

# Master Thesis

*How do hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands perceive the needs of guests with disabilities?*



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## PREFACE

Before you lies the Master Thesis 'A future for inclusive tourism in the Dutch hotel industry', the basis of which are interviews with a variety of participants, employees and managers from six national and international hotel chains. To gain a wider perspective, some interviews with field experts (disabled people and people working in the field of enhancing accessibility either giving workshops or checking hotels on their disabilities were conducted as well. It has been written to fulfil the graduation requirements of the Tourism, Society and Environment Master Program at Wageningen University. I was engaged in researching and writing this Master Thesis (parttime) from July 2020 till September 2020, (fulltime) from September 2020 until February 2021 and from March 2021 till April 2021 (parttime)

The research was based on the combination of my interests in tourism, the hotel industry and care or people with special needs. Due to my previous studies I was aware of the workload and process of writing a thesis. Therefore, it really helped me to choose a topic of a variation of my interests, to always stay and be motivated to work on my Master Thesis.

Fortunately, Dr Meghann Ormond focusses on medical tourism, I was and still am very happy to call her my supervisor during the process of writing my Master Thesis. Meghann, your expertise, enthusiasm and perspective gained me a lot of insights on the topic of inclusive tourism, amazing! You were always available for a check-in or a feedback moment, THANK YOU so much for your excellent guidance and support throughout this process. Lucky me, you will also be my internship supervisor, see you soon!

On top of this, I also wish to thank all the participants, without whose cooperation I would not have been able to conduct the analysis.

Last but definitely not least, my boyfriend Harmen, friends, especially Channah and family, Mom, Dad, Jordi, Oma and Opa, and all others I could discuss my interest in the research topic with: I would like thank you for your wonderful support. It was always helpful and amazing to bat ideas about my research around with you. THANK YOU!

Then, a song I would like to share with you: Make it mine – Jason Mraz. In my opinion this song is where my journey and process of doing my Masters and writing my thesis is all about, it feels as a dream, I could never think of completing, which feels as the following part of the song:

I don't wanna wake before, the dream is over  
I'm gonna make it mine. Yes I, I know it

After providing some personal insights, please - I hope you enjoy your reading!

Demi Karssen

Laren, April 9, 2021

## SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

Hotels accommodate a diverse range of people, both as guests and as employees. Some of these guests have a disability or come with specific access requirements due to their age or health condition. There are several international conventions and directives that have been developed about the rights of people with disabilities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), for example, states that accessibility to tourism products and services is a social right for all travellers, whether able-bodied or disabled (United Nations, 2006). The UNCRPD (article 9) has design standards for the accessibility of environments and buildings, including hotels. However, the implementation of these design standards among tourism suppliers in signatory countries that have ratified the UNCRPD remains relatively weak, even though 186 countries ratified the UNCRPD (UN, 2006). However, less than 10 per cent of tourism suppliers in Europe offer accessible tourism services (Network for Accessible Tourism, 2015).

Therefore, in this study I will focus on hotel managers and employees' experiences and perceptions to enhance social inclusion. This will be related to the (non-)implementation of the accessibility standards and regulations in Dutch hotels.

### AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

This study has two objectives. Firstly, it seeks to investigate how several key hotel chains in the Dutch market currently respond to the needs of their disabled guests. Secondly, it seeks to examine how hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands experience and perceive their disabled guests. Universal Design and the Scandic Hotel Group case (with a main focus on accessibility training) will be used as a lens through which to analyse the participants' perspectives and experiences to enhance the social inclusion of disabled people in the Dutch hotel industry. If the principles of Universal Design are applied in a tourism business, it can be seen as a way of developing tourism environments, services and offerings (Michopoulou et al., 2015). This leads to the following main research question addressed in this study:

*How do hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands perceive the needs of guests with disabilities?*

### METHODS

This study has an exploratory nature. An interpretivist perspective is used to develop an understanding of the viewpoints and experiences of Dutch hotel employees and managers regarding disabled guests' accessibility and inclusion in their hotels.

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with managers and employees of six hotel chains operating in the Netherlands. Twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with hotel employees. Two interviews were used as practice interviews. In addition, twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with hotel managers, of which one was used as practice interview.

A third respondent group was formed during the interviews with the hotel managers and employees. The decision to add this specific group of respondents was made during the fieldwork based on having a third perspective from the practical side: the ones who face barriers and experience the end-product/service as a disabled hotel guest. This group is a combination of field experts: disabled people and people working in the field of enhancing accessibility either giving workshops or checking hotels on their disabilities.

The interview consisted of questions about their experiences, challenges and future perspective related to guests with disabilities and their knowledge/awareness about the legislation, specifically the European Accessibility Act. These questions are based on the literature review, since the literature review analysis Universal Design, which is used in formulating the questions about experiences, challenges and future perspective. The questions related to the European Accessibility Act are based on the literature review about legislation. The interviews finished with questions related to accessibility training by the use of examples of the Scandic Hotel Group case, to make them feel confident in the understanding of the accessibility training and their needs/wants in relation to this topic.

## RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While the hotels included in the study have one or two accessible rooms (a nominal fraction of the total rooms), they are not always designed in a way that meets the needs of guests with a disability. This is mainly due to designers not taking the needs and wants of disabled people into account while designing hotel spaces as suggested by field experts (disabled participants of this study).

In addition, respondents suggested that the way in which hotel employees communicate and provide service to disabled hotel guests, is of importance. People with disabilities want to be treated the same as other guests.

Hotel employees and managers do feel they are not aware of all accessibility related aspects which are important to consider in their hotel. However, there are also managers who are not open to improving accessible hotel products and services, due to their conviction about their high level of service. These hotel managers say and think that their level of service can provide disabled hotel guests with everything they need and want during their stay. They believe that their level of service can solve almost any challenge which, in their eyes, means that accessibility training is not a necessity.

In addition, it can be concluded from the interviews that employees and managers in this study are willing to attend an accessibility awareness training to enhance their knowledge and skills in being of service to guests with a disability. When offering such a training, the focus should first be on the operational teams. If possible, the training should then also be offered to the back-office team, reservations, sales and events/groups departments (second line employees) who are in 'indirect' contact with the guests. 'Organisation B' offers accessibility awareness training, which is an opportunity for the Dutch hotel industry, based on the findings of this study.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ANVR	Algemene Nederlandse Vereniging for Reisorganisaties
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
EAA	European Accessibility Act
ICIDH	International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps
ID	Inclusive Design
UD	Universal Design
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

## INTRODUCTION

Hotels accommodate a diverse range of people as guests. Some of these guests have a disability or come with specific access requirements due to their age or health condition. There are several international conventions and directives that have been developed about the rights of people with disabilities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), for example, states that accessibility to tourism products and services is a social right for all travellers, whether able-bodied or disabled (United Nations, 2006). The UNCRPD (article 9) has design standards for the accessibility of environments and buildings, including hotels. However, the implementation of these design standards among tourism suppliers in signatory countries that have ratified the UNCRPD remains relatively weak. While 186 countries ratified the UNCRPD (UN, 2006), fewer than 10 per cent of tourism service providers in Europe offer accessible tourism services<sup>1</sup> (Network for Accessible Tourism, 2015). Because the Netherlands' government ratified the UNCRPD in 2016, I will focus in this study on hotel managers and employees' experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of these accessibility standards and regulations in Dutch hotels.

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

People with disabilities are more likely to experience more limited social participation and functioning in daily life activities and the execution of tasks, leading to higher incidences of social exclusion. Social inclusion addresses 'the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole' (Levitas et al., 2007, p. 9). Barriers faced by people with disabilities are mainly a result of social spaces and activities being designed for able-bodied people (Figueiredo et al. 2012). Full social inclusion<sup>2</sup> of people with disabilities involves the removal of all kinds of barriers, with a focus on creation of full social participation in meaningful social activities, like socializing with friends (Overmars-Marx et al. 2014). According to Blichfeldt and Nicolaisen (2011), this requires that not only physical barriers related to access and mobility be removed, but also social and cultural barriers. Examples of these physical, social and cultural barriers include lack of travel skills, physical access barriers, social exposure to prejudice, and personal factors such as a lack of confidence and mental health difficulties (Van Asselt et al., 2015). Both the UNCRPD and the European Commission (2014a) adopt this holistic approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Accessible Tourism Services are a chain of services, which is accessible to all. It starts with accessible information and/or offers, like on websites of tourism suppliers. In addition, it is important to serve disabled people with adapted accommodation facilities, catering facilities, parking areas and communication tools (Linderová & Scholz, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Full social inclusion is 'the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights' (United Nations, 2016, p.20).

Accessible tourism:

...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 universally designed tourism products, services and environments. This definition is inclusive of all people including those travelling with children in prams, people with disabilities and seniors. (Darcy & Dickenson 2009, p. 34)

Yet many hotels are inaccessible for people with different kinds of access requirements, hindering their ability to equally participate in tourism and results in exclusion. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has adopted Universal Design in its overall vision by saying that they need to understand the theory of Universal Design to be able to fully support and accommodate guests (World Tourism Organization, 2010). Universal Design is defined as:

... the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design... The intent of the universal design concept is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications and the built environment more usable by more people at little or no extra cost. The universal design concept targets all people of all ages, sizes and abilities. (Center for Universal Design 2009, p. 300)

However, this approach has not yet been operationalised in Europe with detailed policy or funding arrangements (Kastenholz et al., 2015).

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Papamichail (2012) argues that the hotel and tourism industry (e.g., tour operators and hotels) should consider the accessibility requirements for hotels, which are usually included in national building regulations, most of which are not based on an inclusive Universal Design approach. Instead, these regulations are mainly formulated to consider certain numbers or percentages of people with functional (physical) disabilities<sup>3</sup> within the population, not other kinds of disabilities (e.g., intellectual). This Universal Design approach can help identify how the standards (as stated in the UNCRPD) and regulations on accessibility can be better implemented and brought into practice. Specifically, Universal Design seeks to move beyond building codes and standards for access and mobility (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011), with the focus on a 'whole of life approach'<sup>4</sup>.

Currently there are several challenges and bottlenecks that hinder the Dutch hotel and tourism industry from thinking in an inclusive manner about disabled people. Van der Duim et al. (2019) observe that bottlenecks for making the Dutch hotel and tourism industry more accessible for people with disabilities include the heterogeneity of travellers and the inaccessible accessibility information for potential

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<sup>3</sup> The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu) distinguishes functional (physical) disabilities related to hearing, vision and mobility (Volksgezondheidzorg.info, n.d).

<sup>4</sup> Accessible tourism adopts a whole of life approach meaning that people through their lifespan benefit from accessible tourism provision (Michopoulou et al., 2015).

travellers. In addition, there is the need for a different perspective and there are worries about the costs, extra stress and work in and for the hotel and tourism industry (Van der Duim et al., 2019).

The Netherlands ratified the UNCRPD in 2016, meaning that the policies exist and will need to be legally implemented in the tourism sector, including hotels. However, EU laws are needed (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011) to ensure common accessibility requirements for essential products and services at the level of the EU (European Parliament, 2020). Not all countries in the EU have proactively worked on legislative requirements and compliance with the already existing UNCRPD (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). This shows that EU laws on a common implementation of accessibility requirements are needed. An example of implementation in the EU is the Scandic Hotel Group, a disabled-accessible hotel chain from Sweden, where legislation positively influences disabled people (e.g., having a database related to accessible tourist attractions for disabled people). Hence, while the UNCRPD exists at a United Nations level, at a European level no laws exist to give guidance on the implementation of the UNCRPD at national level.

### 1.3 RESEARCH STUDY PURPOSE

While prior research, by for instance Buhalis and Darcy (2011), has focussed on the removal of barriers faced by people with disabilities in their encounters with tourism suppliers, this study focuses on the interaction between tourists and service providers by studying hotel employees' and managers' awareness of and efforts towards enhancing the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Dutch top hotel sector. This study looks at the current status of accessible tourism in the Dutch top hotel industry, how hotel managers and employees currently experience and perceive the needs and rights of guests with disabilities, and how they believe they can enhance the social inclusion and equal treatment of guests with disabilities. This relates to the implementation of the UNCRPD worldwide, at the European, national and civil society levels (United Nations, 2017). This creates the link to focus on hotel managers and employees to see the current implementation of national legislation or possible developments in this phase for hotels. I will give an in-depth analysis in the literature review about this topic, legislation and implementation.

In this study, I concentrate on well-known Dutch and international 4-star hotel chains in the Netherlands because the UNWTO (2015) states that only 26% of the 4-star hotels (all over the world) offer accessibility for guests with reduced mobility. In what ways do employees and managers of 4-star hotels in the Netherlands believe they can improve in the implementation of accessible hotel products and services?

### 1.4 RESEARCH STUDY AIM

The research study aims:

- To investigate how the Dutch and international chains present in the Dutch hotel sector currently address the issue of equal access and social inclusion for guests with disabilities;
- To analyse how hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands believe they can work to enhance equal access and social inclusion for guests with disabilities in their hotels.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the research study aim, the following main research question is used for the thesis:

How do hotel managers and employees in Dutch and international chains present in the Netherlands experience and perceive the needs and rights of their guests with disabilities?

It will be examined through the following sub-questions:

1. What is the current status of accessible products and services in the top hotel industry of the Netherlands?
2. How do employees of top Dutch and international hotel chains present in the Netherlands currently experience and perceive the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?
3. How do employees of top Dutch and international hotel chains present in the Netherlands believe they can respond to challenges to the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?

This thesis has six sections. The first section is a literature review discussing all the concepts that are relevant to this study and linking them to each other. These concepts include 'accessibility', 'disability', 'social inclusion' and 'universal design'. This section also focuses on communication and accessibility awareness. In the second section, the current situation, as well as the involvement of the United Nations, European Union and the Dutch government on social inclusion will be outlined. In addition, the current challenges and opportunities in the Dutch hotel sector in terms of inclusive tourism will be explained, followed by further literature review on accessibility training and Universal Design. The third section is the methodological design, focussing on how I have collected and analysed the data. In the fourth section, I present the results. In the fifth section, I present the discussion. I then conclude with recommendations and suggestions for future research.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

To address the research question, I will first explain the concepts of disability, accessibility and tourism, and the relation between them. This is done to provide a good basis and background on the topics that are discussed in this study. Secondly, a conceptualization of social inclusion and equality will be provided and will be linked to tourism. The purpose is to show that the future of accessible tourism is in making it more inclusive (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). I will also show how inclusive tourism relates to communication and accessibility awareness of hotel employees and managers. Next, building on the conceptualization of social inclusion and equality, the involvement of the government will be elaborated upon. After this literature on accessibility, accessibility training for hotel employees and managers is discussed. Lastly, links will be made to show how Universal Design can be used to enhance social inclusion and equality to make the tourism industry more inclusive.

### 1.1 DISABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

To better understand the concept of enhancing social inclusion for people with a disability in the tourism sector, this section will provide a brief introduction to the concepts of disability, social inclusion and their relation to one another.

In the Netherlands, a general distinction is made between functional (physical) and intellectual disabilities in order to estimate the number of people with disabilities. The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu) describes functional impairments as those related to hearing, vision and mobility (Volksgezondheidszorg.info, n.d). The number of intellectual disabilities is difficult to estimate for the Netherlands, and all over the world, due to different definitions used to make an estimate. A lot of new cases of intellectual disability emerge before or around the moment of birth, and of course after birth during life. Both pre- and post-natal infections can lead to intellectual disability (Shalock et al., 2010). According to Shalock et al. (2010), an intellectual disability is determined on the basis of the intellectual functioning of an individual as well as the support that person needs.

The medical approach is a perspective to define disability, as stated by the World Health Organization's International Classification of Impairments (2002). This perspective focuses on the medical conditions disabling individuals. A disability, or in other words the lack of an ability for an individual, has a lot of classification conditions within its framework which can be diagnosed. The medical model, however, is criticised for portraying people with a disability as 'inferior' to able-bodied people and for contributing to the social exclusion of disabled people (Santos, 2006; Kastenholz et al., 2015). This shortcoming has been recognised by many, including the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1980, which published the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICDH) to bring structure to how disabilities, both functional and intellectual, could be categorized (Fontes, 2014). Due to this categorization of the ICDH, the social model emerged worldwide, which recognized the need to focus

on barriers (e.g., environmental, cultural and economic) that people with a disability face in social life (Yang, 2014). In other words, it recognised that *people* are not disabled but that their *environments* disable them. In 2006, the social model approach was recognized by the United Nations. This meant that policy makers began to think more about which practical steps are needed to be taken in order to make an enabling environment for people with disabilities (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). In practice, this meant that policy makers developed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to enhance the inclusiveness of disabled people in society. Rather than using the medical model, the UNCRPD used the social model.

As the social model described above demonstrated, people with disabilities may experience reduced social participation in meaningful social activities, like socializing with friends (Overmars-Marx et al. 2014), due to social spaces and activities being designed with mainly able-bodied people in mind (Figueiredo et al. 2012). As a result, in social life people are marginalized for having different bodies and are treated unequally (Kastenholz et al. 2015a). Alongside poverty, criminality, and ethnic and gender discrimination, disability is one of the most common factors of social exclusion (Koutsogeorgou et al. 2014).

Another concept in relation to disability is social inclusion. Social inclusion refers to the removal of the physical access barriers – such as access to public transport (Wilson et al., 2017), with a focus on full social participation in meaningful social activities (Overmars-Marx et al. 2014). According to Blichfeldt and Nicolaisen (2011) the removal of barriers is not only at a physical level, related to access and mobility, but it is and should also be combined with social-, cultural- and personal aspects, such as lack of travel or lack of confidence (Van Asselt et al. 2015).

