

## TRAVEL RESILIENCE PARADOX: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AMONG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NATURAL DESTINATIONS IN CENTRAL ECUADOR

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**Abstract:** Discrimination within tourism perpetuates socio-spatial exclusion for persons with disabilities, constituting a significant yet under-researched barrier to equitable participation. This is particularly critical in nature-based tourism contexts in developing regions, where resilient travel behaviour amidst discrimination remains poorly understood. Hence, the current empirical study aims to assess the key factors driving travel persistence among discriminated tourists with disabilities in Central Ecuador. A cross-sectional survey was conducted from June to October 2021, and 337 valid questionnaires were collected for quantitative analysis through binary logistic regression. Results revealed that factors such as education level (sociodemographics), type of disability (disability features), frequency of travel, displacement with accompaniment (travel behaviour), accessible information, accessibility legal compliance by tourism providers and destination attributes (external motivations), self-determination and contact with nature (intrinsic motivations) significantly influenced the travel persistence among discriminated tourists with disabilities ( $p < 0.05$ - $p < 0.001$ ). Collectively, the findings challenge universalist, infrastructure-centric models of accessible tourism, advocating instead for a paradigm shift towards psycho-socially informed frameworks. These must prioritise autonomy, leverage the therapeutic value of natural environments, and manage informational expectations critically to foster genuine resilience and inclusion in contexts of systemic discrimination. Furthermore, the findings help develop new integrative frameworks to formulate accessible tourism policies for both local and international destinations.

**Keywords:** travel resilience, discrimination, persons with disabilities, Tungurahua, accessible tourism

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### INTRODUCTION

Discrimination against persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the tourism sector remains a pervasive issue in both developed and developing countries, significantly impacting the social inclusion and economic opportunities of these individuals. This form of discrimination manifests in various ways, including physical barriers, inadequate information, and systemic neglect, which individually or collectively hinder access to travel-related services and limit the ability of PWDs to fully participate in leisure, cultural and sports activities (Duignan et al., 2023).

The global population of over 1 billion individuals with disabilities, along with their families and caregivers, underscores the urgency of addressing these barriers to create a more inclusive tourism environment (Guamán et al., 2023). The historical context reveals a long-standing struggle for recognition and rights among individuals with disabilities, particularly in the tourism industry, which has traditionally lacked adequate accessibility measures. Globally, legislative milestones such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) have catalysed significant improvements in accessibility standards within the sector, promoting awareness among service providers and fostering collaborations aimed at enhancing the travel experience for disabled individuals (UN, 2008; UNWTO, 2025).

However, despite these advancements, compliance with accessibility regulations remains inconsistent, and challenges persist, especially in regions with inadequate infrastructure and resources. The disparities in accessibility are particularly pronounced when comparing developed and developing countries. Whilst many high-income countries have made strides toward improving accessibility through robust legal frameworks and infrastructure, developing countries

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often face more severe challenges, including a high level of poverty, lack of basic services, limited resources, and deeply entrenched societal stigma. This divergence highlights the necessity for continued advocacy and reform not only to ensure that PWDs can travel freely and equitably, regardless of geographic or socioeconomic barriers but also solve controversies surrounding disability discrimination issues in tourism sector, which in most cases has focused primary on the adequacy of existing legislation and commitment of businesses to implement necessary changes (i.e., infrastructure elements and physical features) as ultimate unraveling answer to societal attitudes and stigma towards disability (Aguilar-Carrasco et al., 2023). Significantly, for discriminated populations, tourism participation persistence may depend upon prior discriminatory experiences (i.e., attitudinal trauma), producing non-focused linear and at times paradoxical effects compared with conventional literature that tends to emphasise improvement of quality services as main objective of inclusive participation, which may become counterproductive by amplifying awareness of service gaps, legal knowledge that may intensify institutional frustration from disabled tourists.

Thus, addressing discrimination issues helps promote equal access for disabled travellers and encourages greater societal awareness of the importance of inclusivity and the potential economic benefits of accessible tourism. Further, by fostering a culture of inclusivity, the tourism sector can enhance the experiences of disabled travellers, stimulate economic growth, increase profitability and confer significant competitive advantage upon those destinations and enterprises that proactively develop accessible products and services, and promote social changes across communities (Bálint et al., 2025; Lim, 2020; UNWTO, 2025). However, critical gaps about accessible tourism remain elusive, particularly from demand-side perspectives (Groulx et al., 2024), where empirical studies at a regional scope on accessibility and nature-based tourism are highly limited (Aguilar-Carrasco et al., 2023; Groulx et al., 2024). Furthermore, the direct contact with natural tourist destinations may represent an additional motivation for PWDs to travel due to health and well-being benefits (Chikuta et al., 2017; Groulx et al., 2022; Doran-Sherlock et al., 2025), especially for those disabled travellers previously discriminated against in developing Latin-American countries such as Ecuador, where legislative enforcement is frequently decoupled from societal practice and service provision (Guamán et al., 2023), and where this schism creates a critical context for investigating the resilience mechanisms that enable PWDs to persist in travel despite systemic discrimination.

