

Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Future of Accessible Beach Tourism in New Zealand:  
A Case Study of Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa.

Sophie Hayden

A thesis submitted to  
Auckland University of Technology  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of International Tourism Management (MITM)

2021

School of Hospitality and Tourism

## **Abstract**

This research intends to contribute an understanding of a significant type of tourism for New Zealand for a segment of the population that is consistently underserved; that is, access to beaches for tourists with disabilities. The research follows an interpretive paradigm and uses face-to-face semi-structured interviews to gather the perspectives of stakeholders in a case study beach destination in the North Island of New Zealand. Content analysis reveals critical findings about the need for ‘inclusion,’ ‘information,’ and around ‘public perceptions and assumptions,’ ‘designing for access,’ and the ‘expense of access.’ The findings reveal barriers which prevent beach access, and therefore, tourism participation, for tourists with disabilities. The importance of New Zealanders being able to access the beach is seen as an inherent national right due the country’s strong beach culture. The importance of active provision of information is highlighted as essential to ensure tourists with disabilities know what facilities and amenities are available to them at the beach. The attitudes of the public are identified as a hindrance, as well as attitudes to cost. This research is the only study in New Zealand that has investigated beach access for tourists with disabilities. It has generated some recommendations for the tourism industry and local and national governments in New Zealand which may help to further scope the accessibility market in the country and enable greater participation in a popular tourism activity.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis coincided with the devastating, heart-breaking loss of my mother, amid a global pandemic and so much uncertainty of what the future will look like. It has been the greatest challenge of my life. My heart and my mind have been pushed to their limit and now, out the other end of the tunnel, my heart and mind have been expanded in ways I could not have predicted or expected. I certainly would not have completed this research if not for all the people I thank here.

First and foremost, to my participants – thank you for your time, passion, and eagerness to share your stories, experiences, and perspectives. Thank you for your insightful and honest critiques of the world we live in. You have truly shown how important the subject of accessible tourism is in New Zealand. You have opened my eyes to so much and I am proud to shepherd your words through this thesis out into the world.

To AUT University, for granting me a full scholarship. Seeing my potential and awarding me a scholarship has been an invaluable recognition of my abilities for which I am beyond grateful.

To my incredible supervisors, the dream team, Alison McIntosh and Brielle Gillovic – your patience and kindness have been invaluable during this research. I never felt like I was falling behind or that my work was not up to par. Your gentle nudging has kept me on track and moving, even on my slowest days. I couldn't have asked for better mentors during this apprenticeship. Thank you for the opportunities, the education, and for constantly reminding me what I am capable of and pushing me to get there.

To my dear, dear friends, Alex, Hayley, Macaela, Cheska, the Argonauts – thank you for endless support and for rallying whenever I needed you. You have been yourselves, and that's given me distraction and fun and reminders of what joy is.

To my super troupers, Shan, Domi, Emily, and Belle – thank you for always being in my corner. Your fierce loyalty and empowerment kept me going through the most difficult time in my life. You never let me settle for anything less than I deserve and remind me that my feelings and choices are always valid. I could not be more grateful for friends who are family – you are my sisters forever. Dr. Domi in particular, thank you for never doubting my academic abilities and for calling me out whenever I was spouting nonsense about not being good enough. Your perseverance with your own studies is an inspiration to me.

To Andrew – thank you for picking up the slack around the house when your sister was caught up in her own stuff. Not having to worry about the cat being fed or the house being tidy for open homes took a lot of pressure off me, and I'm very grateful for that.

To Maree and Peter – thank you for letting me stay with you during my field research. Having a home to come back to each night kept me calm and comfortable during a new and nerve-wracking experience.

To Sandra – thank you for being a mother when I needed one. Being able to run to you and your welcoming home when I needed a sounding board or a shoulder to lean on has been a great source of comfort.

To all my family, aunts, uncles, cousins, Lesley and Leo – what a time we've all had. When it rains, it pours! I am so proud of all of you for your strength and resilience and how you've shared that strength and resilience with each other. Thank you for your encouragement and genuine interest in what I do. Without my greatest source of support and pride, you have all filled the void and given me safe spaces to cry, feel lost, recover and press on regardless.

To Susie – I've tried to write this so many times and it's never come out quite right. In the end, there are no words, only gratitude. **Thank you.** You do so much for everyone else while working through your own stuff and I truly hope that the most difficult times are behind us. New

adventures and triumphs await you – grab them with both hands and give them your all. It's our turn to carry you as you have carried us.

To Heather – what on earth would I do without you? I have been incredibly lucky to have had you as a friend for nearly ten years. Thank you for just getting me and understanding me, always. You are so kind, thoughtful, patient and supportive. I know I can always count on you, even with a pesky time difference, to meet me with logic, empathy, and strength when I've run out. You've truly kept me going these last few weeks by being so darn excited to read this thesis and by helping me keep perspective when I can't see the forest for the trees. Thank you for being excited for me, proud of me, and simply there for me.

To everyone above, and Juliet, Corrin, Anna, Kim, Lisa, Dezzie (of course I'm thanking the cat!), the music of Billy Joel and Taylor Swift, Grown Up Donuts, Earl Grey tea, Snickers Pods, pizza, dumplings, and salt & vinegar chips – this was the time I completely fell apart, and whether you knew it or not, you helped put me back together again. We've learned it truly takes a village (no matter what 'it' is), and I am stronger because I have had the most wonderful village. Please stay in my village – there's still a PhD to come!

In loving memory of Mavourneen and John,  
two beloved grandparents who passed on during this research.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my favourite mother, Janet Brownlie, with greatest gratitude and greatest grief. She always encouraged me and never let me struggle alone. Her wisdom never fails.

Her lessons in perseverance, resilience, and championing oneself remain with me, even though she does not.

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 30 July 2021

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AUTEC – Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

NIMBY – Not in my backyard

WHO – World Health Organization

WTO – World Tourism Organization

WTTC – World Travel and Tourism Council

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

It just feels like a rite of passage as a Kiwi to be able to get to a beach. (Molly, Private Citizen)

It is acknowledged that the number of people with disabilities is rising across the globe as a result of ageing populations and decreasing mortality rates (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b; Lovelock, 2010; Robinson et al., 2007). Because of this, many industries and communities find themselves needing to adjust what they offer and how they operate in order to meet this “emerging” market segment (Robinson et al., 2007, p. 10). The intersection between disability and ageing in particular is “undoubted” (Darcy & Dickson, 2009, p. 33) as it is “part of the human condition” (World Health Organization (WHO), 2011, p. 3) and more disabilities can arise as we age. The World Report on Disability (WHO, 2011) estimates that over 1 billion people live with disability. Percentages of people with disabilities can vary between developing and developed countries due to significant economic differences (WHO, 2011). In relation to tourism, researchers agree that people with disabilities still want to travel and have the money and the right to do so, but the disability, or access, market has largely been ignored (Buhalis et al., 2005; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; Yau et al., 2004). It is also recognised that the tourism industry does not necessarily feel the accessible tourism market is worth pursuing at present (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011, Burnett & Baker, 2001) and that people with disabilities “are not travelling at the same rate as people without disabilities” (Packer et al., 2007, p. 281). This market has been “underserved” (Darcy et al., 2010d, p. 241) by an industry that has historically been “dismissive of their value” (Robinson et al., 2007, p. 3). As such, greater attention needs to be afforded to accessible tourism.

A definition of accessible tourism has been proposed as,

Accessible tourism enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments. This definition is inclusive of all people including those travelling with children in prams, people with disabilities and seniors. (Darcy & Dickson, 2009, p. 34)

Further to this, accessible tourism is also about “creating universally designed, barrier-free environments that can support people who may have temporary disabilities, families with young children and the ever-increasing ageing population, as well as creating a safer environment for employees to work” (Ambrose et al., 2012, p. 1). It is not only people with disabilities that benefit from accessible tourism, and thus including other tourists in the definition indicates a push for accessible tourism to be inclusive of other access needs (Cockburn-Wooten & McIntosh, 2020).

This chapter will introduce concepts around disability, inclusive language and research, and the market for accessible tourism. Following this the background, setting, and significance of the thesis research are explained. Finally, the aim, methodology, my position as a researcher and the structure of the thesis are explained. The research explores a key aspect of New Zealand tourism; that of beach access for tourists with disabilities, by seeking the perspectives of key stakeholders in the popular beach destinations of Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa in the North Island of New Zealand.

## **1.1 Understanding disability**

Whilst this thesis is concerned with the relationship between tourism and disability, a review of previous literature reveals the inherent complexities around researching issues of disability, and consequently the problematic relationship between disability and tourism. Disability is difficult to define (Zajadacz, 2015), because of the “dynamic interaction between health conditions and contextual factors” (WHO, 2011, p. 4). The WHO instead describes disability as an umbrella term which covers “impairments, activity limitations [and] participation restrictions” (WHO, 2011, p. 4). The difficulty in defining disability lies in the vast array of types of disabilities, the spectrum of severity, the degree of permanence, and the circumstances in which the person with the disability lives their daily life (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; Zajadacz, 2015). The “impairments, activity limitations [and] participation restrictions” (WHO, 2011, p. 4) also require definitions and/or umbrella terms to determine what medical or societal conditions should be captured under each term. In this exploratory research, disability is understood as an umbrella term so as not to limit my thinking or the thinking of the participants around what the term can include. The research investigates a specific aspect of tourism as opposed to a specific form (or forms) of disability, and because of the range of stakeholders approached, their understandings of disability may vary.

In understanding disability, previous scholars have frequently referenced the models of disability at the beginning of their discussion which indicates the importance of these models to disability studies (Blitchfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011; Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Darcy, 2012; Zajadacz, 2015). Darcy and Buhalis (2010a) have synthesised the researchers who have in turn synthesised discussions of the models at their time of writing, as shown in Table 1. The table shows a shift from medical to social models and growing understanding of disability as a “product of disabling environment” (Table 1). The medical model considers the disability to be “the problem of the individual” (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011, p. 146) in that there is a deficiency in a person’s body which prevents it from being considered a “normal” body. In the social model, “the problem of disability is revised” (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010a, p. 26). The social model developed out of research in Britain in the 1970s, with the name coined in 1983 (Oliver, 2009). Understanding that it is how society responds to an impairment that affects how a person may live with their disability is important, as well as how it has built the world around them to include or exclude, accommodate or prevent participation based on their impairment. The support that is available to them amongst “disabling environments and hostile attitudes” (McKercher & Darcy, 2018, p. 59) will have a large impact on how they experience life with their disability (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b). As disability in this way is socially constructed, a social solution also becomes possible (McIntosh, 2020).

Given that these models are so ubiquitous, their significance is clear in understanding how thinking around disability has shifted. In short, the medical model (the first model) places the problem of disability on the individual, while the social model (the second, preferred model) “breaks the causal link between impairment and disability” (Oliver & Barnes, 2010, p. 548) and considers disability to be a social construct which is in the hands of the collective to navigate. However, while the social model is regarded on the whole as an “important refinement of perspective” by Daruwalla and Darcy (2005, p. 552), negative perceptions of disability still exist and are seen as a significant barrier to participation.

## **Table 1**

### *Reviews of models of disability.*

*Note.* Reprinted from *Accessible tourism: Concepts and issues* (p. 23) by S. Darcy and D. Buhalis, 2010a, Channel View Publications. Copyright 2011 by Dimitrios Buhalis and Simon Darcy.

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The use of the term ‘minority’ several decades ago is interesting as now the WHO clearly points out the rising number of people with disabilities. While people without disabilities globally may currently outnumber people with disabilities, as populations age or other affecting events occur in certain countries, the ratio of majority to minority may change. Darcy and Buhalis (2010b) imply that the definitions provided by the WHO are the guide for member nations and note that these definitions have been revised over time as models have developed. The definitions and models the WHO follows are significant because of their potential impact on how member nations implement policy and the subsequent treatment of people with disabilities in their own countries.

Previous scholars have seen a distinction between “impairment” and “disability” as important to understanding the complexities of disability. Darcy and Buhalis (2010b) define impairment as “any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function” (p. 24) and disability as “any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an action in a manner, or within the range, considered normal for a human being” (p. 24). This is the social constructionist view of disability as “a product of the socially constructed disabling environment” (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b, p. 27). This thesis adopts a social approach to considering disability, as shared by several accessible tourism scholars (e.g. Darcy & Buhalis, 2010a). The social constructionist view suggests that the barriers perceived by people with disabilities are linked to how the world has been constructed around them (Oliver & Barnes, 2010) and are barriers which are “the things we had in common” (Oliver, 2004, p. 11). Society has been “actively and creatively produced by human beings” (Oxford Reference, n.d.) which indicates that human beings are responsible for creating barriers which affect people with disabilities. This ties into the social model of disability. If society has constructed the framework in which people with disabilities live, then society needs to take the “tool” of the social model (Oliver, 2004, p. 11) and use it in action.

Importantly in the consideration of disability, if the world around a person with a disability is constructed by the non-disabled body and/or mind, it can be considered discrimination (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b) because people with disabilities are excluded from participation. People with disabilities not having the same access to, or participation in, social and cultural life is a step back in the quest for equality, which is “the fundamental aspect of [the] social model of disability” (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020, p. 5). The social model is about understanding the experience of living with a disability and determining how environments can be enabled (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010a). Here, “enabled” is an important word as it neatly implies a history of prevention while simultaneously signalling the way forward or a focus for next steps. Stakeholders for change are important in achieving this.

Stakeholder theory, as conceptualised by Freeman (2010, originally 1984) defines a stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organisation’s purpose” (p. 53). Sautter and Leisen (1999) adapt this to tourism as “all the persons or groups who have interests in the planning, process(es), delivery and/or outcomes of the tourism service” (p. 315). Sautter and Leisen also adapt Freeman’s stakeholder map (see 2010, p. 55) for a tourism context by placing tourism planners in the middle and noting the range of stakeholders they need to consider, as seen in Figure 1. Just as tourists with disabilities are heterogeneous, so too are stakeholders (Nyanjom et al., 2018). Figure 1 reveals stakeholders beyond “the most obvious stakeholders, chiefly tourists, business owners and government officials” (Sautter & Leisen, 1999, p. 315). The most important stakeholders to be involved are people with disabilities as they are the ones who will be most affected (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Nyanjom et al., 2018). These definitions and the map below indicate a reciprocal relationship between tourism planners and stakeholders. Therefore, “cooperation and formulation of strategic partnerships are essential prerequisites” (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2010, p. 261). This is especially necessary for ensuring that accessible tourism is made sustainable (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2010). With this in mind, this thesis focuses on stakeholder perceptions of beach access for tourists with disabilities in New Zealand.

## **Figure 1**

*Tourism stakeholder map.*

*Note.* Reprinted from “Managing stakeholders: A tourism planning model” by E. T. Sautter and B. Leisen, 1999, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(2), p. 315. Copyright 1999 by Elsevier Science Ltd.

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### **1.1.1 Language and inclusive research**

Words can have enormous meaning and impact which can be beneficial or detrimental to a cause. With an issue as complex as disability, it has been argued that the use of appropriate language in research is critical (Gillovic et al., 2018). One of the most important things a person can do is use the correct terminology in discussions of a marginalised group as this shows respect for that group, much like pronouncing someone’s name correctly. In research, scholars have debated the appropriate language to use when discussing disability. As alluded to above, there are comparisons to be made between “disability” vs “impairment” (Milner & Frawley, 2019) and “person-first” vs “impairment-first” which have been critiqued by accessible tourism and disability researchers, and psychologists (Dunn & Andrews, 2015; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). The use of “person-first” or “impairment-first” indicates whether the person will be seen “from the perspective of their dysfunction” (Zajadacz, 2015, p. 192). Throughout this thesis, person-first language will be used to place the individual before the disability in alignment with the social model of disability (Gillovic et al., 2018). This is stated now, at the beginning of the thesis, as it has been found that few researchers will state their philosophy at the beginning of their study despite its importance in positioning the author’s perspective (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015).

Incorporating the voices of people with disabilities is important in discussions, policy, and research because it means they “become active agents in affecting social change” (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010a), especially as they are the ones who will directly benefit the most from this specific social change. In tourism and leisure research, the voices of people with disabilities have been given less priority than the voices of their carers (Gillovic et al. 2018), or by research that is more concerned with class, gender, and race (Aitcheson, 2009). By working “flexibly and reflexively with an expansive vision and

various models” (Nind & Vinha, 2012), there will be greater opportunity for people with disabilities to use their voices to inform how research is done and to engage in issues which directly involve them by being participants in research that centres on their lived experience.

### **1.1.2 Lived experience**

Tourism is an individual experience because tourists travel with different objectives and look for different outcomes (Israeli, 2002). Travelling with a disability may add another layer to those objectives and outcomes. Even with the establishment of a distinct market segment, questions could be raised about the characteristics of that market segment and how homogeneous a definition or list of characteristics of the segment may be, leading to sub-segments of the market (Burnett & Baker, 2001; Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b). “Heterogeneity” is a key term to describe disability and the accessibility market and it is important in discussions of accessible tourism (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b; McIntosh, 2020). It may be the most important term as the industry needs to understand the diversity of the market. It is important to remember that “people with disabilities are diverse as are their disabilities” (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2021, p. 1) and two people may experience the same disability in very different ways. Because of the broad definition of disability, there are many dimensions to consider and each with its own nuances and variations within (Ambrose et al., 2012). The medical definition of a particular disability, and any assumed or generalised (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b) restrictions people with that disability may face, may not match how the person may experience their disability as an individual. While each individual may not be able to have their specific preferences catered to, an understanding of a disability or impairment from an individual perspective can only be beneficial. A tourist’s experience and knowledge of how they interact with their environment are crucial elements in understanding their participation or lack thereof.

In view of the above point, scholars such as Darcy and Buhalis (2010a, p. 34) list the dimensions of disability as follows:

- Mobility: varying levels of physical mobility restrictions
- Sensory: capacity to see and/or hear is limited or absent

- Communication: limited, impaired or delayed capacities to use expressive and/or receptive language
- Intellectual and mental health: lifelong illnesses with multiple aetiologies that result in a behavioural disorder
- Hidden: variety of illnesses.

These dimensions are broad, and individuals may not necessarily fit solely into one or another, but they provide a starting point for researchers, stakeholders, and policy writers to understand what is encompassed within disability. The elderly in particular may fit into multiple dimensions as mobility, vision and hearing impairments can manifest more frequently as people age (Patterson & Pegg, 2010; Wang, 2010). Baby boomers have been recognised as travelling more and being a lucrative market (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; Lovelock, 2010). Because of the range of these dimensions and the individual experience of disability described above, it is unsurprising that tourism for people with disabilities is rife with complexity. As Ambrose et al. (2012) wrote:

Understanding the tourist with a disability is a complex issue in that the tourist experience must be inclusive of: (1) the type of disability/dimensions of access (mobility, hearing, vision, cognitive and others); (2) the level of support needs of the individual (from the independent traveller with a disability to those with very high support needs); (3) their socio-economic circumstances; and (4) the previous tourism experiences. The needs of each individual will vary depending upon their positioning within these four interdependent and overlapping constructs and the particular situation. (Ambrose et al., 2012, p. 3)

These are intricate points to be faced with when approaching the subject of accessible tourism, but they are significant points to consider if stakeholders, particularly tourism operators and providers, want to maximise the opportunities associated with the growing global access market.

## **1.2 The market for accessibility**

As already stated, the number of people with disabilities is rising globally (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b; Robinson et al., 2007; WHO, 2011). Australia, New Zealand's closest neighbour and largest international market (Tourism New Zealand, n.d.a) has an

accessibility market worth AUD10.8 billion (World Tourism Organization (WTO), 2020). It must also be remembered that the accessible tourism market includes those who travel with people with disabilities, such as carers or travel companions (Lehto et al, 2018; Packer et al., 2007; Robinson et al, 2007). A significant number of New Zealanders live with a disability. Stats NZ collects data on disability in the national Disability Survey. The 2013 survey stated that 24% of New Zealanders identified as disabled and over half of those people had multiple impairments (Stats NZ, 2014). This is a significant portion of the population, and if New Zealand follows global trends this percentage will rise in coming decades. Given the intersection between ageing populations and disability, it is not surprising that the survey found that those aged over 65 were more likely to have a disability (59%) (Stats NZ, 2014). The survey was previously administered in 2006, and the next survey is due to be administered in 2023. Qualitative aspects of the access market such as travel motivations and behaviours can also be distinct to this segment and, if evaluated, would bring insight to tourism providers and stakeholders about what the access tourist looks for in their tourism experiences.

The first Disability Strategy in New Zealand was established in 2001, and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities was ratified in New Zealand in 2008 (Office for Disability Issues, 2017) which acknowledges the right of people with disabilities to “full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life” (United Nations, 2006, p. 19), including tourism services. The current Strategy runs from 2016-2026 and will be reviewed in 2021 at the halfway point. It adheres to a social model of disability, recognising that it is environments which disable and not the impairment. Despite the Convention referring to “people with disabilities”, New Zealand’s Disability Strategy refers to “disabled people” throughout the text “based on advice from the New Zealand Disability Strategy Revision Reference Group and in recognition of the history of the term in the 2001 Strategy” (Office for Disability Issues, 2016, p. 13). The Strategy recognises that there are many ways that a person with a disability may want to identify themselves, including primarily by another aspect of their identity (e.g. their ethnicity) (Office for Disability Issues, 2016). New Zealand’s last in-depth statistical report on disability and travel and transport was published in 2009 using data from 2006 (Office for Disability Issues & Stats NZ, 2009). That data is now 13 years old, and given the speed at which the population, society, technology, etc. move, develop and grow, a 13-year gap may not be reliable enough. There is potential for Stats NZ to expand its scope to incorporate more travel and tourism data about the access market.

### **1.3 Research background**

Within the broad context of tourism and disability, and noting the growing importance of the access market, as discussed above, this thesis brings particular attention to the issue of beach access within the agenda for accessible tourism. While beaches and accessible tourism have been explored individually, they have rarely been studied together within tourism scholarship. As an issue which can affect both domestic and international tourists from birth or at any point in their lives (McKercher & Darcy, 2018), beach access for tourists with disabilities is worth significant study, especially in a country where going to the beach is a popular pastime in the peak season of summer, such as New Zealand. It is predicted that in New Zealand there will be between 1.36–1.51 million people aged 65 and over in 2048, compared to 0.79 million in 2020 (Stats NZ, 2020a). The combination of a popular pastime, an aging population, and 24% of New Zealanders already living with a disability (Stats NZ, 2014) means there is merit in exploring the context of beach access among New Zealand’s substantial and valuable tourism activities.

#### **1.3.1 Tourism and COVID-19 in New Zealand**

Rhodda (2012) predicted, “The importance of the industry to New Zealand means that any downturn in tourism will have an adverse effect on the entire economy” (p. 114). This was seen when, in response to COVID-19 reaching New Zealand’s border, the New Zealand government in 2020 closed the border to all non-citizens and most non-permanent residents. This eliminated all international tourism, which was unfortunately New Zealand’s largest export earner prior to the pandemic (Tourism Industry Aotearoa, n.d.). This has affected many tourism operators, and debates have started in newspapers, on social media, and between politicians about how soon the borders can open to New Zealand’s closest neighbour, Australia, and what kind of tourists the industry should be focusing on attracting. As a place known for being diverse and welcoming, in the wake of COVID-19 there is now an opportunity to embrace disability and inclusion in rebuilding New Zealand’s tourism economy (McIntosh & Wilson, 2020). Tourism New Zealand’s Statement of Performance Expectations 2020/21 placed importance on improving domestic inclusion in tourism, with a “focus on New Zealanders’ shared experience of nature, culture and heritage” (Tourism New Zealand, 2020) with no mention of inclusion of tourists with disabilities.

