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# Hospitality sector and the (non-)employment of people with disabilities. Hungarian restaurant owners' experiences after the COVID outbreak

The hospitality sector in Hungary has experienced a dramatic downturn in the last three years. After the shock of COVID, the industry faces further difficulties due to labour shortages and the war in the region. In our research we asked restaurant owners about their opinion of employing people with disabilities and how COVID has shaped their approach. Our results show that the level of employment of people with disabilities is very low in this sector, showing problems of social accessibility. Still, during and after COVID, restaurant owners tried to support and retain their workers with disabilities (along with other workers).

Keywords: people with disabilities, COVID-19, hospitality sector, social accessibility

## INTRODUCTION

According to ILO, 15% of the world population has a disability, and 80% of individuals with disabilities are of working age (ILO, 2019). People with disabilities (PWD) and chronic health conditions have exceptionally low employment rates in all industrialized countries (Kalargyrou et al., 2018; Kamp & Scanlon, 2020). In our paper we use the word 'disability' as an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions (WHO, 2021). Research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic (COVID), which has drastically changed employment situations for workers everywhere and increased economic insecurity, has further worsened the employment situation of marginalized groups such as PWD (Maroto et al., 2021; Rumrill et al., 2021; Schur et al., 2020). As COVID had an especially hard impact on the tourism and hospitality sector, we decided to examine the employment situation of PWD in this sector.

We believe that mainstream science's disability and accessibility paradigms need to be rethought due to the dynamics of change in our world (Han, 2015) and the need to adapt to these changes in a responsive and resilient way (Szántó, 2021). Therefore, we applied a philosophy-centred theoretical framework: the idea is to complement the technical approach to accessibility with the spirit of accessibility (Farkas et al., 2022). In this way, we have a better chance of making fundamental steps toward achieving social integration (Farkas & Nagy, 2020). In our view, higher

quality employment (more inclusive, more meaningful) of PWD is one of the starting points of this goal.

In our exploratory paper we would like to look at the hospitality industry and understand the perceptions and experiences of Hungarian restaurant owners regarding employment (or the non-employment) of PWD. The reasoning for our choice is threefold: on the one hand, there is surprisingly little research on the employment of PWD in the tourism and hospitality sector, so we would like to contribute to filling this gap (Gröschl, 2013; Kuo & Kalargyrou, 2014; Meacham et al., 2019). On the other hand, COVID has hit this sector hard, so it is vital to explore how this may have affected disadvantaged groups, among them, PWD. Finally, we would like to contribute to the concept of social accessibility. In our exploratory qualitative research project, we interviewed seven restaurant owners who have employed or are employing PWD and were willing to talk about their experiences.

## DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

The first empirical work on the employment of PWD was carried out in the 1950s in the USA (mostly related to war veterans) and in the 1960s in the Nordic countries. It then multiplied and became more focused from the 1990s onwards (Csillag et al., 2018). Research shows that in addition to the slow pace of change in the social and labour market context and the lack of economic incentives, practical and mental barriers still make it difficult to engage PWD (Csillag & Hidegh, 2011). Practical barriers were originally identified by Keszi et al. (2002), but have since been confirmed by several authors (Dajnoki, 2011; Pulay, 2009), include (1) lack of a suitable position or job title, (2) problems with physical accessibility of workplaces, (3) lack of mobility of people with disabilities, (4) additional organisational tasks associated with employing people with disabilities, and (5) lack of appropriate skills of applicants.

These are indeed significant barriers, but perhaps even more critical in terms of employment are what Bánfalvy (2005) calls mental barriers, such as (1) general lack of information/inadequate information, (2) assumptions that PWD perform worse, (3) the assumption that employing PWD requires heavy investments, and (4) the assumption that PWD cause more accidents and take sick leave more often (Cseh, 2014; Dajnoki, 2014; Kálmán & Könczei, 2002; Nelissen et al., 2016). These mental barriers reflect the individualised and often stigmatising, exclusionary perspective of the medical view of disability (Oliver, 1996).

### *Employment of PWD and the hospitality sector*

In the tourism and hospitality sector, PWD are increasingly appearing in various job roles and levels of responsibility (Meacham et al., 2019; Mooney & Baum, 2019), but experts still speak of “*untapped potential*” for the employment of PWD (Doan et al., 2021). Despite the entry discrimination, the more significant presence of PWD in the workforce could bring the sector multiple and complex benefits in human resource management, marketing, innovation or inclusive organisational culture (Kalargyrou et al., 2018).

