

## Article

# Evolution of accessible cultural tourism in Chile

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**Abstract:** This article addresses the study of people with mobility disabilities, analyzing their inclusion in both the social sphere and functional diversity within the areas with the greatest accessibility to cultural tourism. The main objective of this study is to understand and justify the visits of people with disabilities to tourism in Chile, analyzing the underlying causes of this phenomenon and how research can contribute to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in their leisure time. This allows us to know and justify the different causes of Chilean tourism, according to the documentary review to support the quality of life of people with disabilities in the pastime. In this work, a series of analyses is proposed in different tourist spaces of the National System of Protected Wild Areas (of Chile), starting from the number of visitors with disabilities, depending on a select group of Chilean tourism; however, all people who enjoy the activities are available and not reserved. It is not an easy task to generate available results through the activity of accessible cultural tourism. In some criteria of the cause of disability, such as deficits (or deficiencies) in some disability type (physical, sensory, intellectual, psychosocial, and multiple), the different characteristics of functional diversity and obstacles create a greater need to transform equality for all types of tourist activities. In conclusion, they allow us to approach visitors with disabilities to observe and argue for cultural quality as strategies for participation and inclusive tourism.

**Keywords:** accessibility; Chile; culture; disability; social inclusion; tourism

## 1. Introduction

In some economically more developed countries, tourism is considered part of the modern experience in which all people have the right to travel; nevertheless, it is also worth writing here that disabled people also encounter economic problems, because their treatment is often very expensive, which is why they choose health, even though contact with nature improves their mental and physical health. This should also be supported by the vacation experience for various reasons, such as low income, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and disability [1]. This article addresses the study of people with mobility disabilities, analyzing their inclusion in both the social sphere and functional diversity within the areas with the greatest accessibility to cultural tourism. It also examines the impact of tourism activities on these individuals, focusing on their right to independent living, respect for their freedom to travel, and their full participation in recreational activities. Most people with disabilities participate in daily life and do not have access to the different places that offer inclusive tourism services [2–4]. On the one hand, to channel this complex situation, for example, in some cases: The existence of barriers causes the fact that a disabled tourist cannot move autonomously and independently, and it is impossible for any other tourist without a disability; therefore, most people with disabilities don't travel for fear of finding barriers at the destination. For all these reasons, it is possible to affirm that there is no equality of conditions between a disabled tourist and a tourist

without a disability in their access to tourism. These circumstances have led many institutions, both public and private, to fight to achieve the right to vacations, and the freedom to travel and to do inclusive tourism [5].

However, many factors are relevant to achieving ‘the elimination of barriers’ to tourism without access to architectural planning and the geographical tourist space through social links. People with disabilities do not cite their incapacity as a reason for not participating but rather a series of structural limitations [1]. This suggests a certain complexity for accessible tourism since the root of the problem is that it produces a strong impediment to the tourist environment. It consists of considering the issue of functional diversity, that is, restricted access to the direct participation of visitors with disabilities in different tourist spaces. They focus their research on the importance of tourism for all, drawing attention to the need to act in the tourism accessibility field [5].

### 1.1. Literature review

The topic of Chilean tourism for people with disabilities refers to social problems of the existing barriers to investigating the causes, depending on the evolution of the population and participation in accessible tourism development. Talking about universal accessibility constitutes an ethical commitment for all professions with specific people, incorporating a pluralistic society in which demands for justice are made to address the difference [6]. Despite these studies, there are benefits to solving problems with instruments based on access needs and resources, depending on adaptive implementation and territorial transformation, especially in response to climate change [7,8].

In Chile, 20% of the adult population and young people over 18 years of age have disabilities; however, this official figure—as of 2016—is not updated, since it is older, and we assume that the total Chilean population with disabilities has grown continuously since then. Also, one of the key elements that make up, and that must promote an accessible tourism analysis, is both universal accessibility and tourism inclusion, taking into account the need to guarantee access for all people to existing tourist attractions throughout the Chilean territory [9–12].