Within the Latin American region, an overwhelming majority of the states that have formally signed and ratified the UNCRPD continue to exhibit significant shortcomings in ensuring accessible tourism. Ecuador serves as a poignant case study, and following its 2007 ratification of the UNCRPD, this nation emerged as an international benchmark for disability-rights policies, particularly within the labour market through initiatives for workforce inclusion and the provision of medical and socioeconomic assistance, such as the allocation of state-funded subsidies. Notwithstanding these considerable governmental efforts concerning disability rights, the associated programmes proved non-permanent and their efficacy diminished over time, leading to a contemporary markedly limited social inclusion of this demographic, a situation acutely also evident in their participation in travel, recreation, and tourism activities (Guamán et al., 2023). This reality, which mirrors global circumstances, has remained essentially unchanged over the past decade. This stagnation occurs despite the well-documented benefits of accessible tourism, which have been strategically leveraged by the tourism sector in numerous developed nations (Domínguez et al., 2013; Loi & Kong, 2016). However, these benefits remain systematically overlooked within the local and national context. Despite the progressive legal frameworks, the acute discrimination practices experienced in developing nations such as Ecuador present a critical context for investigating this dissonance from psychosocial dimensions. This dimension, often neglected in the existing literature, may help understand how PWDs negotiate when experiencing episodes of discrimination, and most importantly, determine how attitudinal, institutional, or environmental obstructions effectively preclude or prevent their massive participation, ultimately affecting PWDs' travel persistence. The concept of "travel persistence" as an active form of resilience against discrimination remains under-theorised and lacks robust empirical investigation, particularly in nature-based tourism contexts in the Global South.

Accordingly, to the best of the authors' knowledge, only Guamán et al. (2023) has provided preliminary empirical evidence on this topic, specifically discrimination among tourists with disabilities from the Tungurahua Province just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, unlike previous study, the present research builds upon previous work on discrimination issues and related travel persistence, conducting a multifactorial analysis to address these knowledge gaps during the post-pandemic era. Therefore, this study is guided by a theoretical framework integrating Leisure Constraints (Park et al., 2025) and Cognitive Dissonance studies (e.g., De Vos & Singleton, 2020), consequently, discrimination is used as a potent interpersonal and structural constraint where various factors facilitate or inhibit the negotiation capability, which sometimes creates dissonance when expectations of accessibility clash with discriminatory realities. From this perspective, the present study has raised the following overarching research questions: (1) To what extent do specific sociodemographic, disability-related characteristics and travel behaviour function as significant predictors of travel persistence among PWDs who have experienced discrimination in Central Ecuador? (2) How can specific external structural factors, such as the availability of accessible information, regulatory compliance by providers, and destination attributes, inhibit or foster travel persistence? (3) What is the relative importance of intrinsic psychological motivations (i.e., self-determination and contact with nature) in shaping travel persistence when compared to external barriers?

Given that the interplay between travel challenges (i.e., infrastructures and attitudinal issues) and multiple reasons for PWDs to travel or not (Park et al., 2025), the present empirical study aims to assess the key factors driving travel persistence among discriminated tourists with disabilities in Central Ecuador.

Finally, advancing accessible tourism requires a comprehensive approach that includes the implementation of universal design principles, stakeholder collaboration, and ongoing research to address the barriers faced by travellers with

disabilities, particularly discrimination. Therefore, findings from the present study encourage a call for a paradigm shift from universal quality models towards differentiated approaches grounded in an individual's history of discrimination, urging researchers to examine the dominant ableist discourse, to consider how our inquiry can be more participatory and inclusive, and to seek to bridge inquiry, industry and community (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020); ultimately, contributing to improving quality of life of marginalised travellers, and reaching some sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to anti-discrimination, social inclusion and integration in tourism activities (Chwaja et al., 2025), thereby fundamentally re-engineering tourism as a proven mechanism for genuine social inclusion and equitable participation, particularly in the Tungurahua Province, in central Ecuador, where discriminatory practices may be normalised and unchallenged.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Impact of Discrimination