In 2020, there was a debate in the media about whether wealthy tourists should be targeted as opposed to backpackers (Trevett, 2020). What debates like this can fail to recognise is that people with disabilities can be part of any market segment, wealth bracket, or tourist type. This may be especially true if they travel with friends, family or caregivers. It should also be remembered that people with disabilities constitute 24% of New Zealand's population (Stats NZ, 2014). With the border closed, a serious reconsideration of all available untapped markets is a smart idea to help businesses "thrive again" (WTO, 2020). Minister Stuart Nash has revealed the new plan for New Zealand tourism, which is to "support, recover, and re-set" (Nash, 2021). The plan largely focuses on economic and environmental steps in locations hit hardest by the lack of international tourism, and contains no mention of disability, accessibility, or inclusion despite wanting to "elevate 'Brand New Zealand' so that this country is seen by international travellers as one of the top three aspirational global travel destinations" (Nash, 2021). Yet, there is no shortage of documents, guidelines and examples of best practice to steer conversations, for example the WTO Inclusive Recovery Guide (2020) and the WTTC's Inclusive and Accessible Travel Guidelines (2021).

However, despite the closed border, it should be noted that New Zealand has a larger domestic tourism market than international. In the year ending March 2020, domestic tourism expenditure was \$24.4 billion while international was \$17.5 billion (Stats NZ, 2020b). Prior to COVID-19 reaching New Zealand's border in February 2020 and its subsequent closure to certain groups of people, tourism was New Zealand's largest export earner (Tourism New Zealand, 2020). The number of overseas visitor arrivals at YE March 2020 was 3,651,967 (Stats NZ, 2020b). This was a decrease of 5.6% on YE March 2019, but whether this was a result of COVID-19 reaching New Zealand during February-March 2020 will not be known until the YE March 2021. Tourism Satellite Account data will be released in December 2021. The majority of these visitor arrivals were for the purposes of holidays (1,826,781 visitors) and visiting friends and relatives (1,049,601) (Stats NZ, 2020b). The size of New Zealand's access market is currently unknown (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015) and not explicit in visitation statistics, but the presence of a feature on accessible tourism on 100% Pure New Zealand's website suggests an interest in attracting the access visitor (Tourism New Zealand, n.d.b).

### 1.3.2 The research setting

Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa are two suburbs in Tauranga (see Figure 2), a city in the Coastal Bay of Plenty region in the North Island of New Zealand. The Coastal Bay of Plenty stretches from Waihi Beach to Ōhope Beach. While it does reach inland, it does not reach as far as the tourism hotspot of Rotorua. The key stakeholders include Tauranga City Council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council, Tourism Bay of Plenty (a trust controlled by Tauranga City Council and Western Bay of Plenty District Council), Mount Mainstreet and Pāpāmoa Unlimited (local business associations), local residents, activist groups, accommodation providers and cruise and tour companies. The Coastal Bay of Plenty receives approximately \$1 billion in tourism revenue which is an increase of 51% since 2009 (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.d). Visitors to the Coastal Bay of Plenty include domestic visitors (79%) and international visitors (21%). Tauranga is a port city which had a strong cruise market, prior to COVID-19, of over 320,000 passengers each season (approximately October-April) (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.d). The city is known to have a significant population of retirees, and elderly people constitute 27% of people with disabilities in Tauranga (Stats NZ, 2014).

Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa are a short drive apart and connected by a beach (as shown by Figure 2), so both suburbs are considered in this research. The beaches included in this thesis are Mount Main Beach, Pilot Bay and Pāpāmoa Beach. Mount Maunganui is first on the list of Tourism Bay of Plenty's destinations (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.b). The peak season is the summer season and the beaches are a significant drawcard. The beach is the first item mentioned on Tourism Bay of Plenty's Mount Maunganui webpage and features heavily in the photos on the webpage (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.a). Pāpāmoa is further down the list of top destinations but has similar branding. The main type of tourism enjoyed by domestic tourists is visiting friends and relatives (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.d). Statistics about visitors to Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa do not exist because they are suburbs within a wider destination. Therefore researchers must rely on statistics for Tauranga and the (Coastal) Bay of Plenty.

**Figure 2**

*Map showing locations of Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches*



Within Tauranga City Council there is a Disability Advisory Group whose “advocacy and monitoring role...involves advising council on the development and implementation of policies, projects, planning and service delivery that have an impact on the lives of disabled people” (Tauranga City Council, 2020), as per the Tauranga Disability Strategy. The Tauranga Disability Strategy is extensive and includes promotion of beach access as a goal (Tauranga City Council, n.d.). However, in Tourism Bay of Plenty’s Visitor Economy Strategy 2018-2028 (n.d.f), Annual Report 2018-19 (n.d.i), Statement of Intent 2019-2020 to 2021-2022 (n.d.h), and Tourism Bay of Plenty Toolkit (designed to help tourism and hospitality businesses) (n.d.d), there is no mention of accessibility, the disability market, or plans to include people with disabilities in planning or discussion. There are mentions of being “inclusive” but no explanation of which markets or people are to be part of that inclusion. The Visitor Economy Strategy 2018-2028 mentions ease of access as a “fundamental success characteristic” (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.f) without explanation of what that means or how to achieve it. Tourism Bay of Plenty’s Tourism with Purpose: A Plan for Regenerative Tourism document (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.e) focuses on fostering a sustainable natural and cultural environment, but presently makes no mention of how accessibility and inclusion can be part of it.

Despite a lack of strategically planned action, local groups are leading the charge to introduce accessibility to the area, and some initiatives are already being trialled, such as a beach mat initiative, which would allow wheelchair and crutch users to move from the dunes down to the water without sand getting stuck in their apparatus (“15k secures

wheelchair access,” 2017). However, there is no study of how effective these initiatives, or additional ones, are in making the beaches more accessible, and no attention has been given to the perceptions of stakeholders who may contribute to this vision. Newspaper articles detailing a beach matting project in 2016 were the catalyst for this research, as well as my fondness for the area as a regular participant in visiting friends and family tourism in Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa. The beach matting project was driven by a local business after the Tauranga City Council put out a call for fundraising in 2016 (“Ball rolling on beach mat fundraising,” 2016; “15k secures wheelchair access,” 2017). This shows a strong community connection to the project and the benefits it brings. The matting has been replicated at other beaches around New Zealand, such as Hutt City (Hutt City, 2019) and Auckland (Bhatia, 2020), New Zealand’s largest city, although the aim of this research is to provide a case study analysis of the Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches specifically. Future research may wish to consider how the regions compare in terms of their accessibility initiatives.

There is merit in focusing the research on a case study of the Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches. TripAdvisor releases a list ranking the best beaches globally, regionally and nationally every year based on reviews by visitors. In 2019, Mount Maunganui was considered the best beach in New Zealand and the fourth best in the South Pacific (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.c). Mount Maunganui had been ranked in this way for several years but was supplanted in 2021 by Ōhope Beach (in the same Bay of Plenty region) and Kaiteriteri Beach (in the Tasman District (TripAdvisor, n.d.a). The rankings are not determined by any particular criteria, but simply by “reviews, ratings, and saves that travellers share from across the globe” (TripAdvisor, n.d.b). Mount Maunganui Beach was also shortlisted for the New Zealand Herald’s search for the best beach in New Zealand, but lost out in 2021 to Ōhope Beach (McDonald, 2021). As such, the case study beaches that are the focus of this research are notable as popular sites for visitation in New Zealand. They might also be categorised by being urban rather than rural beaches, as the below discussion will show.

Numerous existing classification systems for beaches are described by Williams (2011) around the types of waves or composition of the beaches, and then a classification of “resort to rural” (p. 51) is proposed. An anthropogenic scale is used, meaning “resulting from the influence of human beings on nature” (Merriam Webster, n.d.). The beaches

are classified based on their proximity to human habitation and public services, and the simple spectrum ranges from resort to remote (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Types of beaches.*

Type	Population	Facilities	Location
Resort	Adjacent to accommodation complex	Complex responsible for management	Within/adjacent to urban area
Urban	Large populations	Well-established public services	Within/adjacent to urban area
Village	Small population	Small-scale community services	Outside urban environment
Rural	Seasonal residency	Few facilities and no public transport	Outside urban/village environment
Remote	Seasonal population	Difficult to access (e.g. over 300m walk)	Adjacent to village or rural, but not urban areas

*Note.* Adapted from *Disappearing destinations : climate change and future challenges for coastal tourism* (pp. 51-3), by A. Williams, 2011, CABI. Copyright 2011 by CAB International.

For this thesis, the Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches could be classed as “urban” (Williams, 2011, p. 52) as they “serve large populations that have well-established public services...are located within/adjacent to the urban area and are in the main freely open to the public” (p. 52). Since the formation of the Mount Maunganui Surf Club, the beach area has been developing from ‘village’ to ‘urban’ (Williams, 2011).

### 1.3.3 Significance of the research

Beach access for tourists with disabilities has been vastly under-researched across the globe. A few studies exist with their own specific focus, and from specific academic angles, but many more are needed to fill gaps in our knowledge, as will be highlighted in chapter 2. To the researcher’s knowledge, a study like this has not been done in a New Zealand context. Two studies that have been done in Europe on beach access and tourism

are discussed in chapter 2, as well as three projects from the WTO. Given the rise of beach mats and beach wheelchairs across the country, it could be argued that interest in beach access is becoming more apparent. It is also apparent from the discussion above that one of New Zealand's primary tourism attractions is the beach. Therefore, an exploratory study such as this one is needed to begin to scope the perspectives of relevant stakeholders to achieve an accessibility agenda for New Zealand's beaches.

Importantly for this thesis, previous studies have concluded that a stronger push by the government and industry leaders is needed to prioritise development of accessible tourism (e.g. Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). To achieve this, there is an important role for tourism stakeholders. Those at the top are in a unique position to enact change, and Rhodda's (2012) chapter on accessible tourism in New Zealand in the book, "Best practice in accessible tourism: Inclusion, disability, ageing population and tourism" (Buhalis & Darcy, eds.) lists myriad steps to be taken to make this happen. Examples of these steps include:

- Create, adopt, and champion national (central government) and regional (local government/RTOs) accessible tourism strategies and accessible tourism action plans.
- Promote and champion universal design.
- Survey and describe attitudes to accessible tourism amongst operators, central and local government and communities, and define how any barriers can be eliminated. (Rhodda, 2012, p. 121).

Chapter 2 will further critically discuss what questions and gaps remain in academic literature, and while this research cannot answer all of these questions, or fill all of these gaps, in a global context, it is another step forward in understanding what improvements can be made to beach access in New Zealand, drawing on the case study presented. There is potential to start a list of recommendations for how stakeholders can move forward for increasing the accessibility of beaches in New Zealand.

#### **1.3.4 Research aim**

The thesis aims to explore the perspectives of stakeholders on the current and future state of beach access for tourists with disabilities. Interview questions sought notable

stakeholder opinions on the beach matting and other initiatives, what further access could look like, and how it could come about.

Because the research seeks opinions and perspectives of people close to the issue of beach access for tourists with disabilities, a qualitative method is used. An interpretivist paradigm is followed because there are a variety of opinions and “multiple realities” (Jennings, 2010, p. 40) being sought, and because this is exploratory research. The targeted group of participants were stakeholders with a relevant interest in the development of beach access, either in Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa, or in New Zealand in general. These included people working in the disability sector, tourism industry and local government. Data was collected using face-to-face interviews. A series of open-ended questions were put to stakeholders to obtain qualitative data which was coded for common themes and meaning through content analysis.

### **1.3.5 The researcher’s position**

I do not come to this research from any lived experience of disability beyond having elderly relatives and active cousins who constantly injure themselves, but I believe that issues of disability are not solely for people with disabilities to research and find solutions for. Thanks to my supervisor, Professor Alison McIntosh, my eyes were opened to the problems of tourism for people with disabilities in one of my tourism classes, and I found a setting and aspect of tourism to focus on that resonated with me. Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa were chosen as I have family there and have participated in VFR (visiting friends and relatives) tourism at the beaches in question many times. I am highly invested in seeing New Zealand, the country I was born and raised in, become an even better tourism destination than it is now. I believe that all New Zealanders should be able to access beaches simply because we are surrounded by them. Whilst my interest and beliefs thus shaped this research, I consider and positioned myself more as an outsider to the research as a person without a disability (Dunn & Andrews, 2015), intending instead to let the perspectives of the tourism stakeholders be prioritised in this research as it is they who hold the expert knowledge to ensure the future consideration of beach access for tourists with disabilities in the chosen locations.

## **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

Chapter One outlines the background to the study, its key concepts, originality, the case study beaches, and the importance of framing the research in a New Zealand context.

Chapter Two contains the literature review. Accessible tourism, beach tourism, and beach access for tourists with disabilities are examined in terms of previous literature and where gaps and questions remain.

Chapter Three explains and justifies the research methodology. It begins with discussion of the research paradigm, and methodology employed in the research. Sampling procedures are also discussed. Then the data collection and analysis processes are explained. A thematic spread reveals the common themes across participants. Questions of ethics and the trustworthiness of the research (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) conclude the chapter.

Chapter Four reveals the themes derived from the data analysis. The most significant findings are presented using direct quotes pulled from interview transcripts to prioritise stakeholder views. The chapter also discusses the findings in line with the research aim and the wider literature. The significance of the themes is explored and new insights are shared.

The final chapter concludes the thesis. The findings are summarised and research limitations discussed. Final recommendations for the development of beach access for tourists with disabilities are explained and avenues for future research proposed.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter critically reviews the extant literature on accessible tourism, beaches in the context of tourism, and beach access for tourists with disabilities. Relevant New Zealand studies are noted where such studies exist. The research gaps will be revealed and the significance of this research presented.

### **2.1 Issues of disability and the (in)accessible tourist experience**

As noted in chapter 1, the relationship between disability and tourism is about the right to participate in all aspects of daily life that people without disabilities already participate in (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). It is acknowledged that tourism can provide great personal benefits of, for example, self-improvement, confidence, and affirming one's place in the world and society (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). A review of the relevant literature reveals a significant proportion of research on accessible tourism is spent discussing barriers faced by people with disabilities with respect to their ability to participate fully in tourism (Avis et al., 2005; Bi et al., 2007; Daniels et al., 2005; Israeli, 2002; Kaganek et al, 2017; McKercher & Darcy, 2018; Smith, 1987). Smith's (1987) work is considered the "seminal" (Darcy, 2006; Lee et al., 2012) research on barriers. He synthesises a variety of examples given by researchers of barriers under the categories of intrinsic, environmental, and interactive (Smith, 1987). Barriers may also be structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Previous scholars have also analysed barriers in relation to participant profiles to determine market segments or groups of tourists with disabilities who may encounter certain barriers more than other segments or groups (Avis et al., 2005; Kaganek et al., 2017). Informational barriers can include information not being correct on a website or in a brochure (Daniels et al., 2005), or information being hard to find or missing (Rhodda, 2012). In the case of accommodation, for example, what is advertised may not match the reality (Rhodda, 2012). Access to information is also crucial to people with disabilities' ability to participate (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). The importance of information is stressed in the decision-making process for people with disabilities and their support people (Blitchfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011; Yau et al., 2004).

Environmental (or structural) barriers have largely been encountered in accommodation (Avis et al., 2005) and attractions (Bi et al., 2007). However, these studies have only

quantified the number of environmental barriers encountered rather than outlining what those barriers are specifically, and how tourists with disabilities have faced them. Daniels et al. (2005) breaks structural barriers down into sub-categories to illustrate the varied ways in which tourists with disabilities can encounter constraints and negotiations (i.e. transportation, facilities, environment/geography, and financial). Breaking the broader category of barriers down into sub-categories in this way may assist other researchers, informing their own research project, analysing their results or producing recommendations.

Attitudinal barriers are another significant group of constraints. Avis et al.'s (2005) study is significant in that it found that 50% of the respondents surveyed had faced attitudinal barriers in their travels. These barriers include negative staff attitudes (Avis et al, 2005), societal attitudes and stigma (Bedini, 2000; Smith, 1987), and oversensitive staff (Turco & Stumbo, 1998). While barriers are not the specific subject of this research, they become relevant to the discussion of the research findings in chapter 4. The ability for stakeholders to make beaches accessible requires consideration of the existing barriers to access and participation. Importantly, it aligns with considerations for future improvements to accessibility.

Within the published literature on accessible tourism, two key books put forward the key issues relating to the pressing need for accessible tourism. *Accessible Tourism: Concepts and Issues* (Buhalis & Darcy, 2010) takes a social constructionist approach to look at a variety of economic factors, disabilities, market segmentations and themes surrounding the tourist experience. In *Best Practice in Accessible Tourism: Inclusion, Disability, Ageing Population and Tourism*, Buhalis et al. (2012) have collected case studies which analyse a variety of aspects of the tourism experience and industry from the accessibility sphere. It is more specifically focused on policy and business aspects of tourism, including planning, design, and management. These case studies are from a largely European context but incorporate several studies from New Zealand and Australia as well. These two books help to enable understanding of the scope of what has been researched already and in what context.

The market for accessibility has been researched in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Quantitative aspects include the size and economic value of the market. Qualitative aspects include the needs, motivations, and behaviours of the access tourist

(Burnett & Baker, 2001; Ray & Ryder, 2003; Robinson et al., 2007; Stumbo & Pegg, 2005). Studies concluded that word-of-mouth is a key method of attaining relevant information as tourists with disabilities find they cannot always put their faith in travel agents to determine what is and is not accessible for them (Ray & Ryder, 2003; Robinson et al. 2007). Because tourists with disabilities can have very specific requirements when they travel, researchers have also identified that loyalty to the places that meet those requirements is an important characteristic of the access market (Burnett & Baker, 2001; McKercher et al., 2003). Understanding these aspects of the access tourists is essential for stakeholders wishing to engage with the market.

Tourism industry stakeholders have been researched previously. Accommodation providers, mostly hotel managers, have been a particular focus (Capitaine, 2016; Darcy & Pegg, 2011). Notable for this thesis, two studies of stakeholder perspectives toward accessible tourism have been conducted in a New Zealand context; that of Gillovic and McIntosh (2015) and McIntosh and Cockburn-Wooten (2021), although they do not focus on beach access. A review of the accessible tourism stakeholder literature shows that they have revealed that lack of education and training about the needs of people with disabilities among tourism providers has been considered a barrier in the tourism experience for tourists with disabilities (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; Stumbo & Pegg, 2005). There is an opportunity to understand the “needs, barriers, and difficulties” (Maria De La Fuente-Robles et al., 2020) that make stakeholders themselves a barrier, from their own perspective (that is, if they consider themselves a barrier, or are aware they could be a barrier). For example, if disability training among hotel managers is lacking, research could investigate the specific reasons why. Any patterns revealed by such a study may indicate where barriers are the cause of individual providers or the tourism industry overall. The suppliers of tourism products and experiences may be able to provide more specific insight into the factors that make them a barrier to full and equal participation for tourists with disabilities. In this way research may generate more insight into how barriers can be mitigated, and not just what barriers exist.

There is an opportunity for researchers to think about how they conduct research to attain greater involvement of people with disabilities and other stakeholder groups. Previous studies have used face-to-face interviews (Bedini, 2000; Bi et al., 2007), questionnaires (Avis et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2012), and interpretation of travel accounts (Daniels, 2005). Other qualitative methods may be helpful to bring stakeholders together to compare and

provide feedback on diverse perspectives and opinions. Focus groups or Delphi studies may help to facilitate discussions between stakeholders to share and compare ideas. Using a Delphi study would allow for anonymous responses and feedback for difficult topics or if stakeholders are uncomfortable sharing their opinions in front of others. However, Delphi studies can be lengthy, depending on the number of rounds used (Garrod & Fyall, 2005). Focus groups and less-used co-creative methods, such as Ketso (McIntosh & Cockburn-Wootten, 2021), may be better for discussions of future possibilities and problem-solving around current issues. However, they rely on participants being willing to engage and share open and honest opinions.

An interesting note is that two accessible tourism literature reviews have been published over the course of writing this thesis. Maria De La Fuente-Robles, et al. (2020) specifically reviewed qualitative studies concerning stakeholders. The study found that the “motivational autonomy” (p. 9) of tourists with disabilities was a significant consideration for stakeholders, as it is essential they understand not only what needs tourists with disabilities have but also what having those needs met means for them. Rubio-Escuderos et al. (2021) have performed a literature review across the whole field of accessible tourism to analyse common research themes and reveal gaps where more research can be done. The study argues that among previous studies there is a strong European focus as a result of the release of the OSSATE report by the European Network for Accessible Tourism (Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2021). Both reviews determined education and training, technology, strategy, competition, and co-design to be the main themes that have arisen from accessible tourism studies. Neither gave much space to discussions of how research into lived experience and embodiment are important avenues through which to gain insight from the voices of tourists with disabilities. Whether there is not enough research on this subject or the reviewers considered them unimportant fields of research is not known. These reviews indicate that the field of accessible tourism has grown to a point where synthesis is needed to consolidate understanding and identify where gaps exist. It is possible that another researcher may analyse the same studies and consider different gaps or themes to be the most important. Despite this, literature reviews are still useful tools to get an idea of the common themes and recurring gaps that exist.

Within extant tourism literature, both visible and invisible disabilities have been explored in relation to accessible tourism. Visible disabilities have been explored the most with

wheelchair accessibility being a key concern in conversations around barriers to access (McIntosh, 2020). Physical disabilities in general have thus been explored extensively (Avis et al., 2005; Bi et al., 2007; Daniels et al., 2005; Felizardo et al., 2018). Hearing and vision impairments have been increasingly researched as well (Poria et al., 2010; Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2021; Small, 2015). The literature review by Rubio-Escuderos et al. (2021) acknowledges that invisible disabilities (intellectual or hidden impairments) have thus far been rather “shunned” (Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2021) by researchers. Examples of the invisible disabilities that have been studied include depression (Fullagar, 2010), epilepsy (McIntosh, 2020), and autism (Sedgley et al., 2017). Not all authors focus solely on visible or invisible disabilities. If this is the case, they will frequently delineate the various disabilities their participants or respondents have (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Packer et al, 2007). My research takes an exploratory perspective and therefore does not limit the types of disability or impairment that may be discussed by participants. Stakeholders with disabilities are not being targeted specifically, and so there is no requirement to disclose or identify as having a disability. If a disability is disclosed, then that will be noted in findings to provide context for quotes that describe lived experience.

## **2.2 Disability and accessible contexts for tourism – towards an understanding of beach access for tourists with disabilities**

Beaches often fall under the umbrella of coastal tourism and are considered one of its most valuable assets (Lazarow et al., 2013; Marin et al., 2009). Coastal tourism comprises “the full range of tourism, leisure, and recreationally oriented activities that take place in the coastal zone and the offshore coastal waters” (Hall, 2001). A review of previous literature shows that coastal tourism is often concerned with environmental issues, particularly climate change (Blackwell et al., 2013; Raybould et al., 2013). They are often linked to discussions of beach management, and strategy is a key theme underpinning many topics related to beach and coastal tourism, such as research into behaviours and attitudes of beach users (Hasan et al., 2019; Maguire et al., 2011). The value of beaches has been recognised as significant because of the boost they can provide to the local economy (Blackwell et al., 2013; Lazarow et al., 2013; Marin et al., 2009). As noted in chapter 1, attention to beach access could boost the local economy even more.

