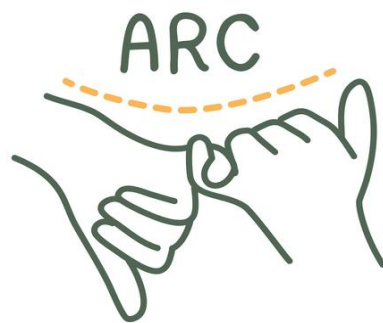


**ARC - Access, Respect, Connect:**  
Enhancing Social Participation of  
Persons with Disabilities for a Diverse Community



**Research Phase -  
Final Report**



Co-funded by  
the European Union

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Work package 2

Project Result 1

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atempo

concordia  
ACADEMIA

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EUDAJMONIA



Panevėžio socialinių pokyčių centras



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## Summary in easy to read

### Information about the ARC project

The ARC project helps people with (learning) disabilities join local community life.

The project creates education plans for adults.

These plans help people with disabilities take part in local activities.

### Information about the research phase

Inclusive teams do the research.

These teams include people with learning disabilities and their supporters.

Supporters can be trainers, family members, or neighbours.

The research is made of workshops, interviews, and good practices.

It also uses community mapping and the photovoice method to study the local community.

### Goals of the research phase:

- Create and prepare inclusive teams for the project.
- Understand the current local situations in 5 countries.
- Create a shared understanding among project partners.
- Build a shared understanding for the project.
- Learn about the needs of people involved in each country.
- Provide recommendations for the next work package, which focuses on creating the learning content.

## Conclusion in easy to read

These ideas come from talks with people with learning disabilities.

Their supporters also shared what is important and what help is needed.

The ideas will help make learning materials clear and useful.

This is part of the project called Work Package 3.

The next step is to create digital learning materials.

These materials are for two groups:

- People with learning disabilities
- Their supporters



## **Results: Recommendations**

Now, the recommendations for digital content will be presented. These ideas show how learning materials can support both people with learning disabilities and their supporters. The goal is to help everyone take part more fully in everyday life, be more independent, and feel more included in their communities.

### **Recommendations for learning materials for people with learning disabilities:**

- Making friends: How do I talk to others? How do I find friends?
- Feeling strong and brave: I can join in. I can do it!
- Knowing my rights: I have the right to join. I can decide for myself.
- Finding my way: How do I find information? When will it happen? Where does it take place?
- Learning to search on my own: I can search online or ask questions.
- Understanding money: What is for free? Where can I get discounts?

### **Recommendations for learning materials for supporters:**

- Good support: Support them, don't take over everything. Do not leave the person alone.
- Helping to become independent: Do real activities together. For example, plan an event or search for information.
- Encouraging self-advocacy: Let the person speak for themselves.
- Giving clear information: Use easy language, pictures, or videos.
- Handling stigma: Help when someone says something mean or unfair.
- Looking for new ideas: Work with other groups or companies. Let people with learning disabilities become digital coaches or reading helpers.

## **Conclusion**

It is important for people with learning disabilities to join everyday life.

They should feel safe and make their own decisions.

These ideas will help them feel included in their community.

Good learning materials can explain things clearly and give courage.

This makes real participation in local communities possible.



## Key terminology

Terminology	Term description
PWLD	Short form for <b>People with learning disabilities</b> . This term refers to individuals who have difficulties with learning, understanding, and processing information. These challenges can affect everyday tasks, communication, and participation in society.
Supporters	<b>Supporters</b> can be trainers, family members, community members or neighbours.
WP	Stands for Work-Package. A <b>work package</b> is a clearly defined section of a project that includes specific tasks, objectives, responsibilities, and expected results. It helps organize and manage complex projects efficiently.
Inclusive teams	<b>Inclusive Teams</b> consisting of people with learning disabilities, project-members, and supporters.
Local community	The term <b>local community</b> refers to the people living in a specific geographic area, such as a neighbourhood, town, or city. It includes individuals, groups, and organizations that interact with each other and share common spaces, services, and interests.
Community mapping	<b>Community mapping</b> means making a simple map that shows what exists in a community — like people, places, services, and what is missing or needed. It helps everyone see what is there and what could be better.
Photovoice method	<b>Photovoice</b> is a simple method where people take photos to show their everyday life, feelings, or problems. Then they talk about the pictures to share their stories and ideas. It helps others understand their point of view.



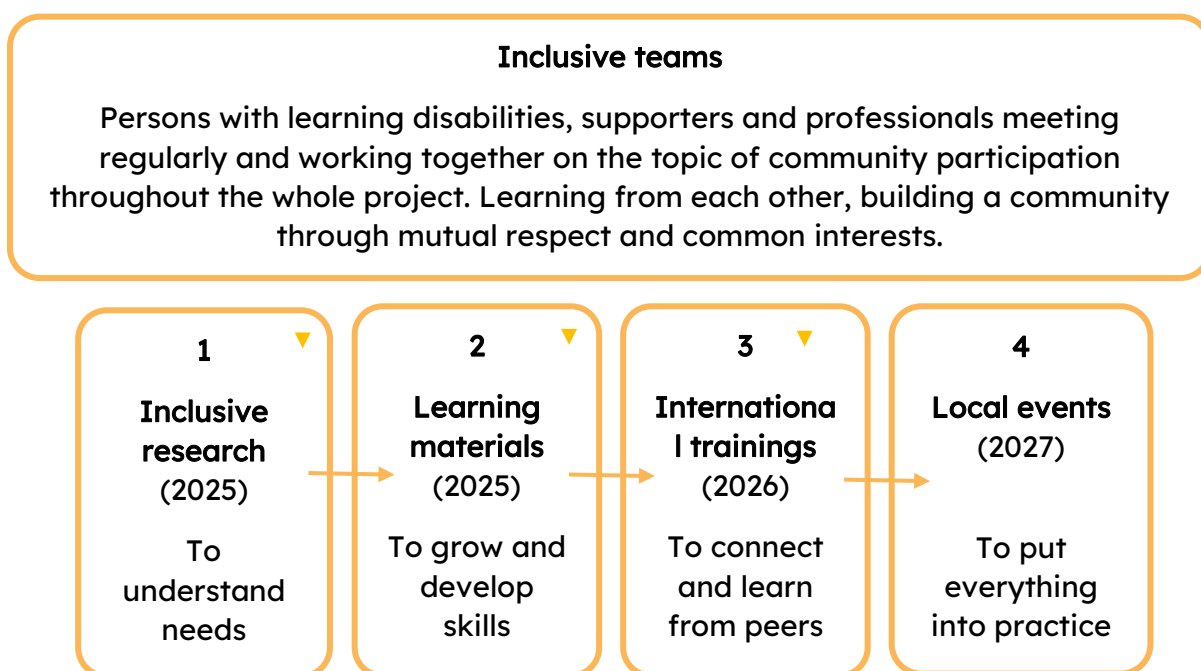
## Information about the ARC project

The main idea behind the ARC-project is to promote the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in local community life through skills development and

empowerment. By understanding community as locality, we want to develop adult education curricula that strengthen and increase the local community embeddedness of persons with disabilities and thus their social network.

In this process, persons with disabilities would play an active role, so the primary aim of the project is to contribute to the development of the local community by strengthening their active local community involvement. In doing so, we will empower them in their role as citizens beyond disability, strengthening the ways in which they themselves can take responsible steps to create connections with the local community and in being active participants of community events.

### Structure and elements of the project:







## Project partners:

### atempo (AT)



atempo is a private non-profit organisation and an experienced social enterprise specialised in the field of raising the quality of life for people with disabilities. Based in Graz, Austria it has more than 20 years of experience in working with and for people with disabilities. The aim of all atempo activities is to work towards equalisation of people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Besides atempo works to remove barriers hindering people with learning difficulties and disabilities to take part in society as equal citizens.



### Concordia Academia Association (RO)

CA aims to increase the quality of social services provided at regional level and build the capacity of organizations active in social, educational and medical fields by providing certified high-quality training programs and support services. CONCORDIA Academia Association was created in 2023. Through its programs, CA has trained professionals, offered supervision services and coaching sessions to practitioners, held webinars on trauma and self-care, organized an intensive Masterclass training program, and been directly involved in European project management and consultancy programs in Romania.



### Eudajmonia Foundation (PL)

The Foundation has been supporting people with disabilities since 2007. It actively combats discrimination against people with disabilities. The Foundation participates in consultations on the development of strategies and the protection of the rights of people with disabilities. In its tasks, it focuses on the inclusion of people with disabilities in local communities. Self-advocacy groups organise events in the local community to bring the diversity of the community closer to people with disabilities, following the principle "nothing about us without us".



### Hand in Hand Foundation (HU, coordinator)

HIH was established in Budapest in 1993. The Foundation as a direct service provider reaches people with disabilities and their families with its supported employment and housing service, legal aid and information. It also supports the work of professionals through professional trainings, provides methodological service to social service provider organisations and assists families and professionals affected with various publications.



Panevėžio socialinių pokyčių centras

## Panevėžio Socialinių Pokyčių Centras (LT)

PsPc is situated in Panevėžys since 1996, the year when Panevėžys Town Council established the centre. The centre provides social day care services for persons with intellectual disability aged 18 years and older. Their mission is to fully satisfy the needs of service users by specifically planning and organizing activities in PsPc, improving the life quality of service users and paying the utmost attention to the achievements of young adults. While providing services, they undoubtedly concentrate on activities stimulating interaction with other people as well as developing and maintaining working skills. They also try to advocate and promote the rights and interests of their users.

## Information about the research phase

The aim of the research phase (work-package 2) is to explore existing community-based methodologies and good practices with a specific focus on **"how to help persons with disabilities to be active locally"**.

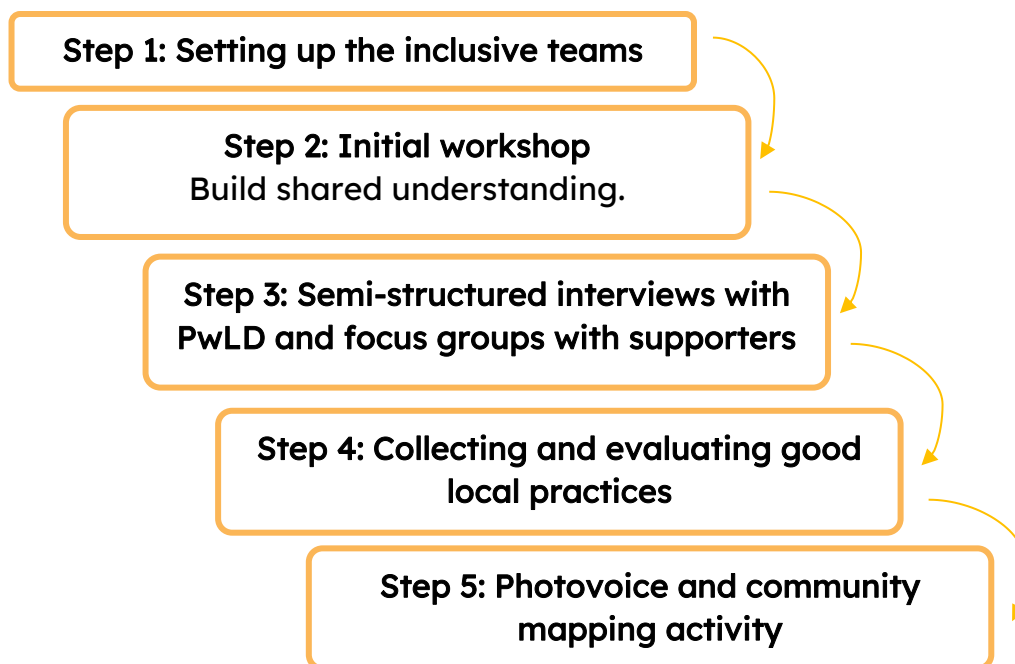
We do this through the involvement of **inclusive teams**. The inclusive teams consist of PWLD and their supporters, these are people who provide direct or indirect support (trainers, relatives, neighbours). The research question is answered with the inclusive teams through interviews, good practices, with community mapping and extending the photovoice method to exploring the local community.

### The expected results are:

- We want to create an active and inclusive group for the project.
- Increase inclusive team members' knowledge of the subject.
- We have a common understanding of the subject among partners.
- We will learn about the needs of stakeholders.
- We will understand social engagement in different countries.

## Methods

The following section outlines the participatory methods used throughout the project to ensure inclusive involvement of PWLD and their supporters. Each phase was designed to promote active engagement, shared understanding, and meaningful contributions to the project's goals.



## Setting up an inclusive team

The objective was to form inclusive teams in each participating country to ensure active and meaningful engagement in the project. Each organization assembled a team of at least five members, resulting in over 25 participants in total. **These teams included professionals, PWLD, supporters, and members of the project team.**

Interested individuals were invited to participate. It was important that they were interested in social participation and in expanding their own skills. The activities undertaken emphasized non-formal, participatory methods such as mapping, photovoice, and co-creation workshops.

**Targeted result: 25+ members of inclusive teams**

## Initial Workshop

The aim of the preparatory workshop was to introduce the ARC project in an interactive and inclusive way and to develop a shared understanding of the terms *local community* and *neighbourhood* within the newly established inclusive team.

Starting from their own living environments, participants reflected on their current neighbourhoods and worked together to create vision boards comparing present realities with desired futures. Using creative methods such as visualizations and group discussions, the teams explored what an inclusive and liveable community could look like. This shared foundation supported consistent understanding and language throughout the subsequent interview phase.

**Targeted result: 5 definitions / understanding of local community**



## Interviews & Focus Groups

This phase focused on conducting and analysing semi-structured interviews and focus groups to gather insights on social participation. A total of 25 interviews with PWLD were carried out—five per partner organization—between February and mid-March 2025. The interviews were conducted with PWLD to ensure their perspectives were central to the project. Each interview followed a one-on-one format, lasting approximately 30 minutes, and was guided by a structured interview protocol. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy during analysis.

In addition to the interviews, five focus groups were conducted with supporters across the partner organizations. These sessions aimed to capture additional perspectives on the conditions and experiences that enable or hinder participation.

The deliverables included a full transcript in the interviewee's or participant's native language, along with an English translation. Audio recordings were produced using tools such as Whisper by OpenAI. The analysis of all interviews and focus group discussions was completed by the end of March.

**Targeted result: 25+ interviews with PWLD and 5 focus groups**

## Best Practices

The objective of this phase was to collect and share best practices in social participation to support the development of practical tools. Each partner was tasked with identifying five relevant examples, such as events, shared spaces, tools, research initiatives, or competitions.

The selected examples were documented in English, including a brief description, a reference link, and a note on their relevance. Inclusive national teams reviewed the examples, providing feedback on their quality, relevance, and feasibility for broader use.

Based on these contributions, atempo consolidated the findings into a single report. The collection was submitted via a shared drive by the end of March.

The outcome was a curated set of tailored, inclusive examples to inform the practical development of project tools.

**Targeted result: 25 rated practices in the field of social participation**

## (Digital) Community mapping and Photovoice

This phase aimed to identify barriers and promote inclusive community-building for PWLD, with a focus on physical, informational, and social obstacles. In addition, the process explored ways to strengthen community connections for PWLD.

Two participatory methods were used: **Community Mapping** and **Photovoice**. During the community mapping process, teams analysed local maps to assess accessibility and identify not only barriers but also opportunities for participation in the



community. Observations and insights were documented collaboratively to reflect both challenges and potential for inclusion.

