

Education and Training for Disability Awareness of Front Line Hospitality Staff in Selected Hotels in the Cape Winelands

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Abstract

Universal accessibility implies that everybody has an equal chance to access anything, which should also apply to the tourism industry. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation has pleaded that tourism be open to all, despite any impairments. Universal accessibility is not always available to visually, intellectually, mobility, psychiatrically and learning impoverished persons. People with Disabilities are often denied tourist activity pleasures enjoyed by healthy persons. The obvious challenges include restriction of mobility, but few facilities are visually impaired-friendly, besides addressing the other impairments. The study question was to investigate whether hospitality staff are educated or trained to assist people with disabilities to enjoy fully the facilities offered to paying guests at places of accommodation. The study adopted a mixed methodology, following a cluster and convenient sampling framework, focussing on the Cape Winelands area of Cape Town, South Africa. The results indicate that hospitality staff are interested in receiving disability awareness training, but that essential appropriate training would benefit disabled travel as a market segment in South Africa. This study is of material importance to tourism organisations, such as Cape Town Tourism and Wesgro, in promoting tourism in one of the major destinations in world tourism.

Keywords: Accessible tourism, hospitality industry, people with disabilities, tourism barriers, universal accessibility

Introduction

Living with a disability, such as hearing impairment, visual, mobility, intellectual or psychiatric disorder, poses unique challenges and can influence participation in many activities. “Tourism is one such activity that many people with disabilities (PWDs) feel must be sacrificed as it requires an orchestrated cooperation of physical, mental and social capabilities which are often adversely affected or compromised by a disability” (Yau, McKercher & Packer, 2004:946). It



is to meet these challenges that persons employed in accommodation establishments should possess the knowledge, and receive proper education and skills-training, to assist PWDs to experience tourism as able-bodied tourists do, and which should be the function of hospitality-training institutions.

PWDs have the same desire to travel as able-bodied tourists (Anuar, Yahya & Yulia, 2017). Some of the benefits that PWDs enjoy from travelling include a sense of liberation and being in command of their own lives, contributing to the building of their self-esteem and diminishing their self-doubt, feelings that will be dispensed with if the hospitality staff are educated and trained to recognise these desires and respond accordingly. PWDs often report feeling less 'objectified' as they have the opportunity to escape from the accustomed care environment and explore other settings (Bauer, 2018).

In recent years, there has been a great surge in research concerning the "needs and experience of PWDs in the hospitality sector" (Chikuta, Kabote & Chikanya, 2017:131) and disabled tourism has developed rapidly worldwide as an alternative type of tourism (Cengiz, 2016). Nevertheless, disabled travellers still encounter various obstacles which deny them equal access to tourism offerings because of mobility constraints and other conditions such as poor eyesight, hearing difficulties or medical conditions. "The market for travellers with disabilities is a misunderstood and underappreciated segment of the tourism industry" (Kong & Loi, 2017:100). It is recommended that tourism practitioners in destinations should acknowledge PWDs as a distinct market segment and recognise that each traveller has unique needs (Kong & Loi, 2017).

Unconstructive outlooks and behaviours have a negative effect on PWDs resulting in potential undesired consequences, such as diminished sense of worth and reduced participation from individuals. People who experience stress from other individuals owing to their disability, often refrain from visiting places, changing their routines, or even leaving their homes (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2011), so excellent personal service from hospitality staff can have a significant impact on any tourist. There appears to be a shortage of staff that have undergone disability equality training and are capable of relating confidently and effectively with PWDs (Agovino et al., 2017). The lack of disability awareness from hospitality staff often creates more annoyance than physical access issues (Bauer, 2018) and because of this, PWDs "do not feel adequately understood" (Agovino, Casaccia, Garofalo & Marchesano, 2017:62). Consequently, "staff training is crucial to the way PWDs are treated"; "if staff have not had experience of PWDs they will be unsure how to approach people, or act in an appropriate manner" (Darcy & Pegg, 2011:474). The aim of the study was to explore the level of knowledge, skill and experience of front line hospitality staff at accommodation establishments of travellers with a disability, to establish if adequate training in this field would be beneficial to them and improve their confidence levels in interaction with PWDs.

