



‘Pleasure for all!’

A white paper about the issue of accessibility and inclusivity
within Dutch day attractions, now and within 10 years

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English Version



Throughout this white paper I will address accessibility and inclusivity within Dutch day attractions. Guests, Dutch and European law and regulations, the government and society require more services for people with disabilities. Reviews by guests, social media (e.g. Facebook groups such as 'Wheelchair mafia' en 'Eelkedroomt') and newspaper articles, make that day attractions will be more than previously framed as 'not accessible'. Day attractions cannot deny the accessibility issue anymore. At the same time it provides an opportunity!

Namely, Gardaland had, as a result of their inclusion strategy in 2019 experienced an increase in sales revenues of daily tickets and seasonal passes compared to 2017.

In this paper I provide guidelines on how the management of mainly theme parks and other stakeholders systematically and concrete can go along with accessibility.

1. In 10 years

Within 10 years' time it is normal that everyone enjoys a day trip. Parks have their strategy and policy adjusted to receive guests with disabilities. Purposeful enjoyment is seen as a chance. That is what they have implemented, through cooperation with interest groups and branch organisations, in their whole business operation. Regarding 3 variables it will later be different: attractions, infrastructure, and staff members.

Adjusted and new attractions

At location there are enough physically adapted attractions. With new technologies new attractions are made to attract a new public; guests with a disability. Thereby the smartphone, VR en AR will be put in more to offer customised services. That will lead to an improvement of a personalised guest experience, the involvement of a guest with an attraction and sharing the experience with family and friends. Definitely for guests with a

slightly mental disability that is promising; a smartphone is important for them and they are quite skillful with it. Wi-Fi-tracking and Big Data will help attractions to optimise guest experiences and to realise interactions with the guest with a disability. Stories will be brought to life that will match the feeling and the motion of this target group. With VR also multi-sensitive experiences can be created, which is a nice new offer for people with e.g. a visual or hearing disability.

New attractions will be designed during the design phase in cooperation with the target group and their network (parents/ caregivers/ doctors/ teachers/ therapists).

Adapted infrastructure

In addition, the leisure entrepreneur has adapted the necessarily needed infrastructure at location and facilitates guests with devices. Thereby innovative robots can be inserted, like will happen during the Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020. These robots will bring wheelchair users to an attraction, carry their food or other things and will inform guests with information.

All communication- and information means are adapted to guests with special wishes and needs; from an accessible website, an app to a visitor centre specifically for them.

The government has, also due to the 'Omgevingswet' (Environmental law), invested in an accessible infrastructure towards a day attraction. The legislator has taken care of accessibility, like in Sweden, where it can also be enforced. Similarly, there for the 'Bouwbesluit' (Building decree) is adjusted.

Guests and staff member with a disability

For staff members it is normal that a part of the guests, and a part of their colleagues have a disability. They have knowledge on the subject, and they possess the skills to go along with it. That is why subsidiary foundations as third parties are mainly useful within theme



parks. Within a theme park inclusivity and accessibility are integral part of the strategy and operations. For guests with a disability that is more convenient since they will be seen as normal visitors. That is their greatest wish! Prior to their visit, they will not have that much stress during their preparation. The municipality facilitates theme parks actively to place staff members from the bottom of the labor market. As well in the shape of financial allowances as in devices to be used. In addition, at the park volunteers are present who can support guests with disabilities and also be a source of information to them. Supervisors do not always need to come along with them.