In the photovoice activity, inclusive teams photographed public spaces and community areas from their perspective, highlighting both difficulties and positive examples of inclusion. Before starting, participants received an introduction to basic photography techniques. Each photo was accompanied by a written narrative, explaining its significance and context. The results from both the community mapping and photovoice activities were compiled into a digital map using the Padlet platform, making the findings easily accessible to a broader audience.

**Targeted result: 40+ entries of locations in padlet with photo and key message**

## Implementation & Results

In the following sections, the focus will be on describing how these methods were implemented in practice. Additionally, an overview of the key findings and results gathered through these approaches will be presented. This will help to understand the process and outcomes of the project more clearly.

### Initial Workshop

**Aim:** foster common understanding of inclusive teams about the concept of neighbourhood and community. Discover personal views and experiences.

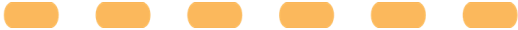
**Main expressions:** neighbourhood, community, vision board, analogue map

**Necessary tools:** Analogue/printed map of local neighbourhood + stickers, tools for a creative vision board (magazines, scissors, markers, pens)

All partners successfully organized and conducted the initial workshop. The workshops aimed to foster a deep, reflective engagement with the participants' local environments and encourage shared understanding within the inclusive teams.

During the workshop, participants were guided through a series of activities to reflect consciously on their neighbourhoods. They explored what *community* and *neighbourhood* meant to them personally and how these concepts relate to social inclusion.

The workshop encouraged active discussions and creative exercises, where each participant described their local neighbourhood or workplace, sharing what makes these spaces unique to them. To visualize their surroundings, the locations were marked on a map or symbolically represented.



The group then explored questions such as:

- This reflection led into the creation of a **Vision Board**: each participant designed a representation of their ideal neighbourhood, focusing on inclusivity, accessibility, and the spaces they would like to have in their community. The vision board activity aimed to inspire a collective dream for a better, more inclusive living environment.

## Results

Partner	Definition of the chosen local community
atempo (AT)	<p>The inclusive team jointly decided in the kick-off workshop that for atempo, the local community is defined as the area within a 3 km radius around the atempo building. This decision was made because the building is located near the border of a district in Graz (Geidorf district), and adhering strictly to the district boundary would mean losing important meeting points and recreational areas for the participants.</p> <p><b>Focus: the area 3 km radius around the atempo building</b></p>
Concordia (RO)	<p>In our working group, the community is represented by the city of Rm. Sarat. People with learning disabilities described their community as being friendly, accessible, practical, safe, and offering role models (they mentioned neighbours, their professions, and neighbourhood customs). They also feel accepted; it is the place where they grew up, the roots that provide them with stability. (They compared their connection to their neighbourhood with the string that ties a balloon, so it doesn't float away.)</p> <p><b>Focus: City of Râmnicu Sărat</b></p>
Eudajmonia (PL)	<p>Local community is understood as the people and places that surround and are close to the heart. Polkowice is a small town where people with disabilities feel safe and are treated as part of the local community. The local community is a club that people attend, including neighbours and places such as the club, the local park, McDonald's (a meeting place) and cinema etc.</p> <p>In terms of living place, they are places close to home where they feel safe and surrounded by people who accept them (e.g. belonging to a church, a house, etc.)</p> <p><b>Focus: City of Polkowice</b></p>
Hand in Hand (HU)	<p>As most of our group members live in different parts of the city, the common area and neighbourhood to discover shall be the area of the Hand in Hand office as a common and easy to access meeting point, also because it is a central area that is in a good location of the city.</p> <p><b>Focus: Neighbourhood around the Hand in Hand office</b></p>
PsPc (LT)	<p>It is a close, accessible and inclusive environment where we can feel safe, accepted and active in our daily lives. These are spaces not too far from our homes, in strategic locations in the city - day care centres, shopping centres, parks, cafes, libraries, cultural institutions - easily accessible on foot or by public transport and forming a network of the most frequented and demand-fulfilling facilities.</p> <p><b>Focus: The Surrounding area, Panevėžys city center</b></p>



By the end of the workshop, participants had a common understanding of their current realities and shared aspirations for a more inclusive and connected neighbourhood. The workshop not only sparked reflection but also strengthened the group's sense of togetherness and mutual understanding.

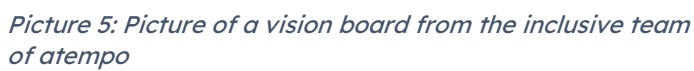


*Picture 2 and 3: Workshop and visualization of the PsPc team's neighbourhood*



*Picture 4: The Concordia team at the workshop*





# Interviews & Focus Groups

## Implementation Interviews

**Aim:** learn about experiences, needs, challenges in details and good practices of both PwLDs and supporters. To use the results for the learning materials.

**Main expressions:** local community, wishes, trust, support, participation, barriers, inclusion, exclusion

**Necessary tools:** questionnaires, recorder if you want to record

**Duration:** interview with PwLDs: 30-45 mins, focus group with supporters: approx. 60 mins

Between February and May, a total of 25 interviews were conducted with people with learning disabilities across all partner organisations. The focus of these interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of individuals in their local contexts, to explore what matters most to them in their communities, and to identify where they currently have access – and where they do not – including the reasons behind these barriers.

For the analysis, each partner was assigned an ID code based on the country-ID. These codes are used throughout the appendix and the summary.

atempo	AT	6 interviews with PWLD (AT001-AT006)
Concordia	RO	5 interviews with PWLD (RU001-RU005)
Eudajmonia	PL	5 interviews with PWLD (PL001-PL005)
Hand in Hand	HU	5 interviews with PWLD (HU001-HU005)
PsPc	LT	5 interviews with PWLD (LI00-LI005)



The analysis addressed the following questions:

- What is the **current situation** of the interviewee? How do they live? What is important to them?
- **Uses and wishes**: What do they use from the local community, what do they lack, and what do they wish for?
- **Trust in unknown people**: This question asked the extent to which strangers are trusted and what is needed to build trust.
- **Needed support** addresses the question of what support PWLD need.

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the interviews from all partners, you will find the structured results here.

## Results

### 1. What connects the different interviews?

Across all countries and participants, the following commonalities emerged:

- **Desire for social inclusion**: Every participant, regardless of independence level, expressed a wish to connect with others, spend time in public spaces, and engage in local events or activities.
- **Challenges with trust**: Most individuals find it difficult to trust unfamiliar people. Trust needs time, repeated interactions, kindness, and understanding. This is often due to negative past experiences (e.g., discrimination, being judged or misunderstood).
- **Need for accompaniment and support**: Almost everyone stated they would feel more comfortable participating in community life if accompanied by a familiar person (friend, assistant, support worker).
- **Barriers to participation**:
  - Poor or inaccessible public transport
  - Lack of clear, accessible information about events or services
  - Financial constraints
  - Internal factors like shyness, anxiety, or fear of rejection
- **Emotional and social needs**: Many spoke about feeling lonely or isolated, needing motivation or emotional encouragement, and wishing for safe and friendly spaces to connect.



## 2. Where do differences appear?

Key differences relate to individual personalities, living arrangements, and levels of support:

- **Social confidence and independence:**
  - Some are highly independent (e.g., HU003, LI002) and attend events or explore alone.
  - Others avoid going out unless accompanied (e.g., HU002, RO003, PL004).
- **Level of community engagement:**
  - Some are actively involved (e.g., LI004, PL001) while others rarely engage (e.g., AT002, PL005).
- **Urban vs. rural context:**
  - Participants in urban centres often had more access to services but also faced more social anxiety or anonymity.
  - Those in rural settings often experienced close-knit but closed communities with limited offerings.
- **Type of support needed:**
  - Some need mainly social-emotional encouragement (e.g., LI003).
  - Others require practical help, such as transportation, money, or structured opportunities (e.g., AT004, RO004).

## 3. Country-specific differences

There were some patterns that reflect country-specific conditions or cultural dynamics:

- **atempo:** Many participants lead structured, supported lives but show little initiative to explore the environment around atempo. Trust is a major barrier; spontaneous participation is rare without clear structure and support.
- **Concordia:** Most participants are young, socially active in school or art, and hopeful about participation—but struggle with structural constraints (institutional life, discrimination, safety concerns). Kindness and encouragement are critical.
- **Eudajmonia:** Participants tend to be familiar with their town and use services independently. Still, they face emotional and practical barriers (judgment, lack of inclusive infrastructure). Financial limits and social trust are recurring issues.



- **PsPc:** Participants are highly active in their day centre and value community participation. However, mobility, self-confidence, and inclusive infrastructure are central challenges. Many are eager to contribute but need accessible formats and emotional support.
- **HIH:** There's a strong theme of individualism with a mix of independence and emotional vulnerability. Many participants want meaningful interaction but struggle with initiative, trust, or social anxiety. Public infrastructure and group formats are less relevant than personal connection.

#### **4. Needs for better inclusion in the local community**

Based on the interviews, here is what is needed from the perspective of the interviewed PWLD.

##### **a) Relational support:**

- **Companionship:** someone to go with, especially for first-time experiences

“Interviewer: And what do you need for that [going to a workshop in a library]? PWLD: That someone accompanies me.” (AT006)

“I like to go everywhere. I have no problem in Pest... I go alone... but with a stable person, I would gladly go anywhere.” (HU003)

“Going to the movies, theatre, partying alone is not so much fun after all. Even if the event is really good and tempting, I think the root of the problem would definitely be this.” (HU004)

“The other thing is that my problem is that I don't like to go anywhere alone.” (HU001)

- **Emotional encouragement:** gentle, patient support from trusted individuals

“I think I'd try bowling once, but I don't want to go alone, because it's not a party. So, I hope that one day there will be someone with whom I can go, or even more of us can go. And then I can try it too.” (HU002)

- **Opportunities to build trust over time** (e.g. recurring, small group meetings)

“Interviewer: So what needs to happen for you to trust someone?”

PWLD: Firstly, that person would have to be discreet and simply able to listen, not judge from the outset.” (PL003)

“We haven't fully built trust with the neighbours in the area yet, at most we say hello on the street and talk. But I can't fully trust them yet. But I could trust him if I talked to him every day or went to places with him, for example. If only we could talk honestly with each other. I ask questions, he asks too. After that, you can't trust the other person with a snap, but trust gradually develops.” (HU003)



#### b) Accessible and inclusive offers:

- Barrier-free transport and spaces

“We also go to the seaside sometimes, which I really enjoy because the environment there is accessible for me and my wheelchair. These places may seem simple, but to me, they are extraordinary and truly fascinating.” (LI003)

- Events that don’t require pre-registration or social pressure

“Group activities: I would say it’s actually difficult, because it can be that I often don’t feel like it, because I usually prefer to do things on my own. So, when I adapt to a group, I find it a bit difficult because I often think, maybe I don’t feel like it, I’d rather do something on my own and maybe I’ll come along or maybe not.” (AT001).

*“I would like to go to the gym because I have never been... but now... I wanted to go, and work came up.” – PL001*

#### c) Clear and personalized information:

- Simple, slow-paced, and visual communication: One person highlights the screens at Burger King or at the cinema buffet are changing too quickly. (HU002)
- Personalized guidance or orientation tours

**Interviewer:** I’m curious – is it easy for you to find the services you need in our city on your own, like going to a doctor or finding the right office? **PWDL:** I would say it’s easy when I know and have been there before. But if I went alone for the first time, I think it would be hard. My mom always accompanies me. (LI002)

- Awareness about what’s happening locally and how to join

**Interviewer:** Would you like to take advantage of more offers in the area?

**PWLD:** Yes. Actually, yes.

**Interviewer:** And what do you need for that?

**PWLD:** Wow, I don’t really know. No idea.” (AT003)

**Interviewer:** But so, you even know what’s going on, how can we help? **PWLD:** For example, by telling me when something is happening.” (AT001)

#### d) Recognition and acceptance:

- Non-judgmental, welcoming attitudes from the public and service staff



*"I had one such incident when I was studying. One of my childhood friends, it so happened that she also attended the same school, and thanks to her, I found another friend. She said, "Let's go talk," and I said, "Okay, I'll sit and wait for you." She said, "No, we'll go together." I wasn't brave, but she was." (LI003)*

- Awareness-raising in communities to reduce stigma and misunderstanding

*"If people would know more about the disabilities, they wouldn't be afraid" (HU001)*

*"I find it difficult to trust people. Since Tesco [previous workplace], it's even more difficult, but I'm trying to overcome this inhibition somehow. I don't know." (HU002)*

- Opportunities to contribute

*"You know, I'm not going to start frying bacon alone. Last year they came, a lady from the foundation, 3 of us fried bacon, but half of it had to be thrown away. Nowadays, as I am involved in this cooking program on Saturdays, this is a great joy for me now. But we invited others to the bacon frying and no one came." HU001)*

#### **e) Structural support:**

- Financial assistance (e.g. bus passes, entry fees)

**atempo:** One participant said: *"I think a bus ticket and probably some money would help." (AT004)*

Some said they didn't explore offers not because of lack of interest, but because they **weren't informed or couldn't afford them**.

**Eudajmonia:** A participant mentioned: *"I've never been to a massage... because it's too expensive." (PL001)*. Others noted that even if events exist, they may require **fees or equipment** they can't afford.

**PsPc:** A participant said: *"If there's a volunteering opportunity... with an accessible environment... close to home... maybe they could invite me." (LI003)*

**Concordia:** Financial strain is mentioned more **implicitly**, but comes through in discussions of: Limited access to leisure activities, reliance on supported housing due to **family poverty or loss**, constraints on mobility.

**HIH:** One person expressed interest in a Thai massage or going out more, but **costs were a barrier**. *"Wow, I'd love to sign up for that, because I've never tried someone massaging me for money in my life." (HU004)*

- Personal assistants, peer supporters, or mentors

Most of the person wish to get support in getting to know someone and build trust from outside, to be accompanied by an assistant, a mentor or a coach, a known and trusted person. Even if the person feels confident, they would still like to have support.

*"Interviewer: What support do you think would be useful for you to explore the local community more?"*





PWLD: “I don’t know, I would need someone, I don’t know, a curious and interested person to show me those places, yes.

Interviewer - A person to accompany you.

PWLD: Yes, to accompany me, a curious person to tell me about places, to make me curious too, to be interested too.” (RO002)

- Supported housing models that promote independence without isolation

**Atempo:** Many live in **group homes or assisted living**, but several said they go straight home after daily modules and don’t explore the community. They feel safe but **socially disconnected** and lack initiative or companions to engage outside the familiar setting.

**Concordia:** Some youth live in **residential centres** and have learned independence (e.g. RO002) but still express the need to be accompanied to discover new places. They are often **well-trained** in self-care but still **isolated** from the broader community.

Interviewer: “Have you seen announcements or ongoing activities where you couldn’t participate?

PWLD: Yes.

Interviewer: And when you couldn’t go, what stopped you?

PWLD: Either the ladies didn’t let us, or... I don’t know... for example, there was the City Days... and I couldn’t go because it was at night, and the ladies wouldn’t let us because there were gypsies, or those kinds of people... but in the end, we begged them, and we went with one of the ladies.” (RO004)

**Eudajmonia:** One person living with family described **reliance on relatives** for daily support, but also a lack of opportunities for personal community participation, indicating **dependency that limits social inclusion**.

**PsPc:** While participants attend day centers, they often **lack accessible local services** or people to accompany them, meaning that structured support doesn’t necessarily translate into **community inclusion**.

**HIH:** Several live alone and are proud of their independence (e.g. HU003), but mention feeling **lonely, hesitant to initiate contact**, or needing encouragement to go out. They are **physically independent but socially disconnected**.