**Table 1.** The three features of accessible tourism by [5].

Feature #1	Feature #2	Feature #3
It is necessary to develop a line of research whose central axis is the study of the behavior of tourists with disabilities. Therefore, it is essential to delve deeper into the analysis of needs, preferences, purchasing habits, motivations, etc., and it is also possible to know and design a tourist product that does not discriminate against any tourist due to age or disability.	It is necessary to know the real positioning, that is, the perception of those destinations classified as accessible, in order to incorporate to what extent the perception of accessibility by tourism entrepreneurs depends on the real needs of people with disabilities.	It is important to create a line of research focused on the variable communication study aimed at tourists with disabilities, specifically on those most relevant aspects and attributes that should characterize advertising and promotion aimed at the segment of inclusive tourists.

This should be assumed by the need for an expert in universal accessibility and architectural design, both for functional diversity and for human diversity, that favors an accessible tourist service to attend to broad development and social responsibility [6]. Like the rest of human beings, professionals are quite complex and valuable for developing the disabled population, such as tourist visitors, the future of heritage-

tourism strategies, or different territorial brands. And some crucial characteristics to consider for accessible tourism development (**Table 1**).

In this sense, the most important is the tourism sector for all people with disabilities through accessible cultural tourism. This is because accessibility is considered a determining factor for the participation of disabled people in the tourism sector [5].

## **1.2. Current status of Chilean legislation on disability and accessible tourism**

In Chile, disability legislation seeks to promote inclusion and establish the functioning of tourism and local activities, facilitating the active participation of all visitors. Within this framework, some current regulations relate to accessible tourism for visitors with physical disabilities (such as those with reduced mobility or wheelchair users) and visitors with visual impairments (who use guide sticks or companions) in public tourism services. However, managing these projects requires generating knowledge about universal accessibility [13,14], which complicates implementation in Chile's protected wilderness areas.

These areas are regulated by various Chilean systems—regulated by Sistema Nacional de Áreas Silvestres Protegidas del Estado (the National System of Protected Wild Areas of the State, SNASPE for its acronym in Spanish) and administered by Corporación Nacional Forestal (the National Forestry Corporation, CONAF for its acronym in Spanish) of the Ministry of Agriculture of Chile—that provide access to accessible tourism spaces. While inclusive access to these tourist locations can be challenging due to the specific topographical characteristics of the regions, it is not always a complex or impossible task. By considering the different types of accessibility, it is easier to understand the adaptation of several spaces within parks, squares, and tourist trails to make them more inclusive. Although the topographical conditions of many wild and protected areas in Chile represent a significant obstacle, this does not mean they are inaccessible. While it is complex to adapt them completely, it is feasible to identify and enable specific sectors that allow for the creation of accessible routes and more disability-friendly environments [13,14]. In this sense, it is crucial to advance theoretical approaches that address the issue of accessibility as a central axis of tourism development.

Therefore, they have different roles or situations regarding the accessible cultural tourism activity carried out by the SNASPE units to contextualize the study of inclusive tourism. However, information and communication technologies (ICT) are absent for people with disabilities as clients of different tourist destinations [15]. Tourist destinations must consider ease of access, circulation, and use of facilities, which encourage people with disabilities to leave their comfort and captivate space by offering an experience that satisfies their needs and enjoy them [16].

SNASPE, through CONAF, includes universal accessibility in its strategy to create adequate infrastructure for individuals with physical and sensory disabilities. As of 2020, the system comprised 106 units across the country, including 42 national parks, 46 national reserves, and 18 natural monuments. Despite some progress, only a few of these units have implemented universal accessibility services as part of the

National Strategy for Universal Accessibility, which has the motto ‘Nature for all people’. This approach aims to ensure social equity, prevent discrimination, and promote access to accessible recreation and environmental education for people with disabilities in Chile [9,17,18].

Of note is the collaboration between institutions such as Fundación Lepe, Fundación Sendero de Chile, Fundación ERES, and CONAF, which, under the motto ‘Hiking Without Limits’, are opening up access to natural spaces for people with physical or motor disabilities, or reduced mobility, expanding their participation in recreational, sports, and nature-related activities. Various governmental, non-governmental, and public-private sector organizations are committed to adapting tourism environments to guarantee everyone has the right to enjoy leisure and tourism [19,20].

The concept of accessible tourism seeks to integrate this market segment by identifying their needs and preferences and adapting tourism offerings to accommodate different types of disabilities [5,21,22]. Creating an inclusive society through accessible tourism also includes recreational activities that encourage the participation of all individuals in leisure activities; however, further study and development of the psychological and social foundations underlying leisure dynamics is necessary to ensure effective inclusion [23].

