

Perceptions of Disabled People on Public Transport as an Enabler of Inclusive Domestic Tourism in South Africa

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Abstract

The article aims to investigate the perception of disabled people on the public transportation system as an enabler for their participation in domestic accessible tourism and leisure in South Africa. The principles of Grounded Theory guided the methodology to develop a theoretical framework inclusive/ accessible tourism and leisure directly from the collected data. Capability theory informed the study. In-depth interviews only gathered the views (voice) of persons with visible impairments. The data analysis was done using Creswell's qualitative analysis framework. Results revealed that public transport is still inaccessible, unaffordable, unsafe, and inconvenient to most disabled people. In addition, there is a need for improved access, empowerment, and agency of disabled people for effective participation in tourism and leisure. Respondents suggested mechanisms to improve disability-inclusive public transport systems. Obstructs should be reduced for public transport to enable accessible domestic tourism in South Africa. A theoretical framework for inclusive/accessible public transport to enable the effective participation of disabled people in inclusive/accessible domestic tourism and leisure was developed. The ONE Ride business model was developed for Access Human Solutions Pty Ltd's Non-Profit Organisation named ONE Ride, funded by the South African Breweries Foundation and is at the pilot stage.

Keywords: disability; inclusive-public-transport; visible-impairments; one ride; inclusive/accessible domestic tourism

Introduction

At the global level, the Sustainable Development Goals enshrines inclusion (Makuyana & du Plessis, 2022). Hence, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) indicates that the exclusion of people from development is mainly due to gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, or poverty (UNDP, 2016). Albeit development can be inclusive—and reduce poverty—only if all groups of people contribute to creating opportunities, share the benefits of development, and participate in decision-making (UNDP, 2016). In this regard, public transport that supports domestic tourism is not an exception. However, the multifaceted sector requires policymakers to design context-based policies that significantly guide and inform community-based initiatives at a destination when facilitating mobility using public transport systems.

A dilemma exists in that tourism is interdisciplinary and has various areas of knowledge gathered to address socio-economic issues in different geopolitical regions. In most cases, a social science and humanity dimension must be adequately interpreted and understood among private industry role players who prefer exclusive tourism (Jamal & Camargo, 2014). Leading to making public transport appear as not playing a significant role as private transport in tourism. However, Campos et al. (2020) highlighted efforts towards inclusive tourism, mainly by multinational companies like the Apollo Tour operator. In support of the debate, Scheyvens

and Biddulph (2018) believe inclusive thinking upholds a holistic approach toward pursuing more equitable and sustainable outcomes throughout the tourism value chain. Therefore, this study defines inclusive tourism as transformative tourism in which marginalised groups engage in ethical co-production, co-consumption, and benefit-sharing (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018).

In an attempt to further inclusivity, Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) conceptualised inclusive tourism development. Bakker (2019) proposed a conceptual framework for identifying the binding constraints to tourism-driven inclusive growth. Each research provides insights towards widening access to co-consumption, co-production, and benefit-sharing on tourism resources and fosters implications of inclusive growth in tourism development versus pro-poor growth (Bakker & Messerli, 2017). Wall-Reinius et al. (2021) believe inclusive tourism affects the geography of tourism, and mobility and transport (private and public) are critical to the debate. The same applies to access to tourism among persons with disabilities (Wall-Reinius et al., 2023). However, the present study paid attention to public transport systems only. Therefore, inclusive tourism requires re-thinking and re-drawing the tourism 'map' to incorporate experiences and interactions in sites not initially designed for everyone (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018).

In South Africa, Butler and Rogerson (2016) looked at the inclusion of local citizens; however, in this instance, the present study does not intend to further pro-poor and responsibility tourism per se., but to add a layer of disability inclusion as an element of inclusive tourism. Additionally, the study upholds a domestic tourism lens that focuses on the experience that informs perceptions of disabled people on public transport usage when participating in South African tourism. Research has not fully explored disabled people's view of public transport as an enabler of domestic inclusive tourism in South Africa. Such a sector-specific lens contributes to disability inclusion as part of the country's policy decision-making and planning processes of the transport sector, as indicated in the Disability-Disaggregated National Development Plan 2030 (Republic of South Africa. Department of Social Development, 2016). This makes the study contribute insights from passengers with disabilities (whose voice has been missing) towards a more disability-inclusive transport system.

Rogerson (2019) established lessons for inclusive tourism in South Africa based on international travelling experiences. That is, Rogerson (2019) emphasised the need for policymakers in the tourism sector to engage persons with disabilities in policy and policy implementation in the value chain. Interestingly, public transport is central in moving the majority of black South African citizens below the middle-income bracket. On the one hand, the citizens below the middle-income bracket constitute the support structure of people classified as having temporary or permanent disabilities, like obese people, ageing and old age, and people either born or acquired impairments after birth (Darcy et al., 2020). In most cases, persons with disabilities and their support structure prefer tourism resources and modes of transport that accommodate them (TravAbility, 2018). In addition, population groups that fall into categories of having a disability (medical or not medically certified) share similar access needs (World Tourism Organisation [WTO], 2020). Statistics South Africa (2022) indicated that more than 75% of the population of South Africa who make up domestic travel emerge from the visiting friends and relatives- category of travellers below the middle-income bracket. All this points to the need for research to explore perceptions of previously marginalised groups in South Africa from a tourism lens.

