

**Mindful tourism services  
for people with mental  
impairments**

Intellectual  
Output 1:

Intellectual Output 1:  
Situation Scan of regional tourism services  
for people with mental impairments



Mede gefinancierd door het  
programma Erasmus+  
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<b>Project title</b>	Mindful tourism services for mentally disordered people
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<b>Leading organisation</b>	Thomas More Mechelen-Antwerpen (E10181600,BE)

#### a. Intellectual output 1 summary

A situation scan gives information of the **current status of tourism services for people with mental disorders in the participating regions**. This is needed to understand the standpoint of current situation and what are the expectations and needs to go forward. This output is mostly needed overview of existing situation on regional, national and international level. The scan is the result of desk research and a series of interviews with organisations and experts working with people with mental disorders. It also includes a comparison and discussion of international good practices. This output gives clear and accurate understanding of accessibility of tourism services for mentally disordered people and overview about the challenges and needs of mentally disordered people.

#### b. Tasks

- 1) **Desk-research, international literature research** on tourism services related to intellectual/mental disabilities, related to sightseeing and other tourism activities (good and bad practices in the participating countries as well as countries from outside the project consortium).
- 2) **Interviews (5-10)** with organisations and experts working with people with intellectual disabilities
- 3) **Interviews (5-10)** with tourism organisations (front-runners and laggards regarding tourism services for people with intellectual disabilities). These interviews will include general tourist stakeholders on one hand and a particular group of tourist service providers on the other hand (in case: museums, attraction park)
- 4) Writing **a report on regional tourism services** for people with intellectual disabilities
- 5) Making an **visually attractive situation scan** for each participating region.
- 6) Preparation of **communication and dissemination** of the situation scan during transnational project meetings and the teaching and learning activities
- 7) **Feedback to regional stakeholders** regarding the regional situation scan. In this phase of project, lay most of responsibilities on partner HEI's: Thomas More Mechelen-Antwerp, University of Tartu and University of Latvia. They are responsible to implement all mentioned 7 tasks. Pärnu Museum, Museum Dr Guislain and Zeit Hotel are involved into tasks 3 and 7 (interview and dissemination of situation scan).

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# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Aim of the situation scan (Belgium)</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Research method</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.1 Pilot study</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1.1 Pilot questionnaire development	4
3.1.2 Pilot questionnaire distribution	4
<b>3.2 Expert, organisation and museum interviews</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.3 Literature review &amp; desktop study</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Desk-research and literature review on mental impairments</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.1 Mental impairments</b>	<b>7</b>
4.1.1 Defining mental impairments	7
4.1.2 The classification of and types of mental impairments	8
<b>4.2 Mentally impaired people in Belgium</b>	<b>8</b>
4.2.1 Profile of people with impairments in Belgium	8
4.2.2 Belgian organisations assisting persons with mental impairments	9
4.2.3 Efforts made towards accessible tourism in Flanders, Belgium	10
a. The Flemish accessible tourism label	11
b. Education and information for the Flemish tourism sector	11
<b>4.3 Accessible museums</b>	<b>12</b>
4.3.1 Mindful museums	12
4.3.2 Literature review regarding museum accessibility for mentally impaired	13
4.3.2.1 Barriers to accessibility	14
4.3.2.2 Making museums more accessible for people with mental impairments	16
a. Communication	16
b. Guidelines for improved visitor experience	17
<b>5. Results from interviews</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>5.1 The target group</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>5.2 The needs and behaviour of people with mental impairments</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5.3 Guidelines for how museums can become more accessible for persons with mental impairments</b>	<b>22</b>
5.3.1 Information acquisition	23
5.3.2 Pre-visit communications	24
5.3.3 Staff training	25
5.3.3.1 General communication between staff and persons	25
5.3.3.2 Services and communication before a museum visit commences	26
5.3.3.3 Staff services and communication during the museum visit	26
5.3.4 Management of museum tour	27

5.3.5 Making exhibitions fun, interactive and easy to understand	27
5.3.6 Museum facilities and possible future facilities	28
5.3.7 Increasing museum accessibility	29
5.3.8 Creating an appropriate atmosphere	29
5.3.9 Collaborations towards making museums more accessible	30
<b>5.4 Current steps taken by Belgian museums and organisations to enhance accessibility and experience</b>	<b>30</b>
5.4.1 Staff and training	30
5.4.2 Specific museum efforts to create better experiences	30
5.4.3 Accessibility	31
5.4.4 Physical and service adaptations in museum	31
<b>5.5 Current challenges in making museums accessible</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>6. Analysis of good-practice museums</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>6.1 Recommended examples of good-practice museums</b>	<b>34</b>
6.1.1 Belgian (Flemish) museums without specific services and/or facilities for persons with mental impairments	34
6.1.1.1 STAM Gent	34
6.1.2 Belgian museums with specific services and/or facilities for persons with mental impairments	35
6.1.2.1 Design museum	35
6.1.2.2 Huis van Alijn	36
6.1.2.3 Museum Kunst & Geschiedenis (Art & History Museum)	38
6.1.2.4 Mu.ZEE (Museum next to the Sea)	39
6.1.3 International museums with specific services and/or facilities for persons with mental impairments	41
6.1.3.1 National Gallery of Ireland	41
6.1.3.2 Museum of London	42
<b>6.2 Lessons learnt regarding museum accessibility for people with mental impairments</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>45</b>

# 1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organisation, around one billion people (or about 15% of the global population) live with some form of impairment, and this number is increasing. Of the one billion people, around 450 million have some form of mental or physical impairments (World Health Organisation, 2020). In Europe alone, 15% of the population experience impairments, of which 10% are moderate impairments and 5% are severe. In Belgium, 15.2% of people have impairments (Eurostat, 2016).

According to Article 30 of the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations, 2020), "States Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life". They further state that certain measures should be taken so that those with disabilities have full access to cultural materials; that they should be able to enjoy television programmes, theatre and other cultural activities; and that they should be able to enjoy places with cultural performances or services, such as museums, to their fullest. However, making museums more accessible for people with disabilities is not only a fundamental human right, but it can also be beneficial to the European tourism industry and the various countries' economies.

The "Economic impact and travel patterns of accessible tourism in Europe" – study by the European Commission (2014) showed the more than half of the European residents with mental impairment, for instance, travelled between mid-2012 and mid-2013. The total number of trips taken by special care individuals amounts to around 783 million trips within the EU alone (both domestic and intra-Europe travels), thus making such trips around 12% of the European tourism market. The total direct contributions by this travel segment to the European tourism market in 2014 was estimated at 352 billion Euros. The study shows further benefits of the accessibility tourism market in that they tend to travel during off-peak periods; they travel in groups; they are more likely to make return visits; and in some cases, they are willing to spend more than other groups. When taking into account the importance of this market segment, it creates the realisation of the significant gap in tourism offerings, especially at cultural heritage attractions such as museums (Silvia, 2013).

Many museums are working towards making their infrastructure, products and services more accessible for people with impairments which include special, larger parking spaces, ramps to the building, replicas of museum items that visitors may touch and other physical adaptations. Even services regarding how to communicate with the deaf and blind and other staff training can be developed (Montsho, 2020). There are various resources that

guide museums towards being more accessible. For instance, the DBSV guidelines provide precise information (DBSV, 2011), while Demos takes it a step further through visualisations of what the spaces in and around the museum should look like – they also provide guidelines on how museum staff should address people with mental impairments (Demos, 2017). The COME-IN!-project (Interreg Central Europe, 2019) developed guidelines and a training handbook for museum operators towards creating more inclusive museums for people with mostly physical impairments. It is clear that a multitude of guidelines exists towards making museums more accessible (in terms of service and physical offerings); however, it seems that there is an extra level of complication when examining mental impairments (Hadley & McDonald, 2018) – not to say that a multitude of studies does not already exist. [Click here](#) for a further list of current projects.

Frequently, research and museum accessibility upgrades focus either on making more accessible for the physically impaired or by focusing on specific mental impairments. One example is the Azure project which worked towards making artwork and social experiences at museums more accessible for people with dementia and their families (Azure, 2019) which applied at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. The T-Guide (or Tourist Guides for People with Learning and Intellectual Difficulties in Europe), focuses on another aspect, which is the special training of tour guides regarding working with people with mental impairments (T-GUIDE, 2015). Another example of breakthrough research is the Creative Differences handbook. This handbook stems from research regarding the impact of music on neurodiversity within the creative industries and provides guidelines on how to incorporate people with various mental impairments into a diversity of situations (Universal Music UK, 2020).

The studies show that certain impairments allow for higher quality outputs within certain fields and that each type of impairment is something that should be seen as valuable. The research conducted on mental impairments is quite broad but also quite fragmented when one aims to apply it in a coherent manner at museums specifically. An important part of this project is to determine to what extent Belgium, and especially the Flemish-speaking region, has taken steps to make the tourism industry, with a special focus on museums, more accessible to people with mental impairments.

## 2. Aim of the situation scan (Belgium)

The main aim of this report is to determine the current status of tourism services for people with mental impairments in Belgium. The results will provide an understanding of the current situation and provide guidelines regarding expectations moving forward. This output will provide a clear and accurate understanding of tourism services for people with mental impairments and an overview of the needs of this diverse group.

To achieve the aim of this intellectual output, a certain number of tasks had to be completed. For this report:

1. **Desk-research** and **literature review** on tourism services related to mental disabilities, relating to sightseeing and other tourism activities (good and bad practices within and outside the project consortium)
2. **Interviews with experts and organisations** who work with people with intellectual disabilities.
3. **Interviews with tourism organisations** (various stakeholders such as museums) to determine current tourism services and needs.
4. To author this current report on **regional tourism services and guidelines** for people with mental disabilities.

After completion of this report:

5. To author a visually attractive situation scan for each participating region.
6. Preparation of communication and dissemination of the situation scan during transnational project meetings and the teaching and learning activities.
7. To provide feedback to regional stakeholders.

The method used to collect the data needed is listed in the next section.

