

# **Presenting a methodbox: Inclusive prototypes for overcoming barriers in the Museum Stutthof from 26th to 29th February 2024**



Participants of the second inclusive memorial trip to the former concentration camp and today's Museum Stutthof in Sztutowo near Gdansk from 26th to 29th. February 2024.

Compiled in March 2024 by Constanze Stoll (project coordinator)

The last trip in the German-Polish cooperation project “Remembering – Inclusive” took the project team and participants once again to the Museum Stutthof in Sztutowo near Gdansk in Poland at the end of February 2024.

The **project team** and the **participants** - a total of 45 people with and without disabilities - consisted of the following groups of people:

- nine participants with different disabilities and, if necessary, their assistants from Germany and 13 participants with different disabilities and, if necessary, their assistants from Poland,
- three spoken language interpreters and four sign language interpreters,
- as well as twelve colleagues from the cooperation partners IBB gGmbH, Museum Stutthof and Schwarzenberg e.V., who organized and accompanied the project and the last trip.

Overall, people took part who had already taken part in previous events and there were people who were there for the first time.

The reason for the third inclusive memorial trip in the project was to show the participants the **results developed during the project**, test them and obtain feedback.

We call the results that were developed during the project “Remembering – Inclusive” prototypes. These are small, exemplary solutions for huge barriers in the Museum Stutthof. Also a guideline was written. It is aimed at the organizers of inclusive remembrance projects and inclusive memorial trips and was therefore not the subject of consideration during the second inclusive trip to the Museum Stutthof.

The development of the prototypes was preceded by an investigation into barriers that arise for people with different disabilities when visiting the Museum Stutthof. For this purpose, a diverse group of people with different disabilities and without disabilities from Germany and Poland traveled to the Museum Stutthof at the end of September 2023 for a network meeting. The group noted numerous barriers on the site and the outdated exhibition. Their conclusion: As a historical place of learning, the museum is difficult to reach and very difficult to access for disabled people:

- Physical barriers limit the mobility of wheelchair users and people with walking difficulties; Ramps laid on edges make it difficult to use the ramps.
  - Difficult language on text boards and in guided tours makes it impossible for neurodivergent people and people with learning difficulties (and many other people) to engage meaningfully with the history of the place.
  - Blind people do not receive spatial orientation because of the lack of tactile models; there is no guidance system for the blind.
  - The exhibition does not contain videos in sign language for deaf people. Tours in sign language are not offered.
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- There is a lack of seating on site. There are no resting places.
  - Tours are not conceptually geared to the needs of disabled people.

- The museum management gives high priority to the inclusive redesign of the memorial site. The museum staff recognizes a high need for awareness and learning for all employees in the area of inclusive remembrance culture and the removal of barriers.

At the beginning of December 2023, a two-day method workshop followed with the participants at the Memorial Museum Ravensbrück (Germany). Four working groups developed inclusive ideas and formats for overcoming specific barriers in the Museum Stutthof. These four ideas were concretized as so-called prototypes (see below). From December to February, the teams completed the four prototypes for their presentation during the last inclusive memorial visit to the Museum Stutthof.

The focus of the program for this last inclusive memorial trip was the presentation of the four prototypes. Each group presented its prototype in 1.5 hours each, had the participants try out the prototype in order to deepen their observations, strengths and opportunities for improvement in a subsequent feedback round with the participants.

Below we list the four prototypes and summarize the key results of their testing. Photos accompany the report.

## Prototype 1 – Guide for developing an inclusive visitor service

### Cause

People with disabilities, like everyone else, want to be able to move as freely as possible when visiting the memorial and to view or perceive the exhibition. If this is not possible due to barriers, they must know in advance what disabilities they will face.

Information about accessibility is usually provided by an institution's website. In addition, a visitor center, which is usually installed in the entrance area of a memorial, provides information about the barriers and the inclusive offers.

An inclusive visitor service does not shy away from making the lack of accessibility explicit. This should also happen on the website, ideally barrier-free. So videos with subtitles for the blind and visually impaired and sign language are needed, possibly information read aloud and explanations in Easy Read.

Photos that make the area visually visible are helpful. The photos are described for blind people.

The visitor service staff must not succumb to the risk of downplaying the existing barriers on the site and the exhibition. A safety concept also includes pointing out the dangers.

The German-Polish working group dealt with various questions regarding the inclusive design of the visitor service at the Museum Stutthof.

The central finding was that the establishment of an inclusive visitor service requires that the museum staff as a whole have a positive attitude towards the inclusive orientation of the facility. An inclusion concept must be developed, which also includes barrier-free visitor services.

The visitor service staff must be trained to approach people with disabilities without patronizing them and at eye level and to proactively provide information about safety on the site and the exhibition, about existing or missing inclusive offers and about accessibility and the lack of accessibility.

During the practical and methodological workshop in Ravensbrück, the team agreed on the purpose of the prototype: It should provide an example of the areas in which an inclusive visitor service ideally provides information in a memorial sight or museum. The fact that the museum's new visitor center is under construction and the website is also being redesigned played a role in the implementation of the prototype.

