



COUNTRY REPORT ESTONIA

MindTour: Mindful tourism services for intellectually disabled people

Intellectual output No. 1 (IO1): Situation Scan of regional tourism services for people with intellectual disabilities

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INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization estimates that 15% of the global population, roughly 1 billion people, live with some form of disability (World Health Organization & The World Bank, 2011). An estimated 450 million people worldwide have a mental disorder. At any given time, approximately 10% of adults are experiencing a current mental disorder, and 25% experience a mental disorder at least once during their lifetimes. (World Health Organization, 2001) Mental disorders account for 13% of the global burden of disease, and according to current estimations depression will have become the prevalent health issue by 2030 (World Health Assembly, 65, 2012). The European Disability Forum (EDF) says that tourism is an important source of growth for the economy in Europe. However, travelling can still be a real challenge for persons with disabilities. The EDF wants to raise awareness of everybody's right to have equal access to tourism services. (European Disability Forum, n.d.)

Taking Europe as an example, the accessible tourism market has been estimated at approximately 27% of the total population and 12% of the tourism market (World Tourism Organization, 2016). The accessible travel market presents a great opportunity for destinations that are ready to receive these visitors, since they tend to travel more frequently during the low season, usually accompanied or in groups, make more return visits and, in some parts of the world, they spend more than average on their trips. Facilitating travel for people with disabilities is therefore not only a human rights imperative, but also an exceptional business opportunity. Yet, a change in the overall mind-set and in the model of tourism services provision is needed to meet this major market demand.

This report explores regional tourism services for people with intellectual disabilities. A situation scan gives information of the current status of tourism services for people with intellectual disabilities in Estonia. The scan is the result of desk research and a series of interviews with organisations and experts working with people with intellectual disabilities, tourism specialists and museums. The same research was undertaken in Latvia and Belgium during spring 2021.

The research activities contributed to the following objective of the Erasmus + Strategic Partnership MindTour project: to promote and support tourism entrepreneurs to value customers with intellectual disabilities and their families as persons, and to help them to design mindful tourism services accessible for mentally impaired people.

The sub-objectives of the situation scan were to:

1. find out more about the specific needs and behaviours of travellers with intellectual disabilities;
2. assess the current level of accessibility in the tourism sector and identify different approaches to accessibility within the sector;
3. identify obstacles for the introduction and implementation of accessible tourism for intellectually disabled people.

The final outcome of the project includes the creation of prototypes of museum services for people with intellectual disabilities, preparation of study material on how to design and implement tourism services for intellectually disabled people and the development of an assessment tool for evaluating the accessibility of tourism services in the context of mental disorders.

1. INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN ESTONIA

1.1. Definition and statistics

Different concepts are used for describing intellectual disability: mental disability and mental retardation (Tervise Arengu Instituut, 2010). According to the International Classification of Diseases (World Health Organization, 1992), mental retardation is placed under psychic and behavioural disorders. Definition: Mental retardation is the insufficient or incomplete development of the mind, characterised by the loss of certain skills during development, accompanied by a low level of sensitivity, speech, motor and social interaction at all levels of intelligence (World Health Organization, 1992). Mental retardation is distinguished as follows:

- Mild mental retardation (F70) – language is acquired with delay, but most use it in everyday life. Most have full independence in self-service, and possess practical and domestic activity skills, but developing them takes time. There are difficulties in reading and writing. They can handle simple practical manual work.
- Moderate mental retardation (F71) – the development of the mind and the use of speech is slow. Motor skills are lagging behind in development, with some needing a caregiver/supervisor. Some are able to acquire basic skills in reading, writing and computing. May do simple and practical work, but this needs to be carefully explained and instructed in advance.
- Severe mental retardation (F72) – broadly similar to moderate mental retardation, but the majority have significant motor disorders that indicate clinically significant damage to the central nervous system or a developmental disorder.
- Profound mental retardation (F73) – they have a significantly limited ability to understand or meet demands and orders. The majority are unable to move on their own or the ability to move is severely restricted; they are able to communicate in a very primitive non-verbal form.
- Other specified mental retardation (F78) – used if the assessment of a person's intellectual deficiency is hindered by severe behavioural disturbances or sensory disability (visual impairment, deafness, muteness).

- Unspecified mental retardation (F79) – mental retardation is evident, but due to the lack of information, the retardation cannot be assigned to any of the previous categories.

The Social Benefits for Disabled Persons Act (1999) does not specifically address mental retardation, but § 2 provides for the definition of disability: Disability is the loss of or an abnormality in an anatomical, physiological or mental structure or function of a person which in conjunction with different relational and environmental restrictions prevents participation in social life on equal bases with the others. According to § 2, disabilities are divided by severity into moderate, severe and profound. For children and the elderly, the classification is as follows:

- Moderate disability – the person needs regular assistance or guidance at least once a week.
- Severe disability – the person needs regular assistance, guidance or supervision in every twenty-four-hour period.
- Profound disability – The person needs assistance, guidance or supervision twenty-four hours a day.

For persons of working age, the definitions are the following:

- Moderate disability – a person who has difficulties in his or her daily activity or participation in social life.
- Severe disability – a person whose daily activity or participation in social life is restricted.
- Profound disability – a person whose daily activity or participation in social life is wholly restricted.

The Social Insurance Board indicates separately the number of persons with mental disabilities in its statistics. The proportion of persons with mental disabilities among persons with disabilities varies between age groups (Figure 1). Among children (0–16 years), the proportion of persons with mental disabilities has increased by 5% in the last five years. The proportion of working age population (16–63.5 years) with mental disabilities has decreased by 9% among people with disabilities. Proportional changes in the elderly group are minor.

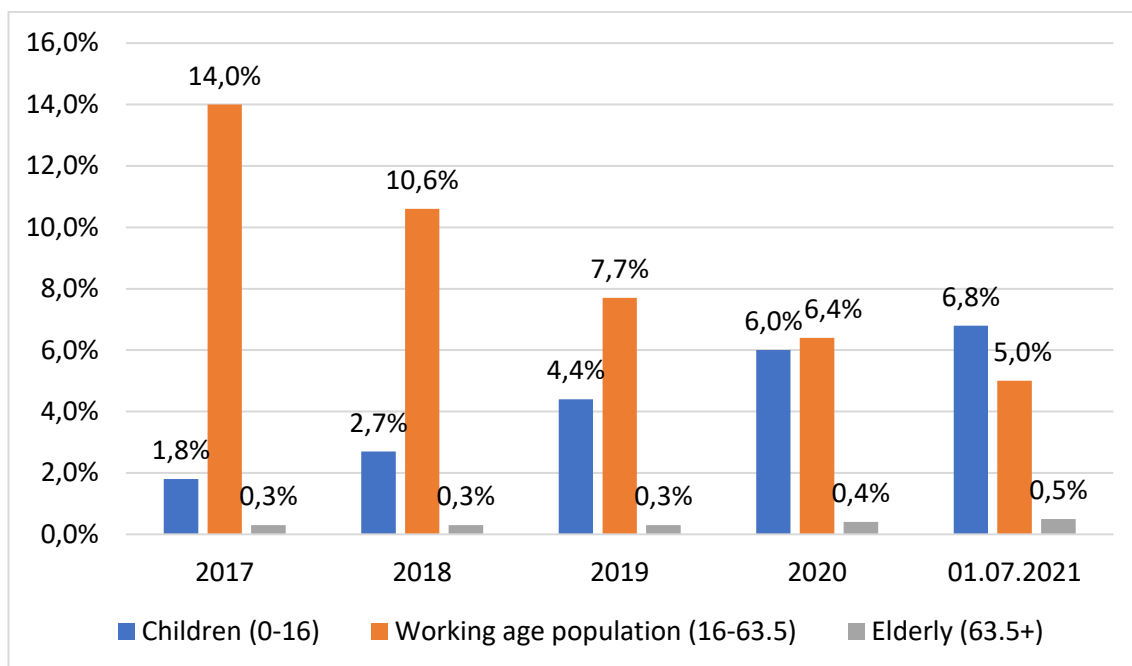


Figure 1. Proportion of people with mental disabilities. Source: Social Insurance Board (Sotsiaalkindlustusamet, 2021)

The total numbers of people with mental disabilities have increased in the last five years among children and the elderly (Table 1).

Table 1. People with mental disabilities by age groups.

Mental disabilities	2017	2018	2019	2020	01.07.2021
Children (0–16)	232	321	459	565	597
Working age (16–63.5)	8237	6814	4821	3623	2650
Elderly (63.5+)	220	233	259	346	353
Total	8689	7368	5539	4534	3600

Source: Social Insurance Board (Sotsiaalkindlustusamet, 2021)

According to the classification of degrees of mental disability, the number of people with severe mental disability is the highest across all age groups (Table 2).

Table 2. Degrees of mental disability as at July 1st, 2021.

Degree	Moderate	Severe	Profound
Child	81	496	20
Person of working age	843	1426	381
Elderly	33	215	105

Source: Social Insurance Board (Sotsiaalkindlustusamet, 2021)

Mental disability is described in different terms, but the basic description still comes from the International Classification of Diseases. The social field addresses all disabilities collectively and does not define them. However, statistics from the Social Insurance Board distinguishes between different types of disability. The total number of persons with mental disabilities in the last five years shows a declining trend, but in the age group of children, the number of persons with mental disabilities, particularly with severe disability, is increasing.

1.2. Legislation regarding accessibility: accessibility, services, and support for intellectually disabled people

Different laws and documents take a more general approach to disability and special needs and fail to distinguish between different types of disabilities. Consequently, the legislation do not specifically outline the characteristics of different disabilities.

According to § 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia (1992), persons with disabilities shall be under the special care of the state and municipalities, and § 12 provides that no one shall be discriminated against. § 1 of the Equal Treatment Act (2008) foresees the protection of people against discrimination and the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, race or colour in almost all areas of life. Discrimination on grounds of disability is prohibited only in professional life. Therefore, the Equal Treatment Act fails to protect people with disabilities when it comes to goods and services (Equal Treatment Network, 2021). The Commissioner for Equal Opportunities is an independent and impartial official who advises and assists anyone who feels they have been discriminated against. In 2019, for example, she was addressed in 45 cases regarding disabilities (Võrdsete võimaluste volinik, 2020).

Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol (2012) describes accessibility for people with disabilities in order to ensure that they have, on equal grounds with others, access to the physical environment, transport, information and communication, and other public buildings and services. However, a report published by the Equal Treatment Network (2021) points out that there are large regional discrepancies regarding accessibility and recommends making public spaces more readily accessible.

The Estonian Association of Architects, Estonian Design Centre and Estonian Academy of Arts (Eesti Arhitektide Liit et al., 2012) compiled the guidance material “Designing and Creating an All-Inclusive Living Environment”. People with intellectual disabilities may experience difficulties in navigating in different environments. It is therefore necessary to use simplified means of communication to identify the trajectory and to communicate information. It is necessary to use language that is easier to understand in communication. Using simple keywords and pictograms to differentiate between rooms is essential. The communication methods used must be introduced to the user before they enter the environment.

In March 2012, the Government of the Republic and representative organisations for people with disabilities signed a memorandum of cooperation in which both parties agreed to promote active and full participation of people with disabilities in the society (Eesti Puuetega Inimeste Koda, 2012).

Sub-section 1 of § 2 of the Museums Act (2013) points out that upon the performance of its functions a museum shall take into account the needs of disabled persons.

Communication from the European Commission (2021) to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions describes the strategy on the rights of disabled persons for the period of 2021–2030. This document calls on the Member States to promote the creative activities of people with disabilities and to make more art collections and museums available to people with disabilities.

The draft Cultural Development Plan for 2021–2030 of the Ministry of Culture (Kultuuriministeerium, 2021) foresees that access to culture must be guaranteed to all regardless of special needs and other conditions. At the moment, access to cultural services for people with special needs is limited, and the staff in direct contact with customers do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to consider visitors with special needs. One of the policies of the Cultural Development Plan is to ensure access to culture throughout the human life cycle, regardless of special needs and other conditions. The principles of inclusive design must be applied in the development of human-friendly and user-focused solutions, and the well-being of people with special needs throughout the

consumer journey must also be taken into account. The planning of the cultural infrastructure and organisation of cultural events must consider all special needs throughout the life cycle.

Different laws and guidance materials describe disability-related topics more generally. Often, long lists leave disabled persons at the very end. The reviews of recent years continue to reveal various problems that are actually already enforced by law but have not yet been implemented.

1.3. Main challenges regarding accessibility and visitation of museums for intellectually disabled people

The issues related to people with intellectual disabilities are addressed by respective sub-associations and organisations. A number of accessibility analyses have been carried out.

In 2013, the accessibility of branch museums of the Art Museum of Estonia was analysed for people with intellectual disabilities (Eesti Liikumispuudega Inimeste Liit et al., 2013a). Museum visits are very important for people with intellectual disabilities as they contribute to better interaction and new experiences. At the same time, it is difficult for them to acquire new knowledge and their adaptability is lower. Kumu Art Museum was easily detectable and understandably marked. Upon entry, there was information in the form of pictograms. The information desk was easily found. Customer service providers were friendly and interacted with the visitors. The floor plan on the first floor gave all the necessary information in a graphical way. It was clear which direction should be taken when moving in the hall. There were understandable signs, written information, and pictograms in the room. The entrance and exit, and the location of exhibitions were distinctly marked. The names and authors of the exhibitions were clearly labelled, which allowed the intellectually disabled to easily navigate. The education programme was interesting, straightforward and easily understandable. The programme manager gained the attention of the visitors and was able to monitor their behaviour and requests.

Since 2021, information on the Kumu Art Museum website is provided for visitors with dementia and autism. Kumu has created a programme for people with dementia and their family members called “Meeting Again”. Through art therapeutic methods, the

programme offers instructive activities in the museum. After a brief introduction, participants head to the exhibition to look at selected artwork in the Kumu permanent collection. The second part of the visit is practical and includes a workshop based on creative therapy. Alternatively, they can enjoy cafe-style get-togethers. The meetings are organised by employees of the Kumu educational centre and the non-profit association Life with Dementia. Visitors with sensory hypersensitivity or autism are welcomed to visit Kumu Art Museum as part of the programme “Silent Mornings”. Once a month on a Saturday morning, sound is turned down on the loudest exhibits of Kumu. The halls have a sign system that informs visitors about the lighting, sound level and accessibility of the rooms. At that time, the museum does not host any excursion groups or school lessons. Special short tours are offered upon request. Kumu Education Center has a quiet area for rest. (Kumu kunstimuuseum, n.d.)

Access to the Mikkel Museum is not complicated (Eesti Liikumispuudega Inimeste Liit et al., 2013b). It is easy to navigate in a small museum. The information provided was understandable, logically and comprehensively marked. The customer service provider explained everything slowly and amicably and used plain enough language. It was easy to move around in the halls, but it was difficult to find the second floor. At the exhibits, it was hard to see which title belonged to which painting. It would be more understandable if each label were next to the corresponding painting.

The education programme was well-planned, the tour guide was emotional, open, friendly and was able to involve visitors in the discussions. The visitors were given the opportunity to make their own choices and to participate in activities. They could select the sculpture they liked the most and describe why they chose it. During the practical part of the education programme, the tour guide was in the same room with the visitors and worked alongside them. This makes people with intellectual disabilities feel equal to other people. In the course of discussions, cards in traffic light colours can be used with an explanatory pictogram: red – cannot understand, yellow – speaking too fast, green – all is understandable.

Since 2021, the Mikkel Museum homepage has information for visitors with mobility disability and the visually impaired, but no precise programmes have been outlined. It has been mentioned that children, young people and adults with hearing, intellectual and

multiple disabilities can participate in the educational programmes of the art museum, but no specific programmes have been listed for persons with an intellectual disability. (Mikkeli muuseum, n.d.)

Access to the Adamson-Eric Museum is easy thanks to guiding aids (Eesti Liikumispuudega Inimeste Liit et al., 2013c). Information about the museum is readily available and understandable. Customer service is positive. However, there is no clear floor plan. It was also difficult to find the stairs leading up to the second floor. The theoretical part of the education programme was short enough, but the participants were not particularly involved in the conversation. The practical part meant drawing a picture of yourself, which was of great interest to the participants. The programme manager left the participants alone to draw, which was not appropriate for people with intellectual disabilities.

Since 2021, the Adamson-Eric Museum homepage has information for intellectually disabled visitors for whom museum lessons can be adapted. After selecting an interesting theme among museum lessons, it is recommended that its content and suitability be consulted with the museum staff. The homepage offers museum lessons for student groups: “The Artist and Home” – for the visually impaired and blind – the visitor gets to know Adamson-Eric’s work and senses the objects related to the artist’s life, followed by creative work; “The Sun is Smiling” – develops children’s ability to discuss and reason, and repeats familiar geometrical shapes. (Adamson-Ericu muuseum, n.d.)

Access to the Kadrioru Art Museum is understandably marked for people with intellectual disabilities (Eesti Liikumispuudega Inimeste Liit et al., 2013d). The building, the information desk, and the ticket office were easily located. The manager of the education programme guided the group to the staircase leading to the second floor without noticing that the group also included a person with mobility disability. Navigating in the rooms was complicated because there were no information labels or pictograms. It was difficult to concentrate in the exhibition hall because there were a lot of people at the same time, and the conversations of others disturbed the participants. Moving from one floor to another caused confusion because there were several different labels and many doors. The content of the education programme was interesting, but the tour guide used difficult words and was unable to attract the attention of the participants or engage them in

conversations. The theoretical part was difficult to grasp as there were many people around, and the attention of the participants was distracted. The practical part was interesting, the tour guide was in the same room with the participants and helped them with recommendations.

In 2021, the homepage of the Kadriorg Art Museum provides special information for visitors with mobility disability, the visually impaired, hard of hearing, and the deaf. Children, young people and adults with mobility, vision, hearing, intellectual and multiple disabilities are welcome to participate in education programmes. The programme “Art through Senses” is offered for students with special needs. There is no separate programme for intellectually disabled visitors. (Kadrioru kunstimuuseum, n.d.)

Access to the Niguliste Museum is straightforward and clearly marked (Eesti Liikumispuudega Inimeste Liit et al., 2013e). Finding the entrance is facilitated by information boards. The information desk, however, was not recognizable. It was difficult to find toilets – the labels were understandable, but it took time to find the doors. It was easy to navigate in the exhibition halls, but it was difficult to get to the hall from the information desk. The sign “Exhibition” remained unnoticed by visitors due to the complex nature of the word. The plans of the exhibitions on the walls remained unused because the participants were unable to notice them. Leaving the hall was problematic because there was no corresponding marking. The education programme was well-planned and the programme manager knew how to engage the participants, was attentive and friendly.

In 2021, the Niguliste Museum website provides information for visually impaired visitors and visitors with mobility disability on a specific subpage for visitors with special needs. Education programmes are advertised for visitors with intellectual disabilities, but the corresponding subpage states that the page was not found. (Niguliste muuseum, n.d.)

In 2021, access to the Estonian Health Museum for visitors with special needs was evaluated (Eesti Puuetega Inimeste Koda et al., 2021). For people with intellectual disabilities, finding the location information was difficult. The road to the museum lacks signs and information. However, finding the museum on the street was easy because of understandable markings. On entry, the information desk and ticket office are well-

located, but they lacked simple labels like “Information or Tickets” which make it easier for people to navigate. The information on the leaflets offered was incomprehensible because it remained unclear where to start the visit and where it will end. Customer service providers must be trained on how to support visitors with intellectual disabilities during a visit to the museum. The museum is difficult to navigate, the floor/walls should have arrows or pictograms. It was not even possible to leave the museum without assistance because there was no corresponding marking. The explanations for the exhibitions were too complicated. Interest was shown in exhibits which were familiar and could be associated with previous experiences. It is important to obtain clear and easy-to-understand information.

The importance of easy language was underlined in the handbook by Kaartinen and Linnapuomi (2017). In addition, the authors of the handbook point out that people with intellectual disabilities may need a support person to assist them during a cultural event who should have free access to the event.

A number of accessibility studies have highlighted the need for simple language and for the lack of skills for writing understandable texts in easy language. In November 2020, an international project funded by Erasmus+ Indire was launched aimed at promoting the use of simple language and creating materials for it. With the help of these materials, specialists working with people with low literacy would be able to produce understandable texts in easy language. The objectives of using simple language are to improve users’ access to different information, to increase their independence and to raise awareness of their choices and decision-making. The need to use simple language also arises from Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (Oberpal, n.d.)