In line with Overmars-Marx et al. (2014) and Blichfeldt and Nicolaisen (2011) is the assumption from Kastenholz et al. (2015a) that social inclusion assumes the existence of the opposite, namely social exclusion. Exclusion is a process that implies removal from a certain context in symbolic and material terms, which relates to the transformation of a person's identity in feeling excluded (Kastenholz et al., 2015a). It is marked by feeling the inability to overcome the social, cultural and economic barriers that cause a situation of exclusion (Paugam, 1996).

As shown above, there are several perspectives on disability and on social inclusion and exclusion. For this study, I will use the social model on disability in relation to social inclusion (Blinchfeldt and Nicolaisen 2011) in order to focus on barriers faced by disabled people, at physical, social and cultural levels, and to analyse the practical steps to socially include disabled people.

## 1.2 DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN RELATION TO TOURISM

This study focusses on disability and social inclusion in relation to tourism and the hotel industry. Tourism has the potential to enhance disabled peoples' life quality and satisfaction, mainly through social interaction and personal development (Figueiredo et al., 2012). In line with Figueiredo et al.

(2012), Darcy (2010) argues that it should be priority to focus on these benefits for disabled people within the tourism industry. Studies examining the participation of socially excluded groups in tourism have shown that tourism has a positive impact on marginalized groups, including people with health problems and disabilities (McConkey & McCullough, 2006). Yet, people with a disability encounter barriers in the tourism industry, including service attitudes negatively affecting their tourism participation (Packer et al. 2007). In addition, Cass et al. (2005) show that rights to accessibility and mobility are also related to physical barriers which leads to social exclusion. However, if accessibility is not taken into account and barriers are not seen by the tourism supplier, tourism's 'full potential is squandered and its promise of many powerful benefits for humanity remains unfulfilled' (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006, p. 1193). With accessibility focusing on providing participation in tourism for every individual, the demand for "accessible tourism" will likely grow, as the group of people with disabilities is likely to increase each year, since disabilities related to hearing, vision, and mobility increase with age (Michopoulou et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2007; CBS, 2018).

In the past decade, both governmental and non-governmental organizations have paid more attention to accessibility in tourism. This has been due to concern of the United Nations about social inclusion of people with disabilities and equal opportunities for all (Bélanger & Jolin, 2011). Grant and Kluge (2012) state that tourism is capable of providing opportunities to promote social inclusion by 'reaffirming self and developing a new identity in later years' (p.130), as well as by facilitating social interaction and networks. Saying this, the main goal of the right to go on holiday for everyone (including disabled people), is to provide as many people as possible with access to tourism, within the framework of 'social tourism' or 'tourism for all', with senior citizens and people with disabilities as the main targets (Bélanger & Jolin, 2011). This right is also underscored by the United Nations as it 'recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to take part in social life' with others on an equal basis (United Nations, 2006).

While there are growing opportunities for social inclusion of disabled people (McConkey & McCullough, 2006; Bélanger & Jolin, 2011; Grant & Kluge, 2012), Kastenholz et al. (2015) state that tourism, including hotel stays, are far from accessible to all, relating this to inclusion of other marginalized groups like people living in poverty, for many of whom tourism is a distant dream. Since legislation in the European Union has set goals to enhance social inclusion of people with disabilities, the entitlement to go on holiday is coming to the foreground in higher-income countries (Domínguez et al., 2013). In addition, these European goals include the focus on accessible tourism (Fraiz & Alén, 2013).

To summarize, social inclusion via participation in tourism should not be compromised as a result of inaccessibility (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). Real inclusivity and equality can be achieved when people with disabilities are integrated in the community and when there is diversity (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

## 1.3 THE DUTCH HOTEL INDUSTRY IN RELATION TO UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND ACCESSIBILITY

### TRAINING

In this study, I focus on the potential for accessible tourism and its lack of implementation in the hotel industry by providers, like hotel managers and employees. Because of that, this section of the literature review focuses specifically on identifying what has and has not been done relative to hotels and accessible tourism. Here I will introduce the relation of Universal Design and accessibility training in the hotel industry.

#### 1.3.1 THE HOTEL INDUSTRY AND ACCESSIBLE TOURISM IN GENERAL

Accessibility contributes to tourism activity and a higher occupancy of hotels (Ambrose et al., 2012). Additionally, it increases the market share and the customer base, while reducing the effects of seasonality for the hotel/tourism industry (Ambrose et al., 2012). Furthermore, it may improve profitability and enhance competitive advantage and destination competitiveness within the European tourism industry (Michopoulou et al., 2015).

Despite these positive impacts, Gillovic and McIntosh (2020) show that in general the governmental tourism agenda is still not inclusive, basing their conclusion on the tourism agenda in New Zealand. Even though some governments in Europe, the United States, New Zealand and Australia have worked on an accessible tourism agenda, these can still not be called *inclusive* agendas, with inclusion meaning the incorporation of disabled people in the decision-making process or having more accessibility-related topics on the tourism agenda (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). This is because the accessible tourism agendas do not engage in 'co-creative stakeholder engagement methods to engender collaborative dialogue, equitable inclusion, reciprocal learning and the challenging of existing knowledge gaps and assumptions held by powerful tourism stakeholders' (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020, p. 8).

Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) show that reflection on the decision-making process of tourism products, including participation of disabled people, is an element of inclusive tourism development. Other elements of inclusive tourism development are related to marginalised groups as tourism consumers, promotion of mutual understanding and respect and power relations transformed in and beyond tourism (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). The findings on participation in decision-making processes, as well as the other elements, come together with a future focus on accessibility, since there is a need for a greater understanding of disabled people's needs, wants and experiences among hotel and tourism employees/managers (Zajadacz, 2015).

Gillovic and McIntosh (2020) argue that the tourism and hotel industry have failed, in (large) part, in developing their products and services for disabled people with attention to accessibility and participation. This is mainly related to the limited accessibility awareness of the hotel industry, meaning that hotel managers and employees are not aware of accessibility problems and the earlier-mentioned potential benefits that solving these problems can bring. Studies focussing on disabled people and their experiences in the hotel industry suggest that disabled people are misunderstood, ignored as

consumers and under-served (Darcy & Pegg, 2011). A common argument or assumption in the hotel industry is that disabled people are seen as a minority market that has low return on investment and profitability (Kalargyrou et al., 2018).

From an accessibility perspective, social inclusion can be enhanced in the entire tourism and hotel industry. The current lack of implementation is argued by scholars like Buhalis and Darcy (2011) to be due to disabled people's lack of participation in decision-making processes. This is of relevance to my study since I relate social inclusion and accessible tourism to the implementation of access requirements (as described in the UNCRPD) in the hotel industry. While there are positive impacts, the implementation of an inclusive tourism agenda has not yet been reached.

### 1.3.2 THE DUTCH HOTEL INDUSTRY IN RELATION TO LEGAL ASPECTS IN ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

This section will show the top-down involvement of the United Nations, European Commission and, in this specific case, the Dutch government, towards social inclusion and equality of people with disabilities. This is followed by showing the current status of the Netherlands in terms of social inclusion in general and in the tourism industry, specifically, with a focus on accessible tourism. In this study, it is important to show and analyse the aforementioned points to see what steps have already been taken, the current situation and challenges faced in the implementation process of ratified legal procedures.

In 2006, the United Nations introduced the UNCRPD, which is an international treaty identifying the rights of disabled people as well as the obligations on parliaments of countries ratifying the UNCRPD to promote, protect and ensure those rights (UNCRPD, 2006). It aims to ensure that disabled people enjoy the same human rights as everyone else and that they can participate fully in society (UNCRPD, 2006). The most relevant articles related to tourism in the UNCRPD are Articles 9 and 30, as these deal with the right for people with disabilities to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. Introducing Articles 9 and 30 meant that the topic was approached from a social perspective, focussing mainly on social structures as obstacles to participating in society instead of focussing on a person's individual body and its capabilities (Kastenholz et al., 2015a). This change fostered a perspective on social responsibility towards a more inclusive society (Kastenholz et al., 2015a). However, the current focus in the European tourism industry is on material and income inequalities, instead of a focus on social, cultural and political inequalities, which Labonte (2004) argues should be brought more to the forefront. Examples of these social inequalities are feelings of being accepted and feeling part of a society (Overmars-Marx et al., 2014).

The UNCRPD – the first international, legally binding instrument setting minimum standards for rights of people with disabilities – was signed by an unprecedented number of national governments (186 countries). Each country decides separately on the Convention's ratification and implementation. This led to an interesting challenge for the European Commission since, by January 2019, all EU member-states had signed the UNCRPD. The UNCRPD's ratification will eventually lead to more accessible products and services for differently abled people and elderly within the EU (UN, 2020). Yet, significant problems with UNCRPD's implementation exist within and between countries, due to every countries'

need to separately ratify and implement it (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). This creates an outcome of not having accessible products and services implemented across the European tourism industry, especially due to differences in human rights legislation and building requirements (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). EU laws are needed to ensure common accessibility requirements for essential products and services at the level of the EU (European Parliament, 2020), like accessible information on websites of the hotel and tourism industry, also in the Netherlands. The first steps have been taken, since the Netherlands ratified the European Accessibility Act, which will be further explained in one of the next sections.

The Dutch government signed the UNCRPD of 13 December 2006, on 30 March 2007. Since the Convention was signed, the Netherlands has undergone a period of investments and introduction of new measures. In 2011, the government at the time announced 'reforms and major cutbacks to social security and welfare that were likely to have an (negative) effect on social inclusion' (p.7). This law had to be shelved due to the fall of the Dutch Government on 21 April 2012. On 12 April 2016, the UNCRPD was ratified by the Dutch Government ten years after the UNCRPD was introduced. Bert Koenders (Dutch ex-minister of Foreign Affairs) noted that it took a long time to prepare provisions of human rights treaties, which are directly applicable to the domestic legal order. These preparations were necessary as many provisions of human rights treaties are directly applicable to the domestic legal order, these requirements first had to be met before introducing and ratifying the UNCRPD (Koenders, 2016). However, preparation was necessary as many provisions of human rights treaties are directly applicable to the domestic legal order, and these requirements had to be met first.

In 2016, the Dutch government was working towards a better tourism environment by introducing the European Accessibility Act. The main focus of this act is a directive that aims to improve the functioning of the internal market for accessible products and services, by removing barriers created by divergent rules in member-states (European Commission, 2019a). As soon as the European Accessibility Act was officially published in 2017, the member-states were given three years to apply it to national law and six years to adapt to the law (European Parliament, 2019). The European Accessibility Act is built to complement the European Unions Web Accessibility Directive which became a law in 2016 (European Parliament, 2019). It also reflects the obligations of the UNCRPD, it includes a wide range of services including operating systems, ATMs, ticketing and check-in machines, services related to passenger transport and banking services. For instance, tour operators and hotels in the Netherlands will need to make their websites accessible for people with disabilities starting in 2024 by, e.g., showing the accessible features of the hotel rooms, showing pictures on the website related to the needs of disabled people and creating the option to listen to the text stated on the website.

As stated by van der Duim et al. (2019), the bottlenecks for the Dutch hotel and tourism industry are related to heterogeneity of travellers, the need for a different perspective towards inclusivity, inaccessible accessibility information, costs, and extra stress and work. Some steps towards inclusive thinking have been taken. At the same time, Meijers (board member of Nederlandse Branchevereniging Aangepaste Vakanties (NBAV)) is unsure whether achieving the deadline of 2024 for the implementation of the European Accessibility Act will be possible (Bekkering, 2020). Van der Duim et

al. (2019) identified two recommendations and opportunities to be most relevant to focus on to be able to reach the deadline of 2024: firstly, to focus on providing one platform with all relevant information about the European Accessibility Act for tour operators/hotel providers who need to implement the regulations and, secondly, providing accessibility training to employees in the hotel and tourism industry.

In contrast to the low level of implementations related to the UNCRPD ratified by the Netherlands and the bottlenecks as previously mentioned, there is an enormous market potential for people with disabilities, mainly the elderly (Ekkering, 2020). The World Health Organization stated that the population of people with disabilities in 2011 was more than one billion worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2011). Between 2000 and 2050, the percentage of people aged 60 years and older will double. With the knowledge that there is a well-established link between disability-related needs and aging (World Health Organisation, 2007), as stated by Radstake, 'We as Algemene Nederlandse Vereniging van Reisondernemingen (ANVR) should promote the market potential of disabled people, including the elderly, to make the hotel and tourism industry aware about this potential target group' (in Bekkering, 2020).

To conclude, there are goals set and even worked on by the United Nations and European Union. However, implementation is lacking with the countries that ratified the UNCRPD. The reasons behind the lack of implementation are the focus of this study.

There are steps taken to monitor and implement the UNCRPD, as stated in Article 33 of the UNCRPD (United Nations, 2017), from a worldwide perspective to a national perspective and even further to a niche market, the tourism and hotel industry.

**Step 1:** The adaption of the UNCRPD in 2006 can be seen as the first step in the implementation process. The UNCRPD is intended as a human rights instrument with a specific focus on social development, to change the attitudes and approach to disabled people (UN, 2006).

**Step 2:** From 2006 onwards, step 2 of the implementation process started among the 186 countries that ratified the Convention. The countries' governments that ratified the Convention, including that of the Netherlands, took the protocol into account. However, all state parties have their own responsibility, with their legal and administrative systems, to establish their own framework, including laws and legislation to protect and monitor the implementation of the convention (United Nations, 2017). The Netherlands took into account the European Accessibility Act, as noted earlier.

**Step 3:** As soon as the implementation of the national legislation happens, the hotel and tourism industries are the next ones to act on the laws and/or regulations. In the Netherlands, the European Accessibility Act needs to be implemented before 2024 in the hotel and tourism industry. In this step, civil society (particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations) is a key player in monitoring the process of implementation (United Nations,

2017). This will give insights into why and where implementation is lacking. Besides the Netherlands, other Member-States of the European Union are becoming aware of the growing accessibility market, which can be influenced by governments' antidiscrimination policies (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). Accessibility is being adopted as part of the strategic development of a country's or region's tourism products. In England, Spain, Italy and Flanders (Belgium), increased awareness leads to a higher level of accessibility (created by pilot projects and accessibility training), which is seen as development and driver for the tourism industry (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a).

Steps 1 and 2 were addressed in the aforementioned literature review. However, step 3 is not addressed yet. In the following sections, I will focus on hotel managers and employees in relation to accessibility legislation and analyse how accessibility training and Universal Design may serve as a useful tool to support their implementation of the existing legislation.

### 1.3.3 ACCESSIBILITY TRAINING

In this section, an introduction will be given about accessibility training and its relevance for this thesis. After this, an analysis will be provided based on the content of an accessibility training programme and how it supports accessibility for disabled hotel guests. Lastly, an example will be provided from the Scandic hotel group using an accessibility training program, and it will later be used as a model to help formulate this study's interview questions for hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands.

As stated in the Accessible Tourism Training report (Hausemer et al., 2014), published on behalf of the European Commission, there is need for employees in the hotel industry to be trained on accessibility awareness. This needs to be done repeatedly, due to the majority being low-skilled workers with transient jobs (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). Still, implementing accessibility training is mainly triggered by legislation and policies.

Hausemer et al. (2014) highlight that incorporating accessibility training in the tourism industry is a tool to make the tourism industry more inclusive. In 2015 the ELEVATOR training programme was created for several partner countries of the European Union: Italy, Greece, Czech Republic and Slovenia (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). This training programme provides hotel trainees 'with knowledge and understanding of the value of inclusive and accessible tourism for all' (European Commission & ENAT, 2015b, p.37). There are two training methods that provide a set of modules with topics related to different aspects of disability, including specific modules for the hotel sector (European Commission & ENAT, 2015). A training provider called Perfil developed a course that includes core modules addressing 'disability awareness'. Upon completion of these modules, participants get access to three other specialised courses to gain specific sector knowledge – making the training relevant for all kind of sectors, like public transport, tour operators and air transport. The types of training which exist to provide, for instance, accessibility awareness in the Dutch hotel industry, are also to be considered. An example is formal training which consists of instructor-led classroom training and learning technologies training (Kusluvan, 2003).

In addition, it was found that, when the tourism industry does implement training, it is not restricted to traditional, formal education. Instead, it is mainly informal and training takes place 'on-the-job' (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). This makes it necessary to consider a broader definition of training, using not only formal but also informal education in the tourism industry. The Accessible Tourism Training report states: 'informal training and availability of learning resources such as guidelines, videos, checklists and references are vital for businesses to take the first steps towards increased accessibility' (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a, p.15). However, according to Kusluvan (2003), it is important that the selection of one or multiple training methods be based on the needs and objectives of the audience which can be referred to as the right tactic.

Other forms of informal training can include 'awareness raising, mentoring, advice and information through seminars, workshops, printed material or other course content which is not delivered in a structured and formal way' (Hausemer et al., 2014, p.40). Decisions on using informal and formal trainings are often based on time availability, budget and costs (Kusluvan, 2003).

On the other hand, according to research conducted by the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT): 'legislation seems to encourage the growth of training offers and engagement, at least where this legislation is being properly enforced' (European Commission & ENAT, 2015d). This has been demonstrated by several cases, such as the national legislation of Luxembourg. In this case, the public transport company Chemin de Fer Luxembourg (CFL), together with the city of Luxembourg, did a one-day training programme for their employees (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). This shows that legislation, can have a positive influence on development of accessibility training within businesses.

Another aspect is the content of the training. In terms of educational content, the focus is mainly on accessibility skills, such as proper etiquette, understanding assistive technology and the strategic understanding of accessibility and 'Universal Design', which often needs external parties with expertise in accessibility products and services (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). The strategic understanding of Universal Design and accessibility are difficult to learn on-the-job since the knowledge is often not in-house. As a result, external parties are needed to improve and develop businesses on their accessibility awareness (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). Another aspect which is of great importance according to Hausemer et al. (2014, p.55) is that:

the objective of providing accessible services should not merely be to cater to tourists with disabilities, but also to include them in all tourist activities in the same way as an able-bodied tourist. A major part of any successful training initiative should be to overcome stigma, stereotyping and exclusion.

