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Istanbul Inspirations

Case: A Study on the Accessibility of Historical Attractions

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Istanbul Inspirations
Case: A Study on the Accessibility of Historical Attractions

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Istanbul Inspirations - Case: A Study on the Accessibility of Historical Attractions

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The aim of this thesis was to find out the current level of accessibility in few of the most important and historical tourist attractions in the city of Istanbul: Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia Museum and Blue Mosque. Also the accessibility of the surrounding area, Sultanahmet Square, and the transportation possibilities were assessed, for finding out how easily a person with disability or restriction can reach the selected attractions. The further purpose for the study was to find out if Istanbul would be ready to acquire an accessible image for itself and to enter the field of accessible tourism.

Istanbul is one of today's most popular urban destinations. In 2013 there were more than 10 million visitors to the city and it has been on the MasterCard Worldwide top ten list of "destination cities by international overnight visitors" for several years. Istanbul is known for its long history, diverse culture, beautiful architecture and also modern lifestyle.

Accessibility on the other hand is a growingly important global trend in tourism, and a subject which affects a great fraction of the world's population. The term "accessible", also referred to as "barrier-free" and "suitable for all", signifies that the products, services and environments can be accessed by everyone with equity and dignity. Accessibility is usually related to those with disabilities and according to World Health Organization (WHO 2011), there are approximately billion persons with disabilities in the world. Accessible tourism is a branch of tourism which takes into consideration and fullfills the special needs of the disabled tourists. It offers great business opportunities due to the huge number of prospective customers. The number of disabled people is even expected to rise due to ageing of the world population. Moreover it is important to realize that accessibility is beneficial to everyone and if products, services and environments are well designed to be suitable for all, it is unlikely to harm anyone.

The research was conducted with qualitative methods. The author visited the attractions and used the public transportation for collecting data, such as pictures, notes and measurements. Hence the main method in the study was observing the chosen places in person. Also one brief interview was conducted. The main study took place on 15th of August 2014 and also some observation was done during September and October.

The results of the study showed that there has been efforts for making the attractions and transportation more accessible, but there is still a lot to be done before these attractions can be referred to as "suitable for all". Out of the attractions Hippodrome was the most accessible, while Hagia Sophia Museum and Blue Mosque got bit lower grades and had many barriers. The transportation possibilities where found to be relatively good and with least barriers. In turn, when considering the type of disability, it was found that persons who are blind or in a wheelchair face the most issues. All in all persons with visual and mobility related impairment seemed to confront more barriers than those with hearing impairment. Altogether it was found that Istanbul is not ready to be promoted as accessible destination yet. However, the results were encouraging because there has been developments done or under planning.

Keywords: Accessibility, destination image, historical attractions, Istanbul, urban tourism

Heiskanen Janni-Julia

Inspiroiva Istanbul - Tapaus: Tutkimus historiallisten nähtävyyksien esteettömyydestä

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli selvittää esteettömyyden taso muutamissa Istanbulin tärkeämissä historiallisissa nähtävyyksissä. Tutkimuskohteiksi valikoituivat Hippodromin vanha hevosareena, Hagia Sofia museo sekä Sininen moskeija. Lisäksi nähtävyyksiä ympäröivä Sultanahmetin aukio sekä kulkuyhteydet alueelle olivat tutkimuksessa mukana. Näin tutkija pystyi selvittämään nähtävyyksien esteettömyyden lisäksi, myös onko vammaisten ja rajoittuneiden ihmisten mahdollista kulkea niihin ilman esteitä. Tutkimuksen syvempi tarkoitus oli saada käsitys siitä olisiko Istanbul valmis saavuttamaan esteettömän imagon ja ottamaan esteettömän matkailun asiakseen.

Istanbul on yksi tämän päivän suosituimmista kaupunkikohteista. Vuonna 2013 kaupungissa kävi yli 10 miljoona vierailijaa ja se on ollut jo vuosia kymmenen parhaan joukossa MasterCard Worldwide:n listoilla kaupunkikohteiden kansainvälisten vierailijamäärien perusteella. Istanbul on kuuluisa muun muassa pitkästä historiastaan, monipuolistesta kulttuuristaan, kauniista arkkitehtuuristaan sekä modernista elämänmenosta.

Esteettömyys puolestaan on jatkuvasti tärkeämmäksi muodustuva globaali trendi matkailualalla ja asia joka koskettaa suurta osaa mailman väestöstä. Termillä "esteettömyys" viitataan siihen että tuotteet, palvelut ja tilat ovat tasa-arvoisesti kaikkien käytettävissä, ilman että kukaan menettää arvokkuutensa. Esteettömyys ja sen tarve yleensä liitetään ihmisiin joilla on jokin vamma ja Maailman Terveysjärjestö WHO:n mukaan mailman väestöstä jopa noin miljardi kärsii jonkinlaisesta vammasta. Esteetön matkailu on matkailun muoto, jossa otetaan huomioon ja vastataan vammaisten sekä rajoittuneiden matkailijoiden erityistarpeisiin. Esteetön matkailu tarjoaakin paljon liiketoimintamahdollisuuksia suuren potentiaalisen asiakaskunnan vuoksi. Vammaisten määrän uskotaan jopa kasvavan väestön vanhenemisen myötä. Myöskin tärkeää on ymmärtää että esteettömyydestä hyötyvät kaikki, eikä kaikille sopiviksi suunnitelluista tuotteista, palveluista ja tiloista ole haittaa kenellekään.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tutkimus oli luonteeltaan laadullinen. Tutkija vieraili tutkimuskohteissa ja keräsi tutkimusmateriaalia, kuten kuvia, muistiinpanoja ja mittaustuloksia. Tärkein tutkimusmenetelmä oli siis kohteiden tarkkailu paikan päällä. Tutkija suoritti myös yhden lyhyen haastattelun. Pääosin tutkimus suoritettiin 15 elokuuta, mutta tutkija tarkkaili esteettömyyttä hieman myös syyskuun ja lokakuun aikana.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat että vaikka nähtävyyksien esteettömyyttä onkin pyritty kohentamaan, vielä on paljon tehtävää ennen kuin ne ovat kaikille soveltuvia. Tutkimuksen mukaan Hippodromi on valituista nähtävyyksistä esteettömin, kun taas Hagia Sofiassa ja Sininessä moskeijassa oli vielä monia esteitä ja ne saivat siten alhaisemmat arvosanat. Kulkuyhteydet puolestaan olivat kohtuullisen hyvät ja kaikkein esteettömmät. Jos puolestaan viitataan vamman laatuun, tutkimus osoittaa että sokeat ja pyörätuolin käyttäjät kohtaavat eniten esteitä. Yleisesti ottaen näkövammaiset ja liikuntarajoitteiset vaikuttavat olevan huonommassa asemassa kuin kuulovammaiset. Kaiken kaikkiaan tutkimuksesta kävi ilmi että Istanbul ei ole vielä valmis laajasti vastaamaan esteettömän matkailun tarpeisiin, mutta tulokset olivat rohkaisevia, sillä yrittystä selkeästi löytyy ja muutoksia on tehty.

Asiasanat: Esteettömyys, historialliset nähtävyydet, Istanbul, kaupunkimatkailu, matkakohteen imago

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1 Introduction

This bachelor's thesis deals with the subject of accessibility in the context of urban tourism and historical attractions of Istanbul. The metropolitan city of Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey, is one of the top urban tourism destinations in today's world and known for its historical heritage and vivid culture. Istanbul is chosen to be the set for the research in this paper due to its touristic importance and the author's personal relationship and experiences in the city. Accessibility on the other hand is one of the growing global trends in tourism. As a result of ageing world population and increasing importance of disabled persons' dignity and right for life without social or physical barriers, accessible tourism, also known as "barrier free tourism" and "tourism for all", has become a significant phenomenon that should not be understated. The importance of including the disabled people in tourism has already been recognized by United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 1991 and it is recommended by the organization that all its member countries invest in eliminating the existing barriers and enhance accessibility in tourism (UNWTO 2010; 2013).

As an UNWTO member country, Turkey has also experienced some progress when it comes to accessibility. The Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TÜRSAB) has for example established Accessible Tourism for All -committee in 2006 for supporting accessible tourism in Turkey. Hence it can be assumed that there has been efforts done in Istanbul, the largest city of Turkey, for enhancing accessibility. However, it is important to investigate and determine the current level of accessibility in the city and its tourism sites in order to increase and promote accessibility successfully (UNWTO 2013). So, in this paper the level of accessibility of three historically important tourist attractions in Istanbul, Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia museum and Blue Mosque, is assessed.

This paper begins with introducing the background of the research, explaining the purpose and objectives of the study, defining the research question and limitations as well as explaining briefly why this subject has been chosen by the author. The rest of the paper consists of theory section and chapters related with the research and its findings. The author also suggests some further research topics and evaluates her thesis project in the end.

The theory section, chapters 3 to 6, provides many-sided information of Istanbul as a tourism destination. The section starts with a chapter introducing the history of Istanbul and the tourist attractions chosen for the study: Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia Museum and Blue Mosque. Also an insight to the culture of Turkey and the city is given. The history and culture of Istanbul are introduced because they are important factors for the city's tourism and also have influence on the accessibility. Istanbul's tourism figures, such as visitor amounts, competitive advantages and customer profile constitute the second part of the theory section by providing

more specific information on the tourism of the city. Following, the destination image and branding of the city and the importance of the image in today's world is discussed. Finally, the last part of the theory section handles accessibility in terms of tourism and Istanbul.

The research and findings part, chapters 7 and 8, narrates the practical research of this thesis. The way of formulating the research question and setting limitations is explained together with introduction to the methods and criteria used in the study. The research is conducted with qualitative methods, such as photographing, measuring and observing the attractions in person. The purpose is to find out how accessible the chosen attractions are at the moment and to evaluate if accessible tourism could be promoted in the area. In addition to the attractions, the surrounding area and the transportation possibilities are assessed. The research question to be answered in this paper was set to be: How accessible are few of the most important tourist attractions in Istanbul, Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia museum and Blue Mosque, and is it possible for the disabled persons to reach these attractions without facing barriers? Also improvement suggestions are given in the end.

2 Research Background

The author of this thesis has been fascinated with the city of Istanbul for several years. She has visited Istanbul several times a year since 2010 and lost her heart for the city. She moved to Istanbul in March 2014 for conducting a study related internship and has been living in the city ever since. The author's internship took place in a Finnish tourism related company, which gave her deeper insight to the tourism industry and customer profile of the city. During her time in Istanbul, she has been able to experience and observe what the city has to offer and also what there is to be developed.

The idea for this thesis subject sparked from a study unit which the author took part in at spring 2014. The study unit dealt with accessible tourism and included a small research on the subject. As the author was already residing in Istanbul when the small research was to be conducted for the study unit, she decided to observe and analyse the accessibility of public transportation in the city. After seeing the potential and lacks in the city's accessibility, as well as noticing that many of the Finnish tourists using the services of her internship company were elderly people with some physical limitations, she decided to take on this thesis. The author felt eager to learn more about the state of accessibility in the city, and especially its tourist attractions. Hopefully the research results will give useful information on the accessibility of the city, create awareness on the issue of accessibility in tourism and maybe even facilitate development in the area.

2.1 Purpose and Objectives

Accessibility is the word of today and an important aspect of sustainable tourism (UNWTO 2013). This thesis aims to provide an analysis on the level of accessibility of three well-known historical tourist attractions in Istanbul. The idea is to pay attention to the different aspects of accessibility, not only for those in wheelchair, although for many, accessibility is often centered around mobility disabilities. Hence, the special needs of those with reduced mobility, visual or hearing impairments as well as families and the elderly are kept in mind while conducting the research. The study is aimed for finding out how well the disabled tourists can manage in the chosen environments without the help of a special guide and the results may be used for developing and enhancing accessibility in the historical Sultanahmet Square of Istanbul and its attractions: Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia Museum and Blue Mosque. Also the transportation possibilities to these attractions is assessed. The aim is to find out if the area is ready for being promoted as barrier-free and weather or not accessible tourism packages could be created there.

2.2 Research Question and Limitations of the Study

The main research question of this study is formed as: How accessible are few of the most important tourist attractions in Istanbul, Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia museum and Blue Mosque, and is it possible for the disabled persons to reach these attractions without facing barriers? Also the results of the research are used to see if an accessible image for the city could be created and whether or not Istanbul could be promoted as an accessible destination.

The study had to be limited to only three attractions due to their size as well as the fact that this is a bachelor's thesis. The attractions chosen for this study are very well-known and monumental. They all have great historical and cultural importance and are on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites list (UNESCO 2014). Also at past they have had some religious importance. Moreover, Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque have developed into symbols of the city.

In addition to the attractions, the accessibility of transportation in the area is taken into consideration. This is done because if the attractions are accessible, but there is no way for the disabled tourists to reach them, then those attractions should not be promoted in terms of accessible tourism. Hence, a brief evaluation of the transportation was seen as necessary by the author in order for the study to provide a realistic picture of the potential of the chosen attractions to serve the disabled customers. Also in this way the research would be more beneficial as the attractions need accessible transportation to hotels and other attractions.

3 The Historical and Multicultural City of Istanbul

Istanbul is the largest and most populous city in Turkey, inhabiting more than 14 million people (Turkish Statistical Institute 2013). The city is located at the North-West of Turkey, spreading on both the European and Asian continents separated by the Strait of Bosphorus. Istanbul is in fact only city in the world laid out on two continents. Istanbul is also a city with diverse culture and a long intriguing history because it has been the capital of two great empires; The Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Nowadays Istanbul is the industrial, economic, entertainment and educational center of Turkey (Ayyildiz 2009). Also according to Alvarez and Yarcın (2010) Istanbul is developing into a world city with its growing offer of cultural activities together with its history, multiculturalism and economic development.

In this chapter, the history of the city and the selected attractions for this study, Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia Museum and Blue Mosque, are briefly introduced. Also the culture of the city and the people living in it are under inspection. These subjects are important for realizing the significance of this city for the local people as well as tourism in Turkey. There are also factors that have influence on the accessibility of the city. The long history for example attracts many people, but at the same time sets limits for modifying the attractions. Also the lively culture and happenings in the city attract many people, but the attitudes of the local people can be hindrance for development.