## 3. Research method

To ensure that the situation scan of mental impairments and tourism provided as much information as possible, it was decided that a diverse data collection technique would be followed. The order of research actions is as follows: a pilot study; interviews; literature & desktop study; and results.

### 3.1 Pilot study

An online pilot study was launched, consisting of two online questionnaires (one towards experts in the field of mental impairments and one towards organisations and museums which cater to or attempt to cater to people with mental impairments). The aim of the pilot study was to obtain background information on the needs of people with mental impairments and their experiences when visiting museums.

#### 3.1.1 Pilot questionnaire development

The questionnaires were designed to be short and concise and to obtain key pieces of information which would help guide the research. Furthermore, all respondents were asked for their personal contact information and whether they would be willing to take part in online interviews at a later stage. The questionnaires were created in Qualtrix™. Some of the questions asked included "...what are the specific needs and behaviours of persons with mental impairments who visit tourist attractions such as museums?", or "...what is/are the main type(s) of mental impairment(s) that this research should focus on and why?" and "...what do you think of the current developments (if any) regarding making museums more accessible for people with mental impairments?". Both questionnaires had similar questions, but the focus of the expert questionnaire was more on the impairments and requirements, while the organisation and museum questionnaire focused more on the museums and services. The questions were asked in both Dutch and English. A link was created for each questionnaire, which could then be distributed online.

#### 3.1.2 Pilot questionnaire distribution

The questionnaire links were distributed by sending e-mails directly to experts, organisations and museums. The contact information for these was found through Google searches, government and organisation listings, as well as referrals by other experts, organisations, colleagues and project partners. The e-mail contained a short introduction to the project and requested that the reader click the link and complete the questionnaire. For the experts pilot questionnaire, 7n completed questionnaires were obtained, which contained detailed information. For the tourism organisations and museums questionnaire, a total of 8n responses were recorded. The responses from the respondents were captured



online, downloaded, analysed and summarised. This provided a sense of guidance for the rest of this research. All those who indicated that they were willing to take part in further in-depth interviews were then contacted.

## 3.2 Expert, organisation and museum interviews

For this part of the research, the partners at Museum Dr Guislain played a key role, together with Thomas More University of Applied Sciences. The researchers opted for semi-structured interviews because it allows for clear answers to questions while also providing participants with the opportunity to share additional information that they may find as important for this research. The interviews to place in both English and Dutch; for the Dutch interviews, the Museum Dr Guislain partners translated the content to English. In total, 6n expert interviews and 6n organisation/museum interviews were completed. The participants can be viewed in Table 1. Please note, some of the experts formed part of various organisations and were placed under experts. The interviews included: Experts on mental impairments; tourism organisations; museums; organisations that assist with the integration of people with mental impairments into society such as job-training and placings; organisations focussed on providing recreational activities; and tourguide training organisations.

*Table 1: Details of interviews done*

Experts interviewed				
	Who	Where	Position	When
Exp1	Efi Kalampoukidou	European Federation of Tourist Guide Associates (FEG) & ExCo President	Certified tourist guide in Greece	23 Nov 2020
Exp2	Anouk De Keyser	Vzw Kompas	Holiday organiser	23 Nov 2020
Exp3	Jasmien De Meersman & Katrien	Konekt	Co-researcher	7 Dec 2020
Exp4	Ivor Ambrose	European Network for accessible Tourism (ENAT)	Managing Director	7 Dec 2020
Exp5	Bart de Nill	Iedereen Leest & FARO	Wellbeing Advisor	8 Dec 2020
Exp6	Wim Haeck	Villa Voortman	Coordinator	8 Dec 2020
Exp7	Det Dekeukeleire	Vlaamse Dienst Autisme	Only pilot study input	
Organisations/museums interviewed				
	Who	Where	Position	When
MO1	Marijke Wienen	Hof van Bus (museum)	Expert participation and support strategies	9 Nov 2020
MO2	Jan Van den Meerschaut (group discussion)	Onze Nieuwe Toekomst (organisation)	Project manager	21 Nov 2020

MO3	Marieke De Poortere	STAM Gent	Educative worker	8 Dec 2020
MO4	Liesa Rutsarty	Huis van Alijn & Het Industriemuseum	Accessibility, participation & outreach	8 Dec 2020
MO5	Mieke Dumont	Speelgoedmuseum	Head of public services and coordinator of daily functions	4 Dec 2020
MO6	Nancy De Mits	Vzw Demos (beschut wonen) (organisation)	Mentor	16 Dec 2020

### 3.3 Literature review & desktop study

With the guidance obtained from the pilot study and interviews, a clear direction was provided for the appropriate literature and documents that would be needed for this study. During the search for information, Google searches, Google Scholar, as document and website analyses were done, which helped provide a better understanding regarding the current situation regarding the accessibility of museums for people with mental impairments, as well as what needs to be done.

In the next section, the results from the pilot study and interviews will be discussed collectively. The thematic analysis was loosely based on the main research questions, with additional topics addressed that came to light during the interviews. However, for the purposes of this report, the researcher will first discuss the desk research and literature review, followed by the interviews.

## 4. Desk-research and literature review on mental impairments

This section of the report examines the current literature and available statistics on mental impairments and accessibility in tourism. It will firstly examine the literature regarding mental impairments, as well as various publications applicable to this study. Furthermore, it examines the current needs of people with mental impairments when taking part in tourism activities (with a special focus on museums) as well as the steps that have been taken to make museums more accessible. The main focus will be on Belgium to better understand its current situation.

### 4.1 Mental impairments

#### 4.1.1 Defining mental impairments

Various terms and definitions for people with mental impairments exist. Be it a learning disability, physical brain damage resulting from mental and social disabilities, or other mental illnesses. The Collins Dictionary (2008) defines 'mental impairment' as "... a condition in which a part of a person's mind is damaged or is not working properly" and "...a loss of mental capacity that requires you to have substantial supervision to maintain your safety and the safety of others". In Belgium (VAPH, 2021), the official definition was adopted from the American Psychiatric Association by the *Vlaams Agentschap voor personen met een handicap* (Flemish Agency for persons with a handicap) and states that a mental impairment is "...a developmental disorder that includes limitations in intellectual functioning as well as limitations in adaptive functioning on a conceptual, social and practical level".

According to VAPH (2021), the Belgian authorities view mental impairments from a socio-ecological perspective in that one has to examine a person in his or her daily living situation. This is because they do not simply view a mental impairment only as a disorder in cognitive functioning but rather examines it from the need of a person to take their place in society in how they take part in everyday activities. Thus, the functioning of a person is viewed as an interaction between the person and their environment whereby personal- (age, gender etc.) and external factors (available resources and activities) can influence their functioning. The definition and approach are broad, and it is suggested that one also examine the different levels and types of mental impairments.

### 4.1.2 The classification of and types of mental impairments

In order to diagnose someone with an intellectual impairment in Belgium (VAPH, 2021), three criteria must be met:

1. **The intellectual criteria:** *the person has a clear impairment (IQ 70 or lower) in intellectual functioning.*
2. **The criterion adaptive behaviour:** *the person experiences simultaneously present deficits in or limitations of the current adaptive behaviour.*
3. **The development criterion:** *the restrictions must have started before the age of 18.*

When a person meets the above criteria, they will then be observed by experts who will then rate the extent of their mental impairment. There are four main categories:

- Light (IQ 50-55 to 70-75)
- Mediocre (IQ 35-40 to 50-55)
- Serious (IQ 20-25 to 35-40)
- Severe (IQ lower than 20-25)

If a person has a lower IQ between 70-75 and 85-90, they are not viewed as mentally impaired, but rather indicated as *zwakbegaafd*, which translates to “weakly gifted”.

Some of the main mental impairments recognised in Belgium include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Dementia, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia (DCD), Behavioural and emotional disorders, and Non-congenital brain injury (NAH), for instance.

## 4.2 Mentally impaired people in Belgium

From the literature, it is clear that holiday and recreational experiences form part of basic human rights in Belgium. The campaign slogan *Iedereen verdient vakantie* (everyone deserves a holiday), for instance, is used by *Steunpunt Vakantieparticipatie* which is an organisation consisting of various partners in the public and private sphere that work towards making holidays more accessible to all, irrespective of the barriers to participation they might experience (Iedereen verdient vakantie, 2019). Because recreational time is deemed important, there are also various other actions being taken to make tourism more accessible in this country. This section will take a deeper look at the current state of conditions for people with impairments in Belgium, with a focus on mental impairments.

### 4.2.1 Profile of people with impairments in Belgium

According to the “Disability statistics prevalence and demographics report by Eurostat (2016), around 15,2% of the Belgian population had some form of disability. Furthermore,

the “Disability and social participation in Europe” report (Eurostat, 2001) provide a more detailed (albeit older) breakdown of the disability statistics in Belgium. In 2001, 8.3% of disability cases were moderate, and 4.6% were more severe. When categorising according to gender, 8.7% of women have moderate disabilities, and 2.4% have more serious disabilities. Men have a slightly higher percentage of severe cases (5%) and fewer moderate cases (7.9%). When examining ages, the report reveals a clear trend in that the older the population becomes, the larger the changes of disabilities are. For instance, 3% of people between the ages of 16 and 19 have disabilities, while the percentage is 10,4% for the 35 to 39 age group and 27.3% for those who are between 55 and 59.

#### 4.2.2 Belgian organisations assisting persons with mental impairments

The Belgian government takes various steps to create a safe and welcoming environment for people with mental impairments, either through financial assistance, integration into society and the workplace through training and assistance, lowered (or no) tax for certain services and products, and special care through social security (FOSZ, 2021). There are also various private non-profit organisations that support persons with mental impairments.