This shows that a training programme should also be linked to the strategic understanding of 'accessible tourism'. Visit Flanders already brought in this practice. Their course material emphasises the inclusion of any individual, whether able-bodied or disabled. According to their standards, everyone should be included in activities and not seen as distinct from other tourists (Hausemer et al., 2014).

As Hausemer et al. (2014) has shown, 'the skills needed for hospitality and tourism staff are very similar across Europe and, thus, there are valuable lessons to be learnt from drawing on all case studies' (p.78). This makes it important to understand the context, impact and efficiency of existing training in the wider tourism sector, such as the various trainings offered by Scandic Hotel group.

The Scandic Hotel Group presents their in-house Accessibility Training Programme, which is used and developed by SCANDIC, the largest hotel operator in Northern Europe. Scandic Hotel Group aims to offer accessible travel for all and believes in the right of treating everyone equally (Scandic, 2013). This approach ensures that its products are available to all customers, satisfying all needs (Scandic, 2013). As a result, it is recognised as the world leader in accessible hotels (European Commission, 2014b). Accessibility training for the Scandic Hotel group was developed by Magnus Berglund, Disability Coordinator as of 2003. Over the past years, Berglund's work has developed the hotel chain's policies and practices, with the aim to have all Scandic hotels: 'offer the same high level of customer service to people with disabilities as for other non-disabled guests. *Accessibility for All* is part of the ethos of Scandic and accessibility training is given to all Scandic staff' (European Commission, 2014b).

The Scandic Hotel group uses three methods to offer accessibility training:

- 1. On-the-job training:** Berglund and other team leaders carry out training courses in each of their 160 hotels. The focus is on trainings for front-office (related to awareness about different fire alarms, how to welcome disabled guests and offering a suitable room), food and beverage (how to serve disabled guests) and housekeeping employees (to make them aware about the preparations needed in the rooms for the disabled guests).
- 2. Classroom teaching:** Scandic has created a set of PowerPoint slides and textbooks which all hotels have access to. This is mainly related to accessibility awareness, with a special focus on guests with visual, hearing and functional disabilities.
- 3. Online course:** Digital training is available in the form of an Introductory Course on the company Intranet. All staff members must complete this 30-minute course. This course is more focussed on the standards of the Scandic Hotel and the general guest experience (European Commission, 2014b; Scandic, 2013).

To conclude, these different ways of learning methods for the tourism industry, in combination with the key concepts in this study, accessibility, social inclusion and Universal Design, are relevant to form a better understanding of how training can be used to improve accessible tourism services across Europe (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). In addition, this literature is relevant for my study to create interview questions.

### 1.3 UNIVERSAL DESIGN

In this section, Universal Design will be discussed and analysed by providing a definition of Universal Design, challenges/limitations of Universal Design, and perspectives and examples of the Universal

Design principles. This is done in order to make a link to accessible tourism and social inclusion, as well as to use Universal Design as a lens to help formulate interview questions.

### 1.3.1 A DEFINITION OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN

The seven principles of Universal Design are Equitable Use, Flexibility in Use, Simple and Intuitive Use, Perceptible Information, Tolerance for Error, Low Physical Effort, Size and Space for Approach and Use (Center for Universal Design, 2008). These principles were developed in 1997 at North Carolina State University by a working group of researchers consisting of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers (Center for Excellence in Universal Design, 2020). After the European Accessibility Act (2019), it was also applied and used in tourism studies. The seven principles are used in to examine existing designs, guide the design process and act as a source of information on designing more usable products and environments (Dolmen, 2013). Currently, Universal Design is used in several industries, including the hotel and tourism industry (e.g., variety of airports like Oslo Airport, and the Scandic Hotel group, which is unique in its use of Universal Design (Ambrose, 2011)). In the following quote, it will be shown how Universal Design is used:

The Oslo Airport shows how to combine modern architecture and design with consideration of universal design: good, consistent quality in the design of products, interiors, architecture and functional solutions, the universal design of a high level is evident in this project. Scandic Oslo Airport sets a new standard in the way they have integrated universal design. Here one has, as the only hotel chain today, taken into account the interests of all users in the business strategy. (Ambrose, 2011)

Design for people with disabilities is a narrow perspective, compared to using Universal Design since it only includes one specific group of people instead of designing for all. Universal Design seeks to create high-quality, safe and comfortable environments for all guests, including, but not limited to, those with disabilities. As a response to shortcomings in the design for mass production, such as not having a product that is usable for everyone, Universal Design was developed in the 1980s. From then onwards, architects, designers and researchers in Europe started to incorporate it.

The way in which the Universal Design framework will be discussed in this paragraph is stated below:

Universal Design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The intent of the universal design concept is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications, and the built environment more usable by more people at little or no extra cost. The universal design concept targets all people of all ages, sizes and abilities. The Universal Design approach goes beyond traditional design, which tends to focus on the 'average' user. Universal Design is a design approach, reflecting a way of understanding people's needs. It is not a list of particular solutions, measurements, or products – Universal

Design is the way to reach the solution, contributing to social inclusion. (Center for Universal Design, 2008)

Based on this definition, the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) started 'to reinforce the need for the Universal Design of customer engagement products and services by emphasising that every person can experience a decrease in health during their lifetime and thereby experience some degree of disability' (World Health Organization, 2019). The focus of the ICF is not on the people with a disability, but instead on the fact that 'disability' does not influence only a minority of people.

Another aspect of Universal Design is the way in which it should be applied. The Center for Universal Design (2008) set up guidelines and principles to examine existing designs, guide the process of universal design for businesses and act as a source of information to design more usable products, services and environments. The aforementioned aspects are designed to support and progress social inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in everyday life (European Parliament, 2020). It establishes a regulatory basis for the support of disability-specific products and services, while improving access to public products and services (European Parliament, 2020).

Buhalis and Darcy (2011) state that Universal Design is a lens through which one can look at accessible tourism to improve the process, products and services offered to disabled guests. Tourism products, services and environments, in their view, should be delivered as universally designed. This shows that the tourism industry needs to 'design and deliver offerings and services that are suitable to all potential users and remove any physical or organisational barriers that can prevent visitation' (Michopoulou et al., 2015a, p. 184). Taking tourism into account, applying the principles of Universal Design can be seen as a way of developing tourism environments and its services and offerings (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). Buhalis and Darcy's (2011) perspective on Universal Design will be used as a lens for this study, due to their idea on using Universal Design as a lens to look at accessible tourism, which allows for focus on questions of social inclusion and accessibility in the hotel industry and tourism.

### 1.3.2 PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS TO UNIVERSAL DESIGN

There are also problems and limitations related to the Universal Design (UD)/Inclusive Design<sup>5</sup> (ID) approach, due to the gap which still remains between theory and practice. Since the UD/ID became popular, there has been an urgent need to understand what the problems and limitations are to make the Universal Design approach more effective for both practitioners and customers. One of the key problems, according to Mace (Center for Excellence in Universal Design, 2020), which started using the definition of universal design in 1985, is the terminology itself as well as how the term is applied.

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<sup>5</sup> 'As overlapping design philosophies, universal design (UD), human-centered design, or the preferred European terms inclusive design (ID) and design-for-all have come a long way since their inception. Despite their separate beginnings, their overarching concepts developed in parallel. They all have two common origins: (1) the disability movement and (2) the impact of user-centered design on quality of life. In the context of this chapter, the abbreviation ID covers them all in a general sense, while UD refers specifically to American developments' (Sandhu, 2006, p. 44.3).

According to Coleman et al. (2007), a variety of thoughts arose from the consumers about the assumptions of the 'one size fits all' design terminology, as there were 'assumptions about underpinning products, services and environments' (p.32). Assumptions arose about the ones who did not conform with these 'one size fits all' products in terms of, for instance, height, physical strength or cognitive capacity. As a result, these people felt excluded. This mismatch grew as the consumer market expanded across the developed world. The main mismatch began when a generation started with people who actually grew up with consumerism and developed different expectations and aspirations from those of their older family members. They rejected exclusion due to disability or age, causing society to think more about equal rights (Coleman et al., 2007).

Another aspect is the lack of application of UD/ID in the majority of the world. Only a few stakeholders are involved in applying UD/ID that affects a majority of the world. As stated in the research report from the Center for Universal Design (2013) (funded by the National Disability Authority of Ireland): 'by applying Universal Design principles and guidelines, businesses and organisations can produce products and services that are usable, accessible and understood by all customers, to the greatest practicable extent, without the need for adaption or specialised design' (p.7). Based on their perspective on Universal Design, an important aspect of Universal Design is the way in which it is applied. According to Topalian (1980), the problems that occur when applying Universal Design to a business are mainly related to the business representatives, the managers who represent the business. These business executives who apply the design for a business are the ones who are able to have the greatest influence. In turn, this also influences the way design is applied related to set values, policies and standards of the business (Coleman, et al., 2007). As Coleman et al. (2007) note, 'Given the crucial influence of those who manage design activities on their outcomes, this gap weakens all attempts to promote a wider, successful adoption of inclusive design' (p. 49). This shows that the influence of the ones who manage the Universal Design in a sector can potentially cause the problem of applying it differently within that sector or, more specifically, in a hotel.

Lastly, a major limitation of UD/ID is the current practice of conventional use of human-centred design -- in other words, taking into account the user perspective. In relation to this is the next challenge since, besides the user perspective, it is of increased importance to open up UD/ID to a wider perspective. This includes social, political and legal issues. On the one hand, this wider perspective will be of a wider positive influence for disabled people. However, it also has challenges: 'UD/ID has moved away from the activity of designing, i.e., producing objects and environments for users, to mere abstractions, such as codes and standards authoring' (Sandhu, 2006, p.44). In that case, the concept takes another direction than its core definition and approach, and problems result in sorting out UD/ID approaches, impacts and standards.

The above limitations of the Universal Design approach need to be taken into account in this study, to be sure of the right use from a variety of perspectives.

### 1.3.3 THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF THE UNIVERSAL DESIGN APPROACH

The seven principles of Universal Design are given below, including examples and perspectives from the tourism industry. The purpose of providing these principles is to show the existing debates and discussions about topics linked to each principle:

**Principle 1: *Equitable use:*** *The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.*

Equitable use is related to design products, services or destinations useful for every individual with or without a disability. The definition of accessible tourism by Darcy (2011), as noted earlier, recognises the importance of three values, which are the basis of the process: independence (being able to be independent/have access), equity (fair treatment) and dignity (feeling accepted). If these three values are implemented prior to travelling to a destination (with tour operators providing accessible information) during the travel (accessible transportation) and during the stay in the destination (accessible accommodation, accessible attractions and the way service is provided) (Van der Duim et al., 2019) as part of the experience and design development, then people with disabilities will be seen as more included and are able to be more independent travellers (Darcy & Dickenson, 2009). This results in fewer support needs from the tourism industries destination and, on the other hand, the travellers are able to experience enjoyment with equity<sup>6</sup> (Darcy & Dickenson, 2009).

**Principle 2: *Flexibility in use:*** *The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.*

Yau, McKercher, and Packer (2004) show that much participation in tourism of people with disabilities is primarily related to the acceptance of their disability, and second, to the active attitude by them in trying to overcome obstacles that the non-inclusive society and their disabilities lay before them. This attitude also relates to the challenge of active participation in daily life, which refers to leisure and tourism as being part of it, meaning that for people with disabilities it is about taking risks, having trust during their trip while being in an unknown or uncontrolled environment. In this context, constraints created related to social and cultural aspects should be overcome, which requires socially inclusive attitudes on behalf of everyone to enhance accessibility in tourism (Bélanger & Jolin, 2011). On top of this, Buhalis and Michapoulou (2011) note that people with disabilities are a large and diverse category of people, having a large variety of needs and requirements to provide equal access to all, in a material and immaterial dimension (Figueiredo et al., 2012).

**Principle 3: *Simple and intuitive use:*** *The use of the design is easy, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level.*

Simple and intuitive use of the design can be related to the design of buildings and spaces, in the tourism and hotel industry. An example is that, while many entries of a hotel, for disabled people are located at the back or side of the building, not always are there clear signs in place to direct people to them. This has to do with simple and intuitive use in the sense of the way something is directed, by signs or language. This relates to the awareness of hotel managers and employees about accessibility and the needs and wants of their

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<sup>6</sup> Equity in this case is used to show that travellers are able to experience and enjoy tourism with fairness in access, use, and distribution of goods and benefits from tourism (Darcy & Dickenson, 2009)

disabled guests. If they are aware, they are able to keep the use of their products and services simple and intuitive.

**Principle 4: *Perceptible information:*** *The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.* The 2017 European Accessibility Act obliges tour operators in the Netherlands to make their websites (and other offline and online communication tools) accessible and understandable for people with a disability starting in 2024. Additionally, the United Nations and the European Union, including the Netherlands, are working for the past few years on inclusion of people with disabilities, demonstrated by 2006 UNCRPD and the ratification of the UNCRPD and the European Accessibility Act by the Netherlands (European Parliament, 2019). This is an important sign, since legislation also seems to have an impact on the growth of training offers and engagement, mainly to comply to regulations formed by the European Union, for instance. (European Commission & ENAT, 2015). It is interesting to see that Dutch tourism associations, like ANVR, are focussing more and more on accessibility training in tourism, also for hotels (ANVR, 2019). As stated by Frank Oostdam (Director of ANVR) :

'It is important to be aware that the needs are different for people with disabilities, as well as their needs for support and care. To start, providing accessible information is essential, besides good training on accessibility. Taking responsibility together with all participants involved in the tourism industry, local governments, hotels/accommodations and other businesses we can support in developing a destination for all' (ANVR, 2019).

**Principle 5: *Tolerance for error:*** *The design minimises hazards and adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.* Discussing social inclusion in tourism is often related to the functional (physical) accessibility for tourists with disabilities (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2015). However, as argued by Figueiredo et al. (2012), notwithstanding the need to remove physical barriers, the focus and attention must also be on removing emotional and sensorial barriers. An example of an emotional barrier for a disabled hotel guest is the way they are approached in a hotel verbally. In this case, they can feel excluded by the use of words from the hotel employee, though the hotel employee may not even be aware that it might have an emotional impact. This shows that the principles of Universal Design should be combined to come to an effective form of inclusion, instead of looking at the principles separately.

**Principle 6: *Low physical effort:*** *The design can be used effectively and comfortably and with minimal fatigue.* In the case of accessible tourism, most difficulties derive from functional (physical) barriers, which exclude people with disability from participation in social life. As stated by Cass et al. (2005), social inclusion is closely related to the concepts of mobility, access and accessibility. In the hotel industry, this mainly relates to the design of hotels. Are the entrances accessible for wheelchair users? Is the reception desk low enough to be reached by the guests and does the hotel have an accessible room(s)?

**Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use:** *Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.* Tourism is generally designed with the perspective of tourists and travellers being able, mobile and seeing, and mainly the whole tourism industry focusses on experiences directed at non-disabled people (Aitchison, 2009). According to McFarlane and Hansen (2007), 'Inaccessible buildings and public transport, demeaning stereotypes, prejudice and ignorance, and negative social ascriptions, undermine and deny the many capacities of disabled people' (p. 89). Aitchison (2009) finds that the practice of exclusion in society summarizes the nature of society itself, leading to demand that tourism channels and decreases this negativity in order to motivate new generations to make the tourism industry, inclusive and accessible.

To combine all principles, and to conclude, showing perspectives and/or examples of the Universal Design principles, the link was made to social inclusion for people with disabilities. I suggest that this can be enhanced by the use of the seven principles in the way as shown above, which will be studied focussing on the Dutch Hotel Industry.

To conclude, Universal Design framework is thought to be likely to deliver better products and services usable by as many people as possible, rendering them accessible through this inclusive framework (Michopoulou et al., 2015). The Scandic Hotel Group is an example of a hotel chain already using Universal Design in practice for their products and services. Universal Design and the experience within the Scandic Hotel Group can therefore be used as a set of tools to design and analyse in this study. However, as stated earlier, there are some challenges in UD/ID which need to be taken into account when using the approach. To deliver better products and services, the Universal Design approach is needed (Michopoulou et al., 2015). In this case, the Dutch hotel industry can be linked to accessible tourism in a way of seeing where to develop the production side of the hotel industry to make it more inclusive for consumers with disabilities.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

This section will focus on the research perspective, positionality, respondents, sampling strategy, data collection, data analysis, (potential) dilemmas and the strengths and limitations of the study.

### 2.1 RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE AND POSITIONALITY

This study has an exploratory nature, as it aims to explore how hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands believe they can work to enhance the social inclusion for their guests with disabilities. In this study, an interpretivist perspective is used to develop an understanding of the viewpoint of employees and managers in the Dutch hotel industry on social inclusion, equality and development towards a more inclusive tourism approach. Interpretivists see reality as socially and culturally constructed. Moreover, people's experience of reality is ever-changing; it is experienced subjectively – which means that what people say, think and how they act is fundamental (Gorton, 2019). Thus, interpretivists advocate for consideration of the context in which knowledge is produced and received by people. For this study, qualitative methods are used to be able to comprehend the complexity of issues related to enhancing social inclusion and equality in the tourism industry from the perspective and opinion of the employees and managers within the Dutch hotel industry. This will be studied by making use of the information gathered in the literature review, literature on accessibility training, the Scandic Hotel group and Universal Design's seven design principles to develop the interview questions for semi-structured interviews with hotel managers and employees in the Dutch hotel industry. The focus of these interviews is to see what the current status is, and what the potential future status can be, of social inclusion in hotels.

