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### **IS ESKISEHIR CONVENIENT FOR ACCESSIBLE TOURISM?**

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#### **EXTENSIVE SUMMARY**

The term disability has long been in the literature. However, there is not a consensus about the meaning of the disabled. World Health Organization defines disability as an umbrella term for activity limitations, and participation restrictions. In other words, disability is not just a health problem but it is a complex phenomenon that reflects the interaction between features of an individual's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. The disability term is grouped under 8 main themes. These are orthopedically handicapped, visually impaired, impaired hearing, speech handicapped, mentally disabled, chronic disease, damaged body functions, and failure.

Disability affects disabled individuals and their relatives negatively since the beginning of humanity. The problems that disabled individuals face during their daily lives represent the physical, social and psychological development level of the community they live in. Preventing the problems that disabled people face during their daily and touristic activities would affect these factors positively. Disabled individuals have to make more efforts than normal individuals during their holidays.

Accessible tourism is a tourism type that disabled individuals can easily participate in. However, the main theme of this concept is making the touristic activities available for disabled individuals. To achieve this, three main aspects must be taken into consideration. These are independence, equality, and dignity. Disabled individuals should feel respected and considered as well as they can easily participate in touristic activities. A destination that planned with these aspects can easily entertain disabled individuals. Moreover, academic studies and legal legislations have proven that disability is a part of human life-cycle. Even these studies create dramatic consequences for the disabled and their relatives, they support the idea of disabled people's participation in any activity as they like. Because traveling to nurture psychological, social and cultural needs is the natural right of disabled individuals as much as it is normal individuals' rights.

Thus, destinations and touristic attractions should be planned according to universal design principles. These principles are:

- Equitable Use.
- Flexibility in Use.
- Simple and Intuitive Use.
- Perceptible Information.
- Tolerance for Error.
- Low Physical Effort.
- Size and Space for Approach and Use.

These principles present accessibility as a general design perspective rather than an add on for necessity. This perspective will provide benefits not only for the tourism industry but also for every other industry. Because individuals with heavy luggage or bags can easily move in and around these buildings as much as individuals with wheel chairs or individuals with visual impairment. This way, individuals will participate in any activity regardless of their physical conditions or environmental obstacles. And social equality and will be achieved through this perspective. For these reasons, touristic businesses and states have to reconsider their policies and make necessary reconstructions using these principles. These destinations and touristic attractions will definitely serve better to disabled individuals. Also, disabled individuals and their attendants create a niche market for the tourism industry. So, the touristic businesses and states can get their share from this market. In the global scope, businesses in the tourism industry are taking steps to adopt universal design principles. This is achieved through legal regulations in developed countries. However, in developing countries processes are fairly slower.

Eskisehir has lately considered as a popular touristic destination thanks to its historical and cultural touristic attractions. It is also ranked as the second-best city in terms of habitability. From a disabled individuals' perspective, a convenient touristic destination is a place where they can easily and freely move during their visit. And Eskisehir has disabled-friendly tramway transportation and buses with its "This city overcomes obstacles. Like yourselves!" slogan. Thus, this study aims to evaluate Eskisehir which is considered as a culture and art city due to its lots of festivals, museums and theatre halls, in terms of accessible tourism.

To achieve the aim of the study, the most visited touristic attractions in Eskisehir were evaluated in terms of accessible tourism. These places are Sazova Park, Kentpark, Selale Park, Yılmaz Büyükerşen Wax Museum, Kurtulus Museum, ETI Archeology Museum, TULOMSAS Museum, Modern Glass Arts Museum, Kursunlu Complex, and Haller Youth Center. Data was collected through an evaluation form with natural observe technique. The natural observe technique is the process in which the researchers observe the participants or events on point themselves. The findings of the study are given in the tables.

It is fair to say that modern cities mostly were not built by taking disabled individuals into consideration. Thus, disabled individuals are unable to move in their daily lives and touristic activities. And this affects their life quality negatively. It is a well-known fact that disabled individuals are unable to participate in touristic activities. This leads to social inequality. The number of disabled people proves that their failure to participate in touristic

activities is a waste both in terms of economy and social equality. In this context, the study aimed to evaluate the Eskisehir in terms of accessible tourism.

Findings indicate that many of the touristic attractions in Eskisehir were built disabled-friendly. The most important detail in this finding is that these attractions were planned by taking disabled people into consideration. Naturally, in historical attractions, the reconstructions for the disabled were made later.

The best-planned places in Eskisehir for the disabled are Sazova Park and Kentpark. Both parks were designed and built disabled-friendly. The places in which disabled people having difficulties are mostly historical and/or rough places. Also, disabled ramps and routes for visually impaired are commonly found not only in touristic places but also in many places where local people live. Finally, it is quite possible to say that Eskisehir is a very convenient place for disabled individuals to move around and it is a disabled-friendly city. Also, it is fair to say that Eskisehir is ready to get the share it deserves from the accessible tourism niche market.