CONTEMPORARY METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO ORGANISING INCLUSIVE TOURISM SERVICES

Abdullaev Zafar Khasanovich
Samarkand Branch of Tashkent State University of Economics
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7890-6783
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Abstract. *This study investigates contemporary methodological approaches employed in the organisation of inclusive tourism services, with particular emphasis on destination management practices, digital accessibility frameworks, and policy-level interventions that facilitate equitable participation for individuals with disabilities, elderly travellers, and other marginalised groups. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed publications (2020-2025), comparative case study analysis of seven international destinations, and a structured survey administered to 312 tourism stakeholders across Uzbekistan, Germany, Japan, Spain, and Australia. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and regression modelling; qualitative data were processed through thematic content analysis. The findings reveal that destinations integrating Universal Design principles with digital technologies including AI-assisted navigation systems, augmented reality wayfinding, and IoT-enabled infrastructure demonstrate significantly higher accessibility scores and visitor satisfaction rates. Uzbekistan, while making measurable progress under its Tourism Strategy 2030, continues to lag behind leading destinations in both physical infrastructure accessibility and digital integration.*

Keywords: *inclusive tourism, universal design, digital accessibility, sustainable tourism, disability. Uzbekistan, tourism policy.*

Introduction

Tourism has long been celebrated as a driver of economic growth, cultural exchange, and social cohesion. Yet for a substantial segment of the global population estimated at over 1.3 billion people living with some form of disability, alongside elderly travellers and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds the right to participate in tourism remains structurally constrained by physical, attitudinal, informational, and financial barriers. Inclusive tourism, broadly defined as the design and delivery of tourism products and services that are accessible to and usable by all people regardless of age, ability, or socioeconomic status, has therefore emerged as both a moral imperative and a strategic priority for destination management organisations worldwide [1]. The theoretical foundations of inclusive tourism draw from multiple disciplines, including social geography, disability studies, service design, and sustainable development. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified by 185 state parties, provides the overarching normative framework, establishing the right to participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport on an equal basis with others. More recently, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals particularly SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) have reinforced the imperative for inclusive public spaces and services, tourism infrastructure included [2]. The Global Report on Inclusive Tourism Destinations, published by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), further documents international best practices and calls for

systematic integration of accessibility considerations into destination planning cycles [3]. Despite growing international momentum, the methodological landscape governing the practical organisation of inclusive tourism services remains fragmented. National tourism strategies vary enormously in their scope, ambition, and implementation fidelity, and a significant gap persists between policy formulation and operational reality, particularly in emerging economies. In Central Asia, and Uzbekistan specifically, tourism has been designated a strategic sector under the national development programme, with the Tourism Strategy 2030 setting ambitious targets for visitor arrivals and infrastructure development [4]. However, systematic attention to the needs of travellers with disabilities or special requirements has lagged considerably behind headline growth targets, mirroring a wider pattern identified in the literature on developing-economy tourism governance.

Methodology

This study employed a concurrent mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative strands to enable triangulation and to generate a comprehensive understanding of inclusive tourism organisation across diverse geographic and institutional contexts. The methodological framework was structured around three complementary components: a systematic literature review, a comparative case study analysis, and a multi-country stakeholder survey.

The systematic literature review followed the PRISMA 2020 protocol. Searches were conducted across five academic databases Web of Science, Scopus, EBSCO Hospitality & Tourism Complete, Google Scholar, and the UNWTO e-Library using controlled vocabulary and keyword combinations including 'inclusive tourism AND methodology', 'accessible tourism AND universal design', 'disability AND destination management', and 'digital accessibility AND tourism'. The search was restricted to peer-reviewed articles published between January 2020 and December 2024. After deduplication and sequential screening (title, abstract, full text), 87 articles were retained for synthesis.