Impact

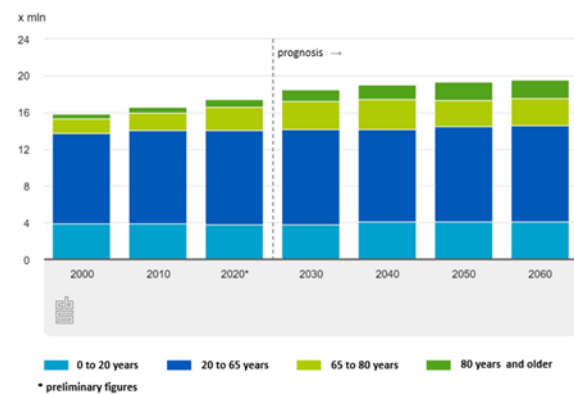
In 2030 inclusion is the new normal. That has a big impact in many ways: personal impact for the client because he/she is again autonomous and has control and also it leads to improved physical and psychic health; economic impact for a day attraction because they will get new clients, as people with a disability will often take along friends and family; social impact for someone with a disability because they 'belong to it.' Through this, disabled guests are experiencing connectedness, and together with friends and family they are able to have fun; societal impact because the costs of the society will decrease because it is proven that the welfare of people with a disability improves if they have a day trip or when they go on holiday. Moreover, following the example of e.g. New Zealand, our national budget will be a supposedly 'well-being budget' which aims the welfare of all Dutch citizens instead of a budget which is only based on economic success variables.

2. Present day

We are not that far yet. Currently, the Dutch day attraction industry is not enough accessible for the 2,4 million people with a

disability. Specifically, as staff members in hospitality want to make as many guests happy as possible! The target group of disabilities will only increase more, mainly because of the increasing aging population. About 26% of the population is 65 year and older. And this group has time and money.

Population structure by age on January 1



Source: www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2019/51/prognose-19-miljoen-inwoners-in-2039

In general, I see multiple main problems.

Strategy is not directed at guests with a disability

Day attractions are under great pressure to attract as many visitors as possible and to earn money. Most of the parks are in foreign hands. At the head office abroad the strategy for the Dutch parks will be determined. That is mainly directed to the shareholders (the Anglo Saxon model) in order to keep them satisfied. In that strategy doesn't fit a target group which is relatively small, complicated and therefore, also needs more time and attention. This opinion is reflected in the business operation.

It looks like day attractions don't realise how many people are not able to enjoy. Simply because they don't see these guests, hear or recognize them. In other words, there is ignorance, insufficient awareness, and lack of knowledge about the target group by employees in day attractions.



Physical disability	Amount
Parkinson	50.000
Muscular diseases	200.000
Rheumatism	2.000.000
Cara	1.000.000
Psychic disability	
Slightly mental disability	1.100.000
Down syndrome	13.000
Psychiatric	216.000
Autism	200.000
Dementia	280.000
Sensitive disability	
Visually impaired/blind	320.000
Hearing impaired/deaf	1.500.000

Sources: interest groups

This implies that besides the day attractions there are all kinds of subsidiary foundations present. They have the knowledge and make an effort for these guests.

For instance, by organising a complete day trip and accompanying them during the day. For the guest it means a higher price tag.

Insufficient adapted day attractions

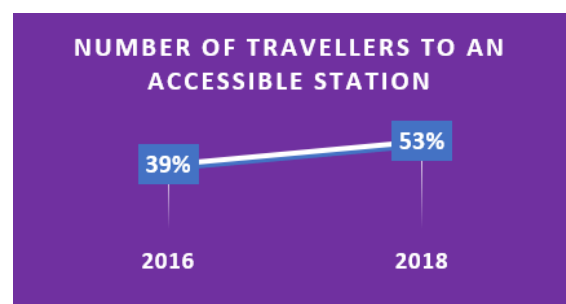
In the Netherlands physically adapted attractions are lacking. That means that someone with a disability cannot enter an attraction without a transfer (and so hassle!). Moreover, the newest attraction Symbolica in the Efteling can only be reached through a separate entrance and a separate platform with a transfer. In the design of attractions, the target group is insufficient and not included on time. Globally there are many examples of theme parks that do have adapted attractions like accessible tree climbing, horse riding, a skyride, a Swing or the Magic Bike. Examples of theme parks with specific offers for guests with a disability are Parque dos Sonhos in Brazil, Morgan's Island in Texas, Luna Farm in Italy and Dreamland in

Ireland. Manufacturers donate their adapted attractions to the resort Give Kids The World Village in Orlando.

In the Netherlands we notice that with modern technologies new attractions are made. For instance, the VR Droomvlucht at the Efteling. Still a guest with a disability is separate from his/her friends or family. Furthermore, there are insufficient activities or tours for special target groups. In the day attraction industry, museums are a positive exception in providing adequate hospitality. The cultural sector is from a quality perspective as well as a business point of view active in this domain. They organize several activities for elderly, deaf and visually impaired people. That is also 'forced' by government financing and stimulated by the 'Code Diversiteit en Inclusie' (Code Diversity and Inclusion).

