

Inclusive Tourism in Mizoram: Opportunities, Challenges, and Perspectives

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Abstract

Inclusion of accessibility in various tourist destinations has now emerged as one of the widely accepted term to enhance inclusive and sustainable development across the world. But its study is constrained in most places particularly north eastern states of India. The intent of this context is to address the current scenario of tourism accessibility in Mizoram and also to identify the obstacles faced by individuals. Moreover, understanding how accessibility could be integrated into the infrastructure, services, and tourism policies of Mizoram is also a major aim to facilitate equal access to tourism activities. This study uses bibliometric methods through VOSviewer to analyse 100 academic articles from the year “2025”, written by well-known authors worldwide on inclusive and accessible tourism. Instead of just counting data, it maps key topics, knowledge connections, and new directions in studies about delicate, high-altitude regions. In parallel, a structured synthesis of existing writings helps shape a conceptual framework model based on proven global approaches. By analysing several practices from Indian hill states and major worldwide mountainous regions comparatively, we have drawn valuable insights that could be used in Mizoram's socio-geographical context. The findings show that although there are accessibility efforts in other hilly areas for inclusive design, rational policies, and coordination among stakeholders, Mizoram is yet to experience such policy involvements and capacity development to achieve similar kinds of results. Drawing from international as well as regional patterns, the paper suggests a strategic agenda for the development of inclusive tourism policy, training programs, and design codes suited for hilly terrain. Thus, the paper bridges an important research divide and offers a foundation for further studies in Northeast India.

Introduction

Inclusive tourism, a branch that guarantees the participation of the disabled in travel by removing all the barriers, is a very important yet mostly neglected aspect of the global tourism industry (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). Although the hospitality industry has gone through a lot of changes and has grown significantly over the past decades, it still poses accessibility problems at a large scale that need to be addressed, especially for the mentioned society groups like people with disabilities, the elderly, and so on (Porto et al., 2019). Presently, around 15% of the entire world population suffers from different kinds of disabilities, and this number is expected to go up along with the world population due to longer life expectancies; hence, the need for enabling policies and facilities in the tourism sector becomes even more acute (Quattrone, 2025). This implies that the tourism sector must initiate the process of becoming more inclusive not only as a social obligation but also as an economic imperative that addresses the different needs of all types of travelers (Blinnikka et al., 2024) (Popović et al., 2022). Far from just helping those who struggle to move around, this field touches lives marked by challenges in thinking, learning, hearing, vision, and more. So, planning right from the start has to weave together both design and support seamlessly (Popović et al., 2022). Because aging populations and long-term health conditions are making disability more common across the globe, getting inclusive travel right won't simply respond to rising demand. It'll shape whether the sector survives at all down the line (Porto et al., 2019).

Literature Review

Looking into studies about inclusive tourism shows researchers now focus on different angles, like where ideas started, what's happening today, and how things might grow (Rubio- Escuderos et al., 2021). Papers suggest it's due to seeing disabled individuals not just as users but as active contributors needing proper tools and space (Robles et al., 2020). One key framework points out seven parts needed for real progress, putting differently abled people at the centre as makers and enjoyers of travel experiences who can steer scholarship toward lasting outcomes (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). Instead of treating access as an afterthought, some individuals now see it as central to fair travel, opening doors for people with impairments to join trips and connect socially (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). Backed by global bodies like the (UNWTO, 2016) was named "Inclusive Tourism for All," highlighting that isolated options fall short because true progress means weaving inclusion into every level of travel life (Martín-

Fuentes et al., 2021). Shifting away from old views that frame disability through health alone, current thinking places barriers outside the person, specifically in culture, design, and policy. So, limitations don't come from the body but from inflexible environments (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). When seen this way, accessible journeys do not serve one group, but rather they lift quality, fairness, and comfort for all travellers, regardless of ability (Robles et al., 2020).