- **konekt** – this group works towards ending the stigmatisation of mentally impaired person and believe the there is a job type that each person will be able and willing to fill (konekt, 2017).
- **Kompas vzw** – an organisation that helps people make better life decisions and deals with problems such as addiction (Kompas vzw, 2021).
- **Iedereenleest** – an organisation that takes special steps to ensure that reading is inclusive. They strive towards making reading accessible to everyone, including mentally impaired persons (Iedereenleest, 2021).
- **Nationale Hoge Raad Personen met een Handicap** – Organisation which strives toward the integration of people with disabilities in all parts of society through hands-on assistance (NHRPH, 2021).
- **Onze Nieuwe Toekomst** – an organisation managed by mentally impaired persons to empower themselves and also each other. They tackle problems such as relationships, poverty, coaching and support, as well as politics. This organisation ensures that the concerns and wants of people with mental impairments are discussed and heard (Onze Nieuwe Toekomst, 2021).
- **Villa Voortman** – organisation that works with people with drug addiction and psychiatric illness (Villa Voortman, 2021).
- **DOMOS vzw** (beschut wonen) – an organisation that guides people with psychiatric vulnerability towards living independently and to actively take part in society (Domos VZW).

There are also countless other organisations that assist people with mental impairments to integrate into society as far as possible. Some go even further to incorporate such persons into the tourism industry; to ensure that persons with mental impairments can take part in tourism activities such as tours and museums visits.

- **ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism)** – this organisation function across Europe, also in Belgium, and takes part in research, promotion and practice towards more accessible tourism. They also connect various research studies and their guidelines on their website (ENAT, 2021).
- **FEG (European Federation of tourist guide associations)** – this organisation developed the T-GUIDE, which is a special training manual for tour guides that will instruct them on how to approach people with mental impairments and on how to ensure that these groups of people receive a satisfactory experience during tours and visits, including museums (FEG, 2015).
- **KOMPAS vzw** – An organisation that supports people with mental impairments with accommodation, work as well as leisure time. They create catered tours for people with mental impairments to have inclusive tourism experiences; they also organise museum visits for such groups and also guide them (KOMPAS, 2021).
- **Gehandicapt en solidariteit vzw** – This is an organisation with many functions. It provides adjusted leisure opportunities for people with mental impairments; it helps people with disabilities, their parents and helpers to better understand their needs, as well as other types of support (Gehandicapt en solidariteit, 2018).

From these examples, it is clear the persons with mental impairments are provided with not only support in society but also within tourism. However, to provide a good tourism experience at museums, for instance, it is also important to investigate the steps that museums have taken towards being more accessible for people with mental impairments.

#### 4.2.3 Efforts made towards accessible tourism in Flanders, Belgium

Tourism Flanders is the official tourism authority of the northern region (Flanders) in Belgium. It is a Belgian tourism authority tasked with promoting tourism within the region, as well as the development of tourism products. They do this through direct investments, co-funding and subsidies to facilitate innovation within the tourism sector. One of their main aims is to increase the accessibility of tourism services in the region (**Ghijssels, 2012**).

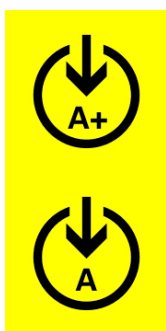
In 1999, a study was launched to determine how accessible hotels in Flanders are; however, negative results were obtained – only a small number of hotels could be considered 'accessible with assistance' (Ghijssels, 2012). Further research was done, which

built up to the establishment of 'Accessibility Action Plan for Tourism Flanders' in 2001. The action plan worked towards an inclusive approach, which means that travellers with impairments should have equal access to tourism. Their action plan included three main points of focus: 1) Improvement of physical accessibility; 2) Sensitisation and training; 3) Obtaining reliable information regarding the current state of tourism products.

A host of funding and subsidies allowed for renovations and new construction across Flanders to make accommodation more accessible, improve public transport, toilets, and parking spaces, to name a few. Tourism Flanders invests between €3 and €3.5 million annually towards a more accessible environment. To better communicate information about the facilities and attractions, they developed the Flemish accessible tourism label (VisitFlanders, 2020).

### ***a. The Flemish accessible tourism label***

According to VisitFlanders (2020), there are two designated labels that help indicate accessible holiday accommodation, tourist offices, visitor centres and even conference facilities. For accommodation and other buildings, the 'A'-label is used.



#### **The A+ label**

When buildings contain the A+ label, it means that people with disabilities can easily and comfortably access and move around in the building.

#### **The A label**

Buildings with this label provide basic accessibility for visitors. It is possible that in some instances, a person might need additional assistance to get around.

This label takes various aspects into account, including access from the public road, entrance and reception, dining areas, toilets, bedrooms, multifunctional rooms, access routes, front desk and desk furniture, as well as information carriers and devices, for instance. A central website has also been created where potential visitors can indicate their requirements; then they will be provided with the appropriate information regarding such places (Toegankelijk Vlaanderen, 2019).

### ***b. Education and information for the Flemish tourism sector***

VisitFlanders (ToerismeVlaanderen, 2020) has a dedicated website with course material on specific information for hotels, restaurants and cafes, cultural centres, green areas as well

as hiking routes. These guidelines are all based on physical impairments. Additionally, they also provide a detailed manual for tour guides regarding all aspects of impairments, including how one should communicate with people with mental impairments. They also provide a detailed webpage for tourists who would like more information regarding accessibility in terms of the label, planning a trip, selecting accommodation, activities, care and service, transport, travel stories and tips, as well as brochures (VisitFlanders, 2020).

When taking into account the strides that were made in Flanders to make it more accessible to people with impairments, there seems to be a clear lower level of attention focussed on people with mental impairments – information seems fragmented.

## 4.3 Accessible museums

As mentioned earlier, all people, including persons with physical and mental impairments, have the fundamental right to and should be afforded the chance to have full access to cultural materials, which include museum visits (United Nations, 2020). In this section, the researcher will examine documents and literature pertaining to accessible museum visits. Questions such as “What can museums do”? “What have they done”? and “How well does it work”? will be answered as far as possible.

### 4.3.1 Mindful museums

Mindfulness is a complete process where one pays attention to the present to create an experience that is beneficial for mental health by focussing attention on thoughts, sounds and feelings. Through mindfulness, one can help people connect with art and other exhibitions in museums (Coates, 2021). A mindful museum is a responsible museum with a heightened sense of social, environmental and economic stewardship. Such organisations are aware of social issues and adjust their management models to function in parallel with the community it finds itself in (Janes, 2010). A mindful museum has active engagement with persons and communities, which it represents, as well as a shared responsibility. Some of the main characteristics of a mindful museum are listed below (Janes, 2010):

1. **Synthesis over process** – A museum needs to prefer synthesis over process; listen to other stakeholders and custodians of the exhibitions. It is more about a collective than collections.
2. **Values** – Idealism, humility, interdisciplinary, intimacy, interconnectedness, transparency, and awareness of the community and environment are vital values, instead of peer recognition and professionalism.
3. **Internal organisation** – Internal organisation should reflect increased awareness.



Staff should display emotion, imagination, intuition and reflection.

4. **Rapid response groups** – Permanent groups within an organisation with fingers on the pulse of possible changes in society, the environment or within management structures which can quickly analyse, understand and apply changes where needed.

5. **Branding** – Branding should focus on being community-centric and attempt to find solutions to local issues. Values such as collaboration, inclusiveness, diversity and consciousness should be displayed.

6. **Public programming** – Create collaborative forums with wider community groups, even those who might be non-museum innovators (examples include filmmakers, writers, storytellers, social activists, public agencies and other non-government organisations).

In essence, for the purposes of this project, museums should be open to input from all persons, including those with mental impairments and be mindful of the manner in which displays are planned together with a specialised approach to service delivery. This is all easy to say, but how can a museum become more mindful, especially towards groups who are traditionally less likely to experience museums as mindful and accessible? For this reason, the researcher will examine current literature regarding accessible museums, especially focused on people with mental impairments.

#### 4.3.2 Literature review regarding museum accessibility for mentally impaired

People with impairments have often been termed the “absent citizens”; this term comes from cultural beliefs, material relations and common social practices, which often stigmatises people with impairments. This leads to this group of people often being absent from museums and some cultural activities. Traditionally, when museums attempt to become more accessible for people with impairments, such adjustments are mostly physical in nature in that they become more accessible for people with physical impairments through structural adjustments (Hadley & McDonald, 2018); less explicit emphasis has been placed on the requirements for services and programmes for visitors with mental impairments (Flynn, 2013).

Luckily an increasing number of academics and governments are beginning to pay more attention to accessible tourism, which includes the study of how to make tourism more accessible for people with mental impairments (Silvia, 2013). The *Tourism for all* approach in Europe is also an approach that is being adapted more widely; it states that tourism should be planned in such a way so that everyone can participate in it, regardless of locomotor and sensory capacities (Crîșmariu & Oana-Diana, 2017). Silvia (2013) further

states the importance of the disability market segment in terms of the beneficial economic consequences that might accrue. But what is accessible tourism exactly? According to (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011, pp. 10-11), “accessible tourism is a form of tourism that involves collaborative processes between stakeholders that enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of designed tourism products, services and environments. But why is it that so many tourism attractions still struggle with accessibility issues?

#### **4.3.2.1 Barriers to accessibility**

According to Silvia (2013), accessibility tourism can have a variety of barriers for special need tourists. Some include little to no information on accessibility and special facilities; it is difficult to find accommodation that is completely accessible; it can be difficult to book accessible accommodation; the cost of caregivers can be high (or there might be none available); the site itself might be inaccessible; the information about accessibility might be fragmented; as well as other financial constraints. Eichhorn and Buhalis (2011) add to this by stating that staff attitudes and the ability to interact with people around them are also major constraints. From this, it is understood that clear, concrete information on accessibility should be available, staff should be well trained regarding communication with impaired persons, and costs to the special needs tourists should be kept to a minimum.

To better frame the barriers to accessibility, various authors have attempted to categorise such barriers. Back in 1987, Smith (1987) attempted to categorise the main barriers for travellers and identified three dimensions of limitations: *intrinsic barriers* (as results of tourist’s level of cognitive, physical and psychological function); *environmental barriers* (external limitations such as attitudinal-, architectural, ecological-, transport-, and rules and regulations constraints); *interactive barriers* (reciprocal interaction between the tourist and the immediate surroundings – focusing on the interaction between the guest and host). In 1991, Crawford et al. (1991) further developed the *hierarchical order*, which identified three constraints: *intrapersonal constraints*; *interpersonal constraints*; and *structural constraints*. To simplify, a summary of internal (the persons with disabilities) and external (tourism supply) is made.