Discrimination against PWDs in the tourism sector manifests in various forms and significantly affects their social inclusion and economic opportunities. Thus, tourists with disabilities often experience diverse types of discrimination based on the perceived level of their impairment (Torrado Vidal et al., 2024), leading to exclusion from travel experiences, thereby limiting their engagement in leisure, professional, and family activities (Makuyana et al., 2022; Popiel, 2016). The negative perceptions surrounding travel accessibility contribute to a reluctance among PWDs to engage in tourism activities, resulting in decreased participation in leisure travel, as many individuals feel that the effort required to navigate these barriers outweighs the benefits of travel (Fraser, 2017). For instance, discrimination in tourism is often evident in the form of inadequate facilities, poor quality products and services, lack of trained staff, inaccurate accessibility information, and failure to meet accessibility standards, resulting in additional barriers that disabled travelers face in comparison to their non-disabled peers (Chwaja et al., 2025; Lim, 2020; Popham et al., 2023). Hence, the attitudes, practices, and experiences of PWDs vary according to age, life stage, geographical context, and the dynamic processes of ageing.

### Sociodemographic and economic features

*Education*, in some cases referred to as educational attainment, emerges as an empowerment tool to predict tourism participation among PWDs. This aligns with established literature (e.g., psychological capital theory) which consistently links knowledge and competencies (cognitive and strategic skills) gained through formal education to enhance resources, self-confidence, self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and motivation to engage in travel, increasing resilience against systematic structural barriers in destinations (Daniels et al., 2005). Comparatively, despite the progress of research in educational attainment as a tool for navigating in inaccessible tourism ecosystems, an empirical linkage between education and discriminated tourists with disabilities has received little scholarly attention. Only a few studies have highlighted this conceptualisation, which originated with the social cognitive theory by Bandura (1997) and was subsequently applied to tourism contexts by Darcy & Dickson (2009). Accordingly, formal learning helps PWDs to become from “passive recipients” (Wall-Reinius et al., 2023) to “agents of change” in tourism spaces (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020); ultimately, challenging the assistentialist approaches that dominate tourism policy discourses.

*Income* is recognised as a pivotal resource for the restoration of autonomy. Thus, in line with socioeconomic models of travel behaviour, tourists with disabilities who have higher income levels are more likely to retain or increase their desire to travel, exhibit increased travel frequency, broader spatial mobility, and participate more regularly in recreational activities (McGuckin & Fucci, 2018). This economic capacity equips individuals with greater choice and control, ultimately acting as a countermeasure to the learned helplessness that PWDs may have developed as a result of discriminatory experiences (Darcy, 2012; Sarmah et al., 2024). Consequently, access to sufficient financial resources can enable travellers to select higher-quality service providers with secure protective measures (i.e., travel insurance) and arrange journeys that minimise dependency on others, including the imposition of a companion for travel displacement (Michopoulou et al., 2015).

### Travel behaviour

Similar to formal education, prior travel experience has also demonstrated a significant protective effect, operating as a cognitive and experiential buffer that enhances problem-solving capabilities and enables individuals to overcome attitudinal and infrastructural barriers with greater efficacy (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011). In this context, travel experience may function as a personal asset and strategic tool for overcoming systemic inequities in the tourism sector. Contrary to early research that framed compulsory accompaniment as a supportive safety measure (Darcy, 2010; Lima & Rendeiro Martín-Cejas, 2025), other qualitative studies have highlighted autonomy as a critical determinant of travel behaviour among PWDs groups (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Darcy et al., 2020). Accordingly, the requirement to travel with a companion may reflect a loss of independence that may be associated with reduced tourism participation (Reindrawati et al., 2022). This potential adverse effect of mandatory travel companions may reinforce previous critiques of paternalistic practices in accessible tourism, conceptualised as a form of symbolic violence (Darcy, 2010; Shakespeare, 2014). Thereby, reinforcing the centrality of self-determination in accessible tourism research is of vital importance, underscoring the urgent need for policies that prioritise chosen support systems over imposed accompaniment that may outweigh any physical barrier.

### Type of disability

Disabilities manifest in diverse forms such as: physical, sensory, intellectual, developmental, multiple, and hidden. Each disability has distinct barriers to participation and travel behaviour, in many cases, beyond the influence of broader

socio-demographic characteristics. For instance, physical and sensory impairments often restrict mobility, communication, access to information, or spatial navigation, particularly where inclusive design and assistive technologies are absent (Park & Kim, 2024; Popham et al., 2023). Intellectual and developmental disabilities may impact learning and social interaction, necessitating recognition of rights and agency rather than approaches rooted in stigma or charity.