Furthermore, WTO (2020) and TravAbility (2020) acknowledged the intersectionality and spectrum of disability among sub-groups of the population with disabilities in communities where tourism resources are situated. In most cases, the tourism distribution system relies on the transport system, which plays a role in the mobility of travellers to and from their destinations (Redstock, 2017). Interestingly, a contrasting environment exists between Global

North and South regarding mobility; for example, most public transport, such as trains and buses, have universal design facilities. In European countries like France, visiting friends and relatives tends to be facilitated by public transport (rail, road, air and water). While in African countries like Zimbabwe, disabled people are discriminated against by the design of the public transport system. Despite universal design features in modes of public transport, Tomej and Liburd (2020) feel a need to improve public transport to facilitate disability-inclusive tourism in the Global North's countryside. However, European cities in countries like Norway have adopted a universal design that nurtures a reliable, comfortable, affordable, and safe transport network that allows travellers to access tourism resources (Redstock, 2017).

The Global South, especially African countries like South Africa, has tourism resources, primarily located in the countryside (rural) and accessed by different modes of public transport that still need essential infrastructural support with universal design to accommodate disability inclusion. Urban areas have been the focus of public infrastructural growth that nurtures tourism and travel (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2022). It is, therefore, necessary to investigate the extent to which disabled population groups like the visually impaired, blind, deaf, hard of hearing, mental health, and mobility, among other visible impairments/disabilities, perceive public transport as an enabler for inclusive domestic tourism such as Visit Friends and Relatives (VFR). The discussion will focus on the enabling dimension of agency, the ability to move (access), and be empowered to actively participate in domestic accessible tourism and leisure (visiting friends and relatives included). The layout of the study is as follows: literature review as a background to the study, the method used in the study, findings, and conclusion, which comprised of implications and contribution of the study to inclusive domestic tourism.

Literature review

Inclusive tourism concept

Inclusive tourism is a topical subject in various academic debate platforms and forums, especially in the Global North. Among other scholars, Münch and Ulrich (2011) opine that inclusive tourism is the same as 'accessible tourism' or 'disabled tourism'. With time, Darcy et al. (2020) investigated the literature on disability tourism. Darcy et al. (2020) concluded that the disability tourism concept as a niche concept evolved into accessible tourism. However, they distinguish it from other forms of inclusion like LGBTQ, pro-poor, and responsible tourism. Nevertheless, the tourism business generally has systemic discrimination, which is costly to the communities (Makuyana & Nzo, 2022), as it seeks exclusivity in production, consumption, and benefit sharing. For example, space tourism costs USD 100 million per person (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018), and the Expedition on Titan submersible ship to view the wrecked Titanic ship for USD 250,000 per person. All this is a form of exclusion, and more examples illustrate that disabled people used to be and still feel that there is systemic exclusion from the leisure activities offered to people without disabilities. However, there are more economic benefits when transport includes all people (Redstock, 2017). Therefore, in the present study, inclusive domestic tourism makes it easy for everyone, regardless of gender, age, disability, or physical status, to enjoy tourism experiences (Münch & Ulrich, 2011).

It is rare to find inclusive domestic tourism in a joint discussion within the transport system debate, especially incorporating almost all disability subgroups' perspectives. In this case, transport services should allow disabled people, elderly travellers, pregnant women, parents pushing their children in strollers, or even people with temporary injuries, such as a broken leg or chronic ailments, to travel for tourism purposes. Their relatives, friends, and other companions also benefit; hence, as opposed to allowing a particular group of non-disabled

people, a more holistic approach should be adopted by public transport to enhance and catalyse accessible tourism for every citizen who is willing and able to travel.

In efforts to create an inclusive transport system, Nyanjom et al. (2018) proposed stakeholder collaboration that should embed control and coordination, communication, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and collaboration and integration. Like any other research on inclusive tourism, accessibility at the destination is deemed central; however, little focus has been set on public transport and transport that enables demand to move to and from the destination (Załoska et al., 2022).

Domestic inclusive tourism

Domestic inclusive tourism focuses on the movement among citizens within a geopolitical area like country-inter- and intra-provincial and district mobility. The National Household Travel Survey (2020) is the most extensive data on household travel patterns that indicated growth in South Africans who travelled, from 42.4 million in 2013 to 45.0 million in 2020. Of the 45 million people who took trips across all provinces, Gauteng (28.2%) had the most significant number of travellers, followed by KwaZulu-Natal (16.9%), Western Cape (11.2%), and Limpopo (11.2%). Northern Cape had the most minor travellers (2.2%). Interestingly, the access need market remains underserved because demographic aspects like disability do not appear in the disaggregated statistics (profiles). NHTS (2020) is silent on population segments classified as having a disability by having a blanketing value indicating 77% of individuals in metropolitan and urban areas travelled around the country, whilst 74.3% of individuals in rural areas travelled in the same period, which was slightly lower than the national percentage of 76.0%. There is a high chance of policymakers maintaining systemic discrimination of access-need people due to the need for more statistical support on domestic travel.