In summary, the voices of participants across countries reveal a consistent and urgent need for more relational, structural, and emotional support to enable full participation in local community life. While individual circumstances vary, the underlying themes are strikingly similar: people with disabilities want to be seen, included, and supported—not merely through infrastructure, but through human connection, trust, and access to opportunities that reflect their interests and strengths. Whether it is a trusted companion, clear information, financial means, or social acceptance, inclusion must be built around the realities of their everyday lives.





## Conclusion

### In-depth knowledge of the needs and barriers for PWLD

- **Needs:**
  - Accompaniment by familiar people for safety and building trust in community participation.
  - Emotional encouragement and patient support, especially in new or social situations.
  - Accessible and barrier-free offers and transportation.
  - Clear, personalized, and easy-to-understand information about activities and services.
  - Recognition, respect, and non-judgmental attitudes from others.
  - Financial support to enable participation in activities.
  - Personal assistants, mentors, and supportive housing models that promote independence without isolation.
- **Barriers:**
  - Difficulties trusting unfamiliar people due to past negative experiences.
  - Internal barriers such as shyness, fear of rejection, and emotional vulnerability.
  - Lack of accessible and clear information.
  - Poor or inaccessible public transport.
  - Financial constraints.
  - Structural and institutional limitations in support systems.

### Insight into local community dynamics and participation

- Varying levels of community participation depending on individual personality, independence, and living environment (urban vs. rural).
- Urban areas often offer more services but also involve more social anxiety and anonymity.
- Rural communities are often close-knit but more closed, with fewer opportunities.
- Many PWLD living in supported housing feel safe but socially isolated and less motivated to explore the community.
- Some PWLD are highly active in community life, while others rarely engage, often due to the lack of opportunities or support.

### Understanding of societal barriers and opportunities

- Societal barriers include stigma, prejudice, and lack of awareness about disabilities.
- There is a strong need for awareness-raising to reduce fear and misunderstanding.
-



- Opportunities arise from active involvement of PWLD in events and initiatives, which increase visibility and acceptance.
  - Many examples show PWLD actively contributing to their communities.
- 
- At the same time, many PWLD live withdrawn lives, raising questions about their true choice versus lack of knowledge or access to options.

### Foundation for creating inclusive project results

- Importance of integrating supportive accompaniment, trust-building, and inclusive communication.
- Development of barrier-free, flexible, and low-threshold offers that reduce social anxiety.
- Inclusion of financial and structural support to ensure access and participation.
- Promotion of awareness and sensitization efforts within the broader community.
- Consideration of diverse living situations and individual needs, such as personal support, local offers, and self-advocacy.
- Foundation for measures addressing both practical barriers and emotional/social needs.

### Focus Groups

#### **Implementation**

The focus group aims to gather insights from supporters of PWLD about their roles, the level of integration in the community, participation opportunities, barriers, and support needs. The group includes professionals, volunteers, and local supporters. The discussion seeks to understand supporters' perspectives, identify current challenges and successes in inclusion, and collect suggestions for improvements to better support PWLD integration.



*Picture 8: Focus Group in Poland*



*Picture 9: Focus Group in Lithuania*

## Results

Structured around five key questions, the analysis explores how supporters view their roles, how community inclusion is progressing, where participation is already happening, which barriers persist, and what support is still needed. The results reveal both shared challenges and innovative, context-specific approaches to fostering meaningful inclusion across diverse local environments.

## Understanding the Role of Supporters

This section summarizes and outlines the different ways in which supporters from the five organizations perceive their roles in working with people with learning disabilities.

Organization	Perception of the Supporter's Role
<b>atempo (Austria)</b>	<p>Supporters act as <b>motivators and initiators</b>, offering security, and encouraging new ideas.</p> <p>“I believe that I can, for my part, provide security and entice people out of old habits and then motivate them and give them security so that they really try something new and have the courage to do so. “</p>
<b>Eudajmonia (Poland)</b>	<p>Supporters see themselves as <b>facilitators</b> and <b>activity coaches</b>. Their role is to initiate processes, mobilize resources, and empower self-advocacy.</p>
<b>Concordia Academia (Romania)</b>	<p>Supporters provide <b>practical everyday support</b>, including help with administrative tasks, schooling, helping identify the needs, assisting in progressing, fostering independence and self-confidence.</p>
<b>PsPc (Lithuania)</b>	<p>Supporters act as <b>bridges to society</b>, educating the public, reducing stigma, and building PWLDs' self-confidence, independence, participation and visibility.</p> <p>“Participants highlighted key roles [...] emphasizing that supporters act not only as mediators between PWLD and the community but also as teachers, guides, psychologists, friends, and motivators”</p>
<b>HIH (Hungary)</b>	<p>Supporters work discreetly and person-centred, fostering independence, helping form support circles, and promoting self-determination without overstepping.</p> <p>“The role of the supporters <b>depends on the individual needs</b> of the supported person.”</p>

## Inclusion of PWLD into the Community

This section summarizes how each organization assesses the current level of community inclusion for PWLD, highlighting both general observations and specific areas where inclusion is already taking place.

Organization	Inclusion Experience & Existing Structures
<b>atempo</b>	Inclusion is currently low. Participants mostly stay within the facility. Some cooperation (e.g., with a sports club) is planned to strengthen visibility.
<b>Eudajmonia</b>	<p>Inclusion <b>depends on local context</b> and key individuals – even within one city, openness varies. A charismatic, committed person can drive change and inclusion.</p> <p>There is good practice within a supported employment method: in 5 stages it is possible to help PWLD acquire professional skills.</p>
<b>Concordia Academia</b>	<p>Inclusion has improved over the last decade, particularly through education, healthcare sectors and sports. Still, it remains fragile.</p> <p>“At times, inclusion is rigid and challenging, depending on direct experiences and specific circumstances. There is an initial adaptation period; <b>depending on the first interactions</b>, inclusion can either open up or become restricted.”</p>
<b>PsPc</b>	PsPc actively fosters the inclusion of PWLD through community events, cultural and sports activities, and traditional festivals that increase visibility and empowerment. Key successes include participation in sports, volunteering, social workshops, and the DuoDay project, which offers short-term work experience. Despite these efforts, consistent long-term integration in employment and society remains a challenge.
<b>HIH</b>	<p>Discussion about the choice of <b>being alone</b> by some PWLD. It is a question and needs to be understood if it is a conserved <b>habit</b> based on the past life experience or a real preference? If they never had opportunities and experience in going out, how can they have ideas if they need it?</p> <p>Good practice is supported housing. It is located across city districts, blending into society without being marked as “special.” Social contact with neighbours is common.</p>

## Opportunities for Participation

This section outlines the spaces and activities where PWLD currently participate and presents concrete examples of successful inclusion shared by the five organizations.

Organization	Participation Spaces & Positive Examples
<b>atempo</b>	Participation through intergenerational projects (e.g., teaching seniors how to use iPads), planned cultural engagement, and cooperation with local clubs.
<b>Eudajmonia</b>	<p>There is no clear or uniform situation for people with disabilities—it depends on where they live. In cities like Wrocław, there are many opportunities, accessible public spaces, and inclusive initiatives like disability-run cafés. However, just a few kilometres away, people with disabilities may face isolation, lack of support, and no prospects after school, essentially living in social exclusion.</p> <p>Good Practice is the Work Experience School or an inclusive bar, where PWLD are working in service.</p>
<b>Concordia Academia</b>	<p>Weekly volunteering by school students, cultural festivals, sport clubs, adjustment in school curricula, and traditional community events involving PWLD -&gt; high level of inclusion within families, foster care services and other organizations.</p> <p>Beneficial but insufficient measures are day centres and professional vocational inclusion services, and social housing.</p>
<b>PsPc</b>	<p>PWLD can currently <b>participate</b> in cultural institutions (theatres, cinemas, galleries, museums, libraries); sports activities (sports clubs, swimming pool training); social activities (volunteering in elderly care homes, food banks, environmental clean-ups); social workshops and informal education programs; independent living skills development; community events.</p> <p>While there are successful examples of integration, participation opportunities are still <b>not equally accessible to all</b>.</p>
<b>HIH</b>	<p>Supporters can help in gaining information, as that is often not easy to understand.</p> <p>Some good practices are:</p> <p>participation in open labour markets, participation in sport clubs, cooking with volunteers or using health care - e.g. dentist:</p>

	<p><b>Example:</b> A service user of HIH was the first client with a disability at a local dentist, now more of them go to the same doctor. The attitude of health care workers is very important! Supporters can help the first meetings to build trust and to obtain proper information. They can accompany the PWLD until they become independent in the process. The service users also convince each other in using certain services.</p>
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## Identifying Barriers

This section summarizes the main barriers identified by the organizations that hinder full participation of PWLD in community life, distinguishing between social, physical, and systemic obstacles, and providing concrete examples.

Organization	Barriers & Examples
atempo	<p><b>Systemic:</b> Lack of time and funding for community work; <b>communication:</b> lack of easy-to-understand information; <b>physical:</b> The path from atempo is very narrow for wheelchair users, making it difficult for groups to pass along the walkway</p>
Eudajmonia	<p><b>Social:</b> Deeply rooted stereotypes (e.g., disability as punishment); infantilization (treating adults like children); <b>systemic:</b> legal incapacitation, segregated education; preventing PWLD from building (sexual) relationships; <b>physical:</b> isolating PWLD through segregation, inaccessible public spaces, lack of easy-to-read formats.</p>
Concordia Academia	<p><b>Systemic:</b> Few local organizations dedicated to their support, Complex legal structures regarding labour market inclusion, poor alignment of education with labour market (school curricula that are not adapted to labour market demands, their potential, or their aspirations); <b>social:</b> The risk of being deceived or exploited as PWLD; <b>economic:</b> Individuals who take advantage of PWLD's assets, money, and rights.</p> <p><b>Necessary Improvements for Better inclusion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing visibility in society through the involvement of specialized non-profit organizations.</li> <li>Adapting vocational training to local labour market demands and levels of disability.</li> </ul>



<b>PsPc</b>	<b>Social:</b> Employer prejudices (e.g. all PWLD are aggressive) and misunderstanding of abilities; lack of trust in PWLD as responsible workers, fear of how to communicate with PWLD; <b>physical:</b> not fully adapted buildings and transport to the needs of PWLD; <b>systemic:</b> lack of long-term policies for consistent inclusion (e.g., insufficient employment promotion, lack of support for families).
<b>HIH</b>	<b>Social:</b> lack of soft skill training of PWLD as a result of segregation, lack of information in the society (e.g. wheelchair-users are not the only type of disability). <b>Professional:</b> not enough time or motivation for proper support (it is easier to stay at home/at the institution than going out), inclusion is not present in the training of professionals; <b>systemic:</b> no assigned responsibility for inclusion in institutions; lack of funding, actively restricting in big institutions (e.g. 'Let's not take them to too many places, because they would see too much'.)

### Support Needs for Better inclusion

This section presents the support needs identified by each organization to improve the inclusion of PWLD.

Organization	Support Needs & Recommendations
<b>atempo</b>	Dedicated culture budget (sports budget is already available), additional staff, inclusive recreation programs, and stronger local partnerships.
<b>Eudajmonia</b>	Abolishing legal incapacitation, introducing supported decision-making, expanding facilitator roles, and showcasing positive examples. <p>"Deinstitutionalisation is necessary."</p> <p>"Ideas are not enough, there are many good ideas, but their practical implementation is hindered by the system [...]"</p>
<b>Concordia Academia</b>	Legislative facilitations for PWLD employment, development of a mentorship network for better labour market inclusion, awareness activities involving kindergartens, schools, and organizations, direct consultations to identify their needs, problems, and desires.
<b>PsPc</b>	To better integrate PWLD into the community, the following resources are needed:



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More practical opportunities for PWLD to enter the labour market (including personal assistants if necessary);</li> <li>• Improved public infrastructure (e.g., transportation, accessible buildings).</li> <li>• Continuous training for businesses and communities on PWLD inclusion.</li> <li>• Financial and organizational support for social initiatives.</li> </ul> <p>Key suggested improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialized training for employers on how to include PWLD in the workforce.</li> <li>• Community awareness campaigns and public events promoting inclusion.</li> <li>• Stronger commitment from public institutions to inclusive policies.</li> <li>• Greater collaboration with NGOs and social enterprises.</li> </ul> <p>A more structured approach—including better employment opportunities, improved public infrastructure, community education, employer training, and increased collaboration between municipalities and businesses—would significantly improve PWLD integration into society.</p>
HIH	<p>Awareness training for professionals and supporters (how they can support PWLD in inclusion, how to connect PWLD with others, how to find inclusive programs etc.), volunteer engagement strategies, peer-to-peer support networks, and access to inclusive service directories.</p>

## Conclusion

### Understanding the Role of Supporters

Supporters take on different roles depending on the organization: they motivate, provide security, initiate processes, promote self-advocacy, assist in daily life, build bridges to society, reduce stigma, and foster self-determination—always tailored to the needs of people with learning disabilities (PWLD). **However, they are often limited by structural barriers. Frequently, they cannot engage PWLD in the local community as fully as they would like due to a lack of resources or framework conditions (e.g., time constraints).**

### Inclusion of PWLD into the Community

The level of community inclusion varies greatly depending on location and context. Inclusion is often fragile and depends on open-minded individuals and supportive structures. Good examples include supported employment, education, sports, and inclusive housing, with significant local differences.



## Opportunities for Participation

People with learning disabilities actively participate in diverse activities such as culture, sports, volunteering, and work experience. **At the same time, many PWLD live withdrawn and alone. It is often unclear whether this is by free choice or because they lack awareness of available options or do not know how to access them.** Despite

positive examples, access and opportunities vary widely depending on the local environment.

## Identifying Barriers

Barriers exist on social levels (prejudices, stigma), physical levels (insufficient accessibility), and systemic levels (complex laws, lack of funding, poor alignment of education with labour market). Risks such as exploitation and lack of information are also key obstacles.

## Support Needs for Better Inclusion

To improve inclusion, more financial and human resources are needed, along with legal reforms (e.g., abolishing legal incapacitation), mentorship and support networks, improved training for employers and professionals, public awareness campaigns, and stronger collaboration between institutions and NGOs.

## Best Practices

**Aim:** collect and learn about good practices from each participating country and analyse them with the inclusive teams. Foster understanding of community participation and its possible forms.

**Main expressions:** community participation, inclusion, accessibility, barriers

**Necessary tools:** template for best practices + analysis

**Duration:** 2-4 hours

## Implementation

At the beginning of this project phase, each partner organization was asked to research and document **five best practice examples** related to participation and social inclusion of PWLD in their respective EU country. These examples were compiled in a structured format to ensure comparability. The goal was both to identify local initiatives and to create a basis for international exchange.

***You can find the template for the good practices in the appendix, at the end of this document.***

ARC			
Access, Respect, Connect. Enhancing Social Participation of Persons with Disabilities for a Diverse Community			
<b>Document Identification</b>			
Start package ID	WP2	Task 02	Best Practice 1 of 5
Partner	EU1	Date	06/03/2025
<b>Key Information</b>			
country of best practice	Hungary, Budapest		
link (if available)			
short description			
number of people participating	up to 5 people		
project region	national		
<b>Feedback of the Inclusive Teams</b>			
the inclusive team finds the example	yes		
The example could be implemented in our town	yes		
explanations, hints, wishes, ideas			

- 1) Describe **the goal** of the example in easy language:
- 2) What is **special** about this example? Why did you choose this example?
- 3) **Who is behind** the project? Which organization, association, public administration or other is carrying out the project?