Accessibility in the tourism sector includes visiting objects, such as museums, as well as visitor pathways. The tourism working group of the accessibility task force mapped the current issues in 2020 (BDA Consulting OÜ, 2020). It appeared that the meaning of accessibility which includes the adaptation of services and information to all people, is unrecognised. The proportion of people with disabilities in the population is growing, and so far, they are not approached based on their individual needs. The main emphasis in legislation is on considering the needs of people with mobility disability, but other special

needs are ignored. The meaning of the concept of accessibility in strategic framework documents, laws and regulations has not been explained.

The curricula of specialties fail to address or address sufficiently the topics of accessibility, leading to a lack of respective competence. It is necessary to improve the curricula regarding accessibility in specialties related to tourism. Aspects of accessibility in the substantive development of tourism products/services are often not addressed, as it concerns a small target group and is not economically feasible. If resources are limited, no special solutions are created or produced for people with special needs. The websites of providers of tourism services do not provide information on the possibilities and accessibility of content adapted to different specific needs. There is no clear and uniform system of labelling in the public space, which would be understandable to all. There is no uniform marking/labelling system on objects for different special needs, i.e. what the customer journey is and what is accessible. Often, only the special need of mobility disability is targeted. Awareness, practical guidance and supervision are lacking in ensuring accessibility requirements and developing good practice.

In 2018, an accessibility analysis was carried out in projects funded from structural grants in the period of 2014–2020 (MTÜ Ligipäasetavuse foorum, 2018). Accessibility is not only related to a museum itself, for example, but also to the way it is accessed, the way parking is organised, and what the pavement looks like. Expert assessment was given for the following special needs: mobility, vision, hearing and intellectual disability. Only issues related to persons with intellectual disabilities shall be explored in this report:

- Central square and contact area of the town of Põlva – there are few labels facilitating navigation, mainly traffic signs.
- Central square of the town of Võru – entry to the area is restricted by ramps, traffic speed is reduced to 30 km/h, which increases safety, but the object lacks direction/information labels facilitating navigation.
- Network of cycle and pedestrian tracks in the town of Võru – improved access to services, illuminated roads increase safety and assist in navigation.
- Central square of the town of Tõrva – there are few labels facilitating navigation in the area, mainly traffic signs.

- Reconstruction of Valga Old Town – the town lacks direction/information labels facilitating navigation, there are mainly traffic signs.
- Modernisation of the town centre of Elva – navigation in the area is understandable, there are signs facilitating navigation, lots of greenery, crossings are marked, and natural materials have been used.
- Central square of the town of Rapla – green rest areas have been established, the carriageway going through the square has calmed traffic, lamps are used to create different mood combinations, there is an information board and the square plan.
- Development of the public space in the town of Väike-Maarja – navigations in the area is understandable and there are signs facilitating navigation, lots of greenery, crossings are marked, and natural materials have been used.
- Reconstruction of the road to the Lotte Village theme park – there are no explicit and understandable signs; although a board illustrated with rabbits greets visitors in several languages at the intersection, it fails to clearly point to the location of the entrance nor the ticket offices.
- Construction project of Narva Museum and Castle – the project is missing information on signs/labels and other markings.
- The 2nd stage of Valgehobusemäe Ski and Recreation Centre – the project is missing adaptations meant for visitors with intellectual disabilities.
- Vastseliina Episcopal Castle and the medieval theme park Novum Castrum – the project describes several information boards and a simple navigation plan facilitates the presence of visitors with intellectual disabilities.
- Tourism landscape development of Rõuge Nightingale Valley – the project describes several information boards and a simple navigation plan facilitates the presence of visitors with intellectual disabilities.
- Establishment of supporting infrastructure for the recreational area at Võsu beach – appropriate signs have not been explained, navigating the area is straightforward, and the scenic location with resting areas create a safe and peaceful ambiance for persons with intellectual disabilities.
- Development of Suur Munamägi tourist attraction – the construction project details information and notice boards.

- Construction project of the Windtower Experience Center – the name of the center is clearly displayed on the façade.
- Construction project of the main stage planned on Vallimägi Hill, Rakvere – the project presents no information on signs/labels or other markings.
- Construction project of Pikk street in Rakvere – information boards are large and legible; other information is conveyed by traffic signs.
- Construction project for improving the accessibility of Pärnu beach – there is no reference to a solution regarding signs or labels in the project; a scenic place by the sea helps people with intellectual disabilities to feel confident, because the surroundings promote calmness.
- Traffic education centre and the automobile era exhibition in the Estonian Road Museum – the placement of signs/labels is well planned, and attractions and information boards have blackboards, interactive panels, and other notifications.
- Construction project of WOW! Experience Center – attractions and information boards are equipped with interactive panels and other notifications, and the interior design of the center reflects the concept of clear and coherent rooms.
- Construction project for developing the Fat Margaret tower – signs/labels are installed as part of a separate project.
- Construction project of Kosmopark – the interior design project had not been finalised at the time of the assessment, but there is an information desk immediately behind the entrance, thus minimising the risk of getting lost.
- Observation tower in Rõuge Ööbikuorg valley – there are several information boards and posters near the tower, the area is scenic and enables straightforward navigation, which promotes visits by people with intellectual disabilities.
- Reconstruction of RMK Riisa study trail – recreational areas enable privacy; there are explicit information boards.
- Reconstruction of RMK Ingatsi study trail – recreational areas enable privacy; there are explicit information boards.

The accessibility of persons with intellectual disabilities is the most difficult to assess. The projects assessed demonstrate little accessibility for people with intellectual disabilities (Traffic Education Centre, Fat Margaret, RMK hiking trails). It is important

to provide clear and easily understandable information. The adaptability of people with intellectual disabilities is low and so their navigation needs to be marked with easily understandable signs. For that, arrows and direction signs are appropriate. Adaptability is also facilitated by a pleasant atmosphere, which makes plants, flowers and other elements suitable in interior design which creates the possibility to perceive the surrounding environment through different senses. (MTÜ Ligipäasetavuse foorum, 2018)

In 2017, the pan-European Erasmus+ TANDEM project was launched, with museums from seven different countries with the purpose of improving the experience of people with disabilities to explore museums (Jagodin, 2019b). The Estonian Maritime Museum also participated in the project. The aim of the project was to achieve a change of approaches so that the entire museum team would think about a solution for visitors with special needs and take it into account in their activities. The TANDEM project looks at the accessibility of museums from four different perspectives:

- Physical accessibility: are the rooms physically accessible to people with special needs, is it possible to move in a wheelchair in the exhibitions, are there tactile guidance lines for the blind or a light solution that does not make experiencing the environment impossible for the intellectually disabled or visually impaired visitors?
- Intellectual accessibility: are the texts at the exhibition essentially understandable? Is the content provided accessible to a regular visitor, or is the curator text understandable only to a narrow professional audience? Has the content been made accessible to people with learning difficulties in easy language?
- Emotional accessibility: how can a visitor emotionally relate to the subject matter or what emotions it evokes in them? Is it an emotion that is accessible and attainable for everyone?
- Social accessibility: is the museum, exhibition or other event being organised by the museum socially accessible? To how many people could the event be inaccessible due to, for example, a high ticket price?

A museum itself does not have to be an expert at everything, but cooperate with experts. A museum's mission is to offer an environment. As a project member, the Estonian Maritime Museum applied the knowledge gained in planning its new exhibition. At the end of 2019, a new permanent exhibition was opened at the Fat Margaret cannon tower

of the Estonian Maritime Museum which offers a great experience also for visitors with special needs (Jagodin, 2019a). The exhibition includes different ship models. When preparing the exhibition, visitors with special needs were consulted, and it turned out that they did not need anything new to be created specifically for them, but something universal that everyone could enjoy. The needs of different people must be considered. The induction loop sound amplification system enables the personal hearing amplifier to be connected to the system, through which the visitor can hear the curator speak. The videos that are part of the exhibition are equipped with sign language translation. There are tactile guidance lines and floor plans that assist blind visitors to move around in the building, tactile replica models have been created from masterpieces, and an audio description tour. As one of the main target groups of the new exhibition is families with children, playful hands-on solutions have been created for explaining complex phenomena, which also help people with intellectual disabilities to understand the topic. Each thematic hall has a 3D printed copy of a ship model that is allowed for everyone to touch. The museum is equipped with a handicap entrance and elevator.

Accessibility audits carried out in the branch museums of the Art Museum of Estonia in 2013 are available for the public online. The next accessibility audit was conducted in 2021 and by the Estonian Health Museum. Given the large number of museums, audits have been scarce.

1.4. Suggestions and guidelines for including intellectually disabled people in museums and the tourism sector

Various analyses that have been carried out include a number of recommendations to be taken into account when designing services for people with intellectual disabilities and communicating with people with special needs.

In the accessibility audit carried out in the branch museums of the Art Museum of Estonia in 2013 (Eesti Liikumispudega Inimeste Liit *et al.*, 2013a), recommendations were made with regard to people with intellectual disabilities for both exhibition planning and communication. The analysis resulted in the following suggestions:

- Use methods based on feelings and senses in the preparation of an exhibition, use material or visual communication, simplified language. In addition, make use of pictograms and simplified sign language.
- It is important to treat people according to their age, considering their actual age.
- People with intellectual disabilities are unable to conceal their feelings, so their sincere joy and interest is not uneducated behaviour.
- In education programmes, theoretical parts must be alternated with practical parts and the length of the parts must not exceed 10 minutes.
- Pictorial material may not present several details at once and must be in normal size.
- Pictograms on doors facilitate navigation inside the museum.

Recommendations for communicating with people with intellectual disabilities:

- If they want to talk, you have to give them time.
- Answer questions in simple language and determine whether if the answer was understood.
- All they say and how they say it must be taken seriously. They need to be allowed to finish their sentences, even if it takes a long time or is difficult to understand. Their sentences should not be finished for them.
- In order to understand what they wanted to say, they should be repeated in your wording and then asked if the idea was what they wanted to express.

The need to use easy language when communicating with intellectually disabled people was underlined in the handbook by Kaartinen and Linnapuomi (2017).