Characteristics of disabled South Africans' travel behaviours

Makuyana et al. (2020) profiled disabled people as an unrealised potentially lucrative tourism market segment in South Africa. However, the cost of living brings concern among policymakers, especially when prices of energy rise, leading to compromise in the affordability of citizens (Venter, 2011). Such situations question how the day-to-day travel to visit friends and relatives among public transport users, like persons with disabilities (Venter, 2011). The designated affordable public transport can boost the mobility of citizens in the middle to low-income earning bracket (Bryceson et al., 2003). According to Venter (2011), evidence on transport expenditure and affordability in South Africa indicates affordability constraints on public transport users and vulnerability to travel expenditure shocks among disabled, elderly, and low-income earning persons. However, a person's location along the urban-rural continuum determines access, severity, safety, reliability, travel patterns, and perceptions, as the NHTS (2020) indicates.

There is anecdotal evidence to support and motivate public transport providers to be inclusive, as the entire tourism value chain has not yet understood disability beyond charity, human rights, and health issues (Makuyana et al., 2022). This study considers inclusion from a business lens and socio-economic cohesion as an underexplored area (Makuyana, 2020). Inclusive tourism is deemed 'rich' and still needs to mature. Such emerges from the Disability Movement that drives it with limited theoretical grounded to transport-tourism knowledge for policy planning and implementation from a South African baseline/scientific research evidence.

Due to the need for geopolitical power in disability and the effects of systemic marginalisation and stigmatisation, the access-needs market in urban areas is eager to travel using public transport like the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS), bullet train, e-hailing, taxis,

and metred taxis as compared to rural-based peers. Gauteng province in South Africa was selected for the study as the area where access-need markets are active socio-economic participants through visiting friends and relatives. Furthermore, disabled people in Gauteng province have a better attitude and expectations for travelling for different purposes like medical tourism and business (job and human capital development included). In addition, inclusive transport has been piloted in this province through the Gautrain, BRTS, and e-hailing services like Uber and Bolt.

Limited literature has scientific documentation on the disability subgroups as part of knowledge co-creation within South African public transport users for tourism. However, the existing tourism-public transport research is generic to a disability and ageing (Marquez et al., 2019), while some focused on visible disabilities/impairments like physical and mobility from limited availability of transport choices lenses (Marquez et al., 2019). Later, Marquez et al. (2022) suggested specialised paratransit service as BRT's feeder. However, one hardly finds research on invisible disabilities like mental health. Interestingly, inclusive/accessible tourism has been considered in South African tourism since 2011 (Makuyana et al., 2020). Hence, there is a need to explore disabled users' perceptions when using public transport for tourism.

Disabled users' perceptions of public transport for South African domestic tourism

Sinha et al. (2020) believe that users' perceptions of public transport vary; however, their expectations must be revised with policy measures. It is, therefore, essential to understand previously marginalised users' perceptions as social and personal identify variables influencing their decision to travel by public transport (Jamei et al., 2022). Just as Mahmoud and Hine (2013), the present study provided information on the daily experience of disabled users and knowledge of the internal process of evaluating perceived access (drivers/barriers, key influencing factors) to the bus (Rapid Transit System), taxis, train (Gautrain/bullet train and metro trains), e-hailing services. Generally, just like other African states, South Africa has highly dissatisfied people with disabilities regarding the extent to which public transport dis(en)able to meet their socio-economic needs of society (Duri & Luke, 2022; Luke & Heyns, 2017). Socio-economic needs like mobility and accessibility remain largely unaddressed (Heyns & Luke, 2016; Luke & Heyns, 2020). This results in most public transport users wishing and aiming to convert to private car ownership and travel as soon as they can afford it (Heyns & Luke, 2016). Nonetheless, the present study explored individual-in-depth experiences among deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired, blind, partially blind/visually impaired, and multiple disabilities as subgroups that have not been given adequate tourism and public transport research attention in South Africa in one study.

Measuring perceptions and expectations of access-need public transport users

The literature review shows a plethora of frameworks that measure user perceptions of accessibility, like the Perception Accessibility Scale (Lättman et al., 2016). Scholars like Friman et al. (2020) linked quality, feeling safe, frequency of travel and perceived accessibility as critical aspects of transport planning. Lättman et al. (2016) believe perceived accessibility is how easy it is to live a satisfactory life using the transport system. According to Van Wee (2016), there are evolving transport system indicators like affordability, reliability, and perceptions within accessibility research. Within such changes, Marquez et al. (2019, 2020) believe that personal autonomy and perceived accessibility affect the transportation choice process of people with mobility impairments. Like Sukhov et al. (2021), the elements discussed in the perception accessibility scale were incorporated into the data collection tool for the present study.