Literature review

Even though it is acknowledged that PWDs are a growing niche market, the global tourism market sometimes belittles or even tries to prevent PWDs from purchasing its products (Popiel, 2016a). For instance, Bauer (2018) reports that in many cases accommodation establishments have hardly any, or even no rooms, suitable for PWDs. Rooms tend to be designed without fully understanding their needs or are situated in unattractive areas of the accommodation establishment. Popiel (2016a) state that people working in the tourism industry do not always feel confident in dealing with PWDs, due to a lack of knowledge of how to engage with them. Front line hospitality staff at some accommodation establishments lack comprehensive training and are often inadequately prepared to assist individuals with disabilities (Cengiz, 2016). Despite the vast potential of the accessible travel market, the tourism industry, in general, pays



little attention to PWDs' distinctive travel demands regarding travel services and facilities preferences, which is different from non-disabled travellers (Ok Lyu, 2017). Front line hospitality staff (all staff who would come in contact with visitors in performing their duties), in general, do not always know how to interact with PWDs and this problem is exacerbated by the fact that each disabled tourist has their own individual needs (Cengiz, 2016).

People with disabilities in tourism

Popiel (2016a:26) defines a disabled person as “someone who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”. Disability can be further explained as having any one or a combination of physical, cognitive/mental, sensory, emotional and/or developmental impairments (Popiel, 2016a). According to Szewczyk (2015), the World Health Organisation (WHO) identifies the following groupings of disabled people to include: People with any form of mobility challenges, also caused by a previous illness or accident; and People who are retarded, with any form of medical condition.

In terms of tourism, PWDs represent an undervalued and misinterpreted sector (Kong & Loi, 2017). Lubbe (2003) noted that PWDs could make the same level of financial contribution to the tourism industry as able-bodied guests but their travel experiences were often less enjoyable because of insufficient accessibility at most facilities. It is usually not a disability that prevents them from partaking in an experience but merely the lack of supportive amenities. This viewpoint is supported by Bauer (2018) who observes that PWDs have been greatly ignored in travel literature.

Many PWDs choose not to travel because their needs are not met in terms of services and facilities (Olya, Gazi, Aksal & Altinay 2017). Bauer (2018) reports that some accommodation establishments have hardly any, or even no rooms, suitable for PWDs. Rooms tend to be designed without fully understanding their needs or are situated in unattractive areas of the accommodation establishment. Examples of inappropriate design include undersized rooms (including toilets and wash areas) that cannot easily accommodate wheelchairs, televisions, desks, light switches and vanities that are placed too high and restaurant areas that are not accessible by wheelchair (Bauer, 2018). However, Lehto, Luo, Miao and Ghiselli (2018) report that a growing interest in PWDs has developed in recent years in the tourism industry.

Accessible tourism

Accessible tourism refers to the course of action needed to guarantee that transport, accommodation, destinations and attractions across the tourism spectrum properly meet the needs of PWDs (Vila, Darcy & Gonzales, 2015). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2019b) supports the notion that accessible tourism for all involves services and products which will be enjoyed uniformly by PWDs, local and outside visitors, senior citizens, families with children and everybody else. Everybody, irrespective of an individual's abilities, should enjoy tourism.

Accessible tourism in South Africa

Bisschoff and Breedts (2012) found that South Africa could not fully benefit from tourism for travellers with disabilities because of the lack of amenities accommodating PWDs. The issue could have been due to the lack of awareness or interest, or even general lack of knowledge regarding the requirements of tourists with disabilities, thus ignoring the financial contribution that these tourists could make to the tourism industry.



Despite the initiatives and strides made, the South African tourism industry has a long way to go to meet the needs of PWDs fully. However, in recent years South Africa has begun to develop facilities and attractions which are more accessible (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2017). South Africa was also a participant in the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which busies itself with the responsibility to take proactive steps to guarantee that the rights of PWDs are brought to attention, valued and looked after in both the work environments and higher education (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2017). South Africa is viewed as a growing inbound tourism market and a prospective powerhouse for the tourism and travel industry (Perks & Ferreira, 2017).

Universal accessibility

UA, which is also referred to as universal design (UD), is another important aspect of the progression of accessible tourism. Even though UA can be difficult to incorporate into the tourism industry, it remains an important principle in gaining higher social sustainability. According to UNWTO (2019a), all travellers require accessible environments, products and services at some point. Examples of this include assistance needed because of pregnancy, some kind of physical or mental impairment, an accident, sickness or poor health, advanced age, particularly bulky baggage or not knowing the setting well enough to navigate it. These circumstances are a concern, not only to tourists but also to the local inhabitants of a destination. In 2016, UNWTO published a handbook titled *Accessible Tourism for All: Principles, Tools and Good Practice*. This reference document for the tourism industry offers recommendations for attaining accessibility in destinations in the most effective and well-organised way possible (UNWTO, 2019a).