#### **Internal constraints (special needs tourist)**

Some of the internal constraints by the tourists with special needs are summarised in this section (Smith, 1987; Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Fisher, Chacon, & Chaffe, 2019; Tomey & Sowers, 2009; Springer Link, 2010):

*a) Level of cognitive function (intrapersonal constraint)*

Cognitive functioning refers to peoples' mental abilities regarding thinking, learning, decision-making and attention. People with mental impairments have lower levels of cognitive function, meaning that they will have a different experience in terms of learning and interests compared to those with better functioning.

*b) Physical function (intrapersonal constraint)*

This includes physical abilities such as walking, reaching for things, hearing, and vision. People with physical disabilities find it more challenging to move around and experience an attraction as compared to those who have no disabilities.

*c) Psychological function (intrapersonal constraint)*

This includes a person's emotions, skills, mental health and behaviour. This means that psychological variations can create different visitor experiences for persons.

*d) Interpersonal constraints*

These are constraints that take place due to interactions with other persons, including friends, family, and colleagues, for instance.

*e) Structural constraints*

These include external pressures that make it challenging for people to partake in tourism activities. Lack of opportunities and a lack of disposable income are some examples.

**External constraints (tourism supply)**

Various other authors conducted further research on possible external constraints (restraints caused by the tourism supply-side. Collectively they discovered the following constraints (Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005; Turco, Stumbo, & Garncarz, 1998; McKercher, Packer, Yau, & Lam, 2003; Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011):

*a) Architectural barriers*

The include physical barriers at the attraction or accommodation: steps; inaccessible rooms; inaccessible bathrooms; restrictive appliances (cannot reach or cannot control wirelessly); and front-desk counters that are too high.

*b) Ecological barriers*

Exterior obstacles such as: uneven footpaths; and tree roots that stick out of the ground.

*c) Transport barriers*

This includes a lack of variety of transport available; the difficulty of getting onto a bus or transfers between flights.

*d) Legal barriers*

This is mostly when the rules and regulations do not allow people with special needs to bring the equipment they need into attractions, accommodation etc.

*e) Communication barriers*

Difficulty in communicating with persons with disabilities (both at their homes and at the destination).

f) *Attitude barriers*

Service providers might not know how to communicate with special needs persons; they might portray negative, unwelcoming attitudes; unawareness of needs, lack of knowledge regarding what peoples' needs are (some products and services are standardised).

g) *Information barriers*

This can include a lack of information on accessibility; inaccurate information; information that has not been updated; difficulty in locating information (not clearly stated on the websites or at sites); websites that are difficult to read and navigate.

h) *Cultural issues*

The management of a tourism attraction might not truly care about persons with disabilities. This can be caused by a lack of education and training, as well as a disregard concerning legislation, access provision and special services.

The barriers to accessible tourism are now understood, but the current situation in Belgium, especially the Flanders region, still needs to be analysed.

### **4.3.2.2 Making museums more accessible for people with mental impairments**

#### **a. Communication**

There are various guidelines for communicating with people who have mental impairments (ToerismeVlaanderen, 2020). Communication starts even before the museum visit by means of a *Museum Access Statement*, the appropriate manner in which one should speak to people with mental impairments, as well as how to communicate information effectively.

#### ***The museum access statement***

According to ENAT (2014), an Access Statement is a document or webpage that is created to describe all the available services regarding accessibility at a venue or attraction. It is usually mostly text-based, but it can also include photos and diagrams. Potential visitors can then, for instance, visit a museum's website and easily locate information regarding the level of accessibility and make a decision regarding whether to visit the attraction or not.

#### ***Talking with persons with mental impairments***

According to the Queensland Government (2021), communication is a basic human right which is also true for people with impairments; they should also be allowed to express

feelings and to understand communication from others. Therefore, there needs to be some form of means of communication available. To date, various guidelines exist regarding appropriate communication with such persons (ToerismeVlaanderen, 2020; Queensland Government, 2021; ACED, 2017).

- Speak a **very general Dutch** (or applicable language). Speak at a slower rate while using simple, clear words.
- Speak in a **normal tone of voice**.
- Do not **talk to them** as though they are children – don't be patronising.
- **Listen closely, be patient and polite**.
- **Don't pretend to understand**. Ask the person to repeat or expand on what they said if need be.
- If they don't understand, **try to reword** what you are saying.
- Ask **short, concrete, direct questions**. Avoid asking complex, multi-layer questions.
- **Provide enough clear information regarding a visit, excursion or journey before it takes place**. It provides more structure. If changes are made, inform them as soon as possible and also explain the reasons why the plans might have changed.
- **Provide short, concise information**. Think about what information is really important to know and what they might want to know.
- Only provide **further details if they ask for it**.
- It is **okay to make mistakes** when talking to such persons; apologise and continue with the conversation.
- **Don't assume that assistance is needed**, rather ask the person first if they need it.

### ***b. Guidelines for improved visitor experience***

The following guidelines are found in the Flemish guide *Gidsen en rondleiden van personen met een handicap* (Guides and guided tours for people with a handicap), which is used as training material for Belgian tour guides (ToerismeVlaanderen, 2020).

- Where possible, work with a **fun "assignment"**. Use photos or drawings. It helps focus their attention. They are also more excited if they are aware that they will be able to take something tangible home.
- Ensure that **tours and assignments are not too long**. Switch between question moments and recreational free time.

- Persons with mental impairments often examine objects from a 'global perspective', thus missing details. By providing **focused observation assignments**, it allows them to focus.
- Make sure each participant has **seen what you planned for them to see**. Even if they do not fully understand something, they might still enjoy it.
- Only **discuss things that you are examining in a specific moment** instead of referring back to something they might have seen a few minutes prior.
- Make use of **comparisons and examples** to ensure that they find it easier to understand.
- Attempt to show objects, plants and buildings **in their original environment** that they are/were found – a picture can help.
- Many people with mental impairments are **sensitive to the atmosphere** of a place. Pay attention to their moods.
- Use **interesting objects and colours** to 'package' the story you would like to tell. Physical objects and costumes help with this.
- Keep an eye on possible **triggers for anxiety attacks** (such as small stairs, too much noise etc.) and be available to support them (by holding out your arm for them to hold onto).

## 5. Results from interviews

In this section, the results from the interview are discussed, which provide a valuable contribution to understanding the current situation regarding the accessibility of museums for people with mental impairments. The results of the pilot study and interviews for the experts, organisations and museums have been integrated to form a holistic idea. This chapter will firstly examine the focus regarding the possible target groups, followed by the specific needs and behaviour they might have and how museums can adapt accordingly. Then, the current steps that have been taken by museums and organisations in Belgium will be discussed, ending with the current challenges still being experienced regarding a more accessible museum experience.

### 5.1 The target group

The first thing that becomes abundantly clear from almost all the interviews is that the museums should not aim towards becoming more accessible for a specific target group – museums should rather take a global approach. This means that the focus on the current market remains, but that certain adaptations are made to make museums more physically accessible, as well as to provide services for those with mental impairments. It is better to determine what attributes most people with mental impairments have in common and then focus on those. To make a museum more accessible for one type of impairment might stigmatise such persons and be unfair towards other groups.

There exists a vast spectrum of differences within each mental impairment type (Exp2 & 5). Exp3 states that museums should be aware of the big differences between people and impairments and that it is okay not to please all. Furthermore, Exp4 warns that the type of impairment is far less important than the type of experience that is offered. One should rather take general things into mind, such as accessibility, awareness and training of museum staff and an adapted museum offering (Exp5; Exp6; MO4). Think about universal design in infrastructure, service and learning (Exp3; MO3). However, Exp5 indicates that some persons with mental impairments might come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are less likely to visit – special attention could be paid to making the museum more accessible and welcoming for them.

Exp2 is responsible for organising holidays for people with mental impairments and also acknowledges that it is almost impossible to group people according to mental impairment types – here, a different approach is used to group people with mental impairments, to ensure optimum experiences. They divide people into 4 groups according to the level of

disability they might experience due to mental and physical impairments and plan specific holidays that will be most appropriate per group. These groups range from light mental disabilities to severe disabilities.

Group 1: People with **minor mental impairments** (*this group consists of people who have mental impairments but are still able to be employed within the current workforce, they can live independently in terms of looking after themselves, and they have no physical impairments*).

Group 2: People with **minor to moderate mental impairments** (*this group consists of people who have minor to moderate mental impairments, they are still fully independent regarding looking after themselves. They also have no physical impairments but might find it more difficult to function in a workplace*).

Group 3: People with **minor mental impairments, together with a form of physical impairment** (*this group consists of people with light mental impairments together with a physical impairment; they require support for looking after themselves and experience an adapted travel-tempo; attractions and accommodation need adjusted facilities*).

Group 4: People with **moderate to severe mental impairments with a form of physical impairment** (*this group has moderate to severe mental impairments, together with physical impairments; they require greater care to look after themselves, a slower travel-tempo; they need adapted services as well as a constant care-take*).

### Target group:

People with light to moderate mental impairments who would like to visit museums

- Don't focus on a specific type of mental impairment
- Focus on minor to moderate mental impairment in general
- Determine the needs most mental impairments might have in common

## 5.2 The needs and behaviour of people with mental impairments

The situations of people with mental impairments are so diverse that it is almost impossible to divide them into different behavioural segments; it is “like shooting with a cannon on a mouse” (Exp5). Even within a specific target group, a very broad spectrum of differences can be present. Exp2 finds that it works best to rather let persons with mental impairments travel in groups (normally seven persons, plus two tour guides). There are, however,



collective needs that are applicable to most people with mental impairments.