Statistics have determined that the countries which have the largest numbers of coastal tourism arrivals are the United States, France, Italy and Spain (WTO (2003) as cited in Onofri & Nunes, 2013). This is aligned with the prevalence of academic studies on the Mediterranean (Lozoya et al., 2014; Marin et al., 2009;), and some parts of the United States (Klein & Osleeb, 2010; Oh et al., 2010). Australia has also become a key research area in recent years (Lazarow et al., 2013; Maguire et al., 2011). It was noted by Marin et al. (2009) that until their time of writing, there had been a lack of research and analysis on beach users. Since then, research on both residents and visitors has been conducted and used to compare preferences in beach features and facilities (Oh et al., 2010; Onofri & Nunes, 2013). The significance of residents' opinions has been explored alone because local residents are considered the largest group of beach users (Maguire et al., 2011), especially because of the importance of tourism to the local economy, strategy and management (Marin et al., 2009). Strategy and management become important because of beach tourism's seasonal nature (Williams, 2011), especially in the places noted above which get the most coastal tourism arrivals such as France, Italy and the rest of the Mediterranean.

Relevant to this thesis, two studies on beach access for tourists with disabilities are those by Voulgaropoulos et al. (2012) and Mayordomo-Martinez et al. (2019). These studies have indicated the importance of government involvement in driving development of beach access for tourists with disabilities and provide examples of areas and facilities where this has already been achieved. Another study has featured beach tourism in discussions on accessible tourists' motivations (Figueiredo et al., 2012). Further to this, a case study of the development of accessible beaches in Greece can be found in "Best practice in accessible tourism: Inclusion, disability, ageing population and tourism" (Voulgaropoulos et al., 2012). An argument is made for clear, consistent strategy to develop beach access for tourists with disabilities, as designed for all needs, to be in place "as a given" rather than a "special requirement" (Voulgaropoulos et al., 2012, p. 62). This case study is interesting as it indicates that beach access for tourists with disabilities in Greece was motivated by two events, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2004, and the economic profit that would arise from them. Clear strategy was created to make four beaches in Greece accessible, and since then, several other beaches have been adapted as well, but to a lesser extent and with less consistency. The authors note that despite the positive reception of accessible beaches during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, a strategy for developing beach access for tourists with disabilities was not forthcoming.

They briefly touch on the social and medical understandings of disability and lean largely on statistics from Greece and the European Union to explain the market for accessible tourism, both local and international. As has been stated by several sources in other contexts, Greece has an aging population and wishes to ensure their future participation in tourism (Voulgaropoulos et al., 2012). As noted in chapter 1, this argument has relevance to New Zealand also.

The study by Mayordomo-Martinez et al. (2019) has shown how disability advocates and regional councils can work together to produce facilities that allow people with disabilities to participate more fully in beach tourism. Their article centres on designing a smartphone app to allow people with disabilities to search for beaches with the appropriate facilities for their needs, and in the process they establish a classification system for the numerous beaches in the Murcia region of Spain. This is a huge step forward as this case study explicitly states what governments can do to provide for people with disabilities. The authors do not necessarily approach the subject with the whole-of-life approach of Darcy and Dickson (2009), or show understanding of the developments of discourse around disability and accessible tourism discussed earlier in this review. Instead, they approach from a statistical standpoint using data gathered by the Tourism Department of the Region of Murcia and the Federation of Regional Associations of People with Physical and Organic Disabilities of Murcia, to demonstrate the number of people with disabilities. They also use examinations of other research on the use of technology and smartphone apps for people with disabilities. The authors have also produced research on smartphone apps for assisting people with disabilities to shop.

The significance of these studies is that they show what is possible when there is a commitment from the government to provide accessible tourism (whether that be temporary or ongoing), and how they can work with local disability advocacy groups to provide accessible tourism. Facilities in both studies include amphibious crutches and wheelchairs, ramps and means of moving on the sand, and adapted changing areas. They also note the importance of having people on hand to assist those with disabilities. Mayordomo-Martinez et al. (2019) commented that these facilities were already in place prior to the research in question, so the authors focused on a classification system and design of an app in their study. There are a large number of beaches across New Zealand, both urban and rural, and with examples like this it is possible New Zealand could achieve a similar array of beaches with facilities for a variety of disabilities. The facilities in the

study largely cater to people with mobility related disabilities and so an opportunity remains to consider what facilities would benefit people with vision, cognitive, or learning disabilities. What is missing from both case studies, however, is an investigation into the lived experiences of people with disabilities and how they currently do or do not participate in beach tourism. Voulgaropoulos et al. (2012) do stress the importance of the involvement of people with disabilities in helping to find solutions but do not provide suggestions on how that can be done, or indicate their intent to pursue the subject.

There is an opportunity therefore to use the existing case studies of accessible tourism to develop universal international standards. The WTO, for example, has curated a selection of projects titled *Accessibility and Inclusive Tourism Development in Nature Areas – Compendium of Best Practices* (2020) in which three beach projects are included: converting recyclable plastics into infrastructure and equipment in Costa Rica; creating a management system for access to beaches in Las Palmas, Spain; and the addition of accessibility to the criteria for the Blue Flag award. They are brief in detail, but each speaks to the need for collaboration between stakeholders to share knowledge and address barriers to beach access for tourists with disabilities. Even without full description of how each project came about and was successful, they provide examples for stakeholders to compare and contrast in exploring potential developments. The push for international standards and accessibility accreditation also serves to ensure no matter where tourists travel from or to, they may expect to receive the same standards of accessibility. In New Zealand two organisations work with businesses to improve their accessibility and earn national accreditation. The Accessibility Tick programme (n.d.) helps “organisations understand, benchmark and improve disability confidence to better meet the needs of customers and employees with accessibility needs” and Be.Lab (n.d) aims to “enable greater accessibility for all, whilst also redefining the way accessibility is thought about and discussed.” However, whilst these organisations have a domestic focus, there is room for New Zealand to align with international standards to be more recognisable to international visitors. Because initiatives such as the beach mats are already being trialled, the conversation about standards for beach access have already begun in local contexts.

The beach access case studies above have all explored something different in their different contexts. Because there is not yet overlap across them, this subject could be considered to be in a global exploratory phase. Specific destinations in Europe, such as

Spain, may have been working on beach access for tourists with disabilities for a longer time but, now with the addition of accessibility to Blue Flag's award criteria, the rest of the world must work on it in order to maintain existing awards and win new ones. This thesis will ultimately examine a type of tourism destination for which there is very little scholarly research and certainly none in New Zealand. Therefore it will aim to start to fill that gap in tourism scholarship. Beach tourism is an integral part of the classic New Zealand summer (the country's peak season) as people flock to towns and cities near the coast as soon as the weather warms. Indeed, Darcy and Dickson (2009) argue that participating fully in all of aspects of life is somewhat "synonymous" (p. 32) with citizenship. Because of this, it is fitting that all New Zealanders and visitors to the country should be given the opportunity and facilities to participate in beach tourism.

### **2.3 Summary**

The literature review has revealed an array of important gaps in knowledge about accessible tourism, beach tourism, and beach access for tourists with disabilities. Literature on accessible tourism is lacking studies on specific disabilities and in more specific contexts. Tourism and disability are both dynamic and therefore the research could keep evolving as the market changes. Research into baby boomers and their experiences of disability, impairment and tourism, in particular, will become essential as the global population ages (as discussed in chapter 1). Taking further steps to include people with disabilities in the co-design of research projects will make the last stage of Milner and Frawley's (2019) 'on, with, by' a more mainstream approach to research. Gaps exist in New Zealand across all three areas, and there is an opportunity to explore both the New Zealand access market's needs, motivations and behaviours, and also their lived experiences of specific or general travels around the country or overseas. Overseas travel, in particular, may be helpful to provide comparison to destinations with a more advanced accessible tourism or beach access programme. Previous stakeholder studies seem to have largely followed more traditional methods of interviews and questionnaires. Whilst the current thesis research is positioned comparatively with these studies, the extant literature reveals there is room to explore other methods to see how useful they are in gathering information for tourism studies, and if they generate any new patterns or information that interviews and questionnaires so far have not.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The thesis aims to explore the perspectives of stakeholders on the current and future state of beach access for tourists with disabilities using a case study of the accessibility of Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches. In this chapter the methodology is explained and justified, beginning with the research paradigm. Sampling and the research design is then discussed, followed by data collection and analysis. Finally, the trustworthiness and ethical issues of the study are considered.

### **3.1 Research paradigm**

It contains a world view, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world.  
(Sarantakos, 2005, p. 30)

Jennings (2010) defines a paradigm simply as “the overlying view of the way the world works” (p. 35). Another definition is “a basic set of beliefs that guides action...taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry” (Guba, 1990). A paradigm is the lens through which the researcher must look in order to make appropriate decisions about data collection and analysis (Jennings, 2010). There are a number of popular paradigms, including positivism, post-positivism, participatory, constructionism, and critical theory (Patton, 2002). Within each paradigm there is a set of defining characteristics that can assist a researcher in choosing the appropriate framework for their study. Selecting the right paradigm for a study is key because of the individuality of research studies, and the individuality of paradigms.

Guba (1990) describes three questions which must be asked of a paradigm first to understand it and then to recognise how it can be used in a study. These are ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions (as listed below) (Guba, 1990, p. 18), or “parameters” (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 29):

1. Ontological – What is the nature of the “knowable”? Or, what is the nature of “reality”?
2. Epistemological – What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?
3. Methodological – How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?

Sarantakos (2005) simplifies them further, and explains how the ontology and epistemology “underlie the methodology, which in turn guides the research” (p. 29).

Ontologies inform methodologies as to the nature of reality... ‘what’ social research is supposed to study.

Epistemologies...inform methodologies about the nature of knowledge, or about what counts as a fact and where knowledge is to be sought.

Methodologies...prepare ‘packages’ of appropriate research designs, to be employed by researchers, instructing them as to where to focus their research activity, and how to recognise and extract knowledge.

(Sarantakos, 2005, p. 30)

In answering these questions or points, the framework for the study begins to take shape and guide the researcher towards a method of gathering and analysing data. Because the “concept of a paradigm has been used in a variety of ways” (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 136), it is important to justify use of one and rejection of others. The paradigm selected for this research is an interpretive paradigm, and the rejection of other paradigms follows its justification.

The interpretive paradigm is often linked to the constructivist paradigm and is also known as the interpretive social sciences paradigm (Jennings, 2010). Constructivism and interpretivism appear almost interchangeable. There are differences between the two, but the core tenets are the same: multiple realities, subjective knowledge (Guba, 1990), and all knowledge is valued (Greene, 1990; Jennings, 2010). It has also been suggested that they are not paradigms at all, but in fact ontological or epistemological aspects of other paradigms (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 31). Greene (1990) places constructivism under the umbrella of interpretivism in order to capture the elements of both in one word. That is what this research will follow. The interpretive paradigm may align with a qualitative methodology and uses a subjective research process (Jennings, 2010). The ontological basis for the interpretive paradigm is that “the world is constructed of multiple realities” (Guba, 1990, p. 26; Jennings, 2010, p. 40), and research under it is inductive. The interpretive paradigm acknowledges there are “multiple realities” (Jennings, 2010) as each person experiences their own reality of any given context (Greene, 1990). The

paradigm seeks to “observe the general trends and perceptions of a social phenomenon” (O’Gorman, 2005, p. 142).

This research follows a case study method as it is focused on a single location in New Zealand and therefore “can illuminate a general problem through examination of a specific instance” (Beeton, 2005, p. 38). It has been suggested that case studies can be “speculative, unreliable and too specific” (Beeton, 2005, p. 38) due to being limited in their scope. However, it is possible that sub-cases can emerge from a case study by incorporating within in, for instance, stakeholder groups, that may provide a wider range of insight and perspectives. This research is exploratory because of the lack of studies regarding beach access for tourists with disabilities, and therefore an interpretive paradigm is suitable to look at this new subject generally and examine the current thinking of stakeholders. The epistemological basis is that the researcher actively engages with the study setting (Jennings, 2010). It is also noted that “values are integral to research processes since research is a social process” (Jennings, 2010, p. 41). This means that all knowledge is valued (Jennings, 2010), which is fitting for a qualitative study which relies on the full thoughts and opinions of participants, in this case, tourism stakeholders. A criticism of interpretivism, however, is that because of the “pluralism of method, of data and of research design” (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, pp. 30-1), rigorous justification is required to prove that the trustworthiness of the study is as strong as possible. That said, the subjective opinions of tourism stakeholders in the study setting served as the important focus for this thesis research. However, it is acknowledged that the findings of this research cannot be generalised, and may not be the same if carried out in a different case study location.

The research rejected positivism as a research paradigm. Positivism holds an objective epistemology wherein there are “immutable natural laws and mechanisms” (Guba, 1990, p. 20). The ontological position is realism, that reality is fixed and the researcher is removed from it, only watching and never entering. As for the methodology, hypotheses are typically formed in advance and tested “under carefully controlled conditions” (Guba, 1990, p. 20). Riley and Love (2000) note that positivism has been, and still is, the dominant paradigm in tourism studies. They suggest that this is because “the tourism industry is about the generation of dollars and qualitative research is less able (not unable) to translate its findings into practices that affect the bottom line” (p. 182). Statistics and numbers (for example on spending, length of stay etc.), perhaps translate into budgets

better, but for under-researched markets such as people with disabilities, it is the understanding (Greene, 1990) behind the lack of, or disinclination for that, spending, length of stay, etc., that will enable the industry to better adapt to that market.

Positivism is thus not an appropriate paradigm for this research because of the limits it places on the value of knowledge. The experiences of people with disabilities are not uniform, even if in demographic detail (for example type of disability, location, age) are similar or identical. How they live and their opinions, perceptions and personal lived experiences are exactly that – personal. Understanding also requires the researcher to enter the study setting and help unveil the knowledge and pull it out, reconstruct it into new understandings or reinterpretations (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 30), and convey it to an audience. An interpretive paradigm is a more appropriate choice because of the focus on understanding (Sarantakos, 2005), and to further understandings of preferences and to assist in future planning and strategies at beaches (Maguire, 2011).

## **3.2 Method**

The data collection method selected was semi-structured interviews, as there was a need to get specific information to answer the research aim (Patton, 2002, p. 349). Previous accessible tourism stakeholder studies have utilised semi-structured interviews as a means of gathering perspectives and opinions (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; Nyanjom et al., 2018). Interviews were selected over surveys because it was considered the best way to get full, information-rich answers and the hows and whys of personal experiences (Brinkmann, 2013; Jennings, 2005). A survey, even with open-ended questions, would not have allowed for a free-flowing conversation with opportunities for me to probe for elaboration or extra information (Brinkmann, 2013).

### **3.2.1 Question construction**

Interview questions were constructed using the tips set out by Tracy (2020). The interview questions were in two groups, each responding to a different part of the research aim. The first group investigated the current state of tourism for people with disabilities and the second investigated future possibilities. The same set of questions was used for each participant, with the flexibility to alter questions as needed in the course of the interview. The first couple of questions were the same for each interview and then I either

followed the list or was guided by the natural flow of the conversation. Because the interviews were semi-structured, I was able to go back and forth between each section depending on how the participant answered the previous question.

While some questions did get into specific aspects of tourism, disability and accessibility, and the location of the study, because the intention was to have a general conversation, the questions were kept general enough to be a guide for the participants' thinking and responses while not requiring an expert opinion. The questions were carefully constructed to be open-ended to allow for information-rich responses (Jennings, 2005) and to avoid the use of jargon or terms that participants may not have understood (Tracy, 2020). For example, instead of using "accessible beach tourism", the questions used "access-friendly for people with disabilities". International examples were used to stir thinking about what could be possible for Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa, and for New Zealand as a whole.

The first three questions were constructed to be straightforward and basic in what information they sought to ease the participants into the interview by sharing knowledge they were likely to have (Tracy, 2020). Probes were planned for some questions as they were likely to elicit a simple yes/no response (see questions 3, 7-9, under Appendix E) (Tracy, 2020). I had to be careful with questions around barriers and benefits (and potential probes) as I did not want to risk intentionally leading participants to responses that mimicked existing conclusions drawn by previous accessible tourism research (Tracy, 2020). The types of questions listed by Tracy (2020, pp. 164-70) provided an excellent guide to deciding what I wanted to ask. A "posing the ideal" (Tracy, 2020, pp. 166-7) question was improvised as a follow-up to question 13 (see Appendix E) to ask what beach access for tourists with disabilities looks like 'in an ideal world.' Participants' answers thus provided me with a blatant comparison to what beach access currently is as they described the ideal future.

### **3.2.2 Sampling and recruitment**

Potential participants were selected based on established criteria. It was important that participants were selected for their proximity to or expertise in the research subject, in order to gather responses that were relevant, in-depth, and likely to provide real insight into the subject (Patton, 2002). These criteria included:

- People who work in tourism in the region relevant to access to the beach
- People who worked on Tauranga City Council's beach matting project
- Disability advocates and organisations
- Cruise companies
- Tourism boards with an interest in beach access
- Information centres.

Using the above criteria, a list was drawn up by the researcher of people or organisations that would be appropriate to contact. This list was composed using newspaper articles on prior beach access initiatives, information on council websites, and Google searches of tourism companies. When contacted, participants were encouraged to suggest further participants if they felt they could be appropriate for the study, following the snowball method (Patton, 2002; Tracy, 2020). The snowball method asked the initial group of participants contacted to suggest other people for me to contact (Tracy, 2020) and has been utilised in previous accessible tourism stakeholder studies (Nyanjom et al., 2018). This means I could access more viewpoints and experiences than I might have otherwise, especially for marginalised groups of people (Tracy, 2020). It can also enhance the credibility of the research as the original contacts told potential contacts who I am and what I do (Jennings, 2005).

A spreadsheet was created to record the participants selected and the reason why (Appendix G). This spreadsheet was updated throughout data collection to track who had accepted the invitation, the date and time of interviews, transcription and review status, and any other details I needed for the information to be tracked. Participants were emailed using publicly available email addresses obtained from council and company websites, accompanied by a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) and Consent Form (Appendix D). One participant provided further email addresses for people to contact, as per the snowball method, and another contacted potential participants themselves and assisted in arranging interviews with them.

After participants had accepted the invitation to be interviewed, a date, time and location convenient to each participant was agreed, and a consent form was emailed to be signed (Appendix D). The majority either emailed back a signed copy or signed a hard copy at

the interview. One participant required a verbal consent to be recorded, which was recorded and stored separately from the interview, as required by Auckland University of Technology's ethics committee (AUTEC). Following this, interviews were conducted in October and November 2020 in three locations: in person in Auckland, New Zealand; in person in Tauranga, New Zealand (the study setting); and over Zoom. I was based in Auckland but travelled to Tauranga when required. Fortunately, the COVID-19 lockdowns or alert level changes imposed by New Zealand's government did not delay interviews. Some participants were not based in either Auckland or Tauranga and so Zoom was utilised. Two in-person interviews took place in Auckland, four in Tauranga, and six over Zoom.

### **3.2.3 The participants**

Twelve participants were interviewed in total (see Table 3 and Appendix F). They have been grouped according to their stakeholder type in order to maintain confidentiality of participants. These stakeholder groups are Public Authority (3 people), Tourism Industry (2 people), Disability Sector (3 people), and Private Citizen (4 people). It should be noted that the four Private Citizens, while not strictly employed by a Tourism Industry or Disability Sector entity, are closely linked to the subject of beach access for tourists with disabilities because they were somewhat involved with the beach matting initiative in 2016 that sparked this research, or have been identified as persons of interest by another participant through the snowball method.

The other three groups were determined as:

- Public Authority: includes anyone linked to the Tauranga City Council, either as a direct employee, a committee, board or advisory group member, or Council Controlled Organisation employee.
- Tourism Industry: includes people working directly for a tourism operator.
- Disability Sector: includes people working for an organisation or company concerned with advocacy, development, research, and consultation in the accessibility sphere.

**Table 3***Participant profiles.*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Location of interview</b>	<b>Stakeholder Location</b>
Jeremy	Disability Sector	Tauranga	Tauranga
Neal	Disability Sector	Auckland	Auckland
Teresa	Disability Sector	Via Zoom	Hamilton
Astrid	Private Citizen	Tauranga	Tauranga
Molly	Private Citizen	Via Zoom	Tauranga
Patrick	Private Citizen	Via Zoom	Tauranga
Siobhan	Private Citizen	Via Zoom	Tauranga
Eileen	Public Authority	Tauranga	Tauranga
Kevin	Public Authority	Auckland	Tauranga
Serena	Public Authority	Tauranga	Tauranga
Jeff	Tourism Industry	Via Zoom	Christchurch
Megan	Tourism Industry	Via Zoom	Christchurch

### **3.2.4 Data collection**

An initial 25 stakeholders were deemed to have met the criteria and all were contacted. 13 did not respond, and none responded to say they did not want to participate. This left 12 participants agreeing to participate and so 12 interviews took place. Interviews were initially scheduled for one per day as advised by the research supervisors. It was important for me to be flexible around the schedules of participants while also getting space to debrief and have a break between interviews. This was easily possible in Auckland and over Zoom, and in the case of the in-person Tauranga interviews, I worked with the participant who had offered to contact potential participants to determine when meeting rooms could be booked at their place of work. It was agreed this participant would book meeting rooms for entire days, and I set a limit of two interviews per day. Having the entire room booked made it easy to reschedule with participants if necessary, and also convenient for me to have somewhere to reflect and prepare for the next interview. In the event of a two-interview day, a break of at least 2-3 hours was scheduled for reflection, fresh air, and preparation for the next interview. Six interviews were intended to take place in Tauranga, but a family emergency meant I had to return to Auckland at the last minute. Fortunately the remaining two intended interviewees were happy to reschedule to a Zoom interview.

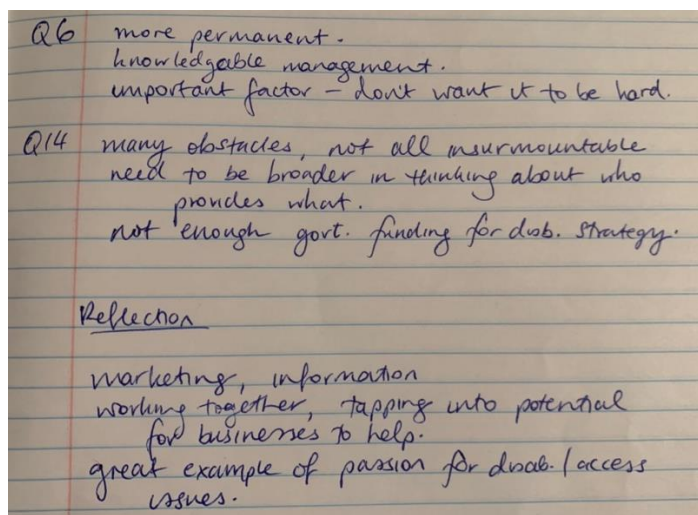
With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded by me, and handwritten notes were taken as well. In all cases, I welcomed the participant, explained the purpose of the research, the structure of the interview and privacy concerns, and then began the recording (Jennings, 2005). Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours. Because the Participant Information Sheet estimated 45-60 minutes, I checked in with participants if time approached 60 minutes to ensure the interview was not taking up too much of their time. One participant had another meeting scheduled and offered to respond to remaining questions by email. When the interview was complete, the recording was ended and the participants were reminded that it would be transcribed and sent back to them to review. The transcripts ranged from 14 to 38 pages, with a single outlier of 49 pages. Three participants made edits to either clarify statements or add extra information.

