

DIFFICULTIES OFFERED BY THE ROMANIAN URBAN ENVIRONMENT REGARDING ACCESSIBILITY TO TOURIST ATTRACTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH LOCOMOTOR DISABILITIES

Carmen Ileana Dobrescu, Aurel Gheorghilas, Camelia Teodorescu, Adrian Nicola Jipa, Darius Nestoriuc

Faculty of Geography, University of Bucharest, Romania, Departament of Human and Economic Geography, Romania

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Abstract

The urban environment, by its very nature, is a dynamic environment in which activities are carried out in increasing numbers and with great intensity. People with locomotor disabilities have to cope with this demanding environment. The urban landscape has taken on a new appearance through the construction of access ramps for people with disabilities. The need for socializing and tourist consumption is normal for any person, including those with locomotor disabilities. The study analyzes these "amenities" for people with locomotor disabilities in the urban landscape Romania. The aim of this study is to draw attention to the limits of the tourist resources offered by the urban environment, due to these incorrect arrangements and the danger they pose. The results were obtained after applying the social survey method and interviews with disabled people, as well as with urban dwellers, regarding the access ramps to tourist attractions or other elements of interest in cities.

Key words: urban landscape, urban planning, social problems, disability, tourism

Introduction

Everyone has the right to live independently. The exercise of this right by people with disabilities implies the ability to decide and control all aspects of their lives. Access to the physical environment is one of the central issues stipulated in the 2010 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a condition that inhibits or facilitates the use of social, educational and health services, to hold a job, to participate in various public activities.

The main difficulties, which people with locomotor disabilities encounter are: lack of continuity of accessible routes for people with disabilities in localities, civil buildings and institutions are not adapted to the needs of these people and do not have a phased accessibility plan, difficulties with accessibility criteria for goods and services, implementation of sign language provisions by TV channels and accessibility of websites of public institutions. As regards access to means of transport for people with locomotor disabilities, the law provides for the sanctioning of operators that do not comply with accessible routes and the demand for special transport services. Hazard or risk maps (Zelevánková et al, 2017) are missing, incomplete or outdated and the staff involved are not trained to follow these rules. Some of the problems for the mobility of people with locomotor disabilities are the lack of special wheelchair accessible footpaths, the difference in level between the pavement and the street, the absence of signs at the stops of the means of transport where it is possible to board, the lack of funding for the payment of high-performance wheelchairs, the non-existence of routes with special cars for the transportation of people with disabilities (Tindal et al, 2019; Schalock et al, 2005).

However, the City Hall has a partnership through DGASMB with the Re-Start Good Cause Association. This initiative called "Abilitaxi" operates as a free taxi on condition that the person in question is resident in Bucharest, has a disability certificate, is not institutionalized in a public residential center, and has only the disability allowance as income. The person must register their personal details 48 hours in advance on the DGASMP website.

Another such initiative has been created by the non-profit organization Taxi Gratis, which offers free rides for people with locomotor disabilities through the donations they receive. People with disabilities should have an adequate standard of living and equal opportunities with regard to their needs for food, health services, clothing, housing, participation in community life (education, employment, leisure, civic participation) without being hindered by their vulnerabilities. Independent living is a fundamental human right which implies independent daily activities and the freedom to choose and have control over one's own life. This right means having the ability to decide on all aspects of their lives, supported by accessible, appropriate and affordable disability services. In sport and tourism, the needs of people with disabilities are often overlooked because there is a lack of adequate sports legislation, inaccessible playgrounds, high costs of participation in various sports and underdeveloped tourist services (Dumitraşcu et al, 2023). For spending leisure time in nature, there should be an inventory of

tourist sites accessible to people with disabilities, with well-trained people leading the trips and providing emotional and scientific support.

Material and methods

For the realization of this material, we used the *bibliographical method*, studying several articles on current topics related to obstacles encountered by people with locomotor disabilities, as well as strategies for adapting tourist objectives to facilitate access. Another method used was the *method of observations* following field investigations, where we were able to ascertain the current state of accessibility of the infrastructure and tourist objectives studied using the previous method, also taking photographs personally or obtaining them from various official documents and articles written by people with disabilities.

The interview was one of the methods often used in this article. We had conversations with people with disabilities or their careers. They shared with us the obstacles they encounter in their access to transportation and various important sights in Bucharest, as well as suggestions for solutions that would make their daily life easier in order to integrate into society (Schalock et al, 2005). A final method used in writing the article was *the case study*. By studying different articles I managed to find information related to non-profit associations, which organize different initiatives, which offer people with motor problems the possibility to access different tourist attractions.

Results

Bucharest is a large city, which presents landscapes with different characteristics, natural vegetation, but mostly localized in anthropized green spaces, water features and especially many institutions and tourist attractions.

Although the relief is not of particular tourist importance there are still some places that can be considered tourist spots, such as: Mitropoliei Hill, Cotrocenilor Hill, the terraces on the Colentina River and the Dâmbovița Valley.

Natural vegetation is quite rare, with little representation in green spaces, where man-planted vegetation predominates with species such as the Egyptian walnut trees located in the Circus Park, the trees planted by King Carol I in the Carol Park (including the Sequoia Gigantea, which is considered a monument of nature), the rest of the Codrii Vlăsiei, which includes the Cișmigiu Park, the Văcărești Natural Park and the Petricani Meadow, which are home to plant and animal species protected by law. In addition, there are anthropic tourist attractions such as Calea Victoriei, the Historical Center and the Lipscani Street area, the Village Museum, the Romanian Peasant Museum, the Romanian History Museum, the Romanian National Art Museum, the National Museum of Metropolitan Art of Romania-Palatul Parlamentului, the National Literary Museum of Romania, the National Library of Romania, the Romanian Athenaeum, the Odeon Theater and others (Teodorescu et al, 2016). Unfortunately, not all the sights, monuments, cultural institutions, and various shops in Bucharest can be visited by people with locomotor disabilities due to the lack of access facilities (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: The road to the Museum of Contemporary Art with a bump between the sidewalk and the street and the sidewalk on the Mitropoliei Hill

Some of these are: The Romanian Athenaeum (Fig. 2), Romanian Opera, Dissescu House-Institute of Art History, George Enescu Museum, Museum of History of Bucharest, National Theater of Romania, Mitropoliei Hill and others.