Going beyond the economic interest and logic, the sector could also play a significant role in shaping social attitudes: if we accept that companies have a responsibility to move towards sustainable economic and social operations and that inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalised minorities and equal opportunities are fundamental values, then hospitality, in constant and active contact with guests, could have a crucial role to play in effectively creating equal opportunities, leading by example, and becoming an inclusive employer.

In relation to employment, this sector also identifies the general labour market barriers that have already been discussed: a general lack of information on the part of employers and employees, communication difficulties, stereotypes, a lack of employment support systems, competency gaps (also) resulting from the training system, and the perceived or real costs of accessibility (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012). However, Doan et al., (2021) also identify sector-specific factors such as stigma associated with disability and possible consumer perceptions related to service quality (Doan et al. 2021). Gröschl (2007) suggests that the tourism and hospitality segment basically seek young and attractive workers who are able to multitask, are flexible, able to work long hours and in any position. The image of this ideal worker may contrast with the image of a person with a disability, whose appearance may show the disability and whose disability or lifestyle may make them less flexible (Gröschl, 2007).

## *Hospitality sector and COVID*

Due to the specificities of the hospitality sector, it is very difficult to find loyal employees with the right qualifications, who can adapt to the difficulty and rapid change of the job (Thi Kim Phuong & Trung Vinh, 2020). This has been made much more difficult in recent years by a series of closures, restrictions and re-openings due to COVID, as evidenced by the decline in the performance of the commercial hospitality sector. In Hungary, the sector has shrunk by 30% compared to 2019, to HUF 950 billion, according to KSH (2021). With the number and proportion of vacancies returning to near pre-pandemic levels following the reopening of restaurants, the sector continues to face significant labour shortages (Zerényi, 2022). Reaching and exceeding pre-COVID performance levels is likely to take years. During this time, however, market operators will have to adapt to changing guest demands and operating conditions, and will likely have to contend with the ongoing threat from COVID (Debreceni & Fekete-Frojimovics, 2021).

## *Impact of COVID to the employment of PWD*

While COVID has affected everyone, its impacts on PWD have been particularly harsh. PWD face the same issues experienced by the general public, such as social isolation, health concerns, and heightened stressors, but are also at greater risk of experiencing economic inequities and job losses due to the restrictions in place to slow the spread of the virus (Okyere et al., 2021).

Several international studies focus on PWD's employment situation during the pandemic. Based on the analysis of (Maroto et al., 2021) in Canada, 36% of

respondents with disabilities experienced temporary or permanent job loss because of the pandemic; more than half of the participants reported difficulties meeting financial obligations. Maroto et al. (2021) emphasised that those PWD who worked in retail, food and hospitality sectors heavily affected by the pandemic have come to face a great deal of uncertainty in the labour market and have to rely on other sources of income to get by. They found clear evidence that occupation matters: PWD in 'good' jobs (e.g., qualified, white collar) were less likely to see income disruptions and also expressed a greater sense of financial security.

Okyere et al. (2021) conducted their research on a global sample of PWD. The vast majority of respondents (more than two-thirds) reported adverse experiences in their employment. In addition to the widespread negative impacts, they were affected by the limited social contacts with support professionals, such as job coaches and a reduction in public transportation in many communities. 22.6% of the respondents reported being laid off or dismissed, and 19.5% chose not to work due to personal or health reasons. In addition, a quarter of the respondents experienced a reduction in work hours and income.

## OF TECHNICAL ACCESSIBILITY AND FUNDAMENTAL ACCESSIBILITY

In our research we briefly present what we believe is the necessary paradigm shifting in technical accessibility and fundamental accessibility, to create social accessibility, the essence of which, we believe, is that the perception and application of (fundamental) accessibility is one of the foundations of the human character. As we know, in philosophical and sociological readings, several important thinkers consider the social organisation of human beings as the focal point of their development and, more importantly, of their survival (Adler, 1998; Fromm, 2002; Gehlen, 1976; Han, 2021; Jaspers, 1996). Thus, the individual himself, in our interpretation, has recognised the indispensability of community existence as a key to his survival, which derives from both his own handicaps and his existential disability (Farkas & Nagy, 2020). It follows directly from this basic premise that the technical accessibility (barrier-removal) as a technological activity, which is nowadays linked to the conditions and modes of manifestation of disability, does not have a direct and clear relationship with existence in hermeneutical, existential philosophical, or, we would even dare to say, sociological terms. In other words, it has been reduced to a category of concepts denoting material activity which has become isolated from the original source of the human spirit. We can say that fundamental accessibility in a conceptual and practical sense is interdependent with the existential character of humanity which carries aspects of disability, such as a significantly weaker and more fallible body structure than the majority of animals.