Notes were taken during the interview (see Figure 3) “to consciously and coherently narrate, synthesize, and interpret practices and actions in the field” (Tracy, 2020) and to reflect on the interview at its conclusion (Jennings, 2010). In the in-person interviews,

the participants could clearly see notes being taken in front of them, and for the Zoom interviews, I held up the notebook and pen before beginning so the participant would know why I might not be looking at the camera. Although the recordings would be transcribed, taking notes helped in three ways. It indicated to the participant that I was engaging with what they said and that what they had to say was worth noting; it gave both of us time to think when I said, “I’m just going to make some notes here,” and paused for a brief time. I was able to keep track of interesting quotes from the participant and refer back to them to ask the participant to expand if necessary. The latter reason was especially helpful as I could note when a response sounded as if they could answer another question later in the interview.

### Figure 3

*Example of notetaking during an interview and reflection afterwards*



It was always the highest priority that I gave the subject matter of disability and the stories shared by people with or without disabilities the seriousness, gravitas, and respect that they deserved. A “radical sense of openness” (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 30) was required to acknowledge the opinions, perceptions, and realities that were being offered. The understanding that underpins the interpretive paradigm requires that openness from the researcher. My role was to listen, understand, and accept the stories and views offered by participants. This also included accepting the language used by participants. Some participants preferred “inclusive tourism” or “disabled people” instead of “accessible tourism” or “people with disabilities.” If I was corrected about the language I used, the participant explained why they preferred certain terms and I adopted them throughout the rest of the interview.

When each interview concluded, I put the notes taken during the interview aside and took 5-10 minutes to reflect on the interview. Without looking at the notes, I reflected on the key words, themes, or topics that came out of the interview. For example, if I was conscious that “information” had been mentioned multiple times, that was noted. The aim was to note the key points that stayed with me immediately after the interview, both as something to consider later and as a shorthand for remembering the contents of the interview. The first interview, recorded over Zoom, was sent to the research supervisors to gain feedback before continuing, as another means of reflecting on my skills as a researcher.

All 12 interviews were transcribed. Completing the transcription myself enabled me to remain grounded in the data, retain memories of body language and tone, and pull out potential themes, quotes, or significant points while transcribing and then link them back to notes made during interviews and reflections (Brinkmann, 2013). It was another opportunity for me to enhance the validity of the transcript (Amankwaa, 2016). Upon completion of the transcription, each transcript was then sent back to the relevant participant for “member reflections” which provided participants with the opportunity to add extra information or clarify statements made during the interview (Tracy, 2010). It was also an opportunity for me to add a note in the accompanying email which asked participants to check relevant pages for questions I may have left them. This was in the event there was a term, acronym, or muffled piece of dialogue that I did not understand during transcription. At the end of Interview 9, the participant raised the point that as well as asking about benefits (Question 16) I should be asking about disadvantages as well, to represent the other side of the coin. After consulting with my supervisors and confirming wording, this question (Question 17) was added to the remaining interviews and thus captured in the transcript. For interviews that were already complete, this extra question was added at the end of the transcript for the participant to provide an answer either in bullet points or a short paragraph and return it with their transcript.

### **3.2.5 Data analysis**

The method of data analysis used is content analysis. Content analysis was used to be able to go through the transcripts and pick out recurring words, phrases, themes and examples. Lune and Berg (2017) define content analysis as “a careful, detailed,

systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, assumptions and meanings” (p. 182). The researcher takes that body of material and embarks on a process that “involves identifying, coding, categorising, classifying, and labelling the primary patterns in the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 463). In their study which analysed how content analysis has been used in tourism research, Camprubi and Coromina (2016) found that “the main data type used in content analysis research is qualitative” (p. 137), and it was mainly used to analyse interviews, focus groups and open-ended questions. Content analysis is fitting for an interpretive study because the specific words and/or phrases of the interview transcript are analysed, as well as the broader themes that may arise through thematic analysis (Lune & Berg, 2017). For these reasons (qualitative methodology, interviews, and interpretivism), and because it has been used in previous stakeholder studies (e.g., Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2010; Yau et al., 2004), content analysis was deemed an appropriate data analysis method for this research.

That said, content analysis has previously been used in qualitative tourism research despite Camprubi and Coromina’s (2016) contention over what defines content analysis and how researchers should attempt it. Patton (2002) also notes that it is hard to define what content analysis is, and that defining it may not be possible. Content analysis can be positivist or interpretive (Lune & Berg, 2017), quantitative (Seale, 2012) or qualitative (Camprubi & Coromina, 2016; Lune & Berg, 2017). Seale (2012) describes two forms of content analysis, thematic and straight content analysis. Because of the myriad of definitions for content analysis, it is not always clear how quantitative it can be, and whether frequency counts are an explicit component of it. It is important to check how researchers have used content analysis because it can mean thematic content analysis or counting content analysis. Seale (2012) distinguishes between the two and suggests combining a counted content analysis with a qualitative method to form “interpretive content analysis” (p. 465). He suggests it is not enough merely to count but also to “attempt to take in issues of meaning and context” (Seale, 2012, p. 464). Because this research is concerned with understanding, perceptions and opinions, simply counting is not enough. Therefore Lune and Berg’s (2017) description of content analysis is adopted.

Lune and Berg’s (2017) framework has been selected for the comprehensiveness of its steps. The framework seemed adaptable as elements can be added or removed to make the analysis more thematic or content driven. For example, in their discussion, Lune and

Berg (2017) discuss frequency counts and manifest and latent content. Frequency counts are being used to indicate patterns across participants and will be helpful to indicate what words, phrases, and examples appear across stakeholder groups. In this way, points of consensus or division, variety and division, in particular, may become apparent. What researchers all agree on is the importance of being “systematic” (Camprubi & Coromina, 2016; Lune & Berg, 2017; Van Rheenena et al., 2017) in a content analysis. Its strength as a method of analysis comes from establishing a set of steps that will ensure each transcript is coded consistently and in a way that will allow another researcher/analyst/coder to pick up the framework and either assist in the project in question or apply it to their own research. A well-established codebook is important for this reason as well. Lune and Berg (2017) stress the importance of not only establishing codes, categories, and labels (depending on your chosen terminology), but also the criteria for what allows an item to be filed under that code, category, or label. This is discussed more under step 4 of Lune and Berg’s (2017) coding framework.

Lune and Berg (2017) have outlined a seven-stage process for content analysis (Figure 4). It is essentially an inverted triangle or ‘funnel’ (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 192) in which analysis begins broadly, is refined down into patterns and counts, and is ultimately linked back to the research aim. The research aim is both the alpha and the omega of the analysis process, as the researcher is initially guided by what the aim is concerned with, and at the end must apply whatever they find back to the aim and the context of the research.

#### **Figure 4**

*Stage model of a qualitative content analysis (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 196)*

*Note.* Stage model of a qualitative content analysis. From *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (p. 196), by H. Lune and B. Berg, 2017, Pearson. Copyright 2017 by Pearson Education Limited.

*This content has been removed by the author due to copyright issues*

#### **Step One – Identify Research Question**

The analyst goes back to the research aim to affirm what coding and analysis is trying to achieve, and asks “What are you trying to explain?” (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 196). To do

this I had the research aim written out on a piece of paper next to the transcript to review and consider before beginning each transcript.

### Step Two – Determine Analytic Categories

In content analysis, codes can either be generated through data analysis or be established beforehand by using codes determined by previous researchers (Lune & Berg, 2017). In this analysis, codes were derived both from the interview questions and the resulting data.

Analytic categories can be established prior to reading data by reviewing the interview questions and using them as inspiration. I also went back to field notes to review the reflections from the end of each interview. In this way I was able to do an initial brainstorm of words, phrases, and potential themes that stood out in my mind as especially recurrent or significant. For example, the theme of ‘information’ stood out to me in reviewing the reflections.

### Step Three – Read Through Data and Establish Ground Categories

The data is now read through and coded with categories and themes that appear. They may not necessarily be the same as those established in Step Two, but those codes may still appear. The important point of this step is that “the categories should have some relationship with the research question” (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 196). The research aim remained top of my mind throughout reading to ensure I was keeping the coding relevant and reading the data in the right frame of mind. I noted codes in the margins alongside the specific text reference (for example, “info” for information and “public” for the attitudes expressed by members of the public) and underlined specific quotes (see Figure 5) that stood out to me as significant.

**Figure 5**

*Example of coding process*

Yeah, so maybe, I would say the lifeguard style...somebody that's there all the time. [pause] And that's obviously peak season. Like down in Christchurch they have beach wheelchairs but they're locked in a container and you have to get the key and you have to know where to find them, etc., etc. In Nelson, the Halberg's got some, CCS has got some but they're, like, locked up, nobody knows where they are. They don't even know that they exist. There's a lot of things in New Zealand that are all here and all available but you have to know. You have to be in the know and you have to be aware.	SH assist ✓ NZ FA ✓ info NZ
<u>That's that information piece you were talking about.</u>	
They keep them under lock and key because they think people will steal them and it's like, it's a joke, you know. It's, I work with so many different companies and stuff, it's not really my forte if you like. But yeah, at this point in time it's not working, in the South Island anyway. In the North Island it sounds like they've got a higher population so it will help. And the thing is, which I find is, with everything as soon as people are aware that these are available, as soon as people see other people using them, then they'll be like, they'll tell Fred down the road, they'll tell the child's mother, they'll tell them that they are available. There'll be more public awareness and more people will be using them, more people will get there etc. It's like a snowball effect. It's the same with everything, you know. You can make it all accessible, but you have to market it. <u>People have to know that it's there.</u> If nobody knows about it, then it's a joke, you know. So the major part of all inclusion is making it accessible or available, but then marketing it as well and making sure people aware of these things.	FA ✓ NZ ✓ info ✓ public ✓ mark. in incl ↓

**Step Four – Determine Systematic Criteria of Selection for Sorting Data Chunks into the Analytic and Grounded Categories**

This step involves a significant part of the coding process: determining “some explicit definition of coding rules” for the categories and what they include. These guidelines should be established in a way that another researcher can take the criteria, apply it to the data and generate the same codes and results. While reading the data, I made a long list of codes but could see how some might be linked to each other. Therefore, developing “criteria of selection” (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 185) was beneficial to determine what exactly fitted under each code. For example, the code “information” was given the following criteria: “References to people having or lacking knowledge, awareness or understanding of aspects of disability, accessibility, beaches, and/or the tourism industry, whether that be simple facts (such as where a beach wheelchair can be hired from) or deeper conceptual understandings (e.g. why blue is an appropriate colour for beach mats).”

**Step Five – Sorting Data into Various Categories**

As the name suggests, at this point the data is pulled out of the transcripts and grouped under the category headings. Categories and criteria may be revised if necessary, especially if working with multiple coders. In this instance, I was the sole coder but revised the codes and criteria as though another coder was being used. Therefore, all codes were reviewed along with the data extracts they contained to see where codes might

overlap or encompass each other. For example, the codes of “FA” (examples of existing and potential facilities and amenities at Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches) and “planning” (how providers approached new developments) were combined under “design” because they were both related to discussions of how the development of new facilities and amenities could face difficulties in the planning stage.

#### Step Six – Frequency Counts

The items and data points under each category are counted, to establish themes and patterns, or demonstrate a lack of themes or patterns. Each category can be broken down into sub-categories as required (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 197). Frequency counts were taken of each theme to determine how many participants spoke about it and how many times the theme was mentioned across all interviews.

#### Step Seven – Explanation of Patterns

The analysis comes full circle to link back to the research aim and literature in order to explain the patterns or lack thereof that have emerged from the data. I revisited the literature review and relevant documents to see how the findings expressed by participants aligned with the wider literature and previous studies.

When coding was complete, the data was collated under theme headings and the number of mentions across participants was calculated. The themes selected for discussion were chosen because of the number of participants that mentioned it, the descriptions they commonly reported, and the quality of insight likely to be gained from analysis.

Content analysis of the interview data revealed five key themes: ‘The Power of Inclusion,’ ‘Information,’ ‘Public Attitudes and Perceptions,’ ‘The Expense of Access,’ and ‘Designing for Access.’ The thematic spread (Table 4, see Appendix H for a summary of participants’ key points for each theme) reveals the commonality of each theme across the participants. The key points for each theme are accompanied by direct quotes from participants, and then discussed alongside the context of the research setting, the literature and wider significance.

**Table 4**

*Thematic spread across participants reflecting the strength of their contribution.*

Stakeholder Group	Participant	The Power of Inclusion	Information	Public Attitudes and Perceptions	Designing for Access	The Expense of Access
Disability Sector	Jeremy	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Neal		✓		✓✓✓	
	Teresa	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓
Private Citizen	Astrid	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓
	Molly	✓	✓	✓✓		✓
	Patrick	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
	Siobhan	✓	✓	✓✓		✓
Public Authority	Eileen	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	
	Kevin	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓
	Serena		✓	✓	✓	✓
Tourism Industry	Jeff	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Megan	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	

### 3.3 Ethics approval

Ethics approval for this research was gained from AUTECH and the principles and guidelines set out by AUTECH were followed consistently through data collection and analysis. The Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) clearly stated how data would be used and how the identities of participants would be kept confidential. This was particularly important considering any sensitive information that may have been divulged in an interview. Participants were given a pseudonym in the research to ensure confidentiality, and while their employer's name was collected for my reference during analysis, it was also not reported in the research findings; rather, participants are reported by their stakeholder grouping. Pseudonyms were also given to any other people participants mentioned in the course of their interviews. The data for this study will be stored for six years and then destroyed.

### **3.4 Trustworthiness of the research**

The trustworthiness of the research must also be considered. Lincoln and Guba (1985) created four criteria which would enhance the trustworthiness of research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These will be considered below in relation to the research conducted.

Credibility is concerned with the accuracy and truth of the research (Amankwaa, 2016). In this research, purposive sampling meant that data was obtained from people close to the subject, and the questions were constructed to allow for answers with depth. These two features meant that the appropriate people and questions were chosen to achieve the research aim. I checked in with participants during interviews to clarify information or seek extra information if I did not understand the point they were making (Brinkmann, 2013). Member reflections (Tracy, 2010) also aided in checking the accuracy of data as participants were sent the transcript of their interview to add or clarify information, and to ensure it reflected the answers they gave.

Transferability reflects the ability to apply the research in other contexts (Amankwaa, 2016). In qualitative studies “findings are highly context and case dependent” (Patton, 2002, p. 563). This means that researchers should explain the full context and study setting for readers or other researchers, which in this case is set out in the introduction chapter. They are thus able to look at the “thick description” (Amankwaa, 2016, p. 122) of the research and decide if it is applicable for their own study or chosen context.

Dependability is demonstrated in the consistency of the research process (Amankwaa, 2016). The data analysis followed a logical, established process (Figure 4) to ensure consistent and equitable treatment of each interview transcript. “Judges” (other researchers with knowledge of the research project, in this case the research supervisors) (Camprubi & Coromina, 2016, p. 135) were also asked to review the analysis of early transcriptions to check the consistency of the researcher.

Confirmability demonstrates the neutrality of the researcher in the findings of the research (Amankwaa, 2016). The research findings must be shown to have come from the data, not from any bias on the part of the researcher or from any source other than the participants. Claims made in the findings chapter (Chapter Four) are linked to specific

participants or transcripts to show that findings are evidence-based and can be clearly located within the data.

### **3.5 Research limitations**

This research has followed an interpretive paradigm. The research is qualitative and as an exploratory study represents the individual perspectives of a small number of stakeholders. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised as they are bound by the stakeholders who agreed to participate. A quantitative, positivist study could evaluate a wider sample of stakeholders and/or beaches, which may help to validate the findings of this study. The study is also limited to beaches in two specific suburbs of Tauranga, New Zealand and so may not be generalised to other locations either in New Zealand or internationally. Another study at another beach destination in New Zealand or internationally may not reveal the same findings. Social and cultural differences may also be the focus of future studies.

The majority of participants did not disclose having any disabilities. Of the participants who spoke to their own experience of lived disability, all but one used a wheelchair for a mobility disability. Participants largely discussed physical/mobility disabilities or impairments despite not being restricted to discussing specific disabilities or impairments in interview questions. Given the beach matting in particular was designed to be blue to assist people with vision impairments, the viewpoint of people with vision impairments would possibly widen the variety of opinions. Research into more specific types of impairments (visible or hidden) will reveal a wider range of perspectives and experiences.

The focus of the research leaned towards the supply side rather than beach users. Even though some participants identified during interviews as having a disability and as users of the beach matting at Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches, beach users with disabilities were not targeted specifically in sampling. Therefore a gap remains where researchers may focus on beach users with disabilities.

Beyond the stakeholders who participated in this research, different stakeholders may hold different views. Therefore, the views represented in this thesis might not represent the rest of the stakeholders in Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa, for example, tour operators. Because this research topic has not previously been scoped in this area, there was a relatively small selection of stakeholders to choose from. In order to get more

disability sector representation, national companies and organisations with knowledge of the area were sought alongside local companies and organisations.

Semi-structured interviews are good for scoping perspectives because they use open-ended questions and the conversation can turn anywhere. Thus the interviewer may get some information or context they otherwise might not have. A written questionnaire may still have open questions but whether on paper or online a participant may not have enough space to convey everything they wish to. However it requires the interview to stay focused on the aim(s) of the interview and ensure the conversation stays on track. Another limitation is the time that interviews can take up more time from a participant's day and they may therefore not wish to participate. Surveys can be useful in this situation as they can be completed in the participant's own time and the probes and follow-up questions that may arise. It is possible that more stakeholder perspectives could have been gathered if the time requirement were not a factor. There is risk of valuable time being spent on tangents that do not contribute to the research.

As discussed in the literature review (chapter 2), alternative qualitative research methods could have been employed in this research, as employed in some other stakeholder studies, such as co-creative methods (e.g. McIntosh & Cockburn-Wooten, 2021). As this is exploratory research I felt it would be good to use individual perspectives to get an overview of the state of beach access for tourists with disabilities in Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa. Focus groups or the Ketso method may have produced more in-depth and collaborative discussion amongst stakeholders than a one-on-one interview, as well as potentially being better options to create a co-created and inclusive project. A Delphi study, which are often used in forecasting studies (Garrod & Fyall, 2005; Green et al., 1990) was considered for this research due to the research aim being concerned in part with considering future possibilities. A Delphi study may have been beneficial in that stakeholders would be able to review each other's perspectives through answers to research questions (Donohoe & Needham, 2009; Garrod & Fyall, 2005). However, it was determined that time constraints and the size of such an undertaking would not make a Delphi study logistically feasible, notably within the context of a global pandemic when the data collection was being undertaken.

The use of an established content analysis process was beneficial to this research as it gave a logical progression of steps for me to follow. Each transcript was analysed in the

same manner which meant they were coded by the same criteria and with the same viewpoint. All participants are represented in the findings. Some interviews were longer and more comprehensive than others and so while each participant answered all interview questions, some may be represented more than others; however, their subjective positions were heard.

## **Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion**

This chapter will explore the themes inductively derived from the data to reveal significant perspectives from stakeholders about beach access for tourists with disabilities in the case study destination. The first theme, ‘the power of inclusion,’ discusses how being able to access a beach provides tourists with disabilities with the benefits of belonging in a country with a strong beach culture. The theme of ‘information’ considers the provision of information and the importance of that information being accurate. The theme of ‘public perceptions and assumptions’ discusses how stakeholders currently see the public as a stakeholder group and their opinions as a challenge in providing beach access. The theme of ‘designing for access’ considers stakeholder perspectives of the facilities and amenities which could be considered in enabling beach access. The particular challenges posed by a beach environment were also discussed. The final theme of ‘the expense of access’ is discussed in regards to the attitudes towards spending money on development initiatives for tourists with disabilities. This theme also discusses issues around sources of funding.

These themes reflect the aim of the thesis which is to explore stakeholders’ perceptions of the current and future state of beach access for tourists with disabilities. The quotes used throughout this chapter were taken verbatim from interview transcripts to reveal stakeholders’ perspectives directly.

### **4.1 The power of inclusion**

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis related to ‘the power of inclusion’. This theme is about the perceived importance of inclusion at beaches for New Zealanders and families, and how inclusion can improve Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches as a more inclusive destination and avoid creating feelings of “segregation” and “exclusion”.

Several participants recognised the importance for New Zealanders of being able to access a beach, as the following quotes show:

Yeah and like it’s a Kiwi thing. It’s part of growing up Kiwi, I think. You know, use the beach to its full extent. (Jeremy, Disability Sector)

New Zealanders think of it as a right to be able to go to the beach, and everybody should be able to go to the beach whether you have a disability or not, and I think that's inherent in our nature. (Teresa, Disability Sector)

Jeff (Tourism Industry) emphasised very strongly that it was not just about what tourists with disabilities need, but all New Zealanders:

In the past, we're in 2020, and in the past it's always been "Oh we've done this for the disabled community" or "We've done this..." you know, it's bullshit. We're doing this for New Zealanders. We're doing this to provide access for Kiwis, you know. It's got nothing to do with the disabled community. (Jeff, Tourism Industry)

Megan (Tourism Industry) commented on the "disconnect" between the reputation of Mount Maunganui Beach and the people who are able to go there:

My view always was...that the Mount beach had just been voted one of the best because in Australasia or Southern Hemisphere or whatever, and yet the percentage of the population who had said that they lived with disability was, I can't even remember what that was, and so it seemed incongruent that we would have this amazing beach and this sector of the population and this disconnect between people in our community being able to enjoy it. (Megan, Tourism Industry)

Participants saw inclusion as a "key, essential" factor in beach access for tourists with disabilities. They noted that inclusion affects not only the individual tourist but also their family and friends. The meaning of inclusion for tourists with disabilities cannot be underestimated as it is perceived as "life-changing" for those who have previously not been able to participate in the way they might have wished to.

People don't go to the beach by themselves. They go with their friends and their families, so double those numbers, you know? And that's when you start to see the snowball effect of how many people it will include. It's not just Fred in a wheelchair. That's the tiny part. So the power is numbers. The power is inclusion,

and the power is making people understand that, who we're talking about. (Jeff, Tourism Industry)

I live in an apartment and in my building, everyone accesses the beach, and for the first time I could join my mates and go down there and, you know, that one is all about inclusion is, at its finest really. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

The importance of inclusion for families was also identified by participants so that everyone can benefit from accessing the beaches. Participants noted that beach holidays can be “very difficult” or “exhausting” if the family has a child with a disability. Thus, the power of being able to spend time together and do what everyone else does on holiday was described by many participants. For example, the following quotes highlight how “life-changing” beach access can be:

It's life-changing for a family that wants to go the beach together. To be able to bring little Jimmy along in his wheelchair, it's huge, you know? That's about full inclusion at the Mount. Everyone having the same opportunity as everyone else. It's, there's, you can't even put a word on that because it's so powerful. And I don't think non-disabled people understand how powerful that is. To experience something so simple but something so unattainable for Jimmy and the family, because it simply can't be done. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

I think it's a key, essential, if people are coming to the beach and you say the beaches are inclusive, you know, they'll be able to say the whole family can go. Johnny, Mary, it doesn't matter whether they've got a disability or not, you can go on holiday together. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

Participants also discussed “exclusion” and “segregation” as counterpoints to inclusion. Jeff (Tourism Industry) and Patrick (Private Citizen) highlighted that, for children in particular, being excluded from participating in what other kids do can have a serious effect on their lives. The following quotes provide examples of how “exclusion” and “segregation” can have a personal effect on people with disabilities:

I was trying to work out how to word it where...that feeling where you know that everybody else can go to this place, the beach, but you can't. Because there'd be

no accommodation made. So while that's about inclusion and a feeling of belonging, there's also the negative side of that which is the feeling of exclusion. And the feeling that you are lesser, that's the word, than others, because you're not able to be...able to participate the same as anyone else. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

It's about treating humans well. But it also empowers people when they're out and doing stuff, you know, they're not segregated ... There's too many old people in government that don't realise that humans are humans and physical disability has got nothing to do with the mind and if you keep people segregated or separated because of a physical disability then that child will never become society. ... If they are put in a classroom, if they are going down to the beach, if they are jumping on a surfboard, if they are doing what other kids do, then they will be Fred, they won't be 'special.' (Jeff, Tourism Industry)

If a class goes to the beach for a swim from the school and the kid with disability's left parked up on the sand dune, not only is it not inclusive but it actually exemplifies that exclusion. It actually amplifies it. It does, and it's actually...sort of for the kids themselves, they just know that they are not part of the ordinary world. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

Importantly, participants commented about not wanting tourists with disabilities to be left out or an "afterthought", standing out or being "tagged on the end" of picnic tables when they go to the beach with their family.