The main objective of this study is to understand and justify the visits of people with disabilities to tourism in Chile, analyzing the underlying causes of this phenomenon and how research can contribute to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in their leisure time.

## 2. Methods

The methodological and descriptive statistical study compiled current and historical records, and was carried out by Instituto Nacional de Estadística de Chile (the National Institute of Statistics of Chile, INE for its acronym in Spanish) and Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio (the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage of Chile, MINCAP for its acronym in Spanish) to obtain participation through cultural tourism towards inclusion and functional diversity within the Chilean territory.

This work was based on a series of analyses in different tourist spaces of the SNASPE, starting from the number of visitors with disabilities, depending on the select group of Chilean tourists; however, all people who enjoy the activities are available and not reserved. For example, for some authors [14,23], there is a combination of five strategies and techniques to solve universal accessibility problems:

- 1) Most tourist areas do not have the capacity to receive and serve visitors with disabilities;
- 2) Sidewalks, when they have ramps, are inadequate for accessing different public visitation areas;
- 3) Places for leisure and recreation activities do not have trained personnel;
- 4) Access by physically disabled people to places where tourist activities take place does not comply with basic accessibility standards;
- 5) Most of the tourist areas visited do not apply the regulations of the ‘accessibility

plan', since accessible wild circuits (access routes and circulations within the park) do not have access ramps, accessible paths with guide edges, walkways (or accessible bridges).

However, this statistical analysis and methodological procedure were used by the documentary review technique and the qualitative strategy in the state of institutionality analysis to develop and measure the different dimensions of the country's activity [24–27]. Although tourism concepts are deeply about social responsibility and the most sustainable tourism business.

In some works of the thesis on inclusion in Chilean cultural tourism, both architectural accessibility and universal accessibility for people with disabilities [28,29], as well as the methodology used by the new approach for accessible design of tourist space of SNASPE, based on general concepts for visitors with disabilities. Also, according to the methodology of the measurement for universal accessibility in tourist environments (**Table 2**).

**Table 2.** Universal accessibility in tourist environments by adaptations of [11] and own elaboration.

	INCLUSION	DISABILITY
<b>CAPACITY-BASED INDEX:</b> It measures the highest possible level of functioning that a person can achieve at a given time, strictly considering his or her health condition.	No difficulty	Severe difficulty
<b>PERFORMANCE BASED INDEX:</b> It measures what individuals do in their real environment. It considers the aids (technical and human) available to the person and the influence of environmental factors (barriers and facilitators).	No performance issues	Severe performance issues

This methodological instrument of the index based on capacity characterizes the person without disability (inclusion) with ease of going down the step (without difficulty), on the other hand, the person with a physical disability (wheelchair) has a complex obstacle (severe difficulty) through the ascent by the step. And, on the other hand, the methodological instrument of the index based on the performance for inclusion facilitates the access of a simple ramp by going down, on the other hand, the lack of support to the person with a physical and visual disability to guide the orientation of the route within the tourist environment.

From this perspective, this study considers that infrastructure and equipment that do not adequately meet the needs of people with disabilities and other vulnerable segments of the population exclude many destinations from the market; however, in many cases, the environment is not adequately designed for people with disabilities, who often cannot enjoy traveling in the same way as other people without disabilities [9].

### 3. Results and discussion

This evidence is not an easy task to generate available results through accessible cultural tourism activity. However, there is information about the cultural statistics report in 2019 and 2022 on the project of the Subdepartment of Living Conditions Statistics of the INE, Department of Studies of the Undersecretariat of Cultures and Arts of the MINCAP, together with the participation of the statistical study by CONAF to record the total number of visitors with disabilities to SNASPE units for each region

of Chile during the period of the years 2015 and 2022 (**Table 3**).