The main requirement for these groups is to have an enjoyable, new experience “in the company of family or friends, like any other person” (Exp4). They (their families, friends or themselves) require clear contact information when any questions arise; understandable communication with clear vocabulary, short sentence (if possible, accompanied by picto or drawings) (MO2); clear indications of exits, toilets and duration of visits. They would like to be allowed to touch and interact with objects (Exp3). One needs to keep in mind that many of them cannot read or read well, so they require a picture with very little text (Exp2). They always want the experience first; learning is secondary (Exp2).

Furthermore, people with mental impairments, in general, prefer quiet and well-lit spaces without crowds and too much noise. They need to be able to sit and rest (café or private room) as their attention cannot be kept for too long (breaks are important). It is advised that they always travel in small groups and with someone who understands their needs (carers), who would be able to communicate it to museum staff. Other activities such as painting and other arts and puzzles are fun – they learn through entertainment and not theory. They do not like scary places, such as dark dungeons or caves. They also have a need to touch items to really experience it and learn. The parents, especially, want to be sure that the museums will be safe (Exp1). Some mental impairments, such as people with autism, normally have “context blindness”; they cannot understand the context of and exhibit as fast as others.

Below are some of the characteristics that summarise the results of all the interviews – more specific guidelines will be discussed in the next section.

#### a. Predictability of the museum visit

It is important for this target group to be well prepared for the visit; they need to know what they can expect. They want to know what will happen when they arrive, what they will see, what activities they will be able to take part in, as well as what will be allowed and/or not. Sufficient information is needed before a visit (online, for instance) as well as when arriving at the museum.

#### b. Clarity in communication and expectations

Clear, easy language during communication; easy to read text in museums; timing (when what will happen) and clear routes, for example.

### c. Hospitality

Friendly reception and service at the museum; service without judgement; a good level of understanding of needs from the staff. Appropriate levels of staff training are required.

### d. Stimulations

They require an appropriate amount of stimulations. Too many stimulations (sounds, images, lights, crowds etc.) can lead to stress, while too few stimulations can do the same (for example, a large open white wall with a single painting). The level of stimulations should be adaptable to an extent. Many suggest a quiet room where they can sit, relax, talk and reflect.

### e. Context blindness

Some find it more difficult than others to understand the context between objects shown and the stories connected to them. Always try to provide more context in some manner through additional images, activities or stories.

### f. Entertainment

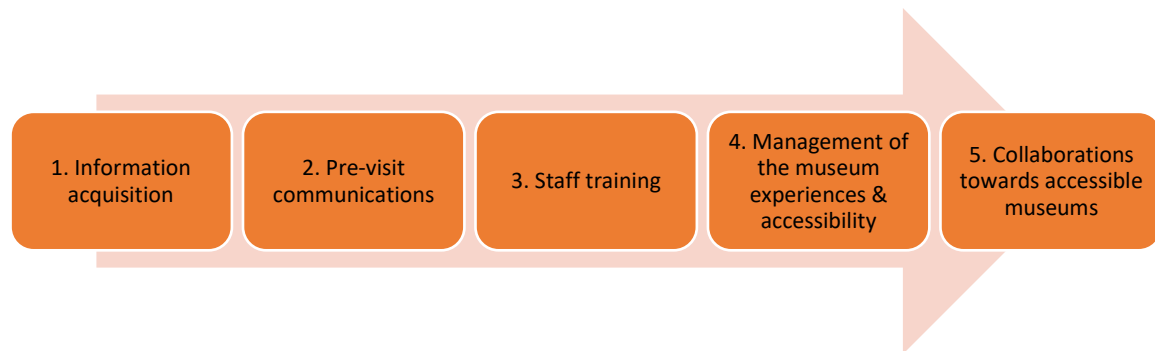
To have a fun experience is the main reason why they might want to visit a museum; an educational experience is secondary. Interactive or task-based experiences give them a sense of visit purpose, and they will be more likely to have fun.

## Needs and behaviour:

- Predictability of museum visit
- Clarity in communication and expectations
- Hospitality
- Stimulations
- Contextual blindness
- Entertainment

## 5.3 Guidelines for how museums can become more accessible for persons with mental impairments

From the interviews with the experts, organisations and museum representatives, various recommendations. This includes the logical steps in a visit, from information acquisition, pre-visit communications down to how to manage and experience.



### 5.3.1 Information acquisition

In this section, everything regarding the acquisition of information regarding a museums' offerings is discussed. Based on the information that is provided, people with impairments, their family and friends, or caretakers decide if they should visit or not. It is therefore important that the marketing of museums are accessible – it should be easy to find and be detailed. EXP3 warns that some museums tend to “hide” such marketing as some perceptions might exist that it could hurt the image of the museum or make the museum seem like a museum that is only open to people with impairments. To battle this, it is suggested that the museum is rather marketed as a place that is accessible to as many people as possible.

According to the interviews and literature, one of the best ways to communicate the level of accessibility of a museum is through the museum access statement (EXP1; EXP4; MO3; MO4).

The **access statement** is a dedicated website page or document which provides as many details as possible regarding the accessibility of a museum – it helps create an idea of predictability, which is vital for the target group. It helps parents and caretakers to determine how safe the museum is for persons who might have mental impairments. It provides information regarding:

- The route to the museum;
- Special parking;
- Suprastructures to make access easier for people with physical impairments;
- Available services and products for people with mental impairments regarding staff training, exhibitions;
- It suggests quieter times at the museum;
- It details special facilities;
- The types of interactive experiences that are provided;
- It provides information on who can be contacted to organise a visit and to ask additional questions or make requests;

- Materials should be provided to make the expectations of the trip clearer – this can include images, videos, pictograms or interactive online material;
- It shares up-to-date information – the information should be accurate and thus updated on a regular basis. If a certain exhibition is, for instance, promised, then it should be delivered.

Some examples of access statements include:

- <https://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.news.1074>
- Access Statement | Pantou and <https://www.amth.gr/en/visit/accessibility>

If the person with mental impairments, their parents, friends or caretakers decide that they will visit the museum, there will have to be some pre-trip communications that need to be had in preparation.

### Access statement:

- Provide an easily accessible piece of information on website or brochures
- This page or document should list all products and services that the museum has available for people with special needs
- The access statements should be updated on a regular basis

### 5.3.2 Pre-visit communications

After deciding to visit a museum, certain communications might need to take place. According to the participants (EXP1; EXP3; MO3; MO4), advanced coordination between the museum, caretakers, parents and persons with mental impairments will allow for an improved visitor experience. They recommend that the museums develop and provide a special form that potential visitors can complete beforehand to indicate any requirements they might have.

#### *The contents of a pre-visit questionnaire:*

Potential things that can be listed include a need for special staff (trained to work with people with impairments, or the appropriate manner of communication), the types of impairments that visitors might have, the date and time of visitation, parking close to the museum. They should also indicate what types of stimuli might work good, or should rather be decreased (objects, lighting and overall controllable atmosphere). The potential visitors can also indicate their age, type and extent of impairment, and the level to which they can read, speak and hear, for instance. Notes regarding context blindness can also be made. Persons with special needs also usually need the assistance of a caretaker or parents to

organise a visit for them – they quite often don't go through with a planned visit if they have to organise it on their own (EXP6).

The museum can then communicate the most appropriate visitation times, special parking and access areas. They will be able to adjust aspects that can be adjusted and notify the potential visitors if certain things cannot be applied. It is also important for the museum to provide the contact information to reach staff who will be able to assist.

### Pre-visit questionnaire:

- Ask basic socio-demographic detail.
- Details regarding the impairment.
- Specific services that are needed.
- Contact information.

### 5.3.3 Staff training

It is vital for museum staff to receive some form of training before they receive visitors with impairments. This includes the provision of a better understanding of body language, asking if assistance is needed, and verbal communication. This involves communication in general; communication before the museum visits commences as well as during.

#### 5.3.3.1 General communication between staff and persons

Various guidelines exist pertaining to the communication between the museum staff or tour guides and persons with impairments (ToerismeVlaanderen, 2020; Queensland Government, 2021; ACED, 2017), as previously listed in this document. However, the participants placed special focus on the following main guidelines:

- From front-desk to cleaning personnel should receive some form of training. A cleaning person might be trained on how to greet such persons and also to quietly inform other staff of persons who might need additional assistance (EXP1; EXP5; MO3; MO6).
- Always be **warm and welcoming** – a simply **smile** decreases possible anxiety (MO1;MO6).
- Ensure that staff members can **speak/communicate clearly** (such as in Dutch) (EXP2;MO2).
- **Don't talk down to the persons** (like when speaking to a baby) – rather use regular language, where you select words that might be more general (EXP2;MO2).

- **Be understanding** - When a child is a bit louder than other children, don't shame the parents. Make the child and parents feel welcome by stating that it is allowed.

### 5.3.3.2 Services and communication before a museum visit commences

- Know what **additional information to ask from caretakers** (EXP2).
- Staff at reception should be well prepared if a person with impairments enters. Be aware of who to call to help out and what questions to ask the parent(s) or caretaker. Suggest the most bright or calm rooms (Exp1).
- **Brief visitors** on exactly what they can expect during their visit. They need to know: how long it will take, what they will see, where they will rest, and at what times these activities will take place – the visit needs to be predictable (EXP1).
- **Don't let them wait too long** to start exploring; they can lose interest quickly (Exp6).

### 5.3.3.3 Staff services and communication during the museum visit

- Always be **available to answer questions** (MO1) or to **take requests** from caretakers (EXP2).
- **Staff awareness** during visits is critical – be aware of the visitors and identify situations where assistance can be provided. Always ask if assistance is needed and don't presume (Exp5).
- If a staff member is a **good storyteller**, they should facilitate the experience (EXP2).
- Rather **communicate in stories or jokes** instead of strict theory. Instead of stating "In 1876...", rather state "A very long time ago..." (EXP2).
- Always **communicate in a positive manner**. If an exhibition has a terrible history, rather highlight the eventual good that might have come from it (MO3).
- Context-blindness – Not everyone can make a link between objects and a theme. As sound might, for instance, not be enough to create understanding. If staff need to create context, try to tell a story in different manners until it seems like the visitors are happy (MO4).