Constraints that disabled tourists experience while travelling

Tourism activities should allow PWDs the opportunity to connect with others on a social level and to get to know one another better. “However, there are still barriers limiting participation of some people in tourism” (Popiel, 2016b:109). PWDs make up a group that is greatly varied and each degree of disability is different (Agovino, Casaccia, Garofalo & Marchesano, 2017). “A disabled person with a severe limitation needs more care and specific service than a disabled person with minor limitations” (Agovino et al., 2017:64). PWDs have to consider many factors when they decide to travel: Cengiz (2016) highlights tourism obstacles that affect participation in activities, and hinder a participant’s enjoyment (Figure 1).

Lee et al. (2012), Kong and Loi (2017) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2019) identify three types of barriers affecting PWDs’ preferences and participation in tourist activities. These barriers all fall into one of three categories: structural, interpersonal or intrapersonal. The first type of barrier refers to a physical and/or material difficulty, the second is more symbolic and refers to dealings with people) and how they approach PWDs. The latter points to PWDs’ mental state affected by the applicable impairment in each individual case (Kong & Loi, 2017:101).

- a) Structural: also referred to as environmental barriers, are tangible and substantial (eg checking in for a flight, and accessible airport facilities).
- b) Interpersonal: behavioural and representational and displayed in interaction with others like hospitality staff, fellow tourists and hosts (eg untrained hospitality staff); and
- c) Intrapersonal: psychological obstructions defined by each individual disability (eg lack of information);

Some front line hospitality staff do not always understand the term “accessible” according to (Poria et al., 2011:581). Some might describe an accommodation establishment as accessible

even though it is not, providing inaccurate information about the establishment and facilities to the public. For instance, a waiter at a restaurant located in a hotel might indicate that the restaurant is accessible as it has only one stair. One stair might be a barrier for a person who is in a wheelchair and can be a barrier for a disabled person who needs to use the restrooms, which in turn can be a barrier to fully relaxing and enjoying the restaurant area. (Poria et al., 2011).



Figure 1. External barriers (Source: Inclusion Scotland, 2019)

Study area

The Cape Winelands region, within the Western Cape, (Figure 2) can be seen as representative of small South African towns and the countryside, representing a diverse level of progression. The area is known as South Africa's culinary capital and offers some of the best wines, locally made cheeses, olives, high-quality fruit and organic products (Wesgro, 2019a). The Cape Winelands region includes the wine-producing towns of Wellington, Paarl, Franschhoek and Stellenbosch (Figure 3).

The annual Wesgro data used in this study are gathered throughout the year. Visitor surveys conducted in the Cape Winelands area between January and June 2017 reveal a relatively skewed distribution of international (58.3%) and domestic (41.7%) visitors. Germany (28.7%), the United Kingdom (25.5%) and the Netherlands (10.2%) are among the top international markets. Provincially, these three markets are the greatest contributors in the Western Cape to Europe tourism volumes (Wesgro, 2019b). The information gathered in the 2018 visitor survey mirrored a reasonably similar distribution of international (47.3%) and domestic (52.7%) visitors. Once more, the top three international markets visiting the region were the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany and again these three markets provincially ranked as the strongest contributors to the volume of tourism in the Western Cape (Wesgro, 2019c).



Figure 2: Map of the Western Cape Regions (Source: The Roaming Giraffe, 2019)

