

Systems Approach to Inclusive and Intergenerational Trail Development

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Abstract

The paper examines the design of accessible intergenerational themed trails as an opportunity to promote social responsibility and sustainable management in heritage tourism. We start from the observation that, in practice, thematic trails are often not designed according to the principles of universal design, which excludes people with various forms of disability, older adults, families with young children, and other vulnerable groups from the tourism experience. Given the aging population and growing demand for accessible tourism (UNWTO, 2016), this type of exclusion poses both an ethical and a developmental challenge for destinations and organizations that manage heritage resources. Our research integrates the concepts of universal design, participatory cultural heritage management, and intergenerational learning into a unified analytical framework grounded in a systems approach and systems dynamics (Jere Jakulin, 2020; Moscardo, 2021; Sedarati, Serra, and Jere Jakulin, 2022). The systemic approach enables a holistic examination of the interrelationships between physical accessibility, the informational and emotional dimensions of experience, local community involvement, and sustainable destination management. The empirical part is based on a case study of the thematic trail “Discover Vipava through Time, Culture, and Nature,” developed as part of the PUŠ project. Three complementary qualitative methods are used: semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and people with disabilities, participant observation along the trail itself, and document analysis. Based on the findings, we construct a Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) that illustrates the reinforcing and balancing feedback loops between accessibility, community participation, intergenerational cooperation, and user experience. The expected contribution of the research is twofold. At the theoretical level, it situates accessible and inclusive tourism within the systemic framework of corporate social responsibility and links it to European and national guidelines (Tourism for All; ReNPK24–31). At the applied level, it offers professional guidelines for destination managers, local communities, and heritage policy makers on how to design tourism products in rural and heritage environments that are simultaneously accessible, intergenerationally inclusive, and sustainable in the long term. In doing so, this paper directly addresses the central theme of the conference—sustainability management in organizations—within the specific context of tourism and cultural heritage.

Keywords: accessible tourism, universal design, intergenerational cooperation, systems approach, systems dynamics, social responsibility, sustainable development, cultural heritage, Vipava Valley