## Results 1

All project partners researched and documented **five best practice examples** from their respective countries, focusing on the participation and social inclusion of people with disabilities.

To begin, we present **one selected example per country**, each accompanied by a short description to highlight its core idea and context.



Following this, we provide an **overview of all submitted examples** from each country, offering a broader insight into the diversity of approaches across Europe.

One selected example per country:

- **DIZ-Art-Project:** multiprofessional and neighbourhood-involving-project with inclusive dance performances (Romania)
- **Valentine's ball** for people with disabilities (Poland)
- **Baltazar Theatre**, a professional theatre company whose members are PWLD (Hungary)
- **Community Sports Event** with various groups of people are involved: people with disabilities, youth, seniors, families (Lithuania)
- **Inclusive Vienna 2030** – a city for everyone: The goal is to make Vienna more inclusive. This means people with disabilities should have a better life in Vienna. Different groups and experts worked together on this. They made plans to improve life in Vienna. (Austria)

Overview of all submitted examples from each country:

**Poland:** Job-Coaching supported housing (flat-sharing with other people with disability and training), self-advocacy, disability simulator -teaching workshops.

**Austria:** “Move-on-inclusion” (an activating participation of PWLD in sports clubs), Inclusion-Run, “Tu ma was” (Leisure Time Assistance), “Duda” (Online-Meeting-Place for PWLD and people without learning disabilities)

**Romania:** “Towards Normality in Adapted Kayaks”-Program (inclusive sports program), a multifunctional sports hall designed for people with disabilities, “Împreună pentru Viitor” (a project for people with disabilities to enjoy the beach experience and have access to water and fun), “Autism Voice” (supports companies through the Work Aid Kit program, offering customized solutions to meet legislative requirements and create an inclusive work environment, particularly in the area of neurodiversity).

**Lithuania:** an inclusive theatre festival, “Open doors day”, community sports event, organising fairs

**Hungary:** a full accessible and inclusive gym, an inclusive choir, an inclusive restaurant, “Access to Leisure”-Exhibition (pictures from a project about free time activities an inclusion)

## Results 2

After submission, the compiled best practices were redistributed across the consortium. Inclusive teams then worked with selected examples from other countries using a structured worksheet. Each team assessed the examples through three key questions: overall evaluation, local feasibility, and open reflection. The discussions were carried out in inclusive settings and required a shared team consensus.



### The results are:

Out of 25 analyses of the inclusive teams, 24 were rated as “good” or “very good”.

In terms of **feasibility**, **24 out of 25 best practices** considered the idea implementable in their own local context—many even rated it as “fully” or “totally” feasible in their city or region.

Only one team raised concerns on the idea of the “open doors day” in Lithuania. The inclusive team of Eudajmonia analysis: “This practice does not integrate the able-bodied with the disabled. This practice reminds us of looking at exhibits in a zoo and has nothing to do with our lives [...]”.

### Identified Barriers Across Teams

During the evaluation process, several recurring challenges were identified by the inclusive teams. These were consistently mentioned across various examples and countries:

2. **Funding:** Financial issues were one of the most frequently cited obstacles.
3. **Infrastructure:** Many teams pointed out infrastructural limitations that hinder inclusive participation.
  - **Lack of Volunteers:** The shortage of volunteers was highlighted as a major barrier to inclusive practice.

This phase of the project demonstrated the richness and diversity of inclusive practices across Europe, while also revealing common challenges. The exchange not only inspired teams to reflect on local adaptations but also laid the groundwork for further collaborative activities, such as community mapping and photovoice, to deepen participation and shared learning.

### Photovoice & digital Community Mapping

**Aim: Photovoice:** Learn about photography techniques and experiment with the participatory photovoice method. Tell personal stories through authentic photography. Practice the use of phones/cameras. Discuss the photos in the team and draw conclusions.

**Main expressions:** photovoice, storytelling, community participation

**Necessary tools:** phone/camera

**Duration:** 2xhalf day or 1 full day

As part of a participatory research process, individuals with disabilities explored and documented public and semi-public spaces that influence their ability to engage in



social, cultural, and everyday life activities. Using the Photovoice method, participants captured and commented on environments that enable or hinder social participation. The results offer qualitative insights into the lived experiences of inclusion, accessibility, and belonging.

***All of the pictures taken and their evaluation are available in the appendix, at the end of this document.***

### **The Photovoice method**

Photovoice is a community-based, participatory visual research method that allows participants to express their experiences and opinions through photographs. Its aim is to amplify the voice of the group, make social issues visible, and promote community reflection. Through this process, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the issues under investigation, and the images can help express experiences that would be difficult to capture using other methods (Wang & Burris, 1997)<sup>1</sup>.

There are many resources available to explore the method further on websites and also in professional literature. Here is an example by Robert W. Strack PhD (University of North Carolina Greensboro):

[https://communityengagement.uncg.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/What-is-Photovoice-A-Breif-Summary\\_Strack-Dec-2017.pdf](https://communityengagement.uncg.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/What-is-Photovoice-A-Breif-Summary_Strack-Dec-2017.pdf)<sup>2</sup>

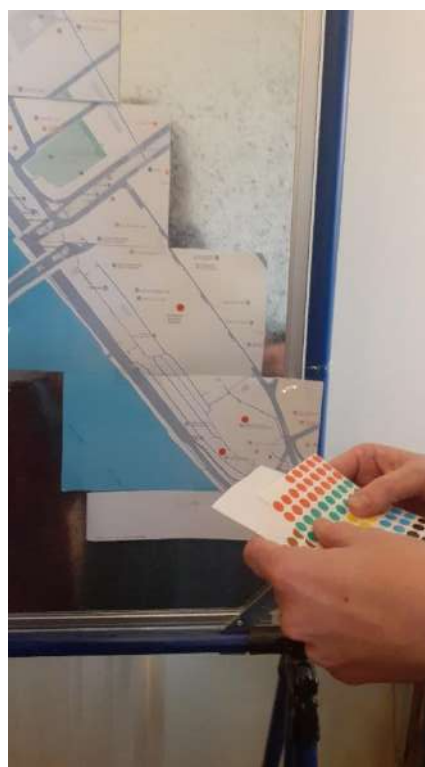
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<sup>1</sup> Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819702400309>

<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Strack, PhD, University of North Carolina Greensboro. What is Photovoice? A brief Summary [https://communityengagement.uncg.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/What-is-Photovoice-A-Breif-Summary\\_Strack-Dec-2017.pdf](https://communityengagement.uncg.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/What-is-Photovoice-A-Breif-Summary_Strack-Dec-2017.pdf) (visited: 30.10.2025)



Picture 10: PsPc Workshop Community Mapping



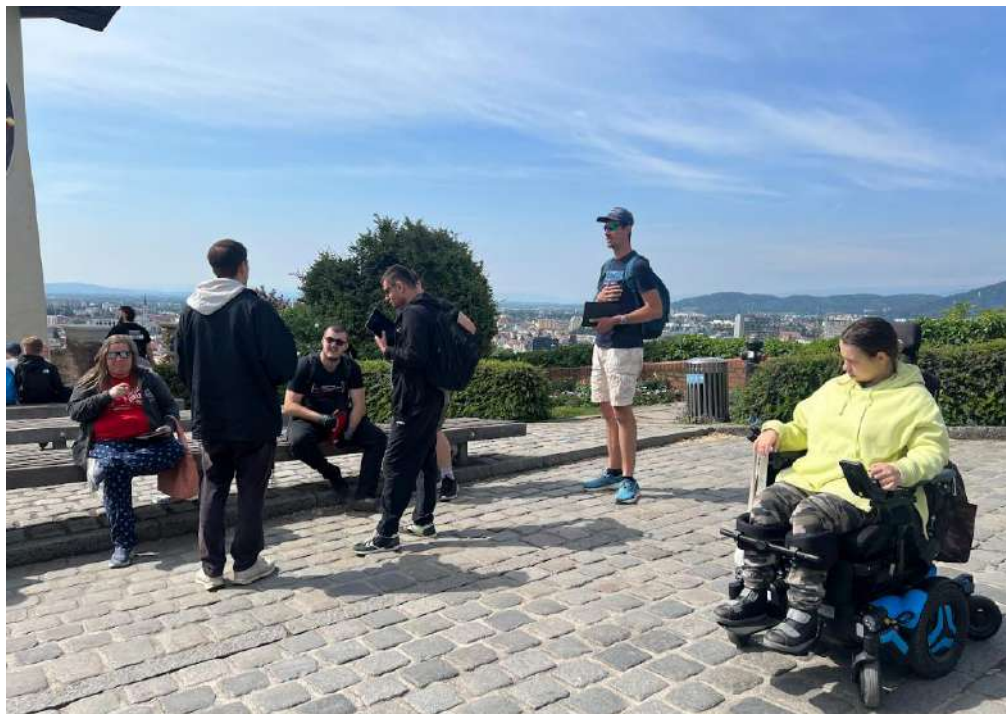
Picture 11: HiH: Community Mapping

## Positive Aspects Identified

- Low-threshold spaces promote participation: Relaxed and informal environments—such as benches, hammocks, or small meeting spaces—play a crucial role in fostering social connection, emotional safety, and self-determination. These places require minimal effort to access and are perceived as inclusive due to their openness and informality.
- Accessible leisure and cultural spaces are highly valued: Locations that combine physical accessibility (e.g. ramps, adapted restrooms) with a friendly and supportive social atmosphere were highlighted as enabling full participation. Staff empathy and respectful treatment further contributed to positive experiences.
- Nature and recreation support well-being: Natural areas and green public spaces were appreciated for their calming effect, accessibility, and opportunity for retreat or socialisation. Multi-sensory environments were especially beneficial, particularly when physical access and quiet zones were available.
- Educational and digital learning spaces foster empowerment: Access to supportive learning environments—especially for digital skills—was perceived as a pathway to autonomy and greater engagement in society. Participants highlighted the importance of calm, respectful atmospheres and peer support.
- Examples of inclusive design exist: Some public institutions demonstrated strong inclusion practices through universal design, sensory accessibility (e.g.



tactile elements, visual simplicity), or through efforts to reduce social or financial barriers (e.g. free admission or services).



*Picture 12: Community Building of the inclusive team from atempo*



*Picture 13 PsPc Workshop Photography*



## Barriers to Participation

- Incomplete physical accessibility: Several places presented partial or insufficient adaptations—such as steep ramps, narrow doors, missing lifts, or inaccessible restrooms—leading to exclusion or dependence on others. Even one inaccessible feature can render an otherwise inviting space unusable.
- Lack of visual and sensory support: Signage was often unclear or missing; menus and instructions were not in easy-to-read or visual formats. This disproportionately affects individuals with intellectual or cognitive disabilities, impacting their ability to act independently.
- Emotional and social barriers: Situations of humiliation, dependency, or being overlooked were frequently reported. These emotional experiences are equally significant as physical access in shaping one's sense of inclusion and dignity.
- Infrastructure gaps in otherwise inclusive spaces: Some locations were praised for general accessibility, but specific shortcomings—like malfunctioning lifts or missing orientation aids—led to exclusion from specific activities or events.
- Inconsistent support in consumption spaces: Shops, restaurants, or leisure facilities often lacked trained staff, adapted services, or assistive features (e.g. call buttons or reach tools), limiting access and independence in everyday life.



*Picture 14: Eudajmonia Photovoice activity*



*Picture 15: Experiences within the community mapping with atempo*

## Implications and Recommendations

- Inclusion requires more than ramps and lifts – emotional safety, respectful interaction, and self-determined use of space are equally important.
- Universal design should be the standard – integrating physical, sensory, and communicative accessibility benefits everyone and reduces stigma.
- Public participation must be inclusive – people with disabilities should be actively involved in planning, designing, and evaluating spaces.
- Micro-experiences matter – small adaptations (e.g. shaded benches, labelled keys, picture menus) can significantly enhance quality of life and autonomy.
- Awareness and training are key – sensitising staff and the public to the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities fosters empathy and inclusion.

## Conclusion

The Photovoice method revealed that true inclusion is not achieved through infrastructure alone, but through a combination of accessible design, emotional recognition, and active social participation. By viewing cities and spaces through the eyes of people with disabilities, the findings call for a shift toward more human-centred and participatory urban development.



*Picture 16: PsPc: Photovoice-activity*



## Photovoice results atempo (AT)

As part of the project, people with disabilities explored the surroundings within a radius of 3km around the organisation. The aim was to identify places that enable social participation – but also to make visible those where inclusion still has potential for development.

Many of the places visited already offer good conditions for participation: barrier-free access, quiet atmosphere, friendliness of the staff. Emotional aspects such as peace, security, appreciation and the feeling of being welcome are shown here as central factors for real participation.

Low-threshold meeting spaces were particularly important to the co-researchers. These places offer social security, self-determination and retreats. However, some cultural and tourist places still need infrastructural improvements to ensure complete accessibility.

### Summary from the team

We stepped outside to see our city from a fresh perspective and questioning our accustomed places. Discovering highlights on our tours like the Botanical Garden, Schlossberg, and the Racket Sport Center – paying attention even to details that often go unnoticed or are not questioned.

We talked about what we see, how we feel, and what changes we would like to make. We learned that Graz needs more participation and enthusiasm from everybody. More color, more cleanliness, more respect – and above all, participation processes for people with special needs.

#### HILMTEICH



The Hilmteich is located near atempo and on the route of the nearest tram. It offers a peaceful pond surrounded by walking paths, benches, and green areas perfect for strolling, relaxing, or simply enjoying the view. The site is accessible for people with disabilities, with level paths, ramps and places to sit by the water. In this area it is one of the most popular places to go during lunch breaks or after work.

*Picture 17 An example of the photovoice-results from atempo*

## Photovoice results CONCORDIA (RO)

As part of the Photovoice workshop of CONCORDIA Academia, participants documented places in Râmnicul Sărat that are important for their social participation. The resulting images and accompanying statements reveal a variety of dimensions of accessibility, belonging and personal meaning.

Places such as Café Jurnal, the children's club or the cultural centre illustrate how accessibility and lived inclusion promote emotional bonding, cultural participation and creativity. They offer spaces for encounter, expression and belonging – regardless of disability. At the same time, structural deficits were identified: For example, the station building is formally accessible, but poorly maintained. Consumption rooms such as the Victoria Center are also not completely barrier-free. The untapped potential of the outdoor play area, which loses its function as an inclusive place due to a lack of maintenance, is particularly clear.

The quotes from the participants show that participation is not only a question of structural standards, but also of emotional security, cultural access and respectful design of public spaces. Personal stories – such as those of Ruben in the sports hall or Alexandra in the café – give the photographed places a deep meaning as part of their own world.

### Cafe Jurnal

The café is located in the city center, next to the central park. This is the place where conversations and jokes are in constant motion, like a dance. The location is accessible, relaxing, and the smell of coffee often draws us in.



*Picture 18: An example of photovoice-results from Concordia*



## Summary from the team

We went out into the city to see it differently: with eyes wide open, phones ready, and minds full of questions. We photographed familiar places and those often overlooked. We talked about what we see, what we feel, and what we'd like to change. We discovered that our city needs more care. More color, more cleanliness, more respect. And above all: *more accessibility* for people with special needs.

We've learned that we can make a difference. We can start with small steps: by paying attention, speaking up, sharing ideas, and staying involved. This is our choice: *to see, to care, to act. Together.*

## Photovoice results EUDAJMONIA (PL)

As part of the Photovoice method, eleven central places in public spaces were photographically documented by people with disabilities and provided with accompanying comments. The images show a diverse range of accessibility and social participation.