## Staff training

- Treat special needs persons as persons, but adjust language level slightly.
- Ensure visitations are predictable.
- Be observant and know when to ask if assistance is needed.
- Be kind, funny and entertaining.

### 5.3.4 Management of museum tour

The participants furthermore highlighted a few general guidelines that can be applying during the planning and execution of museum visits:

- Keep in mind, a 2-hour visit might result in only a **thirty-minute tour**. They need to relax and be entertained in between (EXP1). EXP2 argues that visits be 1 to 1,5 hours long.
- When needed and possible, provide as **much as possible freedom** for them to move around (MO1).
- When **taking a break, they like to play on tablets** (interactive, educative games) or **simply look at postcards** (Exp1).
- If possible, **ask about specific rooms the group would like to see** and cordon it off for the day as to create a quiet space (Exp1; MO6).
- They **don't like to walk too far** to see interesting things – attempt to keep exhibits they need to see in the same vicinity if the museum is large (MO6).

### Management of museum tour

- Keep visits short, provide frequent breaks and limit amount of information.

### 5.3.5 Making exhibitions fun, interactive and easy to understand

From the interviews, it became clear that fun, interactive experiences are central to a good visitor experience. People with mental impairments place much more emphasis on the amount of fun they experience during a visit, and such experiences contribute to them remembering the experience.

- The experience needs to be **fun and interactive**; otherwise, they will not pay attention or learn. They learn through entertainment and not theory. Museums, in general, are seen as boring, and they lose interest quickly (EXP1; MO6).
- Use **simple text** at exhibitions. The **fewer, the better**. Also, use an **easy-to-read font** (MO3).
- Make use of **pictograms** to communicate ideas (MO2).
- **Computers & tablets**, if available, are fun to use (EXP2).
- If possible, **provide earphones** where they can hear certain sounds (the sound that animals made, or the voice of a person (EXP2).
- They like taking home **memorabilia** (a photo while standing behind a frame; a passport where they can tick off things they see) – it creates interest immediately (EXP1).
- Provide **moments of inspiration, fun workshops or something active** as it will help them remember the experience. Scientific texts will be of no use (MO3).

- **Create replicas of tangible museum items** (3D scanning and printing) so that people can touch them (EXP1).
- Make visits more **interactive**; simulations, 3D experiences, multi-sensory etc. (EXP2; EXP4; MO1).
- **Identify specific parts or exhibitions that would be interesting** in the museum and, if possible, invest funds to make it more interactive – no need to change the whole museum (EXP5).
- Create a form of **roadmap** through the museum with fun, colourful identifiers for the different areas. E.g. Different coloured tiles or stones (EXP5; MO4).
- Make the visitor experience more fun by **ensuring the stimuli can be controlled** (quickly brighten or lower brightness of lights, turn sound up or down) – make it as predictable as possible (EXP7).

## Fun and interactive

- Provide tasks for them; it provides a visiting goal.
- Ensure that the experience is fun and allow movements.
- Small memorabilia or taking photos are fun.
- Make items (where possible) available for touching.
- Create a fun route through the museum.

### 5.3.6 Museum facilities and possible future facilities

If museums have the capacity (space and funding) to make adjustments to the museum, the following were recommended by the participants:

- A **room with special entrance** where people can hang coats and lunchboxes is recommended where possible. They can be briefed by the museum staff and carers before starting. They need to know what will happen during their visit before they begin (Exp1).
- Provide a **quiet place for people to sit** when taking a break. A *snoezelruimte* (sensory-poor room) is a good example. It can also be a separate part of a cafeteria. They might require fruit juice or a snack if the carer did not pack any (Exp1:MO3).
- If there is no quiet room, they can **sit at the cafeteria or recommend a café in proximity** (Exp1).

## Museum facilities

- Ensure that there is a quiet area where they can take a break.



### 5.3.7 Increasing museum accessibility

In order to make museums more accessible for all people, the following guidelines were mentioned:

- **Financial attractiveness** - reduced rates or free access for persons who accompany persons with an impairment (MO5; MO7).
- **Accessible communication** is important – they should not have difficulty in finding a staff member of a specific room or other information (MO5; MO7)
- Keep in mind, many of them might have **mobility issues** (EXP1). (EXP2) always ensure access to people with disabilities such as ramps, for instance
- Reception desks are usually too high. **Use desks where a part of it is lower** so that the person on duty can be clearly seen (EXP5).
- **Clear, large indications of exits and toilets** (Exp1; Exp3; MO2; MO5).

#### Increased accessibility

- Lower prices.
- Ensure physical accessibility.
- Information should be easily obtainable.
- Clear, large signage.

### 5.3.8 Creating an appropriate atmosphere

Seeing as it will be impossible to adjust a museum's offerings and services to be more accessible for all types of mental impairments, some more general guidelines are provided, which will contribute to an improved atmosphere for all.

- Good, **relaxing music** can be played but should be able to turn off or lower volume at a moment's notice (Exp2).
- Use a **variety of colours** that catch attention, but **keep lighting constant and bright**. Dark spaces scare them (Exp2).
- The museum experience should be **cosy and fun** – this is achieved through proper services and control of the atmosphere according to preferences (Exp6).
- Make sure that the **acoustics in the museum is good**. Use curtains or seating with soft fabrics to absorb excessive noise (MO3).

#### Atmosphere

- Limit echoes.
- Bright, colourful areas.
- It should seem comfortable and fun.

### 5.3.9 Collaborations towards making museums more accessible

Collaboration involves the museum working with other parties to discuss and plan the possibilities in becoming more accessible. Some of the guidelines provided include:

- **Develop and network of understanding and knowledge exchange** with the various organisations and museums. Share best and worst practices (Exp5).
- **Co-creation of knowledge and exhibitions with special needs** groups will help one develop better, more applicable services and experiences (MO1).

## Collaborations

- Work with other organisations, museums and the target group to exchange information as well as enhance and test accessibility.

## 5.4 Current steps taken by Belgian museums and organisations to enhance accessibility and experience

The participants from museums and organisations were asked about the various steps that the museums have taken or the steps they might have observed, towards becoming more accessible and providing better visitor experiences. The following is a summary of such steps.

### 5.4.1 Staff and training

The participants indicated that their museums, or museums they are aware of, made some adjustments to staff and training to become more accessible. One example is a museum that trained staff regarding how to **speak with children** (but not really those with mental impairments), which contributes (MO1). Others provide specific **training to staff to become guides** as indicated through the T-Guide for instance (MO3). Some have also adjusted their approach to **rather work according to characteristics of people**, instead of being target-group centered (MO3). However, it seems that many museums **still don't have clear guidelines** on how they can adjust their staff training in a concrete manner to enable staff to work with people with mental impairments.

### 5.4.2 Specific museum efforts to create better experiences

Although most museums do not have clear guidelines, they still have some level of understanding of what needs to be done to become more accessible and to provide improved visitor experiences (MO1; MO4). Examples include:

- Trying to move away from the idea of '**do not touch**'. Rather identify things that can be touched and carefully explaining why certain things cannot be touched (MO1).
- One museum launched *Het Kinderspoor* (The Kid's Trail), which is an **interactive route** for families at STAM Gent – the staff at reception notifies visitors of this trail, and if they are interested, an employee will guide the family through the route (MO3). Others also developed walking routes through the museum with colourful arrows (MO3; MO5; MO7).
- People with impairments cannot always stand and wait for the tour to start; some have physical disabilities, and others with mental impairments can lose interest quickly – therefore, they **receive faster service** (MO3).
- Some museums **notify people** on their website when the museum is **quieter** for a less-stressed visit (MO3).
- Some provide a public **offer where tours are done by trained tour guides** (T-Guide) (MO5).
- Another museum indicated that they prefer to **stay on top of developments** and **inform themselves** so that they can also better inform and inspire people (MO6).
- One museum works in a **demand-orientated manner**; they listen to demand and, sometimes in collaboration, adjust their offering to increase museum interest (MO6).

#### 5.4.3 Accessibility

To make museums more accessible, some museums attempt certain actions for easier access. In terms of financial barriers, they indicate that people with impairments have a special card that allows **free access** (MO3; MO5; MO6), while some also provide free entrance to the caretakers or direct family member of the person with an impairment. Another museum (MO3) also adjusts their communication in terms of **not speaking in colloquialism**.

#### 5.4.4 Physical and service adaptations in museum

Some museums have also taken some initiatives to improve the visitor experiences. Some of these actions are listed:

- Museum texts always hang in the same place (create the same rhythm in every space towards enhancing predictability) (MO3).
- The museum provides an incentive basket (materials that people can take with them during the visit, e.g. sunglasses, hearing protectors, stress ball) (MO3).
- They place social stories and a map of the museum online (MO3).

- They attempt to create clarity in texts (yellow texts = task, black texts = information) (MO3; MO3).
- Make stimuli controllable and the visit customisable (first press the button to be able to hear something, press the pump to smell) and place icons next to it (MO3; MO7).
- Provision of visual walking routes and sensory maps (MO6).
- They provide an easy-to-use audio guide or the like (MO6).
- Some provide exhibitions with little or more interpretation, depending of the visitor's choice (MO6).
- One museum actively sees themes that might be more appealing to persons with mental impairments and try to enrich the experiences that can be provided by those exhibitions (MO6).
- Some also try to simplify the level of information that they share and try to keep it interesting (MO6).

## Steps being taken by Belgian museums

- Although there is a lack of information, Belgian museums take own initiative to be as accessible as possible. Some do their own research on the latest actions they can take.
- Museums attempt to identify how they can simplify information and make it more fun and accessible through routes, objects and other aspects.
- Special financial plans are in place to allow access.

## 5.5 Current challenges in making museums accessible

Museums and organisations in Belgium are attempting to make museums as accessible as possible, but there are various challenges that exist in doing so. From the information provided, it seems a lack of knowledge regarding how to make museums accessible for people with mental impairments is one of the main contributors. The following were listed as the main challenges experienced:

- Without proper knowledge and training, museums and organisations find it hard to determine what they need to do to become more accessible. They are not sure regarding how much information they should provide or what information (MO1; MO4; MO7).
- They find it difficult to switch between different groups of people and their needs – briefing is required beforehand (MO1).

