



Investing in your future
Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013
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Protecting Monuments and achieving accessibility. by Joeri Mertens - Regional Heritage Officer

All people from Heritage are pro accessibility. Nevertheless, there are some important questions to be asked and answered:

CAN all heritages be accessible? Does the heritage lend itself to accessibility? Here are some examples.

The Lieve, the famous canal between Gent and Damme, is in some places only as large as a moat: here the ability to access is not existing. Are all archaeological sites, including the Pyramids at Giza (Egypt) or Machu Pichu (Peru) of a nature to be accessible to everyone? In the pyramid you can barely stand up, Machu Pichu is elevated and barely accessible. Is a natural landscape such as the caves in Han-sur-Lesse accessible to everyone? There is an accessible educational project for people with a handicap but this is an exclusive setting and not in the regular circuit. The underground heritage such as the basement walk in Ghent causes problems: it's not accessible. In a protected heritage building the ground floor is accessible. It is not always obvious to incorporate an elevator.

MUST all heritages be accessible? Heritage imposes no requirements for accessibility. Conservation prevails.

A private owner decides on openness and accessibility. Voluntarily! Here are some examples.

Aalst - Property Pieter De Bruyne and "Water Castle", the castle in Laarne. In principle, they're both open to the public, but in practice remains an enclosed building.

Is mass tourism a win for a monument? For instance; St. Peter's Square in Rome is not a problem for a large audience. But at Versailles, the mirror gallery does not come to its own by intense visit.

Is the universal value of the site of that kind that all accessibility is necessary? Some fine examples.

Egypt – the Tomb of Nefertari. We have to pay € 25 for a 10 minutes visit, after an inaccessible journey through the desert. Is it appropriate to broaden the access?

France – the Lascaux prehistoric cave. The original cave is closed for the visitors. You can make a visit to a copy of the site next to the cave.



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Is it valuable to open the entire site when there is little or nothing to see?

Brussels - Black Tower.

The three towers in a row in Ghent. Only one has an elevator. Should all the towers be accessible? Isn't it enough if we can visit the top of one of them?

Is the monument compatible with its new function? Is there a good organization possible?

The organization starts from the monument and not from the program.

- Meeting rooms on the ground floor.
- No multipurpose / general public spaces in attics and basements
- Secondary functions (bathroom, kitchen, entrance hall ...) in outbuildings
- Museums, libraries on the top floor?

Here are some examples.

Aalst – Alderman's House: the oldest alderman's house of Flanders. What went wrong? Why did they put the tourist office and the reception hall for visitors to the first floor and is an exhibition housed in the basement? Does the organisation of these services make any sense in this monument?

Gent - St. - Peter's Abbey is wheelchair accessible according to the website, despite a difference of 8 steps down to the entrance. But through a side entrance, through a restaurant with a lot of tables and the service elevator, there is accessibility to all levels.

Solutions for people with physical disabilities

Access and circulation is not necessarily needed in the monument. As an example:

Paris – Louvre. All wings of the building are accessible through the pyramid. The original building is preserved.

Lovendegem - Castle Diepenbroeck: an additional shaft with elevator.

Lochristi - Rectory Zaffelare with on the ground floor the library and on the first floor a museum. Next to the monument a new block with bathroom, kitchen, elevator and stairs is built.

Access for all at the same place:

Gent - Museum of Fine Arts and Museum of Modern Art.

In this case there is the possibility to create common services (access, bathroom, desk, museum shop, cafeteria...) during the redesign of the square between both museums.

Some landscape solutions:

Sint-Niklaas - Park Walburg where the old tarmac roads have been replaced by split: a peaceful nature trail was created.



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Beveren – Nature Park “The Stroopers”, an old military site. Creation of an accessible route for wheelchair user’s through the swamp.

Solutions for people with hearing impairment:

Classical loop and good lighting so lip reading should be easier.

Solutions for people with visual disabilities:

The importance of good lighting:

Beveren - Fort Liefkenshoek, a 16th century fortress. The texts are hard to read at the exhibition of the history of the fort due to poor lighting.

Gent - St. Michael Slope is a fine example of atmospheric non-dazzling lighting. Significance of contrasts by using colours. Importance of security glass: place the arms in the middle of a glass door.

A nameplate or information panel in glass on a marble wall is barely legible for visually impaired people.

Using models: Gent – Prinsenhof. and Mechelen – Tower.

Audio description: Knokke - Zwin: description of both property and site.

Solutions for people with intellectual disabilities.

Insight from real development activity

Bokrijk: baking bread, lace. Gain from personal experience

Velzeke Museum: put on other clothes and relive passed times.

It isn’t always possible to allow everyone to a monument. An alternative access is not always possible.

Visitor centre and museum from the archaeological site of Ename is in the village museum. All information is accessible. So the site should not be visited.

The visitor’s centre of the Tyne Cot Cemetery is very understandable because of the exhibitions and the re-enactment.

In the Museum of Industrial Archaeology of Ghent (MIAT) an historic room is staged.

Accessibility measure is a target oriented educational project from empathizing with the other.

Ghent – The Castle: located in a city centre. The ticket desk in the Castle should perhaps be better placed to the square in front of the castle. An entrance with an elevator could be created. At this moment the walk around the wall is not really accessible.

Some functions are not in the appropriate locations at the castle. The exhibition spaces are located on the upper floors, renting for concerts are in underground crypts.