In fact, inclusive tourism is one of the key factors in the promotion of human rights, economic development, and sustainable tourism, which represent the very essence of society's well-being around the world (Iacob et al., 2023). The fact is that the adoption of this global perspective of accessibility covers physical, informational, and attitudinal factors recognizes that roughly 30% of any given population has access needs (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). Although there is an increasing recognition of its importance, still a crucial lack of a guiding framework is there to bring smart technologies together to develop inclusive destinations (Lin et al., 2022). In addition to the above, the fast-paced development of generative artificial intelligence (AI), natural language processing (NLP), and the Internet of Things (IoT) presents a new, emerging opportunity to fill this gap, with innovative solutions for developing more equitable and green smart tourism destinations (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024). These technologies can enable more personalized experiences, improve business productivity, and provide real-time and contextual information, thus overcoming traditional barriers to accessibility (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024).

The integration of Gen AI and IoT, for instance, may have the potential to revolutionize the inclusivity and accessibility of smart tourism, but much work still needs to be done to tap into such potential to meet a variety of needs (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024). Specifically, identifying the particular strengths and weaknesses of Gen AI and IoT in meeting the various needs of various groups of tourists is required, particularly in the context of data privacy, technological consistency, and the digital divide (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024). Therefore, extensive research needs to be conducted to identify how such advanced digital technologies can be utilized for good and in an efficient manner to facilitate truly inclusive tourist environments (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024). Such researches are significant for informing policy and design, so that technological advancement can be translated into real-world improvements in universal access and, in the process, does not create new forms of exclusion (Rita et al., 2024).

Out there, technology is constantly innovating ways for people to travel, with new ideas that match what visitors are really looking for (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024). When technologies such as generative AI, language tools, and networked devices come together, they provide opportunities - providing better recommendations, real-time updates, improved travel experiences, and easier management of the locations that travelers visit (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024) (Aliyah et al., 2023). However, the combination of AI and smart sensors in tourist locations also poses challenges with respect to personal data. Managing this requires utmost caution (Aliyah et al., 2023). Nevertheless, incorporating Gen AI could enhance the speed of content delivery, provide personalized support for visitors, and improve predictions for all available travel routes (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024). Further, combining IoT with super-fast networks and smart technology could enable experiences that feel more substantial and personal, providing each visitor clearer images created specifically for them (Roumeliotis et al., 2024).

Methodology

The research on inclusive tourism in Mizoram examines special opportunities and challenges by actively listening to different stakeholders. The research uses a methodological approach based on observation rather than assumption, enabling a deeper understanding of global trends and their application to the socio-cultural context of Mizoram (Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2021). The study utilizes the bibliometric analysis technique using VOSviewer software of 100 scholarly papers from renowned databases, published in the year 2025, on the theme of inclusive and accessible tourism worldwide. This research focuses on the region's tourism potential for people with special needs and develops the required strategies to overcome existing barriers (Porto et al., 2019). The research combines different approaches from various disciplines such as tourism research, disability studies, and special education to enhance accessibility in Mizoram (Happ & Bolla, 2022).

Conceptual Framework

This part draws insights from careful studies to lay out a straightforward way toward fairer travel experiences for all kinds of visitors, irrespective of their support requirements (Porto et al., 2019; Blinnikka et al., 2024). Not simply installing ramps - what matters is connection, dignity and lasting change in how journeys unfold (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Popović et al., 2022). With these perspectives, trips take shape so every person, whether facing mobility limits or

cognitive differences, steps into full participation (Popović et al., 2022; Cockburn-Wooten & McIntosh, 2020). When attention shifts to varied life realities - bodily, thinking, relational - it becomes possible to build fairness right into the journey itself (Happ & Bolla, 2022).

Effective implementation of inclusive tourism initiatives demands efficient engagement of stakeholders, and in this regard, there is a need for mutually dependent collaboration between government bodies, tourist operators, local communities, and disability groups (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). The convergence of intelligent technologies presents a promising approach to address and mitigate many challenges to accessibility, resulting in a more open tourism environment by reducing barriers for tourists with diverse accessibility needs (Lin et al., 2022). This convergence of technology enables personalized experiences and provides real-time information, thereby enabling disabled tourists to move around destinations with greater autonomy and confidence (Popović et al., 2022) (Cassia et al., 2020). This approach not only enhances the experience of disabled tourists but also the overall goals of sustainable and inclusive tourism development (Blinnikka et al., 2024) (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024). Artificial intelligence can also contribute significantly to the design of smart tourism solutions by analyzing massive data sets in order to predict and resolve accessibility, challenges, thereby enhancing the overall experience of disabled tourists during travel (Genç, 2020).