And not feeling like you're an afterthought. Like it's so inclusive, there's a normalisation, I don't even know if that's a word, but you know it's almost normalised and it's, um, the accessibility is no longer a barrier, really, to full participation. (Megan, Tourism Industry)

The fact that my family and I can engage in a space without having to think, that has provision for me as well as them. And it's not like me looking like sticking out like a sore thumb like "Oh my god there's a wheelchair lady on a beach." It's like whoa, there's a whole bunch of tables and a whole bunch of people having a

lovely time without it being obviously disability. So even just that little bit kind of subtle is nice sometimes, you know? (Astrid, Private Citizen)

Despite this example of a positive experience, Siobhan (Private Citizen), who uses a wheelchair, points out a significant problem with the beach matting, and describes the feeling of being able to get only so far down the beach:

The execution I'm a little bit let down by. Only because you can only get down halfway onto the beach. So it's great to be able to be on the beach but it actually goes nowhere. I would love to be able to get down to the water. But I have to sit halfway up the beach and watch people do that. It's almost, it's almost like...being teased a little bit., you now? Dangle the carrot. Oh look, follow me, follow me, oh and I take the carrot away. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

This example demonstrates that getting one amenity right for tourists with disabilities does not automatically make the beach experience complete for all of them, and therefore the possibilities must keep being pushed by planners to ensure they are being inclusive of as many people as they can.

Whilst not specifically asked about particular types of impairments or disabilities during the interviews, some participants did mention that they were only focusing on certain types of impairments or disabilities. For example, Molly (Private Citizen), was reflective in acknowledging she was probably only thinking about mobility impairments or disabilities. In the following quote, Jeff (Tourism Industry) raises the importance of including hidden disabilities in consideration of inclusion and accessibility:

Every human has a different ability on this planet. Some are very, very obvious, like myself, yeah? But most people you'll find will have a hidden, hidden disability, if you like. I think it's, I think the idea of inclusive tourism is about including everybody. So accessibility does not help people that have ADHD or learning disabilities, even to the point for people with hearing impairments. (Jeff, Tourism Industry)

Participants also considered the next steps or the future of inclusion in beach tourism for tourists with disabilities. In particular, they discerned that “commitment” from

stakeholders will be necessary in order to embrace the disability market fully. For example, Patrick (Private Citizen), names specific types of stakeholders and explained a basic plan of action for how to turn Tauranga into a destination for tourists with disabilities.

We've been talking to chambers of commerce and business after five meetings and all those sort of things. Institute directors, just in recent times. I think those are the sort of people that we could talk about "Hang on a minute, there's a whole market you're missing." And the first point of making that market work? Get the attractions right. What's the attraction? The beaches. Make the beaches inclusive, make them accessible, and then that will drive people wanting to come here, people with disabilities seeing Tauranga and the Bay as a destination. It will drive growth in business, accommodation, and so on. The whole untapped market. It's a new market, you know ... When we start getting these things all working together, I think starting...so, if beaches are the main attraction, you want people to come here, why not make it the main attraction why people with disabilities would come here. And make them inclusive, you know? Then that will drive all the other stuff, good stuff. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

Participants across stakeholder groups considered local and national government efforts to set goals and make commitments for the future as means of increasing inclusion. Participants saw it as an opportunity to enhance New Zealand's image as an inclusive destination, as the following quotes show:

I think if they were to make a commitment that by the end of next year, 50% of the beaches would be accessible, because we want to actually prove to the world that we are the accessibility capital of the world. And why are we doing that? Not because we're a soft and fluffy bunch of people up here, it's because we actually just believe that it is the right of everybody to participate and enjoy, you know? ... It's about equity, you know. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

I definitely think that the more, in New Zealand, the more that we are able to be seen to be actively accommodating or including people with disabilities by providing facilities so they can be involved in a whole range of activities then it can't help but be a positive for tourism because you know, over time the country

would become recognised as being a great destination for people just as some other, like Sydney sort of is already, currently we're too reliant on the goodwill of the different providers to be able to say that things are accessible. (Megan, Tourism Industry)

Accessible hubs, which encompass retail, hospitality, and other supporting facilities and amenities, are referenced by Astrid (Private Citizen) and Jeff (Tourism Industry), as a key factor that will aid in promoting inclusion:

That's what I really like, I think that has to happen all round the country. To create all of those little hot spots that we want to market to external tourism when it happens again, will be developed again in a way that is just beautiful and inclusive for everybody. And then it won't matter if you're a cruise ship person or a, it won't matter at all. It means everybody gets to use it, you know, and enjoy it. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

Looking at the international tourism market, okay we don't have many Chinese coming here at the moment, but if you realise with the Chinese and Indians, there's huge amounts of travellers that come to our country, they travel as a family. So that means they bring Grandma, and they bring Grandad, and they'll only do activities that Grandma and Grandad will be able to join them. So that's also massive. Then you have to think about people with disabilities or with families. (Jeff, Tourism Industry)

As such, the participants recognised the importance and power of inclusion as a driver for tourism. There is potential to reach the untapped market that will bring benefits for the economic side of tourism as well as the personal side. These effects will reflect on wider society as well. This is a significant benefit of inclusion because it enables involvement and participation in 'normal' societal activities. Siobhan (Private Citizen), concluded her interview by stating "There are no downsides of having a fully functioning society."

It is perhaps not surprising that the stakeholders in this research commonly raised the importance of the power of inclusion because the social value of inclusiveness is clear in these findings and in previous studies (Cloquet et al., 2018; Michopoulou & Buhalis,

2010). Participants have shown the importance of inclusion for children and families with disabilities, and the benefits of being with friends and loved ones in a social activity are clear (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011; Cloquet et al., 2018). These benefits include “increased communication, improved satisfaction in marital relationships, greater feelings of satisfaction with family life along with improved family cohesion and adaptability” (Cloquet et al., 2018, p. 225).

The United Nations (2006) Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which New Zealand ratified in 2008, states that everyone has the right to participate “on an equal basis” in leisure activities. Therefore, New Zealand is obligated, albeit not legislated, to be working to enable more participation. While tourists with disabilities can legally participate in tourism and other leisure activities, New Zealand can and should go further in assisting in that participation, especially for something that is “inherent in our nature.” Previous research has shown that stakeholders are aware of how other countries have taken up the cause of access provision and believe New Zealand should do the same (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). There is a need to educate both the public and the government and remind them that “the total removal of many of the barriers faced by people with disabilities is said to rest more with firstly, the acceptance of social inclusion as a human right” (Robinson et al., 2007, p.9). This would align with Darcy and Dickson’s (2009) whole of life approach, as discussed in chapter 1.

Normalising tourism for people with disabilities through mainstream marketing could help to put the issue front and centre in view of wider society (Ray & Ryder, 2003). Making natural areas inclusive in particular is important given New Zealand’s image of activities and landscapes that require mobility (Lovelock, 2010). The level of inclusion for tourists with disabilities speaks to the international image of New Zealand for people who may want to come here (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015).

## **4.2 Information**

A second key common theme that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts related to information. The dominant theme referenced by participants was how information, or the lack thereof, can impact participation in the wider tourism system. As such, this theme is about the provision, availability and accuracy of information that would help tourists with disabilities to access a beach destination. This includes

information that would help a tourist to find and get to a beach and/or get onto sand or into water. Participants noted that information provision is important and needs to be delivered by a variety of stakeholders.

Within the theme of information, participants noted the important need for information to be available to tourists about the accessibility of the facilities and amenities in Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa. Participants with disabilities noted the need to have the information they require beforehand in order to make informed decisions about where they are going to travel and what they will do. For instance, as Astrid (Private Citizen) noted:

You know, because I know I can. I need to know I can before I get there without us having to negotiate a minefield of information to figure it out. I need it to be handed to me on a platter. My life is hard enough as it is without having to figure out how I'm going to do something when I go to a place. It would be real cool if I just knew. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

The above quote illustrates the point that awareness of what is available can affect participation and experiences of tourism for people with disabilities. Participants made frequent comments, including “if people were aware” or “so long as people know”. These comments potentially suggest a disconnect between what is on offer and what people know they can access or use.

The availability and accuracy of information were also frequently mentioned by participants. Being able to find the information they need in a timely manner that is accurate and consistent was identified as a key component of the wider tourism system. There are several ways in which the provision of information about accessibility and general tourism by one party can affect another party and how they make decisions or advertise their offerings. Kevin (Public Authority) highlighted what he believed to be a knowledge gap in New Zealand where the absence of information such as statistics and financial numbers can make planning and marketing difficult for the responsible stakeholders. Eileen (Public Authority) also referenced the need for “time-sensitive” tourism data in the regions to inform campaigns and projects to gather information beyond visitor arrivals and visitor spend. She raised the need to know more about the tourist, as the following quote explains:

But how do you track people that rent a car and drive from the Bay of Plenty to Taupo or to Wellington or wherever it is. And where they enter and exit and what that route is and why they chose that. You know, why they went here not there or whatever it is. (Eileen, Public Authority)

Participants pointed out that the relevant stakeholders should be working together to share information about available accessibility to help promote relevant operations and aspects of the tourism experience. Public Authorities were the stakeholder group mentioned most frequently by the participants, as they suggested they were most responsible for provision of information. A participant mentioned difficulty in trying to work with them and gather information to pass on to a Facebook group and spread information to those who would need and use it.

I did ask Tauranga for all the information around their accessibility stuff so I could add them to the website. But um...I don't know whether they see that as something they don't want to contribute, which seems a bit crazy. (Teresa, Disability Sector)

Another participant suggested it would be in the best interest of the councils "to create, to generate" and share their information to bring more people into the region.

They should be really open to being able to pass on that information, to create, to generate something that's going to bring more people into the region. It's in their best interest to do so, you know. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

Another participant expressed a view that information was "siloes" and that all information should be put together in one place to make it easier for people to access it, even if it would take a lot of time and effort to achieve. This was echoed by Teresa (Disability Sector), who highlighted the obstacle of "lots of people doing lots of little bits" and noted the importance of getting the right people to work on projects.

Eileen (Public Authority) showed some uncertainty when specifying what information was available on the Tourism Bay of Plenty Website at the time, and also showed

hesitancy in explaining how they reached out to a tourism database and pulled details together from a variety of sources:

We went out to our tourism database, tourism business database and asked them what kind of accessible tourism...how they catered for accessible tourism, in essence, and we created a database so that if we got enquiries, in particular like say for conferences or things, what information could we provide to those people. (Eileen, Public Authority)

Megan (Tourism Industry) took a similar approach to gathering information, but her comments suggest that this is only possible if the information needed is actually there for her to find:

When I get clients that say they want to go to those areas and accessing the beach is something they want to do then I know where to access that information and I'll go into detail then ... So far for my clients...um...they haven't specifically wanted to access the beaches. However it's one of those things that if there is access available ... I try and put that information in the booklet that I give people so they can think "oh okay if I'm in such and such an area then yes there's access there." (Megan, Tourism Industry)

After finding the relevant information available, participants commonly reported that accuracy and consistency become important because a variation between what is advertised and the reality could alter a tourist's experience.

One thing we know is that for an access citizen the journey is from leaving the hotel, so the information available when I walk out of that place I stay ... needs to be accurate and consistent so the whole journey is unbroken. So I'll probably repeat that through here, but without that there we'll always score it as a 'nice attempt, but.' So my frame of reference is, I'm thinking "I'm staying there or I've got off the boat, I need information quickly, I don't want to get halfway through the Mount, wherever, and then find out I can't access the beach because there's only one point." So, it's the whole system needs to be coordinated. (Neal, Disability Sector)

Being able to trust the information tourists with disabilities find is key. Megan (Tourism Industry) explained that:

When I'm booking accommodation throughout the country I can't trust that what a provider says is accessible is actually going to be. Sometimes you get there and there's no seat in the shower or the seat that is in the shower is really small and tippy, and so I just think that a photograph of what's provided is really good, that can say a lot. Um, video footage so that you can get a whole perspective is great and at the least being really descriptive word wise with what's there. (Megan, Tourism Industry)

This was echoed by another participant, who went a step further to explain what it really means to have all the accurate information you need available to you.

That's my second point about inclusion, is not having to ask. If you don't have to ask and you know from the photographs or the measurements or the advertising that a beach is fully accessible or a building is fully accessible, you feel like you're included. You feel like you're not excluded. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

This quote shows the link between the provision of information and the feeling of inclusion. It is important to know where tourists with disabilities get their information (Ray & Ryder, 2003). However, ensuring information about accessibility is made available in "mainstream sources" (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011, p. 162) would be a more substantial contribution to wider societal inclusion.

In addition to the provision of information about accessible facilities, marketing that information was considered essential. Participants made numerous comments about how advertising, marketing, and promotion are key in attracting people with disabilities to participate and use facilities and amenities, as the following quotes show:

You can make it all accessible, but you have to market it. People have to know that it's there. If nobody knows about it, then it's a joke, you know. So the major part of all inclusion is making it accessible or available, but then marketing it as well and making sure people are aware of these things. (Jeff, Tourism Industry)

I think one of the key things is making sure the facilities that are currently access-friendly are well advertised so they're well used. (Megan, Tourism Industry)

In relation to tourism campaigns, Astrid (Private Citizen) commented:

You see A-Bs, it's all about A-Bs. Able-bodies. A-Bs on everything. Because that's the norm and so like I said you end up having to do research yourself to find out how you're going to make it work because you are the outlier as a group. So irrespective of council initiatives, when you're new to an area you won't know that. You won't know whether the council, whoever's designed anything in terms of construction gives a shit, you won't know until you get there and then you have a go. But you need to be told. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

Clearly marketing what facilities and amenities are available to people with disabilities was considered an important factor by the participants. Stakeholders need to make clear to consumers what it is they offer, how to use it, where to get it, how much it costs, and/or any other information they may need to use the facility or amenity successfully, as the below quotes demonstrate:

It would be good if some of the life clubs, lifesaving clubs were on board. Like I know that a couple of them store beach chairs, but how well they promote that and let the public know that that's available I don't know. (Jeremy, Disability Sector)

We need to make it desirable for people to advertise that kind of stuff and we need to make them aware that this stuff is important and people do look for it when they are looking at Google searches and stuff like that. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

Advertising beyond a beach itself was also considered important as a means of attracting more tourists with disabilities to beaches and to ensure they are aware of the other facilities and amenities available (for example retail and hospitality) to support their visit, as illustrated by the following quote:

Probably, so long as it's advertised well enough that it has all those extra things. I don't think the beach matting itself is the only drawcard. You know, there has

to be the ability to have good restaurants that have good accessibility. That there's good motels that promote themselves with accessible units. That are actually truly accessible and not just have a walk-in shower. You know, there's lots of things that make good accessibility for all, not just your public standards that councils have for public venues. (Teresa, Disability Sector)

There appeared to be conflicting opinions among the participants about how successful marketing directly to the accessible community would be. A Private Citizen suggested a "purposeful" accessible tourism television ad because people "need to be punched in the face with the information...if we're competing nationally for tourism now then that needs to be sold." However, Eileen (Public Authority) claimed that marketing directly to people with disabilities would be "challenging" within tight council budgets, as the following quote illustrates:

There are target markets and things in mind and they would be broader than specifically people with disabilities or requiring greater options to access certain things...it would be more cost-effective. (Eileen, Public Authority)

The fact that information was discussed in every interview suggests its importance not just for people with disabilities participating in tourism but also for those stakeholders involved in providing and/or facilitating tourism. That the stakeholders themselves recognise this is an important finding. This reflexive recognition shows awareness of the significant role of stakeholders in the dissemination of information (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2010). Stakeholders may have varied responsibilities in providing beach access for tourists with disabilities but all are able to contribute to sharing clear, accurate information, especially because of "the [tourism] industry's increasing reliance on information technologies" (Sautter & Leisen, 1999, p. 326).

The findings confirm that in a beach setting, informational barriers appear to present as they do in other tourism settings. Comments about accuracy of available facilities and amenities confirm that potential inconsistencies between what is advertised either online or by travel agents and the reality can be an obstacle in the experiences of people with disabilities (Daniels et al., 2005; Ray & Ryder, 2003; Rhodda, 2012).

Lack of information was seen as an obstacle to improving beach tourism for people with disabilities, echoing its status as a barrier by Buhalis and Michopoulou (2011). There is a clear need for stakeholder groups to collaborate to develop databases and shared knowledge further. Local councils were commonly referenced as organisations that can impede participation by not sharing information, but councils are in turn impeded by not having all the national data, statistics, and financial information relating to the accessible tourism and beach access markets they would like. There are clear information chains that can be broken at any point in the provision of tourism leading to increased barriers and negative experiences for people with disabilities.

An important development to note is that since these interviews were conducted, Tourism Bay of Plenty's website has been improved to include more detailed information about the accessibility of beaches and other activities. "Accessible Bay of Plenty" (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.g) is now located under a tab on the main page and features a specific page for beaches with details on beach matting, picnic tables, and how to hire beach wheelchairs (including location, contact information and pricing). It also has links to pages on accessible accommodation, dining, and activities. The accommodation and dining pages mention wheelchair access as the sole specific access need and otherwise simply refer to the venues as 'accessible'. The activities page also largely refers to suitability for people using wheelchairs or requiring support for physical mobility. It is not known what prompted this website update or precisely when it happened as the website does not list a date or time of its last update. Whether the details and photos are representative enough of the accessibility of the beaches, accommodation, dining and activities (as required by a variety of disabilities) is an avenue for future investigation.

### **4.3 Public perceptions and assumptions**

The third theme derived from the data analysis was that of public responses and attitudes towards accessibility developments at beaches. This theme is about how stakeholders have perceived the attitudes of the general public to making beaches more accessible and how they may hinder progress. This includes general negative perceptions around disability, specific responses to the beach matting initiative and vocalised negative opinions regarding potential developments around beaches.

Participants often expressed frustration with their perceptions of the general public's negative perceptions and assumptions about tourists with disabilities and how they may or may not participate in tourism. These included: "a perception within the general community that disabled people don't have money to spend, which isn't the case", the number of potential tourists both domestically and internationally, and "the tyranny of low expectation." This was expressed largely by participants with disabilities, as the following quotes demonstrate.

When you're looking at people with disabilities...they're like, okay it's 30% of the whole population, then it's 40% of that want to go to the beach. 30% of that, less than 30% probably, that actually have the means to get to the beach. So then there's, it's a perception that there's not a great number of people using it, but it's actually probably quite a decent percentage that are, there's just less of us than general population. (Jeremy, Disability Sector)

There is a thing that we call the tyranny of low expectation. And the tyranny of low expectation is ... people make assumptions about how we feel or what we would like to do so they think that we should be happy with being able to get down to one or two beaches out of 30, you know? So we should have gratitude for that. So that tyranny of low expectation and the fact that we should be grateful for the charitable benefit we have been given is in itself a very hard thing to stomach. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

Throughout these findings the public is revealed as perceived by stakeholders to be a significant obstacle to improving beach access. Their perceived ignorance, vocalised opinions, and "small thinking" are identified as real problems that can be detrimental to improving beach access for tourists with disabilities. In response to the questions "What obstacles do you perceive in the development of making beaches more accessible for people with disabilities?" and "As a counterpoint to benefits, what could be the downsides or disadvantages to having beach access for people with disabilities?" (see Appendix E) three participants stated the general public as their first answer and three more stated the public as their second answer.

I think one of the biggest obstacles is...I was going to say ignorance but maybe it's just lack of will or, I don't know, again I think it's in local communities if you

can get the disability community integrating more with clubs and local providers then I think once you get people communicating and interacting together then there's more of a will to do that, it's not such an academic sort of exercise. (Megan, Tourism Industry)

People who just have no concept of what it is to live a life that you have to constantly think about where you go, how you go, how you are in the world, am I going to fucking die when I get out of my car? Is this curb drop going to take me out? (Astrid, Private Citizen)

General public. Lack of awareness and empathy. ... They often don't like changes to the environment or to existing infrastructure even if it doesn't work for people with other needs. (Jeremy, Disability Sector)

That's quite tough when you meet that level of resistance. And maybe they're the minority but they're the ones who are that standouts that you just kind of feel a bit beaten down by them. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

The notion of 'NIMBY' (Not In My Backyard), was frequently reported by participants and pinpoints that local residents in particular can be a problem. As a relevant stakeholder group, local residents do need to be involved in discussions and actions, to the extent that they are constructively helpful. Their desire to be involved can be perceived as a "handbrake", especially because they may not need to use the facilities in question but still wish to make their opinions known because they feel a "sense of ownership" over an area, as the following quotes show:

I guess overcoming the, sort of maybe the community perception or the, you know, there's sometimes with tourism or catering for particular types of visitors there's often a, like a NIMBY perception from locals. Not in my backyard. So public perception perhaps can sometimes occur where, well A) ratepayer money, why is it going towards this again, and then if for instance...you know, say an accessible, particular type of accessible footpath is widened to make it easy, better, whatever it is and then that takes away carparks, or that somehow is perceived to be taking something away from residents. ... So there's always that balance in tourism between the people that live there that welcome those visitors

into their home, into their backyard, into their space, and then the benefits of that and the trade off and you have to get that balance right otherwise you lose what's called your social licence to operate. (Eileen, Public Authority)

He spoke to the council landscape architect who's consulting with the community there about getting it [a beach access mat at Kulim Park] included in the concept plan and all this, and that's actually a bit of a handbrake because some of the communities...you've got the people who live at a beach, take such a high degree of ownership of the area. They want to be consulted on everything. A lot of old people and retired people. I'm sorry to say it, but they...it's a handbrake. (Serena, Public Authority)

That's a tricky one because people don't want toilets next to their fancy houses at the beach. So it's a real NIMBY thing, you know 'Not In My Backyard'. But...it has to be done, but unfortunately there's been like a really big lag where there hasn't been any new toilets gone in for a long time and we're now starting to get big problems with people using the dunes as toilets. (Serena, Public Authority)

Siobhan (Private Citizen), gave an example of her experience in dealing with a vocal public who opposed new developments:

They're building a change area and a shower, accessible shower in the change area. And they've...for disabled people. And they have door knock plans and they have found a site, and the site is halfway between the beach and Pilot Bay. So you can choose either Pilot Bay or the beach. A really good location. I was involved in the...public feedbacks. And yeah, it was all a bit negative in terms of 'not in my area.' [Mmm, the 'not in my backyard.'] Yeah, that's exactly the word that I wanted. Yeah, these whining people like "it will affect my view." There's no view to be had. It's not looking out on the beach, it's a park. So that was quite disappointing and we were able to make our point but we were much in the minority. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

Participants referenced other specific incidents in which the lack of knowledge held by members of the public, or by people hired by the council, have led to a negative response to the beach matting or other needs of tourists with disabilities at the beach. They describe

how complaints from professionals have come from ignorance of the needs of tourists with disabilities. An important example given was that of a member of the public “trying to make a name for himself” without considering the needs of tourists with disabilities. The following quotes include description of a member of the public who lacked understanding of accessibility requirements and put aesthetics ahead of functional use in considerations of what could be “better”:

We’ve only ever had one complaint or complainant about it, which was from I think an architect who was trying to make a name for himself and wanted to do something different and better and didn’t like the fact that it was made out of plastic, and didn’t like the fact it was blue even when I explained to him it was blue because it creates high contrast for people who have got a visual impairment. And the fact it’s plastic is because we can’t put anything permanent into the sand, so yeah he just wanted to build a concrete ramp and he actually, I managed to find out that he slipped on it, he’s the only person who’s ever slipped on the beach mat. (Kevin, Public Authority)

When we put the accessible picnic tables out and it had a little space between the seats, so you could actually roll your wheelchair into the middle of the table, so you could have fish and chips with people, we got some flak from some designers. “Why did you design it like that? Why don’t you just park the person with the disability at the end of the table?” And we said “Because we got together with a whole bunch of people with disabilities. You know, we got them in the room and we consulted them and they said “We don’t want to sit on the end of the table like an add-on. We want to sit in the middle and we want to be able to feed our kids.” ... there are actually naysayers out there who actually believe they understand disability and people who will, want to speak on our behalf, you know, and that’s why it’s important that we have as many people involved in these conversations as possible. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

It was felt that lack of knowledge or understanding may also apply to council employees or contractors. The significance of this is that as the entity responsible for beaches they should be ensuring that their staff have the right knowledge and attitude to appropriately consider and perform tasks around accessibility (Rhodda, 2012). Participants reflected

on the importance of correct knowledge and how that can flow through the experiences of tourists with disabilities, as the following quotes show:

Does the contractor care or know about disabled persons' needs? ... Or does the contractor care about laying the mat? Do you know the nuances of it? Probably not ... That's probably why there was a gap at the end of the frigging thing last year, you know? ... Made it really difficult, like, people couldn't actually use it. (Jeremy, Disability Sector)

I know that somebody recently or last summer, I know somebody rang Pauanui Life Saving to ask if they had any accessible beach mat or anything, and they literally, they didn't know what the person was talking about. They said 'oh we've got a towel you can borrow.' That was the answer, so there's such a lack of understanding and information, and to be fair it's probably a 17-year-old kid who's picked up the phone who's volunteering for the summer or earning minimum wage, whatever those guys get. So he's not going to know and actually we need to increase that level of knowledge. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

This example of ignorance confirms the need for greater awareness and understanding of access needs. Focused on beach access, it confirms the findings of other studies that tourists with disabilities face barriers, accentuated in the high season because of hot climates and the volume of people at those times (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Astrid (Private Citizen)'s quote below affirms this.