Enterprise Estonia (Ettevõtluse Arendamise Sihtasutus – EAS) has published a guidance material for addressing accessible tourism and has taken project-based initiatives to raise awareness of accessible tourism among tourism service providers (Ettevõtluse Arendamise Sihtasutus, 2018). The main prerequisite for improving accessibility is the desire and willingness to notice and understand people with special needs. Dealing with accessible tourism is part of the tourism business. This guide describes the six main phases of the customer journey of a visitor with special needs. 10 key recommendations for improving accessibility for people with special needs are outlined:

- Maximum accessibility must be ensured in the entire enterprise, including parking, toilets, and additional services.

- Accessibility must be considered as a distinguishable marketing opportunity.
- Employees must be provided with special training in order to make them feel confident in communicating with people with special needs. The whole team must be equally competent. Allow employees to make suggestions for improving accessibility.
- Accurate and clear information must be provided about accessibility, and a respective page must be created at the website of the company/institution.
- Information must be presented in as many formats as possible – as text, pictograms, audio files, etc.
- It must be possible to receive useful instructions and necessary information in the proximity of the reception.
- Allow people with special needs to test your product and, if possible, order a physical accessibility audit from an organisation uniting people with disabilities.
- The preferences of a person with special needs must be asked directly from them, not their supervisor. Fulfilling these preferences requires creativity. Always aim at actually communicating with people with special needs.
- Collect visitor feedback.
- If you need specialised advice, contact the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People or your regional chamber of disabled people or an association of people with a specific disability.

The tourism working group of the accessibility task force observed the accessibility needs of both internal and external tourists moving in public spaces and consuming different services (BDA Consulting OÜ, 2020). After mapping the problems, they offered the following solutions:

- Establish the principles of an accessible museum in the Museums Act. Introduce the principle of accessibility into the follow-up cultural policy strategy to be prepared with the purpose of ensuring the accessibility of museums, theatres and other establishments of culture, both physically and in terms of offering a cultural experience.

- Provide training and develop guidance material on how to take into account customers' different needs, how to communicate with different customers, and support the provision of a positive visitor experience.
- Updating the initial guidance material prepared for tourism entrepreneurs (Enterprise Estonia web-based training platform) and make them public and easily accessible to all parties offering tourism services.
- Organise training and information days addressing the topic of accessibility.
- Support the execution of accessibility audits under the coordination of the Estonian Tourist Board based on the comprehensive view of the customer journey. A financing mechanism is necessary for supporting the audits.
- Development of support mechanisms for facilitating the improvement of substantive accessibility of tourism services.
- Introduction of the issue of accessibility into the curricula of higher education institutions and vocational schools (areas of tourism, heritage protection, architects, web developers, culture managers, etc.) to ensure that specialists have awareness of accessibility requirements and standards.
- Develop information regarding accessibility on the Internet. Identify accessible products and services.
- Based on good international practice, establish an agreed sign and marking system in public spaces, tourist destinations, and tourism enterprises.

Various guidance materials and recommendations have been made to improve the accessibility of people with special needs when participating in different cultural events. Some of them specifically concern people with intellectual disabilities.

2. IMPLEMENTED RESEARCH: INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED PEOPLE IN ESTONIAN TOURISM

2.1. Research methodology

The main purpose of the research carried out was to map the experiences of people with intellectual disabilities in visiting museums and, more generally, in travelling. The second purpose of the research was to identify the experiences and needs of museums and various tourism organisations in terms of knowledge and skills in providing services to customers with intellectual disabilities.

The combined method was used to conduct the research, i.e. both the quantitative and qualitative method. Data was collected with a questionnaire as well as semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was prepared for museums to study their experience with people with special needs and more specifically intellectually disabled visitors. In total, the questionnaire had one multiple-answer question and three open-end questions. The semi-structured interview had 17 questions divided into different sub-topics that, according to the course of the interview, were asked in the planned order or improvised order; questions could also be omitted or new ones added.

The sampling of the research was carried out on the basis of the three sub-objectives of the project:

- examine the primary needs and expectations of people with intellectual disabilities when visiting museums and travelling;
- assess the current accessibility of tourism services for people with intellectual disabilities and how accessibility in the tourism sector is understood;
- identify the main problems and obstacles related to the accessibility of people with intellectual disabilities in the tourism sector, including museums.

Based on the above sub-objectives, it was decided to include in the sample organisations working with people with intellectual disabilities on a daily basis (institutions working with people with intellectual disabilities in the city of Pärnu and Pärnu County were included in the sample). In addition to the institutions working with people with

intellectual disabilities, institutions that are the representative organisations of the target group were also included in the sample. The second group of the sample was made up of museums and the third group encompassed various institutions in the field of tourism, including enterprises directly providing services and coordinating institutions.

The sample of the research was made up of institutions working with people with intellectual disabilities (n = 6), museums operating in Estonia (n = 32) and organisations and enterprises operating in the field of tourism (n = 9).

The research was conducted from November 2020 to August 2021.

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Interviews with organizations working with intellectually disabled people

Six interviews were conducted during the research with institutions whose everyday work is associated with people with special needs and intellectual disabilities. The interviews were carried out with the Head of MTÜ Maarjakodu (home for people with intellectual disabilities in Pärnu), Team Leader of the units in Pärnu of the welfare services company AS Hoolekandeteenused (Pärnu), Head of Viira Home (home for young people with intellectual disabilities in Jõesuu), the principal of Pärnu Päikese kool (a school for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities in Pärnu), the Chairman of the Chamber of Disabled People at Pärnu County, and the Head Specialist of the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People. The activities of these institutions are somewhat different, but they all work with people with intellectual disabilities, either children, young people, or adults. Representatives of all these organisations have a long-term experience (more than five years) in working with people with special needs and/or intellectual disabilities. The questions presented to the representative organisations of disabled people, namely the Chamber of Disabled People at Pärnu County and the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People, focused on their activities on raising awareness in the society of intellectual disabilities and increasing the involvement of such people in the society, including the tourism sector. The questions for other institutions focused primarily on their experience with people with intellectual disabilities during travelling, field trips and museum visits.

Their assessment of the overall involvement in society and the community was also examined. The following results of the research firstly provide an overview of the experience and needs of people with intellectual disabilities regarding museum visits and travels through the eyes of the heads and specialists of relevant institutions.

To the question of how people with intellectual disabilities are treated in Estonia, respondents replied that during the last couple of decades the attitude has changed considerably, and the society has become more aware and open. There has been a lot of discussion, also in the media, about special needs, including intellectual disability.

A1: “They are treated quite well now. We have had a good time with our young adults in public, and nobody has looked at us scornfully. I have been asked how I can work with such people, but I always reply: “What kind of people”? They are people just like us with minor differences. They may seem unreserved, but they are very honest and straightforward.”

A2: “The attitude towards people with intellectual disabilities has become better over the last 30 years. There has been a lot more talk of this special need, people have started to notice more, and tensions have eased. The society’s awareness and openness have changed. People are usually afraid of what they are not familiar with. New employees in the social sector are also anxious at first when they start working with people with intellectual disabilities.”

A3: “The media definitely influences a lot, for example people see a television show that affects them, like Puutepunkt, Isolemine, etc. Many people do not associate themselves with this topic and therefore are not aware of it. /.../ I am constantly emphasizing the need for perception and understanding of how to deal, interact and cope with people with intellectual disabilities. The society has certainly become more tolerant in the last 25 years. For example, our institution will soon be 20 years old. Although we are now quite well-known in Pärnu as well, there are still people who do not know we operate here. All in all, things are looking positive, as there is more awareness of people with intellectual disabilities.”

When it comes to awareness and openness, the institutions involved in the research also point out personal experience, which affects people's attitudes and understanding towards special needs. It was also mentioned that although the society is more aware and no-one scorns these people, there is still an invisible line between people with disabilities and so-called normal people. For example, people tend to not prefer sitting next to them or start a conversation. This line may also be linked to the perception that they are different and therefore distinguish from the rest of the community.

A3: "It all comes down to whether people have any experience on a personal level, if they know someone with intellectual disability or there are other reasons for being aware of such disability. This experience may also come from studies. /.../ The same situation is with our interns. Although they have knowledge of the area, they usually admit before practical training that they have not had any personal contact with intellectual disability. /.../ More than half of the people in our population already have a more understanding attitude. For instance, when we take the city bus with our residents and they behave differently, people sometimes look at us. However, this may only appear like that to me. The parents have also said that they have not experienced any unwanted attention when they spend time in public with their children. However, several parents have stated that they do not wish to go out."

A4: "I cannot see any huge shifts. When I searched for recreational activities and hobby groups for my customers before the pandemic, it was suggested very often that they be put in a separate group instead of joining with others, the so-called normal people. The reasons given for this was that they are slower and cannot keep up with some activities. But our customers want to spend time with others. Nevertheless, we have had very good cooperation with some institutions, for example Pärnu Central Library. They have on their own initiative arranged events for our customers. /.../ The society has become more open and aware, but people with intellectual disabilities are still not so easily incorporated."

Attitudes and consideration are also affected by how a person with special needs, with intellectual disability, is understood by others and how independent they are. A person with intellectual disability is strongly influenced by their environment, that is, how familiar and understandable it is for them.

A3: “Children and young people with severe and profound intellectual disability cannot cope independently and require support 24/7. A person with mild intellectual disability who is in a familiar environment and can read the signs in that environment and understand different situations can manage quite well. Of course, there may be different obstacles, for example in rooms as well. In the last 10 years, elevators and ramps have been installed in buildings. People with mild intellectual disabilities can also express themselves verbally. If a person with severe intellectual disability does not express themselves, their language may remain unidentified. In this type of situation, it is difficult for another person to understand them and cope with them.”

Respondents were further asked about possibilities (such as events, activities) for people with intellectual disabilities, where to go and how to spend time with them? The interviewees found no obstacles in this regard – they go everywhere they find interesting and where their customers or residents (people with intellectual disabilities) have wanted to go.

A1: “We have been to exhibitions, museums. /.../ We like to attend concerts, although not all of them listen or belong to the target group of a specific concert. Museum visits have been very pleasant and gone well.”

A2: “We have been everywhere – to the theatre, museums, water centres, bowling alleys, on trips to Latvia and Sweden, for example. We have not missed out on anything because of disabilities.”

A4: “We participate in all kinds of excursions and outings. We have been welcomed well everywhere.”