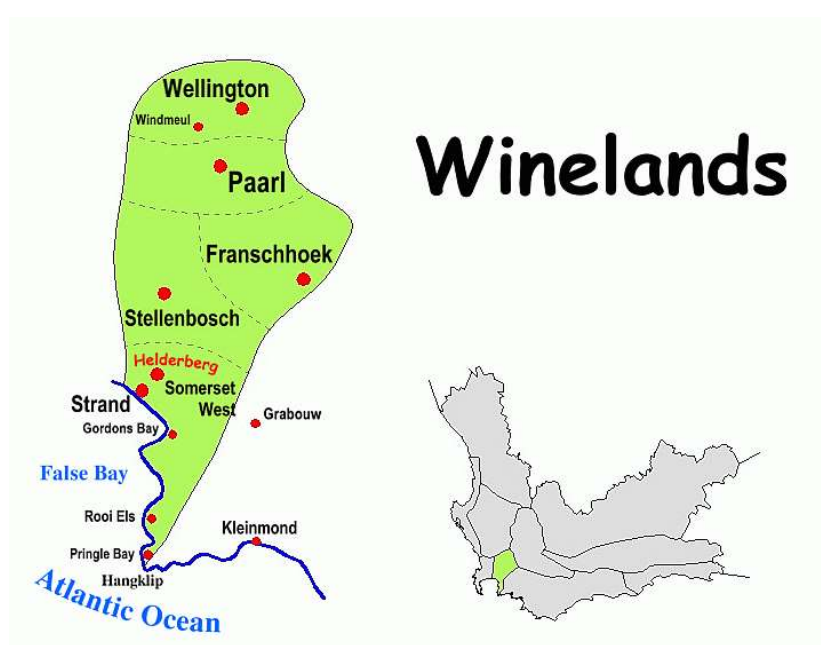


Figure 3: Map of the Cape Winelands (Source: Scapenotes, 2019)

Attitudes of front line hospitality staff towards travellers with disabilities

Horner and Swarbrooke (2016:4) define hospitality as “looking after guests well”. The term ‘hospitality’ has replaced the traditional terms of catering and hotel and includes all organisations that provide guests with drink, food and leisure facilities. Kim and Lehto (2012) believe that front line hospitality staff should be trained to recognise the needs of disabled customers, particularly for those whose disability is less apparent. Cengiz (2016) and Boxall et al. (2018) support Kim and Lehto’s statement and elaborate that hospitality staff also need to understand the particular needs of each disability so that they can assist guests appropriately and avoid maintaining social barriers when interacting with PWDs (Boxall et al., 2018). This involves recognising that their own behaviours and attitudes (for instance, speaking to a computer screen instead of looking straight at a guest with a hearing impairment) can also be



a barrier to the integration of disabled people in the hospitality environment. It is important that hospitality staff make eye contact with disabled guests when they communicate with them and speak clearly, without covering their mouths, which will reduce the level of disability (Boxall et al., 2018).

Attitudinal barriers from hospitality staff are one very important aspect which needs to be focused on as a negative attitude of hospitality staff affects guests' leisure satisfaction. It is essential to remove emotional and sensory barriers as far as possible so that PWDs can enjoy their holiday (Kong & Loi, 2017:101). Kim and Lehto (2012) state that small thoughtless gestures or body language of the service personnel can be exceptionally offensive to disabled consumers or their caretakers.

Accessibility of location and property is the foundation for accommodating PWDs but if front line employees are not trained to deliver good customer service, the needs of PWDs cannot be properly met. (Darcy & Pegg, 2011). It is important that all new staff undergo orientation on disability awareness as soon as they start working at the establishment (Darcy & Pegg, 2011). (Darcy & Pegg, 2011; Cengiz, 2016) elaborate that if front line hospitality staff have not dealt with PWDs before they will be more likely to behave in an inappropriate manner. Olya et al. (2017) state that PWDs prefer to be hosted by someone who is comfortable in dealing with them.

Methodology

The study followed a mixed method approach to identify the importance of disability awareness education and training for hospitality staff in the Cape Winelands area. An exploratory approach was applied, with some qualitative statements included in a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, with provision for interpretative responses. The target group was front line hospitality staff at conveniently selected accommodation establishments situated in the Cape Winelands district. A cluster sampling method was used as only a few accommodation establishments were selected for the research. Simple convenient sampling was then used within cluster sampling where willing participants were approached to complete the questionnaire. The projected sample size was 125 and 111 responded and participation was voluntary. Questionnaires were distributed to 200 identified participants as the aimed-for sample size was 125 and participation was voluntary. According to Israel (2009), a population of 125 (N), "needed 96 respondents (n)" to be considered representative, thus resulting in a 95% level of confidence with a 5% sampling error. primary data, or information collected for the first time for a specific problem at hand, can be used for answering the particular study questions. Primary data will answer specific research questions that secondary data cannot answer (Lamb, Hair, McDonald, Boshoff & Terblanche 2008). Supporting secondary data on UA was obtained from journal articles, including Thompson (2012) and Spencer and Mnqayi (2017), and academic books.

Questionnaires were used to obtain data, which present all respondents with exactly the same series of questions, including three fundamental types of questions: open-ended, closed-ended and scale-response questions. An open-ended question directs respondents to formulate their own words when answering. In contrast, a closed-ended question presents respondents with a limited list of answers from which to choose. The data (results) generated by closed-ended and scaled-response questions are easier to tabulate than open-ended questions because response choices are fixed (Lamb, Hair, McDonald, Boshoff & Terblanche, 2008).