Additionally, I am embedded in this study since I know some of the respondents personally due to my previous job in the hotel industry. This position needs to be taken into account as a potential influencing factor on the study itself and the results (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This could influence the study both positive and negatively: positively since we were quickly at ease during interviews and negatively due to the potential of having a more informal talk with the interviewee. However, to lower this possible negative effect I made sure to handle the small talk, keep it short and direct the interview to a serious and professional direction. In addition, I took into account that every manager or employee will have their own perception of reality, experiences and expectations of accessibility, social inclusion, equality and Universal Design. This is based on their personal background, life experience and values of the differently abled tourists (Weber, 2001).

### 2.2 RESPONDENTS AND SAMPLING STRATEGY

I have conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews. To focus this study, six hotel chains have been selected, all operating in the Netherlands. These hotel chains are selected based on purposive sampling, creating a mix of the 'top hotel industry', taking into account Dutch and international chains all having 3-to-4-star rankings, meaning comparable standards. The hotel chains will be kept anonymous. This study has been conducted from the viewpoint of the key stakeholders within the Dutch hotel industry, focussing on managers and employees. Access to the hotel managers and employees,

was gained by contacting my own network. The fieldwork was done over a period of six weeks, starting on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 and ending on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2020.

As previously stated, the focus of this study is on the viewpoint of hotel managers and employees within the Dutch hotel industry. These groups were included in this study based on the literature review which indicates three steps for implementing accessible standards, regulations and/or laws within national law, for national society. In the third step the monitoring by civil society (disabled people and related representatives) comes into play, to monitor the implementation of national accessible standards, regulations and or laws. Lastly, the hotel employees are of importance to see how and whether they execute the policies. This combination of interviewees is of importance to this study to answer the why and how questions: why there is a lack of implementation and how they see it improving. A third respondent group was formed during the interviews with the hotel managers and employees. The decision to add this specific group of respondents was made during the fieldwork based on having a third perspective from the practical side: the ones who face barriers and experience the end-product/service as a disabled hotel guest. This group is a combination of field experts: disabled people and people working in the field of enhancing accessibility by either giving workshops or checking hotels on their accessibility. In the data collection section, more information is given on the interviewees and in which departments they work.

The sub-groups were sampled using 'purposive sampling', since I selected the interviewees based on contacts within the hotel industry from several specific hotel chains within the Netherlands. I am aware of the fact that using this specific and purposive sampling, other hotel chains were excluded in this study. However, the time available was limited, since this study was done for a thesis.

## 2.3 DATA COLLECTION

Prior to doing the in-depth semi-structured interviews, some steps (like an interview with an accessible tourism supplier, as well as practice interviews with hotel employees and managers) were undertaken to be able to gain a better understanding of the already existing literature, studies, accessible strategies within the Dutch hotel industry and some insights of experts in the field. In addition, I used the in-depth semi-structured approach because it ensured the overall consistency and coherence throughout the study. This type of interview provided me with both structure and the possibility to ask more in-depth questions to gain better and deeper understanding of motives and beliefs. This increases the validity and reliability, and at the same time allows for probing (Longhurst, 2003).

### 2.3.1 IN-DEPTH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH HOTEL EMPLOYEES AND HOTEL MANAGERS

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the hotel employees and hotel managers. Below a short description will be given on the number of interviews conducted.

Hotel employees: Twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with hotel employees. In addition, two interviews were used as practice interviews.

Hotel managers: Twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with hotel managers, of which one was used as practice interview.

These interviews focussed on the ideas and perspectives of the hotel employees on the current status and possible future challenges and opportunities within the hotel industry for people with disabilities, specifically focusing on social inclusion and equality. This provided context to the bigger picture of social inclusion and equality in the Dutch hotel industry.

First, I started with asking informal questions to make the interviewees feel at ease, such as asking about what job they fulfil in the hotel and what their job involves. After this, I moved on to questions about their experiences related to guests with disabilities and their knowledge/awareness about the legislation, specifically the European Accessibility Act. The interviews finished with questions related to accessibility training by the use of examples from the Scandic Hotel Group case to make them feel confident in the understanding of the accessibility training and their needs/wants in relation to this topic. The aim was to have the interviews last about 45 to 60 minutes each.

The perspectives of the hotel employees are of great importance to get a good idea of what appeals to the possible users of accessibility trainings, especially to gather information on what they see as possible options and focus points for accessibility training in the Dutch hotel industry. In addition, this helped to see where and how employees see potential in enhancing social inclusion and equality in the future by offering accessibility training.

Additionally, these interviews helped to answer the sub-research question on which aspects accessibility training should contain. In addition, it allowed me to observe the current status and future potential for people with disabilities in the Dutch hotel industry. The interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

For both interview groups, I tried to build trust by the use of informal conversations with them at an early stage in the study process, as well as mentioning some people from their own network which I used to get in contact with them. Contact was made with these potential interviewees during the first few weeks of the fieldwork stage. This trust-building could help prevent the loss of respondents as it helps develop mutual understanding and a real commitment of potential interviewees (O'Neill, 2004). As I wanted interviewees to be able to speak freely and because the questions might entail confidential information, the interviews were held in a private space. At the start of the interview, permission was asked to record the interview. The interviewees had varying expertises, like in F&B (Food & Beverage – restaurant/bar), Guest Services, Sales & Marketing, Front Office and/or Events departments. The aforementioned departments all include front-line employees, meaning that they are in direct contact with the disabled guests, which provided me as researcher with the best perspective of employees on their work and practices with disabled guests. This variety of expertise was important to take into account to get perspectives from a wide range of hotel employees/supervisors and managers from each hotel, to be able to create robust study data. Lastly, using multiple types of perspectives it ensured the flexibility to

capture diverse themes and information that emerge during the study, even if not anticipated beforehand (Fusch et al., 2018).

The data was documented through notes. Since this study is of qualitative origin, I was the research instrument and therefore some subjectivity in the notes and interpretation of the observations is unavoidable (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

## 2.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered through the interviews was analysed through comparison, computer transcription and inductive coding. This means that for this study grounded theory is used based on open-, axial and selective coding. To make sure I minimized the memory loss of information, the interviews were recorded and I wrote down my fieldnotes as soon as possible after the in-depth semi-structured interviews (Mulhall, 2003). After conducting the interviews, the recordings were used to transcribe the interviews. Then, the analysis was done through inductive coding, which is in line with the exploratory nature of this study (Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004). The inductive coding was based on the findings and existing literature.

During this study, the steps of collecting data, analysing data and developing theory were not considered separate steps. Instead, they were intertwined. This relates to the characteristics of grounded theory. As stated by Corbin and Strauss (1990), action and reflection always alternate in terms of data collection, data analysis and theory development.

The development of results to the study were continued until *saturation* was achieved (after 18 interviews), meaning new data do not seem to contribute any longer to the elaboration of categories. The relations between the categories/codes are well developed and validated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), by the use of open-, axial- and selective coding.

To come to these codes, I used the grounded theory approach by reading and listening to my notes, transcriptions, recordings and memos. In this way I identified frequently mentioned sentences and topics which I described and coded using open coding. I then looked for the interrelationships between the open codes and interview sentences, creating axial codes. The sensitivity of perceiving relationships, the axial codes, is affected by a number of aspects. One of these aspects, in my study, can be related to me being the analyst reading the data. This causes sensitivity due to only having one perception and perspective. The last part of the coding was selective coding in which I made core categories to the axial codes, creating interrelationships. With these core categories a single storyline around all codes was formulated.

## 2.5 (ETHICAL) DILEMMAS

There were also a number of ethical dilemmas when setting up this research. For example, the outbreak of COVID-19, which did not allow in-person interviews with some of the interviewees, due to some interviewees being part of the virus risk group. The setting and contact with the interviewees was therefore very different per interviewee, based on what was possible regarding face-to-face or online

contact. I knew this prior to the start of this study. Therefore, I tried to find literature on how to do online interviews in the best possible way. The literature I found shows that telephone or Skype interviews are 'just as good' as the face-to-face interviews (Irvine, 2011). I knew the challenges, like the role of the technology in facilitating real-time co-presence, which provided me with insights to enhance my interviewing techniques online. An example is related to using Skype as an interview tool. In that situation, the camera is used and the interaction will be comparable to the face-to-face interview (Janghorban et al., 2014). However, only having the "head shot" provided by webcam creates a limitation observing the body language (Cater, 2011) for me as a researcher. To ask more in-depth on certain topics if I felt the interviewee acted different, I tried to solve this limitation. In addition, the flexibility of doing Skype interviews resolved my concern to reach potential key participants in this study and increase participation during this COVID-19 period.

A final constraint in my case was the sensitivity of the subject, for both the hotel industry and the differently abled tourists. It could be difficult for both the interviewee and me, the interviewer, to speak about certain matters because they concerned sensitive topics. This meant that important issues, whether consciously or not, are concealed that would be in the interest of the study. I dealt with this by mentioning this topic prior to the interview to make the interviewee feel at ease and to show that he/she could stop discussing the topic if it feels uncomfortable.

## 2.6 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Limitations and strengths were identified to take into account for future thought. A limitation regarding the included participants refers to the differences in numbers of each included group of interviewees (for further explanation see below, where I also describe this as a strength).

Another limitation was that during the interviews the government, municipality and Koninklijke Horeca Nederland (KHN) came to the forefront as being important parties in enhancing social inclusion and equality for disabled hotel guests in the Netherlands. However, due to limited time I was not able to involve these parties. For future research this can be of added value, which will be further elaborated upon in the next section.

The mixture of interviewees can be seen as a limitation as well as a strength. Of the total 30 interviews, of which three to four were conducted per hotel chain, 10 were employees and 10 were managers. From the group with disabled people there were two interviewed, also three field experts (disabled people and people working in the field of enhancing accessibility either giving workshops or checking hotels on their disabilities) were interviewed. In addition, there were five other interviewees, three conducted as practice interviews and two from other hotel chains. In the end, there were no other new potential participants from these chains, therefore these five interviews are not taken into account – for an overview of all participants, please look at Appendix B. Therefore, I kept it with six hotel chains, three international ones and three national ones. This shows, first a strength, that I was well prepared, due to three practice interviews, to conduct all the official interviews. In this case I was able to add, skip or adjust certain questions for the in-depth semi-structured interviews and came up with potential new topics to discuss in the in-depth semi-structured interviews with field experts. Second, which can be

seen as a limitation, is the variety in number of participants per group. The group of employees and hotel managers was the largest group of interviewees. As expected, and explained in the methods part, 20 interviews were conducted – ten hotel employees and ten hotel managers. The other group was based on new contacts, which I received during the interviews. This provided new perspectives. However, this group was not the main focus of the study and there were just five interviewees of the field experts instead of a larger more reliable number of interviewees. Lastly, the interviewees from among the group of hotel employees and managers sometimes had a variety of experiences prior to their current job. This resulted in a lot of experiences from one interviewee with different perspectives, from different departments. This can also be seen as a strength since it provides more perspectives in one interview. This increased the reliability of the findings since these different perspectives, from international and national hotel chains, were able to provide a holistic overview of the different perspectives present amongst parties involved in the provision of products and services related to social inclusion and equality for disabled hotel guests. However, the aim of this qualitative study was to generate saturation, in other words a high reliability, by using the grounded theory method.

Due to my past job experience in the hotel industry the first few interviews were easily planned. After this it took a little longer to purposively find other contacts within the right hotel chains. However, via via, I received the contact details of participants willing to join the study anonymously. In this case, selection bias may have occurred since all participants were reached and invited to participate based on purposive or convenience sampling. Both of these sampling strategies are non-random sampling strategies, which in general bring the external validity in danger. This means that the results of this study cannot be generalised. Due to triangulation, taking different perspectives from the participants, in combination with inviting a variety of hotel chains the level of generalization in the Netherlands was improved. In other words, the level of external validity improved.

In addition, interviews were conducted to add two other perspectives from the disabled people/potential guests and from the field experts who are working in or for the accessible tourism industry for several years. This shows another strength, since these two perspectives are related to the current situation of social inclusion and equality of disabled hotel guests from the experts and the guests who receive certain hotel services – which provides a holistic overview.

Another strength of the interviews was the combined method of in-depth semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews. This made it possible with the in-depth semi-structured interviews to see whether similar or different answers were given by different hotel chains or departments. In addition, this gave the participants for the in-depth interviews the opportunity to tell their stories about their experiences related to disabled guests, as well as their perspective on enhancing social inclusion and equality for these guests within their hotel. They were able to speak without any steering from me, the interviewer. This broadened the scope in most of the interviews to new and different topics as with the semi-structured interviews. However, in some of the in-depth interviews, some steering was needed to go more in-depth on particular topics or examples. I only gave some examples or steered if they asked for

it or if I really had the feeling that they did not understand my question. This resulted in the fact that the in-depth interviewing method could not always be executed according to the described approach.

### 3. RESULTS

In this section, I present the results derived from the semi-structured and in-depth interviews. The results are divided into different themes, starting with an explanation of the content. The themes described in the results section are related to the selective codes created after doing the interview analysis. The themes are: 'physical hotel design', 'communication and service', 'laws and legislation' and 'accessibility training'. The analysis of the interview data, particularly the results coming from this, are shown and described using quotes from the participants, which are used to answer the sub-questions:

- What is the current status of inclusive tourism in the top hotel industry of the Netherlands?
- How do employees of top hotel chains in the Netherlands currently respond to the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?
- How do employees of top hotel chains in the Netherlands believe they could respond to challenges to the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?

The abbreviations P1-P25 refer to the participants who mentioned certain terms or sentences during the interview which are relevant for the results. Appendix C provides an overview of all participants included in the study.

#### 3.1 THEME 1: PHYSICAL HOTEL DESIGN

In this section I describe the theme 'physical hotel design' from different perspectives. By 'physical hotel design' I refer to a variety of aspects related to the hotel design. These include physical aspects such

as accessible rooms, entrance (for instance, is it broad enough for people in a wheelchair?) or the front office desk (is it low enough to speak to people in a wheelchair?) and all other building-related aspects of the hotel.

When features for disabled guests were discussed during the interviews, participants first noted the physical aspects of the hotel. I started with questions like 'what (kind of) experiences do you have with disabled guests?' or 'what are the features of the hotel, related to disabled guests?', which were always related to physical hotel design, mainly with the focus on accessible rooms. Most hotels had accessible rooms. However, participants, like P5, often noted: 'We do have one or two accessible rooms in our hotel. This makes it so that we are able to welcome disabled guests. However, our accessible rooms are not requested and used that often' (P5). A portion of the employees/managers interviewed made clear that they are aware that the hotels in which they work have accessible rooms, which, in their opinion, means they are able to welcome disabled guests. However, another group said that not all the hotels have accessible rooms. Furthermore, almost all participants only focussed, from the start of the interview onwards, on guests with a functional (physical) disability, which excludes consideration of other disabled guests (e.g., those with visual-, hearing- or intellectual disabilities, which will be further discussed in the second theme about communication and service).

Hotel chain E does not have accessible rooms in all hotels. Instead, they have a concept with rooms which can be transformed into accessible rooms with, for instance, a shower chair or a solution to remove thresholds. The case of hotel chain C is different, they have a lot of old hotels excluding accessible rooms, which were on the planning for a renovation. However, due to COVID-19, the renovations are on hold. This shows that not all hotels have accessible rooms, or only one or two rooms are accessible. This is a low number, since all participants work in hotels with 50 to 557 rooms. There was only one exception to this rule, hotel chain A, where they have 27 accessible rooms, out of the 557 rooms in total, available for guests with a disability. This is due to the building being only 10 years old and, in the design phase, accessible rooms already being taken into account, plus hotel chain A is a UK daughter brand of a larger chain. It was thus required to adhere to UK legislation with standards for a certain proportion of accessible rooms.

In addition to the accessible rooms, which were mentioned a lot as an accessible feature, there were also features mentioned like having a wide entrance for wheelchair users, accessible toilet or having a lower front office desk to be able to also personally welcome the guests in a wheelchair. Just half of the participants mentioned that they have an entrance to welcome everyone, also guests in a wheel chair. Some hotels do not have the main entrance wide enough for everyone to use, or they have a staircase prior to reaching the entrance, which causes a problem for wheelchair users or guests with other physical disabilities. In this case they have different entrances to welcome these guests. Strikingly, according to the hotel managers and the experts in the field of disabled people, the design of the hotels and accessible rooms is only done by architects without knowledge of disabled people or taking their needs into account. This is partly due to the building regulations in the Netherlands, according to organisation B, since aspects for disabled people like thresholds are not taken into account per se. Only

when hotels are renovated are there small adjustments made based on new regulations, notes a representative of organisation B.

Another striking aspect pertains to people with an intellectual disability, which can be influenced by the design of a hotel. Participant 12 mentioned that they have a design hotel with a lot of colours and shapes, which is related to the physical design of the hotel and that this was of influence on the request of the group (a group having autism). This example shows that the hotel design can also be of great importance for guests with a certain disability.

Last but not least, as shortly mentioned earlier, there are guests with visual and hearing disabilities. For these guests, there are certain problems, like the menu or the fire alarm. Of the six hotels in the study, there was only one (hotel chain A) offering a menu in braille and a vibrating buzzer for the fire alarm (P1-P4) for hearing-disabled people to lay underneath their pillow to alert them in case of emergency. Only a small proportion of the participants said that they were not aware of the need for adaptations in the products and services of the hotel they work for, like providing a menu in braille, which is of importance for visually impaired guests. This shows that the awareness about needs and wants of disabled guests are not always known by the participants of this study.

### 3.1.1 CONCLUDING REMARKS THEME 1:

Most of the hotels have one or two accessible rooms, while one of them has more accessible rooms. However, these rooms are not always designed the way needed for guests with a disability. This is, according to respondents, mainly due to not having disabled people giving advice on the design of the room. Instead, only the advice and design of architects, who lack knowledge on the needs and wants of people with disabilities, is perceived to be taken into account.