- It is difficult to identify enough items in the museums that are allowed to be touched (MO1)
- At times, they can find it difficult to communicate with guides. The types of information that is needed and to what extent is difficult (MO3).
- It is difficult to find guides, and guides happen to find their way to the museum (perhaps a lack of marketing) (MO3)
- It can be a challenge to integrate all measures into the current offering without “pushing everything back into a box” where an offering is provided, which might not apply to all (MO4).
- It can be difficult to find a balance between inclusive and exclusive works. It is difficult to make tailor-made tools accessible to the widest audience possible (MO4; MO6).
- Partnerships seem to be short-lived – there are no guidelines on building a long-term partnership with target groups (MO4; MO7).
- Attempts to make museums more inclusive seem short-lived. It needs to be something more sustainable (MN4).
- There is a general lack of time for sufficient input towards improving experiences (MO7).

## Current challenges for becoming more accessible

- There is a lack of knowledge regarding what needs to be done.
- Not enough items in a museum can be touched.
- Cooperation with outside organisations can be difficult and short-lived.
- Attempts to make museums more accessible is not yet sustainable.

## 6. Analysis of good-practice museums

During the interviews, the participants had the opportunity to indicate which museums they deem as good examples for having taken steps towards becoming more accessible for people with mental impairments. In this section, the museum websites were analysed for all the type of information on services and amenities they provide towards becoming more accessible. The following also includes examples located through internet searches.

### 6.1 Recommended examples of good-practice museums

#### 6.1.1 Belgian (Flemish) museums without specific services and/or facilities for persons with mental impairments

##### 6.1.1.1 STAM Gent

The museum depicts the **history of Gent**, from ancient periods, up until modern times, and even where the city is headed.

Location
Gent, Belgium (Godshuizenlaan 2 – 9000, Ghent)
Website and languages available
Website: <a href="https://stamgent.be/nl_be">https://stamgent.be/nl_be</a> Languages used in website: Dutch, French & English
What is on display?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paintings made over the various eras</li><li>• Book collections</li><li>• Artefacts from the trading guilds, stained glass, china, Coins and medals</li><li>• Scaled models of buildings, as well as old and new city areas</li></ul>
The museum's information pages
The following information is provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address &amp; contact information</li><li>• Opening times</li><li>• Route planning (map, different forms of transport, <b>special parking for people with disabilities.</b></li><li>• Ticket purchases (online or by telephone)</li><li>• Diversified entrance fees (10€ basic rate; 8€ per person in groups of 15 persons; they accept the OKV-museum card<sup>1</sup>, teacher card; 2€ per person for younger groups between 19 and 25 years; 1,6€ for people with an UiTPASS; free access for people</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> Special card/cards that provide free or discounted access to various museums in Belgium.

<p>under 18, <b>caretakers of people with disabilities</b>, supervisors of school group and some others on Sundays)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Access for people with disabilities</b> (museum is fully accessible for wheelchair users and provides wheelchairs to those who need it; special parking; they allow guide dogs)</li> </ul>
<p>Services and amenities</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>STAMcafé</b> (restaurant at museum with inside and outside seating)</li> <li>● Museum shop</li> <li>● Meeting room rental (conferences, receptions, lectures...)</li> <li>● Special tours for schools on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays</li> <li>● <b>Het verhaal van Gent (The story of Ghent) children circuit</b> – This is a circuit that children can follow through the museum at their own pace. It is interactive and allows touching, listening, and other interactions while moving through the circuit. It is also <b>fun for all ages</b>.</li> </ul>
<p>Summary regarding access for people with mental impairments</p>
<p>The museum is fully accessible to people with physical impairments, however, nothing about mental impairments could specifically be found. <b>Aspects that makes the museum more accessible for people with mental impairments include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Information on special parking</li> <li>● The café with both inside and outside seating areas where people can relax</li> <li>● They allow guides from outside to provide tours (but should first register)</li> <li>● They provide an interactive, fun experience for children, which adults also find exciting</li> <li>● This museum is stated as a fun experience by a tour guide for people with mental impairments</li> </ul>

## 6.1.2 Belgian museums with specific services and/or facilities for persons with mental impairments

### 6.1.2.1 Design museum

The museum depicts the Belgian design culture over the years. It depicts furniture designs, cooking utensils, as well as other artefacts.

Location
Ghent, Belgium (Jan Breydelstraat 5, 9000 Gent)
Website and languages available
Website: <a href="https://www.designmuseumgent.be/en/">https://www.designmuseumgent.be/en/</a> Languages used in website: Dutch, French & English
What is on display?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Different types of home designs, including furniture and other objects dating from 1805 to the current</li> </ul>
The museum's information pages
<p>The following information is provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Address &amp; contact information</li> <li>● Opening times</li> </ul>

- Route planning (map, different forms of transport, **special parking for people with disabilities**).
- Ticket purchases (online or by telephone)
- Diversified entrance fees (6€ for adults; 4€ for people with special museum cards<sup>2</sup>, 90€ for guided group tours; €70 for guided school tours; free access for guides, press, **caretakers of people with disabilities**, people with disabilities with a handicap or European Disability Card, supervisors of school group and some others including children under 19, have free access on Sundays)
- **Access for people with physical disabilities** (museum is partially accessible for people with physical impairments; however, the museum does not have a lift so different floors can be accessed via stairs; special parking is provided; there are special toilets; guide dogs are allowed)
- **Access for people with mental impairments** (efforts are made to make the museum more accessible for people with autism by developing a tool to make the museum more accessible, structured, compressible and less stimulating. This is termed the *Stappenplan* (Walking plan))

#### Services and amenities

- Meeting room rental (conferences, receptions, lectures...)
- **I spy, I spy with my little eye** is part of what is termed "object stories" where children (or adults) can take figurines and then need to match them to specific objects or designs.
- Play Bag is an effort where children are provided with a bag with various shapes, **figures and colours** so that children can discover more.

#### Summary regarding access for people with mental impairments

The museum is partially accessible for people with physical impairments; this is mostly due to the building structures that might be very old. However, the museum has made some strides regarding becoming more **accessible for people with autism** by developing a structured, easy-to-read guide for the whole museum visit, from when to leave home, what transport to take, where they will arrive etc. The step-by-step guide can be found here: [https://www.toerismevoorautisme.be/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Stappenplan\\_DesignMuseum\\_29082019.pdf](https://www.toerismevoorautisme.be/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Stappenplan_DesignMuseum_29082019.pdf)

### 6.1.2.2 Huis van Alijn

The museum depicts the everyday life of people who lived in Ghent during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is housed in a former church.

Location
Ghent, Belgium (Kraanlei 65, 9000 Gent)
Website and languages available
Website: <a href="https://huisvanalijn.be/nl">https://huisvanalijn.be/nl</a> Languages used in website: Dutch, French & English
What is on display?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different rooms, artefacts, pictures</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Special card/cards that provide free or discounted access to various museums in Belgium.



## The museum's information pages

The following information is provided:

- Address & contact information
- Opening times
- Route planning (map, different forms of transport, **special directions for blind people**). The museum is in a **no-car zone**, but for **people with physical impairments**, the museum can be contacted to obtain a temporary permit to stop with a car at the museum.
- Ticket purchases (online or by telephone)
- Diversified entrance fees (€8 basic rate; 7€ p.p. for groups of 15 persons; €4,50 for Ghent residents; €2,00 for young people between 19 and 25 years; they also support all the main museum passes and discount cards; various people have free access, such as children younger than 19, supervisors of groups as well as **caretakers of people with disabilities**)

The museum website also has a separate accessibility page which lists the following information (<https://huisvanalijn.be/nl/toegankelijkheid>):

- Quiet moments: Monday mornings and one hour before closing every day
- Prices and access: Reduced rates for certain persons with the correct accreditation
- Caretakers and supervisors have free access
- European Disability Card is accepted
- Assistance dogs are allowed (water is provided for them in museum café)
- Special temporary permit to drive in no car zone
- Wheelchair access in museum: historic building, so upper floors not accessible
- Arrival: Ring bell, then employ will install rails
- Toilets: adapted for wheelchair access
- Floor plan is provided
- A "social story" has been drawn up, showing exactly what can be expected during visit (click here)
- Special guided tours upon request for persons with dementia, autism, as well as those with vision and hearing impairments – should be organised beforehand.
- Rest area is indicated
- Various multi-sensory experiences (sounds, smells, projections, dark and bright rooms) that can be controlled (turn off and on). For sensory aspects that cannot be controlled, a "stimulus basket" is provided, which contain things like earmuffs, sunglasses, teddy bears etc.)
- They provide an ExperienceTV which is a big touchscreen television, where people can examine the digital collection of the museum – also accessible to people in wheelchairs

## Services and amenities

- Various services for people with physical and mental impairments are provided
- Guided tours
- Museum café

## Summary regarding access for people with mental impairments

Huis van Alijn has made some great strides towards being more accessible for people with mental and physical impairments. Although people in wheelchairs aren't able to visit the upper rooms, they can still have outer and inner museum access due to various steps that were taken. Pertaining to the accessibility of people with **mental impairments, the museum has made great strides** by offering various services and products that take mental impairments into account. They inform visitors of the **quiet area, special access,**

**price diversification, multi-sensory experiences**, etc. The information is also **easily accessible on the accessibility page** of their website.

### 6.1.2.3 Museum Kunst & Geschiedenis (Art & History Museum)

The museum has various collection on display which dates back to the reigns of the Dukes of Burgundy. Many of the artworks of this period are found in the museum. The museum, one of the biggest in Europe, boasts other types of archaeological artefacts and treasures from far ago.