3.1 Brief history of Istanbul

Istanbul, formerly known as Constantinople, New Rome and Byzantium, has been the capital of two great Empires; the Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman Empire. The city has also been part of Latin and Roman Empires and its story goes back several thousands of years. (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2008c; Ziyrek 2009). There are endless of books written of the city's long life, but in this paper the history is only briefly introduced in order to underline its historical importance and to understand why the city is luring visitors with its history.

It is believed that a city in the whereabouts of Istanbul was first established by Greek colonist Byzas around 680 BC as Byzantium. However there are legends and archaeological findings which suggest that there have been communities living in the area even as early as 5000 BC. In the following centuries after establishment of Byzantium, the leadership of the city changed from ruler to another, including Greek, Persian and Spartan rulers until it became part of the Roman Empire. In 330 AD the previously pagan city was re-established as a Christian city by Constantine the Great. The city was renamed as "the New Rome" and made the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2008c; Hermans 1993.)

After the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century, the Eastern Rome, which is nowadays referred to as the Byzantine Empire, continued to flourish with the New Rome as its capital. Quickly, the city started to be known as Constantinople, named after the great emperor who made the city as glorious as it was. Constantinople was very suitable for its status as the capital of the Empire due to its location at the crossing point of the main roads and sea routes. The city kept its glory long until the 6th century when it experienced its another “golden era” under the rule of Emperor Justinian who constructed many monumental buildings such as Hagia Sophia church. (Ayyildiz 2009; Ziyrek 2009.)

After the period of Emperor Justinian the Byzantine Empire faced multiple attacks of Arabs and Persians as well as struggled with inner power battles. Constantinople was finally invaded by Latins in 1204. The invasion took place as part of the Fourth Crusade and the city was conquered easily by the well-equipped army. Unfortunately the Catholic crusaders looted the Orthodox city and robbed most of the valuables from it. This made the once prosperous city lose its glory. (Ayyildiz 2009; Hermans 1993.)

In May 1453 Constantinople was conquered by Sultan Mehmed II, Mehmed the Conqueror, a young emperor of the Ottoman Empire. The city was made the capital of Ottoman Empire immediately after victory and was restored to its old glory. Mostly no harm was done to the existing structures while rebuilding the city, but many of the important churches, such as Hagia Sophia, were converted into mosques by the new Islamic rulers. Interestingly, it has even been stated that a great proportion of the local people at the time preferred the governance of the Ottoman Turks to the previous Latins conquerors because the new conquerors were more respectful towards the locals than the previous ones. The non-Muslim residents were given freedom of religion under certain regulations and not forced to convert to the ruling religion, Islam. (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2008e; Ziyrek 2009.)

As the capital of Ottoman Empire and the Islamic World, the city once again prospered for hundreds of years. However, after the collapse of Ottoman Empire following World War I and after the formation of Republic of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Istanbul was stripped off its capital status. This was also the times when the city became worldwide known as Istanbul instead of Constantinople. Despite no longer being the capital, Istanbul has remained until today as the largest and most important city of Turkey and has grown to a global city. Istanbul has high historical, defensive, industrial and economic importance for the country. Also the popularity of the city as a tourism destination, due to its rich historical background together with the multiculturalism and new modern lifestyle, is notable. (Alvarez & Yarkan 2010; Ayyildiz 2009.)

The history attracts many visitors and has brought a place on the World Heritage list for great number of attractions in the city, for example Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia museum and Blue mosque (UNESCO 2014). This is a competitive advantage for the city and creates a pull-factor for these attractions by highlighting their importance. Due to their historical importance and beauty it would also be important that everyone would be offered the chance to visit and admire them. However the architectural style and restrictions on modification of the buildings, can set some challenges for increasing their accessibility.

3.2 Historical Tourist Attractions in the City

There is a lot to see in Istanbul due to the city's long history and well preserved historical sites. Some of the most historical and well-known attractions in the city are Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia museum, Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace, Basilica Cistern, Grand Bazaar, Galata Tower, Dolmabahce Palace, Beylerbeyi Summer Palace, Maiden Tower and the list goes on (Grafik-Aski 2013). More detailed information on three historical attractions, Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia museum and Blue Mosque, are given below because they are in the center of the accessibility research in this paper. The other attractions are not introduced in detail as it has been identified by the author as unnecessary for this study.

3.2.1 Hippodrome

The word Hippodrome derives from Greek words "hippos" meaning horse and "dromos" referring to a racing track. Hippodrome has been a venue for countless chariot races and circus performances. During Roman and Byzantine Empires, there were 2-4 horse chariot races at the arena together with other forms of entertainment such as musicians, dances, acrobats and animal trainers on daily bases. The Hippodrome was the center of leisure time, which the citizens of Roman Empire had plenty. (Ayyildiz 2009, 22-25.)

According to many researchers the first hippodrome was built in the city when it was still called Byzantium. However the Hippodrome of Constantinople, of which parts are still remaining, was built around 200 AD by Emperor Septimus Severus after the city had become part of the Roman Empire. Later the arena was renovated by Constantine the Great which often creates a false image that the spot was actually built by him. The historians have distinctive views on the size of the arena but it has been suggested it was more than 400 m long and 100 m wide and could seat even 100 000 viewers (Ziyrek 2009, 9). It was built imitating Circus Maximus in Rome and the arena was U-shaped with many monuments brought from all around the Empire decorating it (Hermans 1993). Three of these monuments, Egyptian Obelisk, Serpent's Column and Column of Constantine, are still available for people to see at the otherwise demolished Hippodrome. There is also a more recent addition to the Hippodrome,

German Fountain, a gift to sultan Abdülhamid II from German emperor Wilhelm II, as a mark of their alliance. (Ziyrek 2009, 9-17.)

The Egyptian Obelisk is the oldest monument in Istanbul and approximately 3500 years old. It has been built by ancient Egyptian ruler Tutmosis III and was brought to Constantinople by emperor Theodosius the Great in 390s. The hieroglyphs decorating the 20 meter tall granite obelisk tell about pharaoh Tutmosis and Egyptian god, Amon-Ra. The marble block, on top of which the obelisk has been set, is carved at the time of Theodosius and tells story of the emperors rule and erecting the obelisk. (Ziyrek 2009, 14.)

The Serpent Column used to be a statue of three snakes twisted together. It has lost its resemblance of snakes in time because the heads have fallen of. It is said that the bronze monument was built of Persian soldiers shields after Greeks defeated them in a fight around 5th century BC. It was brought to Hippodrome of Constantinople from temple of Apollo in Delhi in 324 by Constantine the Great. (Ayyildiz 2009, 25.)

The third monument, Colum of Constantine, also known as the Stone Obelisk or Wall Obelisk, has been actually built for the hippodrome and not brought from somewhere else. It was renovated by Constantine VII in 10th century, but the original builder or building time is unknown. However, what is known, is that it used to be covered by gilded bronze plates which where stolen by Crusades around 1200s. (Ayyildiz 2009, 24-25; Ziyrek 2009, 12.)

There is no entrance fee to the Hippodrome and everyone can admire the monuments free of charge. There are also no opening hours as the arena is located in open air on Sultanahmet Square. Moreover there are no limitations for taking pictures so one can view the monuments freely.

3.2.2 Hagia Sophia Museum

Hagia Sophia is one of the most significant buildings in Istanbul and has a history of almost 1500 years. Archaeologist Ilhan Aksit describes Hagia Sophia in his publication as “one of the greatest monuments in the history of civilization” and the building has even been called “the eighth wonder of the world”. This magnificent Byzantine church was dedicated to the Holy Wisdom, in Greek “Theia Sophia”, and its name arrives from this dedication. After the Ottomans conquered Istanbul in 1453 the church was transferred into a mosque and later in 20th century into a museum by Atatürk. Hagia Sophia is an important tourist attraction as a museum, but many local people are supporting the idea of converting the building back to be a mosque. (Aksit 2008, 9; Directorate of Hagia Sophia Museum 2014d; Haber Türk 2014.)

The construction of this outstanding church was ordered by Byzantine Emperor Justinian and started in 532. The architects responsible for the building process were two of the best architects of their time, Isidoros and Anthemios and they are said to have had more than 10 000 construction workers. The church was opened in 537 less than six years after the construction had begun, although some of the mosaics were finished decades after the grand opening. The opening was ceremonial and included sacrificing thousands of animals. Although the emperor believed he had “got the means for creating such a glorious place of worship” from God, the building has had to be repaired several times due to earthquakes and fires, and it is under ongoing restoration. (Aksit 2008; Directorate of Hagia Sophia Museum 2014e.)

On the hill viewing both Marmara sea and strait of Bosphorus, the very same place where the great stone structure of Hagia Sophia still stands today, there were before it two churches carrying the same name. The first Hagia Sophia, a wooden church, was built in 360 but it burned down during a rebellion in 404. The church was rebuilt in 415 but it also was set on fire and destroyed in 532 during the Nike rebellion. However the Emperor Justinian decided to build Hagia Sophia once again after the rebellion was defeated. He wanted to make sure that the third Hagia Sophia would be outstanding and more stable than the previous ones, so instead of another wooden structure the magnificent church was built of marble and stone. As a way of recycling, columns from old temples such as Temple of Artemis, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world, were used in the building. The design of the building was advanced in its time and the great dome appears to be floating in the air. Also the interior was decorated with golden and breathtaking mosaics depicting the biblical characters as well as the Emperors. (Aksit 2008, 9-28; Directorate of Hagia Sophia Museum 2014d.)

When Constantinople was occupied by the Crusaders in 1204, the great Hagia Sophia was partly robbed. Finally when Ottomans conquered the city, the church was completely changed from the inside. Sultan Mehmed II, the conqueror, decided to convert the biggest church of Byzantine Empire into a mosque which meant that all the Biblical mosaics had to be hidden as there can be no pictures inside a mosque according to Islamic rulings. Fortunately, in opposition for destroying the mosaics, they were covered with plastered paste, which preserved the mosaics very well until our days. Also four minarets, from where the call to prayer was to be sang, a mihrab showing the direction of prayer and minbar staircase for the speeches of the imam were built to the former church. (Directorate of Hagia Sophia Museum 2014d)

Finally in 1935 Hagia Sophia was turned into a museum by Atatürk, after serving 916 years as a church and 482 years as a mosque. The beautiful mosaics were revealed and can now be admired together with the great architecture. The museum also an interesting place for religious dialogue as it has elements of church and mosque. There are occasionally changing exhibitions at the museum and sometime events and conferences are held there. In spring 2014

there were for example lectures given on the subjects of “Ottoman Period at Hagia Sophia”, “Hagia Sophia Restorations” and “Mosaics of Hagia Sophia”. (Directorate of Hagia Sophia Museum 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d.)

The museum was visited by 3 326 591 people in 2013 and according to the Directorate of Hagia Sophia Museum it is one of the most visited museums in the world. The museum is open every day of the week except Mondays. At winter season visitors can discover the museum from 9am until 5pm and between 9am and 7pm during summer season. The normal ticket to the museum costs 30 Turkish lira. Interestingly Turkish citizens of age more than 65 or with a disability can enter for free. Also Turkish citizens below 18 age and foreign children below age of 12 are allowed to enter free of charge. (Directorate of Hagia Sophia Museum 2014a; 2014b;2014f ; 2014g.)

3.2.3 The Blue Mosque

Building of the Blue Mosque, known as Sultan Ahmed Mosque by the Turkish people, started in 9th of November in 1609. The building of this great mosque was ordered and financed by Sultan Ahmed I who had become sultan of the Ottoman Empire less than five years earlier at the age of 14. It was a tradition for the Ottoman sultans to build a mosque complex on their behalf and the new young sultan took on to this great building process. Building this complex, which is the biggest in Istanbul, in his name acted as a proof of the sultan’s power but also had religious purposes. In Islamic world it is believed that doing such a generous act of charity will gain good deeds for the builder, even after his death, as the believers will be visiting the complex and send prayers for the builder. (Sultan Ahmet Cami 2012; Ziyrek 2009, 19,23-27)

The construction process of the great mosque complex went on until 1617 (Sultanahmet Mosque Maintenance Association 2013). The architect behind the building was Mehmed Aga who at the time was the head architect of the Empire. The mosque was built with six minarets, instead of traditional four, and with a large dome supported by “elephant feet”-like pillars. The complex is built so that the main entrance and the praying area are inside are facing the kiblah direction, on other words the city of Mecca, because all Muslims are supposed to pray facing the sacred temple of Kaaba in Mecca. (Hämeen-Anttila 2004, 122; Sultan Ahmet Cami 2012; Ziyrek 2009, 25-.)

As the only mosque in Istanbul with six minarets, located at a very dynamic spot of the city, the Blue Mosque has become a symbol of Istanbul (Grafik-Baski 2008, 80). The mosque became to be known as “Blue Mosque” around the world due to the dominating blue colour of the glazed, floral patterned Iznik tiles inside. Altogether there are more than 20 000 hand-

made tiles inside the mosque. (Sultanahmet Mosque Maintenance Association 2013; Ziyrek 2009, 56)

Mainly the mosque has been well preserved, however some parts of the great complex do not exist anymore such as the hospital, public-kitchen and school. The mosque is still acting as a place of daily worship for Muslims and the main prayer hall accommodates up to 10 000 people at once. The call to prayer can be heard from the minaret of Blue Mosque five times a day and often during Friday's communal noon prayer, which is the most important prayer of the week (Hämeen-Anttila 2004, 121), the worshippers do not even fit into this great building and some of them must lay their prayer carpets out on the courtyard and conduct their prayers there. (Sultanahmet Mosque Maintenance Association 2013; Ziyrek 2009; Hämeen-Anttila 2004, 121.)

The fact that Blue Mosque is an active mosque, and Muslims gather inside to pray several times a day, places restrictions on the tourists' visits. Tourists can visit the mosque free of charge, but only between the communal prayers. The mosque is closed for several hours during the day when the Muslims are praying inside. In June 2014 it was announced that the mosque could be visited between 8.30 and 18.30 with the exception of prayer times from 12.15 to 14.15 and between 16.30 and 17.45 when the interior is only open for Muslims (Sultan Ahmet Cami 2014). However, the prayer times vary slightly depending on the time of the year because they are determined by the movement of the sun.