## 3.2 THEME 2: COMMUNICATION, SERVICE AND ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS

The second theme is communication and service. Communication refers to the communication between the hotels' employees and disabled guests. This communication might occur on the website, in person or by way of promotion of room rate or room type. Service refers to service-related challenges participants faced with disabled guests.

### 3.2.1 COMMUNICATION

Starting with communication, there is variety in terms of how the hotels deal with room types and room rates related to their accessible rooms, if they have them. Part of the hotel chains have an accessible room at the entry level, meaning that it is the lowest room type with the same rate as all other guests pay for such a standard/entry level room. However, there are also hotels that only have their accessible room at a junior suite level, meaning that guests with a disability who are in need of such a room pay more than a regular guest. An interviewee from hotel chain F said:

We do have a junior suite, which can be sold as an accessible room as well. However, we do not promote this room as an accessible room, since we sell the room for a higher room rate to

general guests. The guests who are in need of an accessible room we provide the best available rate. (P19)

There were other answers related to the room type, some more participants said about the same in slightly different words, all other hotels with accessible rooms have rooms at the entry level, only P1-P4 offer a variety of their room types as accessible rooms.

The hotel managers and employees try to treat everyone the same by providing the same room rate. However, for a number of hotel chains (the ones interviewed) the website accessibility is low since they do not promote that they have an accessible room, and visual and hearing disabilities are not taken into account. Website accessibility means that websites are designed in a way that everyone, also people with disabilities can use them, like they are able to navigate, understand and perceive with the website (Henry, 2005). Related to website accessibility, not everyone was aware of whether hotels had or had not stated if they have accessible rooms and if all the hotel features are mentioned for guests with a disability. Last but not least, they were not aware what these guests really needed to know prior to their arrival to be able to book a room. A few of the participants said something like P2: 'These guests always need to give us a call to be sure that we have all the features they need or want' (P2). It is striking that these participants are employees working in the Front Office/Reservations or Guest Services department, with most guest contact mainly about the rooms of the guests. In addition, the quote shows that there is not enough information available on the marketing and communication channels, due to the fact that they say that prospective clients always have to call for further details. All websites show that the hotel is wheelchair accessible and almost all hotel websites show that they have accessible rooms (except two hotels). However, not all show all features needed by guests with a disability. Website accessibility is a particularly important aspect nowadays due to the European Accessibility Act. This act is also applicable for the Netherlands and urges the tourism sector, including hotels, to make their websites accessible. This will be further elaborated upon in the next theme.

The room rate, room type and website accessibility also have to do with equality, providing the same products and services to everyone. This relates to the next topic: hotel service.

### 3.2.2 SERVICE

One of the frequently mentioned topics from the interviews related to service is that the hotel employees try to prepare the stay of guests who have booked an accessible room. Hotel employees from the reservations department or the front office department contact the guests who booked the accessible room to see whether this is correct and what the needs and wants are. While this is a good starting point to prepare the stay prior to arrival, most employees say that this does not happen during busy times at the hotel. Others expect that disabled hotel guests will give them a call if they feel it is needed.

In addition, a number of employees and managers said that they have a sheet in which all details of the rooms are stated to easily inform guests with certain questions, via phone or email. However, the employees who are not in direct contact with guests (e.g., via phone or email) say that they do not use

it too often and that they always have to ask colleagues where to find this information. Only some senior employees know it by heart and can easily answer the guests' questions without an information sheet.

### 3.2.3 ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS

On top of this, all hotel employees interviewed noted that they are not fully aware about accessibility and the needs and wants of their disabled guests. Some employees said that they ask the guests if they need help with anything or if they have any other wants beside the accessible room. One of the participants said: ‘

I think it is also related to your background, how you have been raised, in a way how you will welcome and handle disabled guests. The ones that have experience with disabled people are maybe a little bit older and more experienced in their work, the others are younger and still need to learn how to communicate and provide the best service to these guests in specific. (P8)

Based on this, some participants suggested that it would be a good starting point to create the same basis for everyone on accessibility awareness and some further training in the needs and wants of this specific group of guests, the disabled guests. By contrast, half of the hotel managers strongly believe in their service and echo what respondent P9 observed: ‘We treat everyone the same way, without exceptions. In this case all guests will feel welcome, also the guests with a disability’ (P9).

During all interviews, I tried to move the interview towards a more open interview. In the case of half of the hotel managers, this was more difficult since they wanted to focus on their great service level. I tried to focus more on other solutions than service-related solutions, like a menu in braille, a buzzer fire alarm or creating a lower front office desk (for wheelchair users). However, some participants (managers) I interviewed held a strong opinion that they offer a high service level and always treat everyone the same way, asking everyone for their needs and wants – to meet and exceed the expectations of their guests. However, as they themselves noted, hotel managers were not aware about whether their employees work the same way and if they have accessibility awareness. Still, they did not see any need for accessibility training to provide everyone with the same knowledge on this topic.

On top of this, these hotel managers also say that only a handful of disabled guests, per year, enjoy a stay with them. This makes them not do much about their products, services, facilities or trainings to adjust more to the needs and wants of the disabled guests. Like P9, they say: ‘We can make use of our service to reach nearly any solution if we have a challenge during a guest’s stay’ (P9). This might be a solution for some of the hotel managers, but they demonstrate they are not aware of the perspective of the disabled guests. When I spoke to disabled guests who stayed in hotels to assess their accessibility, they said:

We want to be independent, it is not at all that we need more or better service. We only need enough space, tools and the accessibility to the hotels’ products, to make this happen. However, a lot of hotels are not accessible, even if they say they are. They have an accessible room, but I am not able to have my wheelchair beside the bed, since this path is too small. These are easy to solve problems, but the employees are not aware of this. (P24)

These minor adjustments, which are in most cases easy to solve, are related to the accessibility awareness of hotel employees, which is in most cases only based on their background. They never had training in this, only the hotel tour, which every new employee needs to join, has the accessible rooms included. However, these rooms do not always have all features needed by disabled guests.

Last but not least, there are a lot of different types of disabilities; visual, hearing, mental or physical. When I spoke with the employees and managers of the Dutch hotels, they always immediately started to talk about the accessibility for guests in a wheelchair. When I tried to also get them to think about guests with other disabilities, like hearing- or visually-disabled guests, it was an eye-opener for them to also see it from another perspective. Most of them only had a handful of experiences with guests with other disabilities: 'To be honest, I did not have a lot of experiences with guests with intellectual, hearing or visual disabilities. Only once with a blind guest, but this guest had a family member with him so that was all fine' (P20). This is said by some hotel employee participants. In addition, they also had the same thought of not being immediately aware about these other disabilities. This is also said by most of the disabled guests who had another family member, partner or medical assistant with him or her, so there is no direct need to communicate with the disabled guest directly. This conclusion of the employees also shows that they are not aware of the needs and wants of the disabled guests, since the disabled hotel checkers informed me that they want to be treated the same way. However, in this case, the employees are not aware how the guests feel and what their needs and wants are. This relates to an earlier quote in which it was stated that disabled people want to be independent and communication is one of the most important aspects of this.

#### 3.2.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS THEME 2

It can be concluded that the combination of hotel employees' communication and service for hotel guests is of great importance to the disabled guest since they want to be treated the same as others. Furthermore, the hotel employees and managers do feel they are not aware on some aspects related to accessibility. However, not everyone is open to improvements due to their perceived high level of service. As a result, this means that, in their eyes, accessibility training is not needed. Finally, it can be concluded that some of the employees and a number of the managers seem interested in having an accessibility training to be more aware of accessibility.

### 3.3 THEME 3: LAWS

Related to inclusion of people with disabilities there are already several acts and laws internationally, for instance, the UNCRPD. This has an impact on the daily life of disabled people, due to adaptations to products and services based on these laws. As mentioned in the literature review, European Union member-states created the European Accessibility Act. The Netherlands signed and ratified the Act, which means that before 2024 the Dutch government should pass legislation to adhere to what is decreed in the Act. Part of this is the website accessibility for the tourism industry, including hotels. This will be discussed in this section about legislation, the other part will focus on national and international laws and the role of municipalities.

According to one of the participants (organisation A), the problem in the Netherlands related to legislation is that the Netherlands was late to ratify the UNCRPD agreement based on having locations and services accessible. However, the second part of the agreement based on the fines related to locations and services which are not accessible, was not signed by the Netherlands. Based on the findings of this study, the participants hotel employees and managers of hotel chains A, B, D and F say that fines can be triggers to meet the law related to hotels or tourism services for disabled people.

The next step for the hotel industry came in 2019 with the European Accessibility Act concerning their online and offline communication including the website and menus. Most participants were not fully aware about whether the accessible rooms were promoted or mentioned on the website. Some said that the website only mentions that the hotel is wheelchair accessible. If hotels have accessible rooms at an entry level, all hotels list their rooms on the website as accessible rooms, a part of the hotel websites with the accessible features and the other part of the hotel websites without. However, the employees and managers said something along the lines of P4: 'We are not aware whether all information given on the website is enough for the potential disabled guests to know if they can stay with us' (P4).

In this case, employees and managers were triggered, like P13, to say, based on the European Accessibility Act:

I was not aware of the European Accessibility Act, but based on this I think it is needed to double check if we meet the regulations, since all needs to be adjusted before 2024, as you said. However, it is an eye-opener that I am now thinking and discussing this with you -- we can definitely improve the website based on better knowledge of what the needs and wants are of disabled guests. (P13)

When asked if they knew about the EAA and its implications, no employees or managers I interviewed were aware of it, only the ones I spoke to at an earlier stage about my study (ex-colleagues). This was also an eye-opener for the hotel employees and managers, of which half of the participants said that it would be important that the marketing team gets the policies and regulations to adjust the website accordingly, or that they should get training to be able to meet the law.

On top of this, there are no Dutch laws related to the tourism or the hotel industry and social inclusion of disabled people. An example was given by one of the employees of organisation A, that Scotland, Canada, the United States and Australia have laws for the hotel industry. An example is the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), which states that a certain number of rooms should be accessible for people with a disability, depending on the total number of rooms. In addition, internal routes, external routes, parking zones and entrances are taken into account in the ADA to make the hotel industry adjust or renovate according to these regulations. At this time the ADA is already 30 years old. However, they felt that the Netherlands can still definitely learn from the ADA.

Another perspective from within the Netherlands is that of the municipalities. During the interviews, I only spoke about the municipality of Amsterdam, which is more and more focussing on disabled people

in the city: inhabitants, tourists and other visitors. One of the disabled study participants said that the municipality is actively promoting subsidies for accessible toilets:

We (hotel F) built an accessible toilet during the renovations. Ten years ago, the municipality of Amsterdam was aware of this and contacted me just a week ago that the toilet is already 10 years old and that we could get a subsidy to renovate the toilet to meet the new needs and wants of disabled guests, which is great – in my opinion. (P19)

This shows that, at least, the municipality of Amsterdam is focussing on accessibility for disabled people, even with the focus on tourism and hotels. One of the other hotel checkers from organisation A said that she does freelance work for the municipality of Amsterdam and they are also busy with projects in public transport and with care providers to improve their inclusion of disabled guests. She said:

They are doing the right thing, they hired me as a 'disabled person' to give feedback on the project, which is great to finally have a voice in such projects to really provide them with our needs and wants. However, I have to say that this is one of the first times that they involve the target group, but they are improving on this. (P21)

### 3.3.1 CONCLUDING REMARKS THEME 3

In conclusion, it can be said that the Dutch government can make and improve laws to enhance the inclusion of disabled people in our society. The examples given, of the United States or Scotland, can be used to make decisions on these new laws, to see what worked and what should be improved. Furthermore, the municipalities (and the cultural sector) or in this specific case the municipality of Amsterdam is making progress on including disabled people, not only within society but also in terms of getting disabled people involved in the decision-making process for certain projects.

## 3.4 THEME 4: ACCESSIBILITY TRAINING

The last theme is accessibility training, in relation to the tourism and hotel industry. Hausemer et al. (2014) found that accessibility training is a tool to incorporate in the hotel industry to enhance inclusion. In 2015 a training course was created, requested by the European Commission, called 'Elevator' (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). This course provides trainees 'with knowledge and understanding of objectives of the course or programme, and the value of inclusive and accessible tourism for all' (European Commission & ENAT, 2015b, p.37). During the interviews I asked what the perspective of the participants was on accessibility training, and whether they are interested and see the need for it.

In all interviews the topic of accessibility training came up at the end, mainly due to the topic being seen as a tool to enhance social inclusion of disabled guests within a hotel. When I asked all participants first what they thought was meant by accessibility training, many, like P6, noted: 'If I would describe accessibility training, I would say that it provides us with more knowledge on how to communicate with these guests and to understand what their needs and wants are' (P6). Some participants thought differently about this, and seem to be less interested. The question I asked after this was 'What would be the one topic, in your opinion, that should be included in an accessibility training if you and your team

have to attend?'. This question actually received the same answer as the description of accessibility training, related to communication with disabled guests and being aware or broadening the knowledge on what their needs and wants are, which can be combined as 'accessibility awareness'. In addition, the abovementioned topic of accessibility awareness is actually the content of already existing trainings. In the Netherlands, these trainings already exist, provided by organisation B, which will be further explained in a later section.

The question I asked after this was related to the type of training: offline, online or a combination. Half of the participants said that a combination works best. This would mean first having an online general training to make sure everyone has the same basic level of knowledge on the topic. After this they want an offline training that would focus mainly on the already existing features the hotel has for disabled guests and how this needs to be used to make them feel most welcome. On top of this, they mentioned the value of doing role-play scenarios with a disabled guest to practice with service and communication. They all said that it was only needed for the operational teams (frontline employees) and the back-office teams with the focus on reservations, groups and events, sales and marketing (second-line employees). In their opinion, the Finance team was not in need of a training, due to not having much contact with disabled guests.

Another part of the group said that online trainings do not work and that offline trainings are the best way to gain knowledge. In that case, the offline training should focus mainly on the same aspects of the online/offline combination as explained above. This would mean focusing on accessibility awareness and really knowing the features of the hotel itself for disabled guests.

Another interesting aspect mentioned by the participants is that they think that social inclusion of their disabled guests can be enhanced if they take an accessibility training course. Notes P1: 'Yes, I think that, if we follow or attend a training programme with the focus on communication with disabled guests and get trained on their needs and wants social inclusion, these can be enhanced'. This relates to the main goal of this study, which is to see how and what triggers employees and managers of the Dutch hotel industry to enhance social inclusion of their disabled guests.

On top of this, from another perspective, was the interview with organisation B. Organisation B focusses on enhancing accessibility for disabled people, related to activities and holidays. Organisation B (P23) also tests the accessibility of cultural leisure locations. Examples given by the interviewee are museums, like Van Abbe Museum, Stedelijk Museum and Rijksmuseum, but also theatres and concert halls, like Paradiso, which are locations tested by one of the disabled people in the 750-member-strong test panel part of organisation B. The outcomes of these tests are reported and advice is provided to the locations. In addition, organisation B offers workshops focussed on hospitality, accessibility awareness and accessibility. During this workshop, disabled people from the test panel show and teach what their needs and wants are and a teacher trains attendees on accessibility awareness. Furthermore, and also given as the most valuable experience and eye-opener given by the disabled people I interviewed, the workshop teacher will take some wheelchairs with him/her to let the attendees experience the use of a wheelchair. In addition, the teacher also brings a suit designed by a Dutch

University in Delft which can simulate a certain impairment to experience how this feels and what changes in the needs and wants of the attendees. This clearly relates to the interest of the employees and (most of) the managers saying that they are not aware of needs and wants, that accessibility awareness can be improved.

#### 3.4.1 CONCLUDING REMARKS THEME 4

It can be concluded for theme 4, accessibility training, that a certain number of employees and managers are willing to attend an accessibility awareness training to enhance their knowledge and skills in servicing/welcoming guests with a disability. However, there was a split in opinion about what type of training was best to use, online or offline training, or a combination. The offline training was mentioned by everyone, since 'out of their experience' that is the best way to make an impression and to really learn something, by the use of a role-play, which was mentioned several times by participants. The focus should first be on the operational teams (frontline employees) and also, if possible, for the back-office team (second-line employees) as they are in 'indirect' contact with the guests as well, like reservations, sales and events/groups departments. Finally, these types of trainings (with a focus on accessibility awareness) do already exist in the Netherlands.

## 4. DISCUSSION

In this section I put the study results based on the four findings themes (i.e., physical hotel design; communication, service and accessibility awareness; laws and legislation; and accessibility training) in relation to the literature on Universal Design and the case of the Scandic Hotel Group.

### 4.1 PHYSICAL HOTEL DESIGN

As shown in the findings, all participants were confronted with the fact that they were not always aware of the needs and wants of disabled guests. Specifically, the participants always started to talk about physical disabilities, particularly about guests in wheelchairs. Some participants started to think further and also took other guests with disabilities into account such as the hearing- and sight-impaired. However, when it comes to physical disabilities, there are certain aspects on which the participants lack knowledge. This conclusion is based on their answers to questions when they needed to say what was important for guests in a wheelchair in the hotel, which could vary from the hotel entrance, F&B outlets or the hotel room. They were not aware of all aspects, based on the input of the interviewees interviewed for this study, field experts (disabled people and people working in the field of enhancing accessibility either giving workshops or checking hotels on their disabilities). However, to really make hotels and travel accessible, Eichhorn and Buhalis (2011) find that 'Ensuring access to travel and tourism opportunities for people living with disability as well as for the entire population requires knowledge and design structures that are inclusive for all citizens' (p. 46). This suggests that there is need for the tourism and travel industry to know about Universal Design and design structures in general, also for their disabled guests. However, my study shows that this is not yet present among employees in the hotels I studied.

In addition, also related to physical hotel design is the concept of Universal Design, a concept is central to understanding accessible tourism development. While Darcy et al. (2010) argue that the Universal Design principles provide economic benefits to those who operate with it, hotel managers interviewed in my study do not immediately see this. They focus instead on the short-term costs and are not aware of the positive potential long-term economic benefits.