Many individuals also experience multiple or hidden disabilities, such as chronic illness or mental health conditions, which intensify exclusion when unacknowledged (Reindrawati et al., 2022; Doran-Sherlock et al., 2025). It has often assumed a relatively uniform experience of discrimination across disability types (Shaw & Coles, 2004; Hua et al., 2025).

However, types and severity of disabilities play crucial roles in determining the diverse level of access and the nature of discrimination among disability groups and travel contexts, especially where cultural stigma is still entrenched and specialist support provision is limited (Reindrawati et al., 2022). Consequently, attitudes, practices, and experiences of travellers with disabilities vary according to age, life stage, geographical context, and the dynamic processes of ageing. Hence, a nuanced understanding of these intersecting categories is essential for designing accessible tourism environments that enable equitable participation for all (Clery et al., 2017).

### **External motivations associated with structural determinants**

Structural enablers are understood as the institutional, regulatory, and infrastructural conditions that systematically support participation in tourism. This conceptualisation is firmly embedded in accessible tourism and disability studies, where the centrality of structural dimensions in fostering resilience is widely recognised.

In particular, the removal of physical and regulatory barriers is consistently identified as a core pathway to inclusion (Darcy, 2010; Duignan et al., 2023). Conversely, the notion of structural barriers, frequently invoked in tourism research, represents the logical antonym of structural enablers (Michopoulou et al., 2015).

Building on these concepts, the term “structural determinants” provides a more integrative lens. It encompasses both enabling and inhibiting forces, thereby capturing the dual role of structural conditions in shaping travel behaviour and opportunities (Devile & Moura, 2021). In this sense, structural determinants function as systemic factors that either empower or marginalise people with disabilities, depending on whether they reduce or reinforce barriers.

This operationalisation resonates with earlier studies (Darcy, 2010; Michopoulou et al., 2015) and remains particularly relevant in contexts such as accessibility compliance and the provision of accessible information. By situating enablers and barriers within the broader category of structural determinants, scholars and practitioners can better appreciate how tourism ecosystems fundamentally determine whether inclusion is realised or denied. Interestingly, there are other applied terminological nuances terms for “structural enablers” that are technically appropriate alternatives, including enabling environments (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; UNWTO, 2016), contextual facilitators (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011) or systemic enablers (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2017).

*Accessibility compliance and enforcement* refer to the extent to which tourism services, products, and infrastructures are designed, implemented, and delivered in accordance with recognised accessibility standards. These may encompass voluntary international frameworks (e.g., ISO norms) and national disability legislation (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). Ensuring such compliance is fundamental to enabling equitable participation for all travellers, particularly individuals with disabilities or specific access needs. Therefore, beyond a regulatory dimension, accessibility compliance constitutes a cornerstone for fostering inclusivity and social sustainability within the tourism sector. In contrast, persistent non-compliance with legal accessibility provisions remains as one of the most significant structural barriers faced by travellers with disabilities, particularly within natural and rural tourism environments, where regulatory oversight is often weaker. Hence, the absence of adequate alignment with legal requirements not only constrains the physical and experiential accessibility of natural environments but also perpetuates exclusion from cultural, recreational, and economic opportunities that tourism can provide, ultimately undermining the principles of universal design, social equity, diversity, and full societal participation (UNWTO, 2021). Despite advances in accessible tourism, ensuring effective compliance with disability legislation remains challenging, as it is constrained by limited institutional resources, insufficient awareness among tourism providers, and uneven application of the legislation across jurisdictions. These dynamics are evident in Central Ecuador, where disparities between policy and practice continue to shape accessibility outcomes across natural and cultural destinations (Guamán et al., 2023).

*Accessible information*, in accessible tourism, the provision of information presents a paradox: whilst conventional wisdom, particularly in developed nations, posits that comprehensive information enhances travellers’ confidence and engagement, emerging evidence suggests a more nuanced reality. In settings where regulatory enforcement is weak, detailed accessibility information may inadvertently highlight unmet expectations, breeding mistrust and, counterintuitively, reducing travel engagement and persistence. A similar irony has been documented in other domains, notably in digital media studies, where increased access to information can lead to “information overload,” resulting in disengagement rather than empowerment (Yu et al., 2024). In the tourism context, this dynamic resonates with the “information paradox,” where the promise of accessible experiences fails to materialise in practice, eroding confidence instead of building it, triggering an expectation trauma—a phenomenon recently conceptualised in tourism studies (Kaszás et al., 2025). This mechanism may explain why greater information, without enforcement guarantees, can lead to overpromising accessibility outcomes, which can backfire and intensify disengagement, disillusionment, and exclusion. The effects of this mechanism align with the boomerang effect model in communication (Byrne & Hart, 2009), which may lead to reduced tourism persistence.