Moreover, there is special area inside the mosque separated for tourists as Muslims can pray inside the mosque also between the communal prayers and should not be disturbed. It is expected that shoes are removed at the entrance so that the carpet which covers all of the floor inside would not become dirty. The men should wear clothes that do not reveal their knees nor shoulders and the women must additionally cover their hair with a scarf while inside. Furthermore, the tourists must use different entrance than the Muslims who wish to pray inside. There is additional clothing available at the touristic entrance for the visitors who are not suitably dressed. (Sultanahmet Mosque Maintenance Association 2013)

3.3 Multicultural Istanbul

Istanbul is a city which has served for several culturally different communities and empires during its lifetime. After periods of rulers with pagan religions, the city has been capital of Byzantine Empire and Orthodox Christianity for about thousand years and for centuries it was the center of the Islamic world as the capital of Ottoman Empire. Ever since the Ottoman conquering in 1453, the city has been a place where people with different cultural backgrounds and religions have lived together in peace. This is because the Ottomans allowed the

non-Muslim citizens of their Empire to live their old religion if they paid special taxes and did not try to convert the Muslims to their religion. Even until today the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate church remains in Istanbul. Ottoman mentality of tolerance for other religions and cultures is still popular in Turkey and although majority of the citizens are Muslim, there are still many Christian and Jewish minorities living in the country, especially in Istanbul. There are also many immigrants and expatriate workers living in Istanbul and adding to its multiculturalism. (Ayyildiz 2009; Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2008c; 2008d;2008e.)

In addition to their tolerance, the Ottomans were also known for their love of arts and admiration towards different cultures which could be seen and heard in their great capital. Also during Byzantine Empire the capital city was filled with cultural activities such as horse races and circus performance which mostly took place at Hippodrome. Hence it can be stated that the city has for thousands of years had wide range of cultural attractions to offer. Today, although the city faced a period of stagnation when the capital of Turkish Republic was set to be Ankara, Istanbul has regained its place as a cultural capital and maintains its lively and diverse way of life. The city was even honoured by setting it as the European Capital of Culture in 2010 (Istanbul 2010 2014a).

Indeed there are many different festivals and exhibitions in Istanbul every year and some sort of happening, concert or special exhibition organized almost every day of the year. Maden, Köker and Topsümer (2012) state that visitors who visit Istanbul are likely to take part in cultural events. The variety of the cultural events and the multiculturalism of the city together with the contradictory history can cater for many different customers. Istanbul could almost be described as “the place for everyone” considering its cultural offerings, however there are improvements to be done in order to really make the city accessible for everyone.

Although Turkish people are known to be hospitable and helpful, they are maybe not striving enough for the rights of those with disabilities in the society. This is partly because in the Turkish view everything is assumed to happen as it has been ordered by God and everything has a reason. Unfortunately many seem to be more likely to accept their poor situation than strive for better future, however the situation is changing and people strive more for their rights which can be seen in the wide number of protests and demonstrations.

4 Istanbul as a Tourism Destination

Istanbul is a special city that attracts tourists due to its historical importance, vivid modern culture and diversity together with its beautiful landscape and architecture (Alvarez & Yarcan 2010). As the largest city of Turkey, the ancient capital of two great empires, the only city on two continents and a globalized center of business and entertainment with a lively modern

culture, Istanbul has many competitive advantages . Adding to the list, the relatively low prices, huge number of cultural events and attractions, it is no wonder Istanbul is one of the top urban destinations today (Ayyildiz 2009; MasterCard Worldwide 2013).

In this chapter the tourism figures of Turkey and Istanbul and the customer profile are discussed. The statistical information of the city's tourism helps to realize the current situation of the tourism and its potentials. The investigation on customer profile on the other hand provides insight to the Istanbul's visitors and their possible needs. Especially when examining the profile of the visitors of the city it becomes clear that accessibility is very important for the city's future succession.

4.1 Tourism Figures of Turkey and Istanbul

Turkey, like Istanbul, is known for its warm weather and beautiful nature but the country is also famous for its rich history and vivid culture. The vision of the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism is that Turkey will become "a world brand in tourism" by 2023 and be one of the top five destinations both in terms of tourist amount as well as tourism revenues. According to UNWTO Turkey was the 6th most popular tourism destination in terms of international tourist arrivals in 2013 with 37,8 million visitors. The country was also 12th biggest tourism earner in 2013. On the other hand the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism together with Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat 2013c) claim that there were 34,9 million foreign visitors in 2013. Despite the numeric differences due to the documentation methods, all statistics show a rise in the number of tourists in the past years and the first half of year 2014 has again shown increase in the tourist numbers. (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2007; 2010; 2011; 2013; 2014; UNWTO 2014.)

Istanbul is the most well-known and attractive urban destination in Turkey. Istanbul is luring visitors with its mysterious and contradictional image, long history and culture. Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat 2014) states that almost 10,5 million foreign visitors arrived in Istanbul in 2013. Also according to MasterCard Worldwide, Istanbul is one of the top destinations both in terms of international visitors and the amount of money spent by these visitors. In 2013 report Istanbul was ranked as the 6th and in 2014 report as 7th most visited destination city among the 132 cities included in the statistics, with estimation of more than 11 million visitors. Both in 2013 and 2014 the city was 3rd most visited in Europe after London and Paris. The ranking of Istanbul was slightly lower when it came to money spent by the visitors and the city was listed 11th in 2013 and 10th in 2014 worldwide and 4th in Europe. The visitor numbers and income they bring to the city have been increasing since 2010 and Istanbul has been one of the cities showing strongest growth. Istanbul was also reported as having the greatest increase in International Air Travel Connectivity, referring to amount and frequency

of flights linking the city with others in the rest of the world, with 15 % growth from 2009 to 2014. (MasterCard Worldwide 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014.)

CHART 2 Global Top 20 Top Destination Cities by International Overnight Visitors (2014)



Figure 1: Global Top Destination Cities (MasterCard Worldwide 2014)

Also the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism provides statistics showing that the yearly numbers of foreign visitors staying in ministry licensed accommodation establishments has increased by more than a million since 2010 and almost 4,5 million foreigners arrived to the establishments in 2013. Additionally there were more than 1,8 million Turkish citizens staying in ministry licensed establishments in 2013 which also means half millions increase from 2010. The average overnights of foreigners was 2,5 and the citizens 1,7 showing a slight lengthening in the stays of the foreigners. (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2010a; 2011a; 2012a; 2013a.)

During past years Istanbul has had many notable tributes which have either affected the visitor amounts positively and helped the city in becoming a top urban destination or have been result of the increased popularity of the city. First of all, most of the historical attractions in Istanbul have been given the place on world heritage list. Secondly, in 2010 the city was given the honour of being one of the European Culture Capitals, which has not only increased the number of visitors but also created a pull effect for more wide range of people. Also recently, in spring 2014, the city was chosen as the number one tourism destination by Trip Advisor users (Trip Advisor 2014). Only shortly after, Istanbul was reported as being the fifth most photographed city with one of its remarkable attractions, Maiden Tower (Sightsmap 2014). And to

add to the list, in August 2014 Istanbul was listed by Scyscanner, a travelsite where one can search cheap flights, as one of the top five destinations one should visit before turning 25 (Skyscanner 2014).

However, although one of the top destinations, Istanbul is facing lot of competition. For this reason it is important that the tourism actors in the city are aware of the global trends in tourism and act upon them in order to keep attracting the tourists. They should be able to answer the needs of the potential customers in the changing environment and cater for different types of customers. As accessibility is one of the top global trends of today, Istanbul should invest in it as much as possible and aim for gaining accessibility related awards and better image concerning accessibility in order to attract more disabled and elderly customers.

4.2 Customer Profile

Istanbul, the city of contradictions, has a lot to offer for its visitors which could be seen in the visitor numbers and tributes the city has gained. Due to its diversity, the city attracts many different types of tourists with different interests and desires. Here some of the different tourist types are introduced.

Istanbul has thousands years' history and a multitude of historical attractions for those interested in history and heritage. Also there is wide range of cultural attractions, such as museums, art galleries, fairs and festivals for the culturally hungry and in general the visitors to the city are likely to take part in cultural events (Maden, Köker & Topsümer 2012). Moreover the rich food culture of Turkey can attract visitors to the city for culinary reasons, although many do only wish to taste the real Turkish kebab. Also the entertainment and nightlife is lively which attract especially the young (Scyscanner 2014). The large scale shopping centers, shopping streets and bazaars, with relatively low prices compared to other top destination, also attract those who love shopping (Turkish Culture and Tourism Office 2014c).

Furthermore, Istanbul is a great destination for budget travelers due to its relatively low prices. It is quite easy to find an inexpensive hotel or hostel to stay in and also many locals are offering private housing for free or with a small charge through CouchSurfing (The Guide Istanbul 2013). The exchange rates have also been encouraging in 2014 for especially the European travelers who have been reporter to be seeking for cost savings (European Travel Commission 2012). During the summer months of 2014 one could have bought lowest 2,81 and highest 2,91 Turkish lira with one Euro, in the beginning of the year the exchange rate was even above 3 (Bank of Finland 2014). All in all the prices are very competitive and often packet trips are less expensive than to other Southern European urban destinations (OK-Matkat 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d).

Also many tourists come to Istanbul for religious reasons and the city is quite unique as there are important sites of all monotheistic religions and their sects (Türsab 2007c). As Istanbul has once been the capital of the Islamic World as well as of Orthodox Christianity, it is understandably an important destination for those who search for religious importance in their travel. Visitors may come either to admire the marvelous Ottoman mosques with their high minarets or to visit the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and historical churches of the Byzantine Era, although some of them have been transformed into mosques or museums. Furthermore there are few Jewish districts and synagogues in the city, for example the area surrounding the Galata Tower. (Turkish Culture and Tourism Office 2014b.)

When considering the origin of the visitors it should be noted that Istanbul is a popular destination for both domestic and foreign visitors. Foreign visitors to Turkey and Istanbul come mostly from Europe (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014) and the Europeans are also the biggest market for Istanbul. Further it can be stated that most of the visitors to Istanbul come from Germany, Russia, United Kingdom, France and United States of America. If being more precise on the origin of the foreign visitors, most of the visitors come from London, Paris, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Munich. (Mastercard Worldwide 2014.)

Istanbul: International Overnight Visitors by Regional Origin and Top 5 Origin Countries

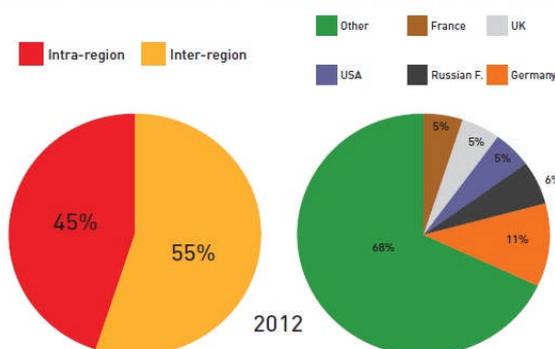


Figure 2: International Visitors Origin (MasterCard Worldwide 2014)

Istanbul is clearly the destination for many people, also for many in need for accessibility. For example those travelling for religious reasons are often elderly and have disabilities. More detailed analysis of the possible visitors need for accessibility is provided in the chapter 6.3.1 “The Demand for Accessible Istanbul”. However, as mentioned before, it should be highlighted that due to the competition on the tourists interest and fulfilling their needs, it would be important to make the city and its attractions as accessible as possible.

5 Istanbul Inspirations - Destination Image and Branding of Istanbul

It is a known fact that there exists high level of competition between destinations for attracting international travelers and that the image and brand of a destination plays significant role in the travelers' minds when making their destination decisions (Pike 2008). For this reason some of the aspects and issues affecting Istanbul's image are introduced together with some brief discussion on the branding of Istanbul. In relation to the main subject of this paper, some pondering on the impact of more accessible image of the city is done.

5.1 Definition of Destination Image and Branding

Destination image is described by Maden et al. (2012) as "the perception of a person or a group of people regarding a place". The image of a destination plays significant role when tourists are booking a holiday for themselves. Identifying and controlling the image of the destination is important for efficient marketing because the image creates an identity to the destination in the minds of tourists.

Brand on the other hand is a distinguishing name or a symbol intended for indentifying and differentiating from others. Destination's image can be modified by destination's positioning and promoting, hence the destination's brand is in the core of the image. The image of a destination can also guide the branding process of a destination. Building and enhancing a differentiated destination image through branding is important for cities and it has been suggested that in future the destinations are going to compete with their brands. However branding destinations is hard due to the intangibility, perishability and substitutability of the customers' experiences. (Law 2002, 24; Maden et al. 2012; Pike 2008)

5.2 What affects the image of Istanbul?

Istanbul is a magical and inspirational city, a city of contradictions. In Istanbul the East meets the West, religion meets secularism and history coexists with the modern society (Istanbul 2010 2014c). Due to the city's diversity, history, lively modern culture and beautiful architecture, Istanbul has lot to offer for persons with different desires and has good competitive advantages (Alvarez & Yarcan). However, as in today's world the competition between destinations is very high, being successful destination requires realizing the importance of creating a strong destination brand. This on the other hand can be only done through understanding and modifying the image of the destination in minds of the tourists. In order to do this, the factors affecting the destinations image must be considered.

First of all, the type of the destination affects the image of the destinations and for example urban destinations, cities, are perceived very different from rural destinations. According to Law (2002, 24) cities usually have a contradictory image. They are associated with negative factors such as being dirty, crowded, noisy, unsafe and immoral with no great sense of community. On the other hand cities are the centers of culture, lively, exciting and full of opportunities and entertainment. For a city, an urban destination, it is important to overweight the negative aspects with positive ones. In the case of Istanbul it is positive that the city is not notorious of pickpockets or criminality and is even said to be one of the safest metropolitan cities in world (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2008f; OSAC 2014). Also the visitors are often surprised by how clean the city is and how friendly and helpful the citizens are. These positive factors may help the visitors to overlook the fact that the city is very crowded and create an overall positive image.

Moreover, according to Maden et al. (2012) and Pike (2008) a destination's image and brand are affected by the country's image, the country's tourism brand, regional and local brands and individual tourism business plans together. Due to this Istanbul's image is to some extent affected by the general perceptions of Turkey and the tourism brand of Turkey. Turkish people are known for their hospitality and Turkey's tourism brand is set as "Be our guest", highlighting the welcomingness and friendliness of the Turks (Turkish Culture and Tourism Office 2014a). This is a positive factor for Istanbul's image and creates an idea that the local people are inviting tourists with open arms.