Inadequate infrastructure

For guests with a disability the infrastructure is still inadequate to go to a day attraction. So the access to and assistance by (public) transport and paratransit transport are not always available nor flexible. Nevertheless, there is an increase of the percentage of travellers that go to an accessible station. However, not all stations are properly accessible yet.

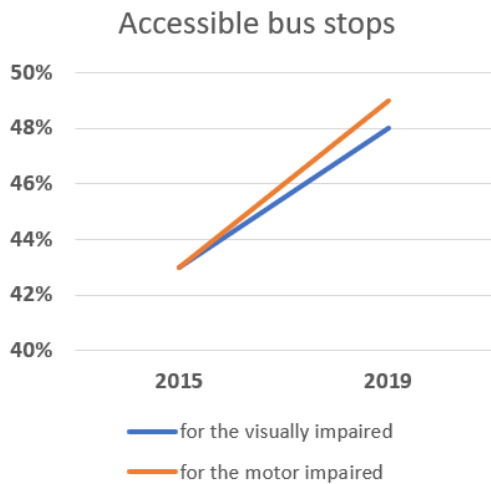


Source: Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2019-2020, 24 170, nr.222

The amount of accessible bus stops has increased.



For the slightly mentally handicapped persons the information at the bus stop is nonetheless hard to understand.



Source: Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2019-2020, 24 170, nr.222

Also, parking lots do not always have toilets or changing rooms.

Often an accessible infrastructure is missing in a park. For instance, a calming area, lower cash desks and ATM's. So do specialised devices such as hoists, pot chairs, ring lines, tricycles or quadricycles. That makes that someone with a disability requires a lot of energy to even come to a day attraction and to check and take along all necessary devices.

Accessible communication and information are specifically for this target group necessary. After all, guests with a disability have to prepare their visit very well. Partly it happens. For example, the Efteling recently placed videos in which they visualised very precisely how transfers are taking place at specific attractions. Often this information is only directed at users of a wheelchair and it focuses mainly on the physical information. Therefore it is not immediately visible on a website. The Dutch theme parks lack a specific 'Accessibility Centre', like for instance Dollywood in the United States. Digital accessibility is still insufficient developed,

while law and regulations will require it in 2024.

Too few and insufficient hospitable employees

The demand of people with a disability is mainly to treat them hospitable, to approach them as humans and as normal.

Unintentionally things are taken over by others, so this group feels regularly humiliated. They experience insufficient involvement and interest of employees. Also, knowledge of the target group is missing.

Employees are not or insufficiently trained in social skills to offer these guests an amazing guest experience. That applies for all departments: reception, attraction, restaurant or for instance cleaning. In addition, there is insufficient staff available. For example, to receive the target group with a disability, to guide them or be there for them as a source of information.

Theme parks have a huge problem recruiting staff members. Therefore the employee turnover is also too big. If employees are trained in 'hospitality' then it is hard to maintain it. Within theme parks there is a lot of standardized, low-skilled work. But little work is done with the lower end of the labor market. Theme parks have a hard access to this market. That is a missed opportunity, certainly because municipalities and UWV (benefit agency) have a lot of people with an alimony who can do this kind of work.

3. Issue

The issue of accessible day attractions is getting more urgent.

Branch organizations in other industries are starting to stir more and more. The ANVR (Branch organization) for the travel industry has recently released a report about accessible tourism. The common branch organizations in the cultural and recreation industry have drafted at the end of 2019 a



behavioural code to improve diversity and inclusivity.

Prevailing law and regulations ('Wet Gelijke Behandeling op grond van ziekte en handicap', and several EU guidelines) and the United Nations Convention also demand the day attraction to implement.

Interest groups will ask the government to maintain these, comparable to the women's quote.

Also, society will enforce the government to take more control; to develop policy and to make finance available. That happened already in the cultural sector where the central government included accessibility and diversity in her financing agreements. Just as in the program 'Onbeperkt meedoen!' ('Unlimited Participation') for municipalities.