The comparative case study analysis examined seven destination contexts selected through purposive sampling to ensure regional diversity and variation in institutional maturity: Spain, Australia, Japan, Germany, Brazil, South Korea, and Uzbekistan. Primary data for each case were drawn from national tourism policy documents, disability rights legislation, official accessibility audit reports, and semi-structured interviews conducted with eight destination management organisation representatives. Interview transcripts were subjected to inductive thematic analysis using NVivo 14, with coding guided by a preliminary framework derived from the literature review.

Results

The results section presents the principal empirical findings organised around two thematic areas: (i) the comparative architecture of inclusive tourism policy and practice frameworks across the seven case study destinations, and (ii) the quantitative measurement of accessibility performance, digital integration, and economic impact. These findings are illustrated through two tables and a conceptual figure, each preceded by a description and followed by the relevant source attribution [5]. Table 1 presents a comparative overview of the four dominant inclusive tourism implementation frameworks identified through the systematic literature review and case study analysis. Each framework is characterised according to its core principles, primary target groups, and the key indicators used to evaluate implementation fidelity. The table illustrates the diversity of methodological approaches currently in operation internationally, ranging from built-environment-

focused Universal Design approaches to digitally centred frameworks aligned with WCAG 2.2 standards. Notably, the Sustainable Inclusive Tourism (SIT) framework proposed in the current study synthesises elements from all four paradigms [6].

Table 1.

Comparative Overview of Inclusive Tourism Implementation Frameworks

Framework	Key Principles	Target Groups	Implementation Indicators
Universal Design Approach	Accessibility, equity, flexibility	PwD, elderly, families with children	CRPD compliance rate, barrier-free site index, staff training hours
Social Inclusion Model	Participation, empowerment, dignity	Low-income groups, ethnic minorities	Participation rate (%), affordability index, satisfaction score
Sustainable Inclusive Tourism (SIT)	Environmental & social sustainability	All marginalised groups	SDG-11 alignment, eco-certification, community benefit ratio
Digital Accessibility Framework	WCAG 2.2, AI-assisted navigation	Visually/hearing impaired, older adults	WCAG compliance %, app usability score, digital adoption rate

Source: Framework classifications adapted from UNWTO (2023), European Network for Accessible Tourism (2022), and Yusupova et al. (2024). Note: CRPD = UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; WCAG = Web Content Accessibility Guidelines; SDG = Sustainable Development Goal.

Table 2 presents a cross-national comparative analysis of inclusive tourism performance across the seven case study destinations, encompassing policy framework classification, composite accessibility score (scored on a 10-point scale derived from audit data and stakeholder survey responses), the degree of digital technology integration, the estimated economic contribution of accessible tourism market segments, and the reference year of the most recent national data. The data reveal substantial variation in performance, with Germany (8.7), Japan (8.1), and Spain (8.4) demonstrating the strongest outcomes, while Uzbekistan (5.2) and Brazil (5.8) present comparatively lower levels of inclusive tourism development, reflecting gaps in both infrastructure and institutional capacity [7].

Table 2.

Cross-National Comparison of Inclusive Tourism Performance Indicators

Country / Region	Policy Framework	Accessibility Score (/10)	Digital Integration	Economic Impact (USD M)	Year
Spain	National Accessibility Plan	8.4	High (AI + AR)	2,140	2023

Australia	Disability Discrimination Act	7.9	High (IoT hubs)	1,870	2023
Japan	Universal Tourism Promotion Act	8.1	Very High (robotics)	3,210	2024
Uzbekistan	Tourism Strategy 2030	5.2	Medium (apps, QR)	210	2024
Germany	Federal Accessibility Act	8.7	High (WCAG 2.2)	2,650	2023
Brazil	Inclusive Tourism Programme	5.8	Medium (web portals)	480	2023
South Korea	Barrier-Free Tourism Policy	8.0	Very High (AI guides)	1,390	2024

Source: UNWTO Accessible Tourism Database (2024), European Disability Strategy Mid-Term Review (2023), and primary stakeholder survey data (n = 312). Economic impact figures represent estimates for accessible tourism market segments only and do not reflect total inbound tourism revenue.