Nevertheless, there are also problems and limitations related to the Universal Design (UD)/Inclusive Design (ID) approach, due to the gap which still remains between theory and practice. This is also shown in the findings, showing that the hotel employees and managers are not always aware of accessibility. An example can be taken from the analysis of the interviews, related to the design of hotel rooms. Hotel employees interviewed for this study think that they think about including disabled guests, that they are able to enjoy a stay with them, but in practice disabled people interviewed for this study say that hotel rooms generally are not adjusted in a way they can use it – especially people using a wheelchair. This shows a gap between what hotel managers and employees believe about their hotels' 'accessible' rooms and disabled guests' experiences of them. Another aspect, from the example of the accessible hotel room in relation to UD/ID, is the lack of application of UD/ID. Only a few stakeholders are involved in applying UD/ID (for instance, architects and the hotel manager), not always taking into account disabled people or other experts with experience in the field of accessibility– and this has been suggested by study respondents to include the disabled users themselves.

#### 4.2 COMMUNICATION, SERVICE AND ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS

Tourism has the potential to enhance disabled people's life quality and satisfaction. This is done mainly through social interaction and personal development (Figueiredo et al, 2012). The fact that social interaction is important can be related to the topics that came forward during the interviews with participants saying that they are not fully aware of accessibility and the needs and wants of disabled guests. Improved human interaction (in this case meant communication of hotel employees/managers with disabled people) can enhance inclusion of these disabled guests. To do this, accessibility awareness trainings/workshops are the first need to provide for hotel employees and managers. This to make them aware about accessibility in general and about certain ways of communication with disabled people – as stated by the three field experts interviewed for this study.

For example, most of the hotel managers and employees I interviewed said that they 'treat everyone the same way'. This can be interpreted as those within the hotel industry wanting to welcome everyone. However, concluding from my interviews with disabled people, this does not happen. They have experienced several things that lead them to not feel welcome. Examples of such experiences include being ignored during check-in or not being able to enter the hotel. Both examples show that more attention or service is needed for disabled guests. However, as the interviewed hotel employees said themselves, they are not always aware of the needs and wants of their disabled guests.

Lastly, participation of disabled people in tourism decision-making processes is an element of inclusive tourism development. Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) show that reflection on certain systems in the society, like the tourism system, should contain the opinion and interests of disabled people in decision-making processes as well. This includes the hotel industry. According to Nyanjom et al. (2018): 'collaborative efforts can be enhanced in the development of accessible tourism to innovatively move the agenda towards inclusive tourism' (p. 676). Several studies show that a variety of stakeholder perspectives, collaboration and participation enhance the development of accessible tourism so that it becomes inclusive tourism. However, the disabled people interviewed in my study believe they have limited opportunities to collaborate or contribute to tourism policies, planning and development. However, this appears to be changing (e.g., one of my study participants is involved in a process of developing products and services for a municipality taking into account her perspective as disabled person).

### 4.3 LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The Netherlands government was one of the last to ratify the UNCRPD in 2016 (a variety of other countries ratified the UNCRPD years earlier) and it has not yet fully adhered to it. Since 2019 the Netherlands (and other Europe Union member-states) has been focussing on the European Accessibility Act. For the hotel industry, this means that their online and offline communication should be accessible for all. Thus, everyone should be included. This law was enacted, but the related sanctions were not. This can be the reason why the Dutch hotel industry is not fully aware about this Act and has no complete inclusive and accessible online and offline communication – as confirmed by participants of this study of hotel chain A and C. This happens elsewhere, as well. According to Gillovic and McIntosh (2015), who studied the situation in New Zealand, while operators should adhere to the legislative requirements, they do not meet the bare minimum due, in part, to the New Zealand government's non-enforcement of such requirements. This shows that, even if there was a sanction or clear legislative requirements, then there may be no guarantee that the operators act according to the law and that the governments follows up on this. Yet, according to ENAT, within the EU: 'legislation seems to encourage the growth of training offers and engagement, at least where this legislation is being properly enforced' (European Commission & ENAT, 2015d). This encouragement is also shown in the results of this study, hotel employees and managers of hotel chains A, B, D and F say that fines can be triggers to meet the law related to hotels or tourism services for disabled people.

In addition, there are some destinations, like some countries in the EU, the United States and Australia, that are conforming to legislative requirements and are proactively 'developing infrastructure, goods, services, marketing and promotion in alignment with the collaborative processes outlined in the conceptualisation of accessible tourism' (Darcy et al., 2020, p. 142). An example of this in the EU is the Scandic Hotel Group, a disabled-accessible hotel chain from Sweden, where legislation positively influences disabled people (e.g., having a database related to accessible tourist attractions, for disabled people). However, as already explained, not all countries in the EU have proactively worked on legislative requirements and compliance with them.

#### 4.4 ACCESSIBILITY TRAINING

Most of the participants in this study stated that they want to increase their accessibility awareness. Often, decisions on using informal and formal trainings are based on certain issues, which relate to time availability, budget and costs (Kusluvan, 2003). However, a few managers interviewed for this study mentioned that it costs money and, due to Covid-19, there is limited budget available and accessibility awareness is not top priority. On the other hand, according to ENAT, 'legislation seems to encourage the growth of training offers and engagement, at least where this legislation is being properly enforced' (European Commission & ENAT, 2015d), providing several cases to support their claim (e.g., the Luxembourg public transport company, CFL – Chemin de Fer Luxembourg, in combination with the city of Luxembourg have a one-day training for their employees (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a)). This shows that legislation can have a positive influence on development of accessibility training within businesses. However, there is still an issue with the question of cost, as hotel managers I interviewed for this study do not want to invest heavily in such developments.

Another aspect is the content of the accessibility training programme. Accessibility skills as well as the strategic understanding of 'Universal Design' and 'accessibility' are difficult to learn 'on-the-job' since the knowledge is particularly not in-house. For this, external parties are needed to improve and develop businesses (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). Indeed, hotel managers and employees interviewed for this study said that the knowledge is not always present in-house but that they think that on-the-job training (e.g., doing a role-play or doing a guided tour through the hotel focussing on the accessible aspects) is most useful. As explained by the field experts (disabled people and people working in the field of enhancing accessibility either giving workshops or checking hotels on their disabilities), there are many workshops and trainings offered by third parties in the Netherlands that relate to the needs of hotel employees. This is not yet known by all hotel managers I interviewed for my study. Some are more willing to include it in their own training, while others are more willing to have an external party involved.

Another aspect which Hausemer et al. (2014) find of great importance is that 'the objective of providing accessible services should not merely be to cater to tourists with disabilities, but also to include them in all tourist activities in the same way as an able-bodied tourist. A major part of any successful training initiative should be to overcome stigma, stereotyping and exclusion' (p. 55). This shows that a training programme should also be linked to the strategic understanding of 'inclusive tourism', being aware of accessibility and its related aspects, an example of Visit Flanders can be given to show that it is already brought in practice, since their course material emphasises the inclusion of any individual, whether abled or disabled, in activities and disabled people should not be seen as distinct from other tourists (Hausemer et al., 2014). The participants in my study mentioned that, to bring the level of accessibility awareness to the same level among all hotel employees, accessibility training was a good option.

Last but not least, training in the tourism sector is not restricted to traditional formal education. Instead, it is mainly informal and takes place 'on-the-job' (European Commission & ENAT, 2015a). This makes it necessary to consider a broader definition of training. As the Accessible Tourism Training report

(European Commission and ENAT 2015c) suggests: 'informal training and availability of learning resources such as guidelines, videos, checklists and references are vital for businesses to take the first steps towards increased accessibility' (p.15). However, another important aspect according to Kusluvan (2003) is that the selection of online, offline or a combination of a training methods and scale be based on the needs and objectives of the audience. Most of the employees I interviewed for this study felt that the best way to come to the core information and knowledge is to combine offline and online trainings. A side-note can be added that they think that offline training – in specific on-the-job training – works best to really understand the material presented. However, often decisions on using informal and formal training programmes are based on time availability, budget and costs (Kusluvan, 2003). Yet, implementing accessibility training is mainly triggered by legislation and policies (European Commission & ENAT. (2015a).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study has been to provide insight into how hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands experience and perceive -- and believe they can work to enhance -- the social inclusion and equality of their guests with disabilities. The key conclusions of this study add to the knowledge needed for the tourism industry to adopt an inclusive approach to offer improved accessible tourism experiences to all. My three sub-research questions are answered below, and together they respond to the main research question. I reflect upon the thesis's findings in relation to existing literature. I then follow them up with recommendations for industry stakeholders and for scholars regarding future research opportunities.

### 5.1 ANSWERS TO THE SUB-QUESTIONS

1. *What is the current status of accessible products and services in the top hotel industry of the Netherlands?*

The current status of inclusive tourism in the top hotel industry of the Netherlands is mainly related to hotel design, communication/service and accessibility awareness. Currently, many Dutch hotel managers and employees interviewed in my study indicate that their hotels have one or two accessible rooms available. However, according to the disabled guests I interviewed, many of these 'accessible' rooms are not sufficiently designed as truly accessible. In addition, because only one or two 'accessible' rooms are available in hotels, guest have no choice in room type, which disabled study participants indicated may feel exclusionary. In almost all hotels included in my study, the room rate is the same as for an entry-type room (lowest room level possible/standard room type). This shows that there is no

difference in room rate for an accessible room (for disabled guests) or a standard room type, suggesting equal treatment here. However, other accessibility features of importance to be able to provide guests with accessible products and services (e.g., sufficiently wide entrances, a lower desk for guests in a wheelchair, buzzers for the fire alarm and braille menus) are not yet implemented everywhere. Here it also comes down to the level of accessibility awareness among hotel employees to know what is needed to make disabled guests feel included and welcome. The Dutch hotel industry representatives that participated in my study are aware of the importance of taking disabled guests into account. However, while they may work in hotels with 'accessible' rooms, they do not sufficiently demonstrate awareness of the needs and wants of disabled guests, which is essential for true inclusion.

The combination of hotel employees' communication and service relative to hotel guests is of great importance to disabled guests who wish to be treated the same as able-bodied guests. Hotel employees and managers interviewed for this study believe they are not aware of some aspects of accessibility. However, due to their own perceptions of the kind and level of service they provide in their hotels, not everyone interviewed is open to improvements in accessibility awareness. In their opinion, their service can solve almost all challenges.

Regarding legislation in the Netherlands, it can be concluded that the Dutch government can improve legislation to enhance the inclusion of disabled people in society and in tourism more specifically. The examples given of the United States or Scotland can be used to make decisions on these new laws, to see what worked and what should be improved. Furthermore, at the municipal level, we see the municipality of Amsterdam making progress on including disabled people through, for example, cultural activities as well as employment by hiring disabled people and involving them in the decision-making process for certain projects. It is important to make sure that the Dutch government works on developing new laws to enhance social inclusion for the tourism and hotel industry. The employees and hotel managers interviewed suggested that, if something is required and a sanction will be given in case of non-compliance, the enforcement of sanctions will definitely help to make products and services inclusive in the tourism and hotel industry. The European Accessibility Act, ratified in 2019, can be taken as an example: not everyone in the hotel industry is aware of this act, which might be due to the lack of sanctions that were brought in and enforced by other countries but not by the Netherlands. According to those I interviewed, this could have been an opportunity to develop the inclusiveness of disabled people the Dutch hotel industry.

Last but not least, it can be concluded that accessibility training is currently not a main focus among those I interviewed in the Dutch hotel industry. In all interviews, the topic of accessibility training surfaced as a tool to enhance a hotel's social inclusion of disabled guests. However, at this stage, hotel chains do not have accessibility included in their employee training. Some of those I interviewed have a similar idea to one another about accessibility training and a variety of them are interested in these specific topics.

2. *How do employees of top Dutch and international hotel chains present in the Netherlands currently experience and perceive the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?*

Hotel employees and managers feel they are not aware on some aspects of accessibility. However, not everyone is open to improvements in this area, as they believe their level of service solves almost all challenges. One aspect which is related to this is that there is a lack of accessibility awareness, which influences the way in which challenges are faced. Accessibility training can be a solution by making employees aware of social inclusion and in turn helping them face the challenges with more confidence. All interviewed employees and half of the managers seem interested in having accessibility training to be more aware on accessibility. However, currently they do not see accessibility as a priority in which they want to invest time and money.

The Dutch government also responds to challenges faced regarding inclusion of disabled people. In conclusion, it can be said that the Dutch government can improve legislation for enhancing the inclusion of disabled people in society. This improvement is needed because even though they ratified certain Acts, so far there have been no sanctions for non-compliance. The hotel industry should respond to the European Accessibility Act before 2024 regarding the online and offline communication of the hotels. All of my interviewees stated that they were not aware about this Act, which shows that the Dutch government has not yet done much to promote this Act. This can be an opportunity for the Dutch government and the hotel chains in the Netherlands to react to challenges with disabled people by offering them the products and services that are wanted and needed.

3. *How do employees of top Dutch and international hotel chains present in the Netherlands believe they can respond to challenges to the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?*

In this study, the hotel employees indicated that they should enhance social inclusion of disabled guests by gaining more and better knowledge about accessibility. Some of the hotel managers agree and find that it is of great importance to be able to fully serve guests with special needs according to their wishes, wants and needs. A way to enhance social inclusion with the focus on accessibility awareness is through accessibility training (Hausemer et al., 2014). Employees of Dutch hotels said that they are more than open towards this initiative, to take part in an accessibility training. Half of the participants said that a combination of offline and online training works best. This might mean first having a general online training to make everyone sure everyone has the same basic level of knowledge on this topic. After this they want an offline training, focussing mainly on the already existing features the hotel has for disabled guests and how this needs to be used to make them feel most welcome. In addition, they mentioned that it would be useful if part of the training were to include a role-play with a disabled guest to practice their service and communication. They all said that such a training would only be necessary for the operational teams (frontline employees) and the back-office teams focusing on reservations, groups and events, sales and marketing (second-line employees).

The other portion of those I interviewed said that online trainings do not work and that offline trainings are the best to really improve knowledge. The offline training in that case should mainly focus on the

same aspects of the online/offline combination as explained above, focus of accessibility awareness and really knowing the features of the hotel itself for disabled guests.

The hotel managers and employees think that social inclusion of their disabled guests can be enhanced if they take accessibility training. This is directly relevant for this thesis as the main goal of this study was to see how and what hotel employees and managers in the Netherlands do to enhance social inclusion of their disabled guests.

On top of this, an interview was conducted with Organisation B who test cultural leisure locations. They also offer workshops focussed on hospitality and accessibility awareness. During this workshop, disabled people from the test panel show and teach what their needs and wants are and a teacher trains the attendees on accessibility awareness. The disabled people interviewed for my study mentioned that it is important for managers to experience what it is like to be in a wheelchair. It was therefore a valuable experience that the workshop teacher took wheelchairs along to let the attendees experience the use of a wheelchair. The workshop teacher also brings along a suit designed to simulate a certain impairment to experience how this feels and what changes in the needs and wants of the attendees. This very much aligns with the interests of the employees and (most of) the managers who are not aware of disabled guests' needs and wants.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, recommendations will be given on potential options of products and services for the Dutch hotel industry that can be used to enhance social inclusion. I will draw on the literature review, input from those interviewed in my study, and experts in the field who study inclusion and equality of disabled people within the Netherlands will be incorporated.

The first recommendation from the study is that accessibility training, with the focus on accessibility awareness, should be implemented in the training schedule for the Dutch hotel industry.

A sector from which the hotel industry can learn is the cultural sector (e.g., museums, theatres and concert venues). Organisation B has expertise in testing cultural locations on their accessibility and in providing the specific locations with an advice on how to improve. This specific project that focuses on the cultural sector is funded through donations from lotteries and government subsidies. From this fund, workshops on accessibility awareness are also given to those in the sector. The cultural sector (being non-profit) get funds from the government, and the hotel industry being a commercial sector does not. This is, according to Organisation B, one of the key reasons that the cultural sector is further developed in social inclusion of people with disabilities. However, the hotel industry can make use of the expertise of Organisation B by using their workshops. These workshops focus on accessibility awareness in combination with hospitality, which is a good match with the interests and lack of knowledge among the employees and managers in the Dutch hotel industry.

This can be the first step towards a more inclusive hotel industry, to focus on the communication of hotel employees and the accessibility awareness of them to provide everyone an equal treatment. The next step, according to those I interviewed in my study, who have a disability themselves, is to first create awareness and then to assign a specific accessibility or inclusion manager to further develop the standards of a certain hotel chain. According to Organisation B, the Rijksmuseum is a good example. It has an accessibility and inclusion manager focusing on social inclusion of disabled visitors with functional disabilities, including visual and hearing impairments. This is the next step to enhance the level of social inclusion and equality.

It is important to trigger hotel employees and managers in ways that get them interested in this target group. If they have that interest, they will focus on this target group and will try to develop or enhance their hospitality service to make it more equal and socially inclusive. If or when the group of potential disabled guests grows, hotel managers interviewed said that they will target on this group. However, until now, they have limited interest in focusing on disabled guests since they comprise such a small percentage of total guests.

It has been said by all disabled participants and experts in the field I interviewed that the only way to get the hotel employees and managers work to enhance social inclusion is to make them aware of the large group of disabled people which are potential hotel guests. In this case the hotel managers also see it as return on investment and it can be a win-win situation. In addition, the disabled participants I interviewed found that it is most important to be treated the same way as every other guest, which starts with accessibility awareness by the hotel employees and managers.

### 5.3 FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of this study and the complete thesis is relevant for future research. This study provides insights in the current situation of social inclusion and equality of disabled hotel guests in the Netherlands. It also provides insight into the perspective and perception of the hotel employees and managers on how to enhance social inclusion and equality for their disabled guests, as well as how to find a practical solution for the hotel industry in the Netherlands.