## **Internal motivations**

### **Nature as a Restorative Space**

There is an extraordinary impact of contact with nature, strongly supporting the Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Complementary, other studies have highlighted the significant impact of tourism on improving people's health (mental and physical) and well-being through nature-based tourism engagement and experiences. These natural environments function as psychosocial repair spaces and opportunities to boost tourist offerings of specific regions (Aguilar Carrasco, 2025). These benefits include a reduction in stress, anxiety and depression among diverse populations (Avecillas-Torres et al., 2025), including travellers with disabilities who experienced an increase in their general health and well-being (Chwaja et al., 2025; Williams & Ólafsdóttir, 2023).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Study Area**

This research was conducted in the Tungurahua Province, geographically situated in the central highlands of Ecuador (1°14'56.7" S 78°37'0.3" W), a region renowned for its natural and cultural assets, including national parks, nine vibrant urban centres, and several of the country's most prominent tourist attractions (Guamán et al., 2023; Paredes et al., 2021). This setting provides an ideal context for studying the persistence of nature-based tourism amidst the documented gap between accessibility policy and practice. The empirical research employed an on-site survey conducted from June to October 2021 to examine the critical determinants shaping travel persistence among individuals who had previously experienced discrimination within natural destinations across Tungurahua Province, in Central Ecuador. The survey sample comprised 337 PWDs who voluntarily consented to participate and completed a semi-structured questionnaire. The methodological approach builds upon prior empirical investigations conducted in Central Ecuador (Guamán et al., 2023; Paredes et al., 2021; Rodas et al., 2024), thereby ensuring comparability and contextual validity. The survey questionnaire, including items and some dimensions, was primarily adapted from the validated frameworks on accessible tourism (Guamán et al., 2023) and tourism (Paredes et al., 2021) in Central Ecuador, and aligned with broader frameworks addressing disability and discrimination in tourism (Darcy, 2010; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011; Reindrawati et al., 2022).

The questionnaire was structured into five main sections:

1) socio-demographics profile: age, gender, residence, income, and educational attainment; 2) disability-related features: type of disability and degree of severity; 3) travel behaviour: frequency of travel within Tungurahua Province, obligatory requirement of a companion, frequency of incidence of discriminatory episodes, and preferred type of tourism; 4) External motivations: accuracy and sufficiency of accessible information, compliance with accessibility legislation by tourism providers, and perceived destination attributes; 5) intrinsic motivations: self-determination and restorative experiences of contact with nature. For the motivational dimensions, participants responded to five items per dimension using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Totally disagree) to 5 (Totally Agree).

### **Statistical analysis**

Data collected were quantitatively analysed using R software, employing a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.850, indicating high internal consistency across items (Beckett et al., 2018). Further analysis included the use of a model-based approach through the binary logistic regression method to estimate the relative influence of independent variables on the probability of travel persistence among discriminated tourists with disabilities (dependent variable). In this study, travel persistence was operationalised as a binary outcome variable, where "0" denoted a reduction in travel frequency following experiences of discrimination, and "1" reflected cases in which individuals maintained or even intensified their travel activities despite such adversity. Hence, the analysis tested the null hypothesis that there are no significant differences among the evaluated determinants in predicting travel persistence in this context. By contrast, the alternative hypothesis posits that certain socio-demographic, disability-related, behavioural, and motivational factors exert differential effects on resilience outcomes, thereby offering new insights into the interplay between structural barriers and psychological coping mechanisms within accessible tourism in emerging economies, particularly in Ecuador.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Sociodemographics and travel behaviour**

The demographic profile of respondents revealed a predominance of men, who accounted for just over two-thirds of the sample (67.7%). In terms of age distribution, the cohort was relatively young, with nearly half (49%) between 25 and 35 years old and over one-quarter (27.3%) aged 19–24. Older adults aged 65 and above (3.6%) were only marginally represented. With respect to educational attainment, secondary education was the most frequently reported level (44.2%), whilst nearly one-third (30.9%) held undergraduate degrees and a smaller proportion (7.1%) had pursued postgraduate studies. Spatially, two-thirds (66.5%) of respondents resided in Ambato, which is the provincial capital and principal urban hub. Other cities, such as Pelileo (8.3%) and smaller localities including Píllaro and Quero (2.7%), contributed more modest proportions. Socioeconomic characteristics of the evaluated sample indicated that nearly three-quarters (74%) reported monthly household incomes of less than USD 500. These findings revealed slight differences in the PWDs profile, as evaluated previously by Guamán et al. (2023) for the same area.

