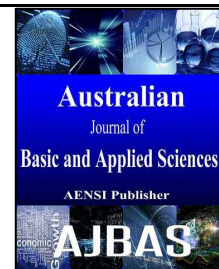




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Factors Contributed to the Inaccessible National Parks in Malaysia: Experts' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Background: In the future, disability will be our greatest concern because of its prevalence is on the rise. Yet, disabled people are still denied from their rights to access to education, healthcare facilities, leisure activities and many other basic needs. People from this group often overlooked and separated from the development of the nation and country. Their interest in tour and travel never been valued and no initiatives were taken to create a barrier-free environment to encourage fairness and equity. **Objective:** Therefore, this paper aims to find out the factors contributed to the inaccessible national parks in Malaysia from the experts' perspectives. This paper only targets the national parks as a small portion from the entire tourism sector. **Results:** From the in-depth interview session, it is found that there are several factors which directly contributes to inaccessibility issue namely, lack of concern, lack of voice to fight for rights, lack of accessible equipment, overlooked due to limited population, stereotype and discrimination, stuck in the specific ministry, lack of understanding regarding disabled people, lack of information and awareness and additional cost is not profitable. Service providers and tour agents are thinking that increasing accessibility in their tourism destinations and tour packages will be very costly and it is not profitable, due to these reasons accessibility become least preferable features to be considered in the tourism destinations development. Tour agents tend to think that accessibility is an additional features but they forget that accessibility is the basic facilities should be provided to ease the access and mobility around the tourism destination. Findings from this paper can be used a tool to promote the cultural shift in attitudes towards the disabled people from pointless sympathy to an excellence companionship and motivating encouragement leading to better quality of life. **Conclusion:** Disabled people no longer have to accept the rejection in access in healthcare, rehabilitation, support, education and employment and travel and leisure activities. All this while, disabled people were denied from the opportunity to shine but this situation should not be prolonged in the near future. Perception that things will change overnight is totally unrealistic due to the limited resources but temporary solutions need to be provided to at least reduce the accessibility barriers.

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INTRODUCTION

The biggest challenge of us is to understand disability and life behind it. Inaccessibility is not only a problem in Malaysia but this problem exist throughout the world. The level of inaccessibility issue is depending on the understanding and corrective actions which is taken to minimize the complaints and shifting towards the "Universal Designs" or "Design for All". In the future, disability will be our greatest concern because of its prevalence

is on the rise. Yet, disabled people are still denied from their rights to access to education, healthcare facilities, leisure activities and many other basic needs. People from this group often overlooked and separated from the development of the nation and country

The Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 protects the rights of the disabled and imposes obligations on government, private sectors and non-government organisations in relation to access to recreation, leisure and sport. The significant omissions in the

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PWD Act have led it to be labelled a “toothless tiger”. There have been calls for the PWD Act to be amended to address its shortcomings, including from the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) which opined that a more comprehensive Act is required to reflect the CRPD and cover all the rights of persons with disabilities. Rights advocates have repeatedly asserted that a paradigm shift is needed so that laws relating to persons with disabilities are rights-based and not drafted from a charity or social welfare perspective (Department of Social Welfare, 2013a).

Even though National Policy for Person with Disabilities 2007 were formed, critics says that it lacks of full commitment from the main stakeholders. Many meetings were conducted to discuss the implementation of the policy but then no timelines were set. There is no clear idea of who or which departments would be responsible for each of the outcomes from this policy. The first National Plan of Action for persons with disabilities was in force from 2008 to 2012. There has not been a review or evaluation of progress of the first National Plan but the Department of Social Welfare is presently conducting a study on the policies,

implementation and outcome of the past and current strategies and programmes for persons with disabilities. (Department of Social Welfare, 2013a).

More than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability, of whom nearly 200 million experience considerable difficulties in functioning (World Health Organization, 2011). According to Department of Social Welfare (2013a), the exact number of disabled population is difficult to be counted due to the lack of reliable and comprehensive data which represent the disabled community in Malaysia. This situation occurs because there are still people who are reluctant to register themselves or their family members to Department of Social Welfare.

Table 1 is showing the number of disabled people registered by type of disability in Malaysia from the year 2007 to the year 2013. From the Table 1, it is found that population of disabled people was 220, 250 people in the year 2007 but this number increase to 494, 074 people in the year 2013. Table 1 is also showing that number of disabled people in Malaysia is increasing year by year. Population of the disabled people is increasing throughout the world.

