

# **An Agenda For Accessible Tourism: Priorities Of Destination Management Organisations In New Zealand**

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# Study Aim

- To reveal the perspectives and priorities identified by 16 Destination Management Organisations [DMOs] in New Zealand to establish a research agenda for accessible tourism development.

# Significance

- Tourism researchers are increasingly questioning how to drive an agenda for a more inclusive, responsible, and sustainable future (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020).
- Within a destination, DMOs are key drivers of accessible tourism development; however, ableist attitudes and a lack of understanding may prevail (Nyanjom et al., 2018).
- Research is significant for understanding the ‘*why*,’ ‘*how*,’ and ‘*who*’ of accessible tourism (Darcy, 2006).
- Determining research priorities can aid in evaluating the current state of accessible tourism in a destination and support its development (Darcy, 2006).
- This is an important first step in guiding future research projects and industry initiatives to address the current inequality and inaccessibility of tourism.



# Statistics

- 1.3 billion people live with disability globally (WHO, 2023), and more than 1 million people live with disability in New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2014).
- 83% of New Zealanders with disability and other accessibility needs regularly engage in domestic travel (Be. Lab, 2019).
- New Zealand's population is ageing (Stats NZ, 2020), as are the visitor profiles of all its major inbound markets (Be. Lab, 2019).
- The size of the potential market opportunity of accessible tourism has been noted **OVERSEAS** (Tourism Australia, 2024; Visit Britain/Visit England, 2024).
- The social imperative for accessible tourism is also well-documented (Darcy et al., 2010).



# Context

- New Zealand's tourism industry remains largely environment-centric and devoid of a social imperative (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015).
- New Zealand's 31 DMOs have primarily focused on destination marketing; however, since the pandemic, have also held destination management functions.
- Due to the changing demography of New Zealand's visitor markets, there is a need to prioritise accessibility to maintain competitiveness (Porto et al., 2019).
- Despite increasing calls for strategic leadership in this space, there is no coherent or coordinated strategy for accessible tourism in New Zealand (Cockburn-Wooten & McIntosh, 2020).
- A gap exists between academic and industry knowledge about accessible tourism, even with calls for a research agenda more than 10 years ago (Rhodda, 2012).

# Literature Review

- Internationally, accessible tourism development is recognised as a function of destination competitiveness (Domínguez Vila et al., 2015; Porto et al., 2019).
- This has been driven by strong policy, legislation, political will, data, and dedicated accessibility initiatives (Porto et al., 2019).
- Effective and inclusive stakeholder collaboration is needed across the whole tourism value chain to ensure an accessible visitor journey (Cockburn-Wooten et al., 2018; Michopoulou et al., 2015).
- Even without national strategic leadership, DMOs can take actions to progress accessible tourism development (Darcy, 2011; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015).
- Accessible tourism development requires disability to be firmly on the agenda across all levels of the public and private sectors (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2011; Nyanjom et al., 2018).
- Importantly, an agenda must be co-created with community, ensuring people with disability have power and voice in decision-making (Darcy et al., 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020).

# Study Methods

- We employed an interpretivist methodology and semi-structured interviewing to gather diverse stakeholder perspectives (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; Nyanjom et al., 2018).
- Participants included 18 representatives from 16 DMOs across New Zealand.
- Interview questions covered:
  - Their awareness of data or research about accessible tourism.
  - Their specific questions about accessible tourism to be addressed through research.
  - Their perceived priorities for research to support accessible tourism development in New Zealand.
- Data was analysed using content analysis to identify common themes relating to the **why, how, and who** of accessible tourism development (Lune & Berg, 2017).

# Findings and Discussion

- The highest identified priority was the need to understand **why** accessible tourism is important.

*“It’s hard data and soft data; quantification of the opportunity. What other benefits have been realised due to going into this market, and exemplars of other areas that have done it; what it has meant to them across the spectrum, why they did it, do they think it’s actually been of benefit and in what ways?”*

**(Bella, Regional Tourism Organisation).**

- Almost all participants were not aware of any data or research about accessible tourism.
- Data-driven knowledge was required to give proof of the opportunity and garner buy-in as DMO’s remained unconvinced.
- Robust accessible tourism data appears to drive initiatives and progress in other destinations (Darcy et al., 2010; Domínguez Vila et al., 2015).



# Findings and Discussion

- The second highest identified priority was the need to understand **how** accessible tourism can be achieved.

*“What the requirements are. It’s all-good people saying, ‘oh we need to be more accessible.’ What do you need? What is that you actually need? Some specifics would be really helpful. What do we need to be accessible?”*

**(Abigail, Regional Tourism Organisation).**

- Participants wanted knowledge about how to develop and promote accessible tourism via *“quick, easy, cost-effective wins.”*
- Participants expected guidance through a gap-analysis to understand the greatest needs that are not being catered for and how to accommodate them.
- DMOs considered themselves unsupported in understanding and accommodating accessibility (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015).