In other words, we cannot speak of a substantial mode of existence of healthiness and disability in this respect either, i.e., man, community, disability, technical accessibility and fundamental accessibility are interdependent modes of existence with emptiness. If this anti-substantial and non-hierarchical approach is accepted as a philosophical starting point, it follows directly that our research aims at focusing on the exploration of barriers to employment arising from classical disability conditions.

However, a change of perspective also confirms that the fundamental aim must be a shift towards a societal structure that has a focus on fundamental accessibility.

Mainstream approaches in disability studies have made small but relevant references to this, but to the best of our knowledge, no mapping of the connections and interrelationships in a holistic way has been done so far (Csillag, 2021). We believe that these steps cannot and should not be spared, as the local and global events of life around us (e.g. COVID-19, escalating international conflicts) highlight the need to develop a completely new type of human consciousness and social structure (Harari, 2019; Szántó et al., 2019). In other words, there is a need to understand, embrace, and implement human, and closely related to this, social resilience. In short, in our reading this means that, on the one hand, the context of the past-present-future needs to be a process in consciousness, , and on the other hand, that the experiential patterns of existential events should not simply be stored as memories but become organic repositories of interpretations. In other words, beyond everyday flexibility, we humans should be able to understand the nature of the obstacles that arise, in addition to being able to withstand the pressures on us, and then, in most cases, to overcome or even circumvent them through common intentions and actions. This practice of barrier understanding can enable us not only to bring either individuals or group members to the condition before the original obstacle, but also to integrate patterns of action in human consciousness in a proactive way for the future (Gonda, 2016; Kołakowski, 2012).

To sum up, the need to achieve social accessibility is indispensable, since we can see that however much the human community has advanced in the technological and scientific dimensions in just over a century, at the same time the community spirit is moving away, with almost the same momentum, from the spiritual source of origin mentioned by Heidegger (Heidegger, 2007). The fundamental accessibility approach that we propose can also be called organic in that it recognises not only the strengths but also the weaknesses of the community, and therefore breaks with the traditional image of disabled vs. healthy or individual vs. community man, for the sake of a quality life. Since the original source has not disappeared in the past but is merely covered by a myriad layers that we humans ourselves have created on its “surface”, our primary task is to move closer, among others, by promoting employment.

## METHODOLOGY

The current study employs a qualitative research method to explore the barriers and supporting factors of the employment of PWD in the hospitality sector. The qualitative methodology has proved effective for investigating complex and multifaceted social phenomena, such as issues connected to disability (Cooper et al., 1995). At the early stage of the research, it became clear that we do not have precise data on the number of restaurants and cafés in Hungary employing PWD, and there was little empirical research focusing on this area.

Due to the lack of information, we used a snowball sampling procedure (Silverman, 2008). Starting from a list of accessible restaurants and cafés (access4you: European certified list of certified restaurants with the access4you certification mark: <https://access4you.io/places>) we first contacted the businesses on this list to ask if they

had employed or were currently employing disabled workers and if they would like to talk about their experiences. We also contacted professional organisations and hospitality businesses that have a strategic partnership with our university and we looked for information online about potential employers. Overall, we did not aim for representativeness, but used a convenience sample for our exploratory study.

TABLE 1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMPANIES

Owner	Companies			
Pseudo-nym	Activity	Age (years)	Location	No of employees
Kira	Restaurant	29	Budapest	15
Richárd	Event organising, catering and restaurant	18	Budapest	350
András	Cafe	9	Budapest	9
Zoé	Cafe	6	Budapest	38
Karolin	Event organising and restaurant	7	Country	14
Ágota	Restaurant	3	Budapest	20
Tibor	Restaurant	25	Budapest	7

Altogether we managed to identify seven restaurants and coffee houses, which used to employ or are employing PWDs (See *Table 1* for the details). We felt it was important to talk to the manager or owner and to explore their experiences, thoughts, attitudes, opinions and backgrounds to their decisions. We collected the data over sessions of semi-structured interviews lasting between one and one-and-a-half hours (Kvale, 2007) in various locations, depending on the demands of the interviewees, between May and July 2022. The list of open-ended questions was developed to explore all the owners' perceptions, experiences, aims, and attitudes.