The data was analysed in three stages: a general profile of the respondents was compiled from section A, section B determined the perceptions of hospitality personnel regarding travellers with a disability, while Section C investigated the insight of hospitality staff into travellers with a disability. Likert scale statements were set where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 =



disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. Ethical principles were adhered to, protecting participants' identities, ensuring their anonymity and making participants aware that the questionnaire was voluntary and for academic research purposes only.

The collected primary and secondary data was interpreted, as the value of the research is determined by the results, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, Microsoft Excel, and an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Results and discussion

Only the most important details from the analysis will be discussed. In attempting to determine the perceptions of hospitality staff on UA, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a range of Likert-type statements relating to accessibility and UA. According to literature, the main barriers encountered by PWDs are insufficient physical infrastructure, lack of knowledge and training of hospitality and tourism staff and unreliable and poor disclosure of accessible destinations and products (Camargo, Sanchez, Guajardo & Garcia, 2012).

Table 1 presents a 5-point Likert-type measurement which was used to simplify the interpretation of the explanations for UA at accommodation establishments. In trying to understand hospitality staff's knowledge and perceptions relating to travellers with a disability, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a range of statements relating to PWDs. All points in Table 1 is discussed in this section.

Table 1: Hospitality staff level of importance and understanding regarding universal accessibility.

	Statement	Level of agreement (%)				
		SA	A	N	D	SD
1.	Accessible tourism is an emerging market (possible niche market).	26.5	52	18.6	2	1
2.	Disabled travellers experience more difficulties while travelling than able-bodied travellers do.	52.3	37.6	7.3	0.9	1.8
3.	Disabled travellers have the right to experience tourism products/services to the same extent as able-bodied travellers.	74.5	19.1	2.7	1.8	1.8
4.	The majority of our disabled travellers are foreign travellers.	4.7	8.4	46.7	29.9	10.3
5.	It is important that there is adequate provision of additional facilities at an accommodation establishment for visually impaired travellers.	37	45	13	4	1
6.	It is important that there is adequate provision of additional facilities at an accommodation establishment for audio impaired travellers.	34.7	45.3	14.7	4.2	1.1
7.	It is important that there is adequate provision of additional facilities at an accommodation establishment for both visually and audio-impaired travellers.	36.3	44.1	15.7	2.9	1
8.	It is important that there is adequate provision of additional facilities at an accommodation establishment for intellectually impaired travellers.	35	37.5	22.5	5	0.0
9.	Disabled travellers are satisfied with the accessible tourism products/services the Winelands district currently provides.	7.3	18.3	45	25.7	3.7
10.	Tertiary education and training facilities (universities, colleges and training centres) which offer courses in tourism and hospitality, should include modules in the curriculum that provide guidance on how to interact appropriately with disabled individuals.	52.3	37.8	6.3	1.8	1.8
11.	Disabled travellers generally prefer to travel with friends, family or even employees, who can assist them whilst travelling.	45	45.9	6.3	1.8	0.9
12.	Guide dogs are welcome in most tourism and hospitality establishments.	18	27.9	29.7	18	6.3
13.	Private transport systems (such as chauffeur services and Uber taxis) offer facilities and amenities to accommodate the needs of disabled travellers.	17.8	26.2	30.8	21.5	3.7
14.	Disabled travellers are charged an additional rate due to their disabilities at certain accommodation establishments.	4.6	10.2	27.8	37	20.4
15.	This establishment is accessible to travellers with disabilities.	22.2	34.3	22.2	19.4	1.9
16.	The reception area has an access ramp for travellers with disabilities.	31.1	31.1	11.3	21.7	4.7
17.	The doorways of rooms are wide enough for a wheelchair.	29.9	47.7	16.8	2.8	2.8



18.	The washbasins in the rooms are easily accessible for travellers in a wheelchair.	16	23.6	26.4	28.3	5.7
19.	The bath/shower is disabled friendly.	17	31.1	32.1	16	3.8

It is clear from the responses to the first statement in this questionnaire, “Accessible tourism is an emerging market (possible niche market)”, that respondents recognise PWDs as a niche market and understand the important potential of this market in the industry. According to Kasimati and Ioakimidis (2019), the accessible tourism market is the largest tourist group when considering the number of disabled individuals with temporary or chronic disabilities, the increase in the elderly population and the individuals who accompany PWDs on holidays (caregiver, families and friends). Kasimati and Ioakimidis (2019:33) further state that the “desire and the special needs that this niche source market has, has contributed to the development of the model of accessible tourism”.