Table 1: Number of disabled people registered by type of disability, Malaysia, 2007-2013 (Department of Social Welfare, 2013b)

Type of disability	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Visually Impaired	20, 039	22, 856	26, 158	27, 840	31, 924	40, 510	46, 307
Hearing	31, 715	34, 580	37, 735	39, 824	43, 788	53, 357	58, 706
Physical	73, 559	83, 070,	94, 346	105, 020	123, 346 ^a	148, 461 ^a	162, 215 ^a
Learning disability	85, 812	96, 246	109, 743	120, 109	134, 659	165, 281	178, 800
Cerebral Palsy	1, 787	2, 890	4, 071	4, 068	-	-	-
Speech	-	-	-	334	725	1, 734	3, 677
Mental	-	-	-	3, 663	8, 927	14, 990	19, 914
Others	7, 338	9, 216	11, 524	13, 389	15, 834	20, 673	24, 455
Total	220, 250	248, 858	283, 577	314, 247	359, 203	445, 006	494, 074

^aIncludes Cerebral Palsy

Blichfeldt and Nicolaisen (2011) stated that gaining knowledge on disabled tourists is critical if the tourism industry wishes to improve products and services which benefits many customers who have some kind of disability or to those who travel with companions with a disability. Griffin and Stacey (2011) expressed at present, holidaying is a standard lifestyle practice for a majority of us but there are several barriers which hinder someone to engage in tourism namely, illness and disability (physiological and psychological), mobility and access, family circumstances, caring for dependants and problems related with aging. Marginalization from tourism is directly linked to an indicator of poverty.

Poria *et al.* (2009), said that requirements from disabled people differs from one and another depending their capacities. For example, wheelchair users and white-cane users need face barriers in different location while travelling. Goodall *et al.* (2004) added that barriers prevents someone from participating tourism activities. Barriers can be

divided into three categories such as barriers faced by service providers and disabled tourists, barriers exclusively faced by service providers and barriers exclusively faced by disabled tourists.

The common barriers faced by both of the service providers and disabled tourists are lack of accessible facilities, lack of accurate and comprehensive information in appropriate formats, communications barriers especially by the tourists who have sensor impairments or learning difficulties and personal attitudes of managers and staff providing tourism services. The common barriers faced by the service providers are inadequate awareness of the requirements of visitors with disabilities and of what can easily be done to improve access, the estimated amount of rebuilding the facilities are believed to be high and unaware of specific acts related to disability. The only barrier faced by the disabled tourists is low aspirations or hopes to visit more locations due to the inaccessibility environment (Goodall *et al.*, 2004).

Barriers are a physical structure which restricts or hinders something. Travel barriers can be categorized into three main categories, namely intrapersonal obstacles, interpersonal obstacles and structural obstacles (Sanmargaraja & Wee, 2013, Sanmargaraja & Wee, 2014). One must remember that tourism is not limited to tourist spots hence, all the barriers should be eliminated and barrier-free should be governed as prerequisites in all aspects of travel (United Nations Environment Program, 2012).

Bennett (2011) said that disabled people frequently experience poor results in welfare and levels of participation. The best approach for managing transformation in disability involves adopting an insurance-based risk management framework, as different from the current welfare model. Utilizing the community potential and cultural impact is a vital piece of the puzzle. This means that large-scale investment in branding and awareness campaigns will be necessary. If the best approach is not adopted from the start, the next five to 10 years may not be as transformative for disability population.

Disabled tourists market is a potential market in the future due to the increment in the disabled population throughout the world. This market is expected to attract more group of people because disabled people usually do not travel alone and they usually travel in the larger group. Accessible tourism is not only beneficial to the disabled people but is it also beneficial to everyone, namely elderly people, parents with baby pram, toddlers, people with permanent and temporary injuries, pregnant ladies

and others because all the people in this group requires the same requirements as the disabled people. Therefore, this papers aims to find out the factors contributes to the inaccessible national parks in Malaysia from the experts' perspectives. This paper only targets the national parks as a small portion from the entire tourism sector. Findings from this paper can be used a tool to promote the cultural shift in attitudes towards the disabled people from pointless sympathy to an excellence companionship and motivating encouragement leading to better quality of life.