Unfortunately the country's image can also have negative impacts. The international image of Turkey is often negatively affected by historical, religious and geographical issues and as well as the media. Turkey is often associated with the Ottoman Empire and old wars, which can make the Turkish people seem frightening. (Maden et al. 2012). Moreover the increasing presence of Islam in the politics, together with the location of the country results in assimilating Turkey with other Muslim countries. When adding to the picture the current troubles in the nearby countries such as Syria and Iraq, Turkey can be seen as a risky destination which affects the image of Istanbul also, although the city is far away from the unstable areas. Especially the recent movements of the Islamic State (ISIS) has created fear of terrorist attacks and increasing demonstrations (Daily Sabah 2014). Hence it is important for Istanbul to control its image and create a separation to the crises and negative issues.

Another important thing to realize is that the tourists' own experiences, cultural background, nationality and religion, have a great effect on how the destination will be perceived by them. According a study by Maden et al. (2012) Istanbul is viewed most positively by those who are from Middle East, which can be explained by the location of Turkey at the edge of Middle East as well as the shared religion. On the contrast the religion seems likely to in-

crease the negative perceptions of those who are not familiar with the Islamic religion and habits. Also it is understandable that those who are not aware of the current situation in the Middle East can have many prejudices and fears.

5.3 The Image of Istanbul - Istanbul Inspirations

Istanbul is mainly perceived as a historical and cultural city. When Istanbul was chosen to be European Culture Capital in 2010 the brand of the city was set to be “Istanbul Inspirations” highlighting the cultural diversity of the city (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2008a). In this context the brand was mainly referring to the contemporary art and urban culture of the city which had long time inspired many artists. The brand was mainly aimed for luring European travelers to be inspired by the contemporary and urban culture. However, the brand is all in all a very suitable for the city of contradictions because everyone can be inspired by different things, may it be the history, culture or beautiful architecture. This brand is well designed and takes into consideration the different images held of the city and creates a unifying image of the city as “inspiring”. It is also easy to be translated into different languages if one wishes to approach the potential customers in their own language.



Image 1: Istanbul Inspirations logo (Behance.net 2013)



Image 2: Istanbul Inspirations (Behance.net 2013)

When considering the different image held by different people it should be noted that the Islamic attractions and Ottoman history are interesting and inspiring for the Muslim customers while the devout Christians in contradiction are more lured to the city to admire the old churches and attractions from the Byzantine Era. In contrast, young people can be attracted to the city by the endless shopping opportunities, low prices and vivid night life and entertainment, while elderly would be more looking for comfort, calmness and accessibility. In order to reach the potential customers and answer their needs, some customized image for different target groups could so be useful. For example when targeting Muslim customers the Islamic image of city should be underlined and when targeting Christians or Jewish the multiculturalism, openmindedness and their cultural heritage in the city should be emphasized. Again with the young the modern, contemporary and vivid life of the city could be in the center of marketing while the elderly could be told about the level accessibility and helpfulness of the locals.

5.4 Accessible Image for Istanbul

As it could be seen above, Istanbul is a city with varying image for different types of people and there are many aspects affecting the image. The level of accessibility is especially important for the elderly and disabled people, but creating a more accessible image for the city is very unlikely to be a hindrance. This is because accessibility is something that benefits everyone, from baby to a grandmother, and makes a destination “a destination for all”. Also as a growingly important trend in tourism, accessibility is viewed as something important by increasing amount of people and facilitates a destination for having a positive image. Many major cities in Europe are perceived as very accessible, such as Berlin for example (European

Commission 2014), and even awarded for it which adds to their popularity. However, before being able to promote the city as barrier-free, the level of accessibility should be analyzed fully for not creating a false image as that would not be beneficial but rather harmful in long run.

6 Accessibility in Tourism

This section deals with the subject of accessibility. The concept is introduced, explained and discussed in the frames of tourism. Also existing and future accessibility related projects and policies in the city of Istanbul together with some disability statistics are presented here.

6.1 The Concept and Issues of Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the ability of a person to access products, services and environments. Accessible products, services and environments are also referred to as “barrier-free” and “suitable for all”. These terms are used in this report as synonyms to the word “accessible”. The term “accessibility” is used especially when referring to persons with disabilities. Disabled person can be further described as someone who cannot fully adapt to social life and faces problems in his/her daily life due to physical, mental, psychological or sensory impairments. The term also applies for the elderly, families with small children, travelers with heavy luggage, persons with injury or sickness and even people of very small or big size. (Republic of Turkey, Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People 2005; UNWTO 2013).

Persons with physical, mental or sensory disability counted for approximately 1 billion people in 2011 according to the World Health Organization (WHO 2011). This means that about 15 % of the world’s population has some sort of disability. In addition to this it has been estimated by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2002) that by 2050 as much as 20 % of the world population will be older than 60, out of which 20 % will be over 80 years old. In respect to this estimation a conclusion can be made that the amount of people in need for accessibility will increase as the world population is ageing. This is because there are proofs that the elderly very likely to get disabilities (Darcy & Buhalis 2011) and in general will not have the same capabilities as the young. These statistics and estimations indicate that accessibility is a big issue and important for significant number of people. Moreover everyone should remember that anyone can face disability anytime due to an accident or sickness, so accessibility is certainly an issue everyone should be interested in. It is in no way an issue to be forgotten about.

Accessibility is easily seen as something that only benefits the persons with disabilities and restrictions as well as the elderly, but it is important to notice the positive effect accessibil-

ity creates for the whole society. It will be easier for everyone to move around and use services and products when they are barrier-free. Accessible design, when successfully planned and executed, is unlikely to be an obstacle for anyone; wider doors, ramps, braille writing next to normal letter and so on, should not make anyone's life more difficult. Accessibility can even increase safety in the environment (UNWTO 2013) as for example railings on stairs can prevent anyone from falling.

In order to reach overall accessibility which benefits everyone equally, so called "universal design" is necessary. Universal design is a concept that aims for designing products, services, buildings and different environments so that they can be accessed by everyone in the best possible way (The Center for Universal Design 1997). Universal design takes into consideration the special needs and restrictions of all people and the outcome is suitable for all. The aim is that the concept would be taken as a part of all planning and policies in society for everyone's good (UNWTO 2013). However achieving fully accessible urban environment where everyone can move freely and act without unease is challenging (Darcy, Cameron, Dwyer, Taylor, Wong & Thomson 2008). Some possible obstacles for eliminating the existing barriers are lack of resources and funding as well as low level of interest in accessibility by some parties. Also the historical importance of the area or building can set restrictions for reducing the barrier with modifications (UNESCO 2013).

6.2 Barrier-Free Tourism

Accessible tourism, also referred to as "barrier-free tourism" and "tourism for all", is a growing trend and promising market in the tourism field. Accessible tourism can be described as a branch of tourism which takes into consideration the special needs of persons with "physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities or other medical conditions requiring special care, such as elderly persons and others in need of temporary assistance" (UNWTO 2005). Moreover accessible tourism is stated by Darcy & Dickson (2009) to be successful when persons with mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive related special needs can access tourism products, services and environments without losing their equity and dignity.

According to the UNWTO declaration on 2013 accessibility is important part of responsible and sustainable tourism and should be seen as a business opportunity instead of an obligation. It is stated that persons with disabilities and other restrictions, such as injuries, should have the same possibilities and rights as everyone else when it comes to tourism. For these reasons it is encouraged by UNWTO that all countries make sure their tourism sites and establishments are accessible by those with disabilities. This should be done by adopting universal design and it would lead for greater social sustainability.

Accessibility has been a factor of growing importance in the field of tourism since 1990s. This is because the rights of the persons with disabilities have increasingly become more important and access to tourism is seen as one of the important rights they should have. Discrimination is seen as an issue which is against human rights, which is why persons with disabilities should not face discrimination and should have the same opportunities and quality of life as everyone else. Also, because the population of industrialized countries is ageing and the senior citizens with different types of age related sicknesses, restrictions and disabilities have got the income, time, and desire to travel, the importance of accessible tourism segment has been increasing and accessible tourism has become a very promising market. (Darcy 2006; Darcy 2008; UNWTO 2013).

Accessibility has become important factor and growing trend in tourism due to demands of tourists and different organizations, such as UNWTO. However it is also important to notice the benefits of developing and promoting barrier-free tourism for the suppliers. For instance, promoting tourism for the elderly is found to be one possible solution for combating seasonality in tourism because these people are no longer working and have more time to travel outside holiday seasons. Seniors also generally prefer to travel off season when there are less crowds and weather is more suitable. Hence, many of them do not like to travel in the summer heat and wait for more mild weathers. The same also applies to many persons with disabilities as they may want to visit the attractions when its less crowded. Also in general, the accessible image of a destination is likely to attract more families with small children and is unlikely to be a reason for someone to not to visit the destination. Moreover when considering the travel agencies and tour operators, it should be noted that creating barrier-free packages could be a good competitive advantage and a new business opportunity. (UNWTO 2013.)

However, although barrier-free tourism development offers benefits and competitive advantage for tourism suppliers and the destinations themselves, there is a clear undersupply of accessible tourism products, services and environments all around the world. Many tourism parties seem to be rather unwilling to strive for become accessible because they are afraid of the additional costs. Moreover, they are often unaware of the special needs of the disabled people, the legislation concerning them as well as the benefits that come with serving these people. (Darcy 2006.)

For overcoming the undersupply, it would be important that the destination management bodies and administrations would make sure all tourism parties have the needed knowledge concerning the importance of accessibility and the benefits of barrier-free tourism. Then of course, in order to reduce the existing barriers from the tourism venues, their current accessibility should be evaluated and improvement action plan created. The administrative parties should carry out strategies based on the search results and set the principles for accessibility.

In order to reduce barriers from tourism in a destination successfully, different tourism stakeholders, such as private companies, local governments and non-governmental organizations, should work together. (UNWTO 2013.)

Co-operation between stakeholders is also essential so that accessible tourism venues can be connected to others as it is not beneficial to promote one tourism venue of the destination as accessible if the others are not (UNWTO 2013). Additionally Darcy & Dickson (2009, 32-44) underline that barrier-free tourism, described by them as “Accessible Tourism for All”, requires universal design. Hence well detailed planning and testing is necessary and accessibility should be present in every part of the tourism chain: in destination management, information and advertising, within urban and architectural environments as well as transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, cultural activities, conventions and events, and all other tourism activities (UNWTO 2013). Also European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT 2011) highlights that “it is important to address all aspects of the tourism value chain to meet the needs of the wide range of target groups” and overall accessibility.

Accessibility at all aspects of the tourism value chain:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information for customers, (on-line, printed and at the venue) should be accessible, e.g. Web sites conforming to Accessibility Guidelines by W3C-WAI.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport and transfers must be accessible for all travellers throughout the journey; this should include the provision of wheelchair accessible transport.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure - all buildings and outdoor environments should be designed and maintained in a way that makes them accessible and usable by all visitors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services - including activities and excursions offered at destinations and venues, should be accessible; e.g. tourist guides, waiter service, cultural tours, festivals and events, also very important - emergency evacuation procedures.

Table 1: Accessibility at all aspects of the tourism value chain (ENAT 2011)

When considering the elements that make a tourism venue accessible maybe the most central ones for those with reduced mobility are ramps, railings and elevators. For the blind and visually impaired people toucheable features, braille writing, contrast colours and markings on the ground to be felt with the white cane are important. For those with hearing problems a calm and acoustically good area is important as well as staff who knows the sign language in case one is fully deaf. Moreover a simple easily understandable surroundings are accessible for those with mental disorders as well as for the children. Additionally the disabled persons should be offered special facilities, such as special parking spots, accessible toilet or hearing

loops, without additional payment. Moreover the staff working on tourism field should be educated and prepared for dealing with the special needs of disabled people. Also it would be very important for the tourism destinations and attractions to publish clear, honest information on their facilities level of accessibility and warn of possible obstacles that the travelers may face. (UNWTO 2009; UNWTO 2013.)

6.3 Istanbul for All

As an old city with buildings and blocks which have been build thousands of years ago it is understandable that the accessibility might not be at its best everywhere in Istanbul. However it would be beneficial for the citys image, economy, the visitors and local people if the city would be more accessible and suitable for all. In order to realize the importance of accessibility for Istanbul the demand is more detailly examined. Also some accosiationa, policies and projects related to accessibility are introduced.

6.3.1 The Demand for Accessible Istanbul

There are around 10 million disabled people in the Turkey, and in 2002 they were counting for almost 12,5% of the population. According to Turkist Statistical Institute (2002) the number of disabled people, including orthopedically, seeing, hearing, speaking and mentally disabled population as well as those with chronic illnesses, was higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Also when considering the different geographical areas of Turkey, the percentage was highest in the Marmara region where Istanbul is also located. The author was unable to find a figure of the number of disabled people living only in Istanbul, but, assuming that the percentage follows the same line with the rest of the Marmara region, the amount should be as much as 1,5-2 million people with some sort of disability of chronic illness. When considering only the people with disability and leaving out those with chronic illness the amount would still be almost 300 000 people. Hence it can be concluded that there is a great proportion of Istanbul residents in need for accessible and barrier-free products, services and environments. Also when adding to the figure the families with little children in strollers and the generous number of tourists with their luggages, it becomes even more clear that especially mobile accessibility is very important. (Istanbul Engelliler Derneği 2014b; TurkStat 2002.)

When it come to touristic aspect of Istanbul, it should be emphasised that there are many potential domestic and foreign travelers in need for enhanced accessibility. As there is stated to be about 10 million disabled or chronically ill people in Turkey, they surely create a large pool of potential domestic customers (TurkStat 2002). As a matter of fact, it has been stated in the Tourism Strategy of Turkey for 2023 that there will be actions done for encouraging “disadvantaged community groups such as persons with disabilities for involving in domestic

travel". This statement signals that serving these people and taking their need in to consideration is seen as something beneficial and profitable as well as necessary.

When considering the foreign tourist, especially the European market as it is the most significant for Turkey and Istanbul (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014; MasterCard Worldwide 2014), one realizes that there is a growing demand for barrier-free tourism in Istanbul and accessible tourism offers great opportunities for the tourism industry in the city. The assumption of great number of potential customers, and opportunities created by accessibility, can be based on the statement of European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT) in 2011 stating that there were 130 million disabled tourists with a potential for spending 68 billion euros in Europe. Also when adding to the picture the projections showing that by 2060 151,5 million European residents would be of age 65 or more, counting for 30% of the population, and from the elderly 61,4 million people would be more than 80 years old by 2060, which is triple from the amount in 2008, the demand for accessibility will be increasing (ENAT 2009). According to studies made in 1990s and early 2000s there was already a substantial market of persons with disabilities willing to travel in Europe, US and Canada those times, meaning that when the number of elderly will increase so should also the potential market because disability and getting old often come hand in hand (Darcy 2006; Darcy & Buhalis 2011).