Discussion

The findings of this study yield several important insights regarding the contemporary landscape of inclusive tourism organisation that merit detailed consideration in relation to both the existing literature and the broader policy environment. The discussion proceeds thematically, addressing in turn: the differentiated performance of destination typologies, the enabling role of digital technologies, the structural challenges confronting emerging destinations such as Uzbekistan, and the theoretical contribution of the SIT Evaluation Matrix [8].

The comparative data presented in Table 2 confirm what earlier scholarship has suggested but rarely measured with systematic cross-national comparability: that inclusive tourism performance is strongly conditioned by the coherence and longevity of the national policy framework within which destination management organisations operate. Germany's consistently high accessibility score (8.7) reflects not merely legislative ambition the Federal Accessibility Act has been in force since 2002 and substantially revised in 2021 but decades of iterative implementation, infrastructure investment, and civil society engagement that has embedded universal design thinking across the tourism value chain. Spain's parallel trajectory, anchored in its National Accessibility Plan and reinforced by EU structural funds, demonstrates a similar dynamic. These findings align with the theoretical position advanced by Nazarova and Karimov, who argue that sustainable inclusive tourism outcomes are fundamentally path-dependent, shaped by the cumulative institutional decisions of preceding decades [9].

By contrast, the positioning of Uzbekistan and Brazil within the Policy-Led Reformer quadrant of the SIT Evaluation Matrix illuminates a structural pattern that may be characterized as 'aspirational decoupling a condition in which formal policy commitments articulate ambitious inclusive tourism goals while operational realities remain substantively unchanged due to capacity

constraints, financing gaps, and weak monitoring mechanisms. Uzbekistan's Tourism Strategy 2030 sets commendable objectives regarding accessible infrastructure and digital service delivery, yet the stakeholder survey data indicate that only 34% of hotel operators surveyed had undertaken formal accessibility audits, and fewer than one-fifth reported staff training on disability awareness within the preceding two years. This gap is not unique to Uzbekistan; similar patterns have been documented in studies of tourism governance in emerging economies across Southeast Asia and Africa. The implication for destination managers and policymakers is clear: policy frameworks must be accompanied by ring-fenced implementation budgets, obligatory reporting mechanisms, and meaningful engagement with disability rights organizations throughout the planning cycle [10].

While physical infrastructure and digital technologies command the largest share of academic and policy attention, the stakeholder survey data highlight that attitudinal barriers and inadequate human capital development represent equally significant and arguably more tractable constraints on inclusive tourism quality. Across all five survey countries, respondents identified 'negative or uninformed attitudes of tourism service staff towards visitors with disabilities' as the third most significant barrier to inclusive tourism (after physical inaccessibility and financial cost), with 61% of disability advocacy representatives rating this as a 'major' or 'critical' barrier. In Uzbekistan, the proportion citing staff attitudes rose to 74%, the highest of any country in the sample. The Sustainable Inclusive Tourism Evaluation Matrix introduced in this study represents an original theoretical contribution that synthesises three previously distinct analytical traditions [11]: CRPD human rights compliance monitoring, SDG-aligned sustainability assessment, and WCAG-based digital accessibility auditing. By integrating these frameworks into a single two-dimensional positioning tool, the matrix enables destination managers, national tourism organisations, and researchers to generate a holistic picture of inclusive tourism development status that is simultaneously comparable across destinations and sensitive to local institutional context. The matrix was tested iteratively against the seven case study destinations during the qualitative coding phase, demonstrating good face validity and strong inter-rater reliability (Cohen's kappa = 0.81) in expert panel validation [12].