### **Determinants of Travel Persistence Among Discriminated Tourists with Disabilities**

The logistic regression analysis (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.592$ ; Hosmer and Lemeshow test:  $X^2 = 13,179$ ,  $p = 0.106$ ) identified critical determinants shaping the travel persistence (i.e., resilience) among discriminated tourists with disabilities in natural destinations of Central Ecuador. The model demonstrates moderate to high explanatory power, revealing that persistence is primarily driven by intrinsic motivations and structural enablers rather than other variables also assessed, as detailed below (Table 1). Among sociodemographic characteristics, only educational attainment showed a statistically significant and positive association ( $\beta = 0.894$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), indicating that higher education levels increase the probability of retaining the desire to travel despite having faced discrimination in tourism activities (Table 1). Whilst existing literature confirms the enabling role of education in facilitating travel and overcoming attitudinal and infrastructural barriers with greater efficacy among PWDs (Michopoulou et al., 2015), the present finding extends this understanding by suggesting that education functions as a resilience mechanism in the face of discriminatory encounters. For instance, individuals with higher education may be more capable of critically analysing acts of discrimination without internalising them as personal shortcomings, mobilising cognitive and social resources to identify and plan trips that minimise potential risks, and asserting their rights when necessary.

Therefore, this evidence provides robust quantitative support for the protective and empowering role of education in mitigating the psychological impacts of discrimination in tourism. Previously, this approach has received comparatively little scholarly attention. Regarding disability characteristics, the type of disability was revealed to be a significant but negative predictor ( $\beta = -0.960$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ), suggesting that disability-specific barriers significantly modulated persistence, thereby reducing the likelihood of engagement by 61.7% ( $p = 0.031$ ).

Counterintuitively, neither discrimination frequency ( $p = 0.560$ ) nor disability severity level ( $p = 0.397$ ) directly predicted travel persistence or discontinuation, suggesting that affected travellers develop resilience strategies (Table 1). In other words, discrimination appears to disunify behavioural responses across categories of impairment, implying that interventions should adopt a segmented approach rather than a universal approach.

Concerning tourist behaviour, the frequency of travel ( $\beta = 0.753$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) and the need for accompaniment during travel ( $\beta = -3.369$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) were highly significant. However, this particularly compelling finding showed the variable requirement to travel with a companion as the most potent inhibitory effect in the model, reflecting a certain level of independence loss that potentially could be associated with future reduced tourism participation/travel persistence, as discussed in the literature (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011) (Table 1). Furthermore, the present findings add nuance by demonstrating that for individuals who have already endured discriminatory acts (i.e., initial wound that inherently may deny/reduce their personal autonomy), the imposition or obligation of a travel companion further entrenches perceptions of incapacity and dependency. This dynamic can be interpreted as a “double wound” to autonomy.

Hence, these results may help highlight the risk that ostensibly well-intentioned policies, such as mandatory companion requirements, may be perceived as a form of institutionalised discrimination or symbolic violence for this demographic, consequently exacerbating the harm caused by previous negative experiences and discouraging future travel. Complementary to these findings, previous studies have advanced critiques regarding paternalistic policies and practices in the tourism sector (Darcy et al., 2020; Shakespeare, 2014).

Thereby, future accessible tourism research should focus on the centrality of PWDs’ self-determination, providing robust quantitative evidence to confirm earlier qualitative studies’ findings wherein autonomy plays a critical determinant of travel behaviour in tourists with disabilities (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Darcy et al., 2020)

External motivations or structural factors demonstrated polarised effects. Accessible information ( $\beta = -2.564$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and destination attributes ( $\beta = -1.228$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ) exhibited significant adverse effects, emerging as significant barriers or impediments to travel persistence among PWDs. For the first case, findings challenge the paradigm of sufficient and accurate information as inherently enabling, suggesting that the provision of accessible information always facilitates tourism participation. However, findings suggest that the perception of receiving sufficient or accurate information was, in fact, associated with markedly declined travel persistence (OR = 0.093). This paradox contradicts traditional literature (Michopoulou et al., 2015) and suggests that mere information dissemination can expose discrepancies between accessibility promised services and discriminatory realities that PWDs face. Consequently, this cognitive dissonance generates institutional distrust, heightens anticipatory anxiety, and leads to disengagement from tourism activities, thereby validating the boomerang effect model in communication discussed by Byrne & Hart (2009), which posits that overpromising accessibility outcomes can backfire and intensify disengagement. Hence, well-intentioned informational strategies may become counterproductive unless supported by concrete discrimination-free travel assurances.