Additionally, as was stated previously in section 4.2 when analysing the customer profile of the city, many people, both Turkish citizens and foreigners, come to the city for religious reasons. Further there has been studies proving that the elderly are putting most importance for their religion. Hence the elderly are most likely to travel for religious purposes and are also the ones usually in need for accessibility (Smith 2012). So it can be said that there are existing many potential customers in need for accessibility, even without promoting accessible tourism as a separate segment. Of course, the local people would also benefit if the religious sites are more accessible as they are the ones visiting these places, such as mosques and churches, most frequently.

All in all it can be stated that accessibility would benefit huge number of people; the local people of Istanbul, the domestic travelers and the international visitors to the city. Hence analyzing the current level of accessibility in Istanbul is important in order to find the existing barriers and reduce them to the greatest extent.

6.3.2 Accessibility Associations, Policies and Projects

Firstly it is important to note that in Turkey there is a law called “Turkish Disability Act” aiming to enable the disabled people to join the society by removing the obstacles these people might face and by providing solutions for their problems related to health, education, rehabilitation, employment, care and social security. It is for example forbidden by the law to be discriminative towards people with disabilities when hiring personnel. Also in 2009 the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons was ratified as a part of Turkish legislation. (Republic of Turkey, Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People 2005; 2009a; 2009b)

There are also several associations in Turkey and Istanbul fighting for and defending the rights of the disabled people and providing information. These associations are for example Bedensel Engellilerle Dayanışma Derneği, Istanbul Engelliler Derneği and Sevgi Seli Engelliler Derneği (Bedensel Engellilerle Dayanışma Derneği 2014; Istanbul Engelliler Derneği 2014a; Sevgi Seli Engelliler Derneği 2012). The associations help to raise awareness on issues important to the disabled people and also provide help and support.

Moreover it should be noted that accessibility has been taken into consideration in Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality’s five year Strategic Plan for 2010-2014. Accessibility was listed as one of the important themes which had been taken into consideration while making the plan. Enhancing the quality of life of all the citizens of Istanbul, also those with disabilities, was set as the vision of the city together with becoming a globally strengthened city. The municipality’s aim is to satisfy the needs of all Istanbul residents and to provide all of them easy access to all services of the city. (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2010; Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2014a.)

There is even a special department of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, “Sağlık ve Sosyal Hizmetler Daire Başkanlığı” which can be translated as “Department of Health and Social Services”, taking care of the issues related with disabled people among other health and social issues (İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi 2014b; Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2014b). There is even a special dimension of the Health and social services department called “Directorate of Disabled People” or “Engelliler Müdürlüğü” in Turkish, working for enhancing the quality of life of persons with disabilities (İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi 2014a). The Directorate of Disabled People also sometimes referred as Directorate of Handicapped people has many ongoing projects for improving accessibility and reducing barriers, such as ESHA - project for helping the disabled people to adapt to social life, “İş’te Engel Yok Gençler”- project for improving the employment opportunities of the disabled youth and different types of art and culture projects (İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi 2010b; İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi 2014a; Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality 2014b).

There is also an ongoing tourism related accessibility project, “Erişilebilir Turizm Engelsiz İstanbul” which can be translated as “Accessible Tourism, Barrier-free Istanbul”- project. The aim of this project is to make many of the museums and attraction of Istanbul more accessible in order to facilitate the participation of the disabled people to the cultural and artistic activities, improve the competitiveness of Istanbul as sustainable global destination. The project aims to find out and remove the existing barriers in the chosen places. The places are analyzed with the help of test persons, including the elderly, those with mobility restrictions, such as wheelchair, blind and those with reduced vision as well as deaf and those with hearing impairments. Also two attractions chosen to be part of the research in this paper, Hagia Sophia Museum and Blue Mosque, are part of the “Erişilebilir Turizm Engelsiz İstanbul”- project. (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Head of Press and Public Relations 2013.)

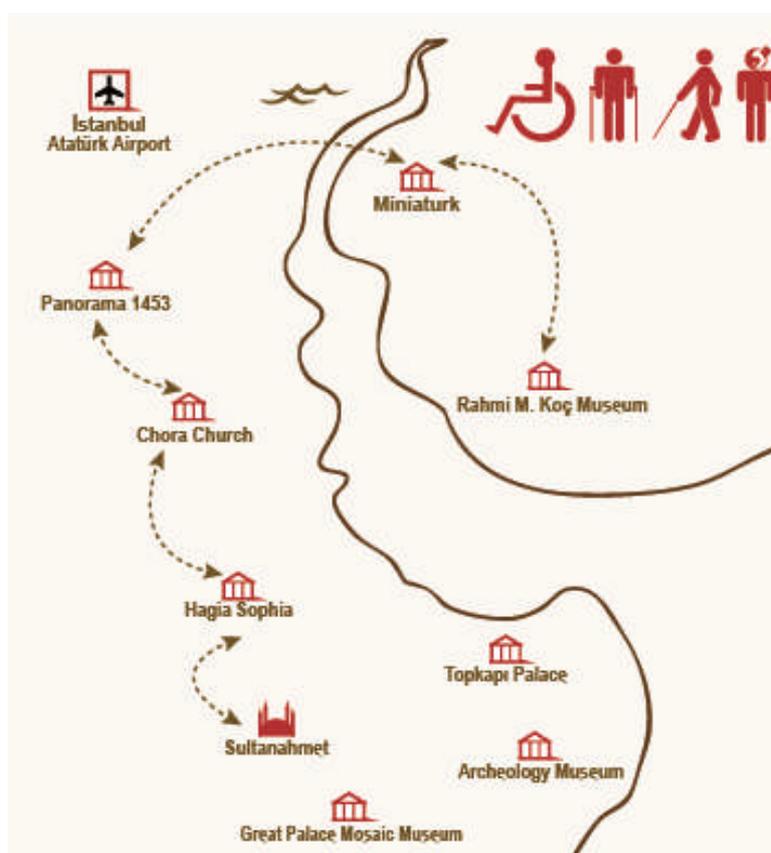


Figure 3: Accessible Tourism Project info

Also, after the revelation of UNWTO’s Resolution of Accessible Tourism for All in 2005, the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (Türsab) established Accessible Tourism for All - committee for supporting accessible tourism in Turkey, on 15th June 2006. This committee is for example working for ensuring that there are accessible accommodation possibilities in destinations, barrier-free public toilets and necessary “ominaisuus”, like ramps, railings and

clear signalization, in touristic facilities. Türsab has also taken part in international seminars and events discussing the subject of “tourism for all”. (Türsab 2007a; 2007b; 2007d; 2008.)

Moreover, there is atleast one tour organizer in the city who are specialized in accessible tours. The company is called Sage Traveling and it offers a wide range of different wheelchair accessible tours for wheelchair users in Istanbul among other European cities. The tours in Istanbul include for example day trips to the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia museum, the Basilica Cistern, Topkapi Palace and the Grand Bazaar. The tours are done either by public transportation or by wheelchair accessible van. The company’s website includes brief investigation to the sites wheelchair accessibility and explains what is going to be done on each tour. (Sage Traveling 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2013d; 2013e; 2013f.)

All in all it can be said that there are many projects and policies in the city of Istanbul striving for making the city more accessible, improving the lifestyle of the local disabled people and enriching the experiences of disabled visitors by reducing the barriers.

7 Research Methods and Conduction

The study in this paper was conducted in Istanbul during the tourism high season, in August, September and October 2014. The research focuses on the level of accessibility of three tourist attractions, Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia Museum and Blue Mosque together with their surrounding area. Also a brief analysis on the transportation possibilities to the attractions is given. The research is qualitative and the main means of collecting data were taking pictures, notes and measurements. Also one interview was conducted on the spot. In this section of the paper the research question, methods and way of conducting the study are introduced in more detail.

7.1 Formation of the Research Question

Due to the authors fascination with the city of Istanbul and her interest in the subject of accessibility, it was natural for her to choose this topic for her thesis. Also it was quite easy for her to choose the area of Istanbul where she wated to conduct the study; Sultanahmet Square and the surrounding attractions are all historically significant, within easy reach of each others, the main attractions visited by tourists and also on the World Heritage list. Few of the attractions in the Sultanahmet area, Topkapi Palace and Basilica Cistern had to be left out from the study because the work was only limited to 15 credits. After pondering on the issue the author chose Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia museum and the Blue mosque to be the attractions studied.

The decision for selecting the above mentioned attractions for the study, was based on the size and importance of the attractions. Also they are from different eras in the city's history, they have had different purposes and attract many types of tourists. Moreover there is a certain contrast between the attractions. Hagia Sophia built as a church and the Blue Mosque are both great manifestations of the religions they were built for. Moreover, Hippodrome has had some pagan features in form of monuments dedicated to different gods. The author had also herself had the chance to visit these attractions several times before starting her research so she was familiar with them.

It was mentioned in UNWTO statement (2013), that if tourist attractions are in inaccessible area without transportation possibilities nor connections to other tourist venues they should not be promoted as accessible. So, in order to make her research more comprehensive and beneficial for the travelers in need of accessibility, she wanted to also take the transportation possibilities to the attractions briefly into consideration. She would have also liked to look into the hotels in the area to see whether they have the facilities for disabled customers or not. This way she could have seen better whether the area could fulfill all the needs of the disabled tourists and persons with limitations. However, as the work would have been too much, she had to give up on these ideas and only concentrate on the chosen attractions and the transportation.

Finally the author stated the main research question as: How accessible are few of the most important tourist attractions in Istanbul, Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia museum and Blue Mosque, and is it possible for the disabled persons to reach these attractions without facing barriers? Also the results of the research are used to see if an accessible image for the city could be created and whether or not Istanbul could be promoted as an accessible destination.

7.2 Research Method - Qualitative

The method chosen for this research is qualitative. Qualitative method was seen by the author as most suitable because in qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, the use of words and pictures is more important than numbers and the qualitative research aims to give a comprehensive picture of a complex issue instead of giving a numeric or percentual results (Brikci & Green 2007; Creswell 2009). A research concerning the state of accessibility fits well into the frame of qualitative research by studying a complex social issue which can be hard to measure with numbers. Also qualitative research is described by Creswell (2009) as a way of "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals and groups ascribe to a social or human problem" and the lack of accessibility can easily be considered as a social problem.

Qualitative research is conducted for answering open-ended questions with multiple forms of data such as interviews, data collection and researchers own observations. The question of the level of accessibility can be considered open-ended as it cannot merely be answered with a number and the issue has many aspects. Moreover, the data for qualitative research is usually collected on the field as was seen the most beneficial for this study. Also, the research was planned to be conducted in a case study type of way for which qualitative method is more suitable than quantitative one. (Creswell 2009.)

The data for the research in this paper is mainly gathered by visiting the attractions, observing and taking notes, photos and measurements. It is mentioned by Brikci & Green (2007) that in order to really “understand the complexities of many situations, direct participation in, and observation of, the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method”. For this reason observation and collecting data on the field was seen most convenient method for this research. Also some research was done in internet and few questions were sent to the authorities responsible for the chosen attractions, but no answer was never received by the author. However, one brief interview was conducted at Hagia Sophia Museum with archaeologist Sabriye Partek.

After collecting data, the findings of the research were interpreted and analyzed by the author. Although she tried to be objective when analyzing data, it should be noted that in qualitative research the analysis of results may be affected by the researchers background and different researchers can have different interpretations (Creswell 2009). Hence if the researcher has had many good experiences and wants to get positive results to the subject, he/she is more likely to emphasize the aspects supporting positive results and in contrast if he/she has negative prejudices weight can be put on the negative issues.

7.3 Research Criteria

The criteria used in this research while evaluating the accessibility of the attractions and their surrounding area was provided by Laurea University of Applied Sciences and has been adopted from European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT). The author had become familiar with the criteria during her study unit on accessibility.

According to the criteria there are four levels of accessibility which are marked by letters A, B, C and D. Letter A stands for the highest level of accessibility and the places which gain the grade A must be fully accessible independently or with a helper. If a place gains a grade B it is partially accessible and the overall accessibility is good. The places with grade C on the other hand have poor accessibility, many barriers and the persons with disabilities and restrictions need a lot of help in order to survive in the environment. Finally the letter D is giv-

en for those places where there are so many barriers that it is impossible for the persons with disabilities and restrictions to visit them. Also - and + symbols are used in the grading for making it more accurate.

Accessibility Criteria:	
A	excellent (fully accessible independently or with a helper)
B	good (partially accessible independently or with a helper)
C	poor (lots of barriers, a customer needs lots of help)
D	impossible (lots of barriers, the place does not suit for a disabled customer)

Table 2: Accessibility Criteria (Laurea UAS)

7.4 Conducting the Research

The main field work for this paper was conducted on Friday 15th August 2014 and most of the data was collected then. In addition to the main field work date, the author has been able to further observe the accessibility while working as a tour guide in the chosen attractions in September and October 2014.

On 15th August the author visited the attractions with a friend and together they took plenty of pictures, measurements and notes. Before hand she had contacted the authorities responsible of the attractions and asked weather she could get a research permit to avoid any trouble. She was told that permit is not necessary and she is free to do her research, however she faced some problems when trying to take pictures and measurements of certain places. For example the staff at Hagia Sophia museum refused to open the door of the disabled people's toilet for her. However all in all the field work went smoothly and the author could collect a lot of usefull data which is analyzed in chapter 8.

8 Findings of the Study: Accessibility of Istanbul's Historical Attractions

In this chapter the data and findings of the qualitative research are analyzed. The chapter is divided in different sections for analyzing separately the accessibility of the transportation possibilities, the square and the attractions. Also the findings are organized so that the accessibility for those with mobility, vision or hearing impairment are analyzed separately from each other. However, it should be noted by the reader that some of the issues are affecting all people. Also some additional observations and comments of the author are added.

The findings are explained in writing and emphasized with pictures. There are additional red drawings, such as arrows, in some of the pictures identifying the existing barriers. Also there are green drawings for pointing out the positive factors.