Yeah, I think people with disabilities...I, we probably avoid it because you get people abusing disability parking because they'll be like "I'm just here for a minute!" You know, don't fucking park in my carpark. It's just, stop it. I don't care whether you're just here for a minute. Anyway, so that is a standard story and unless that's really heavily monitored... Yeah, so...yeah lack of parking means that locally we'll probably avoid the Mount in the on season. In the off season, bring it on ... And there's too many people. And if you're just having to play dodgems? I just basically put my head down and think tenpin bowls. I want people just to move, I feel quite annoyed by the volume of them on the, and how little of them pay attention to their surroundings and the fact that people in

wheelchairs are coming through. They're like...it's just too hard. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

Not all participants thought the public were a fixed obstacle as they thought the public had “high levels of empathy” towards developments. Two participants succinctly explained their views that it was not lack of feeling for the access community that was the issue, but being “oblivious” that led to these perceptions and assumptions:

You know, I think that people forget about disabled people quite quickly. If it's not on their radar they'll just cruise down to the water, sweet as. “What's this blue mat about, oh who cares.” (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

I don't think you'll get any pushback from people thinking it's a great idea and huge levels of empathy, but I think there's a huge cost and of course the opportunity cost of some of the accessibility for disabled people is that then people who don't have disabilities go “well now I can't get to, I can't park in front of my beach because there's all those car parks that are now deemed to be only for disabled people.” (Molly, Private Citizen)

These comments about the public being “oblivious” and an earlier comment by Eileen (Public Authority) suggesting that “there might be some positive sentiment around that, maybe...for people that know somebody with a disability or whatever” may indicate that the difference between responses to improvements to beaches may depend on whether people have some experience of disability or not.

For all these negative points and experiences, participants signalled hope for change. Participants agreed that changing the attitudes of the public would be a significant step in improving how new facilities and amenities could be installed at beaches. Seeing tourists with disabilities using the beach mats would be beneficial as “it normalises the fact that people's bodies are different... it's around creating that societal change and understanding that disability is normal. It's not scary; it's not different” (Kevin, Public Authority). The beach mats, in particular, have been a talking point and a tool for education:

I think the beach mats definitely sparked some interest and some curiosity. And when they get brought out each year people are always, you know, you see in community Facebook groups and things people asking what they're for and then other people explaining, and certainly I think every year somebody learns something or somebody is aware of...that beach access isn't actually possible for everybody and that there are ways to make it more possible. (Eileen, Public Authority)

Oh everyone who sees the beach mats are just like "Oh wow, that's such a cool initiative." I think for a lot of Kiwis, because you've got legs they don't tend to think of what it is like to not have that freedom and that opportunity to just be able to walk out onto the sand and feel it between their toes. So when they see someone, when they see me on it, usually there's just kind of like a light going on in that moment where they just go "Whoa." You know, and I think people are incredibly supportive of it. I think they bitch and moan when there's talk of spending and then when they see people actually on it then they're really open and like "Let's do this everywhere" and they want to help and they think it's a great idea. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

Participants explained how attitudes could be changed by utilising the stories of lived experiences of tourists with disabilities to explain why access is needed or what benefits it could bring. The importance of "how that feels" to be able to go to the beach becomes a useful tool to use on the public, as revealed by these quotes:

Yeah it's how you start to intertwine them as well. I'm a massive believer in everything is how you tell the story. You can achieve anything through a good storyteller. And you can make, you can come to the biggest barriers and tell the right story to the right person at the right time and...access to the beach is one of those things and the more, very much like the Paralympics, the more profile the Paralympic Games gets in New Zealand, the general public has a higher perspective of what disabled people are able to achieve, as do disabled people. They're like, "well maybe I can do that." (Kevin, Public Authority)

You've just gotta do, the way to do it is to tell the stories. You're not going to do this by saying "This is what you can do in different towns." But I think it's by

having the stories of people's experiences, what it felt like for the first time that they went back on a beach, or they've been living in a rest home and they haven't been on the beach because they haven't been able to access it. And then they're suddenly down there and they're like, you know, and they're able to reminisce. So the stories of how that feels is going to be what connects people, the able-bodied public into the value of this. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

By putting these examples and stories in front of the public through council meetings, social media, and/or human-interest stories, the ignorance described by participants can be challenged. By communicating stories and explanations on a "personal level" of why facilities and amenities need to be the way they are for tourists with disabilities, participants believed that more knowledge is spread and there is hope that negative assumptions and perceptions can be changed.

The other thing would be some of the clubs, you know like surf clubs or swim clubs. I think if you bring it down to a real community level because they would be the ones that are interacting with the people with disabilities who are wanting to use those facilities, so you get it onto a more personal level then as well. (Megan, Tourism Industry)

A lot of people in jobs of power have a...find disabled people, they make them very uncomfortable. And I have seen it first-hand. I have made people very uncomfortable just from my presence. And so therefore if they are uncomfortable why would they ever want to be able to help them? "Because they are freaks, they are weirdos, they are people that dribble. I don't want to hang out with those people." ... It goes way back to, not intent of there's no money, but there's no...appetite to provide it because people don't like seeing those people out and about. They make them uncomfortable. I scare people. It's just not a very nice thing to look at on the beach. So if we change the attitudes of those statements then we can really get...you know, I think that's the root of all of this stuff. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

Recognising and commenting on the negative perceptions and assumptions of the general public reveals that stakeholders have identified a specific stakeholder group that may have to be negotiated every time new developments are proposed. The sense of "ownership"

felt by locals is a significant barrier because beaches are public areas as opposed to a private tourism operation or a beach that tourists pay to use at a resort. Palmer (2019) states that “the beach, as public space, belongs to everyone and no one, making it a lens into conflicts and conversations about who controls the public sphere” (p. 183). The beach is therefore a public forum for opinions to be aired and debates to be held about how space is used and shared. It is possible that the public could remain a long-term or even permanent barrier if the provision of education and training about disability and accessibility are not improved. This is especially significant in New Zealand given the country’s strong beach culture. Further examples of members of the public responding negatively to beach matting can be seen elsewhere in New Zealand. When a mat was launched for the first time in Auckland, for example, a member of the public slipped and fell on it, became injured and called for the mat’s removal as a serious hazard (Bhatia, 2021). Making accessible tourism more mainstream in funding, marketing, and education would assist in improving attitudes. Examples given by participants affirm Daruwalla and Darcy’s (2005) finding that personal attitudes are improved if there is connection on an individual or personal level. This also confirms the importance of telling stories of people with disabilities’ experiences. Leadership is needed in this space to encourage the sharing of stories and experiences, and ensuring impact from them.

Participants seemed to suggest that it is the local residents who are the problem when it comes to beaches. How far their sentiments may go in terms of the compromises to their views or space that they are willing to make could be informative. A study of local residents’ attitudes and the NIMBY factor in locations where there are popular urban beaches may examine this further. Investigating how they perceive, value and experience beaches as their backyard may provide insight into how beach access developments affect changes in their attitudes (Palmer, 2019). There may be differentiation between what locals are willing to say in a face-to-face interview compared with a written questionnaire if they are not willing to verbalise negative opinions (Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005).

#### **4.4 Designing for access**

The fourth theme was that of designing for access. This theme involved stakeholder participants discussing the practicalities of designing and planning for facilities and amenities that enable access to beaches. In particular, commonalities in their responses indicated discussion around universal design, challenges around design for natural

environments, existing and future features of the Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches, a design philosophy and the accessible journey.

Participants described the complications of design as there are numerous factors that affect what can possibly be done with a beach. The “goal” of universal design was highlighted as an important factor as it would serve more tourists than those with disabilities. A definition of universal design is “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (Centre for Universal Design, 1997) and also incorporates “concepts of continuous pathways, access and mobility, and barrier-free environments to incorporate intergenerational and lifespan planning that recognises the nexus between ageing, disability and the continuum of ability of people over lifespan” (Darcy & Dickson, 2009, p. 34).

Participants determined that making a beach more accessible for tourists with disabilities raises a lot of questions and considerations of the practicality of the task. Particularly significant was the idea that “you either design people in or you design them out.” This suggests there is an active choice being made about whether a section of the population is being denied access or offered only limited access on purpose.

You either design people in or you design them out, is the base question. Do you want to design them in or are you comfortable designing them out? And when you get to that point generally people say “oh God, we don’t want to design people out” but then you have to get into the conversation of what it means to design people in from a practical perspective, and that always comes to money. (Kevin, Public Authority)

I’d almost ask the question the other way, who’s going to stop access happening? ... Because if they are, they’re designing access out. They’re not doing nothing, they’re not cutting the budget, they are actually designing humans out of this, whatever they’re doing ... It’s bollocks to you, we couldn’t afford it or this, or we had to... You’ve chosen to design 25% or more, it’s more like 50% of the population out. (Neal, Disability Sector)

Universal design was recognised as “the goal” when improving accessibility to beaches. Patrick (Private Citizen), hopes that councils have universal design at the top of their list:

So universal design is about, you put inclusion at the top of the list and you actually look at it for the user’s perspective. And you design it to meet the needs of everyone. So if you’re designing it to suit the needs of wheelchair users, people with vision impairment, blind, whatever, you design it for everyone. You get it right for us you get it right for everyone. And so...and it’s not just about beach access, it’s about car parking, it’s about the journey to get there. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

Universal design’s an amazing one. If you have a wooden ramp going down to a beach to access the roller mats, every person on this planet can walk down a ramp, whereas if you put steps in then Grandma’s gonna have issues, somebody with a broken leg’s going to have issues, mum with a pram’s going to have issues, somebody with a wheelchair is going to have issues. So it’s all about universal design. (Jeff, Tourism Industry)

Kevin (Public Authority) states the council’s “big thinking” is about “taking universal design and trying to hit the limits with it around what we can feasibly do.” He also spoke about the need to inspire New Zealanders to innovate as a means of finding new designs and solutions. This was echoed by Neal (Disability Sector) who acknowledged the good start made by the council with the beach mats but emphasised that “you’ve got to keep pushing the possibilities.”

In an ideal world we’d be pumping for universal design where the facilities we provide are accessible to everyone, within reason you know ... but when it comes to actually activities it’s very much up to the individual provider as to how far they go to accommodate people with disabilities. (Megan, Tourism Industry)

You’re not going to see anything because good design, it’s just there ... If we don’t try and stuff up the environment by someone trying to resolve something with a sledgehammer that didn’t need it. So good design will allow both the atmosphere of the beach to continue and it will be virtually not noticeable that the access is there. No one’s asking someone to put in a bright yellow, you know, or

corrupt the, so if the ethos of why the beach is rated that way, probably access to, you know, there's a whole bunch of good things to write about. (Neal, Disability Sector)

[Universal design] would be the goal, for sure. All you do then is obviously you broaden your market size, your market potential which is, um, obviously a far better use of capital than creating something just for people with disabilities. (Eileen, Public Authority)

The natural environment was recognised as a factor for how feasible certain designs and installations would be at beaches. Participants raised what the challenges of Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches were and how they could be tackled. For example, one participant explained this by stating, compared to buildings like the surf club, a beach could possibly be more flexible in its design by moving sand and removing and replanting plants. However, there are natural challenges, such as shifting sand and tidal surges, that are difficult to combat, as the following quotes show:

The challenge is our tidal range on the ocean side which means that because the mats are secured by 40cm long pins that if we get a king tide or a tidal surge that the mat will just be ripped out so we try to keep it just above the high tide line which is great to an extent, but if you have let's say if you only have 2m of soft sand between the end of the mat and the hard sand, if you're a wheelchair user you've still got 2m of soft sand to navigate ... it is the wheelchair users that struggle most with that. (Kevin, Public Authority)

Because we can't, realistically if we look at the 35km of beach that is managed by our organisation, every beach access point cannot be made accessible. Because they wind through sand dunes that move. It's um... It's not a feasible, you know, I don't, there would be, I think, something like 300 odd access points and we're talking about, obviously you've got the wellbeing of the dunes, you've got the challenges of what's underneath the sand, and you've got just the logistical and financial challenge of doing that. I don't think anybody realistically would be advocating for boardwalk to be built through our natural environment at 50m intervals but, you know, it would have to run down the sand, down the beach for 35kms, and then what you'd have to have carparks that are aligned to that, which

involves pouring concrete into sand which is what we're trying to avoid. (Kevin, Public Authority)

Another point is that if an access is wide enough for a wheel chair it may mean its wide enough for a quad bike or motor bike and that's not good for coastal reserves, native birds and native plants and beach goers don't want motorised vehicles on them. Another one is maintaining natural character and landscape values in an area: if there are a lot of built structures it reduces the natural feel of a reserve and depending on the placement of built structures can negatively impact on the landscape values. Lastly, reserves will have a high degree of natural character, such as: twists, turns, inclines, overhangs, modulations in form. By their nature these are not easy to traverse, so having a surface that is suitable for a wheelchair is sometimes in conflict with maintaining the natural character of a reserve. I think all these issues are best dealt with on a case by case basis to find best resolution. (Serena, Public Authority)

As the above quote from Serena (Public Authority) shows, there is a challenge between creating a built environment and "maintaining natural character and landscape values in an area." Unlike a private tourism operation which may own the land it rests on and be able to transform it largely if not entirely as it wishes, beaches are a public space of often considerable size which councils are responsible for. The size of the public space may have financial implications if more material assets are required to transform the land or if specialised designers are required to create a built environment that aligns with the principles of universal design.

Participants discussed existing and future facilities and amenities of Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches with both positive and negative perspectives. Participants discussed the beach matting, picnic tables, the boardwalk, car parking and viewing platforms, with both positive and negative perspectives on how they accommodated tourists with disabilities. Neal (Disability Sector) recognised the seasonal nature of tourism at Mount Maunganui and how it can bring in an increased population, as the following quote shows:

The design needs to strengthen in the high-traffic areas. So there's some really integral work. There's some really intense periods also at the unique, where others

have a, certainly a seasonal swell. Obviously with tourism they were dealing with that at a point and the increased elderly population at times. Having walked there myself, you'll see 40-50% of the shoppers and people are elderly or, you know. (Neal, Disability Sector)

The common conclusion appears to be that a good start has been made but more improvements could be made, as participants reveal in the following quotes about beach mats, boardwalks and picnic tables:

It [the beach mat] seems to work as a mechanism, I've seen them, I've 'used' them, speech marks so to speak, and in terms of current solutions it's one of the most reasonable. (Neal, Disability Sector)

Or currently down Pāpāmoa. Beautiful viewing platform, nice ramp going up to it but there's steps the last few feet, so... Karewa Parade is a good example. Sure, we can't get good access to the beach but the car parking is very close to the viewing area. The carparks are wide, deep, so if you're in a van and you've got a few people with you, you can get either out the side or out the back. The table, you know, has got this sort of middle seat removed which means you can sit with your family having your fish and chips, and you can actually see a fair chunk of the beach. You can keep an eye on your kids. It would be nice, sometime in the future, it wouldn't be too hard because this is also where the bikes go onto the beach so it wouldn't be hard to actually make a proper pathway down to the beach and then you would only need 100m of mat and you'd be in the water. It would be quite easy so...that would be the next thing I would like to see. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

I also think when they look to replace the boardwalk that they do it with something that's a lot more smoother than the decking which is currently there. A few things, you know, I think having one-way traffic will make it a lot safer for people with disabilities. You know, trying to look left and right and you're looking for bikes and scooters at the same time as cars coming from left or right. I think that if they can do the one-way system with a dedicated bike lane and scooter lane and then dedicated pedestrian lane, I think that would be very helpful as well for people feeling safe, you know. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

The idea of accessible hubs that served tourists with disabilities beyond just the beach were discussed by participants. These areas are designed to support visitors to beaches and tourists with disabilities in particular. They appear to differ in their focus but both provide important facilities. Kevin (Public Authority)'s "accessible hot spot" seems more focused on the supporting infrastructure such as roads and foot paths.

I guess the overarching thing that we're exploring opportunities for which is in Mount North so around beach access and Mt. Drury is the centre of that, which is around creating what we're kinda calling an accessible hot spot which would include mobility scooter charging points, making sure that all the crossing intersections for crossing the road are actually not only code compliant but are better than code compliant so then we're creating a hyper-accessible hub so we might even have a look at putting directional signage that is easy-read, there's high contrast into that area. Creating an all-abilities playground at Mt. Drury...changing some of the roading infrastructure, foot path infrastructure. (Kevin, Public Authority)

In comparison, Neal (Disability Sector)'s 'dwell zone' seems more concerned with assisting participation at the actual beach:

So yeah the other dwell zone as I call it would be exactly those shaded or parkland, they are the two zones. So the two points are once I get to the water I might actually want to do something ... not just to sit there. And B, the other high intensity dwell zone for both kids and parents is those shaded other areas that sit, you know. (Neal, Disability Sector)

Being thorough in the strategy for design was considered essential by participants to avoid poor or unsuitable results and the need to retrofit later. As the entity responsible for care of the beaches, Tauranga City Council was mentioned consistently in discussions of design codes and strategy. A key term, "systems thinking" came from Neal (Disability Sector) who stressed that the council needs to be thinking all the way through their plans as he stated that "I don't see a sort of permanent or consolidated effort, or a coordinated effort. It seems to be individual attempts at individual solutions." The significance of this

is that the discussions the council has, and the decisions they make, will flow through to the community's experience of beaches whether or not consultation is held, as the following quote shows:

They need to have a foundational way of approaching the design challenge or problem so they need to be informed before they then go to the next level, their next group of stakeholders which is the community. So don't go in naively, go in with some level of understanding and expertise and a framework that you can then put things into as you get consultation. (Neal, Disability Sector)

In a similar vein, Molly (Private Citizen) often used the term "holistic" to describe what the strategy needs to encompass. The significance of being "holistic" is that it is about the whole picture of going to the beach and what that encompasses.

It's got to be about how the beach behaviours, access, population, proximity to population, carparking, toilets, it's much more holistic than that ... I think there needs to be water access, and I think those big fat-tyred chairs, I think they are really important too. We tried to extend it to the point that we could get some of those but of course, you know, that's a whole different proposition because then you've got the logistics of managing those and the oversight of those and so it becomes a lot bigger. But I think you know, chairs that, water chairs that people can actually get in the water, the sand is not the beach. It's more holistic than that. (Molly, Private Citizen)

A view that arose throughout interviews is that things can be done ad hoc. Kevin (Public Authority) acknowledges the need for proper decision-making processes, and suggests that so far those processes have not been "well-defined". On a national level, it is suggested that this is due to a lack of guidance from government:

I think the biggest gap is central government. There's no directive around, I guess, inclusive natural environments, whether that comes from DOC [Department of Conservation] or from central government. So everything that is done is done on an ad hoc basis, you know, region to region, council to council, lobby group to lobby group. It's different. People are asking for different things for different

reasons, at different locations, there's no strong guidance from that top, very, very top down. (Kevin, Public Authority)

At a local government level, an interesting explanation of the care of the beach matting was given. It was revealed by Kevin (Public Authority) that it is not a "formalised asset" and "the maintenance is covered on an ad hoc basis by the Parks team." Participants considered the beach matting a successful project that is "pretty popular" and has made a difference to the lives of tourists with disabilities who were not able to get down onto the beach previously, and yet it does not have a proper home within the council.

Participants made clear that, a significant reason why design and planning are important considerations of beach access for tourists with disabilities, is because of the 'accessible journey'. To be able to access a beach in the way an able-bodied person would, the journey from accommodation or car to beach and back again needs to have "no gaps" with an information trail that is "unbroken". Tourists with disabilities also need to be able to access supporting facilities and amenities such as food outlets while at the beach; the whole tourism system needs to be accessible. These points are illustrated in the following quotes.

The biggest challenge people face is not being able to get in the water or onto the hard sand, which I mentioned before, so that's the biggest takeaway challenge that we have is what lead us to investigate the beach wheelchair options and then making sure that we're creating an accessible route from a carpark onto either pavement or boardwalk onto the beach mat and then down onto the sand ... so all the way and then making sure there are no gaps in that which we've just started that process yesterday to make sure that we don't have that type of challenge again because it's not acceptable to create barriers when we're trying to remove barriers. (Neal, Disability Sector)

Ideal world...I would pull up in my car. There would be an accessible park right where I need it. The curb cut would be flat enough so I would get up easily. I would then go onto the boardwalk and figure out where I want to go. The beach mat would be down, so I would cruise down and then there would be a little, a little rest area that I could rest on. I could look around, have a chill out and a conversation with my mates. A little, you know, I'm thinking...the beach mat

goes sort of straight ahead and I would say that there's a little inlet that you could just stop on. Then I would sit there for a while then the beach chair would be located quite close to where the beach mat is. I would transfer into that and then roll down into the water and then, you know, I would get out, get up to the side of the, out of the sand. Wheel up onto the beach mat and there would be an accessible picnic table there. You know, there would be a space for me and all my mates that aren't disabled. Because we don't all hang out together. And yeah, we would be able to have a barbecue and I wouldn't be sitting nearby. I would be right at the table eating alongside them and having a great old time. So that's my ideal day of fully accessible bliss... the accessible journey from the car to the car. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

Siobhan (Private Citizen), who uses a wheelchair, acknowledged that cruise ships also require an accessible journey to access a beach. A cruise ship passenger would have to rely on public transport or travelling on foot to reach the beach as the Tauranga port is over 1 km away from Mount Maunganui Main Beach and significantly further away from Pāpāmoa Beach. In the following quote, Siobhan (Private Citizen) describes the importance of being able to provide what cruise passengers require when visiting a destination:

They're building a change area and a shower, accessible shower in the change area ... But that would be great for, say, the tourists that come on the ships. You know, the high amount of disabled people, the high proportion of disabled people that go on these cruises and therefore you know, we, Tauranga, Mount Maunganui, are a big destination for those tourists. We need to be able to provide accessible, an accessible journey from the ship all the way to the water. Whatever water they want to choose. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

Participants agreed it is also important to consider what else a tourist may want to do while at the beach because "generally speaking, visitors don't just go to the beach and that's it." As Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa are urban areas, there are activities, retail, and dining next to or near the beaches that tourists may wish to enjoy.