Model Elements and Structure

This model is built on the idea that disability is complex, recognizing that different people have unique needs and require various levels of help (Blinnikka et al., 2024). It uses "universal design" to make sure that travel services and places work for everyone right from the start, without needing special changes (Porto et al., 2019). Shaped by new technology, tourism can now be customized to fit an individual's specific requirements (Robles et al., 2020). For instance, artificial intelligence can create personal profiles that highlight exactly what a traveller needs, making the whole experience much better for people who are often left out (Genç, 2020; Robles et al., 2020).

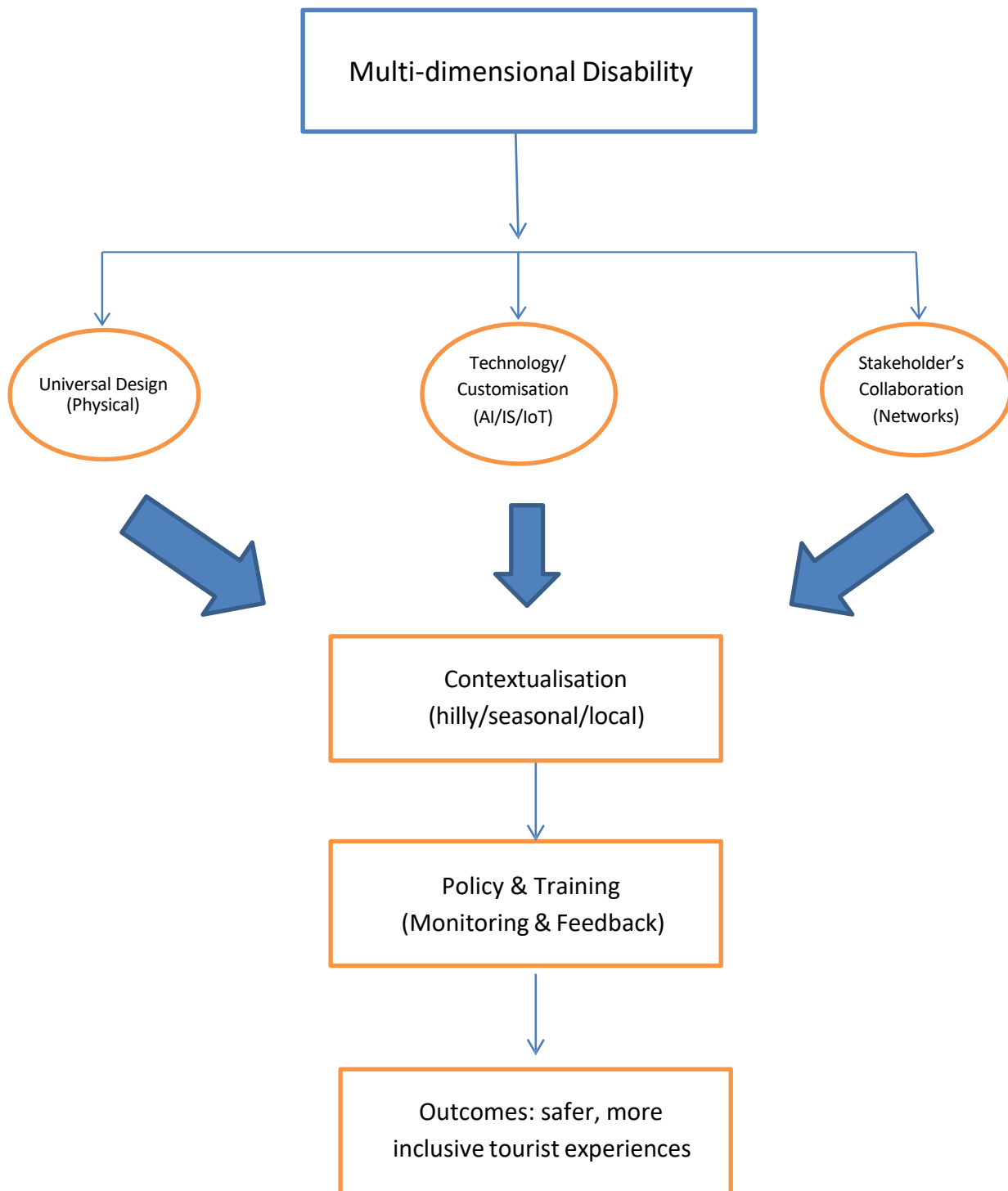


Fig 1: Author's own compilation, adapted from (Porto et al., 2019; Genç, 2020; Robles et al., 2020; Blinnikka et al., 2024; Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024)