Every sub-section is given its own accessibility grade based on the level of accessibility for those with mobility, vision or hearing impairment and also an average grade of accessibility is given. Based on the results the overall level of accessibility in the attraction, area and the transportation possibilities is discussed.

8.1 Getting There - Transportation

Istanbul municipality together with the transportation companies such as IETT and Istanbul Ulaşım, have been working together in order to make the public transportation accessible for everyone. New buses and trains with specialities, such as ramp for wheelchair, screens with the road map and audio announcements of each stop, are increasingly in use. Additionally ramps, and elevators, together with markings on the floor for the blind, are widely found from the tram- and metrostations in the city. (Herkes İçin Erisilebilir İstanbul 2011a; 2011b; 2012; 2013)

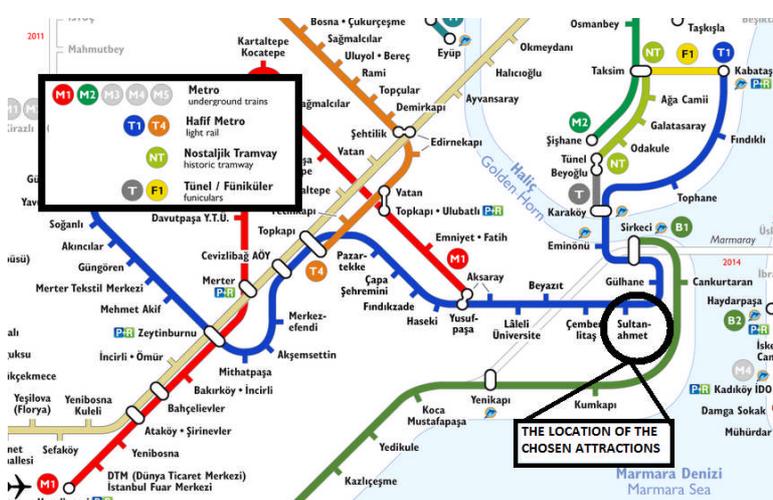


Figure 4: Istanbul Public Transportation map (Istanbul Travel Book 2013)

If one wants to use public transportation to get to the Sultanahmet Square and the attractions located there, he/she is likely to use tram and depending on the location of accommodation also funicular, tünel and metro. The Sultanahmet Square itself is on the way of the tram, T1, and the closest stop is even called “Sultanahmet”. The hotels are mostly located in the surrounding area of Sultanahmet, along the way of tram, or in Beyoğlu area. Beyoğlu is divided into different districts of which Taksim and Pera are maybe most popular hotel locations. From Taksim one can reach Sultanahmet Square by funicular and tram, whilst from Pera by

tünel and tram. Also in some cases one may further have to use metro to reach their hotel. Consequently, the accessibility of the tram, funicular, tünel and metro is evaluated. Also of course if the hotel is closeby one may walk to the square or if one just does not like public transportation he/she may use a private transportation, such as a taxi or a rentable van.

8.1.1 Accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility

In theory the tram, funicular, tünel and metro in the city are quite accessible; the doors are wide, there are ramps and elevators on most of the stations. The Sultanahmet station for example is wheelchair accessible as there is a ramp and a wider entry gate which the security guide, who is always present on the station, will open unless it is already left open. One with a luggage or strollers can also use the same entrance. Similar type of entrance is found on the other end of the tramline, at Kabataş. There is also an accessible elevator to the underground station of the funicular, which leads to Taksim square.

Funicular is also quite accessible, but due to the inclined floor there is a slight gap between the platform and the train which may cause problems to some. At Taksim metro there are also elevators, but no significant gap between the platform and train. There are even some special designed spots in the vagns for the wheelchair users. Also the Karaköy tram station is relatively accessible, and there is for example a wheelchair elevator from the underground tunnel which leads from the tram stop to the tünel. The tünel, world second oldest underground metro from 1875, has also been made accessible with wide entrance, but there is a small gap between platform and train.

When considering those with reduced mobility, but not in a wheelchair, such as the elderly with weak legs or someone with an injury, it should be noted that there are escalators at all underground stations and railing alongside all stairs.



Image 3: Sultanahmet tram station's accessible entry gate



Image 4: Platform and funicular trains' floor level difference



Image 5: Accessible elevator at Kabataş funicular underground station



Image 6: A wheelchair spot in metro

However, unfortunately the reality is often more complicated than theory and as so many people use the public transportation during rush hours, it can be impossible for one to fit inside with wheelchair or big luggage. This fact has even been noted by Sage Traveling and they state on their website that excursions by tram will be only organized during weekends due to the crowdedness of the public transportation (Sage Traveling 2013b). Also, it is negative that the ticketing machines are too high for the wheelchair users. But for the relief of alone traveling wheelchair users, there is always a security guide around to help.



Image 7: Ticketing machines at Kabataş

When considering other forms of transportation in addition to the public transportation, taxi is for sure important. Unfortunately there are no wheelchair suitable or otherwise accessible taxis circulating in the city. If one does not want to use public transportation to the attractions, one can rent a wheelchair accessible van from a private company. There is at least one company, Surf Rent a Car, renting private wheelchair accessible vans. One must however request the drive from the company at least 24 hours prior to the desired pickup. The prices are not much different from the normal taxi prices, which is good.

Additionally if one's accommodation is close to the Sultanahmet Square he/she may walk to the attractions. However unfortunately the roads are partly in bad condition and too narrow for wheelchair user to move comfortably. One may also face thresholds on the way and if there are many other people on the road, moving around can be hard.

8.1.2 Accessibility for the Visually Impaired and Blind

Generally there are proper, yellow markings on the ground for the blind and visually impaired in all of the investigated stations. Also there are announcements in the tram and metro de-claring the current and next station. In funicular and tnel there are no announcements as there are no middle stops and the trains only go up and down. Also when one is adding money to the travel card or buying tokens from ticketing machines, there is a voice helping with the actions. There is unfortunately no braille in the machines but there are always people around to help, at least the security guide. Also in general there is no braille in the trains or stops and stations.



Image 8: Guidance for both the blind and the seeing at Taksim funicular

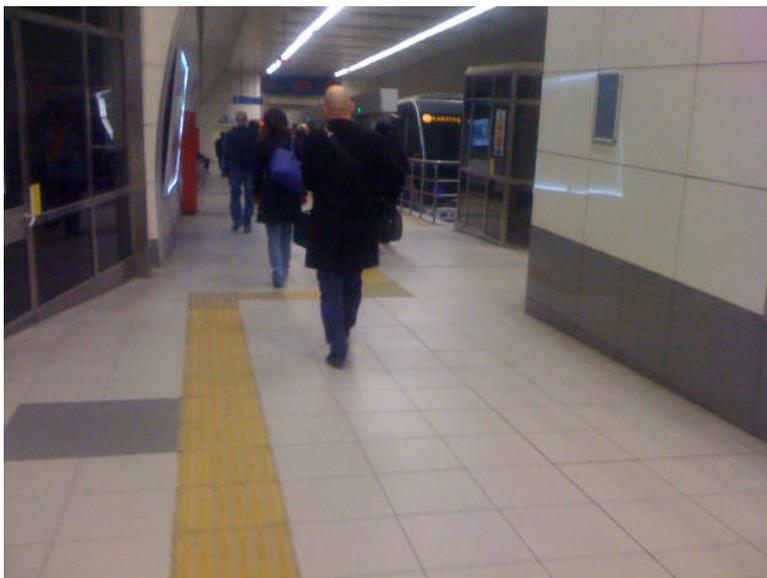


Image 9: Markings on ground for the blind and visually impaired at funicular

If one wants to use the taxi there may not be any problem but some can be deceived by taxi drivers who might overcharge or take him to a wrong destination. For avoiding unwanted situations one should only trust a taxi called to him/her by the hotel or another authority. A protective factor is however that on each car there is inside, either on the passenger door or by the window, the cars register plate information even in braille writing. So if one remembers the plate number, the malicious drivers can be reported to the police.

If one wishes to walk to the attractions, it should be said that on some of the roads there are markings for the blind, but not on all of them. Also the streets are sometimes uneven and one may easily stumble. Moreover the streets may be crowded which complicates moving around.

8.1.3 Accessibility for the Deaf and Those with Hearing Problems

The public transportation is the least problematic for those with hearing problems. They may even consider themselves lucky during rush hours as they do not have to listen to the noises of the crowds. For the help of these people, as they may not be able to hear the announcements of the stops, there are information screens showing the current and upcoming stops. Also the directions are quite well marked at the stations, which is good as not many people know the sign language.

One may also face some issues with the taxi drivers as most of them do not know the sign language. However the Turkish people are usually very good with body language and always find a way to communicate. In turn, when thinking about walking to the attractions, the hearing disability should not be a problem except if asking for directions. Just one should be careful with cars and motorcycles as he/she may not hear them coming from behind.

8.1.4 Other Observations

Overall it should be said that signalization in the public transportation is good as well as the connectivity between different transport lines. One can relatively easily find his/her way around the city even when using the public transportation for the first time. Also there is at least one security guide on each stop and station and the local people are very helpful. However, they do not all know English or other foreign language which is unfortunate. Another negative issue is that sometimes the markings for the blind are a hindrance when pulling big luggage and the author has herself faced related problems many places in the city.

8.1.5 Results and Improvement Suggestions

The overall accessibility of the transportation possibilities to the Sultanahmet Square is good. It could be said that the blind and visually impaired may face the most obstacles and need most help in order to find their way. On the other hand those with hearing impairments need the least help.

Accessibility Grades (A-D)	
Mobility:	B
Vision:	B
Hearing:	A-
Total/average grade:	B+

Table 3: Accessibility of Transportation

The main improvements to be done are making braille available for the blind at stops and station. Also some security guides should know sign language and proper English in order to help those using public transportation . Moreover few of the ticketing machines could be placed on lower level for the wheelchair users and short people to use. The problem of the markings of the blind being on the way for those with luggage, could maybe be solved by guiding the blind with the markings to the normal entrance gates instead of the wheelchair accessible ones. Additionally controlling the taxi drivers and enchancing the condition of roads is important.

8.2 The Sultanahmet Square

The Sultanahmet Square is a square in the old part of Istanbul, in Fatih district. At Sultanahmet Square all the attractions chosen for this study are located. The square is quite large and has green areas, a fountain in middle of it, cafes and restaurants as well as kiosks. The square has Hagia Sophia Museum and Blue Mosque facing each other from the opposite sides and Hippodrome next to Blue Mosque. Also other famous attractions, Basilica Cistern and Topkapi Place are located nearby.

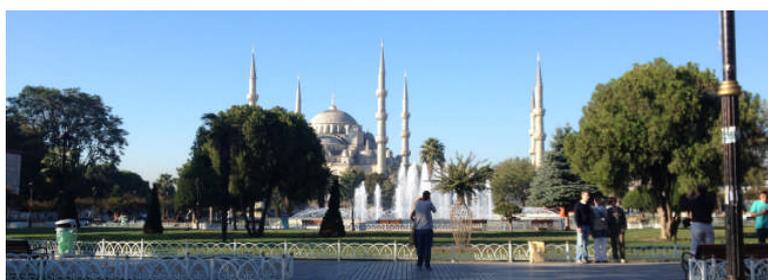


Image 10: Sultanahmet Square and Blue Mosque

8.2.1 Accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility

The surface of the square's ground is made of cobblestone and is not completely even. Also there are some changes in the height of the ground due to which there are thresholds. In several places there are lowerings in the threshold so that a person with a wheelchair or strollers may get past the thresholds, however sometimes the lowerings and ramps are not in the most logical places and one may have to search a while for them.

A positive factor is that there are accessible toilets at the square. One is next to Hippodrome and more details of that toilet is given in section 8.2.2 when discussing about Hippodrome. The other one is next to a restaurant, quite near to Hagia Sophia museum. This toilet has a fee of one Turkish lira, which is a normal custom in Turkey. For those with wheelchair, there is a special elevator as there are stairs down to the toilets, however there is no railing side by the stairs. There is all the time a worker to charge the fee and he/she can help with the elevator.



Image 11: Wheelchair elevator to the public toilet

Another good thing which the author noticed during data collection, was that at least one of the restaurants located at the square was wheelchair accessible with a ramp. That restaurant, maintained by the Fatih district municipality, had a ramp and space for one to move around inside. Even the menu was written also on a low lever for the persons using wheelchair to be able to read the text without problems. Moreover the staff seemed to know English and be helpful when the author ate in the restaurant herself. During her stay in the

restaurant she also saw a family to enter with strollers and they had no problem with fitting in.



Image 12: Accessible restaurant at the square

Moreover, many benches has been placed on the square for one to sit, if in need to rest for a while. Unfortunately the benches are most of the time full and one may find it hard to find a place to sit. However in the local culture people are taught to respect the elderly and give their seats to them as well as to the pregnant women and sick or injured people, so one may be lucky at get a seat even if the area first seems full.



Image 13: Benches at Sultanahmet Square

8.2.2 Accessibility for the Visually Impaired and Blind

As mentioned before, the ground on the square is a bit uneven at some points and there are plenty of thresholds for which the blind and visually impaired may stumble to. Also, unfortunately, there are no markings on the ground for the blind and the signalization in general on the square could be better. For example there is no noticeable sign for how to go to the tram-stop. Also there are several public toilets around the square but there are only few signs to where they are located.

There are sure many people to ask for help, but one again should be careful as there are always people trying to take advantage. There are for example many street salesmen wandering around the Sultanahmet Square and trying to make the tourists to buy their products. These salesmen may sometimes be helpful, but often they are very pushy and disturbing and can try to take advantage of the defenseless people if they happen to ask their help.



Image 14: A Sign to toilet at Sultanahmet Square

8.2.3 Accessibility for the Deaf and Those with Hearing Problems

There is not much special to be noted concerning those with hearing disability, except that for them also it would be beneficial if the signalization was better as they may face problems when asking for directions because people do not generally know sign language in the area. Also these people should be very careful with the possibly passing motor vehicles and the salesmen, as they may not notice them coming near them and the salesmen may be annoyed if they cannot make contact with the people or take advantage of them. Moreover, completely deaf people are not going to be able to enjoy the beautiful call for prayer which is echoing on the square several times a day.