Formally, a multi-purpose product was created: The prototype was designed as a questionnaire for the participants of the last inclusive memorial trip to Stutthof. In addition, as a guide, it provides those responsible for the museum with a checklist of what information is needed as part of an inclusive visitor service, which will also be established as part of the new visitor center.



First page of the four-page guide in the form of a questionnaire: The participants took it into the area to provide important information on accessibility in the museum.

### Form & Content

In the first part of the **Introduction** the guide explains in plain language what the guide is. In the three further parts **Before the Visit, In the Visitor Center, On the Site**, the users of the questionnaire found out what their task was to test the existing or missing information on accessibility.

### Feedback



The questionnaires are distributed to the participants.

After testing the guide for 30 minutes on the site, which they carried out in groups of two or individually, the participants gave plenty of feedback. Unfortunately, it had not been taken into account in advance that the visitor service was already closed at that time (afternoon).

The museum's website was difficult to access due to a mediocre internet connection. Individuals who managed to access noted that the new website still only offers Polish-language information, making the site of little use to visitors from abroad. The website does not yet offer any information in sign language for deaf users.

The accessibility section is generally missing. It was noted that information about the widespread lack of accessibility or the absence of barrier-free educational offerings should be seen as a positive sign of awareness for inclusivity. The problem of a lack of accessibility does not get any smaller by simply ignoring the barriers. The other way around: the more information about accessibility or hurdles that can be viewed, the more inclusive the visitor service is.

The museum staff present tried to excuse the lack of accessibility and pointed out that the mammoth task of converting the overall outdated museum facility could only be achieved step by step. A lot of money is needed for this.

Some participants countered that inclusion was a priority in terms of social and value policy. One of the findings from the project is that there is no reason to first redesign a museum from the perspective of people without disabilities and then tackle accessibility features afterwards. Inclusion must be an integrative part of new buildings and change processes.

It was important to many participants that the visitor service should provide interpreters for sign language, but also for simple language, at least at selected events.

The need to train staff in visitor services was emphasized. It is important to train the appropriate proactive use of possible aids and offers, which is not a self-explaining given.

In principle, it is important that difficult language is replaced by simple language in visitor services.

A tactile model of the entire terrain was considered an important entry-level object. It would particularly benefit the blind, but basically everyone else too.

Multilingual signposts were also highlighted as important orientation elements as part of the barrier-free visitor service, which are essential for a barrier-free route through the site.

## Prototype 2 – Video in German and Polish sign language

### Cause



Difficult to read text board in front of the entrance to the museum.

One of the project team's fundamental decisions at the beginning was that the non-inclusive planned project “Remembrance - Inclusive” would be implemented largely inclusively. As a result, deaf people were also invited as participants in almost all 20 online events. A total of six deaf people from Poland and Germany took part in the analysis of the barriers on site at the Museum Stutthof at the end of September.

Because of the lack of accessibility for deaf people in the memorial, it made sense to form a German-Polish working group to develop a prototype in German and Polish sign language.

The working group selected a text panel in Ravensbrück that presents basic knowledge about the history of the former concentration camp on a text panel before the entrance to the museum.

### Form & Content



Everyone follows the video in Polish sign language. For the German deaf people, the Polish signs are translated into Polish spoken language, from there into German and then into German signs. Complex and very successful interaction!

German and Polish deaf people each worked on the text in difficult language with the support of two sign language interpreters and a hearing historian as well as a few hearing assistants.

The group experienced that translating German or Polish into the respective sign language is not the same as a 1:1 translation. The transmission required an intensive examination of the difficult text: Here one encounters the specification that deaf people cannot easily read the written text, because for them a spoken language is like a complex foreign language. Ideally, a difficult text is first translated into a written text in simple spoken language that adequately reflects the desired message. From this template, deaf people with good sign language expertise can then find the appropriate signs.

In this way, a video in Polish sign language (4:25) and a video in German sign language (2:29) were produced. In addition, an audio recording was made for the hearing participants so that they could follow along during the presentation.

### Feedback



A Polish deaf participant explains the richness of sign language.

The moderator of the working group made it clear at the beginning that the lack of sign videos in the museum makes the entire place incomprehensible for deaf people. This discrimination must be overcome by offering Polish sign language as one of the teaching languages in the museum.

The German and Polish deaf experts recognized major differences in the two videos. They made it clear how important the professional training of the people who sign content in videos is. Sign language is a varied language with many nuances.

Just as in spoken language, a text with different gestures can be less engaging and appealing. For example, spoken language supporting signing (in German: Lautsprachunterstützende Gebärden (LUG)) only accompanies the key words of the spoken language with individual signs (as

happened in the German sign video). That makes the post less appealing overall.

In Germany, a German deaf participant explained, the deaf community has a long history of empowering deaf people who fight against paternalism and heteronomy by hearing people. Deaf sign language experts and deaf participants from Poland acknowledged that there is less independence and self-reliance in the deaf community in Poland. It was described that Polish sign language has fewer signs than the German sign language.