At the same time, all respondents pointed out that every outside activity requires proper preparation, and above all, considering the needs of the people involved. They also outlined a range of activities that are essential for ensuring that all needs are covered, and that trips and visits go smoothly. However, preparations vary, as everything depends on a specific person and his/her needs. It was pointed out by all institutions that personal approach is significant, meaning that there should be enough supervisors for the

customers to have a sense of security. Areas and facilities for sitting and eating were also considered very important.

A1: “Normally I always call the place we are going to in advance to inform them of our arrival. We also plan our journey carefully because our residents like to swing and ride a carousel. They are big and tall, and some nearly 40 years old, but with a mind and character of a child, we need to make sure not to pass any playgrounds on our way where there may be other children. Kids may say something hurtful. /.../ The possibility of sitting down is important as they need a chance to rest. Not everyone may want to go everywhere and so they may stay behind. We always have several supervisors in the group to assist. There must also be an accessible bathroom nearby and an opportunity to eat. Meals are expected and monitored intensely.”

A2: “We do not prepare extensively, but the daily schedule must be planned – to have a place to stay overnight, if necessary, catering, time for rest and eating, etc. There must also be enough supervisors in the group to address individual needs. Every customer should be considered – their fears, what they like or dislike, etc. – just as with ordinary children. /.../ We have travelled with customers who have no mobility issues and are mentally fairly stable. Going out with kids from normal families is perhaps more nuanced. In our case, we probably pay more attention to bringing along medications and taking them. Most important for our young adults is certainly a precise agenda and a steady pace. Many of our customers come orphanages where daily arrangements have not been very flexible. There may be more flexibility in the daily life when a child lives at home, but we need to stick to our schedule when it comes to the children and young adults living here. Meals must be on time, and in case there are more physical activities, snacks also have to be planned, which is essential in creating a sense of security.”

A3: “Everything needs to be thoroughly planned – what the primary needs are, how the journey is planned, what the mode of transport is, how the breaks are organised, how the rooms are prepared, what kind of opportunities there are, how the catering and the food quality are, what the special requirements are, etc. The primary needs are crucial, so it is only after planning these that we can think further. It is also necessary to schedule breaks, the arrangement of seats in rooms, bathroom locations, and how many supervisors there must be per 1–2 children.”

A4: “Preparation is vital. We have our own Community Work Supervisor who organises all our trips and events. The supervisor always informs us, looks up group prices and discounts, etc. Sometimes we can even go for free. I took our residents to the Car Museum and they asked us prior to the visit how many visitors and supervisors they may expect.”

Every outing or trip requires preparation, but it is equally important to prepare the intellectually disabled customers who attend these planned activities. The respondents were asked to describe how long, how, and what they do to prepare their customers for an outing or a trip? They pointed out that notifying the customers beforehand is essential and they always do that, however, if the outings are shorter and closer to home, they will announce it not as early and more briefly. If a longer drive is planned, the preparation time is longer as well, and the provided information is more detailed.

A1: “It is important to notify them before each outing or excursion. People with intellectual disabilities value the sense of security, and therefore, nothing can be done suddenly or unexpectedly. It is thus necessary to give notify them early in advance, show and explain when, where and what is going to happen and what lies ahead. A note is made to the calendar for them to count the days leading up to the event. If the outing is nearby, it will be enough to notify them two or three days prior. Usually, we start sharing information gradually a few weeks before the activity. They need to be able imagine it – once they see the upcoming outing in the calendar, they can think it through and discuss it with others. /.../ When we go somewhere near home, we plan our journey and make sure we arrive back home in about 1.5 to 2 hours. It all comes down to bathroom breaks and snacks. When we go to a museum, for example, we will inform the place in advance, and try to make sure there are less visitors at that time, because otherwise our young adults become nervous. We are not afraid to go anywhere, but if there are too many people around, it might disturb us. A lot has to do with how fast our customers get tired. /.../ It is tricky to go to the beach because there are usually no bathrooms nearby. Although they often come up with solutions to problems, these might not be acceptable by others.”

A2: “A lot of thorough planning is done. For example, during a birthday party we already think about the one next year – who to invite, what to eat, and so on. When we plan our summer trips, our residents want to know where, why and when we will be going from early on. About a month or two before a trip we talk in more detail about it. It is ideal if

there are already materials to show and introduce to customers to give them an idea of what to expect. I have collected materials to show them. We also try to go to places I already know and have been to before, so that we would not experience any negative surprises. This way we already know where the necessary places are, such as the bathroom. For example, I know where to park the car and how to get to the seaside in Jurmala, which gives our people a sense of security beforehand. /.../ Of course, we have to be ready for unexpected situations, and sometimes we have to prepare ahead in a rush. The most important thing is to make them feel safe and secure during any trip or outing, and to have fun together. /.../ They do not tolerate uncertainty. When it is suddenly urgent to reorganise our plans, they ask a lot of questions, but generally accept the changes. When their questions are not answered, it creates anxiety in them. They need us to explain and justify why things or situations have changed.”

Preparations for upcoming outings, excursions or trips is important, so institutions working with people with intellectual disabilities pay a lot of attention to it. Each institution has developed its own methodology for sharing prior information to their customers, but regardless of the details of various special needs, there is a similar desire for simple and pictorial information to which tourism organisations and cultural institutions could pay particular attention. For example, they could take illustrative photographs of their institutions both inside and outside, and these photographs should be available to anyone seeking information about the place.

A3: “In particular, it is essential to share that part of information of the outing that has to do with the child or young adult themselves and their experience. We always inform them in advance. But if information about the trip or outing causes anxiety, we share only little. We approach them on an individual basis. We use the PCS image system to give information to the children, but also look for more images online. We always have the images with us so we can calm them down and constantly show them what the journey will be like. It is also important for ordinary people to follow an agenda, to have pre-information, etc. In general, lack of knowledge and unfamiliar places are unsettling and therefore, clear and structured information on where we will be going and what we will be doing, etc. is needed. /.../ If institutions made the images themselves, it would be very convenient for us to use them. In general, once we have a schedule, we will add the

pictures, PCS images, and other information; we even draw, craft, and so on. We try to gather a lot of information online. Generally, companies do not offer pre-information on their websites. However, whenever we go anywhere, we tell the place about our needs and agree very precisely on what we want and how we need it. Usually, we have come to an agreement everywhere. Children with severe intellectual disabilities are often separated from the rest of the group and, so that they can do activities that are more suitable for them. Overall, it would be supportive and considerate if all institutions created additional material to help prepare a visit. It would also help the elderly and children, to whom the material would make the visit clear and easy.”

A4: “We start talking for weeks in advance about where we will go and what we will do, we show pictures of the place and talk about possible activities. Planning the meal breaks or picnics is a separate process. Everyone can have a say in what they would like to bring along.”

Next, the respondents were asked to bring out in more detail the experiences and needs that would help people with intellectual disabilities to better obtain the information exhibited in a museum, or to get a good experience of the visit. The respondents emphasized time and concentration time. In the case of intellectual disability, it is essential to ensure that standing in one place while listening does not last for too long, and that the length of the entire activity is monitored. An hour-long excursion was considered long by the respondents. A better option are activities lasting for about half an hour and combining the use of different senses, so that, in addition to listening, visitors with intellectual disability can look at, touch or make something, etc. The use of different perceptions was considered very important.

A1: “It is difficult to answer that. They cannot concentrate for long; however, a few of our customers can spend a very long time putting together jigsaw puzzles and usually express their emotions very clearly and strongly once they get the pieces together. The same person may not be able to focus on other things at all. /.../ Half an hour is suitable for their excursions and study trips. A break should follow for them to rest and reflect, and then they are ready to continue doing something. Of course, it all depends on what is being shown to them. For example, they can focus longer when they spend time with animals, as it involves using different senses. This also helps them later to remember what

they experienced. Touch is one of the most important senses for young adults with intellectual disability.”

A3: “With supervision, they can focus for approximately 30 minutes and can listen to about five minutes of talking. Talking should be related to some activity. Understanding a text can be difficult. Half-hour activities are efficient, such as crafting something. /.../ We spent about 1.5 to 2 hours at the Estonian Road Museum, but this included walking and just spending time there by looking around. They can be active for 30 minutes; the following activity should be rather low-paced. Outside, they can stay focused for longer. Drinking and eating and going to the bathroom are also crucial.”

A4: “Active time is not long, even half an hour may be too long. If alone, they can walk through a museum in five minutes, but with supervision and talking and getting their attention, they will focus for a much longer time. It is important to activate different senses and perceptions.”

Museums, hiking trails and many sights often provide information as text, and so the respondents were able to comment on how much people with intellectual disability view and understand information labels and boards. Pictograms and easy language were explored as a separate topic.

A1: “Pictograms could be included because they help understand and obtain information better. Some of our customers read, some spell, and their levels are different. Labels and texts in general could be larger and clearly visible. The information in public spaces could be simplified so that it would be easy to spot and follow.”

A2: “Their levels are very different – some of them read, some do not, some read simple text only. Pictograms, as well as easy language, make it easy for customers with different levels to obtain information. So far, we have not seen pictograms at museums and exhibitions.”

A3: “We use PCS images when working with children. We, too, often use signs to navigate and help us find something. You can see the sign system here and there, but the society could use it more, as it helps people with intellectual disabilities to find and understand information better. /... / Although we have traffic signs, institutions could use

signs or images to mark when they are open – this would provide clarity and better understanding. /.../ It has been scientifically proven that people with intellectual disability struggle more with reading and understanding uppercase letters than lowercase letters. That is something that should be considered when creating a text in easy language. /.../ It would be good to display an image and a text next to it for someone who cannot read. Generally, people with mild mental retardation can read a simple short sentence with up to five words. The same goes for talking – sentences must be short and straightforward, without multiple commands and a lot of information all at once. Instructions for activities must be simple and follow one step at a time. /.../ Information boards and labels are too complicated. Labels on store doors with one or two words are simple and easy to understand for people with intellectual disabilities. In contrast, the information labels at sights, for example, contain a huge amount of knowledge. A person with intellectual disability will not even start reading it because they are unable to grasp it. Basic information with pictures and some figures would offer a lot and be sufficient. Not all the information regarding a sight is necessary to know – just a few facts, details would already make a place memorable or interesting for them. /.../ As the understanding, perception and thinking of young adults and adults with intellectual disabilities is at the level of a 3–4-year-old or a 10-year-old at best, it is important to consider how to present information to them. /.../ When we usually approach a child in a soft, childlike way by using baby talk, a person with intellectual disability should be treated as an adult while taking into consideration that their level of understanding is the same of a child. Such a childlike approach must be omitted. It is important to attract interest, to be keep them motivated.”