Then what's the additional experience? What do I do other than absorb the atmosphere and whatever? Is it near the surf lifesaving area where those things

tend to be? Are they thinking it through to the next step, which is what do I do? Am I just going to sit here or is there things to play and engage in like anyone else would and are they thought through? (Neal, Disability Sector)

So you have carparking, bathrooms, beach access mat probably somewhere where you can purchase refreshments from or food from. Because you have to look at it, I think you have to create a journey approach to it. So what's my day going to look like? I drive to this location, can I get a park my car, can I then get out of my car? Can I then get from my car to the pavement or boardwalk, can I get on the beach, can I get back up the beach to go to the bathroom facility, can I go and buy something that I need to hydrate myself? And then on top of that, we start going can I get in the water? (Kevin, Public Authority)

The findings around designing for access are perhaps not surprising given the calls for this within wider tourism scholarship. The need for universal design to underpin accessible tourism is a key conclusion drawn in previous studies (e.g., Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b; Darcy & Dickson, 2009). There is clear belief among participants that universal design at beaches can be achieved, but they are also realistic about the difficulties of providing it. Participants raised the concept of the accessible journey, also known as a “chain of accessibility” (Darcy et al., 2010), or “travel chain” (Darcy, 2012), which would be a good starting point for this as it endeavours to capture all elements of beach access for tourists with disabilities, from departure to destination. In addition to universal design and the accessible journey, the findings show that the beach setting adds another layer of complexity – the natural landscape and character of the beach. There are clearly huge complications of uniting “the ethic of universal access with that of the primacy of nature” (Lovelock, 2010, p. 357).

The references to ad hoc planning by participants speak to a serious need for consistency and collaboration that has been noted in previous studies (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2011; Nyanjom, Boxall & Slaven, 2018). The right providers need to be involved in the planning process because of a lack of commitment expressed by participants and because they need to understand the nuance of designs. Participants pointed to the leadership of government as essential and to other individual stakeholders that could be instrumental in improving beach access for tourists with disabilities, but researchers have found that partnerships are vital to progress, especially if the aim is to

foster long-term sustainability (Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2018; Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2010). Michopoulou and Buhalis (2010) suggest that the public sector will benefit from the wider range of resources (human and otherwise) that the private sector enjoys. Cockburn-Wootten et al. (2018) state that “each organisation in the tourism system is autonomous, but for decision-making and implementation to occur, consensus through collaborative strategies that cross silos is required to deal constructively with differences between diverse stakeholders, especially those from different sectors” (p. 1485).

The variation in these considerations of approach between participants and researchers suggests there may be a difference in use of top-down and collaborative approaches. The desire for a top-down approach from central government suggests that stakeholders perceive a lack of leadership from that particular entity. The findings have discussed how there is an interest in and empathy for beach access for tourists with disabilities among the public, and chapter 1 of the thesis has indicated that other beach access projects are being run by other local councils around New Zealand. Filling in the missing piece of central government leadership could be useful for leading by example, getting buy-in, inspiring interest and innovation, and policy creation (all of which would need to be done with consultation with people with disabilities) (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015), while collaboration may follow during location-specific discussions of how to make beach access happen on a practical level and then implementing it.

#### **4.5 The expense of access**

The fifth theme, that of expense of access, is about issues of expense that may arise in stakeholder attempts to achieve beach access. This includes how public attitudes towards expense and spending can be a hindrance and how sources of funding need to be established to secure progress. Participants were clear that money and expense were significant factors in improving beach access for tourists with disabilities. Participants were quick to determine that expense was an obstacle to progress. In response to the question “What obstacles do you perceive in the development of making beaches more accessible for people with disabilities?”, five participants immediately stated ‘expense’ (in terms of cost, funding, budget) as their first answer and a further two participants stated expense subsequently in their response. A comment made was that the beach matting was notably expensive at “like \$10,000 for, like, three metres or something, foolish” (Astrid, Private Citizen). “Huge” expense and desire to improve facilities and

amenities appear inseparable to participants as they recognised the expense of changing rooms and beach matting while still wanting more to be able to get further down the beach.

Some participants looked at the bigger picture around spending and how it fits into other tourism spending and revenue. They explain that being able to justify the expense will make a difference because it will prove value, as the following quotes show:

Lots of money is being spent, so spending a little bit of money on making other things accessible, you know, actually in the scheme of things is not a lot. (Teresa, Disability Sector)

I think that's the gap is that at the moment we can't say if we spend X, we will get X amount reinvested into our economy. ... I think that evidence piece is probably missing that piece around disability. If we could prove there is money not being spent, it would probably make it easier to do more of the things that are currently off limits because they're just too expensive. (Kevin, Public Authority)

Things like exploring putting a boardwalk down, for example, you know, they're expensive, but if we can justify it because it improves accessibility which is going to bring over time X amount more spend into the local economy then, you know, you start to build a fuller picture. (Kevin, Public Authority)

Another contributing factor is the perception around the expense of accessibility. Astrid (Private Citizen), who uses a wheelchair, was emphatic in explaining that "I just don't get that the minute that anything's to do with accessibility you just take a number and times it by 100. Everything is so crazy expensive and yet probably if you asked for something similar to that in a different context it would be a quarter or a tenth of the price. The importance of making facilities and amenities free for tourists with disabilities was noted as well. The following quotes draw on the significance of the beach being a natural resource in considerations of the "cost element":

So the fact it's free [the beach wheelchair] needs to be, because again we've all spent enough money either to go on a cruise or else we don't have enough money as local tourists, as national tourists, so things like that that are free to access our

natural resources are important. So the cost element is quite important. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

We also have a beach chair so that is located at a beach school. So they look after it and they hire it out for no money and the beach chair is again for someone that doesn't have the movement or cannot support themselves getting into the water. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

Participants described the attitudes towards expense that are needed to progress beach access for tourists with disabilities. They spoke of "the willingness of someone to do something about it", "commitment", and "investment" and how they relate to expense. They expressed their own attitudes towards the expense of beach access. Patrick (Private Citizen), notes that "it's about equity" and the right to participate, as illustrated in the following quote:

We actually just believe that it is the right of everybody to participate and enjoy, you know? So if it costs a few hundred thousand dollars to do so, that's what the cost is. It's about equity, you know. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

Having someone or people driving progress with "commitment" to beach access is seen as a significant way to secure a budget and achieve tourism goals.

Well if you've got a commitment you'll get the budget. If you've got commitment you will actually have the design done. If you actually say that inclusion is about everybody...then you will not exclude people. I think if they were to make a commitment that by the end of next year, 50% of the beaches would be accessible, because we want to actually prove to the world that we are the accessibility capital of the world. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

Stop thinking about it as a budget cost. Thinking about it as being an investment. Investing in making the beaches accessible is going to invest in making Tauranga a destination for people with disabilities and therefore increase the economy. So stop thinking about it as a cost. Get on and do it because it's an investment in the future of the city. And more and more people are going to live longer and longer, and there are going to be more and more people with disabilities and not just the

ones that live here but others who will want to travel here. So investment, not cost. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

A particular quote from Siobhan (Private Citizen), makes the link between money and the attitudes of those who can “do something about it”:

Money. Money, money, money. It’s all about money. And if it’s not about money it’s about the willingness of someone to do something about it ... I think money could be found if it was desirable to be found. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

This was echoed in another comment which recognises that money comes from ratepayers and what they can afford, especially if it is spending on something which they will not use. This would be despite “huge levels of empathy.” Participants did not deny that beach access was “of interest” to the general public, as shown in the below quote from Patrick (Private Citizen), but pointed out that it needs to go beyond interest.

I think it [improving beach access] is of interest. I think people will agree with it. But it’s about action, you know? It’s about making it happen, it’s about budgeting for it. It’s about making sure we don’t have to have Diana go out and raise money from real estate agents to be able to buy the first beach mats. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

Frequent comments were also made around sources of funding for beach projects and how they need to be clarified and improved. Councils were established as the main source of funding. It could be determined from the interview data that participants viewed the expense of accessibility infrastructure and rationalising spending to focus heavily on councils as the entity responsible for beach management. Jeff (Tourism Industry) typifies this response in the following quote:

It’s like, if you want your beach to be accessible, there you go, there’s that beautiful word, then this is how it’s done. This is where the funding comes from, you know? Councils need to put the funding in. It needs to be, it’s just as important as a pedestrian crossing to get across the road to that beach. And that comes from the government. It comes from funding. (Jeff, Tourism Industry)

The chain of funds for and ownership of the beach matting within Tauranga City Council reveals the importance of strategy. The original matting was funded by local organisations and now “there’s no clear asset owner because council just made the decision to go ahead and do the right thing and haven’t ever actually figured out where, as an asset, they belong.” This has led to uncertainty about where funding for future matting will come from, but the existing matting is being covered “ad hoc” by the Parks team.

Despite the position of council as responsible for beaches, participants have described other sources of funding that have become necessary. This suggests that council funding has not been sufficient. Teresa (Disability Sector), suggests that because “there’s not enough money in council or in businesses,” crowd-funding projects like beach matting may become necessary. Patrick (Private Citizen), describes the need for local businesses to assist in order to complete amenities:

I was involved in the major project to get Karewa Parade the viewing station with an accessible table and so on, and if it hadn’t been for construction company HEB, who donated about \$100,000, we would not have that at all. There would not have been anything down Pāpāmoa end. (Patrick, Private Citizen)

Without formalised funding at a regional or national level, the future of accessible beach projects could be uncertain. In addition, this research has been conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and so naturally participants have thought about the impact that the pandemic will have on funding tourism operations.

So that’s the thing, nobody knows if there’s going be zillions of dollars from some external fund, some external government fund, that come out to the regions that put priority on allowing or making space for all of our citizens to be able to access beaches as well as attracting tourism. (Astrid, Private Citizen)

The standout comment was that as soon as something is about access it becomes more expensive. Previous studies have found that profitability is “improbable if not downright impossible” (Capitaine, 2016, p. 201), that there is concern around “perceived cost of access inclusions” (Darcy, 2010), and that cost-benefit analyses may be helpful to prove worth (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). This does not help the attempts to make accessibility

more mainstream. If something has a reputation for being expensive and councils or tourism operators have a set budget or finite source of funding, then it is easy to imagine that they would be more willing to spend money on serving a larger number of people. An assessment of the actual cost of creating beach access is needed, alongside the social and business case. Understanding the requirements of beach access and the cost of specialised equipment and people resources may help to put together appropriate funding lines. Patrick (Private Citizen)'s comment about "investment not cost" may help to form a social strategy around cost as framing the expense in the right way could make a difference in attitudes around it and help to secure public support. Capitaine (2016) produced an interesting finding that accommodation providers were more likely to consider investing in an improvement if it were "essential for improving tourist accommodation classification" (p. 200). Promoting an accreditation like the Blue Flag award may thus potentially inspire investment in beach access for tourists with disabilities.

With the evidence of what beach access costs, it can be taken to central government. Rhodda's (2012) recommendation to " earmark central government funding for the development of accessible tourism products and for accessible tourism training " (p. 121) still stands now. It would help to show there is a formal commitment to improving beach access for tourists with disabilities through sources of funding. Funding could be gained from the public sector (through policy strategy) and the private sector (through investment). Kevin (Public Authority) made the point that he cannot tell a council how much revenue they would get back, thereby paying for the access developments. It represents another important knowledge gap. Hesitancy to spend money without comprehensive evidence of return on investment may become a very real concern, not just for this area but for others around New Zealand.

It is particularly understandable in a post-COVID-19 environment that tourism operators in particular feel the pinch without an international market. The New Zealand government has focused on bailing out said operators (Wade, 2020; Cropp, 2020) and encouraging their development without a specific aim to improve accessibility. The Minister of Tourism has said that it is a time for "support, recovery, re-set" (Nash, 2021). This suggests the aim is getting back to pre-COVID-19 times with a declared focus on "small business support, tourism infrastructure, the conservation estate, Māori development, economic and regional development, and mental wellbeing support" (Nash,

2021). Because there are clearly a myriad of aspects of the industry that require assistance in recovery, Astrid (Private Citizen)’s comment on not knowing if there will be funding for accessible tourism and beach access post-COVID-19 may go unanswered for some time. It may be that beach access itself may not be profitable but it could improve Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa as tourism destinations, and therefore bring more people into the region to spend their money at accommodation, retail, hospitality, and other supporting tourism operations nearby. The loyalty of the accessible market (Ambrose et al., 2012) and the fact that word-of-mouth is a popular method of information-sharing among tourists with disabilities (Ray & Ryder, 2003) suggests that a wider customer base is attainable (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). Research may be required to assess profitability in the meantime and determine where revenue will come from by building the “fuller picture” that Kevin (Public Authority) described.

## **Chapter Summary**

The research findings have suggested several areas where improvement is necessary regarding beach access for tourists with disabilities in Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa, and also in wider New Zealand. The findings have shown that while some challenges and barriers to beach access are similar to those faced by other areas of accessible tourism, others are unique to the natural environments of beaches. Both public and private stakeholder groups are considered necessary for future conversations around the provision of beach access for tourists with disabilities in the future. Importantly, the findings have raised the need for further consideration of both the social and business benefits that improved beach access can bring to tourism in a region. The recommendations and next steps that can be drawn from these findings are discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The aim of this thesis was to explore the current and future state of beach access for tourists with disabilities through the perspectives of stakeholders. The research came about because there were no studies on beach access in New Zealand and very few globally. The nation's long-standing beach culture, the established legal right to leisure activities and significant portion of its population with a disability made this a necessary subject of research. The case study setting of Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa in the North Island of New Zealand was selected as popular beach destinations and because beach access initiatives were already in motion. As an exploratory study, this research contributes further knowledge of an important aspect of New Zealand tourism and insight into what improvements need to be made in order to develop beach access to enable greater participation by people with disabilities. This chapter will first summarise the key findings of the study, then discuss the limitations of the study, and finally suggest recommendations and future research possibilities.

### **5.2 Key findings**

The first theme of 'the power of inclusion' explored how inclusion and exclusion can affect the experiences of tourists with disabilities when visiting beaches. Participants expressed a clear view that it was essential that New Zealanders are able to access beaches, no matter their abilities, because of the strong beach culture of the nation. Commitment was highlighted as a key factor in improving beach access in the future.

The theme of 'information' echoed the findings of previous studies in explaining the importance of tourism providers offering correct and easily-to-find information. Sharing information among stakeholders was suggested as essential in order to improve future beach access initiatives.

Discussions of 'public perceptions and assumptions' revealed how the general public, a stakeholder group in their own right, were empathetic to the idea of beach access for tourists with disabilities but are currently a hindrance to developments. The idea of presenting personal stories to the public was suggested as a next step to create deeper

understanding and empathy of what it means to be able to access a beach if you have a disability.

The theme of ‘designing for access’ echoed some of the findings of previous studies in recognising the importance of universal design and the accessible journey. However, the most common idea among participants was that the facilities and amenities in place at Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches were a good start, but more could be done to improve access. The challenge of the natural environment is also a significant finding as it is a key factor in determining what can or cannot be done with a beach to create access.

The final theme of ‘the expense of access’ drew out perceptions that there was a negative attitude towards spending money on beach access. However, ensuring there is stakeholder strategic commitment to providing beach access was seen as a heightened way to secure budgets and sources of funding.

This research has shown that some findings of previous general accessible tourism research also apply in a beach access context. Specifically, information, universal design and public opinion are raised often by a variety of stakeholders (e.g. Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2021). This would suggest that these issues are somewhat commonplace in the disability and accessibility experience and may have been predictable in the beach access context. A unique finding is how the extra challenge of a natural environment can add another layer of complexity to the design process and potentially creates a further barrier against what the relevant stakeholders can feasibly do to provide beach access. This can manifest in either the beach itself (which includes sand, sea, and dunes) or the general public who live with the benefits of the beach and have strong opinions about the atmosphere and experience of the beach.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

### **5.3.1 Government leadership**

One common recommendation noted by the participants was the need for governments to lead a change in mindset. Opening stakeholders’ eyes to the potential of the market may help to inspire catering to the disability market. As evidenced in chapter 4, this is especially important in the planning stage of development to avoid retrofitting or negative

experiences later. Leading by example and showing that this is a market segment or group of people who currently may be excluded may raise the profile of people with disabilities in the public eye. All of this may cost a lot of money and time, but making the investment and framing it in that way will be important. Research in Britain has shown that there is value in the accessible market with 20% of day spending by “those with an impairment or those traveling within a group where a member had an impairment” reaching an estimate of £11.6 billion in 2018 (Visit Britain, n.d.). By adding a question to three tourism surveys, Visit Britain (n.d.) have been able to investigate the “volume and value” of accessible tourism markets in England. As a relatively simple answer to collecting more data (with appropriately worded questions) and proving the value of accessible tourism, Tourism New Zealand, Stats NZ or the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment could add a question(s) to the International Visitor Survey when the borders reopen, or to a new domestic survey if one was to start up again (the Domestic Travel Survey ended in 2012). This would be a step towards getting more buy-in from stakeholders and show that accessible tourism is a key concern. If the questions asked about specific activities or types of tourism, beach access would be an essential option to discuss as a significant part of New Zealand culture. This extra research may prove beneficial to New Zealand, considering the importance of tourism to the nation’s economy and the track record of including people with disabilities in human rights legislation (Porto et al., 2019).

The findings around inclusion have shown that the local and national governments are in the best position to make change. Shaw et al. reveal the importance of government roles by noting that “Without a major champion for change at the national level, the task of changing industry providers’ attitudes towards people with disabilities is going to be a far more difficult process” (2005, p. 175). The important role of government in accessible tourism has been echoed by academics in New Zealand (e.g. Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). Working with university researchers may be a way to get research done, as well as looking to other countries for what successes they have had, particularly Australia as New Zealand’s closest neighbour, as well as the growing international standards and best practice for accessible tourism.

### **5.3.2 Strategy and funding**

More research is needed into stakeholder perspectives from central government and/or all regional councils. There is a post-COVID-19 opportunity to investigate the place accessibility has in the new plans for New Zealand. Tourism Bay of Plenty clearly lacks disability strategy but could incorporate it into their regenerative tourism plans which currently have a strong focus on indigenous land and preservation of culture (Bay of Plenty NZ, n.d.e). Even if recovery money is not currently going towards accessibility, as the Minister of Tourism's speech makes clear (Nash, n.d.), there are still public conversations to be had with stakeholders and researchers about the process of making accessible tourism a priority. To justify expense, the government needs, at a national level, to gather the information it needs in order to prove value. The challenge then needs to go out to regional and local councils to look at their regions to see what changes and improvements they can make. The challenge should include a requirement to have a champion within each council. Ideally this should be a person with lived experience of disability, and with understanding of the nuances of the accessible journey. Funding needs to be provided on both a national and local level, and goals need to be made explicit so that the money is not wasted.

### **5.3.3 Legislation**

It is important that New Zealand keeps up with international legislation and best practice as law is "one of the most powerful vehicles of change, progress and development" (United Nations Enable, 2007). If international legislation for tourism especially were to change within the next year or two, New Zealand may be caught on the back foot due to not having an accessible tourism strategy or detailed requirements for access to public spaces. Section 42 of The Human Rights Act (1993) makes it unlawful in New Zealand to discriminate access to public spaces based on disability, but Section 43 does not require provision of access by special services or facilities "when it would not be reasonable to require the provision of special services or special facilities." There is danger in the subjectivity of what is 'reasonable' for either provider or consumer. Fortunately, steps are being taken to raise the profile of accessibility by central government. As of July 2021, the New Zealand Minister for Disability Issues has a place in Cabinet and is aiming to put a bill for wider accessibility across New Zealand before Parliament in 2021, including a framework that "should set accessibility as a high-level concept (rather than

a detailed, prescriptive definition) about the prevention and removal of barriers, so people can independently access the public spaces, built environments, goods, products or services they need to fully participate and be included in society” (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.). The only mention of tourism is “looking to the future, disabled tourist spend both domestic and international” (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.). There is currently no indication of when in the future this will become a priority.

#### **5.3.4 Accreditation**

One participant offered a recommendation of their own for making beaches more accessible: “a symbol system that shows fully accessible, and what that actually means”. Being accredited by Blue Flag, which has now incorporated accessibility into its criteria (WTO, 2021), could be an important signal to international tourists that the Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches are accessible. There are currently no beaches in New Zealand that are accredited and so domestic tourists may not be aware of the significance of the award, but international tourists with disabilities who have visited Blue Flag beaches before will recognise it. The participants spoke about wanting to make Tauranga the most accessible destination in the world, which suggests a Blue Flag award would be beneficial to this goal. An important benefit of the Blue Flag award is that it would align New Zealand’s beaches with the “mainstream standardisation” (WTO, 2021) on an international level and therefore remove any need or desire for ad-hoc accreditation systems.

#### **5.3.5 Prioritise the voices of tourists with disabilities**

Previous work has consistently indicated that the voices and experiences of tourists with disabilities must be front and centre to inform and guide thinking and decision-making. By hearing the stories of people with disabilities, national and local governments and stakeholders will be in a better position to work on tackling the barriers that people with disabilities have expressed lived experience of facing. This aligns with the social model of disability in recognising that barriers are distinct from a person’s disability or impairments (Darcy & Buhalis, 2010b). The example of developing a “universal accessibility management system” for Las Canteras beach, Spain, within *Accessibility and inclusive tourism development in nature areas - Compendium of Best Practices* (WTO, 2021) lists “users with different accessibility needs were involved from the initial

phase of the project, making continued use of it and showing high satisfaction with the result” as one of its achievements. Further investigation into the personal user surveys and internal and external audits performed as part of a “continuous exercise of monitoring and measurement” (WTO, 2021) may reveal ways in which stakeholders should approach beach access projects for tourists with disabilities, whether they be small or substantial. The example above of Las Canteras beach, Spain, used this “continuous exercise” to check for problems and make corrections to their processes and methods as needed (WTO, 2021).

#### **5.4 Future Research**

As the only empirical research study in New Zealand on beach access for tourists with disabilities, it stands to reason that more research is needed to validate and build on the findings of this thesis. Specific disabilities can be explored as people with vision impairments or invisible impairments such as autism may experience the beach differently from those with mobility and other impairments. Other locations around New Zealand should be examined as well because of the variety of beaches around the country.