Methodology:

This research were conducted using experts regarding accessible tourism. In-depth interview session were conducted to list down the factors contributes to the inaccessible national parks in Malaysia. Questions were asked based on their experiences while visiting national parks in Malaysia. Experts were divided into two (2) groups namely, Malaysian respondents and Non-Malaysian respondents. They are from various field and have vast experiences with the disabled people. Respondents were selected randomly, therefore there is no gender discrimination. Selection of respondents was carefully done from various fields to represent opinion from all the parties involved in the policy making, designing and construction process. The respondents were selected namely from government departments, academicians, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and architect as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Categories of the Respondents

Respondents	Field of Organization	Gender		Total	Grand Total
		Male	Female		
Malaysian	NGOs	7	1	8	12
	Government	-	2	2	
	Architect	1	-	1	
	Academician	-	1	1	
Non-Malaysian	NGOs	8	10	18	20
	Government	-	-	-	
	Architect	-	-	-	
	Academician	2	-	2	
					32

Results:

Lack of Concern and Ignorance:

Respondents were questioned about their experiences while visiting national parks in Malaysia main expectations while visiting national parks in Malaysia. There are several key factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks in Malaysia namely, lack of concern and ignorance, lack of voice to fight for rights, lack of accessible equipment, overlooked due to limited population, stereotype and discrimination, stuck in the specific, lack of understanding regarding disabled people, lack of information and awareness and additional cost is not profitable. Lack of concern and ignorance is discussed in Table 3.

These statements are clearly reflecting on our thinking which is towards the growth in economy, all of us are running after materialistic world without thinking of the unique and special people among us. This kind of thinking is exist due to we don't have the disability in us thus we often overlook of this minority group. Disability is no more considered as a disease but it is rather considered natural process which all of us will go through it such as aging process. There is a myth among the disabled's society, nothing about disability without disabled, this myth exist due to the society is unaware about the disabled's feelings and requirements.

Table 3: Respondents' response regarding lack of concern and ignorance

Question	Respondent's Response	
What are the factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks?	Ignorance	- Lack of concern and ignorance - No idea. All this is happening due to ignorance.
	No voice to fight	Nothing about disability without PWD's.
	Society's mind-set	Thinking of the society is very narrow and they need to be open up.
	Lack of concern	In Morocco, people are not concern about PWD's due to they are not aware.
	Lack of understanding	Lack of understanding and concern among the others.
	Lack of awareness	Lack of awareness and selfishness.
	Perceived disabilities first	In USA, people would first see me as an individual person. But in Japan, people

Lack of Voice to Fight for Rights:

Many campaigns need to be organized to raise awareness among the society, even though campaigns are being organized at the present but then participation from the society is still very low hence, many eye catching activities need to be added in the campaigns agenda to increase their level of interest and this will indirectly contribute to voice to

fight for rights. When the society is aware about the disability in the society, they will actively involve in advocacy rights for the disabled people and discrimination towards them can be diminished slowly. Research about disability also will help to raise awareness and to improve understanding. Lack of voice to fight for rights is discussed in Table 4.

Table 4: Respondents' response regarding lack of voice to fight for rights

Question	Respondent's Response	
What are the factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks?	No Equity	Disabled are not given equal rights in the society because they don't have much voice to rise out their problems. PWD's are in the minority in the society and mostly PWD's stands alone without their family.
	Ignored	Because we are the minority and society thinks we are not so important to give us our rights.

Lack of Accessible Equipment:

Society is saying that there is limited in accessible equipment to handle the disabled people, in fact this is happening due to solely ignorance and they run away from their responsibility. The requirements of the tourists with specific access needs should be met within the general provisions for information, accommodation and all kinds of services wherever possible. Whenever an alternative

service or system is established in order to respond to users' and clients' practical requirements, this must be of equal quality and shall not entail a greater cost to users or clients. Occasionally, equipment are provided in the public recreational parks but then the facilities cannot be used by the disabled as well as others particularly the transportation services and communication services. Lack of accessible equipment is discussed in Table 5.