According to the respondents, it is often important for customers with intellectual disabilities to simply carry out a different activity than usual. The goal for doing this is to experience different emotions from usual ones in a safe environment, and to have the opportunity to share something new with others. Memories and impressions from each activity that can be associated with different places, events and activities, are important.

A1: “It is important for young adults to escape for a while from their everyday environment. /.../ It is important to share impressions afterwards so that everybody gets the opportunity to express themselves. For example, museums should provide the opportunity to give feedback in a creative manner, for example by having visitors express

themselves in colours, etc. rather than filling in a questionnaire. When we ask our customers what they liked, they mostly say they liked everything. Even then, it is valuable to recall what they saw, and if something was touched or done differently, it will be remembered better.”

A2: “Sharing emotions and mirroring afterwards is vital. After a visit to a museum or an exhibition, there should be the opportunity to colour some workbooks or worksheets that could be used to recall what a visitor saw or experienced. A simple workbook would be useful also for ordinary children. It would have many purposes – it could be a souvenir, a memory of the place visited, and, on the other hand, an opportunity to learn and gain knowledge. We have not really seen these types of options in museums, exhibitions, or zoos.”

A3: “When a place visited hands out a thank-you note, medal or picture or some other item, it becomes an important thing to look at and show others. It is especially nice if the option to create something is offered, but museums do not often provide it. It is particularly important for a child or adult with intellectual disability to receive personal memorabilia, perhaps a thank-you note or a medal, but that is rarely offered. Buying a souvenir from the shop is not quite the same.”

A4: “The emotion of going somewhere is the most important thing. It does not matter always where they go as long as they can go. The bus ride is an experience itself. What matters is precisely the sense of security, meaning that there are enough people who can be there for them. /.../ For some, thank-you letters and badges are very important. It depends on whether a person is a collector of these type of things. Even more important is a photo to remember the experience by, as it can be up and viewed later. It should have something to do with the person themselves: this place and I. Photos matter, we make a lot of them, and they want to look at and share them and show them to others. /.../ It is a good idea to create a photoshoot corner where you can take more special photos.”

Trips and excursions always involve the expectations and needs of the participants. The respondents further highlighted the aspects that are important to them when they go somewhere. All of them admitted that simplicity, friendliness, and the inclusion of different senses are essential for providing a memorable experience for people with

intellectual disabilities. It was mentioned that animals always bring joy and intellectually disabled people can be around them tirelessly. Importantly, it was pointed out that people with intellect disabilities need immediate attention and someone who is dedicated to them and listens to them. At the same time, direct communication with a person with intellectual disability is also vital for noticing and understanding their surroundings.

A1: “Not everyone likes the same things – some people like animals very much, some are afraid of them. Some want to be in the water, some panic. They like to walk, do different things and are ready to try everything, but must have a bathroom nearby and know where and when they can eat. For example, during a visit to Kihnu island, they were eager to visit Kihnu Virve’s café. They do display emotions, but only briefly. /.../ They want to be cared for and undivided attention. When we go somewhere as a group, we do not always have a supervisor for everyone, which may lead to boredom or lack of interest. However, if there is immediate attention and the opportunity to communicate, it motivates them immensely and is important for them. They may not always notice things on their own and understand the beauty or difference in something they see at an exhibition, and in this case, it is essential to bring this to their attention and explain to them what they see.”

A2: “Animals provoke the greatest emotions; they talk about it for a long time. There is no equally good example of a museum. They will remember things from the museum that they recognize. They always ask about every item in the exhibition and then we explain everything to them in detail.”

A3: “Everything was perfect at Õisu Manor. Our residents with intellectual disabilities like animals a lot, so making contact with animals matters to them very much, may it be riding or patting them. It offers them the best emotions and joy. /.../ When we make something that has a result, for instance when we use clay or cook food, it is a great experience. They like making things by hands. Overall, the involvement of different senses is extremely important.”

A4: “People with intellectual disabilities need to be spoken to in a completely ordinary, open manner. They ask very simple questions, so the other person should also be open, tolerant, friendly, supportive and helpful.”

During the interviews, the respondents were asked to highlight additional topics that are important to them for improving the accessibility of people with intellectual disabilities in the society more generally, including in the tourism sector and museums. This question was answered differently, and two interviewees addressed terminology as a separate topic, that is, what term should be used when talking about people with intellectual disabilities without labelling them but at the same time referring to them understandably.

Awareness of special needs regarding their services was discussed separately with the respondents. The need for labelling or informing was discussed in letting people with intellectual disabilities, their families and supervisors know in advance that the services provided are also suitable for people with intellectual disabilities.

A2: “The word “witty” should be used instead of intellectual disability. It is not like they have a disability; their mentality is simply different. They have more of something but less of something else. If we can change the attitude of our whole society, it will also affect the museums. When we talk about them like special people, then questions arise what is special about them and how it affects their behaviour and perception, and so on. Once it becomes clear how these people perceive the world, institutions will know how to provide services, materials and expositions in a different way. Changing the society begins with small steps.”

A3: “The guide’s preparation is important – if the guide knows to expect children with intellectual disabilities of different ages, they can plan their activities accordingly. For example, the bread museum has many attractions – you can move around on your own, do things yourself, and it is captivating. There is also a need to design information fields and add these in exhibitions. Information about accessibility is vital, meaning that there should be a label indicating that the specific services are suitable for people with special needs, including those with intellectual disabilities. This also suggests that entrepreneurs have been thinking more broadly when developing their services. /.../ When picking a place to eat, we look for different labels or signs, such as the wheelchair symbol. Otherwise, I call and ask about the capacity and the food. Homepages usually include the wheelchair symbol. We have also seen the accessible toilet symbol on homepages. Other aspects are usually personal arrangements which have no separate symbols. However, how could an organisation express that they are using easy language? /.../ In fact, there

is a need for it because the target group is wider, such as children, the elderly, etc., to whom information presented in easy language is important because it makes information simple and understandable.”

By examining the accessibility of people with intellectual disabilities in museums, the tourism sector and society more generally, everyone realised that although our society has become more open and tolerant, awareness still remains low. Often it depends on people’s personal experiences.

A3: “More awareness is needed in museums. It is certainly necessary to inform the guides working in museums and raise general awareness. Alternative communication is an issue that needs attention.”

A4: “Clearly the level of awareness depends on the information released by the media. Everyone knows that there are people with intellectual disabilities among us. We do not hide them in our institution but bring them out to the society. There is less awareness and openness on a personal level because of the lack of personal experience. It is also our mission to integrate these people more in our society and raise awareness of their part in it.”

To summarise, the representatives of institutions working with people with intellectual disabilities found that, although the society has become more open and they can go everywhere with their customers, the whole process could be simplified if cultural and other institutions met them halfway by adapting their services to customers with different needs. This would show hospitality and willingness to welcome different people.

Separate telephone interviews were conducted with two organisations representing disabled people. They were asked about the current situation on accessibility, needs and the activities they have carried out previously or are doing now to improve the accessibility of people with intellectual disabilities in the society.

Both organisations were asked how they assess the accessibility of people with intellectual disabilities in Estonia. Both respondents acknowledged that although awareness has improved, the topic has been somewhat neglected. Movement disability and visual impairment seem to gain more attention than other impairments.

A5: “We have little material and knowledge in this regard. We would be very grateful if the accessibility of people with intellectual disabilities in tourism is further researched.”

A6: “Although awareness has improved lately, it is still rather low. /.../ Knowingly improving accessibility has not been focused on. More attention has been paid to people with mobility disability and visual impairment and their accessibility but hearing impairment and intellectual disability have remained in the background.”

Based on the above, the respondents were asked whether there are currently sufficient activities and initiatives that would help to make the needs of people with special needs (including intellectual disabilities) more visible? Both interviewees found that this topic is addressed, although not in depth – it is sometimes random and would require additional resources and consistent focus. The respondents considered it significant to raise awareness and to reach decision-makers who have the power to highlight this topic as an important issue in the society.

A5: “There could always be more awareness, it is endless work to reach people. There should be more information on special needs and intellectual disabilities, and it must be readily available. Instead, the understanding reaches entrepreneurs in the course of work, through personal experience, and it is only then that more attention is paid to this issue. This means that if the problem is acknowledged, information and possible solutions will be sought. If the topic remains unfamiliar, people do not know what to make of it.”

A6: “Raising awareness has already been dealt with and, for example, the Kumu Art Museum, the Estonian Maritime Museum and the Estonian Museum of Natural History have made disabled access audits and designed their expositions and spaces accessible. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Culture, in April (2021) the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People organised a training titled “Accessible culture for all – what do I need to know and consider?” where inclusive design was a topic, and one part of it was also devoted to the accessibility of people with intellectual disabilities. There were many representatives of museums and cultural institutions who welcome people with intellectual disabilities and have no fear for them. However, there is a need for more awareness on how to provide better service for such people. /.../ Currently, accessibility development has been impacted by the situation arising from COVID-19, which has

affected cultural institutions – many have to deal with more pressing issues, such as surviving the crisis, etc.”

It was also discussed which further steps should be taken and what kind of work needs to be done in order to increase the accessibility of people with special needs in the society more generally and in the tourism and culture sectors. Both respondents once again referred to the need to raise awareness so that intellectual disability is more visible and understandable. This should be done continually through seminars and workshops, but it is even more important to raise awareness among politicians and decision-makers who have more opportunities to address and acknowledge accessibility for people with special needs, and amend the legislation concerning accessibility.

A5: “No law specifically states that services to people with intellectual disabilities must be available. The activities so far are thus relatively random. /.../ Along with the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People we have organised introductory events to local authorities, guides, etc., regarding accessibility and special needs, including intellectual disability. We have talked about how to provide services these people, and so on. It is certainly necessary to continue with this activity.”