Places such as the Aquapark, the McDonald's Restaurant and the Central Leisure Park were perceived by the participants as particularly inclusive – both in terms of structural accessibility and the social atmosphere. Other places, such as the cinema or the bus station, reveal existing barriers: a lack of assistance services, insufficient sensory adaptations or a lack of continuity in the mobility chain hinder equal use.

It is particularly clear that partial accessibility – as in the case of the windmill or the stadium – is not to be equated with actual participation. Structural restrictions (e.g. waiting lists in the therapy centre) can also effectively restrict accessibility, even if the buildings are formally "barrier-free".

The analysis highlights the importance of a holistic perspective on accessibility – one that encompasses both structural and social, communicative and structural aspects.

## Summary from the team

The places that have been visited and marked on the map are, in most cases, accessible to people with physical disabilities and friendly to people with intellectual disabilities.

In most public places, shops and restaurants, the infrastructure is prepared and adapted to people with physical disabilities and all amenities. When it comes to accessibility for people with intellectual disabilities or learning difficulties, everything depends on the attitude of officials or staff at a given location.

### 'Holender' windmill in Polkowice

- There is a café where you can enjoy a cup of coffee or dessert, climb the observation tower and follow the educational trail 'In the Footsteps of Polkowice's History'.
- The entrance to the tower is not accessible for people with disabilities, but everyone can use the café services.
- There, we can meet everyone who wants to drink coffee and eat cake, as well as people visiting the museum.
- Unfortunately, people in wheelchairs or with mobility issues are unable to enter the observation tower.



Picture 19: An example of Photovoice method from Eudajmonia.

## A lady is sitting in the middle of Kálvin's Square



### Background

Kálvin tér is a busy square in the heart of Budapest. It is an important transportation hub where several metro lines, trams, and buses meet. The square is named after the famous reformer John Calvin and has a statue dedicated to him. Around Kálvin tér, you can find shops, cafes, and historic buildings. It's a lively place where locals and tourists often pass through or stop to relax.

### A short story:

When I set out to take photos, it was hard to find a subject because I didn't have a clear idea. Then I saw this lady sitting quietly on the busy, noisy square. I thought how nice it would be to have a little peaceful "me time" like that every day. In the middle of all the hustle and bustle, she seemed calm and relaxed, just taking a moment for herself. It reminded me how important it is to slow down sometimes and enjoy small moments of calm in our busy lives.

*Picture 20: An example from the Photovoice method from Hand-in-Hand*

As part of the Hand in Hand Foundation's Photovoice workshop, places in Budapest that are significant for the everyday reality of the co-researchers' lives were documented. The resulting images show a wide range: from social affiliation to personal places of remembrance to places of longing.

Many contributions, such as those on the church at Bakáts tér, the Jedermann restaurant or Gellért Hill, emphasise places of community, spirituality and recreation. Others, such as the image of the Nándori pastry shop or the luxury yacht, reflect a longing for participation or material access – without having already realized it.

Stories in which everyday places – such as a street artwork, a plant in the courtyard, or a strange woman in the square – unfold symbolic power are particularly touching. They show that participation is not always tied to structural accessibility, but can be strongly linked to emotional resonance, attention and recognition.

All in all, it becomes clear that inclusion has many forms: It is evident in the design of meeting spaces, in social support such as in the market or for sale pub, but also in small gestures of perception and connection. The photographed places are thus also an expression of a city that is constantly being experienced and interpreted anew from the perspectives of its inhabitants.





## Summary from the team

We held the photo evaluation workshop at an external location, the "Space of Possibilities," because we believe it's important for the members of the inclusive team to get to know new community spaces as well.

Through photography, we got to know the area around Hand in Hand better, and we also learned more about each other—like where we would like to go, what challenges might come up when trying to connect with others, and what kind of support each person might need.

The diversity of the photos and the stories shared during the workshop reminded us that there are many ways to connect with the community around Hand in Hand. We just have to be open and curious enough to explore them. It was a powerful experience that helped us see both the environment and one another from new perspectives.

## Photovoice Results PsPc - Panevėžio socialinių pokyčių centras (LT)

As part of the Photovoice project in Panevėžys, people with disabilities documented their experiences with public and private spaces in the city. The results make it clear that despite existing inclusive approaches – such as barrier-free entrances, discounts or friendly staff – there are still numerous barriers that restrict full social participation.

The following challenges were mentioned particularly frequently:

- lack of structural accessibility (e.g. ramps that are too steep, narrow doors, defective elevators),
- Deficiencies in visual communication (missing signposts, menus that are difficult to understand),
- psychological and emotional stress due to exclusionary or humiliating situations.

At the same time, positive examples were also highlighted that show how inclusion can succeed – for example, through universal design in the museum or personal experiences with empathetic staff.

Recommendations for the future include a vision for the future with the aim of improving accessibility, improving infrastructure, and ensuring that all members of the city community feel equal and respected. The research results make it clear that accessibility is more than a technical criterion – it is a prerequisite for dignity, self-determination, and equality.

## Summary from the team

Evaluating all the selected objects, it can be stated that the community of Panevėžys city has good intentions to adapt the infrastructure for people with disabilities, but there are still shortcomings, especially in terms of clearly understandable signs, special adaptations, and acceptance.

**Advantages** – in some places, there are adapted entrances, mandatory discounts, and qualified specialists.

**Disadvantages** – there is a lack of clear directional signs, not all locations provide comfortable conditions for people with mobility impairments, and there is a shortage of staff to assist.

**Future vision** – aiming for greater accessibility, improving infrastructure, and ensuring that all members of the city community feel equal and respected.

## Panevėžys Cultural Center

### • presentation

This is one of the main cultural spaces where various events take place. This place brings the community together and creates a warm, creative atmosphere. The cultural center is located in a convenient part of the city, providing opportunities to participate in both larger and smaller events. However, the accessibility of the space for people with disabilities is not well adapted. Getting into the halls with a wheelchair is a challenge, requiring the help of others to physically lift the wheelchair, as there is no elevator.

### • short story

"Once, my mom, grandmother, who uses a wheelchair, and I bought tickets for a concert and were calm, thinking that we would smoothly enter the hall because there was an elevator for people with disabilities. However, when we arrived, we found out that it was out of order. We faced significant difficulties because the staff couldn't find anyone to help carry my grandmother up the stairs. We just stood there, waiting as others passed by. The whole time, we felt very humiliated and powerless. I would like such situations not to happen again. The cultural center should be open to everyone. The building needs an elevator and more accessibility adjustments."



Picture 21: An example of the Photovoice method from PsPc

## Insights from Digital Community Mapping

**Aim: Photovoice:** to transfer the collected knowledge and information onto a digital map (Padlet). To provide a helpful overview of services, places, and opportunities in the area. Develop digital skills.

**Main expressions:** digital map, community participation

**Necessary tools:** Photos from the photovoice session, digital map (Padlet)

As part of the Photovoice research process, a digital community mapping activity was conducted using the Padlet platform. This phase represented both a creative and reflective dimension of the project, providing participants with accessible tools to visually and narratively document meaningful places within their communities.

Working in small, inclusive teams, participants explored their environments, took photographs, and reflected on their experiences. Despite some challenges, the activity encouraged self-expression, collaboration, and the development of digital and interpersonal skills in a safe and supportive setting.



Picture 21: Picture from Hand-in-Hand





## Phases and Insights

**1. Mapping and Categorisation:** Participants began by identifying and categorising places relevant to community participation (e.g. accessible/inaccessible, leisure, food, culture). This step was highly engaging and developed into a group dynamic filled with curiosity and cooperation.

**2. Outdoor Photography:** Taking photographs of selected locations was one of the most enjoyable elements. Participants approached the task with enthusiasm and creativity. Although technical challenges occurred—such as understanding framing or light exposure—the overall process fostered learning and expression. Emotional aspects often emerged, as participants chose places with personal meaning, including spaces they longed to visit.

**3. Digital Mapping on Padlet:** The final step involved uploading selected photos and descriptions to a shared Padlet map. For many, this was a complex process due to limited digital skills, literacy, or confidence. Some participants required intensive support, while others decided not to engage with this step at all. Still, many overcame their initial hesitation and expressed pride in seeing their contributions published in a public space.

In the closing session, the team revisited one of the photographed locations—a local café that one participant had included in their story, stating they had never been there before but wished to visit. With the group, that visit became a reality, transforming a visual intention into lived experience. This symbolic moment reflected the overarching goal of the Photovoice process: connecting personal narratives with real-world action.

## Reflections and Group Feedback

A structured reflection was carried out at the end of the process, highlighting the emotional, social, and practical dimensions of participation.

What participants learned:

- To listen and give feedback in a supportive way.
- That emotions can be expressed through images.
- To navigate Padlet and create digital content.
- To recognise the value of individual contributions within a team.
- How group collaboration fosters creativity and community connection.
- That working together helps develop both self-awareness and mutual respect.

What was easy:

- Connecting with each other.
- Sharing ideas and working as a team.
- Exploring the community and identifying meaningful places.



What was challenging:

- Managing time during conversations and workshops.
- Maintaining easy-to-understand communication throughout.
- Using digital tools independently.
- Ensuring consistent participation due to outside obligations (e.g. illness, work).

What participants enjoyed most:

- Being together, thinking together, laughing together.
- Visiting community spaces and discovering new programs.
- Learning about themselves through photography.
- Sharing personal stories, wishes, and fears through images.
- Creating their own artworks in the photography workshop.

Ideas and wishes for the future:

- Continue participating in inclusive community projects.
- Visit the places they mapped and try out local programs.
- Use Padlet more confidently and creatively.
- Organize a public exhibition of their photographic work.

What support is needed:

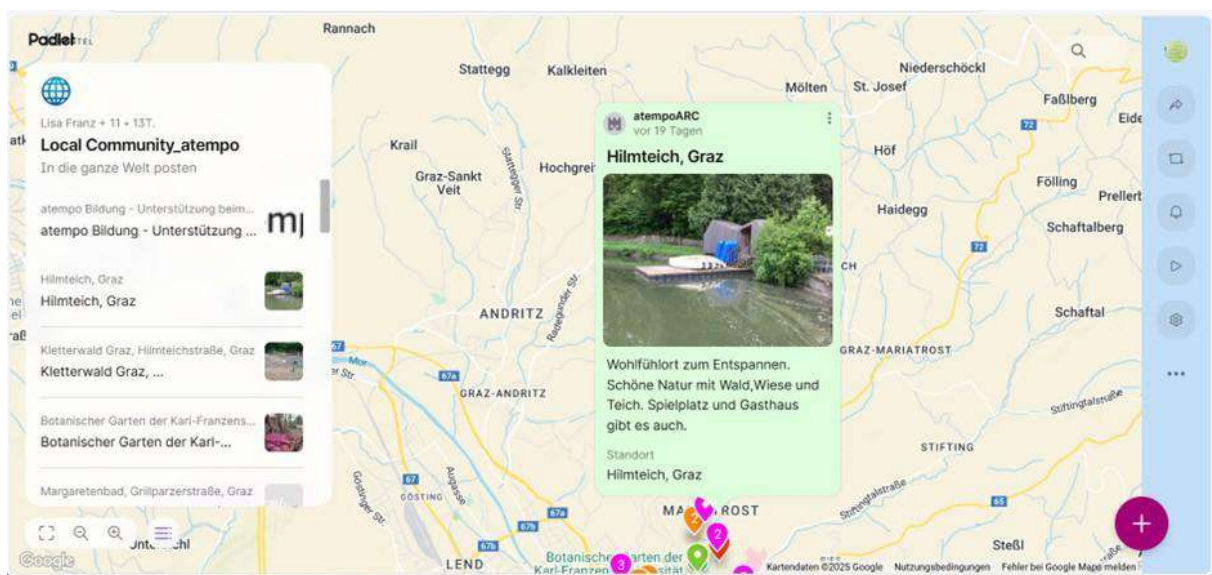
- Encouragement and emotional support to move from planning to action.
- Companionship to attend events together.
- Accessible information about inclusive local activities.

This final stage of the Photovoice journey successfully transformed individual experiences into a shared, visual testimony of civic engagement. Participants not only mapped their environment, but also their identities, needs, and aspirations. The result—a collaborative, digital representation of inclusion—now stands as a tool for awareness and as a symbol of co-created knowledge.

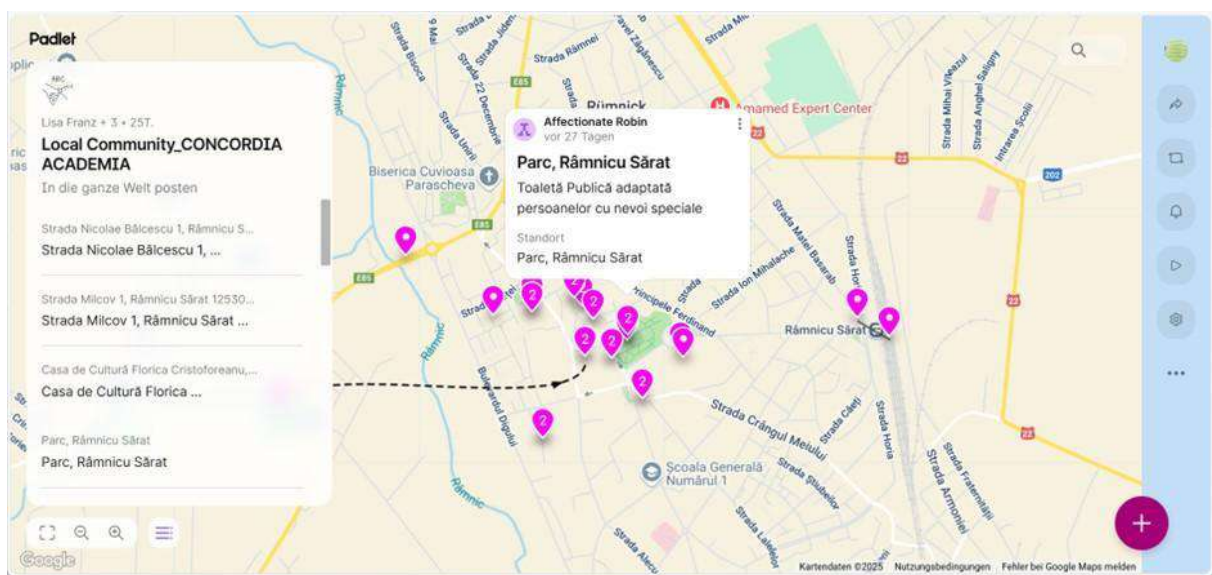
Despite technical and emotional challenges, participants demonstrated resilience, creativity, and a strong sense of ownership. The project affirmed that inclusion is not just about physical access or technical tools—it is about being seen, heard, and supported in expressing one's story and taking part in community life.

The process fostered a sense of purpose, belonging, and confidence that extended beyond the project itself. Photovoice and digital mapping, when embedded in inclusive facilitation, can empower people to claim their space, share their perspective, and imagine new possibilities together.