Respondents were sympathetic (52.3%) in response to the second statement, “Disabled travellers experience more difficulties while travelling than able-bodied travellers do”. They recognised the basic rights of PWDs, as was clear from the overwhelming support (74.5%) for the statement, “Disabled travellers should have the right to experience tourism products and services the same as able-bodied travellers”. Respondents have the desire to be inclusive and accommodate people with a variety of disabilities, including visual, audio and intellectually impaired travellers. They feel that it is imperative to include sufficient material regarding PWDs in relevant course materials. More than half (52.3%) of the respondents supported the statement, “Tertiary education and training facilities (such as universities, colleges and training centres) which offer courses in tourism and hospitality should include modules in the curriculum that provide guidance on how to interact appropriately with disabled individuals”. Kim, Stonesifer and Han (2012) argue that it is important that reservations staff understand common equipment with which PWDs travel while on holiday.

The following four statements were used to determine the viewpoints of hospitality staff on PWDs who travel to the Cape Winelands district: *The majority of our disabled travellers are foreign travellers.* The Cape Winelands region is popular for PWDs from other countries and 46.7% of respondents indicated that there is a balance between domestic and international travellers, while 29.9% disagreed with the statement. *Disabled travellers are satisfied with the accessible tourism products/services the Winelands district currently provides.* Responses to the statement indicate that there is room for improvement in terms of products and services rendered to disabled travellers. A significant 45% of respondents did not feel that satisfaction in this area was particularly good or bad, 25.6% felt that the level of satisfaction was high, while 29.4% believed services to disabled travellers were insufficient. *Disabled travellers are charged an additional rate at certain accommodation establishments because of their disabilities.* The majority indicated that there is no financial discrimination against disabled travellers, as they are not charged extra rates due to their disability, despite the fact that these travellers may require special facilities in their rooms. *Private transport systems (such as chauffeur services and Uber taxis) offer facilities and amenities to accommodate the needs of disabled travellers.* The majority of the respondents remained neutral about transportation, which meant that they believed the level of inclusivity with regard to transport was acceptable for disabled travellers and did not need improvement. Based on these results, the Cape Winelands region is considered as accessible to PWDs but there is room for improvement. Therefore, it is important for front line hospitality staff to be aware of the demands for UD and accessible environments.

The evenly weighted responses on the adequacy of facilities regarding the needs of PWDs indicate that there is room for growth in this niche market. Kasimati and Ioakimidis (2019) indicate that PWDs are far more likely to take longer trips and become (and remain) loyal clients if they receive excellent service. Considering that PWDs usually travel with



companions, this indeed confirms the huge economic potential the relevant upgrading of facilities and services have for this market. Kasimati and Ioakimidis (2019) add that PWDs generally prefer not to travel alone and are usually accompanied by a caregiver, family member or friend. Some PWDs travel with canine support instead of human companions. A combination of 45.9% of respondents strongly agreed and agreed with the statement that guide dogs are welcome in most tourism and hospitality establishments. Service/guide dogs are defined as “animals that are individually trained to work or perform tasks for persons with disabilities” (Takayanagi & Yamamoto, 2019:2) and play a vital role in the disabled travel market. They can assist individuals who have disabilities such as visual and/or hearing impairment and mobility issues (Takayanagi & Yamamoto, 2019).

Accommodation establishments are legally required to provide access for the service dogs and their owners (Randle & Dolnicar, 2019). The majority of the respondents indicated that the reception area and doorways of their places of employment are accessible to PWDs, particularly to wheelchair travellers but a few respondents indicated that when PWDs enter their rooms they struggle with the bathroom facilities, e.g. washbasin, bath and shower, which are not well enough equipped for disabled travellers. Therefore, accommodation establishments should think beyond the reception and main areas and ensure that all facilities meet the requirements when advertising themselves as disabled friendly. According to Randle and Dolnicar (2019:284), properties sometimes advertise themselves as wheelchair-accessible but they are “not completely wheelchair functional”. For example, a property has a widened entry door, a toilet set out from the wall and a grab rail in the bathroom but the vanity in the bathroom is too high to use from a sitting position and the shower does not have a grab rail and shower chair. In addition, the bathroom and shower floor have glossy tiles which is a slipping hazard for someone already not steady on their feet. In such a case it is not technically inaccurate to say the property is wheelchair accessible. In reality, however, it is significantly lacking in term of being truly accommodating in all aspects for someone in a wheelchair.