A6: “Important work has been done with the establishment of the accessibility task force whose final report will reflect the main needs and suggestions for subsequent activities. It is important to reach decision-makers so that the report is not left in the drawer and could be implemented. /.../ In our action plans, the topic of accessibility is one of the priorities of the coming year, as well as planning network training and several other activities. /.../ We work together with different sub-associations a lot. Various EU documents also ban discrimination, which means, among other things, that public and new premises must be equally accessible for everyone. We have a lot of work to do in this regard.”

Based on both conversations, the necessity to raise general awareness of the needs of people with intellectual disabilities and to tackle the issue consistently were highlighted. The institutions directly working with people with intellectual disabilities and coordinating institutions both confirmed that the situation has improved considerably over the last few years and that people with special needs are not generally alienated in

the society any longer. However, this target group is often neglected in the development of services and in finding possible benefits.

2.2.2. Museums' experiences with intellectually disabled people

A total of 175 museums (Statistics Estonia, 2021) were operating in Estonia in 2020. The Estonian Museum Association is the organisation that brings museums in Estonia together. In addition to officially registered museums, different history rooms, etc., have been created across Estonia where history is exhibited but they have not been registered as museums. The mailing list of approximately 600 members of the Estonian Museum Association was used to carry out this research. A questionnaire was sent to the list at the end of November 2020 with the aim of gathering the experience of museums with visitors with intellectual disability. 32 museum representatives replied to the questionnaire.

At first, the representatives of the museums were asked how often they encounter people with special needs in their everyday work. The responses revealed that almost all museums have had experiences with them, of which 22 respondents (69%) replied “from time to time” and 9 respondents stated that there is contact, but very rarely. Only one respondent stated that they had not been in contact with people with special needs.

The respondents indicated that they have had contacts with visitors with mobility and intellectual disabilities the most (25 respondents). Visual impairment (20 respondents), multiple disabilities (15 respondents) and hearing impairment (13 respondents) were mentioned less. Visitors with mood, attention deficit hyperactivity and autism spectrum disorders were also singled out once.

The respondents were then asked how and what adjustments have been made to their normal work arrangements to welcome customers with special needs. The respondents to the questionnaire are characterized by a similar attitude, i.e., they value all visitors, and they attempt to make the museum visits interesting according to everyone's needs. There are many possibilities for this, for example, temporary ramps are made to allow people with mobility disabilities to enter the museum. If it is not possible to move around the museum due to mobility disability, the museum can go to the group of people with special needs as one respondent had done. One respondent pointed out that due to mobility being

limited at their museum, visitors with special needs are often welcomed outside normal working hours to allow them enough time and a peaceful environment for their visit.

On three occasions, respondents indicated that they have adapted their museum programme or journey for visually impaired visitors, but four respondents also indicated problems regarding their museum exposition and visit not being suitable for visually impaired people.

For visitors with intellectual disabilities, support has mostly come from their caregivers and supervisors who help keep the group together and understand the topics. The supervisors are also important for explaining the characteristics of a specific disability, including how long visitors with special needs are able to concentrate. It was considered important that the museum employee is open and friendly, adapts the program according to the visitor and involves different senses, including manual and cognitive activities.

Although the respondents pointed out that they always try to meet visitors' special requirements, they encounter problems. The main concerns were:

- if there is a one-time contact with visitors with intellectual disabilities, there is no information on how to approach such visitors and prepare a programme;
- information on the special needs of visitors is not always shared;
- the rooms are not built in a way that enables convenient navigation, especially in old historic buildings without elevators and with steep and narrow stairs;
- more knowledge and skills are needed to work with people with special needs;
- more investment is needed in facilities and equipment to provide a good experience for visitors with special needs.

In summary, museums are open and ready to welcome visitors with special needs but consider it important to gain additional knowledge and skills to work with such guests, opportunities for investment and cooperation with the supervisors of visitors with special needs, including sharing information.

The questionnaire also surveyed the respondents on what developments they have made to better welcome visitors with special needs. Most of the developments were related to improving physical accessibility. The installation of ramps and making the premises

accessible to people with mobility disabilities was mentioned on ten occasions. In addition, there were various solutions for supporting visitors with mobility disabilities: elevators, the possibility of ordering a special vehicle, offering additional assistance, and the possibility of renting a wheelchair and support frame. It was mentioned four times that an accessible toilet had been built.

In addition to visitors with mobility disabilities, museums have made many adaptations for the visually impaired. One of the solutions mentioned was the Adamson-Eric Museum's previous project on making art "visible" (In the framework of the project, materials introducing the museum were dubbed, relief drawings introducing works of art were made, etc. (Adamson-Ericu muuseum, n.d.)

The respondents added that adapted tours ($n = 3$) had been made for visually impaired visitors, lighting had been changed to make it easier for them to see the exhibition ($n = 1$), information in Braille had been added ($n = 2$), separate spatial plans had been offered and tactile teaching aids had been created ($n = 1$). One respondent also pointed out the following adaptations: large texts in easy language, embossed floor markings, the possibility to zoom in the text on the website, the possibility to take an interactive tour, the development of descriptive translation.

The respondents have developed various audio solutions for people with hearing impairment ($n = 2$), created additional textual and pictorial materials ($n = 1$), and offered individual headphones and adapted excursions ($n = 2$).

In their reply, three respondents stated that they try to gather a lot of prior information about the groups arriving to design excursions according to the special wishes of the guests. One respondent also pointed out that before designing a new permanent exhibition, different interest groups are contacted in order to identify the various expectations and needs when creating the exhibition. Another respondent pointed out that the new exposition is planned to be made in cooperation with the specialists of Töötukassa (Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund), the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People and the Chancellor of Justice in order to be accessible to all people with special needs. Another respondent also referred to future plans and would like to make adjustments if better opportunities arise.

Adaptations for people with intellectual disabilities were not particularly highlighted, but one respondent indicated that they have offered adapted tours according to specific needs. Two respondents mentioned attending trainings to better understand special needs and develop their work accordingly. Six respondents from the museum representatives stated that they had not made any developments because they did not feel a direct need for it (n = 1), there was no information that anything had been done (n = 1) or it had not been possible to make adjustments due to their museum building (n = 4).

In general, the representatives of the museums were open and positive in their answers. Respondents have had contact with visitors with special needs and are always ready to make changes to provide the best visitor experience. In order to better achieve these experiences, self-education, additional information and tools for the development of the premises and the exposition based on the principle of accessibility were considered necessary.

2.2.3. Interviews with tourism organisations

In addition to institutions and museums working with people with intellectual disabilities, various tourism organisations were included in the research to better understand the situation related to accessibility. The following organisations in the tourism sector participated in the research: Enterprise Estonia (EAS), SA Läänemaa (Läänemaa Foundation), Visit Saaremaa (Saaremaa Tourist Information Centre), MTÜ Eesti Maaturism (NGO Estonian Rural Tourism), Taevaskoja Puhkekeskus (holiday centre in Taevaskoja), Hiiumaa Turismiliit (Hiiumaa Tourism Association) (Hiiu Gourmet), Ida-Viru Enterprise Center and South-Estonian Tourism Cluster. Tourism specialists from Pärnu and Viljandi City Governments also commented on the topic.

Similar questions were asked from all organisations, i.e., how much attention institutions pay to people with special needs, including intellectual disabilities. Secondly, it was examined whether any activities have been carried out to improve accessibility in their organisation or region, alone or with partners, and if yes, which activities?

The responses revealed that there have been rather few activities. Institutions that provide services directly to customers have had a lot of contact with people with special needs,

including intellectual disabilities. Usually, the needs and opportunities of the customers have been thoroughly discussed in advance and a compromise has been made to provide the best service. At the same time, the institutions admitted that there is rather less knowledge and awareness and they are happy to receive more information on how to better treat visitors with special needs.

A specialist from Enterprise Estonia (EAS) participated in the research who said that there are no measures or initiatives related to the topic of accessibility (especially for visitors with special and different needs) at this moment. As most of the money for the development of people with special needs and their services is located elsewhere (not in Enterprise Estonia), their opportunities are also limited. Until now, they have rather made efforts to raise awareness in the sector through seminars or in cooperation with other organisations. They also pointed out that they assume that universal design (e.g., the development of Fat Margaret) is applied in the development of services and destinations from the very beginning. During their consultations with companies, specialists of Enterprise Estonia try to direct entrepreneurs to think more and more about accessibility of their services or destination, because this guarantees their suitability and convenience for others as well.

The specialist from Enterprise Estonia pointed out that the topic of accessibility is and will be included in various master classes and, if possible, in measures, as well. Thus, a hospitality programme (trainings for entrepreneurs) is being planned in which one of the seminar topics is accessibility for visitors with special needs (includes different needs, not only mobility disabilities). In addition, the measure ReactEU is being prepared, a part of which involves the development of services and products also in terms of accessibility in the context of the product or service.

As for previous activities, the specialist from Enterprise Estonia co-operated with the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People and organised seminars together to raise awareness. In addition, they have prepared guidance materials for tourism organisations in planning their activities. There are currently no on-going seminars on this topic, but discussions are held over readdressing it.

In addition, the specialist stated that the Environmental Board has dealt with the issue of accessibility quite extensively in terms of national parks, hiking trails, protected areas, and nature in general as a destination. They also supported the Educase project “Chest of Senses” (“Meeltemätas”) (Keskkonnaamet, 2020).

The specialist mentioned that they have had more experience with physical accessibility but has also been involved with developments and recommendations for visually impaired and hearing-impaired visitors. There is a lack of experience with visitors with intellectual disabilities and the services developed for them. The Tourist Board of Enterprise Estonia does not handle this disability separately, but addresses disabilities in a combined manner. In general, they found that intellectual disability receives less attention in terms of tourism services and products (also among entrepreneurs, as the development of physical spaces may seem easier and more comprehensible).

The researcher then approached various institutions and organisations that coordinate the tourism sector to examine accessibility. The answers received predominantly reflect that the accessibility of people with special needs is addressed to a rather low extent and the focus is mostly on people with mobility disabilities.

The representative of MTÜ Eesti Maaturism (NGO Estonian Rural Tourism) stated that they have not addressed the issue of people with special needs separately in their activities, but they were convinced that their members had had contact with such people and are able to comment on this topic. The representative of the organisation asked the members on their Facebook group whether they have had experiences with customers with intellectual disabilities and what their main needs are in relation to this topic. Three companies of the group members responded to the questions, two of which were asked to participate in additional telephone interviews. All three respondents have come into contact with people with intellectual disabilities in their everyday work and find that if the needs have been precisely discussed in advance and they have prepared their team, then there are no problems. At the same time, they emphasized that it is important to continually provide information, organise trainings, and develop the skills of employees in the tourism industry to work with people with special needs.