# Findings and Discussion

- Third highest identified priority was the need to understand **who** the access visitor is as beneficiaries of accessible tourism development.

*“You also need to put some research into various groups of accessibility. There are quite different categories, and they have quite different needs. Some attitudinal research from those groups would be interesting, quite fascinating as well; I think that could unlock the social impact.”*

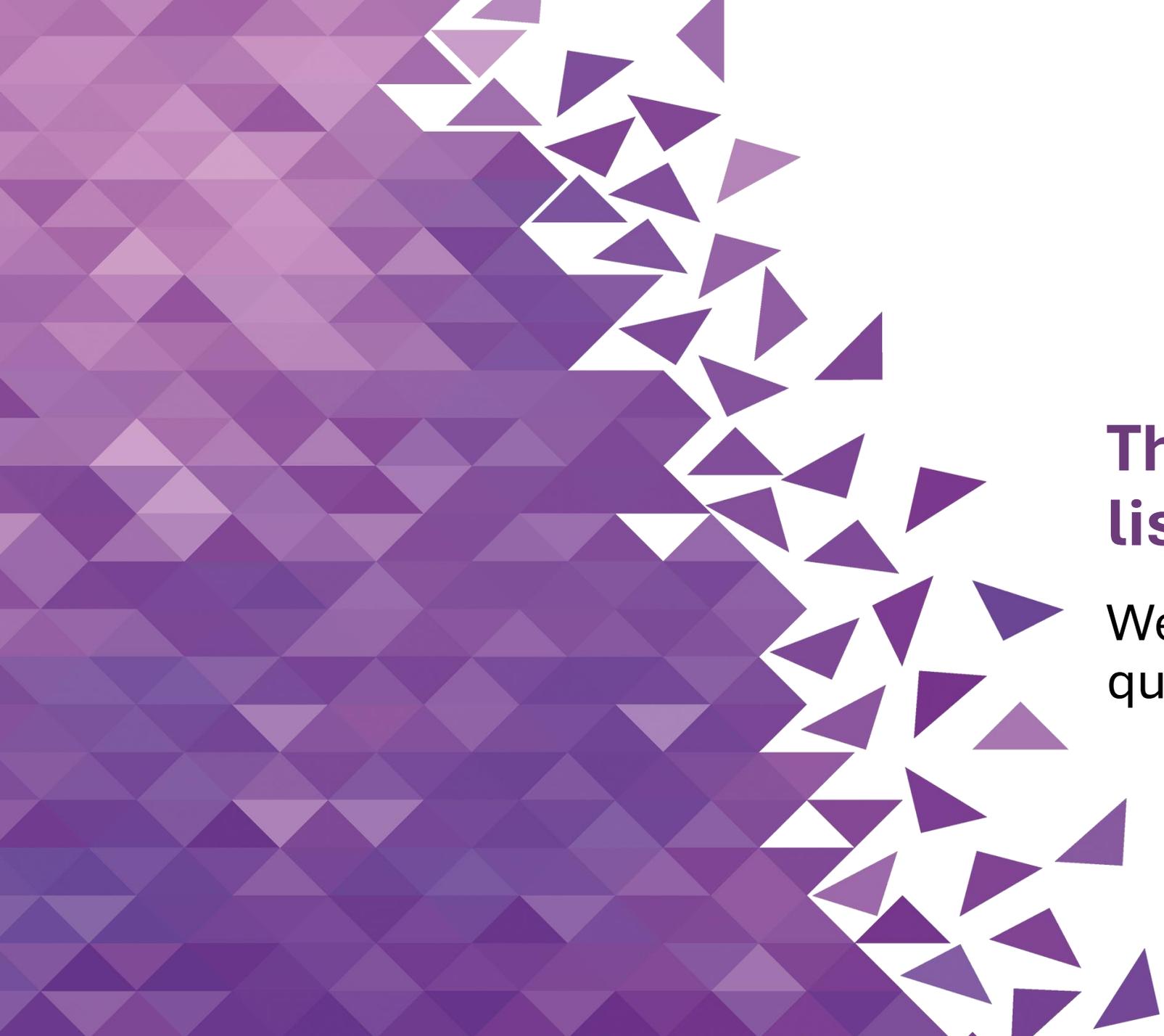
(George, Regional Tourism Organisation).

- Participants recognised that access goes beyond physical disability and there are a broad spectrum of accessibility needs.
- Participants wanted detail to answer the question of: *“What makes a great barrier-free tourism experience?”* including interests, motivations, and limitations.
- Understanding the ‘who’ was key to driving the ‘how’ of accessible tourism.
- DMOs lack of knowledge about the access visitor contrasts with increasingly available data elsewhere (Darcy et al., 2020; McKercher & Darcy, 2018).