Location
Brussels, Belgium (Parc du Cinquantenaire 10, 1000 Brussels)
Website and languages available
Website: <a href="https://www.artandhistory.museum/">https://www.artandhistory.museum/</a> Languages used in website: Dutch, French & English
What is on display?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National archaeology</li><li>• Classical antiquity</li><li>• Non-European civilisations</li><li>• European decorative arts</li></ul>
The museum's information pages
The following information is provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address &amp; contact information</li><li>• Opening times</li><li>• Route planning (map, different forms of transport).</li><li>• The museum states that it is <b>currently working on adding access for people with physical impairments</b>.</li><li>• Ticket purchases (online or by telephone)</li><li>• Diversified entrance fees (€10 basic rate; 8€ p.p. for people who are 65 or older, or for groups of 15 persons; €4 for students, job seekers, press, school teachers, City of Brussels tours guides; <b>Free entrance</b> for people under 18, someone accompanying a school group; disadvantaged groups; <b>people with disabilities and their caretakers</b>; as well as other special museum and other cardholders</li></ul>
Services and amenities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plater-cast workshop (see how a cast of historical artefacts are made; make own cast and take home)</li><li>• Museum shop</li><li>• Café &amp; Restaurant</li><li>• Organise tours for people with mental impairments with cooperation with the caretakers; each need, where possible, is taken into account, which means that the tour is tailored to the group. The museum guide is trained in using a more accessible level of language and a didactic (presents information in an educational manner) method of teaching.</li></ul>

#### Summary regarding access for people with mental impairments

Although this museum does **provide tailor-made tours for people with mental impairments**, such information was not clearly displayed on its website and was obtained from an external source. However, the museum is currently undergoing **a rebranding and upgrading process**, with **physical accessibility to the museum being created**. The researcher also keeps in mind that the museum might have limited the amount of information and activities on their website due to the current COVID-19 regulations.

The museum does furthermore provide **diversified pricing**, an **interactive activity**, and they have **staff trained in working with people with mental impairments**.

#### 1.6.2.4 Mu.ZEE (Museum next to the Sea)

The museum is centred around arts from the Belgian province West Flanders and boasts over 8000 works of art.

Location
Oostende, Belgium (Gistelsteenweg 341, 8490 Jabbeke)
Website and languages available
Website: <a href="https://www.muzee.be/nl/contact">https://www.muzee.be/nl/contact</a> Languages used in website: Dutch, French & English
What is on display?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cultural heritage regarding the history of psychiatry</li><li>• Art</li></ul>
The museum's information pages
The following information is provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address &amp; contact information</li><li>• Opening times</li><li>• Route planning (indications of street access and free parking; public transport).</li><li>• The museum states that it is <b>fully accessible with a wheelchair</b>.</li><li>• Ticket purchases (online or by telephone)</li><li>• Diversified entrance fees (€10 basic rate; 8€ for reductions; €3 for persons between 19 and 26 years; 1€ for visitors between 13 and 18 years; free access if under 13 years old. Special or free entrance with other forms of museum passes)</li></ul>
Services and amenities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Museum</li><li>• Various creative workshops</li><li>• School activities</li><li>• Library</li><li>• Specialised tours for people with mental impairments</li></ul>
Summary regarding access for people with mental impairments
The museum does provide services for people with mental impairments in the form of a

specialised museum tour which focusses on interaction and experience. Such experiences can be booked beforehand.

The website of Museum Pass Museés (2019) furthermore provides a detailed list of museums that have taken significant strides towards becoming more accessible for people with mental and physical impairments, such as visual impairments, hearing impairments, and other physical impairments. Some examples of museums listed include:

- *Museum voor Schone Kunsten* (Museum for Beautiful Arts): Ghent – Provide special tours for persons who are blind or with poor eyesight. Visitors are allowed to touch items while the guide explains and describes its appearance.
- *Mu.ZEE* (Museum next to the Sea): Oostende – provides 3D renders of arts so that blind persons can feel the art. They also provide interactive guided tours with creative assignments in the museum for people with mental impairments – they first enter into a conversation with the caretaker to hear about any specific needs and then determine what can be applied.
- *Het MACS* (Museum of Contemporary Arts): Hornu – the museum makes use of models, thermoforms, music fragments and Braille texts.
- *Museum Dr Guislain*: Ghent - The museum is centred around the theme of psychiatry, both history and current. This museum is fully accessible for people in wheelchairs.
- *De wereld van Kina: het Huis* (The world of Kina: the house): Ghent – A museum about birds that provides a listening and touching trail; visitors can touch the birds and listen to their calls.
- *MAS (Museum aan de Stroom)* (Museum next to the Stream): Antwerp – The museum provides special routes where visitors can touch and smell scented display cases and discover various sound clips.
- *ZWIN Natuur Park* (Nature Park): Knokke-Heist – This is a wildlife park that updated the museum and all pathways to be safe for people in wheelchairs. They furthermore provide three all-terrain wheelchairs for those who would like to explore a bit further.
- *Technopolis*: Mechelen – A museum which displays the latest (and oldest) in technology. The building is accessible for people in wheelchairs, and it provides a very immersive, interactive experience to visitors.

### 6.1.3 International museums with specific services and/or facilities for persons with mental impairments

#### 6.1.3.1 National Gallery of Ireland

The museum is centred around arts and artists, with various exhibitions.

Location
Merrion Square West, Dublin 2, Ireland
Website and languages available
Website: <a href="https://www.nationalgallery.ie/">https://www.nationalgallery.ie/</a> Languages used in website: English
What is on display?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural heritage regarding the history of psychiatry</li> <li>• Art</li> </ul>
The museum’s information pages
<p>The following information is provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address &amp; contact information</li> <li>• Opening times</li> <li>• Visitor guide</li> <li>• Safety guidelines</li> <li>• ‘Frequently asked questions section</li> <li>• Route planning (indications of street access and free parking; public transport).</li> <li>• Virtual tour of the museum</li> <li>• The museum has a full accessibility statement which details all aspects pertaining to a potential visit, including accessibility features for people with various forms of impairments (physical and some mental impairments). Also, AsIAM approved autism-friendly accreditation</li> <li>• The museum’s entrance to their general collection is free; free entrance for carers at exhibitions with an admission charge</li> </ul>
Services and amenities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Museum exhibitions</li> <li>• Library</li> <li>• Podcasts</li> <li>• Activities</li> <li>• Venue hire for various functions</li> <li>• Shop</li> <li>• Lecture theatre</li> </ul>
Summary regarding access for people with mental impairments
<p>The museum provides a webpage as well as an accessibility statement with comprehensive information on the services they provide. The museum furthermore has AsIAM approved autism-friendly accreditation. Further accessibility information includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wheelchairs available upon request</li> </ul>

- Downloadable maps with easy zoom function for mobile devices
- Magnifying glasses, pen and paper are available at the desk
- Special sign language tours and tours for blind or visually impaired people
- Assistant dogs are welcomed – water bowls are provided
- Tactile/sensory boxes are available
- They warn against certain spaces that can be loud while recommending quieter areas
- They provide free noise-cancelling earphones
- Seating is provided throughout the gallery

### 6.1.3.2 Museum of London

According to an article published in the New York Times (Marshall, 2019), the museum of London might be the most accessible museum in the world. The museum showcases various aspects associated with the history and development of London from its beginnings up to modern-day.

Location
Museum of London, 150 London Wall, London, EC2Y5HN
Website and languages available
Website: <a href="https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london">https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london</a> Languages used in website: English
What is on display?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical artefacts</li> <li>• Art</li> <li>• Cultural and social history</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• And various others</li> </ul>
The museum's information pages
<p>The following information is provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address &amp; contact information</li> <li>• Opening times</li> <li>• 'Frequently asked questions section</li> <li>• Route planning (indications of street access and free parking; public transport).</li> <li>• Helping hosts – people who are specially employed to assist visitors</li> <li>• The museum has information on services for various disabilities, including physical impairments, visual impairments, deaf and hard of hearing, as well as information for people with autism and dementia.</li> <li>• Floor plan and guide (downloadable)</li> <li>• Visual story – photographic guide of the museum to examine all facilities before a visit</li> <li>• The museum's entrance was free (indicated until 5 September 2021 at time of viewing page) – regular prices not listed</li> </ul>
Services and amenities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 restaurants/cafes and one lunch space</li> </ul>

- Museum shop
- Lockers
- Various toilets (accessible toilets on ground and third floor)
- Free wifi
- Various tour types

#### Summary regarding access for people with mental impairments

The museum webpage provides comprehensive details for visitors with mental impairments. The webpage provides extra details for people with autism spectrum conditions, as well as visitors with dementia. Special services and facilities include:

- Noise-cancelling headphones at the information desk
- Special early morning events and tours to ensure a more quiet, relaxed environment
- They provided downloadable sensory maps which indicate bright and dark spaces, busy and quiet spaces, noisy spaces and smelly spaces (such as the cafes)
- Special programmes for people with dementia
- They provide contact details of the 'museum experience staff' so that special conditions can be organised beforehand, or during a visit. These museum staff wear bright pink shirts.

## 6.2 Lessons learnt regarding museum accessibility for people with mental impairments

From the information gathered from the recommended and other good-practice museums, it becomes clear that various museums, both in Belgium and internationally, have taken various steps towards making the museums more accessible overall. From a physical accessibility perspective, almost all museums have adapted various features to be as accessible as possible (wheelchair access, special toilets, ramps, elevators, special parking, special services for the deaf and blind etc.). However, in older buildings, some of these adjustments are not always possible due to the type and age of the architecture. Nevertheless, the services and amenities appear to be streamlined.

However, when it comes to accessibility for people with mental impairments, the actions taken are more diverse and fragmented. Although many museums really tried to be more accessible from a mental impairment perspective, it appears as though their efforts are more diverse and fragmented, suggesting that there is a need for clear guidelines on how to approach mental impairment accessibility.

Some museums did make great efforts to address certain types of mental impairments, such as dementia or autism, and one museum even obtains accreditation for being accessible to people with autism. These efforts, although great, do not necessarily include enhanced accessibility for other types of mental impairments. This strengthens

the argument for the development of accessibility guidelines that will take a universal approach. Such guidelines should take into account as many aspects of as many mental impairments as possible, then determine which guidelines will, when applied, make museums more accessible for a larger visitor group. Such guidelines should be practical and cost-effective for museums.



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