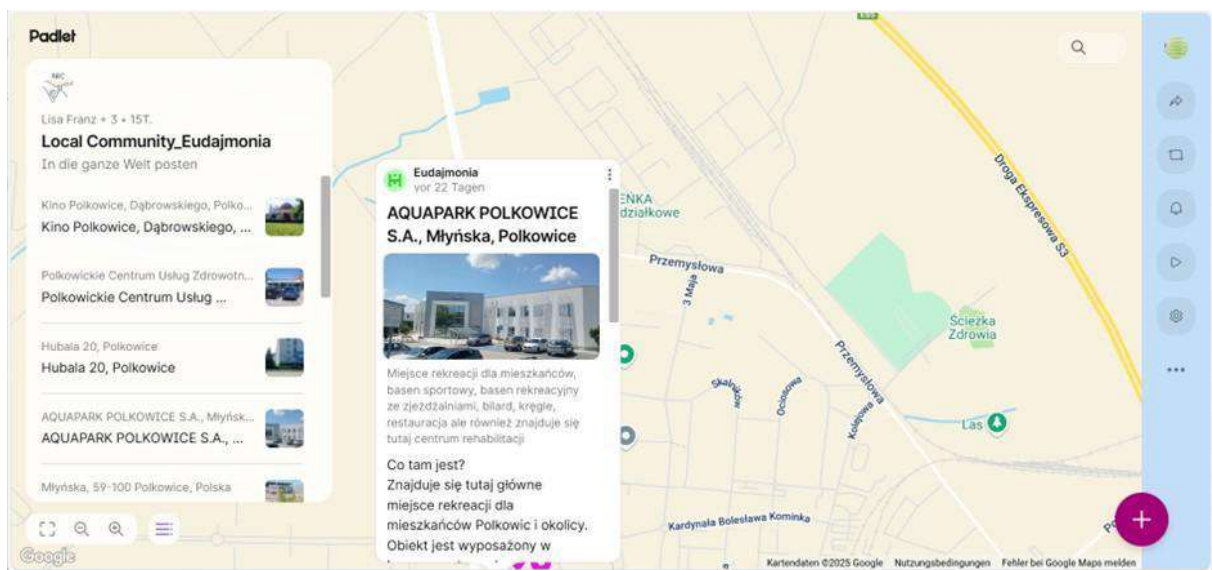




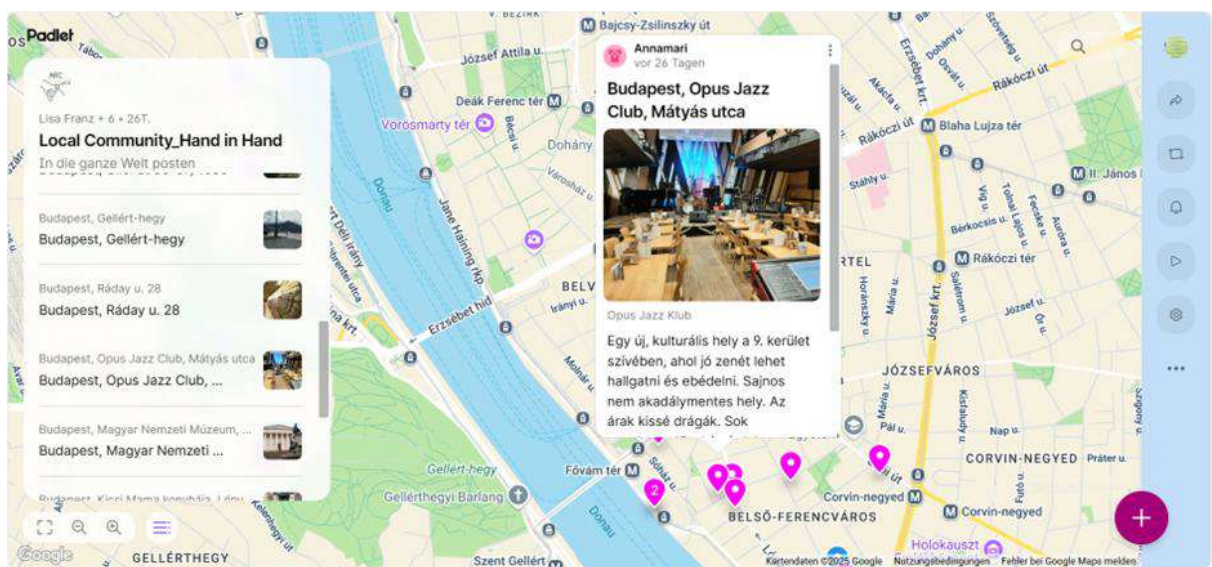
Picture 22 Screenshot of the Padlet from Austria



Picture 23: Screenshot of the Padlet from Romania



Picture 24: Screenshot of the Padlet from Poland



Picture 25 Screenshot of the Padlet from Hungary







## Summary and conclusion

The following recommendations are based on the collected data from the research phase, which has been presented in detail earlier. These insights reflect both the needs and aspirations of people with learning disabilities (PWLD) as well as the perspectives and challenges of their supporters.

The goal is to provide a solid foundation for the next work package (WP3), which will focus on the development of learning materials for the target groups.

The recommendations are divided into two target groups:

- **People with Learning Disabilities (PWLD)** – with a focus on strengthening autonomy, communication, and everyday navigation.
- **Supporters** – with a focus on enabling support strategies that are respectful, empowering, and collaborative.

## Recommendation for People with Learning Disabilities

### 1. Social and Communication Skills

- Include interactive modules on *how to build and maintain friendships*.
- Use real-life scenarios and role-plays to practice social situations.

### 2. Emotional Encouragement & Confidence Building

- Create content that *empowers participation*, e.g., through guided role-playing activities.
- Reinforce the message: *“I am allowed, I am able, and I know how.”*
- Normalize the need for help: *“It’s okay to need support. That doesn’t make me too much.”*

### 3. Legal and Self-Advocacy Empowerment

- Include simple explanations of *participation rights* (e.g., right to mobility, to take part in community life).
- Develop modules on *self-advocacy*: how to speak up for oneself, ask for what is needed, and say “no”.

### 4. Navigating Public and Social Spaces

- Teach *how to access and understand information* (e.g., reading timetables, finding accessible routes).
- Include guidance on *where and how to ask for help* in public settings.



## 5. Independent Research and Initiative

- Encourage *learning how to search for information independently*.
  - What activities are available?
  - Where can I find out more?
  - Where and when does something happen?
- Shift mindset from “*everything has to come to me*” to “*I can find things out for myself.*”
- Use examples and practice exercises for using the internet, reading flyers, or asking questions in person.

## 6. Financial Literacy and Independence

- Provide learning materials about:
  - Where to find discounts or financial support.
  - Budgeting basics.
  - How to travel affordably from point A to B.
- Address learned helplessness by showcasing success stories and strategies.

## Recommendation for Supporters

### 1. Balanced Support Approach

- Provide guidance on finding the balance between *overprotection and autonomy*.
- Encourage allowing PWLD to take responsibility, even if the outcome isn't perfect.
  - Example: Letting them organize parts of an event.

### 2. Empowering Rather Than Controlling

- Foster an empowerment mindset: *Support, don't take over.*
- Promote *co-creation of decisions and tasks* with PWLD.
- Integrate **real-life activities**: practice active participation *at a specific place* (e.g., visiting a youth club, planning a trip).
- Support a **gradual transition into autonomy**, giving PWLD increasing ownership and space to act.
- Practice together:
  - *How to search for information* (online, flyers, info points).
  - *How to ask questions or request support* from others.
  - *How to make choices* based on gathered information.



### 3. Promoting Self-Advocacy

- Support PWLD in expressing their needs and making their own choices.
- Provide space for them to speak for themselves in meetings, events, or day-to-day decisions.

### 4. Accessible Information

- Learn how to create and provide *easy-to-understand, accessible information* (e.g., Easy Read, visual aids, step-by-step instructions).

### 5. Handling Stigmatization

- Include guidance on:
  - How to respond to stigmatizing behaviour from others.
  - How to talk about and reduce internalized stigma.
  - Building resilience in the face of societal attitudes.

### 6. Exploring Innovative Resources and Collaborations

- Actively search for **new and creative ways** to support learning and participation:
  - Identify *best practice examples* from other organizations or regions.
  - Explore *funding opportunities* and *innovation grants* for inclusive education or digital participation.
- Foster *cross-sector collaboration*.
  - Partner with **NGOs, volunteer initiatives, or social enterprises**.
  - Involve **PWLD as peer supporters**, e.g.:
    - **Digital Coaches** (e.g. helping others use apps or search online).
    - **Reading Coaches** (supporting others in reading and understanding materials).
- Build structures that support *mutual learning and shared responsibility*.

Empowerment, inclusion, and participation are not abstract goals—they must be actively practiced and facilitated. The recommendations above highlight the importance of real-life relevance, accessible communication, and mutual learning. Digital learning materials that reflect these principles can play a powerful role in breaking down barriers and building up confidence.

Most importantly, they aim to support people with learning disabilities in becoming more actively integrated into their **local communities**. By focusing on the key areas outlined—such as self-advocacy, independent information access, and emotional empowerment—this approach intends to foster true inclusion and enable meaningful participation in everyday life.



## Appendix

### Template sheet Best-Practice-Research

	<b>ARC</b>  Access, Respect, Connect: Enhancing Social Participation of Persons with Disabilities for a Diverse Community
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Document identification			
Work package ID	WP2	Task 02	
Partner		Date	
Key Information			
country of best practice			
link (if available)			
short description			
number of people participating			
project radius			



## Analysis of the Inclusive Teams

the inclusive team finds the example	---
The example could be implemented in our town	---
explanations, hints, wishes, ideas	

Describe **the goal** of the example in easy language:

What is **special** about this example? Why did you choose this example?

**Who is behind** the project? Which organization, association, public administration or other is carrying out the project



## BENCH UNDER TREE

The bench in our garden is one of our favorite spots. It's where we gather to play games, talk, and enjoy each other's company. Nestled under the trees, it offers cool shade on warm days and a peaceful view of the garden. Whether we're laughing over a card game or simply sitting quietly, it's a place that brings us together and helps us relax.



The place stands for joint activity in the peer group, retreat and connection with nature. The simple design shows how low-threshold places can promote emotional safety. However, although the place is open to the public, it is rarely frequented by people outside the organization

## GARDEN HUT

The garden hut at atempo is a cozy little retreat surrounded by greenery. It stands at the edge of the garden, nestled among flowers, bushes, and shady trees. The hut offers a quiet space to relax, chat, or focus on a task in peace. It's easy to reach when it is dry and adds a touch of calm and nature to our daily life at atempo.



The garden hut combines nature with everyday life. It stands for sensory calming, opportunities for retreat and emotional self-regulation – aspects that are essential for many people in need of support.

## HAMMOCKS AT HILMTEICH



The hammocks in Hilmteich Park are a real summer gem. They're strung between shady trees near the pond, offering a perfect spot to relax. You can lie back gently swaying, take in the fresh air, and watch ducks glide across the water. These hammocks are freely available—just walk over, settle in with a book or a friend, and unwind in nature's quiet embrace. They're popular for evening chill-outs after a warm day stroll around the Hilmteich .



The freely accessible hammocks symbolise low-threshold relaxation and social participation in public spaces. The easy accessibility and atmosphere promote inclusion without major technical adjustments. However, people with mobility impairments cannot get into the hammock without support, which leads to dependency.

## COMPUTER CLASS



Our computer classes offer a quiet place to dive into the digital world. They are often used as a way to calm down from everyday stress and concentrate on specific tasks. Whether it's writing emails, creating documents, or discovering new tools, the atmosphere is supportive and relaxed. The classes are also a great opportunity to build confidence with technology and share experiences with others in a friendly environment.



Digital skills strengthen participation in society. The course offers not only technical skills, but also a protected learning space in which social interaction and self-efficacy can be experienced.



## RACKET SPORT CENTER GRAZ

The Racket Sport Center Graz is located in the city, easy to reach by car or public transport. It offers a wide range of racket sports like tennis, padel, squash, and pickleball. The center is accessible for people with disabilities, with barrier-free entrances and inclusive activities. There are comfortable areas to relax and meet others after a game.



Sport and encounters combine here to form a place of inclusion. Particularly important: the barrier-free infrastructure and relaxed atmosphere promote equality in the leisure sector. The co-researchers feel accepted here and do not experience exclusion.

## BOTANICAL GARDEN

Outdoor areas and historic greenhouses are fully barrier-free. Most show-greenhouse walkways connect via a ramp at the tropical glasshouse. Accessible toilets are available, and the main entrance accommodates wheelchairs easily. The garden offers a sense of peace and discovery in the heart of Graz—a lovely spot to slow down, connect with nature, and explore together.



The Botanical Garden offers multi-sensory experiences, recreation and inclusion through complete accessibility. It enables participation in nature and education regardless of restrictions. In addition, it is free to visit, and there are no financial barriers.

## HILMTEICH



The Hilmteich is located near atempo and on the route of the nearest tram. It offers a peaceful pond surrounded by walking paths, benches, and green areas perfect for strolling, relaxing, or simply enjoying the view. The site is accessible for people with disabilities, with level paths, ramps and places to sit by the water. In this area it is one of the most popular places to go during lunch breaks or after work.

The Hilmteich offers low-threshold recreation in nature. The good accessibility and the barrier-free infrastructure make spontaneous encounters as well as peace and quiet possible for all people.

## MARGARETENBAD



The Margaretenbad is a charming outdoor swimming pool in the heart of Graz's Geidorf district, known for its relaxed, nostalgic atmosphere. Surrounded by greenery and historic buildings, it offers a peaceful retreat with a 25-meter pool, a children's area, and sunbathing lawns. Popular with locals, it's especially loved for its quiet vibe, art deco flair, and neighborhood feel. The staff is very friendly and supportive, offering helpful assistance to people with disabilities to ensure an inclusive and welcoming experience.

Swimming pool with a family atmosphere. The staff make a significant contribution to inclusion by being supportive and approachable. Barrier-free toilets and sanitary facilities are on site and easily accessible. There is also an entry aid into the pool for people with limited mobility.

## GEIDORF KUNSTKINO

Geidorf Kunst kino is housed in a three-screen building right at Geidorfplatz. While it doesn't have dedicated wheelchair lifts or ramps mentioned explicitly, the venue is part of Graz's broader accessibility improvement efforts. This cinema shows a broad variety of both well-known and independent movies.



Cultural place in the neighbourhood with expandable accessibility. Although the cinema is on the ground floor, the doors in the old building are very heavy and can only be opened slightly by people with limited mobility. However, there are ramps to the cinema halls and a barrier-free toilet facility.

## UHRTURM

The Uhrturm is the famous clock tower of Graz and the city's most iconic landmark. Located on the Schlossberg hill, it dates back to the 13th century and offers stunning views over the old town. Saved by citizens during Napoleon's siege, the Uhrturm stands today as a proud symbol of Graz.



Landmark of the city. Access is restricted – falls into the realm of discussion about historical places and their inclusion potential.

## SCHLOSSBERGBAHN



A must-do experience: a quick, scenic ascent combining modern design, steep thrills, and stunning views of Graz's old town. The Schlossbergbahn in Graz is fully accessible and an excellent choice for visitors with mobility limitations, even free of charge if you have a ticket for public transport.

Tourist infrastructure with exemplary character: barrier-free thanks to a lifting device, attractive and easily accessible. The staff is very eager to provide support, both in terms of assistance and support when it comes to ticket reductions or free rides as part of individual social support (Sozialcard).

## The Pancake Caravan "Clătitele Râmnicene"

The Pancake Caravan "Clătitele Râmnicene" is located in the city center, on the Pedestrian Street. It has been the place where we've treated ourselves and enjoyed wonderful flavor combinations. The pancake spot is easily accessible, with tables and chairs outside where we can socialize.



An example of low-threshold, barrier-free leisure activities in public spaces. This is where enjoyment, social participation and accessibility are combined

## Train station Râmnicul Sărat

The place where every brick has witnessed a story—sad or happy, a beginning or an end of a journey.

