorities, the private sector and the disability associations, some of which are very active in the area, such as the Paraplegic Association of the Prefecture of Drama that developed an accessibility map of the municipality of Drama (see Figure 3), is required to implement a holistic approach to the improvement of the infrastructure which would strengthen Drama's position in the accessible tourism industry (Ugur *et al.*, 2009, pp. 127-8).

Common findings of the evaluation of the two cities include the following:

1. Transport:

- There are no arrangements for visitors with sensory impairments.
- The majority of public transportation vehicles and terminals are not accessible.
- Air transport from and to the closest airports is accessible due to the international accessibility air transport regulations.

Table I Main findings of the accessibility evaluation of Mersin and Drama

	<i>Mersin</i>	<i>Drama</i>
Transport	<p>There are very few wheelchair accessible buses with driver operated ramps</p> <p>There are many built environment obstacles, such as varying sidewalk heights</p> <p>Transport terminals are not accessible</p> <p>Air transport from and to the airport of Adana (ADA) (61 km from Mersin) is accessible due to the international accessibility air transport regulations</p>	<p>There are some vehicles accessible to wheelchair users and all new vehicles acquired are accessible</p> <p>Intercity trains are accessible, subject to the availability of personnel assistance</p> <p>Intercity buses and terminals are not accessible to wheelchair users</p> <p>Air transport from and to the Alexander the Great International Airport (KVA) (48 km from Drama) is accessible due to the international accessibility air transport regulations</p> <p>There are no arrangements for visitors with sensory impairments</p>
Accommodation/hotels	<p>Regulations by the Turkish Ministry of Tourism require that hotels with more than 80 rooms should offer accessible rooms</p> <p>There are individual efforts in some hotels with mixed results that seem to lack a holistic approach</p>	<p>There are hotels in the area with certain accessibility provisions, although there is a lack of a holistic approach</p>
Touristic open spaces (natural parks, recreational areas, beaches, etc.)	<p>There are no appropriate Turkish accessibility standards for natural areas</p> <p>The beaches are not accessible</p> <p>Showers, toilets and changing rooms are mostly not accessible</p>	<p>There are no accessibility provisions as part of their initial design, however their infrastructure allows the visit for some categories of visitors with disability</p> <p>Usually, the open spaces lack accessible toilets, signage, etc.</p>
Museums and cultural places	<p>Portable solutions are preferred due to the fact that most museums and cultural places are historical sites</p> <p>There are no provisions for visitors with sensory impairments</p>	<p>The museums examined can be accessed by wheelchair users</p> <p>Usually, there are no provisions for visitors with sensory impairments</p>
Tourism support facilities (restaurants, shops, cafes, etc.)	<p>These places provide no or little accessibility to visitors</p> <p>Entrances and toilets are major problems obstructing accessibility</p>	<p>There are certain specific shops only, with accessible provisions</p> <p>Entrances and toilets are major problems obstructing accessibility</p>

2. Accommodation/hotels:

- There are some efforts by hotel managers to improve the accessibility of their infrastructure. However, in most cases these do not comply with the standards or are solutions that do not create a fully accessible hotel environment.

3. Touristic open spaces (natural parks and recreational areas, beaches, etc.):

- The touristic open spaces examined do not have accessibility provisions for visitors with disabilities as part of their initial design.
- However, their infrastructure makes the visit to them feasible for some categories of visitors with disabilities. The spaces lack facilitations such as accessible toilets, signage, etc.

4. Museums and cultural places:

- There are certain provisions for people with mobility impairments but there are no provisions for visitors with sensory impairments.

5. Tourism support facilities (restaurants, shops, cafes, etc.):

- These places provide little or no accessibility to visitors.
- Entrances and toilets are major problems obstructing accessibility (Ugur *et al.*, 2009, p. 128).

Figure 3 Accessibility map of the municipality of Drama (Paraplegic Association of the Prefecture of Drama, nd)



importance of this market, many countries aim to obtain a greater share of this market” (Ozturk *et al.*, 2008, p. 385). This should be the case both for Greece and Turkey, since both countries owe a large percentage of their national income to the tourist industry and seek ways to gain an advantage in this highly competitive sector.

Accessible tourism seems to be a very promising industry that needs to be cultivated in order to flourish. MEDRA project, as well as similar projects and initiatives, may become the ferment that will develop thematic and conceptual accessible touristic routes both for Greece and Turkey, and also for other countries with similar characteristics.

The main results of the research conducted in the areas of Drama, Greece and Mersin, Turkey include, amongst others:

- the identification of needs of tourists with disabilities;
- the historical evolution of accessibility culture in both countries;
- the legislative framework related to accessible tourism in Turkey and Greece;
- European and international good practices concerning accessible tourism;
- accessibility assessment in Mersin and Drama; and
- policy-improvement recommendations concerning various levels of decision makers.

Local authorities of Drama and Mersin should utilise the MEDRA project findings in promoting accessibility in their areas, as a whole, but also placing priority in certain routes and tourist spots of interest as a starting point. Also the governments of the two countries can utilise results and suggestions addressed on national level.

The successful implementation of the project constitutes MEDRA project as an example worthy of a wider application in the development of accessible tourism, not only in Turkey and Greece, but also in other countries of the wider area of eastern Mediterranean.

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