We recorded the interviews and transcribed them word-for-word. We used thematic coding: we coded interview texts by experiences with disability or with PWD, supporting factors and barriers of employment of PWD in restaurants, COVID impact on the restaurant, and COVID effect on the work of PWD. We followed a double coding protocol; that is, each interview was coded by at least two persons from the research group to support the validity of the coding process. It was very important to conduct the study in accordance with ethical standards of research. Informed consent was collected before the interview, and respondents were acquainted with the purpose of the research, what the data would be used for and the potential risks of participation (Kvale 2007). Concerning potential risks, the confidential treatment of data (Kvale 2007) plays a crucial role: therefore, pseudonyms were used to protect participants.

# THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

## *“We are a rather unique sector”*

When talking about employment difficulties, interviewees often mention the specific characteristics of the hospitality industry. They typically refer to the physical demands of the job (speed, stress, long shifts, multi-tasking, etc.), the dangerous nature of kitchen operations, and the regulated nature of the processes, which can make integration problematic or difficult. *“We can say, for the disabled, catering is a bit difficult, it’s not the ideal profession for the disabled. We have employed people with intellectual disabilities, and we still employ people with intellectual disabilities, well, right now only one. But possibilities are relatively limited because the kitchen is a dangerous place.” (Tibor)*

Although there are many diverse types of jobs within the hospitality industry (besides the classic kitchen and waitressing positions, there are also administrative and clerical jobs, and as a counterpoint, unskilled jobs), the image of the “dangerous kitchen” is usually presented as an argument against the employment of PWD.

Those presenting this argument are aware of the fact that the above-mentioned difficulties could be alleviated, for example, by job sharing or shorter shifts, or by reorganising and rearranging jobs. However, this would require extra energy and time, and might not be cost-effective: *“It requires extra energy because, if I were to say okay, let’s have someone like that. Then you have to create the conditions. To integrate them, I have to think about the kind of workflow based on the options available... I have to think about it and a lot of times it creates a difficulty for others. So extra energy is needed.” (Karolin)*. On the one hand, it would be important to review existing expectations, and rigid work organisation frameworks (e.g., only long shifts are conceivable), which do not only exist in the hospitality sector. On the other hand, solutions should be searched for (e.g., mentoring) which have proved effective in other sectors even though it also requires resources. *“... you need a mentor. This is a fundamental problem for us in this respect. When there is a training process going on, the trainer is also damn tired.” (Richárd)*.

Another obstacle to employment is related to the fact that restaurant owners and managers do not have the necessary knowledge regarding the subject. They do not know where to find information concerning the opportunities they have (accreditation, tenders, etc.) and do not necessarily have enough time and energy to deal with the issue. The lack of information mentioned in the gastronomy literature is a strong barrier for these restaurants.

## ***“No one is a charity organisation. We’re talking about business organizations.”***

The argument against the employment of people with disabilities was repeatedly put forward on economic grounds. *“And there is one person who is less able to do that [task], but he/she is taking up the position because there is a hiring freeze, and so it is very important whether I can take on another person or not. Two make up for one (of them) and two can bring the results. Just an example of the fact that nobody is a charity organization. We are talking about business organizations here. If we don’t have the necessary revenue, we can’t employ people...”* (Karolin) This is inextricably linked to the argument that PWD are not efficient enough, have difficulty coping with stress, and cannot keep up the pace. *“These are the main problems here, that restaurants are very busy, and they [disabled people] can’t cope with these stressful situations quickly. Neither can the employees or their colleagues...”* (Richárd)

## ***“But it’s the law of the jungle, the pack will sooner or later reject the weaker one...”***

It is a perception of restaurant owners that an inefficient disabled employee is detrimental to profitability on the one hand, and on the other may put the understanding and acceptance of the employees to test, as the poorer performance of an employee may also affect the performance (or perception thereof) of the group. The harmonious working of the organisation is important, but they do not want to expose the disabled persons to such potential conflicts, they want to protect them. *“... A big part of the pay comes from the tips and tips are given when the customer is served as they should be. And if you’re a disabled person or just slower, say, a slower colleague can’t serve tables properly and you have to help out because [tips] go to the till and it’s distributed from there. At least that’s how it is in our company. I think it’s normal because if everyone were to pocket their own tips someone who is handicapped or slower, the poor thing would starve. But it’s the law of the jungle, that the pack will eventually reject the weaker ones. And that’s probably why it’s a bit of a more difficult course for someone with a disability. ... In a healthy market environment, it’s hard to throw someone like that in with the piranhas.”* (Tibor) A workplace environment operates according to the laws of the jungle, the strong subdues the weak, the less quick, the less ‘able’ are rejected by the pack, and that’s only natural.