We chose this landmark because, for Ruben, the train station represents a connection to the world—the place he departs from to reach any dream.

The station is accessible and adapted for people with special needs.

The train station needs renovation and regular maintenance of cleanliness.



The station is a symbol of freedom and mobility. Despite formal accessibility, there are structural deficits that make it difficult to use

## Cafe Jurnal

The café is located in the city center, next to the central park. This is the place where conversations and jokes are in constant motion, like a dance. The location is accessible, relaxing, and the smell of coffee often draws us in.



An inclusive social meeting place – accessibility is combined with a welcoming atmosphere that creates emotional belonging.

## Sports hall

Competition, movement, and teamwork are just a few of the essential ingredients of this place.

It is the venue where national competitions are held, it supports team games, and has spaces adapted for training. This is the place where Ruben began his journey in Judo.



A place of physical and social inclusion through sport – individually biographically significant, as it enables participation and a sense of achievement.



## Cultural Center “Florica Cristoforeanu”

This is the place where art and culture bring people's souls together. It is an old, impressive building located next to the best high school in the city. The cultural center is accessible for people with disabilities and allows individuals to practice their artistic passions in dance, guitar, and music workshops. Raluca has taken part in theater and music performances at this cultural center.



Inclusive cultural offerings promote expression, creativity and belonging – the centre stands for artistic participation.

## Gazebo

The gazebo is located in the Municipal Park. It is a place for socializing, but also a space where music, theater, and poetry are freely accessible. An added value comes from the natural surroundings, rich in vegetation.



A low-threshold outdoor cultural space – enables participation in cultural life regardless of costs or formalities.

## Kindergarten

Alexandra chose to present the kindergarten, considering it an important place for children's education, especially due to its facilities, particularly the yard and playground. It is located near the Police Station in Râmnic.

It is a place where every child, regardless of age, enjoys every moment through play and fun.



Play and education as a shared experience – symbolizes an inclusive approach to early childhood development without naming barriers.

## Corina Cafe

Alexandra is emotionally attached to this place, as it is where she went out with her first boyfriend. It is a small and charming pastry shop with delicious treats, located in a safe and accessible area of the city.



Personal and emotional attachment to a public place – social participation and security are in the foreground here.

## Brâncoveanu Complex

A place of prayer and faith, where Raluca feels accepted.

It is located next to the Municipal Museum. It was chosen for its historical significance, as it was built on an old fortification that was part of the Brâncovenesc Complex.



Religion and history as part of identity and inclusion – shows how spiritual spaces can create belonging.

## Shopping Centre Victoria

Victoria Center is a place that Alexandra enjoys visiting to buy gifts, clothing items, or cosmetics. It is located at the zero kilometer point of the city. It is not fully accessible for people with disabilities.



Consumption spaces with limited accessibility – illustrates that leisure activities can be limited by barriers.

## Public Toilet

The public restroom, located in the Main Park, is modern, accessible, and free of charge.

It is the only facility of its kind in the entire city.



Basic infrastructure is in place, but undersupplied – example of everyday accessibility and existing gaps in care.

## Children's Club

The Children's Club is located in an accessible, safe area, surrounded by green space, where all children in the city can participate for free in creative workshops, poetry, theater, and computer science. It is a space where all children in the city can grow and develop beautifully.



A positive example of inclusive child and youth education – shows low-threshold participation regardless of socio-economic background.

## Municipal museum

The museum is located near the central market; it is modern, attractive, and accessible. Children and young people can learn many things about nature, art, and history there.



Education and cultural participation in a barrier-free environment – positive image of an inclusive public cultural space.

## Open space for board games

A special place in nature for outdoor activities, equipped with chess tables and board games, which unfortunately are not maintained and are in an advanced state of deterioration. It could become an accessible and free space, offering meaningful leisure activities for young people with various disabilities.



Shows untapped potential for inclusive leisure activities – lack of care as a barrier to meaningful participation.

## Cinema

- The only cinema in Polkowice. The entrance is accessible for people with reduced mobility. There is one cinema hall. It is located in the central park in the town, right next to a pizzeria.
- It is a small local cinema where you can watch premiere films with a slight delay.
- There is no screenings with audio description or sign language interpretation).



Physical access is given, but sensory accessibility (e.g. audio description) is missing. Inclusion has only been partially implemented.

## Polkowice Health Services Centre



- This is a place where medical clinics are located, but it is also home to the 'Żyć godnie' (Live with Dignity) Charitable Association and an Occupational Therapy Workshop, which our friends belong to.
- The building is accessible for people with disabilities.
- Occupational therapy workshops are open to visitors, but there is a waiting list for regular classes. You can register with a doctor at any time, as needed.



Structural hurdles such as waiting times prevent full participation despite structural accessibility.



## Polkowice AQUAPARK S.A.

- This is the main recreational area for residents of Polkowice and the surrounding area. The facility has a sports pool, a recreational pool with slides, billiards, bowling, restaurants, and a rehabilitation center where you can take advantage of the services of a physiotherapist and a variety of rehabilitation treatments.
- The building is adapted to the needs of people with disabilities.
- For residents of Polkowice and the surrounding area who want to spend their time actively or take advantage of rehabilitation treatments.



ARC • Everyone can use the services of the AquaPark.

Example of holistic accessibility in leisure contexts; shows social and physical inclusion.

## 'Holender' windmill in Polkowice

- There is a café where you can enjoy a cup of coffee or dessert, climb the observation tower and follow the educational trail 'In the Footsteps of Polkowice's History'.
- The entrance to the tower is not accessible for people with disabilities, but everyone can use the café services.
- There, we can meet everyone who wants to drink coffee and eat cake, as well as people visiting the museum.
- Unfortunately, people in wheelchairs or with mobility issues are unable to enter the observation tower.



ARC

Partial accessibility – access to the cultural experience (tower) is not possible for everyone.

## Bus station



ARC

- This is the place from where all buses depart to other destinations.
- The station building is accessible, but not all buses are adapted to the needs of people with disabilities.
- Anyone can use it if they need to go somewhere. They must purchase a ticket. There is no assistant on site; it is self-service.

A lack of accessibility and a lack of assistance severely restrict mobility.

## McDonald's restaurant



ARC

- This is a fast-food restaurant located in the center of the city. It is a meeting place for everyone.
- The restaurant is adapted to the needs of people with disabilities and has plenty of tables to sit at.
- The toilets are adapted. Assistance is available on site.

Example of a barrier-free, social meeting place with supporting infrastructure.



## Polkowice County Office

- This is the County Office building, which houses institutions providing support to people with disabilities (PFRON, County Disability Assessment Team, PCPR).
- Anyone wishing to conduct official business may seek assistance at the District Office during opening hours.
- The building is fully adapted for all disabilities.



Role model for institutional inclusion through full adaptation of public infrastructure.

## Service and retail complex – shopping mall

- It is a shopping park with several shops, located in the centre of the city.
- It is adapted for people with disabilities.



Basic structural accessibility in the consumption room; little statement on social inclusion.

## Central Play and Recreation Park



- Presentation It is a place of relaxation for residents of Polkowice and visitors to the town. It is located in the town center.
- The park is accessible for people with disabilities and is a welcoming place for all visitors.
- Anyone can come to the park and enjoy the attractions it has to offer without restriction.



Symbol of open, inclusive public spaces with a positive perception of accessibility.

## Evangelical park



- Evangelical Park This is a place of relaxation for residents of Polkowice and visitors to the town. It is located in the town centre.
- The park is accessible for people with disabilities and is a welcoming place for all visitors.

Public area with an inclusive character – positive perception as a barrier-free and social place.

## Polkowice Municipal Stadium

- Polkowice Municipal Stadium This is the municipal stadium where the local football team, Górnik Polkowice, plays its matches. It is adapted for people with disabilities.
- The facility is accessible for people with disabilities in some areas.



Fragmented accessibility: not all areas can be used – participation remains limited.

## The church at Bakáts Square

### Background:

The church at Bakáts Square is located close to the Hand in Hand Foundation. It is a very beautiful building. I first encountered faith at a street evangelization event. Since then, I have been attending church regularly.

### A short story:

Faith and God are important to me. I like going to church because I can be part of an inclusive community there. In the photo, I placed the door at the center, which is open. This also means that the house of God is open to everyone."



The church is perceived as a place of spiritual belonging and inclusion. The open portal symbolizes openness and acceptance.

## Nándori Confectionery



### Background:

Nándori Confectionery is located at the corner of Ráday Street and Bakáts Square. You can buy many kinds of cakes here. The terrace area is very cozy. Summer is coming, and it will surely be nice to sit here, have coffee, and eat a cake.

### A short story:

Near the Hand in Hand Foundation, this is a place I would like to get to know. I would gladly go into this confectionery with someone because I have never been here before. I hope that someday I can sit here and enjoy a cake.

A place of longing for social participation. The desire for accompaniment shows an existing barrier in access – not structurally, but emotionally/socially.

## Jedermann Restaurant- "Our place"

### Background:

This is the entrance of the Jedermann restaurant, in Ráday street. In the picture, I placed the door in the center to make it inviting. The signs show different information. It is open every day from morning until evening. From 12:00 to 16:00, there is a discounted lunch menu.

### A short story

After the hand in hand residents' meeting, we always have lunch here together. We always say: This is our restaurant. I like being here because it is fairly quiet, the staff are friendly, and the food is good. The music is nice too.



An inclusive meeting place with a personal connection – food and community are perceived here as positive spaces of experience.

## The Great Market Hall

### Background:

The Great Market Hall is Budapest's largest and oldest indoor market. Located at the end of the famous pedestrian street Váci utca, it offers a vibrant atmosphere filled with colorful stalls selling fresh produce, meats, spices, and traditional Hungarian goods. It's a popular spot for both locals and tourists.

### Short stories

The story of the photographer: I like this place. I come here to buy things. There is an Aldi and a big fruit and vegetable market. I like the market because there are many colorful fruits and vegetables. The people who sell things are nice to me. They help me choose good apples and tomatoes. I am happy when I come here.

Related story from a member of the inclusive team: There is a small restaurant here that, during the Covid pandemic, delivered food to people in need. Because of this, they didn't have to close and could keep their workers employed. I was one of the people who helped deliver food to those who needed it. It made me feel good to help others, and I was happy to be part of the team. Even when things were hard, we worked together and supported each other. It was a special time, and I will always remember it.



A place of everyday inclusion and mutual help – market as a social space with positive experiences and solidarity action.

## Tiny Mum's Kitchen Restaurant



### Background

Tiny Mum's Kitchen is a small eatery near the Kézintőgyűgy Foundation. They cook very delicious food, and the prices are reasonably cheap. I gave this picture the title "My Favorite Restaurant." The staff are very kind, and the food is very tasty.

### A short story

You know, I really love to eat, and I like good food. My mother and I often go to this restaurant. When I eat here, it always reminds me of home because the food tastes very homemade. My favorite dish is the Székely cabbage stew.



Emotional home through familiar food – accessibility in the sense of atmosphere and personal safety.

## A ship on the Danube

**Background:** The picture was taken on the Pest embankment, from a ship anchored on the Danube.

**A short story:** Whenever I walk by here, I always see this luxury ship. I always think about how much I long to travel on one like that. I hope I wouldn't get seasick.



The desire for mobility and luxury contrasts with a feeling of unattainability – illustrating emotional exclusion through status symbols.



## Skateboarders on the Sára Salkaházi embankment



### Background:

I took this picture of some skateboarder guys, who were skateboarding on the Sára Salkaházi embankment. I see them every time I go to the Hand in Hand Foundation. They skateboard along the Danube riverside, laughing and chatting. I'd love to be part of their group, but unfortunately, I can't skateboard.

### A short story:

The skateboarder group is a real team. What unites them is their love for skating. I would also like to belong to a community like that — one that meets regularly and is held together by something meaningful. When I see them, I always think of freedom. The skateboarder guys found a place that is accessible, where the wheels of the skates don't get stuck. So I assume this spot is also well-suited for wheelchair users.

Expression of longing for group membership – skate park as a symbol of freedom, but at the same time a mirror of social demarcation.

## “Street Art” at Fővám Square



### Background:

Street art has the power to bring people together. Whether it's a mural on a wall or a spontaneous chalk drawing on the pavement, it invites conversation, expression, and shared identity. Local artists often reflect the values, struggles, and dreams of the community they belong to, helping others feel seen and heard. In public spaces, street art creates a sense of belonging and encourages people to connect—not just with the artwork, but with each other. It turns ordinary places into shared cultural landmarks, strengthening the bonds between people who live there.

### A short story:

I love this cheerful little face — it always lifts my spirits when I'm on my way to the Hand in Hand Foundation. It smiles at me from a wall behind a bench as I walk past. Someone painted it there with simple blue paint: one big eye, a wide curved smile. It's not perfect, but that's exactly what makes it so lovable. The first time I noticed it, it was a rainy, gloomy day, and I wasn't in a good mood. But that little face looked at me as if it were saying, "Hey, everything will be okay." Ever since then, I look for its gaze every time I pass by. I've seen others smile at it too. Once, a little child ran up to it, touched it, and said to their mom, "Mom, does it live here?" Maybe they were right. Maybe that cheerful little face really does live at the base of the pole, and its job is to bring joy to people. To me, it's a bit like a secret friend in the city — a tiny reminder that happiness sometimes hides in the most unexpected places.

Street art as a low-threshold access to joy and participation in the urban space – art here has a connecting and personal effect.

## Gellért-hill



### Background:

Gellért Hill is a 235 m high hill overlooking the Danube in Budapest, Hungary. It is located in the 1st and the 11th districts. The hill was named after Saint Gerard who was thrown to death from the hill. The famous Hotel Gellért and the Gellért Baths can be found in Gellért Square at the foot of the hill, next to Liberty Bridge. The Gellért Hill Cave is also located on the hill, facing the hotel and the Danube.

At the top of the hill, the Citadella can be found with a nice panoramic view of the city.

### A short story:

This place is perfect for organizing community events. You can go hiking, learn (there's a nature trail), visit the rock chapel, and enjoy a beautiful view of the Danube and the Parliament. I love coming here for walks with my friends. A green heart in the middle of the city.



Closeness to nature, recreation and community are perceived positively – Gellértberg as an inclusive place with experience value.

## For Sale Pub



### Background:

The For Sale Pub is located in downtown Budapest, near the Central Market Hall, and is one of the city's most famous ruin pubs. The special feature of the place is its rustic interior, where the floor is covered with straw, and the walls and ceiling are decorated with postcards, messages, and business cards left by visitors over the years. The For Sale Pub offers not only dining but also a community experience. Visitors traditionally leave messages behind, contributing to the unique atmosphere of the place.

### A short story

A few days ago, I visited this place with a friend. Usually, the waiters don't reserve tables for anyone, but this time they made an exception for me. I was very happy that when my friend and I arrived, a table for two was already waiting for us. It made us feel special and welcomed. While we were there, I also left a message on the wall about the ARC project. It felt nice to be part of the tradition of visitors leaving notes and to share something meaningful with others. The whole experience was warm and memorable.



A place with an inclusive atmosphere that allows for individuality. Writing it on the wall is part of symbolic participation.

## A lady is sitting in the middle of Kálvin's Square



### Background

Kálvin tér is a busy square in the heart of Budapest. It is an important transportation hub where several metro lines, trams, and buses meet. The square is named after the famous reformer John Calvin and has a statue dedicated to him. Around Kálvin tér, you can find shops, cafes, and historic buildings. It's a lively place where locals and tourists often pass through or stop to relax.