This collaboration is essential to tap into various resources and competences in order to create holistic inclusive tourism solutions, making all parts of the tourism value chain responsive and inclusive of the needs of all visitors (Blinnikka et al., 2024). In addition, generative AI and the Internet of Things can transform

inclusive tourism by facilitating real-time context-sensitive interactions and maximizing the use of resources to better engage visitors with disabilities (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024).

The Case of Mizoram

The landscape of Mizoram has hilly terrain and extensive forests which reflect as its distinctive geographical features, as well as a rich culture. They together create a unique microcosm to analyse the implementation of inclusive tourism principles in a developing, ecologically sensitive environment. A fresh look at how worldwide access systems might fit into regional settings which comes by respecting each place's unique character and keeping things open to everyone while protecting what makes the location special (Porto et al., 2019). Instead of copying models exactly, adjustments respond to real local demands. What already exists in Mizoram, such as roads, rules, and support networks, gets reviewed closely. Some missing pieces stand out when measured beside successful examples from elsewhere (Porto et al., 2019) (Robles et al., 2020). Yet those same differences reveal openings where thoughtful design can meet varied traveller needs.

Getting clear on what locals think and need matters a lot. Success in shaping inclusive tourism plans ties closely to meeting both resident and future visitor needs (Rochman et al., 2022). From this comes real-world understanding - how responsible, open travel ideas work inside a national park setting, which offers value for rules and long-term progress (Sica et al., 2020). Though narrow in scope, the research adds weight to broader scholarly talk by diving deep into inclusion within tourism (Porto et al., 2019). Instead of broad claims, it zeroes in on how parts of Mizoram's protected natural areas might welcome more people, especially because many nature trails today remain hard to access for those with physical limitations (Pasca et al., 2022).

A close look at what's already built inside these protected zones sets the stage. New ideas must emerge to open paths and share info with everyone who visits (Pasca et al., 2022).

Instead of standard fixes, testing trail upgrades and using nearby resources could help those moving differently or navigating without full sight (Moutsopoulos et al., 2022). From transport routes to lodging spots, even temples and gathering spots across Mizoram get reviewed so that weak points in reaching them come into view, which shapes precise changes needed.

Results

When analysing early findings in a careful examination of existing literature, some trends emerge, particularly in relation to inclusive tourism and the direction of future research (Jacob et al., 2023). Success is often related to the level of cooperation between different groups, as well as the decision-making process. These examples from Istria County in Croatia and specific protected areas illustrate this relationship (Popović et al., 2022; Ginting et al., 2024). Although top-down models may seem inflexible, efficient collaboration between local participants is of immense importance in determining inclusive tourist strategies (Popović et al., 2022). The key is not only who is involved but also how they are interlinked.

Discussion

This study displays outcomes from a bibliometric review of 100 scholarly papers released in 2025, centred on inclusive tourism. Employing VOSviewer, the examination unfolded across three stages: inspection of source journals, mapping of keyword links, followed by citation-based overlay scrutiny. Each phase contributes distinct insight publication patterns emerge clearly, central themes become visible, while underlying academic influences gradually surface through interconnected references.

Journal Source Analysis

As explained in **Fig 2**, a spread of journal sources appears in, outlining where studies on inclusive tourism emerge by volume, reach, and clustering during 2025. Despite fragmentation across publishing platforms, thematic alignment persists and this cohesion suggests boundaries between disciplines which remain porous here. In terms of origin, “Sustainability” stands out with central prominence among journals, serving as a principal channel for studies on access in travel contexts. Its leading position underscores how closely linked are inclusion in mobility, long-term environmental planning, and broad regulatory approaches, shaping inclusive tourism less as an isolated topic and more as part of wider sustainability efforts.

trends, keyword patterns show tourism studies embrace breadth, prioritizing inclusion while aligning with environmental care and digital responsiveness to form a grounded framework for tackling access issues in remote, ecologically fragile areas such as Mizoram.