# Conclusions and Implications

- New Zealand falls behind other destinations in terms of accessible tourism development (Porto et al., 2019) and a research agenda has been long overdue (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Rhodda, 2012).
- DMO's remain unconvinced about the value and opportunities of accessible tourism development and have no awareness of data or research.
- Participants recognised their own position as people without disability and this could perpetuate ableist attitudes.
- Participants exhibited an attitude of wanting to avoid accountability and push the responsibility onto others.
- There is a clear disconnect between academic research on, and DMO knowledge of, accessible tourism, to generate political will and garner buy-in.
- Clearly, barriers remain, and we need to consider the tensions between academic research, and how we, as tourism researchers, may effect meaningful change.



**Thank you for  
listening!**

We look forward to your  
questions.

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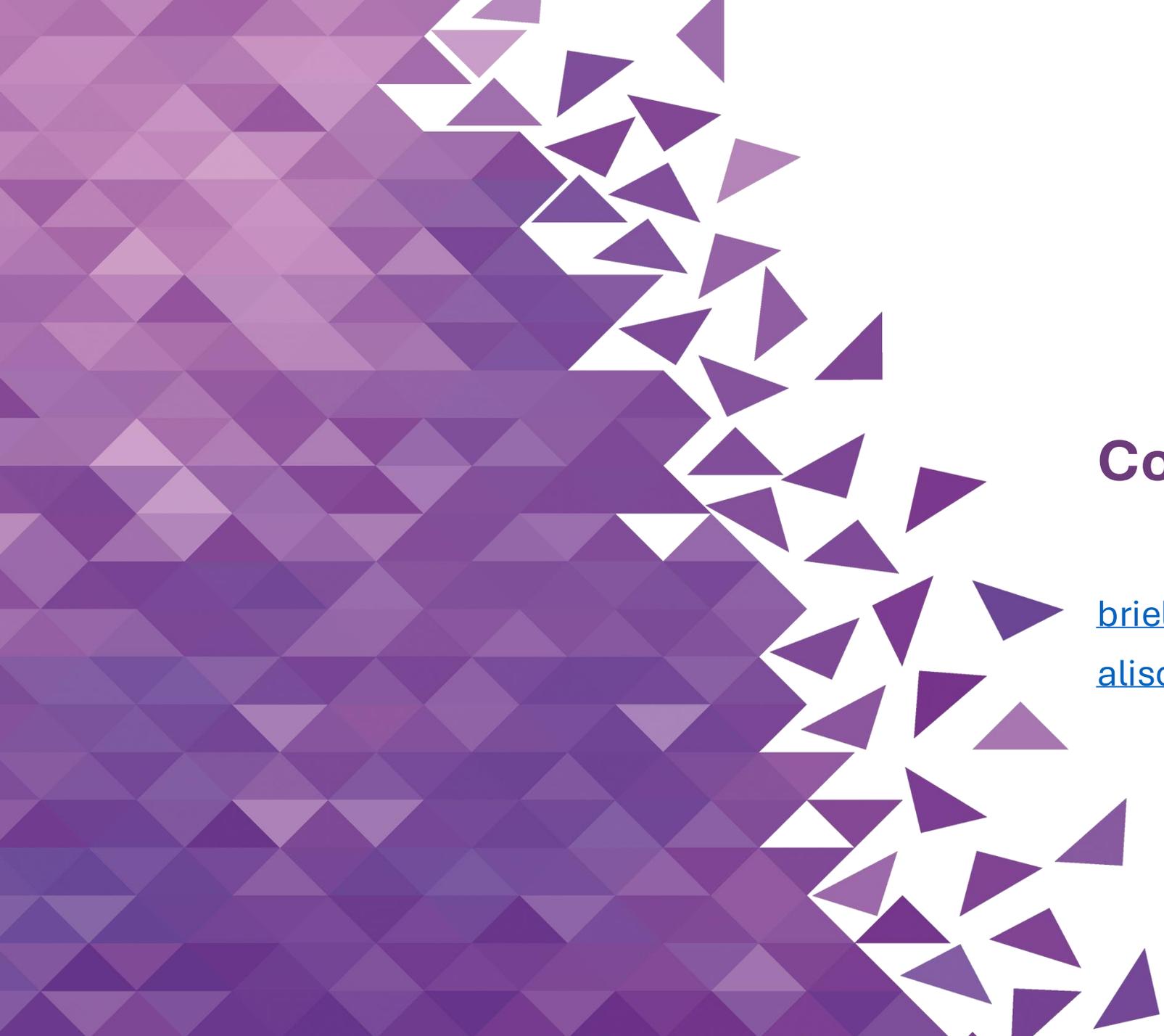
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