On the one hand, perceived accessibility varies based on income, wheelchair users, mobility impairments caused by ageing, and transit dependence (Marquez et al., 2019; 2020). On the other hand, personal autonomy varies on the mode of transport and purpose of use, which poses the following attributes: waiting time, time taken to reach the mode of transportation, price, and travel time (Marquez et al., 2019; 2020). Individuals with greater autonomy are less willing to pay to reduce waiting and travel times (Tiznado-Aitken et al., 2018).

Tiznado-Aitken et al. (2020) uncovered the varying relationship between accessibility barriers and vulnerable people and a 'hidden' value for buses among various profiled disabled and non-disabled public transport users. Different 'socially constructed' narratives for buses and metro transport emerged (Tiznado-Aitken et al., 2020). Their study revealed a dissimilar perception of the transport environment by gender, age, and location (Tiznado-Aitken et al., 2020). Four key elements that can make a transport system facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in tourism include transport networks, land uses, temporal factors, and individual characteristics (Geurs & Van Wee, 2004). The former three elements are related to transport providers, including transport infrastructure, opportunities, and opening hours (Marquez et al., 2020). The latter refers to users' activity demands, abilities, and time constraints (Marquez et al., 2020). Most research focuses on place- or location-based measures while ignoring the individual dimension and assigning equal accessibility levels to different users (Vecchio et al., 2020; 2022). Space-time accessibility has been used for measuring personal accessibility from a people-based standpoint (Neutens et al., 2012). It led to the conclusion that a quantitative approach to measure accessibility usually does not allow researchers to analyse all the barriers a person experiences while accessing their socio-economic activities at the individual level (Jirón, 2009).

Capability theory

The growth in the application of Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach (CA) in fairness, accessibility and transport research has been witnessed in various geopolitical areas (Bantis & Haworth, 2020; Cao & Hickman, 2019; Luz & Portugal, 2021; Martens, 2016; Pereira et al., 2017). That is, when compared to other mobility and transportation fairness approaches, the CA is better suited to account for individuals and broad diversity aspect that enables interaction, cohesion, transport, and resource usage, how people's opportunities are affected in various contexts, characteristics, aspirations, and choices (Vecchio & Martens, 2021). CA is flexible in expressing complex concepts (Bantis & Haworth, 2020; Martens, 2016; Pereira et al., 2017), helping articulate a broader notion of accessibility that incorporates individuals' characteristics, freedom of choice and human agency as central to the CA's concerns (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). CA states that a person's well-being should be based on their real opportunities to do and be what they reason to value (Sen, 1999). Contrary to Rawl's egalitarian approach (Rawls, 1999), which emphasises the primary goods, Sen argues that commodities or wealthy people have provided limited or indirect information about how well life is going (Sen, 2009).

CA focuses on the well-being that individuals achieve because of what they do and be and what they could potentially do and be. CA's four notions are central in analysing this well-being: resources, the conversion function, functioning, and capabilities. Resources are the commodities and intangible goods available to a person to pursue the life they value. However, a person's characteristics, background, and social-spatial context play a role. Resources are the means to achievement (Sen, 1992). The conversion function determines the possibility of converting resources into freedoms and conveying the personal, social, and environmental conditions that format life experience (Sen, 1992). Functionings are the various things a person

may value “being and doing”, such as being well-nourished, having shelter, and participating in political decisions (Sen, 1992, 2009). Capabilities refer to the set of functionings (the combinations of beings and doings) to which a person has adequate access. Each capability is “whatever [people] can do and be in a variety of areas of life” (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993: 2). In other words, capabilities are the opportunities and freedoms individuals can choose and act (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2009).

Capability theory within disabled public transport user’s perceptions

Although mobility is not addressed directly by the main theorisations of CA (Vecchio & Martens, 2021), some transport researchers consider it a capability (Hananel & Berechman, 2016). That is, Beyazit (2011) views mobility as being physically, socially, and financially able to move from one place to another and interact within or with different societies. Such an understanding is close to the concepts of motility (Flamm & Kaufmann, 2006; Kaufmann, 2002). Motility is defined as how an ‘actor’ appropriates the field of possible action in mobility and uses it to develop personal projects (Kaufmann, 2002)—and potential mobility. A different conceptualisation of CA in transport research is accessibility as a human capability.

In contrast, accessibility shares a similar narrative found in Transport Research on Social Exclusion studies, which refers to persons’ possibility of engaging in various out-of-home activities (Martens, 2016). It implies that a person’s ability to move through space is determined by their ability to translate resources into activity participation (Vecchio & Martens, 2021). Therefore, there is a need to ensure that people move through space and that they reach and participate in socio-economic activities as a capability beyond making mobility a capability to inform social inclusion.