Citation Analysis

As explained in **Fig 4**, node dimensions reveal how often works are cited, their prominence tied directly to frequency. Colour variation across points reflects current academic reach, deeper shades marking stronger resonance. Visualization through layered mapping as seen in Figure 4, traces shifts in influence over time. Central references emerge not only by age but by continued engagement across later studies. Influence thus unfolds gradually, shaped more by sustained relevance than isolated peaks.

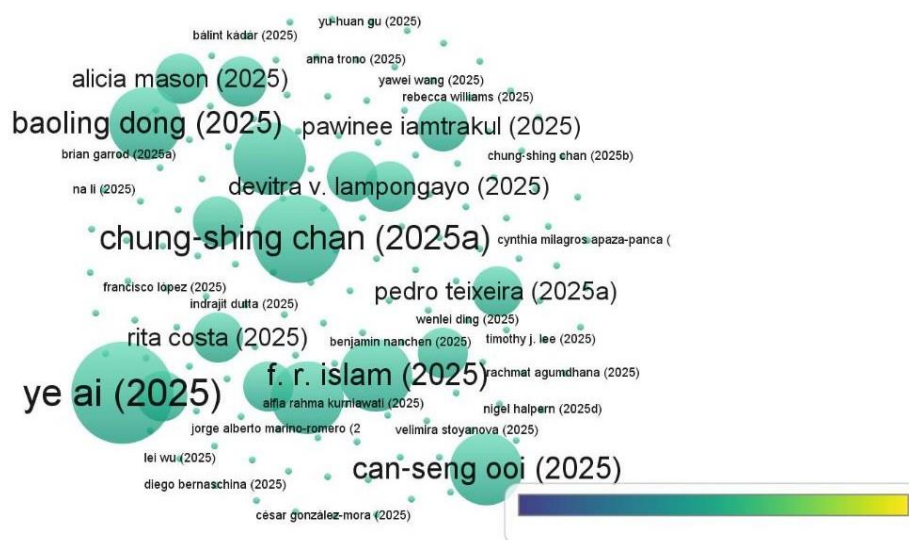


Fig 4: Citation Analysis

Within the web of citations, certain writers stand out like Chung-Shing Chan (2025a), Ye Ai (2025), Baoling Dong (2025), Devitra V. Lampongayo (2025), alongside Can-Seng Ooi (2025). Their visibility signals a merging of viewpoints where inclusion-focused approaches now intertwine with cultural analysis and governance themes in studies on inclusive travel.

Across tourism studies, links appear deep when viewed through cited works, tied closely to environmental planning, economic geography, yet extending into social sciences. Rather than standing apart, inclusive tourism shows

signs of convergence, pulled together by shared theoretical concerns. Several scholarly works focused on policy, law, or planning enter here too, showing how rules and organized decision-making influence what access looks like in practice.

Notably, a large number of influential studies emerge from Asia and the Global South, pointing to growing use of locally informed, non-Western approaches in accessibility research. For Mizoram, this matters because it supports scholarly work rooted in remote, highland, and multicultural settings instead of depending only on frameworks from wealthier nations.

Conclusion

The findings for this study in Mizoram are the key and indicate areas of improvement and possible shifts. The takeaway is that proven strategies are more valuable than generic promises (Cassia et al., 2020). Best practices for Istria County include planning and engaging a community, which should be developed and not replicated. A system that links people, policies, and place is necessary for long-term transformation and aligns vision with practice (Popović et al., 2022). Strategic design is essential for improving inclusion and encouraging greater participation in tourism development. Additionally, the use of smart tourism technologies and online platforms emerges as a crucial element that would make information and services inclusive for individuals with disabilities with no hindrance, thereby indicating the need to have ongoing evaluation and improvement of customer experience in order to establish and maintain their loyalty and satisfaction (Theofanous et al., 2024).

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