Not all physical obstacles can be completely removed, however, some improvements can be made, e.g. avoid loose carpets or floor mats which might be slippery or cause individuals to trip, install handrails in the bathroom, install lights with a dim switch, which can be dialled to the highest level to facilitate visually impaired travellers. Most of these modifications are relatively easy and inexpensive (Randle & Dolnicar, 2019). In addition, Randle and Dolnicar (2019) identify the following points, which accommodation establishments should check before advertising themselves as accessible: step-free access to the accommodation establishment with well-lit and even path to the entrance; wide hallways and doorways throughout the establishment (at least 91cm); wide access to the bed and accessible bed; step-free access to the bathroom with grab bars for the toilet and shower and shower chair; accessible-height toilet; no steps in the public areas; disabled parking space; and a pool hoist.

Table 2: The level of understanding with regard to universal accessibility and its importance for hospitality staff

	Statement	% responses	
		Yes	No
1.	Have you at any point in your career received training which enabled you to deal specifically with disabled travellers?	25.9	74.1
2.	Is the accommodation establishment adapting their amenities/services to accommodate disabled travellers?	65.7	34.3
3.	Does the accommodation establishment advertise their products/services as “accessible”?	57.4	42.6
4.	Have you received any complaints from disabled travellers regarding their experience at the accommodation establishment?	28	72
5.	Are you comfortable with providing services to disabled travellers?	86.9	13.1



Table 2 asked direct questions and the front line respondents had to answer with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The majority of the respondents stated that they had never received any disability awareness training (74.1%), which is a matter of concern, especially since the staff are employed in an industry where they need to provide excellent customer service. Hai-yan and Baum (2006) report that a key element for any organisation to attain competitiveness is to invest in staff and improve their workforce skills. The results of the survey showed that most respondents were unable to assist PWDs as they lacked the necessary skills. However, the majority of respondents indicated that they felt confident and comfortable in providing services to PWDs (86.9%). There seems to be a discrepancy between the level of training of employees in the hospitality industry in terms of disability training and their level of confidence in dealing with PWDs. Further survey data suggests that the respondents have a reasonable understanding of the concept of UD and 65.7% believe their work establishments were adapting appropriately and positively by making the necessary changes to become more accessible. It is important that hospitality staff are trained in-laws and regulations when accommodating PWDs (Randle & Dolnicar, 2019).

The majority of the establishments surveyed advertised themselves as “accessible” (57.4%). This indicates a realisation of the importance of UA and positive change in the industry. It is important for accommodation establishments to be aware that PWDs depend strongly on relevant and accurate information about a destination’s physical and built environment. Randle and Dolnicar (2019) suggest some approaches to overcoming possible communication and information barriers, such as a more detailed description of the establishment’s facilities on websites and adding images so that PWDs can clearly see the precise setup of the public areas and rooms. Hosts are concerned about the liability and safety of PWDs on their premises, that PWDs might injure themselves while staying at their establishment (Randle & Dolnicar, 2019).

A significant majority of the respondents (72%) indicated that they have not received complaints from PWDs staying at their establishments, which suggests that in general, PWDs are satisfied with accessible facilities at the accommodation establishments in the region. This is a positive aspect as PWDs will inform their friends about the good service they received and will most likely return to the establishment and become a repeat client (United Spinal Association, 2019). Kasimati and Ioakimidis (2019:37) indicate that accommodation establishments which have adapted to meet the needs of PWDs, including “better accessibility in physical design, more disabled-friendly rooms and better staff interactions”, would benefit from PWDs as “being disability-friendly equates to greater customer loyalty and thus to higher occupancy levels” (Kim et al., 2012:1317).