In the present study, accessibility is a human capability incorporating the land-use component. It considers how it interacts with the transport systems components to enhance and enable/facilitate people’s capabilities (Pereira et al., 2017). While accessibility captures people’s possibilities to participate in valued activities, mobility is a means (Bantis & Haworth, 2020; Cao & Hickman, 2019). However, it is not the only one; some accessibility may be acquired virtually. In the accessibility as a human capability approach, resources comprise a wide variety of tangible and immaterial means, particularly related to transport systems and land use, that affect a person’s mobility and accessibility directly or indirectly (Vecchio & Martens, 2021). The value of these resources will depend on the social, environmental, and economic conditions and individuals’ ability (conversion function) to convert them into functionings they value. Functionings are what the individuals do and how, as reflected by their travel behaviour and activities participation pattern (Hickman et al., 2017). The individual’s capabilities are accessibility, represented by the freedom to choose from different potential functionings (ways of moving around and possibilities of activity participation) (Hickman et al., 2017). The individual’s well-being, in turn, is shaped by his capabilities (accessibility) and functionings (travel and activity participation) (Vecchio & Martens, 2021).

Accessibility as a human capability works as a reinforcing cycle. While individuals’ ability to convert resources into actual participation (functionings) influences their well-being, the functionings realised, and the well-being they achieve contribute to improving their conversion function and, consequently, their capabilities (Figure 1). For example, a man using crutches who accesses a park close to his home for exercise (functioning) can have better health (well-being) and face fewer obstacles when boarding public transport vehicles (conversion function). Transport planning approaches to mitigate social exclusion often fetishise resources as the personification of advantage (Nussbaum, 2011; Pereira et al., 2017). These approaches ignore how people’s ability to convert land-use and transport-related resources into capability

and well-being is affected by contingencies, such as personal characteristics, physical environment, and cultural norms (Pereira et al., 2017).

The CA is particularly interested in promoting minimum levels of capability, which is crucial for equality of opportunities and freedom to do things vital for survival and later development (Nussbaum, 2011; Pereira et al., 2017). Some authors sufficiently discuss this idea (Martens, 2016; van Wee & Geurs, 2011; Vecchio & Martens, 2021), which presupposes that everyone should be well off up to a given minimum threshold sufficient to meet their basic needs and ensure their well-being (Lucas et al., 2016). Weak sufficientarianism suggests that improvements for people below the threshold are preferred. In contrast, strong sufficientarianism implies that transport policy should focus on preventing accessibility poverty first and foremost (van der Veen et al., 2020). Public policies aimed to reduce TRSE must be concerned with providing minimum access to essential activities (sufficient functioning) to individuals and a reasonable level of freedom to choose what they want.