## ***“Let’s stick to what the owner believes because he/she moves in the direction of least resistance...”***

According to the restaurant owners, some customers might not be happy with disabled service staff, but overall, they felt that a considerable proportion of Hungarian customers would not necessarily object to a disabled employee. That said, restaurant owners still have fears about what customers might say (Doan et al., 2021). *“This phenomenon exists. But not in such large numbers. When we did a survey, and it was just chocolate making, the questionnaire had a question about what customers*



*thought about having their chocolate made by a disabled person. 15% of respondents said that they would be decidedly discouraged. It's, you know, a disabled person and then they think wheelchair, sorry to say, but they think of drooling, I don't know why they think. But basically, all our colleagues with disabilities are tidy, clean, and their work is tidy. So, it's a deeply-rooted stereotype. Obviously, there are disabled people who are as neglected as some of our able-bodied compatriots we see on public transport who haven't seen soap for a very long time. But we should not generalise.” (András)*

***“Basically, I don't even know where to turn if I want to employ someone like that...”***

Several interviewees mentioned that they do not meet PWD they could hire. It is a little easier for those who have some contact with a disability or NGO organization, or who have managed to build up a disability-friendly image over the years. But there is a general lack of clarity about where to find disabled people who are looking for work, and how to recruit them. *“I don't know, maybe there should be a forum through which employers – it sounds silly to use the expression – but could pick and choose. We could have some kind of forum where disabled people are looking for jobs, jobs are suggested to them and there's a common page where you can communicate, and you say you're looking for a dishwasher and on the other page the disabled person says they're looking for a job like dishwashing. ...” (Tibor)*

## **THE IMPACT OF COVID ON BUSINESSES AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

***“The pandemic has turned everything upside down...”***

The COVID period put the businesses we interviewed in an exceedingly demanding situation in many ways. Several of the interviewees mentioned the change in the restaurant-going habits of consumers as a result of the closure regulations, which could even lead to a rise in the long term. *“What we found was that COVID, by the way, gave a boost to the habit of going to restaurants. So, what we experienced was that they weren't going to restaurants before and you know, they didn't think they were missing out. But when they passed a law stating that you couldn't go out, people realized that they could miss out on something.” (Richárd)*. Besides the changing consumer habits, restaurants were also faced with closure, unpredictability, and severe financial difficulties. *“The pandemic has turned everything upside down. Mostly it was a consequence of the fact that the workshops we created were in financial difficulties. A lot of people dropped out, and we had to find new ones, etc. The catering part of it was affected to the extent that in the beginning we couldn't*

open the café.” (Kira) Several restaurants took out loans and made improvements just before COVID, and the epidemic prevented their taking off.

In addition to all the above difficulties, restaurant owners were overwhelmed by the fact that as managers they felt responsible for their workers. *“As far as we’re concerned, it was a very difficult time, and it hurts a little bit to talk about it because I was so enthusiastic about this. When you have a nice upward arc in a business like this, it is very difficult to experience such a downturn. Both humanly, psychologically, and even as a manager, keeping people and not letting them go and protecting them, that’s the employee side.”* (Karolin) Most restaurant managers found this period exceedingly difficult psychologically, often going above and beyond to help the workers they had, including PWD. *“I’m sure our small community experienced it as an Armageddon. The first thing was that no one was allowed on the streets, only able-bodied people came to work. We didn’t let the handicapped come in. So, they couldn’t come in. We have quite a lot of people who grew up in foster care or live alone without any family. In the first few weeks we were just making sure they had food, medicine, medical care, so that they wouldn’t be out on the streets. We started to deal with the business only after that.”* (Ágota).

***“It was definitely a great achievement that no one had to be laid off...”***

Restaurants tried to adapt to the changing regulations, health, and economic conditions where possible, while maintaining the staff that has been together for years. However, this meant coming up with innovations and new survival techniques. One such technique was to reduce the wages of employees. *“We certainly didn’t have enough income to cover all expenses, so we either had to lay off [some of the staff] or cut everyone’s wages. We had one colleague who said we shouldn’t cut his. All the others said let’s cut the wages and stay together.”* (Ágota). Others came up with solutions that might not have been central to the restaurant’s operations before, but which allowed them to generate income during the pandemic. *“In December, we were hit by the bejgli [Special Hungarian Christmas cake] season. We made 2,400 handmade bejglis in two weeks. Everyone was dead tired. ... So, we did what we had to.”* (Karolin). Interviewees in senior positions tried to keep all their employees and looked for flexible arrangements that allowed for it. *“It was definitely a big achievement that no one had to be laid off. Everyone was reemployed. Full time for 6 hours/day, 6 to 4 hours/day, 4 to 2 hours/day. But everybody kept their job.”* (Zoé). In case of solutions where the whole team could be involved in the joint work, managers did not differentiate among employees, everyone found the thing they were able to perform according to their skills, so the main focus was on keeping the established team.