**Table 3.** Number of visitors with disabilities by region of Chile (2015–2022) by [27,28]<sup>1</sup>.

Regions	2015	2016	2017	2018 <sup>3</sup>	2019 <sup>3</sup>	2020 <sup>3-4</sup>	2021 <sup>3</sup>	2022
Arica y Parinacota	1.147	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Tarapacá	34	18	76	48	14	5	4	13
Antofagasta	295	223	184	362	309	59	346	230
Atacama	2	2	6	36	73	22	13	39
Coquimbo	97	34	34	78	168	54	63	261
Valparaíso	285	244	823	176	15	5	224	90
Metropolitana	135	172	77	125	111	16	78	140
O'Higgins	113	95	137	227	223	32	126	166
Maule	39	33	73	109	202	45	405	715
Ñuble	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	— <sup>2</sup>	0	0	2	0
Biobío	11	18	72	190	58	6	24	101
La Araucanía	5.341	6.346	5.160	4.065	266	214	189	710
Los Ríos	15	5	1	1	1	1	16	65
Los Lagos	107	271	438	379	424	207	265	1.765
Aysén	70	241	184	53	171	89	80	410
Magallanes	735	788	2.734	.108	566	398	2.252	1.466
Total	8.426	8.490	9.999	6.957	2.602	1.153	4.087	6.173

<sup>1</sup> The index number of the Cultural Statistics table of the 2019 Annual Report refers to Table 10.54 (On the number of visitors with disabilities to units of SNASPE, by year, according to region and SNASPE unit. 2015–2019), while the Natural Heritage Statistics of the 2020 Annual Report correspond to Table 7.11 (On the number of visitors with disabilities to units of SNASPE, by year, by region and SNASPE unit. 2018–2022); <sup>2</sup> Information not available, due to not having installed administration or not having a visitor registration system; <sup>3</sup> Figures rectified by the informant by the 2020 Annual Report. Therefore, the Ñuble Region was officially born on September 6, 2018; <sup>4</sup> During 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Protected Wilderness Areas were closed following the guidelines established by the health authority, which considerably reduced the number of visitors.

According to this table, their relationship with participation in ecotourism and inclusive activities for all people with disabilities allows them to deepen the number of the best Chilean tourists, but in some cases, due to the incorporation of new places to the SNASPE area, the different units of National Parks, National Reserves, National Monuments, and Protected Wild Areas decrease. Furthermore, several legal changes occurred in Chile to adopt measures to preserve Chilean environmental heritage.

In general, the selected area should have little topographic variation, reducing the need to build ramps [13], thus allowing for different environmental settings, especially for people with physical and visual impairments, to improve the route's accessibility and inclusive tourism.

If the city, one of the tourist spaces by nature, is not accessible, daily life is more complex, and even more so for people who are excluded from forms of socialization and interaction with their environment [23]. However, it is important to note that some trekking, camping, and picnic sectors are not supported by accessible gravel and sand areas for visitors with physical disabilities (wheelchairs), therefore, it is likely that it is allowed to use wooden walkways, such as the accessible beach or beach walkway.

The comparison of (traditional) tourism and accessible tourism with the participation of visitors with general disabilities (**Figure 1** and **Table 4**). In some criteria of the cause of disability, such as deficits (or deficiencies) in some type of disability (physical, sensory, intellectual, psychosocial, and multiple); just as the different characteristics of functional diversity and obstacles, there is a greater need to transform equality for all types of tourism activities.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of tourism and accessible tourism by adaptations of [9–11,13,14] and own elaboration.

The image illustrates the concept of accessibility in tourism through two equations. The first shows that *déficits de personas* (‘deficits of individuals’)—such as using a *silla de rueda manual* (‘manual wheelchair’), combined with *barreras de contexto* (‘contextual barriers’) like *escalones/acceso en desnivel* (‘stairs/uneven access’)—result in *Discapacidad-Turismo* (‘Disability-Tourism’). The second equation demonstrates that providing *apoyos individualizados* (‘individualized support’)—such as a *silla de rueda eléctrica* (‘electric wheelchair’), and *disminuir barreras* (‘reducing barriers’) like a *rampa simple/acceso en nivel* (‘simple ramp/level access’)—leads to *Inclusión-Turismo accesible* (‘Inclusion-Accessible tourism’). This highlights the transition from disability to inclusion through support and barrier reduction.