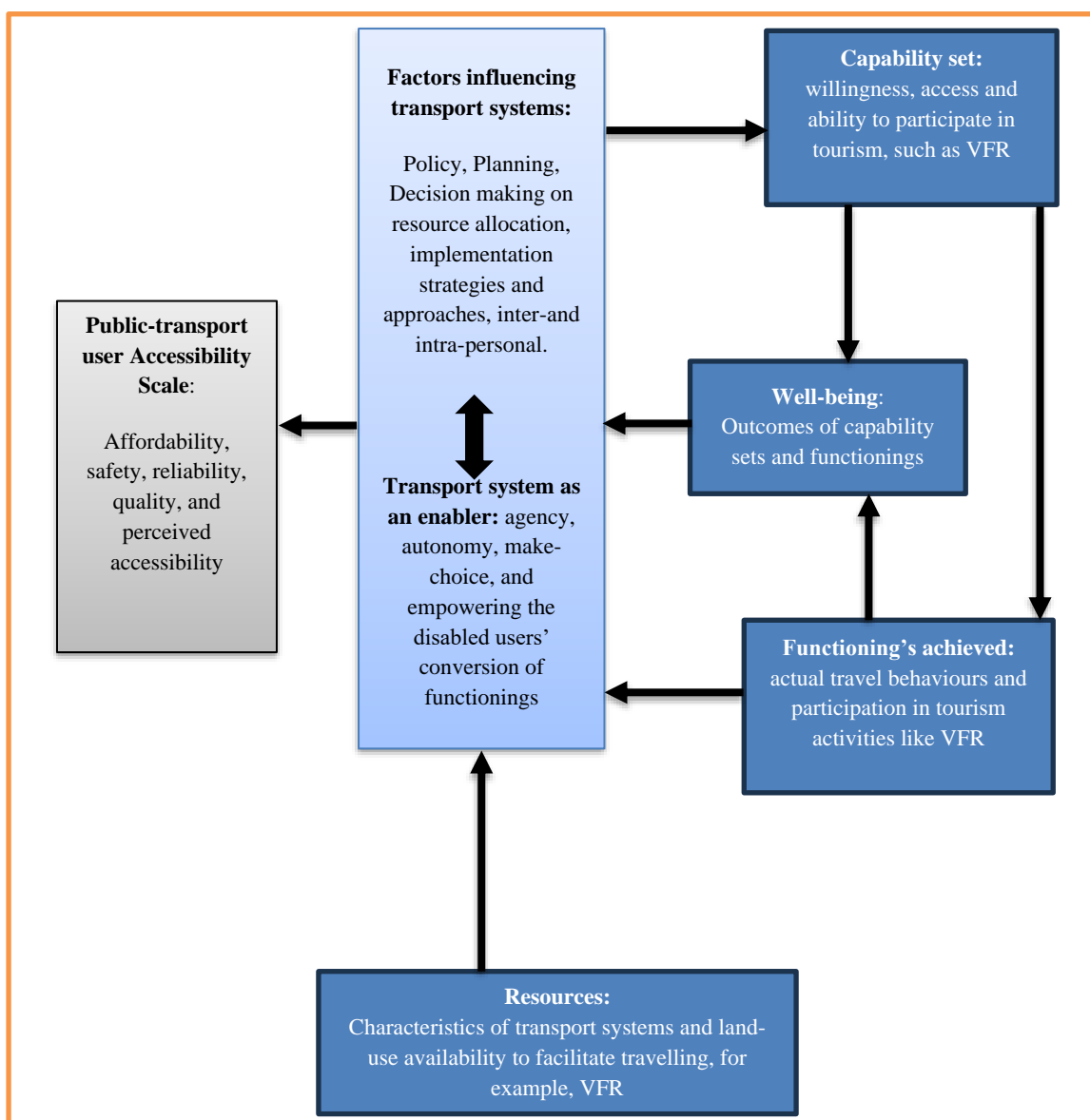


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of public transport as an enabler of inclusive domestic tourism
 Source: Adopted in parts from Capability Approach (Sen,1992; 2009; Vecchio & Martens,2021) and Passenger Accessibility Scale (Lättman et al., 2016; Lättman, Friman, et al., 2016; 2020).

Figure 1 presents a combination of complex interacting aspects partly borrowed from the Perceived Accessibility Scale and Capability Theory. As a conceptual framework, resources are regarded as the characteristics of public transport systems and land use that facilitate travelling. The availability of the resources enables public transport users like persons with disabilities to have agency autonomy, make choices and empower users' conversion of functionings. Furthermore, a direct interaction between factors influencing the transport system as a dimension contributes to the capability set.

The capability set implies willingness, access, and ability to participate in tourism, such as VFR (see Figure 1 above)—such results in achieving functions like actual travel behaviours. The interaction between the capability set and functionings achieved makes well-being an outcome. Nonetheless, well-being and functioning contribute to factors influencing and enabling the public transport system to nurture the conversion of functionings while interacting with resources. The ultimate result of the interaction of the dimensions in Figure 1 seeks to influence public transport users' experiences, in this instance, persons with disabilities' affordability, safety, reliability, quality, and perceived accessibility. Hence, disability-inclusive public transport would enable all disabled people and ageing to participate in domestic accessible tourism and leisure.

Methods

Following Creswell and Poth (2016), a qualitative research design was used. Researchers desired an in-depth understanding of individual dimensions of user experiences to inform how public transport enables disabled population groups to participate fully in domestic tourism. Capability Theory (Nussbaum, 2011; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Sen, 1992, 2009) guided the worldview for the study, and its principles complemented perceived accessibility measuring frameworks (Lättman et al., 2016) as a parameter to assess the role of public transport in enabling disabled citizens to be active participants in different types of domestic South African tourism.

The Gauteng province was the selected geographical area (case study) because the province has the most socio-economic active persons with disabilities, and disability-inclusive transport projects have been initiated and piloted, like the Rapid Transit System (Chakwizira et al., 2021). The province houses the largest population (13725) of South Africans with disabilities under the following categories: blind, visually impaired people, Deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired, intellectual/psychosocial impairments, and multiple impairments (City of Johannesburg, 2021). The sample comprised 60 youth, women, and men above 18 years who gave legal consent to participate. The sample size enabled in-depth and group interviews until data saturation at the fifth group and 31st interviewee.

In-depth interviews with individual and group guides were in English, and e-Deaf Empowerment provided two Sign Language interpreters. The guides were designed to lead the conversation that leads to the co-creation of data on user experiences to inform how public transport enables disabled population subgroups to participate fully in domestic tourism in Gauteng and other provinces in South Africa. The tools were composed of questions that probed to gather functionality (serving its purpose in terms of agency, autonomy and empowering), quality/comfort and accessibility (reasonable accommodation and universal design), reliability (reaching the terminal, waiting and travel time), affordability (cost price), safety and perceived accessibility (information transfer and accessibility/communication) based on their daily experiences as public transport users.

Ethical considerations included study authorisation from gatekeepers. Informed consent was sought and obtained from individuals after explaining the study intentions; participation was voluntary, and one could withdraw at any time if no longer interested. The



gathered data 'voice' would be shared as a consolidated narrative that embeds anonymity as a report for the gatekeepers and the participants. The interviewer sought consent for audio recording and obtained prior interviews.