Table 5: Respondents' response regarding lack of accessible equipment

Question	Respondent's Response	
What are the factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks?	Lack of equipment	Everyone is saying they don't have enough equipment's to handle the disabled. I feel this is solely ignorance and they want to run away from the responsibility. Wherever possible, the requirements of tourists with particular access needs should be met within the general provisions for information, transport, accommodation and all kinds of services.
	Unusable	Many facilities which is provided currently cannot be used by the PWD's as well as transportation services and also communication barriers.

Overlooked due to Limited Population:

Every one of us have the opinion that disability is just a small number in the society but the study World Health Organization (2011) shows that there are more than one billion people with disabilities in the world, which corresponding to about 15% of the world's population. In the meanwhile, South-East Region scored the second highest prevalence rate as

much as 16% of moderate disability and third highest prevalence rate as much as 12.9%. Meanwhile, study Department of Social Welfare of Malaysia (2013) reveal that in the year 2007, there were 197, 519 people or 0.73% were disabled people from total Malaysia population as much as 27, 124, 000 people, but then this number increase to 359, 203 people or 1.24% were people with disabilities from the total

population about 28 961,186 people in the year 2011. The total increment in four (4) years is 161,684 people or 81.86%, this number is growing at an

alarming rate in Malaysia whereby immediate actions need to be taken. Overlooked due to limited population is discussed in Table 6.

Table 6: Respondents' response regarding overlooked due to limited population

Question	Respondent's Response	
What are the factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks?	Overlooked	-In Cebu City, disabled people will be overlooked all the time due to limited population. - Major issue is disabled people are often overlooked because of their physical disability.

Stereotype and Discrimination:

Society norms and social attitude that create stereotype and discrimination. Stereotype and discrimination occurs resulted from lack of concern and social responsibility. Disability is a social concept based on an "ideal" or "social norms" that has been formed from presumption of power in society. This power has constructed from the statement that each of us consider others to be

comparable with our own identity, whereby there should be equal mould that all kind of people exactly fit in. Therefore, disability is created by people who senses a power upon others that must be exploited. Consequently, everyone has their own self-definition about disability, hence their perception of imposing power on the feeble people differs. Stereotype and discrimination is discussed in Table 7.

Table 7: Respondents' response regarding stereotype and discrimination

Question	Respondent's Response	
What are the factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks?	Society norms	Society norms and social attitude that create stereotype and discrimination.
	Myths	Because of the society's myths saying that PWD's are useless and they are being people with disabilities due to their sins.
	Social and Cultural Stigma	Sad to say, in our society, the social and cultural stigma forces the newly blind adults to be confined to his/her own home.

Stuck in the Specific Ministry:

One of the respondents pointed out about the accessibility issue is stuck in the Ministry of Woman, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) and this issue should be brought to all the ministries in Malaysia. The scope of each ministry need to be widen and some new scope regarding welfare services need to be added, currently we have twenty-

four (24) ministries in Malaysian cabinet 2014. Tremendous support is required to carry forward activities under ministry level, initiatives from two (2) ministries namely Ministry of Woman, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) and Ministry of Tourism only are inadequate. Stereotype and discrimination is discussed in Table 8.

Table 8: Respondents' response regarding stuck in the specific ministry

Question	Respondent's Response	
What are the factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks?	Stuck in the specific ministry	The issue is stuck in the one ministry, Ministry of Woman, Family and Community Development (MWFCD). It should be in all ministries.

Lack of Understanding Regarding Disabled People:

Majority of the current problems is due to lack of public understanding about the causes of disabilities. It is believed that disability is caused by religious and cultural sanctions and therefore women with disabilities does not have access to education services, information, health service, social interaction and employment. Society has wrong understanding about disability. It is because

generally society do not take any actions to learn or to know about disability due to ignorance and lack of interest. Other than that, society do not show any interest to learn about the disability with the mind-set that they won't go through any disabilities in their life since they born as a normal person. On the other hand, even they know about disability but then they ignore or overlooked it. Lack of understanding regarding disabled people is discussed in Table 9.

Table 9: Respondents' response regarding lack of understanding regarding disabled people

Question	Respondent's Response	
What are the factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks?	No understanding	Because they did not give much emphasis to our human value. Major current problems include the lack of public understanding about the causes of disabilities.
	Lack of concern	Lack of understanding and concern among the others.