**Table 4.** Comparison of tourism and accessible tourism by adaptations of [9–11,13,14] and own elaboration.

Criteria	Advantages	Disadvantages
People in current status	Inclusion	Disability
Tourist accessibility	Yes	No
Architectural barrier	Yes	No
Entry barrier	Lowering barriers	Context barriers
Wheelchair access	Single ramp	Steps
Access level	Level access	Sloped access
Wheelchair type	Electric	Manual
Disability cause	Individualized support	People shortages

On the other hand, the concept of accessible tourism—according to Corporación Ciudad Accesible (Accessible City Corporation)—does not exclude at all; however, its strength is to increase the number of tourists with disabilities with the possibility of accessing different services; private companies and public institutions (by the State administration) linked to the tourism issue are responsible for developing the offer through environments and services with an accessible approach. Likewise, the advantages of accessible tourism reflect the quality of tourists with disabilities, depending on the accessibility on offer through benefits or services to those who implement it from said companies. To this end, the Accessible City Corporation not

- Increase the number of disabled tourists with the possibility of accessing different services.
- Attract a client known as the ‘multi-client’, that is, each trip made by a disabled person attracts their companions.
- Promote deseasonality, generating an additional business opportunity and a competitive advantage for those who take on the challenge.
- Improve the image of tourist destinations, generating loyalty for the services offered.
- Incorporating the accessibility variable into tourist destinations and services complies with the principles of independent living incorporated in Law 20,422 (which establishes standards on equal opportunities and social inclusion of people with disabilities in Chile), and the rights of an increasingly long-lived and active population.

These essential points are complex to analyze when analyzing the participation of visitors with disabilities. It also reflects the interests of our research to obtain the degree of sanctification on the advances in the incorporation of accessibility in some tourist destinations and services; as well as the increase in accessible accommodation and the initiatives of tourist operators that begin to incorporate accessible activities [10,30].

Finally, it is relevant to highlight the main debate on this empirical study, both in qualitative and quantitative research theory towards tourism generation in Chile: This issue has undoubtedly become a major challenge for the state administration. This is why, when addressing sustainable tourism development in protected areas of the state, the variable of universal accessibility is considered fundamental, especially when implementing public infrastructure to support tourism activity [12].

For this reason, it is essential to propose the incorporation of accessibility for cultural tourism through the SNASPE units for visitors with disabilities, supporting the need for a comprehensive approach in our study, as it allows us to differentiate and establish a series of situations that tourism in Chile presents, whose relationship with various public-private companies reflects on safety and satisfaction with better accessible services.

## 4. Conclusion

The conclusion allows visitors with disabilities to observe and argue about cultural quality as strategies for participation and inclusive tourism. However, in some main points and concrete projects:

- The incorporation of trekking, camping, and picnicking to create an accessible visitor concept, respecting it in different suitable spaces and using it with the use of universally accessible crafts for SNASPE. However, it is recommended to improve and develop wild areas as a standardization of universal accessibility for cultural tourism, that is, accessible and adapted trail information with the Braille reading and writing system and a tactile map on relief (or accessible model) of Chilean copper (with the benefit of sanitation and health) for visitors with visual disabilities; including access to the recreation area of different SNASPE units.
- Reassess or update with different cultural tourism crafts to check the SNASPE,



including with the advancement (or implementation) of new special technologies (emergency, digital tourist guide on Google Maps or other specialized applications with voice indications for blind users, and of course, in different SNASPE units), reinforcing with the new technologies of the latest generation to support the technological accessibility of tourism or technological innovation in Chilean tourism.

- The competitiveness and accessibility issue of protected natural areas as a private tourist service. Lack of valorization of accessible tourist spaces and improvement of offers, and even of tourist activities and the environment. A bad tourist practices both economic and functional diversity to evolve accessible quality. Therefore, it is recommended to respect the current regulation of accessible tourism and the right of visitors with disabilities, of course, to improve and develop priority needs that include all people who wish to participate or are interested in these accessible cultural tourist activities to make the new decisions of these private companies.
- The incorporation of experts and universal accessibility consultants from the Accessible City Corporation to provide support for inclusive tourism or another organization that dedicates technological innovation to accessible cultural tourism. It is recommended that ICT studies with greater complexity be carried out by SNASPE to manage the implementation of tools for users with disabilities, through the set of inter-ministerial bodies of the Chilean State, however, depending on the areas of tourism, social development, culture, disability, economy, public works, technology, environment, etc.

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