In-depth individual and group interviews gathered the views (voice) of persons with visible impairments from April 2021 to December 2021. The study adhered to all COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown precaution measures. The study excluded people with invisible impairments, as most of their gatekeepers did not consent to the participation of their beneficiaries. In contrast, others have yet to respond to emails and phone calls. Data collection considered codes and categories expressed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Data collection code, categories, and venue

Identity-Code for the interviewees	Category of interviewees	Type of interview	Type of reasonable accommodation used	Venue
Based on the category Initial Alphabetic letter, the numerical sequence of the interviewee/group and the interview date.	Individual=I	Face-to-face individual interview	Sign Language interpreters	Interviewees' workplace
	Group=G	Face-to-face group interview		

Source: author's compilation

In addition to Table 1, Access Human Solutions Pty Ltd managed access to collected data as the investigation's project owner and lead organisation. Data was stored in a password-locked cloud under the custodian of Access Human Solutions Pty Ltd. The researchers were granted access to the data to develop a report for a project to inform the development of a disability-inclusive public transport service provider and produce an academic article. The research report was presented at South Africa Breweries Foundation's entrepreneurship development platform and shared with gatekeepers and their beneficiaries who participated in the study.

Data analysis

The data was analysed using Creswell's (2013) qualitative analysis framework after the researchers manually transcribed all interview recordings verbatim. The transcribed data was cleaned by thorough reading and collating with notes (gestures/body and voice expressions) that the researchers jotted during each individual and group interview. Each interview response was coded based on the prescribed parameters to hide the respondents' identity in Table 1 above. On the other hand, as the researchers read the transcribed data, codes from content were generated from the responses of each individual and group interview. The researchers then categorised the codes into sub-themes, which emerged from the grouped codes from (the content) data after following parameters adopted partly from the Capability Theory and Perceived Accessibility Scale/measuring frameworks discussed in the literature review section. The sub-themes from the coded data were clustered into themes as the researchers manually analysed the data. The main themes that emerged are functionings, quality/comfort and accessibility, affordability, reliability, and safety, as reported in the findings section below.

Findings and discussions

The demography of the participants was thirty-five females and twenty-five males. Twenty are in the working class, and 40 are in various leadership programs like Information and Communication Technology. Only some participants were willing to share their occupations and qualifications. Nonetheless, the main findings are presented under the following themes:

Functionality

According to G01 (15/04/2021), which was comprised of 10 Deaf and hard-of-hearing people, public transport like taxis does not enable them to feel that it serves its purpose in terms of giving the disabled user agency, autonomy, and empowerment. The sentiment emerged that drivers and vehicles/destination signal boards at the taxi ranks could not communicate their route, leading to drivers dropping them at the wrong destinations in most cases. In addition, they feel not empowered to express choice and decide which taxi to use. The same was observed in responses from G02 (01/05/2021), with 10 participants who are partially blind and G03 (23/07/2021), with 15 multiple disabilities.

A different expression of the same sentiment emerged from twenty persons with mobility impairments, especially females, as they feel disempowered, lack choice and limited autonomy when a stranger lifts them from their wheelchair into various public transport like e-hailing, taxis, and buses. For example, I04 (30/04/2021) said, *'When I make stop signal while being at a bus terminus, when the taxi stops and while I am in the process of boarding the vehicle, other passengers complain that I delay them as I take time to get in the car with my wheel car. The delay comes from the fact that the entry point of the vehicle was not wheelchair friendly. I always ask the driver or other passengers to help me enter the vehicle. It frustrates me and makes me anxious whenever I want to travel, but I do not have a car, and my relatives with cars are out of my proximity'*. This sentiment is shared among all 30 respondents who use a wheelchair. In contrast, the other 30 none-wheelchair users feel that public transport compromises their functionings, however not in the same way expressed by their peers who use wheelchairs. Still, public transport also does not allow them to participate in travelling entirely.

Quality/comfort and accessibility

All sixty respondents indicated that public transport does not nurture good quality experiences, especially taxi-kombis, which were regarded as the most uncomfortable and inaccessible to all subgroups with disabilities. However, about fifteen respondents who stay close to Gautrain stations believe Gautrain has features that uphold reasonable accommodation and universal design, which are usable by most subgroups like deaf, hard-of-hearing, blind, and wheelchair users. The rest (forty-five) indicated they stay in separate areas from the catchment of resources like Gautrain and Rapid Transit System. Hence, their daily commute to work and visiting friends and relatives is still infested with poor-quality travel experiences and inaccessibility.

Affordability

All respondents expressed that they cannot afford the prices charged by public transport, mainly because most routes are served by two or more taxis (taxi-kombis), Rapid Transit buses feeding to the other routes to complete the trip (travelling to and from the destination). Neither disability grants nor payment from work suffice to cover the transport cost in a month-to-month interval.