The issue of accessibility for people with special needs was also studied among various Estonian tourism clusters. Among the respondents to the survey, SA Läänemaa (Läänemaa Foundation) who organises the work of the Haapsalu Tourist Information Centre and tourism in Haapsalu and Läänemaa, had dealt with the topic of special needs the most. The representative pointed out that Haapsalu has always considered accessibility very important, precisely because of the Haapsalu Neurological Rehabilitation Centre (HNRK). Fra Mare and Laine sanatoriums have also contributed. However, the focus is more on wellness spas now – e.g., Fra Mare Thalasso SPA and Hestia Hotel Haapsalu SPA. Next, the specialist described how Haapsalu has contributed a lot to accessibility in its developments and, for example, emphasised that there are more ramps in Haapsalu than elsewhere. One may see them at the entrances to the town’s institutions, public toilets, and so on. Both the rehabilitation centre mentioned before and Viigi School in Haapsalu have brought the issue of accessibility to attention, and therefore the contribution of companies in that region is more evident.

The representative of SA Läänemaa said that they have not done much regarding tourism marketing, but they have partners who have accomplished a lot in the field. Here are some examples:

- In 2020, an accessible activity park was opened at the Haapsalu Neurological Rehabilitation Centre (HNRK) (Puhka Eestis, n.d.-a);
- In 2020, an accessible toilet was built at Paralepa beach (Raigla, 2020);
- In 2014, an accessible bridge was added to the swimming area at Väike Viik (aivaronline, 2014);
- The hostel of Haapsalu Vocational Education and Training Centre also has an accessible elevator (Haapsalu Kutsehariduskeskus, n.d.);
- There is a lifting platform at Haapsalu Kultuurikeskus (Haapsalu Cultural Centre) so that everyone can participate in cultural events.
- Haapsalu is one of the few cities in Estonia who has compiled a list of objects that are accessible for disabled people called “Accessible Haapsalu” (Puhka Eestis, n.d.-b)

In 2021, Haapsalu participated in the competition “2021 Wellbeing City”. Although Haapsalu did not reach the final, the town’s activities in terms of accessibility were noticed (NewCities, 2021).

All of this indicates that Haapsalu and SA Läänemaa have contributed greatly to improving accessibility, but the focus is currently more on mobility disabilities rather than intellectual disabilities.

Representatives of Saaremaa, South Estonia and Ida-Viru County admit that they have not dealt with the issue of special needs, and the same goes for their cooperation partners. They highlight the activities of SA Lääne-Eesti Turism (Foundation West-Estonian Tourism) in the project “Nature Access to All” where the city of Pärnu also participated by enabling improved physical access to Pärnu beach (Pärnu linnavalitsus, n.d.).

The representative of Ida-Viru County points out that their area is not well-known among this target group, although several of their cooperation partners have welcomed people with intellectual disabilities, for example Alutaguse Matkaklubi (Alutaguse Hiking Club) has adapted hiking trips accordingly to the group’s characteristics: a shorter programme, exchanging information with emphasis on cognition, more group leaders per group, etc. According to the respondent, the issue of accessibility emerged from a survey about the visitor journey after which they sat down with entrepreneurs and local governments to share the results of the survey. During these discussions, they put forward specific proposals for designing the public space and improving accessibility. However, the issue of accessibility for people with special needs is not purposefully addressed in Ida-Viru County.

The South-Estonian Tourism Cluster did not comment on the topic at length but forwarded the questions to the 18 members of the cluster, of whom two museums responded. Both pointed out that the institutions have been recently renovated and opportunities have been created for people with mobility disabilities. No special adjustments have been made for people with intellectual disabilities, but the museum programme is adjusted if necessary and with prior notice. One of the respondents stated that although they have not made any direct adjustments, their information stands are in large print and easy to understand. They also have audio guides. Another respondent pointed out that their main concern involves often having no information in advance about a visit from people with intellectual disabilities. In this case, it is difficult to fulfil all the special wishes that the visitors may have.

The tourism specialists from Pärnu and Viljandi who participated in the research stated that they are not directly involved with accessibility of people with special needs, specifically with intellectual disabilities. Pärnu City Government participated in the project “Nature Access to All” during which Pärnu beach park and the beach itself were made accessible to people with mobility disabilities, but they have so far not targeted people with intellectual disabilities. The specialist from Viljandi also pointed out that they do not deal with the issue of accessibility in their everyday work but follow the requirements of accessibility in the construction of new buildings. Various institutions have a greater role to play in increasing accessibility, doing so primarily under their own responsibility. For example, Ugala Theatre is more accessible after it was renovated, and they also offer a translation service. The cultural centre Sakala Keskus acquired a stair climbing aid to support the activities of the elderly club, as it is located on the 2nd floor. The initiator was the head of the centre. At the Kondas Centre, some of the paintings are tactile and include descriptive texts on how to explain the paintings to visually impaired people. However, the respondent acknowledged that the focus in developing accessibility is still on the mobility disability.

It is clear from the information gathered from tourism organisations that accessibility means first and foremost physical accessibility, and despite the experiences so far, the needs regarding intellectual disability and accessibility have not been particularly recognized and addressed.

CONCLUSION

People with special needs, including people with intellectual disabilities, love to go on trips and participate in various cultural events and activities. They like to visit museums and exhibitions because different activities help bring some variation in their daily routine, to socialise and give meaning to their lives. Due to their special needs, access to culture, tourism services, and museums may be difficult, or even impossible, because the services, premises or information provided are not designed in a way that a person with special needs can reach them.

The purpose of this report was to examine the current situation regarding accessibility in the Estonian tourism sector, including museums, for people with intellectual disabilities. Attention was paid to the needs and expectations of people with intellectual disabilities toward their visitor experience, the general accessibility of museums and tourism, and what has been done or needs to be done next in order to improve accessibility.

In Estonia, different definitions are used to describe intellectual disabilities, but the main classification stems from the international classification of diseases. Organizations that work with this target group prefer using different terms that do not label or insult their customers. One institution found it more reasonable to use the clear term “intellectual disability” for clarity, while another calls its clients “witty”.

Estonian legislation defines the levels of severity for disability, and although statistics show that the total number of people with intellectual disabilities has decreased, the number of children with severe intellectual disabilities has increased. In legislation, intellectual disability or, in other words, intellectual disability is not directly addressed; disability and special needs described more generally in different legal documents. In the various documents of both Estonia and the European Union, reference is made to the need for accessibility and non-discrimination, but specified requirements are not detailed for different special needs. Somewhat more specifically, the needs of people with special needs are addressed in different guidance materials, e.g. the “Designing and Creating an All-Inclusive Living Environment” prepared in 2012 by the Estonian Association of Architects, Estonian Design Centre and the Estonian Academy of Arts, and the handbook issued in 2017: “Events for all! Manual for hosting an accessible and diverse cultural

event” (Kaartinen & Linnapuomi, 2017). Since 2013, attention has been paid to the accessibility of museums in the Art Museum of Estonia and its various branch museums, where accessibility audits were carried out and based on these improvements in accessibility for different target groups with special needs were made. The last known accessibility audit was done in 2021 at the Estonian Health Museum.

The research revealed that despite awareness in the society of people with intellectual disabilities, the institutions in direct contact with customers find that their knowledge of the needs of people with intellectual disabilities and related customer service skills is still low. This notion is also supported by the accessibility audits carried out, according to which improvements are needed in the audited museums to improve their services for the target group. The museums involved in this research pointed out that, although many of them occasionally come into contact with customers with intellectual disabilities and try to offer them the best possible service, they still feel that additional information, know-how and tools are needed to enhance the existing space and exposition. Accessibility audits were not mentioned by any responding museum staff about their museum. The institutions who participated in the research and work with people with intellectual disabilities, unanimously stated that they have had many positive experiences visiting museums and various tourism organisations, but this has always required a great deal of preparatory work, which would be easier if the services had already been designed as universal and inclusive.

Somewhat surprisingly, the research revealed that institutions coordinating the tourism sector have been relatively limited in their activities with regard to the accessibility of people with special needs in the tourism sector. At the same time, they consider the issue of accessibility important and thus have organised various seminars and information days, discussed the matter and taken the first steps to improve accessibility. These currently mainly concern better access for people with reduced mobility to various tourist services, including museums. Intellectual disability has been addressed as part of seminars where institutions in the tourism and culture sector have been introduced to the topic of customers with special needs. Enterprise Estonia (Ettevõtluse Arendamise Sihtasutus, 2018) has issued separate guidance material to better service people with special needs aimed at raising awareness of accessible tourism in tourism entrepreneurs. The tourism

working group of the accessibility task force (BDA Consulting OÜ, 2020) covered the topic, as well, and outlined a number of recommendations for improving accessibility for people with special needs in tourism. Representatives of associations for disabled people who participated in the research pointed out that one of the most important activities still is raising the society's awareness of the existence of people with special needs, their needs and access to different services.

In providing services, representatives of museums and tourism organisations involved in the research noted that they adapt to the wishes of groups/visitors and are flexible. There is not much prior preparation, as there are rather few such visitors, and they sometimes lack knowledge for any specific preparations. However, the heads of institutions working with people with intellectual disabilities say that although they are well received and their wishes accepted, various preparations could be made in advance to provide them with suitable services. The same services would then also be suitable for children and the elderly. Recommendations included the use of different senses in service design, the use of easy language, pictograms, having more openness and willingness to communicate in a friendly manner. The respondents acknowledged that, although people with intellectual disabilities are no longer disrespected in the society, there is still a so-called line between the intellect-disabled and ordinary people, and something is holding the latter from sitting next to them or just talking to them.

Based on the above, it may be suggested that Estonia has become increasingly open and tolerant towards special needs, including people with intellectual disabilities, and more and more efforts are being made to increase accessibility for people with special needs. However, accessibility still concerns, to a large extent, improving opportunities for people with reduced mobility. The accessibility of people with intellectual disabilities must continue to be discussed, information and skills need to be shared, and entrepreneurs convinced how they could benefit from the development of accessible tourism.

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