*“In the case of the able-bodied employees 50% was the cut, in the case of the disabled, it depended on their original wages, there were some who had only a 10% cut, the most I think was a 25% cut.”*

The central theme of our research is the employment of people with disabilities in the hospitality sector. Retaining disabled staff was a challenging task for the interviewed employers, as in many cases the survival of the business was at stake. *“And the same applies, I think, to people with disabilities, while of course you’re happy to take them on, but there are numbers to meet. And, at that moment, if he/she’s not doing anything, it is a payroll burden, and therefore a cost.”* (Karolin) Still, managers tried to spare disabled workers the hardship, to treat them somewhat differently than their able-bodied peers. *“For all the others, the cut was 50% for the able-bodied, for the disabled, it depended on their original wages, some received only a 10% cut, the most I think was a 25% cut, that’s how much we cut back on wages. So, we tried to survive somehow.”* (Ágota) Of course, for a market-based enterprise this was difficult, but it is clear that in addition to economic considerations, they also tried to consider social aspects as well.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the post-COVID environment, the employment of PWD is a controversial issue in the minds of restaurant owners. On the one hand, as described in the literature, in the minds of restaurant owners and managers who are not accredited employers, the perception that profit and profitability are paramount is still persistent. Moreover in the current economic climate, with COVID still lurking around and with rising energy prices, profitability is becoming increasingly important (Shapoval et al., 2021). It is difficult to fit the employment of PWD in this “razor’s edge” situation, since the idea that PWD, as a “homogenous group”, are not efficient enough and are less able to perform their job is firmly held (Nelissen et al., 2016). The symbol of exclusion from employment is the image of the “dangerous kitchen” from which PWD must be saved – it is a somewhat paternalistic stereotype that PWD are to be protected (Hidegh & Csillag, 2013).

On the other hand, in the current situation of a labour shortage, there is intense pressure to exploit all recruitment opportunities, so PWD appear as a potential source for employment. Besides the psychological barriers, employment is also hampered by objective barriers: employers do not know where to find potential workers, there is a lack of a widespread support system for workplace integration, and often employers lack the necessary knowledge and skills in the field (Schur et al., 2014), in line with the original barriers identified by Bánfalvy (2005).

The dichotomous, bipolar interpretation of (physical, mental, intellectual) integrity and (physical, mental, intellectual) disability is very much evident in the interviews. Either people are disabled and so less “able” and thus less employable, or they are able-bodied and so they can work efficiently. This ableist distinction (Csillag, 2021) makes it difficult to interpret individual human abilities and situations and thus the

creation of inclusive restaurants. In this context, the notion of existential disability may indeed be a good analytical framework, especially given its anthropological paradigm that humans – and all forms of existence as we know them – are as far from the ideal of able-bodiedness as the existence of the disabled versus able-bodied dichotomy is from our much-emphasized humanity.

In the course of the interviews, we had the recurring impression that restaurant owners find it difficult to talk about the issue, they are uncertain about the meaning, usage and “correctness” of certain terms and words (such as disability, reduction in functional capacity, wheelchair, rehabilitation contribution, accredited workplace). There is little knowledge and experience concerning the subject, and it seems that the issue itself is a taboo, with little relevant knowledge sharing in professional discourse. Referring back to the problematic nature of our understanding of existential disability vs humanity, we can see that the “veil” of so-called political correctness and the constraints of “correct” terminology – which are mostly intended to provoke emotional reactions – are in themselves taking us further away from the deep exploration of this social problem and set of challenges, which is now once again on the increase, or the development of adequate solutions to address them: in our case, the employment of people with (functional) disabilities in the hospitality industry.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by the Ministry of Innovation and Technology of Hungary from the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund, financed under the *Tématerületi Kiválósági Program 2021 (TKP2021-NKTA)* funding scheme (Project no. TKP2021-NKTA-44).

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