8.2.4 Other Observations

It should be mentioned that there is a road for the tourist busses as well as a short-time parking lot at the square, enabling the tourists to get off and on their transportation very near to the attractions. However, the drivers have to pay a fee in order to enter the square with a motorized vehicle, meaning that if one desires to visit the attractions on their own by taxi and wants to get off in front of the attractions, they have to pay extra for the driver in order to do that. However the normal road also passes by near the attractions, so one may tell the driver that there is no need to enter the square, but to stay off by side of the road.

8.2.5 Results and Improvement Suggestions

All in all the accessibility of Sultanahmet Square is quite good. However the blind and those with visual impairment can face barriers due to poor signalization.

Accessibility Grades (A-D)	
Mobility:	B+
Vision:	C
Hearing:	A-
Total/average grade:	B

Table 4: Accessibility of Sultanahmet Square

There is much development to be done in the signalization and making the area easy to move around for those with visual impairments. Also there could be something done for restricting the business of the salesmen as they are often very disturbing. Moreover it could be beneficial idea to position a tourist info point at some central place on the square to answer the possible questions of the tourists and to be a reliable source of information and help.

8.3 Hippodrome

Hippodrome is, as mentioned previously in this paper, an ancient horse racing track and circus arena, which unfortunately has mostly been destroyed over time. Today three ancient monuments are standing in the place where the arena once stood with multitude of monuments in honour of gods and victorious rulers. Today one can go and admire the existing monuments free of charge as they are located outside on the public Sultanahmet Square.

8.3.1 Accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility

The Hippodrome is a quite accessible attraction for persons with reduced mobility, for example wheelchair users. When entering the ancient circus arena there are some changes in the level of the ground causing thresholds, but there are also lowerings on the ground making it possible to move around with a wheelchair or strollers. The ground surrounding the monuments is a little bit bumpy, as it is of cobblestone, but it is possible to move on it with a wheelchair quite easily. Moreover, one with reduced mobility can easily see the monuments close by without greater obstacles as they are merely surrounded by a fence. A negative aspect though is that in the informative pillars, located next to the monuments, the text is located a bit too high for those in wheelchair or who are short. Moreover there could be more benches on which the elderly and children could sit if they get tired and enjoy the views.



Image 15: Lowering on the treshold



Image 16: Benches at Hippodrome

Next to the hippodrome there is a clearly marked wc establishment with wheelchair accessible toilet. There are two ramps to the toilet. However there are no stairs to the toilet, which can be a hindrance for example for persons with crutches. The toilet normally costs one Turkish lira but the accessible toilet is free and opened by the staff member who is available at the toilet all the time. Unfortunately the researcher was not given a permission to take measurement inside the accessible toilet as it was busy time of the day, but it seemed to have fulfilled the requirements. In addition to the accessible toilet, there were two “European style” toilets, referring to toilets with a seat, and one “Turkish Style” with only a hole on the ground. It is good that there were both European and Turkish style closets as for some the Turkish style can be very hard and uncomfortable to use, while some may prefer it to the sitting toilet. It may seem strange to the European travelers that the locals really often do prefer the Turkish style toilet to the European style, but it is very true and the rational for the local people’s preference is hygienity. They feel like the European toilet is not hygienic as everyone sits on the same seat. But it was clearly marked on the door which type of closet each one is, so the users can choose for themselves.



Image 17: Toilets next to Hippodrome



Image 18: Interior of the accessible toilet



Image 19: Sink and chair in the accessible toilet

8.3.2 Accessibility for the Visually Impaired and Blind

Although Hippodrome is quite accessible for those with reduced mobility, persons with visual impairments may face some serious obstacles. This is because at the moment there is no markings on the ground for the blind. In addition there are barely any signs pointing the location of hippodrome from further away and it can easily blend in to the rest of the Sultanahmet Square.

As earlier mentioned, there are informative pillars next to all of the monuments giving information in Turkish, English and Arabic languages, however there is no braille text available in the pillars. Also the informative pillars could be more noticeable with some colour which stands out. Additionally to the informative pillars there is a possibility for gaining information of the monuments by audio guidance.

By each monument, on the ground, there is a plate with instructions on how to acquire audio guidance. For guidance one has to call to a number written in the plate and follow the instructions coming from the phone. There are several language options, including English (Istanbul Kalinma Ajansi 2014b). This service is provided by the Fatih Municipality and Istanbul Kalkinma Ajansi, which can be translated as “Istanbul Development Agency” (Istanbul Kalinma Ajansi 2014a). The idea is very good, however it serves more the people who can see as there is no braille and the plate is not really standing out.



Image 20: Informative pillar at Hippodrome



Image 21: Plate with information of audio guidance

8.3.3 Accessibility for the Deaf and Those with Hearing Problems

There is not much to be said concerning the deaf those with hearing impairments. They are able to admire the monuments of Hippodrome like everyone else. One issue which they might face however is that if they go for a guided tour they may not be able to hear the guide as the area can be very noisy. Also it is not very common for the local people to know sign language which can make it hard for completely deaf people to ask help if they cannot find the spot or ask for help, unless they are on a special tour with guide who knows sign language.

8.3.4 Other Observations

It is very positive that one does not have to pay any entrance fee to the Hippodrome. Unfortunately there are many, often very pushy and disturbing, street salesmen wandering around the hippodrome as everywhere else around the Sultanahmet Square area.

8.3.5 Results and Improvement Suggestions

All in all, the blind are the ones needing most help at the attractions at the moment. Also the elderly visitors or persons with bad legs or an injury, may get tired of standing if all the seats are taken. However as mentioned before often the local people are helpful and give their seat for those in need. The hippodrome can be said to be very accessible for those ion wheelchair, due to the easy access near the monuments and also the wheelchair accessible toilet right next to the square. Those with hearing impairment also are unlikely to face many problems, but they should be careful with the salesmen especially.

Accessibility Grades (A-D)	
Mobility:	A-
Vision:	C
Hearing:	A-
Total/average grade:	B

Table 5: Accessibility of Hippodrome

The main factors to be improved at Hippodrome is that there could be markings on the ground for the blind to find the monuments. Also the audio guidance information could be given in braille and instructions located on the information pillars instead of on the relatively indistinguishable plate on ground, or the plate should be more noticeable. Also maybe there could be toucheable miniatures of the monuments available. Another interesting addition to

benefit all could be a figure showing the original appearance of the square. Moreover in the informative pillars, there could be more language options.

8.4 Hagia Sophia Museum

Hagia Sophia Museum, a magnificent building with breathtaking architecture was built as a church in Byzantine era and then converted to a mosque by Ottoman sultan Mehmed the Conqueror. Finally in the 20th century the mosque was turned into a museum to serve both the Christians and Muslims and anyone else willing to admire its beauty. One can visit the museum with a relatively low price of 30 Turkish lira. Also, as mentioned before, it should be noted that children and Turkish citizens over the age of 65 or with a disability can enter the museum for free.

8.4.1 Accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility

When entering the Hagia Sophia museum one first faces the ticket sales and the security check lines. Sometimes the lines are very long and there is no place to sit, which can be tiring for the elderly and children especially. Also there is nothing making shadow on hot days. At the ticket sales however there are free wheelchairs provided by the museum for the elderly and those with walking problems, such as injury. The ticket sales desk is a little bit too high for serving easily those in wheelchair. Because the wheelchair users can not fit through the normal ticket gates, there is a separate, marked gate for them with the necessary width. Also if there is someone with especially large wheelchair that person can be allowed to enter from the side.



Image 22: Ticket Sales at Hagia Sophia Museum



Image 23: Ticket gate for wheelchair and markings for blind

When entering the Hagia Sophia building itself, there are high thresholds. However there is a wide ramp added to be used by wheelchair users, the elderly, children and families with strollers. At downstairs of the building there are many thresholds of 5 cm, but to each new room there is at least one ramp making the downstairs accessible. Unfortunately the upstairs of Hagia Sophia museum is completely inaccessible for those with wheelchair, due to several stairs with no ramps. The upstairs is also hard to reach by anyone, especially by the elderly, children and injured people. This is because between the stair in the beginning and end one has to climb up a long, partly slippery road, which doesn't have railings to hold on. What is interesting is that when going down, from another side, there are railings.



Image 24: A ramp at Hagia Sophia



Image 25: Stairs leading to the road upstairs

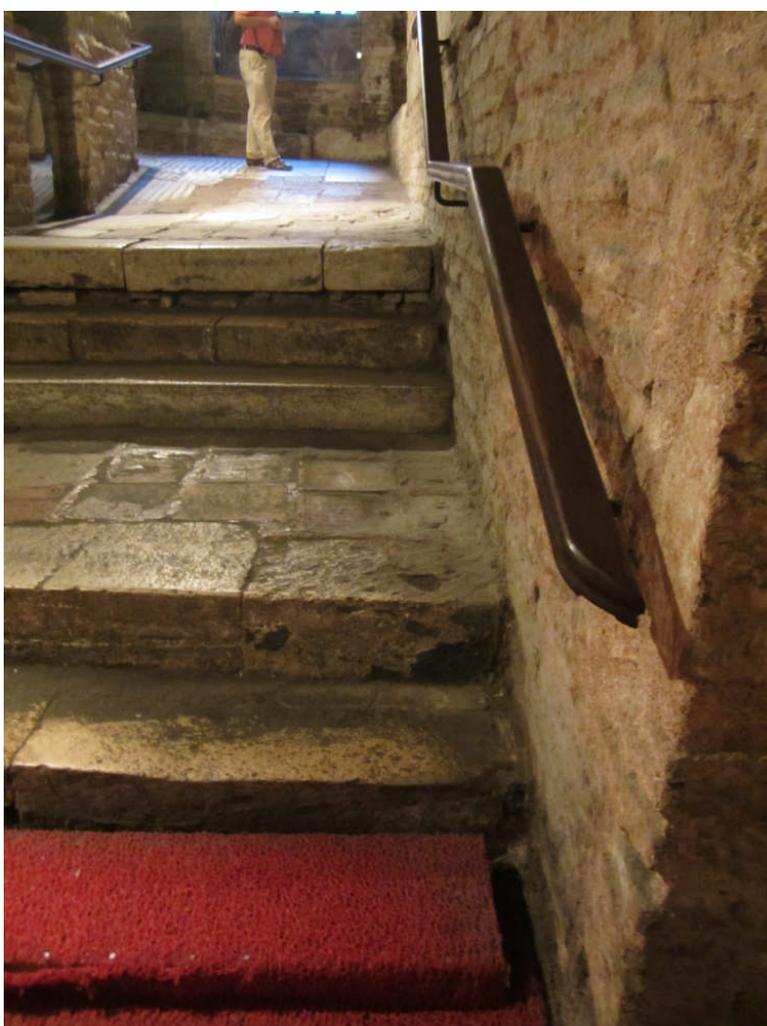


Image 26: Railing on the way down



Image 27: Warning about the steps going downstairs

There is also another place inaccessible for those in wheelchair. That place is on the yard and originally it was used as a place for conducting baptism. On the small yard one can view some large scale vases, empty sarcophaguses and tombs of the Ottoman sultans. However those with wheelchairs are unable to enter the yard as there are first few steps up and then down and no ramps. Also there is no railing on the side of the stairs for helping the elderly or others to climb up and down. The strais are also bit high for small children. Additionally there is another inaccessible area near the cafes and the museum shop on the front yard, where some remains of the previous Hagia Sophia church are displayed. The display is on higher level and there is a very high treshold with no ramp. However one can see the exhibited remains partly from the side without entering the area itself.



Image 28: Stairs to the old baptism yard



Image 29: Exhibition of remains of the previous Hagia Sophia

Inside Hagia Sophia Museum there are no toilets, but at the yard after ticket gates there are separate toilets for men and women. All of the toilets are “European style” which might be bothering for some of the local people as they are often used to the “Turkish style” toilets. However the European style toilets are generally better for the elderly, children, pregnant people and anyone with bad legs.



Image 30: Accessible toilet at Hagia Sophia Museum

There was also one toilet marked with a wheelchair sign and it is supposedly accessible. However the toilet is locked and the author was not allowed in by the staff members. When she tried to explain her intention for seeing it in research purposes she was forwarded to talk with an archaeologist, Sabriye Partek, who provided her with information on the ongoing accessibility project, “Erişilebilir Turizm Engelsiz İstanbul”, in Hagia Sophia. Partek explained that the project is conducted with the help of test persons, who have different sorts of disabilities and come to test the accessibility of the building. The brief interview was informative and useful, but despite requesting to see the toilet from inside again, the author was not allowed to do so. This led the author to the conclusion that the toilet may have not been accessible as she was prohibited to see it from inside, however she could not get a precise information on the issue.

Other mobility related accessibility issues are the museum shops and the cafes in the museum area on the frontyard. The museum shop on the frontyard is quite accessible as it is on the floor level, however it is small and the way to move around is narrow and one may accidentally drop something if entering with a wheelchair. Another shop inside the Hagia Sophia itself also has similar problem and one more is located upstairs, where those in wheelchair cannot enter. Also one of the two cafes on the yard is inaccessible with a wheelchair due to a high threshold to the service counter. The other one is accessible from one part, but also has high thresholds surrounding it otherwise. But it should be noted that surely the staff would help and take orders from table if one cannot reach the service counter.



Image 31: Threshold to the cafes service counter

8.4.2 Accessibility for the Visually Impaired and Blind

At the moment the accessibility for the blind is not really good as there is no markings on the ground, except for a small fraction of the area from ticket gate to the audio guide selling stands. The audio guides are available in 12 languages, including English. The price for audio guide is 20 Turkish lira and it can be very useful aid to get the most out of the museum experience if one visits there without a guide. However for the blind to be able to enjoy this feature to its full extend, there should be markings on ground for them all around the building and also braille signs and writings available, which is not the situation at the moment.



Image 32: Audio guide sales point at Hagia Sophia

Another issue in addition to the lack of markings for the blind and the lack of braille, is that there are generally no contrast colours used to mark the high threshold found in many parts of the building. This may lead for those with visual impairment, or basically anyone to trip easily. The author her self for example has faced this problem often when visiting the building.



Image 33: Threshold inside Hagia Sophia

Additionally something positive that can be said about the museum is that the signs are easily understandable and there is contrast between the colours which facilitates those with visual impairments, but who are not completely blind.