Further research can expand this knowledge by addressing how the level of social inclusion and equality of hotel guests can be further increased through using accessibility training. This involves the connection of the different parties involved within the hotel industry, like Koninklijke Horeca Nederland (KHN) with the provincial and municipal governments throughout the Netherlands. If a connection can be made and these parties are willing to support the hotel industry, it will enable them to tackle the identified barriers. Furthermore, with future research, it will be important to take into account the perspectives of the different parties involved and the possible roles they see for themselves when tackling the barriers.

The outcomes of the interviews are also relevant in day-to-day practice, since the different perspectives amongst hotel managers and employees of different hotel chains in the Netherlands on social inclusion

and equality of disabled guests indicated that they do not always identify what is important for disabled guests. These differences in perspectives can be overcome by the launch of accessibility training. On top of this, it is important for the participants to receive clear guidelines from the Dutch government or KHN about how to diminish barriers that hinder social inclusion and equality of disabled guests on their websites (like the ANVR has done), related to the European Accessibility Act. Certain accessibility trainings already exist (for instance organisation B offers workshops on this) which use the input and feedback of disabled guests. For writing guidelines for the tourism and hotel industry, inclusion of input from disabled people should also be considered. This should be done at an early stage as this will increase the compatibility of the guidelines. This compatibility is about the degree to which the guidelines, the accessibility training, and the subsequent actions by parties involved in the tourism and hotel industry, are in accordance with the social norms, experiences, needs and wants of disabled people.

The results of this thesis were also relevant for research and day-to-day practice since it expanded the knowledge on the perceived additional value of an accessible website (and accessibility training) for hotels on the social inclusion and equality of disabled hotel guests. Further research can expand on this by assessing how financial stimuli can contribute to increasing accessibility training for hotel employees. Further research could also focus on assessing adjustments to be made to hotel websites, in relation to the enhancement of social inclusion and equality of disabled people, to the disabled hotel guests who stay in hotels in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the results of this study can be used for future research and day-to-day practice since they increased the scientific knowledge on the differences that can arise between policy and practice, in this case mainly related to the European Accessibility Act and the UNCRPD, which was ratified by the Netherlands, as one of the last members. Still, as beforementioned, a variety of barriers were identified by the disabled people interviewed for this study related to full participation in society, and in relation to the Universal Design approach. The identified barriers and challenges, as well as possible opportunities to diminish the barriers, can be used in order to continue supporting equality and social inclusion of disabled people.

In addition, various studies show that a variety of stakeholder perspectives, collaboration and participation enhance inclusive tourism, from accessible tourism towards inclusive tourism. Michopoulou and Buhalis (2011) analysed stakeholders in accessible tourism and inclusive tourism, focussing on the shared experiences of disabled people. However, in practice it is shown that this group of actors (including the cultural sector and the hotel industry) are not always able or have limited opportunities in the contribution of policies and development (Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2011). Based on this it can be concluded that 'collaborative efforts can be enhanced in the development of accessible tourism to innovatively move the agenda towards inclusive tourism' (Nyanjom et al., 2018, p. 676).

Therefore, it can be concluded that this also requires future research attention, focussing on the opportunities in co-creative stakeholder engagement methods. This, as stated by Gillovic and McIntosh (2020) to, 'engender collaborative dialogue, equitable inclusion, reciprocal learning and the challenging of existing knowledge gaps and assumptions held by powerful tourism stakeholders' (p. 8).

In addition, there are two final and other aspects which were striking in the findings, related to potential future research. The first one is that, due to Covid-19, hotels do not have a large budget available for accessibility training which means that it is currently not a priority. However, maybe it can be seen as an opportunity for the hotel industry to tackle this challenge to enhance social inclusion of disabled guests due to their low occupancy and work load. This can be something to further explore in future research. Secondly and lastly, it is already mentioned in the study that adjusting the hotels' product and services to a Universal Design has economic benefits. However, not all hotel managers and hotel employees that were interviewed were aware or agreeing on this. It is of relevance to study how these hotel managers and employees can be convinced that Universal Design, taking into account disabled people, can be of potential economic benefit.

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### **Interview Guide**

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In this report an interview blueprint and an interview guide will be described based on the theme: 'Universal Design', 'Accessible Tourism' and 'Inclusive Tourism'. The first section will consist of a detailed description of the interviewees. The second section consists of the interview guide.

#### **Detailed description of the interviewees**

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The focus of this report will be on the viewpoint of employees and managers of top hotels in the Dutch hotel industry. To narrow down the research, seven hotel chains have been selected, operating in the Netherlands, the hotel chains will be kept anonymous for this study. The interviewees will be recruited via my own network with a specific focus on national and international top hotel chains in the Netherlands. The selection of top hotels is due to their star rating having more or less the same level of service and standards.

A general distinction has been made between interviews with employees (semi-structured) and managers (in-depth interviews) of top hotels in the Netherlands. This is due to their possible level of

influence on policies and practices for the hotel, which is higher with managers and lower for most employees. On the other hand, the experiences and knowledge of front-line employees (in direct contact with disabled guests) is from another perspective very important to see what knowledge is still missing and what, from their experiences, are good elements to take into account to improve Universal Design for a hotel in the Netherlands. Please find a description below on the departments of interest for the interviews:

- **Managers:** General Managers, Section Managers, Heads of Department: Operations Managers, Heads of Departments (related to the customer services below), Assistant Head of Departments and Duty Managers,
- **Front-line** (in a hotel): Bar/restaurants, Front Desk, Reservations, Sales and Marketing (including Social Media), Conferences and Events, Customer Care, Concierge.

These departments all include front-line employees, meaning that they are in direct contact with the disabled guests, which can provide me as researcher with the best perspective of employees on their work and practices with disabled guests. This variety of expertise's is important to take into account to get perspectives from a wide range of hotel employees/supervisors and managers from each hotel, to create robust study data.

These two given sub-groups will lead our research, to also have a variation within the sub-groups having several departments and expertise's involved to gain insights in different perspectives, and therefore gain insights in different perspectives of knowledge gaps. The sub-groups will be sampled by 'purposive sampling', since myself as being the researcher select the interviewees of which I think are most convenient. I am aware of the fact that using this specific and purposive sampling, other hotels are excluded in this research. However, the time available is limited, since this research will be done for a thesis.

## Interview Guide

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This section is based on the literature review and research questions. Moreover, during the interview it will be taken into account that the subject can be sensitive and at every time needed an interviewee can skip a question, if they feel like it. Please find below the interview guide:

### General introduction

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- Greet the interviewee and introduce myself by informing who I am (name, master students, interest) to give the interviewee already some trust.
- On top of this, it is very important to also ask for permission to record, and inform that it is always possible to stop the recording during the interview.
- I will anonymously use your interview in our research and report.
- Furthermore, mention that the interview will take about 45-60 minutes.

- For the interviewer (myself): make sure to start taking notes from now on!

## Explanation of interview purpose

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- The purpose and reward to participate to the interview is: having a better understanding and experience with/about the concept of 'inclusive tourism', the results of this research will form an advice for the inclusive tourism sector.
- Introduce the structure of the interview.
- When the participant is **not** familiar with the term 'Inclusive Tourism', introduce these terms in a very clear **but** general way to make sure that the interviewee understands what is meant with both terms (tricky, avoid bias).  
**Note:** always explain the terms to make sure you are on the same level.
- Inform that if there is anything where the interviewee feels uncomfortable with to give me a sign, so I can skip the question, try to make the interviewee as comfortable as possible or start to talk about a different topic within the research.
- After the introduction, start with opening questions, not threatening, to gain the trust of the interviewee and to make him/her feel at ease, especially since it can be a sensitive topic. Start with questions such as:
  - Can you tell me about what your job involves at the hotel?
    - Follow-up question: What does a regular day look like for you?

## Experiences of hotel employees with people with disabilities and the current status of inclusivity

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6. The first set of questions focus on main-question 1: *What is the current status of inclusive tourism in the top hotel industry of the Netherlands?*

Nr.	Question	Keywords and probing examples	Why?
1	In your job as X, what kinds of experiences have you had with guests with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiences</li> <li>• Disabled guests</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What kinds of experiences do your co-workers have had with people with disabilities?</li> <li>- How does this affect how you do your job?</li> </ul>	<i>This question will help to understand to what extent the interviewee interacts/ has contact with disabled people and how this influences their work.</i>
2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information source</li> </ul>	

	In your role as X with the hotel, is there a source where you can find information about X, Y or Z that is accessible to hotel guests with different kinds of disabilities (physical, cognitive, sensory, etc.)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Knowledge</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In your role as X, what's been your experience with the guests' requests for or challenges with getting information about X, Y or Z?</li> </ul>	<i>These questions will help to find out where employees have a source to gather the information needed and what challenges they encounter in this.</i>
3	Do you feel confident in working with guests with disabilities? Why or why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Confidence</li> <li>● Knowledge</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What kind of knowledge do you feel is missing for yourself to be able to work properly with disabled guests?</li> <li>- How do you feel this knowledge can be gained to enhance your confidence in working with disabled guests?</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<i>The importance of this question is to understand in what way the interviewee feels confident in working with people with disabilities or if they feel there is lack of knowledge.</i>
4	What kinds of practices and policies exist at this hotel for guests with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hotel policy</li> <li>● Hotel practices</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you think about these practices and policies?</li> <li>- In what way are these policies and practices influencing your work with disabled guests?</li> <li>- How would you like to see these practices and policies improve?</li> </ul>	<i>This question gives insight into the current hotel practices and policies.</i>

## **Challenges** to inclusion of guests with disabilities according to employees

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7. This set of questions focus on main-question 2: *How do employees of top hotel chains in the Netherlands currently respond to challenges to the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?*

Nr.	Question	Keywords and probing examples	Why?
1	How can the existing facilities, products and services in your hotel/ job serve the needs of disabled people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengths</li> <li>● Weaknesses</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the strength of these existing facilities, products and services in your hotel/job? And why?</li> <li>- On the other hand, what is a or are weakness(es) of the existing facilities, products and services? And why?</li> </ul>	<i>This question is important to understand the strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, also to understand the challenges</i>
2	Based on the strengths and weaknesses mentioned in your hotel/job in working with disabled guests, what challenges do you face when working with disabled guests?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Challenges</li> <li>● Opportunities</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you tackle these challenges at the moment?</li> <li>- How do you think these challenges can be tackled in a different way to improve the quality of products/services for disabled guests?</li> </ul>	<i>This questions will give a better understanding of current challenges, how these challenges are addressed currently and how these challenges can be tackled in a different way to improve the products and services for disabled guests even more.</i>
3	Are you familiar with the 'European Accessibility Act'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● National challenge</li> <li>● Local challenge (city wide)</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>If yes</b>, what is the influence of the European Accessibility Act on the hotel policies and practices?</li> <li>- <b>If no</b>, explain what it is and why it is important for hotels to know about it.</li> </ul>	<i>This question will assess to what extent the interviewee is influenced by the 'European Accessibility Act', how this influences the hotel, if this is seen as a challenge and how this can be tackled.</i>

**Future perspective** on how employees believe they could respond to challenges to inclusion of disabled guests

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- This set of questions focus on sub-question 3: *How do employees of top hotel chains in the Netherlands see how they could respond to challenges to the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?*

Nr.	Question	Keywords and probing examples	Why?
1	Coming back to the current facilities, products and services the hotel offers disabled guests, from your viewpoint, are these facilities, products and services enhancing social inclusion of disabled guests? Please explain why or why not.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social inclusion</li> <li>• Disabled guests</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you understand when talking about social inclusion of disabled guests?</li> <li>• How do you interact with disabled guests in your job to give them the feeling they are socially included?</li> <li>• How do you see yourself improve in your job to enhance social inclusion of disabled guests?</li> </ul>	<i>This question is important to understand the perspective of the employee in finding a solution to enhance the existing facilities, products and services of the hotel. Whether this should or should not be developed.</i>
2	Why should or shouldn't the hotel develop these existing facilities, products and services to enhance social inclusion of disabled guests, from your viewpoint?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development</li> <li>• current facilities</li> <li>• possible improvements</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How should the existing facilities, products and services be developed, by the hotel, to serve the needs of disabled guests?</li> <li>• What should be developed first in order to serve the needs of disabled guests?</li> </ul>	<i>This question is important to understand the perspective of the employee in finding a solution to enhance the existing facilities, products and services of the hotel. Whether this should or should not be developed.</i>
3	How can this (these) possible development(s) help to enhance social inclusion in the hotel, in your opinion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social inclusion</li> <li>• Opportunities</li> </ul> <p><b>Probing examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you feel this development can be used as an opportunity in the hotel you work for? <b>OR</b> How would</li> </ul>	<i>These questions will give a better understanding of the link between social inclusion and possible opportunities to apply it in the hotel industry.</i>

		you apply this development in the hotel you work for?	
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## Accessibility Training, an example taken from the 7 principles of the Universal Design framework

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- This set of questions focus on an example from the Universal Design framework, which can help to enhance inclusion of disabled people in the Dutch hotel industry, in theory. However, do the employees feel this can be of added value as well?

Nr.	Question	Keywords and probing examples	Why?
1	Do you currently have or have had an accessibility training, provided from your employer? <i>(closed question, therefore the probing questions are very important)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current training</li> <li>• Opinion on training</li> <li>• Strengths and weaknesses</li> </ul> <b>Probing example:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If yes, what does this training consist of?</li> <li><b>or</b></li> <li>• If no, why do you think this is not provided to you yet?</li> <li>• What is the strength of this training?</li> <li>• What is the weakness of this training?</li> </ul>	<i>This questions will give a better understanding of the current situation on accessibility training in the Dutch hotel industry.</i>
2	From your viewpoint, what is accessibility training for the hotel industry?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of Accessibility training</li> <li>• Importance in hotel industry</li> </ul> <b>Probing example:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your opinion on Accessibility training, is it of added value for the hotel industry?</li> </ul>	<i>This question is important to see what the interviewees see as accessibility training and if they feel if it is of added value.</i>
3	What elements should accessibility training contain,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience</li> <li>• Elements for training</li> </ul> <b>Probing examples:</b>	<i>This question will assess to what extent the interviewee is interested in accessibility training and in what areas</i>

	<p>looking at your experiences with disabled guests?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If you were able to describe one element to come to the forefront in accessibility training: How would you describe the most important element for an accessibility training from your perspective?</li> </ul>	<p><i>they feel there is need to gain knowledge on.</i></p>
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## Closing

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- Note that this is the end of the interview
- Give a short summary on the answers given, ask for any supplementations from the interviewee.
- Again, explain our aim to make sure the interviewee is aware for which purpose the interviewee is used. If you are interested in reading our results, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.
- In addition, may we use your contact details to get in contact with you again for any follow up questions, if needed?
- Thank you very much for your time and interest.

## APPENDIX B: OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEWEES

Legenda	
	Practice interviews (to improve the interview questions and my skills)
	Interview approved (took place in the past weeks)
	Interview approved (not enough interviewees from the same chain)

In-depth semi-structured interviews   Hotel Employees				
Hotel name	Employees' name	Department	Date & time of interview	Language
		Breakfast/Groups, Conferences & Events	Date: Wednesday 4th of November Time: 2.00pm	English
		Reservations	Date: Wednesday 4th of November Time: 7.30am	English
		Skylounge/reservations/front office	Date: Thursday 12th of November Time: 5.30pm	English
		Front Office	Date: Monday 2nd of November Time: 4.00pm	English
		Assistant F&B Manager	Date: Friday 20th of November Time: 1.00pm	Dutch
		Reservations/Groups	Date: Tuesday 10th of November Time: 10.00am	Dutch
		Front Office employee	Date: Thursday 19th of November Time: 10.00am	Dutch
		Front Office Shiftleader	Date: Monday 16th of November Time: 11.00am	English
		F&B employee/manager	Date: Monday 23rd of November Time: 4.30pm	Dutch
		Hospitality Trainer	Date: Thursday 10th of December Time: 1.00pm	Dutch
		Sales & Marketing employee/manager Jakarta	Date: Monday 30th of November Time: 3.00pm	Dutch
		Front of House (Guest Services & Front Office)	Date: Wednesday 18th of November Time: 10.00am	English
		Front of House (Guest Services & Front Office)	Date: Thursday 26th of November Time: 10.30am	Dutch

\*Due to privacy reasons the hotel and participants' names are taken out

In-depth semi-structured interviews   Hotel Managers				
Hotel name	Managers' name	Department	Date & time of interview	Language
		Groups, Conferences and Events (GC&E) Manager	Date: Monday 2nd of November Time: 2.30pm	English
		Sales Manager	Date: Thursday 5th of November Time: 4.00pm	English
		Marketing Manager	Date: Thursday 5th of November Time: 11.00am	English
		Commercial Manager	Date: Wednesday 11th of November Time: 10.00am	English
		Desk/Guest Services Manager	Date: Wednesday 18th of November Time: 2.00pm	English
		Market Sales Manager	Date: Monday 16th of November Time: 2.00pm	English
		Reservations Manager	Date: Tuesday 3th of November Time: 2.30pm	Dutch
		Groups, Conference and Events Manager	Date: Wednesday 4th of November Time: 10.30am	English
		Regional Marketing Manager NL/DE/CH	Date: Friday 20th of November Time: 9.00am	English
		Regional Groups and Events Manager (AU/NL/ES/DE)	Date: Wednesday 11th of November Time: 2.00pm	English
		General Manager	Date: Friday 27th of November Time: 11.00am	Dutch
		Sales Manager	Date: Wednesday 25th of November Time: 10.00am	Dutch

Field experts				
Organisation	Name	Position	Date	Language
		Accessibility Consultant	Date: Wednesday 11th of November Time: 5.00pm	Dutch
		Founder of AccessibleTravel.online and Accessible Travel Foundation	Date: Tuesday 8th of December Time: 1.00pm	Dutch
		Hotel testpanel Accessible Travel.online	Date: Monday 30th of November Time: 4.00pm	Dutch
		Hotel testpanel Accessible Travel.online	Date: Tuesday 24th of November Time: 1.00pm	Dutch
		Zonnebloem	Date: Wednesday 9th of December Time: 2.00pm	Dutch

\*Due to privacy reasons the hotel and participants' names are taken out

#### APPENDIX C: OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANT ABBREVIATIONS

Participants	Employee/Manager	Organisation	Department of expertise
P1	Employee 1	Hotel chain A	Food & Beverage /Groups, Conferences & Events employee
P2	Employee 2	Hotel chain A	Front Office/ Food & Beverage/Individual Reservations employee
P3	Manager 1	Hotel chain A	Sales Manager
P4	Manager 2	Hotel chain A	Marketing Manager
P5	Employee 3	Hotel chain B	Food & Beverage employee
P6	Manager 3	Hotel chain B	Guest services
P7	Manager 4	Hotel chain B	Guest services/ Groups, Conferences & Events/ Market Sales
P8	Employee 4	Hotel chain C	Individual Reservations employee
P9	Employee 5	Hotel chain C	Front Office employee
P10	Manager 5	Hotel chain C	Individual Reservations/ Group reservations Manager
P11	Employee 6	Hotel chain D	Food & beverage employee
P12	Manager 6	Hotel chain D	Groups, Conferences & Events Manager
P13	Manager 7	Hotel chain D	Regional Marketing Manager
P14	Employee 7	Hotel chain E	Front office / Guest services employee
P15	Employee 8	Hotel chain E	Guests services employee

P16	Manager 8	Hotel chain E	Regional Groups, Conferences & Events Manager
P17	Employee 9	Hotel chain F	Trainings
P18	Employee 10	Hotel chain F	Marketing / Sales employee
P19	Manager 9	Hotel chain F	General Manager
P20	Manager 10	Hotel chain F	Sales Manager
P21	Expert 1	Organisation A	Accessibility Consultant
P22	Expert 2	Organisation A	Accessibility Consultant
P23	Expert 3	Organisation B	Project Manager Accessibility
P24	Disabled person 1	N.A.	
P25	Disabled person 2	N.A.	