Table 3: Additional training which hospitality staff are willing to attend to accommodate disabled travellers

	Statement	(% responses)	
		Yes	No
1.	Would you attend conferences focusing on disability awareness training	95.4	4.6
2.	Training regarding children with autism	85.2	14.8
3.	Assisting travellers with wheelchairs/mobility aids	96.3	3.7
4.	Communicating effectively with travellers with a disability	97.2	2.8
5.	Guiding and orientating travellers who are visually impaired	96.3	3.7
6.	Training in sign language to communicate with hearing-impaired travellers.	90.7	9.3

Most respondents (97.2%) indicated that they would attend relevant training to be better able to assist PWDs, including training related to communication with PWDs. According to



Wakelin-Theron (2014), the South African tourism industry is experiencing a shortage of critical skills and tourism graduates are not properly prepared when they enter the tourism industry. Hence, it is essential that tertiary institutions include in their tourism-related programmes, subjects which contribute towards the development of employability skills, to decrease youth unemployment in South Africa (Wakelin-Theron, 2014). Hai-yan and Baum (2006) argue that employee skills are a crucial operational tool as service determines the success of the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry is highly competitive; the level of service provided by staff distinguishes accommodation establishments from each other and will lead to repeat business and increased profitability (Hai-yan & Baum, 2006).

Kim et al. (2012) found that some PWDs feel that they receive insufficient attention from hospitality staff because some staff are not able to communicate with them accurately. Appropriate disability awareness training will equip hospitality staff to offer excellent customer service to PWDs and capacitate them to understand disabilities such as mobility impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment and ability impairment, including learning difficulties (People First, 2019). Front line hospitality staff should be able to understand their own emotions, biases and misconceptions when serving PWDs and be aware of facilities available in areas which are accessible to PWDs, including accommodation, attractions, transport and restaurants (People First, 2019). Hospitality staff should be aware of the establishment's own facilities and equipment and whether they are equipped to accommodate PWDs (People First, 2019). Kim et al. (2012) recommend that to enhance the quality of service and present policies and procedures for PWDs, the following aspects are addressed in the hospitality industry: improve training for supervisors and employees who communicate with guests on a daily basis to meet the unique requirements of PWDs; have an excellent understanding of accommodation establishment equipment and facilities that pose potential barriers to guests; and create efficient communication sources (for example, advertising, website and pictures) for guests.

Kim et al. (2012) further suggest a unique disability awareness training for hospitality staff to interact with PWDs in a natural manner. If hospitality staff participated in simulations that have the staff use "wheelchairs, walkers, gloves, ankle weights, blindfolds and silencing headphones designed to simulate common disabilities" (Kim et al., 2012:1312), it would allow them to experience how life for a disabled person feels. Paez and Arendt (2014) report that employing individuals with disabilities in the hospitality industry offers advantages to both employees and employers. Employing disabled people could be a practical solution for managers seeking diversification in their workforce by acknowledging diversity in the work environment, which includes different genders, cultures, races and employees with disabilities.

Conclusion and recommendations

The main objective of this research was to determine the extent of disability awareness of hospitality staff at accommodation establishments to verify the importance of disability training for the tourism industry. The need for education is supported by an assessment of the competence levels of staff in this field as well as the economic potential of this niche market. The significance of PWDs as a niche market in the hospitality industry, both in economic and numerical terms, has yet to be fully acknowledged. Considering that 15% of the world's residents have at least one disability, this figure can be expected to rise due to demographic ageing, as people live longer (Agovino et al., 2017). Hospitality staff must be aware of the requirements of PWDs and training in dealing with this group of travellers is essential. Accessible premises are the starting point for providing services but unprepared staff add to the problem (Darcy & Pegg, 2011). It is important for a destination to be aware of the economic importance of disabled tourists and that the service staff and the local community is trained in how to deal with PWDs appropriately.



The study concludes that disability awareness training is essential in the hospitality industry and that the tourism industry in South Africa would benefit from disabled travel as a market segment. The results reveal a positive attitude from hospitality staff who want to receive disability awareness training. Tertiary tourism and hospitality institutions should include disability/sensitivity training in their curricula and provide students with the necessary training/education to interact with PWDs.

Many barriers faced by PWDs are due to the negative attitude of hospitality staff towards them. It is therefore essential to provide training to improve the skills of the hospitality staff. Information on accessibility of premises, equipment and services must be made available at the accommodation establishments. The study data also revealed that many PWDs did not travel as they were uncertain whether the establishment or tourist facility would be able to meet their requirements. A travel voucher scheme or discounted rates for PWDs and their family, friends and carers could be offered to encourage them to travel.

Dimou and Velissariou (2016) argue that making tourism more accessible is not only a social responsibility but it could boost tourism's competitiveness. It is therefore recommended that tourism establishments in the Cape Winelands region are made aware of the economic potential of disabled travel as a niche market. Furthermore, the research indicates that more tourism bodies, such as Cape Town Tourism and Wesgro, should explore the benefits of accessible tourism for the Western Cape and make the public aware of this growing niche market.

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