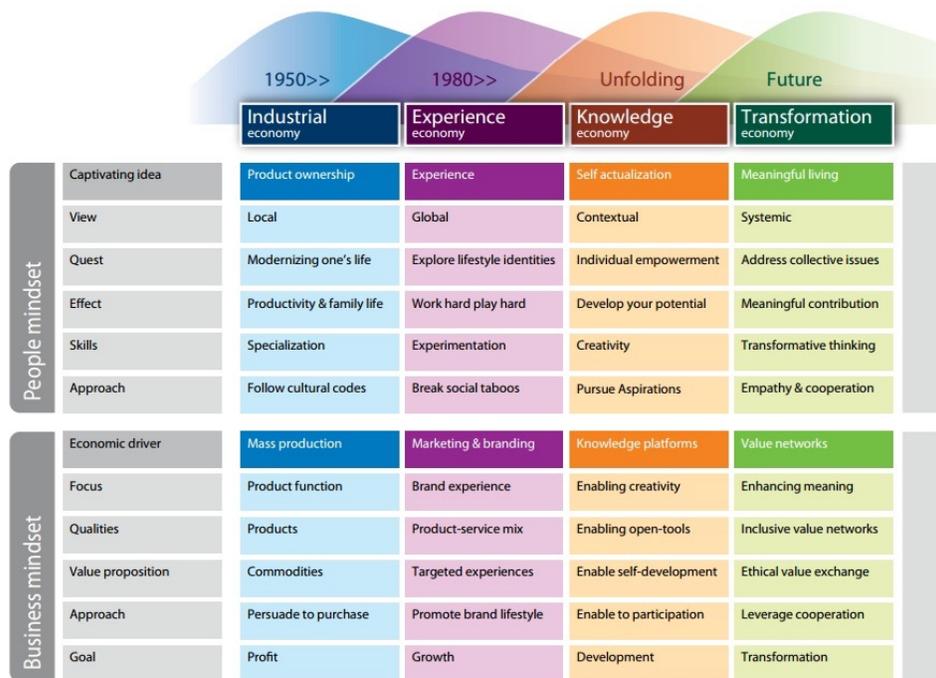


A summary of  
**Barrier-free travel in German theme parks**  
 by Laura Zimmermann

The need for more and improved accessible tourism is growing. The world's economies are evolving and so are the expectations and desires of people. When basic needs are fulfilled, new ones arise. In strong economies, like Germany's, people are now aware of social problems and expect governments and companies to take responsibility and action. Also the demographic aging plays a role. But after all it is important to understand that accessible tourism is meant to make life easier for everybody, no matter if disability, broken leg or pushing a stroller.

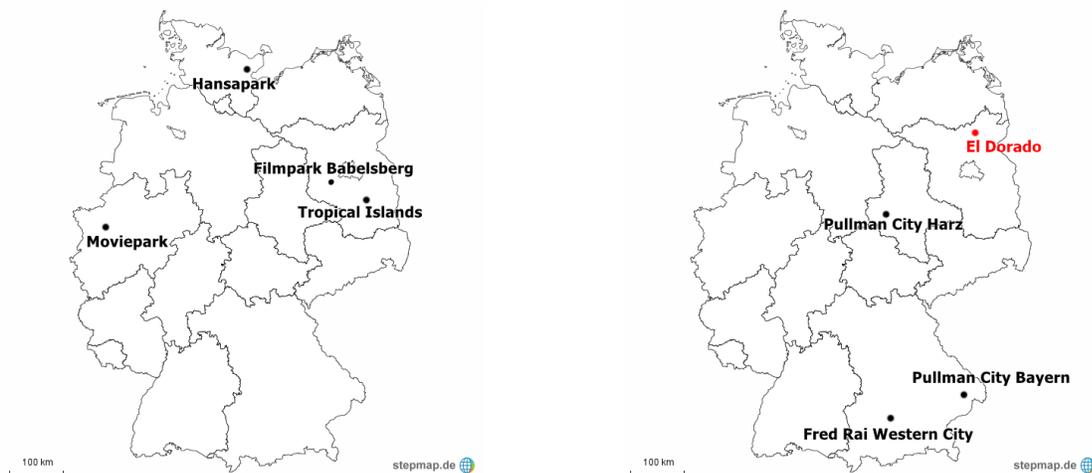


Source: A Philips Design paper - 2011

The German government has been taking action. In the Basic Constitutional Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (GG) it is stated in Article 3 that no one must be disadvantaged because of their disability. The BGG (Law on the Equalization of Persons with Disabilities) was passed in May 2002. The law aims to remove disadvantages and provide an equal participation and self-determined lifestyle. Germany also signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities in 2007.

When looking at the „Teilhabebericht der Bundesregierung über die Lebenslagen von Menschen mit Behinderungen“(Participation report about the circumstance of people with disabilities) of the Federal ministry of labour and social affairs from 2013, one can see that accessible tourism should not be seen as a niche market. 25% of the people in Germany have impairments; almost 27 million people which is about a third of Germany's population. The report also shows clear problems in the lives of people with disabilities. One of the biggest ones is clearly the lack of self-determination; something that could be greatly improved by better accessibility.

The project looked at the websites of multiple theme parks to find out how big of a topic accessibility is there already.



All four theme parks (Hansapark, Filmpark Babelsberg, Moviepark, Tropical Islands) had a part of their website dedicated to accessibility, reaching from the status of it to advice. It is obvious that theme parks are aware of the topic, also because their goal is to attract as many different market segments as possible. After just visiting the Tropical Islands theme park it can be said that there is a clear effort for accessibility, seeing that there is even a wheelchair lift to get to a bar on the second floor of a restaurant. Although, universal design did not seem to have been applied from the beginning as there are parts in all parks that are not impossible but harder to access.

When looking at four Western theme parks (Pullman City Harz, Pullman City Bayern, Fred Rai Western City, El Dorado) it is found that their effort is not yet big enough. A big challenge is of course to combine the accessibility of the park with its authenticity. Both the El Dorado and Pullman City Harz lack information on their website. Pullman city Bayern on the other hand has detailed information about the accessibility of the park and even cooperated with another website that concentrates on testing tourism attractions' accessibility and informing people about it (<http://www.holicap.de/Ausflugsziele/Bayerischer-Wald-Niederbayern/Eging-am-See-Pullman-City-Westernstadt.html>).

The El Dorado Western city Templin was looked at more specifically. Although there are no information on the website, the theme park makes a point in offering and improving the accessibility. After visiting the park and interviews with employees it can be said that although the accessibility is far from perfect, the park makes up for it with its attitude. They are eager and happy to help people visiting the park, are aware of the market segment and are in contact with people to find problem areas and solutions. The El Dorado emphasizes their ambition to find individual solutions, because individuality is a main part of the park.

The main problems of accessibility and accessible tourism in Germany and German theme parks lay in the lack of funding, awareness, research and information. The topic is still often seen as only serving to a small, un-profitable group of people and both the general public and tourism students are not brought into contact with the topic enough, causing it to seem smaller than it really is. Seeing the trends of society and tourism, clear action needs to be taken to guarantee a qualitative tourism product for everybody in the future.