#### APPENDIX D: EMAIL TO POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES

This appendix shows the email/Whatsapp or phonecall message I made when trying to reach out to potential interviewees. All interviewees I already had contact details from, I tried to contact via phone, to make the first impression more personal. All other potential interviewees I received contact details from via other interviewees, which happened a lot, I contacted most of the time via email since I did not have receive any other type of contact details. The information I always tried to start with is as follows (in Dutch and English):

##### **Dutch:**

Goedemiddag/goedemorgen ...,

Via ... heb ik jouw email adres mogen ontvangen – hartelijk dank daarvoor! Waarschijnlijk heb je al een korte toelichting ontvangen van ... waarom ik jou graag benader, zie onderstaande een korte toelichting:

Op dit moment ben ik bezig met mijn Master aan de Universiteit van Wageningen (Ms Tourism, Society and Environment) en schrijf ik mijn scriptie over 'social inclusion and equality of disabled guests in the Dutch hotel industry' – met als hoofdvraag: how do hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands experience and perceive the needs and rights of their guests with disabilities?

Op basis van deze onderzoeksvraag benader ik managers en andere medewerkers binnen de Nederlandse hotel industry voor een interview (een variatie binnen F&B, FO, Marketing, Sales, reservations, guest services en events afdelingen). Dit om zoveel mogelijk verschillende perspectieven te ontvangen vanuit medewerkers over de ervaringen, challenges en mogelijke verbeteringen ontvangen van gasten met een beperking. Deze inzichten kunnen hopelijk een toevoeging zijn op social inclusion en equality van gasten met een beperking van de Nederlandse hotel industry.

Jouw ervaringen als ... zouden heel interessant zijn voor mijn onderzoek. Daarom ben ik ook erg benieuwd of jij jouw ervaringen zou willen delen. Graag zou ik daarom willen vragen of je het leuk zou vinden, en tijd zou hebben, om met mij een interview te doen over het bovengenoemde onderwerp. Het kost ongeveer 45-60 minuten. Zo ja, welke dag/tijd zou jou uitkomen? Ik ben aanstaande ... beschikbaar.

Ik hoor het heel graag, alvast ontzettend bedankt voor jouw reactie! Een heel fijne dag!

Met vriendelijke groet,

Demi (+31 654261660 / [demi.karssen@wur.nl](mailto:demi.karssen@wur.nl))

**English:**

Good afternoon/morning ...,

Hope you are fine! Via ... I received your contact details – thank you very much!

I think you already received a short explanation from ... about why I would like to get in contact with you. I explained to ... that I am currently working on my Master thesis (Master Tourism, Society and Environment – University of Wageningen) related to social inclusion and equality of differently abled hotel guests within the Dutch hotel industry. My main research question is: how do hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands experience and perceive the needs and rights of their guests with disabilities?

I am currently in contact with a lot of hotel managers and employees in the Netherlands to plan interviews to find out what their perspective, needs and wants on this topic are. The hotels I am in contact with are national and international brands. On top of this, I focus on a wide variety of departments which varies from operations departments to regional managers, from F&B employees having face-to-face contact with differently abled guests to a general manager, to make sure to take into account different perspectives on this topic. I hope that these interviews provide me with information, which can be of addition to enhance social inclusion and equality of differently abled guests in the Dutch hotel industry.

Your perspective on this topic would be of great addition to my research. It would be great if you are interested in conducting an interview, by providing me mainly with information related to your experiences in the past years with disabled guests and creating a more inclusive society. If you are interested, we can plan a phonecall / Skypecall to conduct the interview.

I am very much looking forward to your reply! Have a lovely day!

Best wishes,

Demi (+31 654261660 / [demi.karssen@wur.nl](mailto:demi.karssen@wur.nl))

## APPENDIX E: WORKPLAN

<b>Period</b>	<b>Weeks</b>	<b>Description</b>
03.07.20 – 24.07.20	3 weeks	'Soft start' – orienting on the topic of Inclusive Tourism and start with the initial proposal
27.07.20 – 10.08.20	2 weeks	Holiday
10.08.20 – 24.08.20	2 weeks	Initial proposal
24.08.20 – 21.09.20	4 weeks	Draft version of the proposal
21.09.20 – 26.10.20	5 weeks	Final proposal (to be approved by the supervisor)
26.10.20 – 07.12.20	6 weeks	Fieldwork
07.12.20 – 24.12.20	2,5 weeks	Initial draft thesis
24.12.20 – 18.01.21	3,5 weeks	Revised draft of thesis
18.01.21 - 15.03.21	8 weeks	Final version of the thesis and planning colloquium
25.03.2021	2 weeks	Undertaking colloquium

## APPENDIX F: CODING SCHEME OF INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

### LEGENDA OF THE TABLES

<b>Legenda</b>	
Column 1	Research question 1/2/3
Column 2	Open coding
Column 3	Axial coding
Column 4	Selective coding

CODING RELATED TO *RESEARCH QUESTION 1*

Research question 1	Open coding (examples of participants' words)	Axial coding	Selective coding
<p><i>What is the current status of inclusive tourism in the top hotel industry of the Netherlands?</i></p>	<p>Not all hotels have accessible rooms</p>	<p>Number (of accessible hotel rooms)</p>	<p>Accessible hotel rooms</p>
	<p>Hotel rooms can be transformed into an accessible room!</p>		
	<p>Because there are just 1 or 2 rooms per hotel, or some hotels do not even have accessible rooms – it is sometimes the case that there is not anyone available anymore.</p>		
	<p>A certain amount of rooms should be accessible.</p>		
	<p>Always standard room rate, to treat everyone equal</p>	<p>Room rate (of accessible hotel rooms)</p>	
	<p>Free upgrade for disabled guests if they are in need for an accessible room (which is a higher room type)</p>		
	<p>Only a higher room type available as accessibility room. Including a higher room rate, not the entry level rate.</p>	<p>Room type (of accessible hotel rooms)</p>	

	Not always an entry level room type		
	Not much requests of guests with a disability	Not much requests	Hotel requests (of disabled guests)
	The amount of guest requests is environment/location specific maybe?		
	Disabled guests are just a small part of the business.	small part of the business	
	Treat everyone equal	Equal treatment	Equality
	Hotel chain A started a cooperations with 'Wheel the World' to try to understand this type of guest better.		
	Accessibility training is not needed, everyone is treated the same way.		
	Broad entrance	Practical features	Practical features/improvements
	Accessible toilet		
	Broad hallways		
	In the elevator there is/should be numbers in braille	Practical improvements	
	Yes/no braille menu		
	Yes/no buzzer for deaf people during a fire alarm		
	Wheel chair users	Physical disability	Type of disabled guests
	Less mobile guests		

	Authism	Visual/ hearing or mental disability	
	Visual disability		
	Deaf people		
	More and more young guests with disabilities.		
	Older guests, due to ageing	Old guests	
	No promotion on the website for accessible rooms	Low/no website accessibility	Website accessibility
	Accessible rooms on the website	Promotion of accessible rooms on website	
	Features of accessible rooms on the website		
	Wheelchair accessible sign on the website	Wheel chair accessibility sign	
	People with a disability will feel heard when accessible rooms are displayed on the website, not the case yet.	Feeling heard by use of website accessibility	
	Not the design for guests with special needs	Physical hotel design	Accessible hotel design
	Historical buildings are harder to transform to accessible hotels		
	Hotel star classification – safety first related to fire alarm.		
	Small entrance		

	Products are placed too high on a shelf (for wheelchair users)		
	New hotels or renovated hotels keep an eye on 'drempels' – they do not have it anymore!	Renovated hotels	
	There were renovations planned, due to corona they were taken off!	Corona	
	No standards or policies for hotels related to accessibility	Hotel policies	
	Horeca Nederland should provide guidelines for European Accessibility Act		
	In the UK it is obligatory to have a certain percentage of the total room number as accessible room.	European Accessibility Act	National/international laws and hotel policies
	No one knows about the European Accessibility Act		
	Municipality of Amsterdam is working on accessibility	Municipality	
	No accessibility trainings, yet.		
	Accessibility training is not needed (as said by 2 interviewees)	No interest in accessibility training	(NO) Accessibility training
	The showround for new employees already has		

	<p>accessible rooms included, and its features.</p>		
	<p>In the duty handover it is always mentioned about accessible rooms and disabled guests if the employees are aware.</p>	<p>Current internal information/training on accessibility</p>	
	<p>Everyone has a different background and therefore different knowledge on accessibility. To make the knowledge at the same level a training would be a good solution.</p>	<p>Accessibility training is a good solution</p>	
	<p>The hotel industry is aware of disabled guests, but they are not willing to see their needs and wants, and to adjust to it.</p>	<p>Ignorance of hotel industry</p>	<p>Unwillingness/Ignorance</p>
	<p>Not everyone is aware of the large group of guests with disabilities, this makes it hard to let them change or adjust their behaviour and products/services</p>	<p>Unwillingness of hotel industry</p>	
	<p>It is not just disabled guests it is also related to disabled employees/colleagues</p>	<p>Social inclusion of hotel employees</p>	<p>Social inclusion</p>
	<p>Only three hotels are fully accessible in the Netherlands based on the checklist of ATO (Accessible Travel Online).</p>	<p>Low social inclusion</p>	

CODING RELATED TO *RESEARCH QUESTION 2*

Research question 2	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
How do employees of top hotel chains in the Netherlands currently respond to challenges to the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?	What are their wants?	Needs and wants	Ask for needs and wants
	What are their needs?		
	Ask questions	Ask and listen	Service related solutions
	Listen to the guests' needs and wants.		
	(NO) Fire alarm for deaf guests	Practical accessibility aspects (missing)	
	Shower-chair for disabled guests		
	(NO) Braille menu for blind guests		
	Low/high desk for guests in a wheel chair		
	In the duty handover it is always mentioned about accessible rooms and disabled guests if the employees are aware.	Action/service to improve guests stay	
	Being flexible in service		
	Free upgrade for disabled guests if they are in need for an accessible room (which is a higher room type)		
	Guests do not always inform the hotel about their disability, which makes it hard to	Preparation prior to arrival	Preparation

	prepare for the employees.		
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CODING RELATED TO *RESEARCH QUESTION 3*

Research question 3	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
How do employees of top hotel chains in the Netherlands believe how they could respond to challenges to the inclusion of guests with disabilities in their hotels?	Also guests with other disabilities than just in a wheelchair – not always aware	Social inclusion by use of good communication	Communication between disabled guests and employees
	Social inclusion needs to be enhanced, mainly practical related. However, also service related in communication with guests and awareness of accessibility.		
	There are internal sheets with all information on accessible rooms and other features. However, it is not used often, which makes that not everyone is aware.	Make better use of current internal sheets/information	
	Communication with disabled guests		
	Online training is good for a basis	Online training for every hotel employee	Focus of accessibility training (online/offline) on accessibility awareness
	Accessibility training should include how you serve guests.		
	Online accessibility training for the marketing		

	teams – related to European Accessibility act.		
	No accessibility trainings, yet.	No interest in accessibility training	
	Accessibility training is not needed (as said by 2 interviewees)		
	Accessibility training should be part of another existing training to make it not something special or new, but to treat it as equal training.	Offline training for operational teams	
	Offline tour about features of the hotel on accessibility.		
	Operational teams should receive offline training, since they have face to face contact with the guests.		
	Offline training has the preference for operational teams.		
	Offline training works better		
	Focus on accessibility awareness during trainings (how to communicate with guests/what are needs/wants)	Focus on accessibility awareness	

	A combination of online and offline training is the best. Online for all employees and offline for the operational teams/frontline teams.	Combination of online and offline training	
	What are their needs?	No idea of needs and wants	Improving knowledge of the team on accessibility (needs/wants)
	What are their wants?		
	Ask questions		
	Not enough knowledge on accessibility	Knowledge of the team	
	Adaptation to rooms to make it accessible	Room related design	Universal Design
	Fire alarm for deaf guests	Practical design adaptations	
	Braille menu for blind guests		
	Universal design, no one is left out.	Hotel design by architects	
	The look and feel of a hotel, music/colours etc. also has an influence on guests with a disability.		
	Also architects are important to take into account, for the design of new hotels or hotels to be renovated.		
	Let the knowledge of experienced people play a role in designing hotels/trainings	Experts with knowledge on accessibility	
	We can learn a lot from the cultural sector, they		

	are way further in the inclusion of disabled guests – like theatres and musea.		
	An application is created by Gavin Neate to make Front Office aware about needs and wants of a guest with a disability.		
	There are checklists to check hotels on their disability. This experience should be seen as an opportunity.	Checklist on accessibility of hotels	
	Not always pricy solutions also easy and simple solutions.		
	The law is different in countries like the United States they have the ADA, such law is not applicable in the Netherlands.	Laws/legislation	Laws and hotel standards
	Include accessibility standards and policies for hotel chains.	General standards	

## APPENDIX G: MEMO WRITING

### 1. Experiences:

- There is not always the practical solution (e.g. lower desk or an accessible buffet) to help guests with disabilities but there is always a solution, which is most of the time related to **service**.

#### **Examples from the interviews are:**

- If there is no lower desk, go to the restaurant and sit down with the guest to treat them the same way as other guests.
- If the buffet is not in all aspects accessible the breakfast employee can fill the plate with whatever the guest prefers.
- Internal information

#### **Examples from the interviews are:**

- Is very good. We are aware of who is staying in the room and also 'overdragen' to the next shift.

### 2. Challenges:

- Building/room related/architects

#### **Examples from the interviews are:**

- It is hard if a hotel is located in a historical building to make it accessible, like with stairs, no elevator, small rooms, doors etc.

- Mental disabilities and communication

#### **Examples from the interviews are:**

- Physical disabilities can be seen, that is why that is what our priority gets. I am not sure how to deal with mental disabilities. Especially if guests do not mention it.

### 3. Future perspective:

- Improvements of challenges faced

#### **Examples from the interviews are:**

- Communication related (□ can be improved by accessibility training)
- Building related, harder to change. However, we have other hotels which are more accessible. We are aware of this and try to make the best out of it with our service.

- Equality and social inclusion

#### **Examples from the interviews are:**

- Most of the time there is only one or two rooms in the hotel who are accessible. Mainly one room type – entry level. Only one hotel has just the junior suite as accessible room, since it is a historical building this was the best solution to

create an accessible room. This is not equal to everyone and does not enhance social inclusion.

- Building related, harder to change. However, we have other hotels which are more accessible. We are aware of this and try to make the best out of it with our service.

#### 4. Accessible training:

- Communication related

##### **Examples from the interviews:**

- How do we communicate with disabled guests? Not only with physical disabilities, also with mental disabilities.

- Accessibility awareness

##### **Examples from the interviews:**

- We try our utmost best to make them feel welcome and to treat every guest the same, but I do not know if this is really how they want to be treated.

- Accessibility training

- Combination of online and offline training

Online: accessibility awareness (more general and can be done online to save time)

Offline: hotel detailed training (all accessible features of the hotel and repeating the online training aspects)

- Practice with a roleplay
- Show round to discuss the online training and show all accessible room features

#### 5. Other:

- Other sectors

##### **Examples from the interviews are:**

- We can learn a lot from the cultural sector, they are way further in the inclusion of disabled guests – like theatres and musea.

- Experts

##### **Examples from the interviews are:**

- The hotel industry should make use of the existing expertise and experience of disabled guests, like AccessibleTravel.Online

- Unwillingness / ignorance

##### **Examples from the interviews are:**

- The hotel industry is aware of disabled guests, but they are not willing to see their needs and wants, and to adjust to it.
- Not everyone is aware of the large group of guests with disabilities, this makes it hard to let them change or adjust their behaviour and products/services.