	Wrong disabled definition	Because they still have wrong understanding of PWD's.
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Lack of Information and Awareness:

Lack of information and awareness among the society, hence the level of acceptance among the society is very low. School syllabus need to be changed for the young generation to learn and understand disabled people as one of them. It is true that society is not being taught about disability and the barriers faced by them. Teaching about disability

need to be added in the moral subject curriculum to teach their children about the disability since they are very young to create a caring, loving and responsible society. If we were to change the mind-set of the society, we need to do it when they are still small because it is easier to shape the children rather than the adults. Lack of information and awareness is discussed in Table 10.

Table 10: Respondents' response regarding information and awareness

Question	Respondent's Response	
What are the factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks?	Change school syllabus	Lack of information, awareness, changed of perception of the disabled, change school syllabus for the young to learn about disabled people and accept them as useful & intelligent citizens who can contribute to the country if given a chance to do so.

Additional Cost not Profitable:

Government need to enforce the law and regulation to check and maintain the accessible facilities for the disabled people. It is known that additional cost is creating the barriers for the provision for accessible facilities in the existing buildings. Additional cost can be reduced if the accessible facilities is introduced at the initial planning stage of each development. Government agencies need to play important role in monitoring

the design process to reduce unnecessary additional costs to demolish and rebuilding process. On the other hand, disabled people themselves creating much problems to the Department of Social Welfare by not registering themselves to this department, because of this issue this department failed to keep count of the actual disabled people's statistics. Additional cost not profitable is discussed in Table 11.

Table 11: Respondents' response regarding information and awareness

Question	Respondent's Response	
What are the factors contributing to the inaccessible national parks?	Enforce law and regulation	Society thinks additional cost is not profitable. Government need to enforce the law and regulation. Many of the PWD's doesn't registered.

Discussion:

There are several factors were identified contributing to the unavailability of the accessibility facilities in national parks in Malaysia, namely lack of concern and ignorance, lack of voice to fight for rights, lack of accessible equipment, overlooked due to limited population, stereotype and discrimination, struck in the specific ministry, lack of understanding regarding disabilities, lack of information and awareness and additional cost not profitable.

All the respondents strongly stating that all the accessibility issues regarding disabled people mainly caused by the lack of concern and ignorance from the society. Society typically think that disabled people need to be punished for their bad deeds in their last birth and they deserved such situation of injustice. Disabled people were always be blamed to be troublesome to their parents, educators, employers and the society because of their physical deficiency. Society usually perceive disability as a heredity diseases and think that not everyone will go through it just because there is no disabled members in their family.

Service providers and tour agents are thinking that adding accessibility in their tourism destinations and tour packages can be very costly and it is not profitable, due to these reasons accessibility become least preferable features to be considered in the tourism destinations development. Tour agents are also thinking that potential of the disabled market is very low and not well acceptable by the disabled tourists due to their minority population in the society. Even if the disabled people start to explore in the tourism destination, society usually discourage them in the tourism sector by saying that they are not physically fit to take part like any activities in tourism destination namely hiking, trekking, boating, camping, swimming and others. In many places, disabled people are not warmly welcome and this makes them to have low self-esteem.

Conclusion:

This research is significant to highlight the discrimination issue in tourism industry faced by the minority group. More research need to be conducted in this field to educate the society and to be an eye-

opener to everyone that accessibility is not only provided for the disabled people but accessibility is required to all us who have different requirements when we are planning for tour. More number of researches will make this issue as an alarming issue in the society. When the disability is perceived a part of the society, then separation of the people with disabilities from the society can be diminished. Discrimination towards the disabled people cannot be solved if the disabled people still excluded from the social activities. Marginalization of the disabled people will only worsen this unresolved accessibility issue.

No point for waiting for the situation to be critical, corrective action need to be taken as soon as possible. Disability and aging in the society cannot be avoided, every one of us know that Malaysia is growing older day by day. Population if the elderly is increasing and on the other hand, birth rate and fertility rate is decreasing dramatically. Dreams will only come true if every one of us has the same dream which is to create barrier-free environment. Collaboration between the stakeholders is highly required to plan new national policy regarding disability. Regulation and laws are there, but enforcement and monitoring is not carried out. Therefore, periodic monitoring and penalty need to impose on the public premises which does not comply the acts and guidelines.

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