### A short story:

When I set out to take photos, it was hard to find a subject because I didn't have a clear idea. Then I saw this lady sitting quietly on the busy, noisy square. I thought how nice it would be to have a little peaceful "me time" like that every day. In the middle of all the hustle and bustle, she seemed calm and relaxed, just taking a moment for herself. It reminded me how important it is to slow down sometimes and enjoy small moments of calm in our busy lives.

Observation of everyday life as a reflection on self-care and calm in the urban hustle and bustle – symbolic image for mindful inclusion.

## ÉFOÉSZ



**A short story:** The bottom sign belongs to the Association of People with Intellectual Disabilities (ÉFOÉSZ). I've often wondered whether there really is a civil organization here, because the gate looked so abandoned. But they are here. These little signs symbolize to me how many companies and civil organizations are housed in the buildings around Hand in Hand.

Visibility of civil society presence in the cityscape – a sign of networking, even if the places seem inconspicuous on the outside.

## Green plant

**A short story:** I always see this plant when I go to the Hand in Hand Foundation. It looks like a maypole decorated with colorful ribbons.



The view of seemingly insignificant things shows emotional anchoring in everyday life – symbolic enhancement through one's own perspective.

## Outdoor Fitness Area

### • presentation

This public sports space is not adapted for people with mobility disabilities – it lacks universal design solutions that would allow everyone to use the exercise equipment. Such an environment increases exclusion and limits the opportunities for people with disabilities to actively participate in community life. To achieve true inclusion, it is essential to create accessible spaces where every person – regardless of their abilities – can feel like a valued member of the community.

### • short story

"I really love being outdoors and exercising, but this playground makes me feel uneasy. My friend uses a wheelchair, and she can't use a single piece of exercise equipment here. She just watches while we move. It hurts me that she is left out. I wish there was at least one machine for her. After all, she also wants to be stronger, healthier, and enjoy sports like everyone else in the city."



A lack of inclusive design leads to exclusion – sporting activities are not accessible to everyone. The emotional stress of the participants illustrates the urgent need for action.

## Tennis hall



### • presentation

This is a sports hall intended for table tennis. One of the most important aspects is the opportunity to play table tennis in a real sports environment and to visit the hall free of charge. This inclusive gesture deserves respect and gratitude – it sends a clear message: sport should be accessible to everyone. Unfortunately, the sports hall is still not adapted for people using wheelchairs. There are no accessible paths, the passageways are too narrow, and the toilets are also not suitable for people with mobility impairments. Such physical barriers silently say: "You are welcome... but not entirely."

### • short story

"I really enjoy playing table tennis in the sports hall with my friends. It's one of those places where I feel free and equal to everyone. However, one day something sad happened that made me stop and think. My friend, who uses a wheelchair, needed to use the bathroom. When he approached the door, it turned out to be too narrow. Moreover, the bathroom itself was so cramped that even without a wheelchair it would have been difficult to turn around. Unfortunately, all the doors in the building were very narrow – only the entrance to the sports hall had wider, accessible doors. We couldn't leave him in this situation. I called the staff, and together, carefully and with respect, while talking to him to make sure he felt safe and dignified, we helped him out of the wheelchair and carried him to the toilet. At that moment, my friend's dignity was violated, and he felt deeply sad."



Physical barriers in otherwise inclusive places lead to moments of degradation. The combination of positive approaches (free admission) and serious shortcomings (toilets, paths) shows the ambivalence of inclusion efforts.

## Museum „Stasys“

### • presentation

The museum showed how it is possible to create a space for everyone – with clarity, calmness, and respect. Here, universal design allows us to be not just spectators, but true participants. In such an environment, I feel understood and valued. It is a place where culture is accessible to everyone, not only to those who grasp everything quickly. There should be more places like this. Museum admission is free for persons with disabilities and their accompanying person.

### • short story

"When I visited the museum, everything was clear and accessible – it was easy to move around, the signs were understandable, and my friend in a wheelchair could access every area. But for me, as a person with a mobility impairment, one thing was missing – a place to sit and rest. It would be very helpful to have at least one bench in each exhibition hall."



The museum shows how universal design can be implemented. The small but important note on seating shows that accessibility must be thought of holistically – even small adjustments can be decisive.

## Cafe „Solidari kava“

### • presentation

"Solidari kava" is a cozy space in the center of Panevėžys that fosters community spirit, where people with intellectual disabilities work. Various free events are often held here – concerts, educational activities, meetings – inviting people to gather, interact, and form friendships. Although this place has many advantages, it lacks informational signs, directions, and menus in easy-to-understand language for people with intellectual disabilities."

### • short story

"I really enjoy visiting the 'Solidari kava' space. My friends work here, and the café itself is very cozy. I often come to the musical evenings or educational activities – they are free, interesting, and fun. Once, when I was feeling sad, everything here cheered me up – the people, the music, and the hot cocoa. I also come here with my friend, who cannot read, but sometimes it's hard for her to choose because the menu doesn't have pictures. Then she always has to ask for help. It would be much easier if there were pictures on the menu."



Positive example of social inclusion by employing people with disabilities. However, there is a lack of visual support for people with intellectual disabilities – there is still room for improvement here.



## Panevėžys Art Gallery

### • presentation

It is one of the most important art spaces in the city, where contemporary art, ceramics, photography, and textile exhibitions are showcased. The gallery actively implements educational projects, organizes exhibition presentations, meetings with artists, and cultural evenings for the community members. It ensures physical accessibility – there is an elevator, clear directional signs, and a comfortable space for visitors with mobility impairments. Additionally, people with disabilities and their companions receive price discounts, and the staff is helpful and friendly.

### • short story

"I visit this gallery often – both with my family and with friends. I always enjoy it here because the staff is very kind. The last time I was here, I attended a Japanese doll exhibition – they were very beautiful, colorful, and had embroidered clothes. What surprised me the most was that the staff member allowed me to touch one of the exhibits so I could feel with my hands how complex the creation was. It was a special moment – I truly felt the amount of work and beauty put into it. I feel safe and understood in the gallery, and I'm sure I will always want to come back here."



The permission to experience art haptically highlights the inclusive attitude of the gallery. Accessibility means not only physical but also sensory participation.

## Panevėžys County Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė Public Library

### • presentation

It is a modern, open, and community-oriented space. Here, you can not only read books or use computers, but also take part in various events, creative workshops, educational activities, learn new things, or simply spend time in a calm environment. This library is a great example of how a public space can be adapted for people with disabilities. The clear and easy-to-understand signage makes it easy to navigate, but we noticed one issue – the lift is not suitable.

### • short story

"Our group of friends came to a meeting at the library – we had been invited to share our thoughts on a new space being planned for local communities. However, we encountered a problem: one of us – a visitor using an electric wheelchair – was unable to access the meeting room located on the upper floor. It turned out that the existing lift is not suitable for heavier, electric wheelchairs. This caused sadness and disappointment – we were invited to share our ideas, yet not all of us could participate. The library staff apologized for the inconvenience, and we hope that in the future, proper accommodations will be made so that everyone can access such meetings without barriers."



Despite good accessibility in general, participation in a central event fails due to technical limitations – this shows how important continuous accessibility is.

## Cafe „Gazelė“



### • presentation

Cafe 'Gazelė' is a small, cozy café in the city center. It's a great place to have lunch, celebrate personal occasions, or simply enjoy a cup of coffee. Unfortunately, this place is not fully adapted for people with intellectual disabilities. Although there is an entrance for people with mobility impairments, the menu is not presented in easy-to-understand language.

### • short story

"I often like to stop by this café for lunch. It's in a very convenient location, near the shopping center and my home. I really enjoy the food they make here. However, every time I face a problem – I can't read the menu, neither the one outside nor the one inside. The staff is very friendly and always tells me the menu for the day and explains it needed, but I would feel much better if I could do it myself. For example, the menu could have pictures, and I would be able to choose the dish independently."

## Wellness center „Romantic“



### • presentation

This is a place where you can take care of your health and relax. You can use the pool, unwind, exercise, and strengthen both your body and mind. The environment is calm, tidy, and suitable for those looking to escape daily stress. However, the space is not fully adapted for people with mobility impairments. There is a lack of a special lift to help visitors who use wheelchairs get in and out of the pool. Additionally, there are no clear and easily understandable signs to help people with various needs navigate the space more easily.

### • short story

"I like visiting the pool. I relax there. I get a locker for my things and a key to lock it. But once, when I needed to return, I realized I couldn't remember which locker was mine. The locker number wasn't written on the key. I felt confused and lost. It was uncomfortable. I had to ask a staff member for help. He was kind and helped me find my locker, but I still wanted to feel more independent. I think it would be very useful if the locker number was also written on the key. Then it would be easier and clearer – I wouldn't have to worry or feel uncomfortable."

Recurring topic: lack of barrier-free information. The helpfulness of the staff is positive, but it does not replace structural adjustments to the independence of the guests.

A lack of intuitive orientation and labelling impair independence – this shows how small details can have a big effect.

## Square “Laisvės aikštė”

- presentation

This is the city center of Panevėžys and a gathering place for the community. There are often concerts, fairs, and various events held here. The square is well-maintained, renovated, modern, and cozy. Visitors can use the water station and sit on many comfortable benches. However, most of the benches are directly exposed to the sun, making them uncomfortable to sit on during hot days.

- short story

"I often meet my friends in Laisvės Square. It's a really nice place – there are many cafés around where we can have coffee, talk, and enjoy our time. But when the weather gets warmer, it becomes hard to find shade in the square. Most of the benches are directly in the sun. Once, I felt unwell from the heat. Luckily, there was a water station nearby – I was able to drink some cool water and refresh a bit. Still, we had to leave soon to look for shade elsewhere. It would be really helpful if there were more shaded areas in Laisvės Square – it would make us feel safer and more comfortable, especially during the warmer months."



Beautiful design, but lack of heat protection reduces comfort. Inclusion also requires environmental adaptation to extreme weather conditions – especially for sensitive groups.

## Grocery store „IKI“

- presentation

This is one of the main grocery stores in the center of Panevėžys. It is easily accessible both by foot and by public transport. Here, you can purchase daily products and household items. However, there are some drawbacks: the ramp is not adapted – it is too steep, making it difficult to safely go up with a wheelchair. Products on high shelves are hard to reach for short-statured individuals or people with physical disabilities, and there is no clear assistance system in the store.

- short story

"I visited a grocery store to buy some necessary items. The product I needed was placed on a high shelf – I couldn't reach it. There were no staff members around. I felt confused and frustrated. I tried to ask a young man passing by for help, but he pretended not to hear me. The whole situation left me with an unpleasant feeling – I felt invisible. I truly wish that supermarkets like this would install an audible help button that could call a staff member. That would allow me and others to shop with safety and dignity."



A lack of assistance systems and inappropriate shelves lead to social isolation and frustration. Technical support and sensitized personnel are needed.

## Miltinis Drama Theater



- presentation

The theater is located in a historic, old building in the city center. Various performances, events, and meetings with actors and creators are held here. It's great that the theater cares about accessibility – people with disabilities receive ticket discounts, and individuals with mobility impairments and their companions can purchase tickets with a 100% discount. However, the theater still lacks clear directional signs to help people navigate more easily. Wheelchair access is available through the courtyard, but this information is not clearly marked.

- short story

"I was very excited when I visited the theater with my family for the first time. But when I arrived, I couldn't find any directional signs and didn't know where to go to get to the hall. During the intermission, I couldn't find the restroom either – I had to ask other people for help. This caused some inconvenience, and I ended up being late for the second part of the performance. So, I would suggest putting up clear and visible signs."



The emotional impact of a lack of guidance leads to uncertainty and frustration. Cultural institutions also need clear visual communication.

## Park "Senvagė"



- presentation

This is truly a great place to relax and enjoy nature. The park offers comfortable walking spaces and various resting zones, making it very friendly for people with mobility impairments. The paths, designed for wheelchairs, allow easy access to the entire area, while nearby benches and rest zones provide an opportunity to catch your breath and enjoy the surroundings. Additionally, events and festivals add extra energy and a sense of community.

- short story

"The park has always been a place where I can relax and spend time with friends. I especially love visiting the island – it's quiet, beautiful, and you can sit on a bench and simply enjoy nature. One day, I invited a friend who uses a wheelchair to come along, but she declined. She told me that the ramp leading to the island is very steep for her. For someone using a wheelchair, it's really difficult to go up such a slope alone. She always has to ask someone for help. Because of this, she often avoids visiting the park altogether – it doesn't feel good to constantly rely on others. It would be much more comfortable and safe if the ramp had a gentler slope. Then, my friend and I could reach our favorite spot independently."



Despite good infrastructure in the park, too steep access prevents independent participation. The example underlines the importance of structural details for true inclusion.

## Panevėžys Cultural Center

### • presentation

This is one of the main cultural spaces where various events take place. This place brings the community together and creates a warm, creative atmosphere. The cultural center is located in a convenient part of the city, providing opportunities to participate in both larger and smaller events. However, the accessibility of the space for people with disabilities is not well adapted. Getting into the halls with a wheelchair is a challenge, requiring the help of others to physically lift the wheelchair, as there is no elevator.

### • short story

"Once, my mom, grandmother, who uses a wheelchair, and I bought tickets for a concert and were calm, thinking that we would smoothly enter the hall because there was an elevator for people with disabilities. However, when we arrived, we found out that it was out of order. We faced significant difficulties because the staff couldn't find anyone to help carry my grandmother up the stairs. We just stood there, waiting as others passed by. The whole time, we felt very humiliated and powerless. I would like such situations not to happen again. The cultural center should be open to everyone. The building needs an elevator and more accessibility adjustments."



Technical defects can have serious effects on emotional experience and participation. Access must not depend on chance.

## Cosmetics store „Kristiana“

### • presentation

This is a prestigious beauty and perfume store. It is part of an international network offering the highest quality cosmetics and fragrances. We have an unpleasant history related to the store's treatment of people with disabilities. However, we are glad that the current situation is good – the staff is friendly, and the store is adapted for people with mobility impairments – the entrance and interior are accessible for wheelchair users.

### • short story

"I still remember that unpleasant experience a few years ago when we went to the 'Kristiana' store with my friends. We just wanted to look at cosmetics and shop, but the store employee was very rude and told us to leave simply because we had a disability. It was a shock, and it hurt a lot. My friends and I felt humiliated. This showed how important humanity and acceptance are, because whether we have a disability or not, we all deserve respect and equal opportunities. No one should feel rejected because of their appearance or abilities. I hope that such situations will not happen in the future."



A negative example from the past shows how important sensitization and respectful interaction are. Positive: today the shop is now barrier-free and the attitude has changed.

## Physiotherapy clinic „Judesio DNR“



### • presentation

This is a modern wellness facility. The clinic offers various services aimed at restoring mobility functions, relieving pain, and strengthening the body. The premises are adapted for people with mobility impairments – the entrance and parking area are designed for wheelchair users.

### • short story

"I visit the 'Judesio DNR' clinic to reduce my back pain. The clinic's environment left a good impression on me – it's easy to enter, the staff are friendly, and the treatments helped me feel better. At the end of the visit, they suggested some exercises to do at home. However, once I got home, I couldn't remember how to do them exactly – there was a lack of clear instructions, simple language, or pictures. I missed having an easy-to-understand reminder that would help me continue the exercises independently or with the help of my family, ensuring better results."



Good practice in the facility – but the importance of follow-up and supporting materials for sustainable participation is evident.