Image 34: Sign for toilets

8.4.3 Accessibility for the Deaf and Those with Hearing Impairment

Firstly it should be noted that when a tourist group is larger than 15 people, the guide has to purchase headphones through which the group members will hear their guide's voice. This is positive for those with hearing problems as they do not have to try to hear the guide's voice behind all the other voices, instead they receive the voice directly to their ear. However sometimes the headphones are not working flawlessly and the voice of the guide is unclear, which is what happened to the author on one of her tours and the customers complained for not understanding her speech fully.

Unfortunately, when the author asked from Partek if there were any staff members who knew sign language, she answered negatively. However it is on the development list and hopefully soon there will be new staff members with this skill or the old ones will be trained. However

Partek underlined that they has staff speaking multiple languages and when the author tested some staff's English skills, they could communicate satisfactorily, some better than others. For the advantage of the deaf and those with hearing impairments, there are several informative stands explaining the different features of the building. But in order to get most out of their experience it would be best for them to have a guide who knows sign language or a guide book with them, for explaining the features more detailly.

8.4.4 Other Observations

One issue to be discussed is the security check as not everyone can get trough it. For example it is not good for the pregnant woman to go trough the radiating gate. Also those with an artificial joint or heart pacemaker can have problem if they use the gate. However this is not a problem and when one explains the situation to the security guide he/she is allowed to pass from the side without entering the check. Only that persons bag must be placed on the detector and the personnel may check that visitor briefly with hands.

To be added, the entrance prices are not too high and it is very positive that local disable people and youth and foreign children can enter the museum for free. Also it is good to have the toilet free of charge in stead of the normal one Turkish Lira fee as someone might not have the needed money.

8.4.5 Results and Improvement Suggestions

Hagia Sophia has many barriers for persons with severe mobile or visual disability. Some parts of the museum are completely in accessible with wheelchair or strollers. Also one has to be constantly careful not to stumble as the floor is partly slippery and has multiple tresholds. Once again the place can be said to be most accessible by those with hearing disability.

Accessibility Grades (A-D)	
Mobility:	C
Vision:	C-
Hearing:	A-
Total/average grade:	C+

Table 6: Accessibility of Hagia Sophia Museum

Although there is lot to be done in order to make Hagia Sophia accessible for all, it was positive to hear from archaeologist Partek, and find from internet information confirming, that there is an ongoing project aiming to better the situation. The most radical changes to be

done are concerning the markings for the blind, and making the upstairs accessible for the wheelchair users and adding railings for everyone else. Also maybe more ramps could be added and some contrasting stickers put on the most dangerous thresholds.

Regarding people with hearing impairments, the museum could hire staffmembers who know sign language or educate the existing personnel on the subject. Also in general the staffmembers should be educated and aware of the need of the disabled customers and know how to handle them. Moreover it would be important for the museum staff to check the headphones constantly so that they would not give unclear voice when a group needs to use them.

8.5 The Blue Mosque

The Blue mosque, also known as Sultan Ahmed Mosque, is one of the main attractions in Istanbul and somewhat a symbol of the city together with Hagia Sophia. The mosque can be visited free of charge between the Islamic prayer times. However the tourists have to use a separate entrance from the local people and Muslims who go inside to pray.

8.5.1 Accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility

The Blue Mosque has unfortunately many obstacles that the visitor with reduced mobility must overcome before being able to enter the establishment. There are several gates to the garden area surrounding the mosque and its courtyard. To the courtyard which is located on a higher level there are also three entrances and then again two entrances to the mosque itself, one touristic and one for the local people and praying Muslims. Unfortunately, out of all these gates and entrances none can be considered truly and fully accessible.

Firstly, out of the five outer gates only one, gate C, is supposedly accessible. It has been marked with signs of a wheelchair and strollers. There are also signs at the other gates, A, B, D and E, to the gate C, but the signs could be located in a lower level and be more clear. Unlike the other gates, gate C does not have a threshold or steps as obstacles, however the boards laid on the ground are a little bit unstable and there is a large crack right after the entrance which can complicate moving with wheelchair or strollers or even cause someone to trip if not looking on the ground. Moreover the C gate is entering to the area where the tourists wait in line for being able to enter the mosque, making the area in front of the gate very crowded.

After entering the garden area one can move without greater problems as there are no significant barriers or obstacles, although the ground can be uneven at some parts and have cracks. The courtyard on the other hand, is on a higher level and one had to climb several stairs in order to get up to one of the three entrances. There are no railings on the stairs for one to

hold on while going up or down. However an effort has been made on one of the three entrances to the courtyard and the entrance facing the gate C has a ramp. Unfortunately after going up the ramp, one faces a 8 cm high threshold which has to be passed in order to get into the courtyard.



Image 35: The ramp to the courtyard



Image 36: The 8 cm treshold after the ramp

In order to enter the mosque itself and see the interior the customers with a wheelchair must enter from the entrance of the local people. This may cause some unnecessary waiting in the touristic line as one might get confused weather or not he/she must also use the touristic entrance. This is because one actually has to go to the touristic entrance in order to see that it is not accessible, there are no signs showing it. Also it can be a problem for those who are visiting the attraction in a normal group as they must be separated from the group and the guide. Moreover at the local entrance there are two tresholds, first one of 17 cm and another one of 7 cm, which makes it impossible for one to enter without helper. Additionally one has to switch her/his wheelchair to other one provided by the mosque staff which also requires help and may be imbarassing for the person if he/she has to be lifted from a chair to another in front of others. How ever this is necessary because nothing that has touched the ground outside, such as shoes, cannot be used inside the mosque. This also includes the strollers and is forbidden due to the fact that muslims puts their face on the ground while praying and it must be clean.



Image 37: A man in need of help due to 17 cm treshold (marked with arrow)

Once on reaches the interior of the mosque the area where the tourists are able to move around is mainly accessible. The praying areas of the muslims are separated and the tourists are not allowed to enter those areas.

Other negative aspect to be notices is that within the walls of the Blue mosque there is only one toilet establishment with separate areas from men and women. In order to reach the toilet, one has to go down several stairs and the place is impossible to reach with a wheelchair. In addition there is only one “European style” seatable toilet for women and one for men, the others are “Turkish style” referring to only a hole on the ground. Using a Turkish style toilet may be very had and uncomfortable for those not used to it, especially the elderly and children.

8.5.2 Accessibility for the Visually Impaired and Blind

When moving on to consider the needs of those with vision impairments and the blind, it first has to be noted that there are no markings on the ground which these people could follow, neither is the signalization very clear. There is no signs with braille and the existing signs are either very small, located too high, or the text is not clearly differentiable from the sign’s background. Hence due to the lack of clear signs it may be hard for the visually impaired to find the right touristic entrance, unless they see the other tourists who are waiting in the line or ask helps from the security guides or other people they face.



Image 38: The location of the sign: too high



Image 39: The colour of the sign: no contrast colours

Moreover, inside the mosque there are usually a lot of people during the touristic visiting hours, which may be disturbing for the blind as it can be hard to move around in crowded places. Also one may accidentally cross the touristic line and go to the area of the praying muslims and disturb someone. However as there are many people, including security and other staff members, one is likely to be helped.

Another issue is that there are many thresholds and no railings on all stairs, as mentioned in previous part. This makes moving around hard also for those with visual impairment. Also there is no contrast colour for one to clearly notice the stairs or thresholds.

8.5.3 Accessibility for the Deaf and Those with Hearing Problems

There is not much to be noted considering those with hearing impairments. As mentioned earlier, they may face problems when asking for help or get some problem with the security guides if they do not hear their commandments to do or not to do what they want, but otherwise they are able to admire the building same way as everyone else. Unfortunately there seems not to be any personnel knowing sign language, but hopefully this will be changing in near future.

8.5.4 Other Observations

It is very nice that one does not have to pay any entrance fee to the mosque. However the praying times limit the possibilities for visiting the site, but that is also something that cannot be changed. Also it is good that the mosque provides headscarfs for the women and additional clothing for both sexes, in this way one does not have to be turned away from the door if his/her clothes do not correspond the mosque's dress code.

8.5.5 Results and Improvement Suggestions

The blind and the persons in wheelchair face the most barriers during their visit to the Blue Mosque. All in all the situation is hardest for those with visual or mobile restrictions.

Accessibility Grades (A-D)	
Mobility:	C
Vision:	C-
Hearing:	A-
Total/average grade:	C+

Table 7: Accessibility of the Blue Mosque

It would firstly be important to increase number of ramps and create solutions for the thresholds, such as putting ramps over them or atleast some contrast colour. Also making railings side by side all the stairs should high be on the development list.

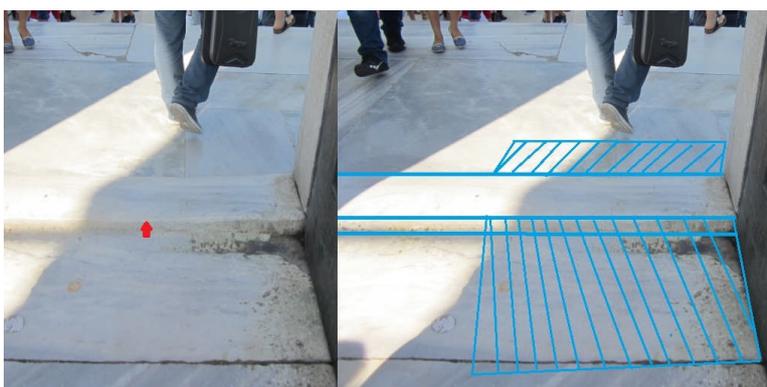


Image 40: One suggestion for treshold problem

Moreover it would be important that the opening hours of the mosque for each day would be clearly marked at each entrance. At the moment the opening hours are not clearly marked and one has to search for finding them, or ask someone, in order to not to stand in the line

for nothing. Also there could be some shadow provided for the tourists standing in line during the hot summer days. It could also write somewhere the estimated time one has to wait in the line. Moreover inside the mosque there are usually a lot of people making noise, which causes the site to lose its authentic peacefulness. Also it is very uncomfortable to wait in the line for entrance and then be hurried to go out from the building in order to give place for new people.

8.6 Conclusions

Considering the overall research, the transportation got the best grade and out of the three attractions Hippodrome was the most accessible. Hagia Sophia Museum and Blue Mosque had most barriers, but still they are at least partly accessible although the persons with disabilities may need much help and not manage in the environment on their own. The blind seemed the most unfortunate and likely to face most barriers, followed by wheelchair users. All in all those with hearing restrictions were much more capable to visit the attractions and use the transportation than those with reduced mobility or vision. When considering the overall research and the total average grade, which was determined to be B-, it can be concluded that the chosen places were partially accessible independently or with a helper. This is an encouraging result, but the level of accessibility could be better and the result does not exactly encourage for widely promoting accessible tourism in the city before some adjustments and improvements are done.

Average Accessibility Grades	
Transportation:	B+
Sultanahmet Square:	B
Hippodrome:	B
Hagia Sophia Museum:	C+
The Blue Mosque:	C+
Overall total/average grade:	B-

Table 8: Average accessibility grades

Clearly some effort has been made in order to make the attractions accessible, but still there is much to be improved. With relatively small improvements the level of accessibility in the researched places could be enhanced. Markings for the blind, ramps and railings are maybe the most important elements to be added together with braille information and staff members with knowledge on foreign languages, sign language and how to deal with disabled people.

One of the main barrier for making these attractions accessible for all, is that there are limitations on the modification of the attractions due to their historical importance. This was very much emphasized by archaeologist Partek when she was interviewed by the author. Some changes, such as building elevators, ramps or railings, may be hard to implement because of the historical importance. However it is also important to remember that access to heritage sites should be everyones right and try to find compromises (Martin 1999).

Also it should not be forgotten that the attitudes of the local people and the authorities and their knowledge on the legislation concerning the rights of those with disabilities has a huge effect on the development of accessibility in the area. In Turkey in general changes take time and people are slow with requesting their rights, however it seems like the situation is getting better. Atleast it seems like the many accosiations and local municipality has become active in reducing the barriers in the city. Istanbul authorities are, atleast seemingly, trying to find the solutions, trough projects like “Erişilebilir Turizm Engelsiz İstanbul”.

There are still many barriers in the city and Istanbul cannot be promoted as an accessible destination yet, but maybe after few years and several development projects the city will be among the most popular accessible urban destinations.

9 Further Discussion

Different aspect to the research could have been done by using a test person, like in the local “Erişilebilir Turizm Engelsiz İstanbul”-project. This would maybe help to find some barriers that the author did not think about and alto to realize that some of the though to be barriers are not as severe as was tought by her. Further research could also be done on the accessibility of the chosen attractions’ official websites as it was mentioned by ENAT(2011) that all aspects of the tourism value chain should be accessible, including information providing websites. As far as the author was using the websites for acquiring information she could see that they did not really fulfill the qualities of accessibility or provide information on the attractions accessibility.

Moreover the accessibility of the other touristic attractions in the Sultanahmet area, such as the Basilica Cistern and Topkapi Palace, as well as elsewhere in the city should be evaluated. Research could also be done on the accessibility of the surrounding hotels as the results could enable promoting full accessible packages or encourage for creating accessible accommodation solutions in the area. Also it would be interesting and useful to study the local people’s attitudes towards persons with disabilities and the local authorities’ willingness to make an effort for developments. Moreover the existing accessibility projects could be studied in more detail in order to find out how thorough and well planned they are.

10 Self-Assessment

Living abroad at the time of the thesis writing created some challenges for the process. Due to being between houses, there was not internet connection always when necessary which made information search difficult and sometimes it was hard to contact the thesis counsellor for help and guidance. Moreover the access to the written sources of Laurea UAS was limited. However during a short holiday in Finland the author was able to meet the thesis counsellor and use the library of Laurea UAS. Also finally in October she got an internet connection to her home.

Despite the challenges, the author enjoyed the thesis project because the subject was interesting and important for her. It was challenging for her to limit the study as she would have wanted to include many other aspects in the study also. Also processing all the collected data took a lot of time and was not easy. The thesis became much more comprehensive than the author first intended, but she felt like all the aspects were related and important. She hopes that the readers will not find her work too heavy and can learn and benefit from it.

The findings of the study were very similar to what she had expected. However she was even a bit surprised when hearing about the comprehensive tourism related accessibility project that is going on. It was very encouraging to find out and she hopes that within few years there would be great development done and Istanbul would start to attract more disabled customers. The city is great and everyone should be able to experience it, she thinks.

All in all, the author really enjoyed the project and she hopes the readers enjoy it also.

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