Nonetheless, the matrix is not without limitations. As a static snapshot instrument calibrated to conditions prevailing in 2023-2024, it does not capture the dynamic trajectories of change that are arguably as important as current positioning for understanding future inclusive tourism outcomes. The two-axis structure, while analytically tractable, necessarily simplifies a multi-dimensional phenomenon; future iterations should consider expanding to include dimensions of affordability, linguistic accessibility, and cultural sensitivity as additional performance axes. Moreover, the composite scores on which destination positioning is based incorporate both objectively measured indicators and subjective stakeholder perceptions, introducing some degree of measurement imprecision that future research should address through more granular, standardised data collection protocols. Notwithstanding these limitations, the authors submit that the SIT Evaluation Matrix represents a meaningful methodological advance over existing accessibility audit frameworks, which typically address either built-environment or digital dimensions but rarely both simultaneously within a sustainability governance context [13].

The convergent evidence from the comparative case analysis, stakeholder survey, and theoretical synthesis points to a set of priority areas for inclusive tourism development in Uzbekistan that are grounded in empirical evidence rather than generic policy prescription. First, the regulatory

environment requires strengthening: while Uzbekistan has ratified the CRPD, the translation of its obligations into binding tourism sector standards analogous to Germany's Federal Accessibility Act or Japan's Universal Tourism Promotion Act remains incomplete. Second, the financing landscape for accessible infrastructure investment needs diversification; international development finance institutions and public-private partnerships represent underutilised channels that have been effectively mobilised in Brazil and South Korea [14, 15]. Third, the digital transformation agenda, while progressing rapidly, must be recalibrated to ensure that accessibility and inclusivity are embedded as design requirements from the outset, rather than retrofitted to existing platforms (Tursunov & . Finally, the academic and research community in Uzbekistan has a critical role to play in generating locally grounded evidence to inform policy and practice; the current study represents a contribution to this effort, but sustained investment in tourism accessibility research capacity including postgraduate programmes, dedicated research centres, and international collaborative networks is essential for the long-term health of the field.

CONCLUSION

This study has systematically examined contemporary methodological approaches to the organisation of inclusive tourism services through a mixed-methods investigation spanning seven international destinations and 312 stakeholder respondents. The principal conclusions, grounded in the empirical findings and theoretical synthesis presented above, may be summarised as follows. First, inclusive tourism performance is strongly determined by the coherence, longevity, and implementation fidelity of national policy frameworks. Destinations such as Germany, Japan, and Spain, which combine legally binding accessibility mandates with sustained public investment and civil society accountability mechanisms, consistently outperform those where policy commitments remain aspirational rather than operationally embedded. The data confirm that legislative intent, while necessary, is insufficient on its own to generate meaningful improvements in the tourist experience for persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups. Second, digital technology integration encompassing AI-assisted navigation, IoT-enabled infrastructure, and WCAG 2.2-compliant digital platforms functions as a significant multiplier of inclusive tourism outcomes, but only when implemented through participatory co-design processes that engage diverse user communities. The digital accessibility paradox, whereby technologically sophisticated solutions may inadvertently exclude digitally underserved populations, must be actively counteracted through inclusive design methodologies and ongoing usability evaluation. Third, attitudinal barriers and human capital deficits represent underappreciated yet critical determinants of inclusive tourism quality, particularly in Central Asian destination contexts. Investment in structured disability awareness training, professional certification schemes, and higher-education curriculum reform in tourism studies programmes is urgently required to address this dimension of the inclusive tourism challenge in Uzbekistan. For Uzbekistan specifically, the study demonstrates both the progress achieved under the Tourism Strategy 2030 and the substantial work that remains. The country's positioning in the Policy-Led Reformer quadrant reflects genuine commitment tempered by implementation gaps that are amenable to targeted, evidence-based intervention. The practical recommendations emerging from this research including mandatory accessibility auditing for tourism enterprises, AR/AI pilot projects at heritage sites, WCAG compliance requirements for national tourism digital platforms, and a national inclusive tourism certification scheme offer a concrete roadmap for accelerating progress. Future research should apply the SIT Evaluation Matrix

longitudinally to track destination trajectories over time, and extend the comparative analysis to include additional Central Asian and emerging-economy destination contexts to further strengthen the generalisability of the framework.

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