Within the affordability conversations, the group interviews, which had two leaders of disability people organisation (G02, 20/06/2021), indicated subsidies offered by the government through the South African Revenue Authority to transport providers who are i. interested in configuring their vehicles to be inclusive using universal design, ii. having inclusive vehicles, and iii. renovation of terminals/taxi ranks (infrastructure) to accommodate disabled population subgroups.

I20, with multiple disabilities, including intellectual impairments and mobility, in an interview conducted on 01/12/2021, said, *'As a person who moved from learnership program to the other due to failure to secure a job, it is difficult to use public transport like e-hailing*

that at least offers convenience. I pay almost R100 daily to travel short distances with my wheelchair, which I cannot afford.'

Reliability

All sixty respondents indicated that public transport feels unreliable because they take time to reach the terminal from where they come from and disembark the transport a distance from their destinations. Fifty-five explicitly indicated that they take long waiting and travel time as they need to connect/take one or two more vehicles (taxis, buses, e-hailing) to and from reaching the destination. Only five individual face-to-face interviewees were not interested in answering the question on public transport's reliability.

Safety

The respondents concur that they feel their safety is compromised due to crime when using all forms of public transport when moving within the province. Fifty indicated a lack of information transfer and accessibility/communication to and from disabled passengers, service providers and drivers. At the same time, responses from ten face-to-face interviews perceive their daily experiences using various public transport like e-hailing, taxis, buses and trains as inaccessible, unsafe and inconvenient to most disabled people.

All 60 respondents share a standard view that public transport is still discriminative because the transport facilities designed for inclusion, such as Gautrain, are located to serve specific catchment areas like Sandton City, Pretoria-Bosman, Hartfield, and Johannesburg-Parkstation. In most cases, only high-end travellers access such services. At the same time, forty respondents believe they need reasons to visit such areas frequently. For instance, interviewee I05, who is blind and deaf, in an interview conducted on 26/09/2021, said, *'I am scared to use public transport alone after being harassed in different types of transport since she was 15. Unfortunately, there is no affirmation of being safe when using public transport, including e-hailing. Hence, I do not travel alone, due to a combination of compromised agency, empowerment and autonomy and choice of means to enable my mobility.'*

Suggestions/recommendations from respondents

Despite that, all respondents indicated that tourism-supporting public transport systems still regard disabled people (ageing included) as a niche market and lack the motivation to make public transport inclusive. Interestingly, all respondents provided suggestions composed of ideas and practical mechanisms to improve the disability-inclusive public transport system, for example, having a publicly designated transport system that is initiated, managed, and driven by disabled people who have insights into living as a disabled person while continuously engaging the access-need market. In addition, Disabled People Organisations in the disability space advocate for improvements in access, empowerment, and agency of disabled people through inclusive transport policies that are currently difficult to enforce due to the lack of a disability Act and regulatory mechanisms for sectors like transport and tourism, among others.

Implications

The findings share similarities with Chakwizira et al. (2021), Marquez et al. (2021) and Rogerson and Rogerson (2022) that public transport in South Africa is perceived as inaccessible and lacks agency, autonomy, and empowerment for disabled users. Despite similar views, the abovementioned research focused on vehicles without relating it to tourism. Therefore, the theoretical implications point to the study as unveiling transport from a joint lens of tourism, capability, and perceived accessibility. The present study provides a layer to the debate on public transport as an enabler of domestic inclusive tourism in South Africa.

While indicating the deficiencies, the study offers insights into areas which are vital for disability-inclusive transport to enable accessible tourism as:

- i. the co-creation of knowledge and value co-creation in practices, processes, and management of rural and urban transport systems.
- ii. Empowering everyone with awareness and knowledge of disability can contribute to willingness to change attitudes, perceptions, behavioural outcomes, communication, and a built environment to support accessible public transport.

Furthermore, the study provides practical implications, which include:

- i. Adopting principles of the capability approach in that legislative tools/frameworks nurture empowerment and agency and enable both disabled and non-disabled to access facilities to move from one point to the other using public transport systems.
- ii. Self-representation is feasible if transport providers and infrastructural developers have exposure and are informed of government incentives for disability-inclusive initiatives.
- iii. On the one hand, the study informed the establishment of the ONE Ride business model under Access Human Solutions Pty Ltd's Non-Profit Organisation named ONE Ride, funded by the South African Breweries Foundation and is at the pilot stage.

The study concludes that disabled people perceive the public transportation system as an [dis]enabler for participating in domestic accessible tourism and leisure, especially from a visit to friends and relatives. Therefore, the study uncovered systemic obstructs that the stakeholders like transport operators, designers, developers, and auditors in the public transport sector should consider for disabled people to be empowered and have agency and access (ability to move) to tourism and leisure in South Africa. The study contributes insights towards pro-disability inclusive attitudes, communicable means when passing messages between passengers and operators, and environmental settings that can nurture accessible public transport to enable the effective participation of disabled people in accessible domestic tourism and leisure. The present study was limited to the opinions of disabled people with visible impairments only. Hence, future research can consider hidden impairments and other stakeholders in the transport sector in South Africa.

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