The confrontation in the chain (ecosystem) between guests, leisure entrepreneurs, legislator and government will show up ever closer in the day attraction industry.

One of the common threads through my exploration is that to make day attractions accessible, it calls for action and collaboration between all parties; including guests, manufacturers, suppliers, theme parks and government. That will be a collaboration between parties that so far have not been natural parties. In this development a great opportunity is hidden; sustainable relations with customers and network partners with whom theme parks can connect socially much stronger.

4. How

The necessity to look beyond frontiers and to combine forces, is big. The driving force behind the ecosystem of theme parks was mostly money driven; as many guests in the shortest time as possible. Moreover, that determined who was the determining stakeholder; the shareholder. Nowadays the ecosystem is stirred up. More stakeholders are joining. As illustrated below, I have

provided an outline of how it will happen according to me.

New product-market combinations

Day attractions will adjust their strategy, as a result of some factors, offering everybody a magical guest experience, potential sales revenues and reputation. They will develop new product-market combinations. The next 10 years they will figure out how they can welcome more guests with a disability during their quiet periods (a midweek). Also, they will organize festivals at their theme park for guests with a disability. Day attractions will develop new technologies (VR/AR/AI) to come up with attractions that are suitable for guests with and without disabilities. Especially guests with a disability provide the opportunity for theme parks to generate more revenues.

Focus on marketing & sales

All in all, it will be about 120.000 – 240.000 potential visitors (5% -10% from 2.400.000 people with a disability).

Day attractions will adapt their marketing & sales and their pricing policy to that, and they will collaborate differently with interest groups. These associations know the specific wishes and needs of these guests during the whole customer journey very well. Interest groups will be with their volunteers in the park. They will be involved in the formulating and implementing of the strategy of the park. Therefore the parks will adjust a part of their attractions.

All information and communication means will be adjusted to guests with a disability. In this way a guest with a disability can prepare itself well at home and in the park. On site they will get, before entering the park, a day planning and a customized tour from a host (volunteer of an interest group/ employee) in the Accessibility Centre, matching with their disability.



New HR policy

Employees will be trained in hospitality so they will be skilled in customer-friendly handling with this target group. And they will be trained that way so that they have enough knowledge and are skillful in being hospitable to these guests.

Entrepreneurs will apply for the standardized work new ways of recruiting & selection at the lower end of the labor force. Therefore, day attractions collaborate with municipalities, social work companies, special and secondary vocational education (level 1 and 2) and with the UWV (benefit agency). They make use of (financing) opportunities from the 'Participatiewet' (Benefit law) and WMO (Law for Social Support). At the park there are enough employees, experienced experts and volunteers to support guests where necessary. That makes all kinds of auxiliary structures in the form of foundations outside a day attraction less necessary. With that the playing field will be clearer.

Invest in infrastructure

The local government will provide the WMO (Law for Social Support) financing to parks in order to purchase devices. So, a guest with a disability does not need to take along all the devices him/herself. The park itself invests into an accessible infrastructure, for example a toilet for the handicapped at an accessible place in the restaurant and a calming area for guests who are unable to tolerate many stimulus. Correspondingly, the local government invests in accessible transport for guests with a disability as well as for employees at the lower end of the labor force market. Equally, she invests in an accessible public space and infrastructure like relief floors for signage.

Active role societal organizations

Interest groups take -in addition to their present informing role – an active lobby role

towards politics. With that they address accessibility and inclusivity within the day attraction industry on the top of the agenda. Branch organizations will formulate, following the example of the cultural sector, a behavioural code. In the same way, they will equip entrepreneurs with instruments to get started with accessibility.

I spoke with different people; with guests with a disability, their supervisors/parents as well as professionals. At the executive level as well as at the operational level. And from inside and outside the leisure sector. To them I posed questions and I listened to the answers. Also, I visited an exhibition of theme parks, several symposia and congresses, I read professional literature and newsletters. That is what my white paper is based on. I don't have the illusion to be complete in this white paper.

Karin Stiksma is the business owner of Joint Projects and as a strategic consultant active at the edge of accessibility and leisure. Do you have questions, or do you need some support in making your day attraction more accessible? Please feel free to contact me.



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