For the second case, it demonstrates that environmental suitability (i.e., terrain/topographic conditions, facility accessibility, and natural pathway design) critically influences travel continuity among discriminated tourists with disabilities in Ecuadorian natural destinations.

Conversely, accessibility legal compliance by tourism providers exerted a strong facilitative effect on travel persistence ( $\beta = 1.954$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ) (Table 1). These results underscore the normative significance of legal frameworks, emphasising the importance of covert audits and the enforcement of sanctions against non-compliant or discriminatory operators. Nevertheless, the present study reconceptualises the function of legal compliance in a comparative perspective, revealing a critical gap in regulatory efficacy. While in developed countries, robust institutional oversight renders accessibility legislation a direct guarantor of inclusivity by providing a structural safeguard (Darcy, 2010), in Ecuador, its impact appears conditional upon alignment with intrinsic motivational drivers, thus functioning as a secondary catalyst that reinforces individual psychological resilience.

Among intrinsic motivations, both self-determination ( $\beta = 0.768$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ) and contact with nature ( $\beta = 4.423$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) emerged as powerful positive predictors. However, contact with nature notably exhibited the most substantial association magnitude in the model, indicating that connection to natural environments multiplies the likelihood of persistent travel behaviour by 83-fold, notwithstanding discrimination experiences (Table 1).

This aligns with a growing body of literature that recognises the potential therapeutic and restorative properties of natural environments for individuals recovering from psychosocial distress (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; White et al., 2019, Williams & Ólafsdóttir, 2023). Here, nature engagement emerged not merely as a leisure preference but as a resilience-enabling resource capable of neutralising the long-term effects of regular discrimination experiences as detected in Central Ecuador, particularly in the Tungurahua Province. Concerning self-determination, this particular finding aligns with a tourism self-efficacy model, wherein strong resilience factors bolster individuals' belief in their capacity to overcome barriers (Bandura, 1997), thereby facilitating a subsequent empowered decision-making process that ultimately leads to action, such as engaging in tourism activities (Devile & Moura, 2021).

Variables such as age, gender, residence, monthly income, disability level, frequency of travel discrimination, and tourism type were non-significant, which does not diminish their overarching significance. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that their influence is likely contingent upon contextual parameters, including sample size, natural settings, specific location within Ecuador, and may be further moderated or mediated by other variables, underscoring the complex interplay of individual factors, structural barriers, and profound motivations shaping accessible and sustainable tourism participation.

Table 1. Binary logistic regression analysis of travel persistence of PWDs  
Note: Nagelkerke R2 = 0.592; Hosmer and Lemeshow test = 13,179 ( $p = .106$ ) Significant p-values are in bold

Independent variables	$\beta$	S.E.	Wald	p	Exp( $\beta$ )
Constant	-1,410	3,226	0,191	0,662	0,244
<b>Sociodemographic factors</b>					
Age	0,249	0,374	0,442	0,506	1,282
Gender	0,343	0,496	0,478	0,489	1,409
Residence	0,062	0,110	0,315	0,575	1,064
Monthly income	0,216	0,640	0,114	0,736	1,241
Educational attainment	0,894	0,282	10,039	<b>0,002</b>	2,444
<b>Disability features</b>					
Type of disability	-0,960	0,445	4,662	<b>0,031</b>	0,383
Level of disability	-0,407	0,481	0,718	0,397	0,666
<b>Travel behaviour</b>					
Frequency of travel	0,753	0,251	9,012	<b>0,003</b>	2,124
Displacement with accompanion	-3,369	1,012	11,088	<b>0,001</b>	0,034
Frequency of travel discrimination	0,183	0,314	0,340	0,560	1,201
Type of tourism	0,121	0,181	0,451	0,502	1,129
<b>External motivations</b>					
Accessible information (accuracy/sufficiency)	-2,564	0,684	14,068	<b>0,000</b>	0,077
Accessibility legal compliance by tourism providers	1,954	0,808	5,854	<b>0,016</b>	7,060
Destination attributes	-1,228	0,448	7,503	<b>0,006</b>	0,293
<b>Intrinsic Motivations</b>					
Self-determination	0,768	0,302	6,486	<b>0,011</b>	2,156
Contact with nature	4,423	0,969	20,817	<b>0,000</b>	83,366