Importantly, this thesis research has shown that the business case for beach access for tourists with disabilities needs to be made. Further research could scope the economic impact and social capital of catering to this market segment. This would be especially important if government and councils need to see the value in order to invest. The government or tourism bodies will also need to assess the spread of information and potentially consolidate it into a more central or official location (without removing it from its original location). They would need to give due credit to the people who have collated information so far because, aside from the issue of claiming credit for another person’s work, it is likely that people with disabilities have already had a hand in spreading information. It has been established in previous research that tourists with disabilities rely on word-of-mouth (Ray & Ryder, 2003) and the past experiences of others (Burnett & Baker, 2001). The Accessible Travel Forum for New Zealand Facebook group regularly receives stories and reviews of travel experiences from people with disabilities that others will comment on to share more experiences. Further research could look at accessible tourism websites and social media channels in New Zealand to analyse what and/or how information is available. Research could also look at national tourism

websites to see how easy it is to find that information and suggest improvements. Travellers' feedback and commentaries could also be the focus for analysis.

There is a research gap in looking at how much money there is to make in beach access in New Zealand, especially if investors want return on investment (Dwyer & Darcy, 2010; Visit Britain, n.d.). It is perhaps not the beach itself that will bring in extra money, but supporting tourism operations such as accommodation, hospitality, activities. This may take a couple of high seasons to be able to calculate a trend over time and therefore research should begin now as a priority. Local hospitality and tourism operators at locations with nearby beach access for tourists with disabilities could be targeted to see if they have noticed any new patterns in revenue since beach matting and wheelchairs were put in place.

Given the importance of stakeholders working together and ensuring that information is shared amongst themselves and with tourists with disabilities, a next step in enabling more tourists with disabilities to participate in beach tourism could be creation of an app similar to that of Mayordomo-Martinez et al. (2019). Their study revealed the collaboration between local councils and disability groups in installing suitable facilities and amenities at beaches for tourists with disabilities, and offered an app design that would allow users to search for beaches and/or specific requirements at those beaches. The next step is to reach across industries (disability organisations, tourism, government and technology) to make the app a reality. The research by Cockburn-Wooten et al. (2018) demonstrates how researchers can be involved in this process to help connect different stakeholder groups, guide the sharing of knowledge and importantly to break down the silos between stakeholder groups. Researchers with an interest in beach access or how technology can assist tourists with disabilities may be intermediaries to connect stakeholders, observers or facilitators of the process for research purposes. Such an endeavour may also improve inclusive practices as industries work together to share knowledge and learn the requirements of the disability community in relation to both beaches and technology.

Rhodda (2012) recommended that attitudes towards accessible tourism in New Zealand be surveyed to seek out attitudinal barriers to progress. This study has made a start with exploring these findings among specific stakeholders and in a particular destination, but further research is required to scope the attitudes of central government and/or across all

regional councils. Previous research on beach access for tourists with disabilities has not examined local residents' attitudes towards developments (either in surveys or interviews). This is an important gap to fill because, as stated above, beaches are public space and other urban beaches may encounter the same obstacle. This should be a matter of priority for providers of beach access to survey, whether a destination is beginning or progressing through its development, as the results may impact on how work progresses.

Further research could explore the challenges perceived by stakeholders in keeping the character of the beach intact while enabling more people to be able to use it. Further research on the logistics of design at a beach is also required. The studies by Mayordomo-Martinez et al. (2019) and Voulgaropoulos et al. (2012) focused on technology, information and events, but there was no discussion on how the beach itself influenced beach access. Exploring beaches in relation to designing for access would be essential due to the varied nature of beaches across a region, country or the world. A gap also exists on the meeting between what facilities and amenities tourists with disabilities want and what can feasibly be provided on a beach or in the water. Learning how universal design could be employed in a changeable natural environment is an essential piece of research to undertake as it may have implications for similar natural areas that are affected, in particular by weather events.

Future research could look across New Zealand and determine a classification system for the country's beaches. This could be borrowed from Williams (2011) as a starting point and adapted as needed. Participants with disabilities shared examples of their travels to Spain and Brazil where the facilities were more advanced, widespread, and with educated staff on hand to assist in the activities they wished to partake in at the beach. This means there are already people in New Zealand with experience of using beaches with well-established access and can therefore provide feedback on what they have found to work well. Following this and with consultation with accessible tourism providers and tourists with disabilities, hubs like those described by Kevin (Public Authority) and Neal (Disability Sector) above could be designed as a means of working out new regulations or policies for how beach access should be provided for tourists with disabilities. Given the variety in classification of beaches described by Williams (2011), it may not be possible for a one size fits all approach, but it would be a start. It was recommended by a participant that a "symbol system" be designed that would assist tourists with disabilities in determining what is accessible for them:

I think it's one of the things that you could recommend. That there be a symbol system which shows fully accessible, and what that actually means. And you can also go partly accessible, and what that actually means. So people don't have to ring up and find out, they can actually see this is fully inclusive. That it meets the universal design standard or whatever, you know? (Patrick, Private Citizen)

The Blue Flag award is one potential means to achieve this. Criterion 33 for the award requires a beach to provide access and facilities for the physically disabled but does not mention hearing, vision, or hidden disabilities (Blue Flag, n.d.). There are currently no awarded beaches in New Zealand. Participants' comments about wanting Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches to be a top tourist attraction would suggest that having this award would help, especially as it is a globally recognised award. A symbol system for accessible tourism echoes the suggestion by Rhodda (2012) in her list of recommendations for next steps in accessible tourism, specifically for New Zealand. Whilst there is much merit in an international standard approach to classifying beach access, ultimately, it is the experiences of the beach user that will become the eventual barometer measure.

## **5.5 Concluding Remarks**

The complexities of beach access for tourists with disabilities has been explored through the eyes of stakeholders in this thesis. The passion of the participants in this study shows their determination for change as they explained the essential factors of the accessible journey and experience, and the obstacles they perceived in achieving them, both now and into the future. Of significance is the recognition that people with disabilities can exist in any and all tourism market segments, be they country or region of origin, budget or expenditure capabilities, or the type of tourism they participate in; and as such, this thesis research fits within the wider agenda to ensure tourism is for all. Targeting tourists with disabilities may add value to more than one market segment. In the wake of COVID-19, in which New Zealand as a nation has been preached to as a "team of 5 million" and has been encouraged to explore the country, all members of the team should be enabled to participate in tourism with equity, as has been legislated. It is an opportunity to inspire innovation to create better design and advance what universal design means and can do in New Zealand. Fortunately there are already people working in this space (for example,

Be.Lab, Accessible Beaches New Zealand, and several regional councils) who are knowledgeable and well-connected. By reaching out to these people in the spirit of collaboration and partnership, the New Zealand government and tourism industry would be tapping into lived experiences of disability or accessible tourism as a vital resource to understand what changes need to be made to enable more participation in visiting one of Kiwis' most cherished locations – the beach.

Researcher positionality is an integral component of qualitative research; hence, final reflections on my experience carrying out this research is appropriate. For me as a novice researcher, learning more about accessible tourism and the experiences tourists with disabilities and/or access needs have faced encouraged me to be particularly conscious of the importance of language and of promoting the voices of the people most closely linked to the issue of beach access for tourists with disabilities. I had discovered this during the literature review but have now seen its importance first-hand through conducting interviews and handling the data for myself. Aligned to this, as research on accessible tourism continues to increase beyond its embryonic stage, the importance of prioritizing the lived experiences of those for whom it most affects and co-creating solutions to the existing barriers also became clear to me.

As such, a quote from a research participant seems a fitting way to close this thesis. A final reflection from Siobhan (Private Citizen), who uses a wheelchair, describes the ideal scenario for her in which beach access is realised in an unbroken journey from home to beach:

How magic would it be for me just to be able to get in my wheelchair at home, get a towel around me, you know, be able to jump out of my chair into the beach chair and hoon down to the water. Wow, man, that would be... it would be life-changing. (Siobhan, Private Citizen)

Putting stories, experiences, and dreams such as the one illustrated in this quote in front of the people in a position to make or inspire change might help to engender a more empathetic understanding of what it feels like to be able to participate in tourism fully. In New Zealand, accessing a beach is a cultural norm that all people should be able to access, no matter their abilities. The opportunity to provide life-changing inclusion for New Zealanders should be grasped firmly while the tourism industry, amid a global

pandemic, is focused on domestic travel and enable tourists with disabilities to participate in a quintessential Kiwi pastime.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A – Approval of ethics application

9 September 2020

Alison McIntosh  
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Alison

Re Ethics Application: **20/269 Stakeholders' perceptions of the future of accessible beach tourism in New Zealand: a case study of Mount Maunganui and Papamoa.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 9 September 2023.

### Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz). The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: [cgn9727@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:cgn9727@autuni.ac.nz)

## Appendix B – Participant Information Sheet

### Participant Information Sheet

#### Date Information Sheet Produced:

14 August 2020

#### Project Title

Stakeholders' perceptions of the future of accessible beach tourism in New Zealand: a case study of Mount Maunganui and Papamoa.

#### An Invitation

My name is Sophie Hayden and I am a Master's student at AUT. I am researching accessible beach tourism which is about how people with disabilities access beaches for recreation and leisure. The information gathered in this research will help me to understand what obstacles currently prevent people with disabilities from accessing beaches for recreation and leisure and what may happen in the future to increase their participation.

#### What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to investigate what the current status of how accessible the beaches are to people with disabilities in New Zealand, and in Mount Maunganui and Papamoa, and what it could be in the future.

The findings of this research may be used for future academic publications and presentations, and confidentiality will be maintained in any and all publications. This means that any information that would identify you in any way in these publications would not be included. For example, a pseudonym would be used instead of your real name.

#### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been invited to participate in this research because you have been identified from publicly available information as working in tourism or disability/accessibility in the Mount Maunganui and Papamoa area. Please note that expertise in the subject is not a requirement and this interview is intended to be a general discussion about accessible beach tourism and its future in Mount Maunganui and Papamoa. Please feel free to forward this invitation to others that you may know with an interest in the subject of this research.

#### How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

If you would like to take part in this research, please email me at [cgn9727@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:cgn9727@autuni.ac.nz). You will need to sign a consent form which I will send to you. If you are not able to sign the written consent form you will be able to give verbal consent at the time of the interview. Following this we will arrange to have the interview at a date, time and location convenient to you.

#### What will happen in this research?

Your participation in this research will involve one interview of 30-60 minutes with me at a date, time and location convenient to you. This interview will be recorded and transcribed to assist me in analysing the data, and the recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a secure location to keep all data confidential.

In the event that New Zealand remains under Alert Levels 2, 3 or 4 due to Covid-19, I would like to continue with the research but move the interview to Zoom, Skype, a telephone call, or another platform convenient to you.

#### What are the discomforts and risks, and how will my privacy be protected?

There will be no discomfort or risk for you by participating in this research. I will record your name, your employer's name, and your job title for the purpose of analysis, but no identifying information about you will be made public in the research findings. This information and your responses to the interview questions will be kept confidential. The data will be stored in a locked office and will only be accessible by my supervisors and I.

**What are the benefits?**

By participating in this research you will be contributing to discussions around the development and improvement of accessible beach tourism in New Zealand. The improvements that may come from this research will help people with disabilities across New Zealand have more positive tourism experiences and participate in the classic Kiwi beach tourism that New Zealand is known for.

This research is a great benefit to me as it will contribute to wider knowledge about beach access for people with disabilities and to the thesis for my Master of International Tourism Management degree at AUT University.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The interview will take place at a date, time and location convenient to you and last approximately 30-60 minutes, and reviewing the transcript when it is sent to you may take up to an hour.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You will have three weeks to consider this invitation, until 2 October 2020.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Yes, you will receive a short summary of the research findings and it will be sent to the email address used to keep in contact with you throughout the research process. You can tick 'no' on the consent form if you would not like to receive the summary.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Alison McIntosh*, [alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz), +64 9 921 9999 ext 6983.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of ATEC, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

***Researcher Contact Details:***

Sophie Hayden, email: [cgn9727@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:cgn9727@autuni.ac.nz).

***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

Prof. Alison McIntosh, email: [alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz), telephone: +64 9 921 9999 ext 6983

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 9 September 2020, ATEC Reference number 20/269.

## Appendix C – Email to participants

### Email to participants

*Subject line: Invitation to participate in tourism research*

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Sophie Hayden and I am a Master's student at AUT University in Auckland. I am conducting research on accessible beach tourism under Professor Alison McIntosh and Dr. Brielle Gillovic, and invite you to be a participant in this research.

The research explores how people with disabilities currently access Mount Maunganui and Papamoa beaches and what developments could be made to encourage greater access in the future. It's an under-researched subject across the world and I'd like to examine how Mount Maunganui, Papamoa, and New Zealand as a whole might become more access-friendly.

You have been contacted because you work for an organisation which is close to the issue of accessible tourism, but there is no pressure to participate. I would also encourage you to forward this invitation to other people you may know who may have views to share on the subject of accessible beach tourism.

Participation in this research involves a single interview of approximately 30-60 minutes, at a date, time and location convenient to you. Expertise in the subject of access issues for people with disabilities isn't a requirement as the interview is intended to be a general conversation about current access issues and future possibilities for development. A participant information sheet is attached to this email which details what your involvement would be and how your data would be used.

I thank you in advance for considering this invitation and look forward to your response. You can email me directly at [cgn9727@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:cgn9727@autuni.ac.nz), and ask that you respond by 2 October 2020.

Kind regards

Sophie Hayden

## Appendix D – Consent Form

### Consent Form

**Project title:** *Stakeholders' perceptions of the future of accessible beach tourism in New Zealand: a case study of Mount Maunganui and Papamoa.*

**Project Supervisors:** *Alison McIntosh and Brielle Gillovic*

**Researcher:** *Sophie Hayden*

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 14 August 2020.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I will be asked to review the transcript of my interview to clarify or add information.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study (including the interview) at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I understand that any identifiable information about me will not be included in the research outputs and I consent to a pseudonym being used.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 9 September 2020 AUTEC Reference number 20/269.**

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

## Appendix E – Interview Schedule

### Present

1. What are the aspects of Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa in general that are access-friendly or not?
2. What are the aspects of the Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches that are access-friendly or not?
3. Are there any initiatives that you are aware of to make the Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa beaches more access-friendly for people with disabilities?
  - a. If yes:
    - What were these initiatives? Please provide examples.
    - How successful were they?
    - What could have been improved?
    - Were there any key ‘take home messages’ about what works and what doesn’t?
  - b. If no:
    - Have you heard any discussion of the topic or any initiatives, from the general public or from stakeholders such as Tauranga City Council or community groups?
    - Do you have ideas of your own of potential initiatives? If yes, please give examples.
4. Based on the initiatives and discussions you are aware of (or not aware of), do you think beach access for people with disabilities is currently a subject of interest to the general public or stakeholders?
5. Are there any tourism campaigns, initiatives, or actions you are aware of to attract people with disabilities to Mount Maunganui or Pāpāmoa, either running currently or over the past few years?

## Future

6. What are some of the next steps that might be taken to make beaches more access-friendly in Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa?
7. Would there be more visitors to these beaches if the amenities were improved? If yes, please explain why.
8. Mount Maunganui beach is already considered the best beach in NZ according to TripAdvisor, and the 10<sup>th</sup> best in the South Pacific. Do you think if the accessibility features were improved would that ranking improve? If yes, please explain why.
9. Going to the beach and enjoying the classic Kiwi summer is a staple of New Zealand culture and tourism. There are plenty of beaches around the country to choose from but do you think that if more initiatives like the beach matting are put in place, could beach access for people with disabilities in Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa have the potential to become a major drawcard for domestic tourists? If yes, why?
10. Given the large number of beaches across New Zealand, do you think beach access for people with disabilities as a staple of tourism has the potential to become a major drawcard for international tourists?
11. There have been a couple of case studies in Europe in which beach access for people with disabilities was explored in two ways: what it looks like (for example what are the facilities and amenities) and who can make it happen.

In the Murcia region of Spain, local council worked with advocacy groups to develop amenities at the region's beaches (popular with both domestic and international tourists). It was a meet-in-the-middle approach with council and advocacy groups working together. In Athens, Greece, development began because the city hosted the Paralympic Games in 2004. It was initially driven from the top-down, to accommodate athletes and visitors, and for economic benefit.

In considering these examples (both having been met with some success), and thinking about any other possible means of achieving beach access for people with disabilities across New Zealand, what could be done to achieve this?

It's a large question, and I have some smaller ones which can break it down a bit, but what are your initial thoughts or ideas?

12. Who would be the key stakeholders? How could stakeholders could work together (or not work together) to make this a reality?
13. What facilities and amenities might be required?
14. What obstacles do you perceive in the development of making beaches more accessible for people with disabilities?
15. What would the impact and benefits be for tourism marketing and strategies? Do you think there would be some kind of economic benefit to the tourism industry? If so, how do you think it will become apparent?
16. What would be the benefits of having beach access for people with disabilities, for example for individuals, families or community groups?
17. As a counterpoint to benefits, what could be the downsides or disadvantages to having beach access for people with disabilities?

## Appendix F – Participant Profiles

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Location of interview</b>	<b>Stakeholder Location</b>
Jeremy	Disability Sector	Tauranga	Tauranga
Neal	Disability Sector	Auckland	Auckland
Teresa	Disability Sector	Via Zoom	Hamilton
Astrid	Private Citizen	Tauranga	Tauranga
Molly	Private Citizen	Via Zoom	Tauranga
Patrick	Private Citizen	Via Zoom	Tauranga
Siobhan	Private Citizen	Via Zoom	Tauranga
Eileen	Public Authority	Tauranga	Tauranga
Kevin	Public Authority	Auckland	Tauranga
Serena	Public Authority	Tauranga	Tauranga
Jeff	Tourism Industry	Via Zoom	Christchurch
Megan	Tourism Industry	Via Zoom	Christchurch

Note that all Private Citizens are in some way linked to a Public Authority organisation and/or beach access projects.

## Appendix G – Example of tracking spreadsheet

Invitation				Participant Information					Interview		
Invite Sent?	Date Contacted	Accepted?	Date of Response	Employer	Name	Job Title	Email Address	Reason / Notes	Consent Form	Complete	Transcript Reviewed
Yes	11-Sep-20	Yes	15-Sep-20	Company A	Andrew	Runs a tourism company at Papamoa	andrew@companya.co.nz	Industry knowledge	Electronic	Yes	Yes
Yes	11-Sep-20	Yes	14-Sep-20	Company B	Belinda	Council worker	belinda@companyb.co.nz	Local knowledge	Electronic	Yes	Yes
Yes	11-Sep-20	Yes	14-Oct-20	Company C	Colin	Council worker	colin@companyc.co.nz	Local knowledge	Electronic	Yes	No
Yes	12-Sep-20	Yes	15-Sep-20	Company D	Danielle	Disability advocate	danielle@companyd.co.nz	Disability knowledge	Physical	No	No
Yes	13-Sep-20	Yes	19-Oct-20	Company E	Eva	Runs an accessible tourism company	eva@companye.co.nz	Industry knowledge	Electronic	No	No

Note: this is an example only, and details of participants in this spreadsheet are fabricated to retain confidentiality.

## Appendix H – Summary of participants' key points for each theme

Stakeholder Group	Participant	The Power of Inclusion	Information	Public Attitudes and Perceptions	Designing for Access	The Expense of Access
Private Citizen	Astrid	Inclusion needs to start with government and the terminology they use.	Awareness and promotion of what is offered at beaches is key. Stakeholders should collaborate to share information. Information needs to be easy to find and access.	It is important to change the attitudes of the public to gain their support and understanding.	Important that people in the right positions listen to and collaborate with those with different needs.	Some aversion to spending by councils and/or public. Cost of items required for accessibility raised. Cost to users needs to be considered. Sources of funding post-COVID-19 need to be arranged.
Public Authority	Eileen	What is offered to improve inclusion does not have to be special but should improve the whole beach experience. In enabling participation the market can be broadened.	Stakeholders should collaborate to share information. Increasing knowledge and promoting it is important, especially in the tourism industry. Access to information and promoting it is key.	The Not in my Backyard (NIMBY) factor means there are a lot of vocal voices who dislike change in their environment, but there is still positive sentiment among the public.	Universal design a key factor. Important to create a well-rounded visitor experience.	--

Tourism Industry	Jeff	Everyone in New Zealand with access needs should be included, not just people with disabilities. Marketing mainstream is important because it empowers people.	Availability, promotion of knowledge and creating awareness are key as currently you have to be “in the know.”	It is about showing the public that people with disabilities are no different to them.	Having to retrofit should be avoided so better planning is required. Universal design is a key factor.	A government source of funding is needed.
Disability Sector	Jeremy	Beaches in particular are important sites of inclusion for Kiwis.	Promotion of information and increasing knowledge are key.	General lack of awareness and empathy by the public is a barrier.	--	Recognises the cost of accessibility is high.
Public Authority	Kevin	Equity is key and something that should not be opted out of.	Industry knowledge is important and is one place where knowledge gaps exist. Training and promotion of information are essential.	Current reliance on goodwill. Need to get people on board with ideas around accessibility and alter negative community perceptions. Telling the stories of people with disabilities is a way to create understanding.	Beach environment a challenge in itself. Universal design a key factor, as well as accessible hot spots. Design currently done on an ad-hoc basis. The full journey to, at and from the beach needs to be considered.	Knowledge gap means they cannot always confidently say how much things (e.g. a beach mat) will cost.
Tourism Industry	Megan	Inclusion means catering to a variety of needs and it	Importance of being descriptive and using different ways	People without disabilities need to be careful with their	Universal design a key factor.	--

		should be coming from the community as well.	of conveying information for different needs. Promote what is already at beaches to help inform choices	assumptions about what people with disabilities can or cannot do. Communities should be accommodating others within the community. Ignorance is a key negative factor. Current reliance on goodwill.	Currently up to provider to accommodate or not.	
Private Citizen	Molly	100% participation is the goal because it then it is about normalisation. Invisible inclusion should be considered.	Understanding what people with disabilities need is key.	Not considered a priority by the public unless it concerns them directly, but there still may be some levels of empathy.	--	Cost considered an obstacle.
Disability Sector	Neal	--	Information should be available, accurate, and consistently present across the journey. Stakeholders should collaborate to share information.	--	Design needs to accommodate a variety of needs. The full journey to, at and from the beach needs to be considered. Currently "individual attempts at individual solutions."	--

Private Citizen	Patrick	Inclusion is key for families and children. It does not have to be something special but should address the needs of everyone. Equity is important.	Information should be promoted and easy to access. Increasing knowledge and awareness is important.	The “tyranny of low expectation” breeds assumptions about what people with disabilities can or cannot do and what they need.	Universal design is a key factor. The full journey to, at and from the beach needs to be considered. Suggests a symbol system to assist.	Funding and budgets need to be secured for longevity.
Public Authority	Serena	--	Getting the right knowledge is key.	The NIMBY factor means there are a lot of vocal voices who dislike change in their environment.	Thorough planning is essential to avoid retrofitting. Currently approached case-by-case.	Recognises the cost of accessibility is high.
Private Citizen	Siobhan	Full execution of inclusive practices is important. Inclusion means being part of society which is what people with disabilities are.	Providers should be promoting information about what they offer.	The NIMBY factor means there are a lot of vocal voices who dislike change in their environment. Lack of understanding of disability from the public.	--	Perceives aversion to spending and considers that “money could be found if it was desirable to be found”
Disability Sector	Teresa	Inclusion means participation no matter what disability. It should not just accommodate the	Providers should be promoting information about what they offer. Stakeholders should	Creating more access for people with disabilities will help the public recognise them as	Important to design to meet the needs of everybody.	Funding needs to be secured.

main need and then add on extras. Social and mental benefits of inclusion are significant.	collaborate to share information. There needs to be ease of access to information.	part of the community.
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