Fig. 2: Restricted access in the Romanian Athenaeum

But there are also places where people with locomotor disabilities can have access, such as: The Parliament Palace and its glass wing housing the National Museum of Contemporary Art, the Odeon Theater with a movable ramp, the National Museum of Romanian Literature with a ramp and elevator (rarely visited by people with locomotor disabilities), the National Library of Romania with a ramp and six elevators, National Museum of Romanian History with ramp outside, ramp inside mobile but dangerous, with elevator for the floors, but no access to the basement of the museum (Fig. 3), the ARCUB with street level entrance and mobile automated platform for wheelchair, the "Dimitrie Gusti" Village Museum which has entrances at ground level.



Fig. 3: Access facilitated by ARCUB and the automated mobile wheelchair platform:
<https://www.scena9.ro/article/cultura-dizabilitati-scaun-rulant>

Only some of the shops and state institutions have ramps for people with locomotor disabilities, even apartment blocks (Fig. 4).

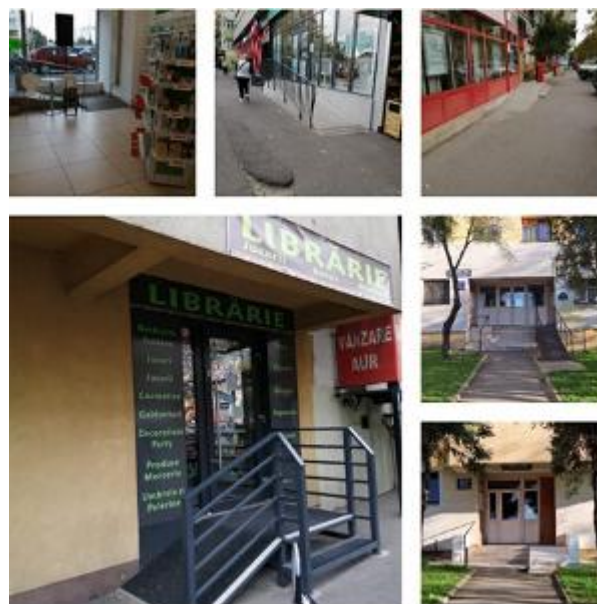


Fig. 4: Accessibility for people with mobility impairments in public buildings

The Văcărești Natural Park integrates people with locomotor problems through innovative projects, adapted infrastructure and thematic events, collaborating with NGOs such as Acces Natura and AMAIS, as well as with ING Bank, Orange Foundation (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Activities within the Văcărești Natural Park and map of the Petricani area:
<https://amais.ro/2021/06/24/accesibilizarea-potecii-biodiversitatii-urbane>

Discussion

In Bucharest there are organizations that organize themed trails specially designed for people with locomotor disabilities. Among the routes offered are "*Bucharest Tour*", "*Scenic Route at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains*", "*In the footsteps of Decebal-Sarmisegetusa Regia*" (Șureanu Mountains), Dimitrie Gusti National Museum, Astra Sibiu Museum of Traditional Popular Civilization.

Another project, "*Nature is for all*", was carried out in 2019 by the Acces Natura Association, in which they organized assisted hikes for people with motor impairments in the Văcărești Natural Park, using a Joëlette chair, which was used for the first time in Romania and Eastern Europe. This is a special device for traveling over uneven terrain, including unpaved paths. The Văcărești Natural Park Association has set up a new protected natural area in sector 2 in the Petricani Meadow, which has a 1 km trail with access stairs and bridges for reduced mobility, with urban furniture and observation areas adapted for people with disabilities, information boards accessible to them. In this area, 12 mammal species (otter, stone marten, ferret and fox), 90 bird species, 12 fish species, 3 amphibians, 7 reptiles, 101 insect species, 88 plant species, of which 49 are protected species. There are also other possibilities for planning and developing tourism by creating special bus routes and visiting historical places, such as Plumbuita-Palatul Monastery and Ghica Tei Church, Fundeni Church, parks and traditional fairs in Bucharest, Antim Monastery, Stavropoleos Church, Zlătari Church, St. George the New Church, the Cathedral of the Salvation of the Nation and others.

Conclusions

Persons with disabilities must have physical, informational and communicational access to the products, services and programs that society makes available to its members. If the competent administrative bodies would pay more attention to and support people with disabilities, their integration into their social-cultural life would be much better realized and would lead to an improvement in the quality of their personal life.

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Souhrn

Článek se zabývá inovativní myšlenkou zpřístupnit turistický ruch v Bukurešti všem jejím obyvatelům, včetně osob s pohybovým postižením. Článek představuje současnou situaci hlavních turistických atraktivit a míru jejich přístupnosti, ale také řešení, která některé nevládní organizace nacházejí pro osoby s pohybovým postižením vytvářením tematických tras přizpůsobených jejich potřebám. Tyto věci se stále vyvíjejí a podporují jejich integraci do dnešní společnosti.

Contact:

Darius-Stefan Nestoriuc

E-mail: darius-stefan.nestoriuc@s.unibuc.ro

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