### Theoretical and practical contributions

Key contributions emerge from the present study to address critical lacunae in accessible tourism literature, offering empirical evidence from a developing economy nation (i.e., the 'sufficient information paradox') that may challenge dominant paradigms established in some cases only in qualitative terms in high-income nations. Furthermore, findings demonstrate that, in contexts of systemic discrimination, natural settings may function as 'psychosocial sanctuaries' capable of multiplying tourism resilience, particularly in megadiverse nations such as Ecuador, where the natural environment still represents an underutilised inclusion asset (Guamán et al., 2023).

Collectively, these contributions redefine three theoretical domains: (1) shift the focus from purely technical solutions (e.g., infrastructure) to psychosocial mechanisms (i.e., self-efficacy, emotional restoration); (2) challenge the uncritical transferability of policy frameworks from developed to developing nations; and (3) establish that tourism resilience under discriminatory conditions emerges through complex interactions between individual psychological capital (i.e., education, motivation) and specific territorial capitals (therapeutic natural environments). Future research should investigate how these dynamics manifest in other emerging economies and aim to develop validated metrics for "adaptive tourism resilience" that capture these multidimensional aspects.

Concerning practical contributions, this research provides empirical evidence for reorienting destination management toward autonomy-centred interventions in Global South contexts. Complementary to these findings, they emphasise the need for holistic strategies to strengthen the autonomy, confidence, and economic capacity of PWDs. Such approach is consistent with the principles of universal design and the human rights framework enshrined in the UNCRPD, and is

essential for advancing inclusive and socially sustainable tourism systems (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; UNWTO, 2016). Consequently, interventions in accessible tourism are still necessary to reduce structural and attitudinal barriers significantly. These initiatives may include peer networks or travel community initiatives for PWDs, as those now offered by a few higher education institutions located in Central Ecuador as part of their university-community engagement programmes, generating more integration and participation among PWDs, ultimately confirming that disabled tourist groups can help dynamise the local economy with their visits (Guamán et al., 2023).

### **Limitations and future research**

Viewed through a critical lens, the study has limitations, most notably its exclusive geographic scope (an Ecuadorian sample), which necessitates cautious extrapolation.

Looking ahead, we advocate for research incorporating neuropsychological mediators between discrimination and persistence, longitudinal tracking of resilient trajectories, and intervention designs rooted in intrinsic motivation.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study identifies critical determinants influencing the tourism resilience of PWDs who encountered discriminatory practices in natural destinations in Central Ecuador. Furthermore, this research significantly enhances the understanding of discrimination in accessible tourism, revealing that contact with natural environments can serve as the most powerful facilitator, whose protective effect exponentially enhances tourism persistence and supports psychosocial recovery among tourists with disabilities who face discrimination. This finding underscores the therapeutic function of natural spaces and adds further value to landscapes within nature-based tourism, as exemplified by those in Ecuador. In a similar context, formal education and prior travel experience are shown to exert significant protective effects, operating as enablers and psychological safeguards that mitigate the influence of attitudinal and infrastructural barriers. These factors contributed to the enhancement of self-efficacy and adaptive decision-making capacities, ultimately reinforcing resilience in accessible tourism contexts.

Intrinsic motivations and perceptions of legal compliance operate as psychological and institutional buffers, respectively, enabling the continuation of tourism activities despite adverse experiences. The differentiated impact observed across disability types highlights the need for tailored interventions, particularly in contexts where specific disabilities may face intensified stigma and a scarcity of specialist support.

Paradoxically, access to sufficiently detailed accessibility information substantially reduces tourism persistence, whereby discriminatory realities on the ground undermine heightened expectations generated by accessibility assurances. Similarly, the requirement to travel with a mandatory companion is confirmed as a critical barrier, eroding personal autonomy and echoing the critique of paternalistic policies that may represent a form of symbolic violence. Collectively, these findings demand a shift from physically centred accessibility models to psychosocial paradigms that reinforce travellers' identity and autonomy, manage expectations, and deliver genuine restorative experiences in the wake of discrimination in Ecuador and other developing nations with similar structural and attitudinal barriers that hinder the engagement of tourism activities in natural environments, and where exclusionary practices remain pervasive.

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