Deaf guests from Germany expressed and emphasized that the hearing sign language interpreters only borrow the sign language of deaf people. Recognizing this fact is important because it means recognizing sign language as a complete language and not constructing it as a replacement for a deficiency, namely being deaf (ableism). Spoken language is just one form of language, sign language is another form of language. The German experts said that deaf sign language interpreters could also be requested in Poland to produce signed videos. This is common in Germany.

In this way, deaf sign language experts stand up for their own language and also generate income. By also paying attention to this connection, the museum acts as an “ally” – a supporter of inclusion, which, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), represents a legal obligation in all EU states that not only requires social rethinking, but also different actions.

At this point it became clear that inclusion also requires intercultural competence in binational negotiations: We can make sure that we do not repeat paternalistic patterns and heteronomy. Each society must negotiate its own ways of redistributing power to achieve civil society balance in its efforts towards inclusion. The neighbourly dialogue about the driving forces and values of inclusion is invaluable - this was also an insight from the presentation of this prototype.



Lively conversation between deaf participants. The other way round: hearing participants have to wait for the audio to be played. Inclusion also means changing habits!

The transcultural, conflictual question of what importance was given to inclusion in the Museum Stutthof and generalized in memorial sites became obvious. In both countries we observe that, on the one hand, inclusion is undoubtedly wanted, but on the other hand it is often neglected. People with disabilities are fundamentally faced with being put off: barrier removal is often thought of proportionately and not holistically with new construction or renovation measures. Most of the time reference is made to financial limits. The UN CRPD, which is action-oriented, suggests that



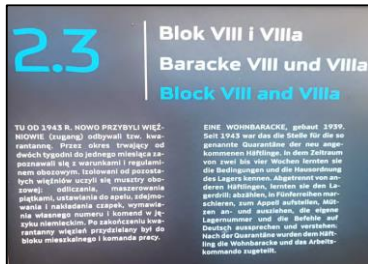
barrier reduction is an overarching, cross-sectional issue. One participant suggested that the pilot project “Remembrance – Inclusive” in the current redesign of the visitor service and the museum's website could lead to a sign video about the new digital 3D tour for people without disabilities being shown at the same time Accessibility situation in the museum or information about it appears in simple language on the website. “Inclusion first” is potentially a very powerful slogan that creates a win-win situation and puts the museum in a very good position. After all, when it comes to inclusion, EVERYONE wins!

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One participant suggested that a pilot project like “Remembrance – Inclusive” could have an immediate impact on the museum's current redesign of visitor services and its website: at the same time as a new digital 3D tour appears on the website for people without restrictions, a sign video about the accessibility situation in the museum or information in simple language should also appear there. “Inclusion first” is potentially a very powerful slogan that creates a win-win situation and puts the museum in a very good position. After all, when it comes to inclusion, EVERYONE wins!

## Prototype 3 – Text panels in plain language

### Cause



Text panel in the Museum Stutthof: Even more complicated history in difficult language

Right from the start, people with learning difficulties were identified as a group of potential project participants. The importance of their inclusion was confirmed by a participant in the first online event. This resulted in the synergy for a course on National Socialism in simple language only for people with learning difficulties. The aim was to recruit some participants with learning difficulties in order to prepare them for the inclusive memorial trip so that they could contribute their experiences as experts on their own behalf.

In the Museum Stutthof, the group recognized the need to basically explain the place in simple language. The first time dealing with the project of translating a text panel from difficult to simple language immediately illustrated to the team the time-consuming complexity of the undertaking. The group took on these tasks.

### Form & Content



The text in simple language is stuck onto a board as a DIN A2 poster by a print expert.

The German-Polish working group selected the 16-line German translation of a Polish text board on a barrack. It is the so-called quarantine station, where the SS prepared the newly arrived prisoners for the humiliation, drill and violence.

The moderator tandem explained the process the working group went through: (1.) discussing the difficult text together, word for word, in order to (2.) understand the meaning and understand the Nazi history associated with it and (3.) to decide which central message the text should convey in plain language (it's about people and not about all historical facts); (4.) written formulation in plain language (in German) with the help of an expert in plain/easy read language, (5.) translation into Polish plain language; (6.) read the text out loud and record it as an audio file and generate a QR code to play the audio; (7.) make a drawing to support the meaning and have the text including the QR code and drawings laid out (by a graphic designer with inclusion experience) and (8.) have the texts printed on a support.



The moderator tandem explains the development of the prototype. Step by step.

The plain language expert underlined the criteria of simple language: short sentences; one thought per sentence; Avoid or explain foreign words; the sentence ends with a period; Avoid subordinate clauses. We learned that the EU logo for Easy to Read, which, unlike plain language, is based on precise rules, is also used in Poland.

The moderators emphasized this point: Plain language cannot simply be translated word for word from a difficult text. As with the presentation of a text for signs, it is a matter of first discussing and interpreting the difficult text in terms of its quintessence. It is very important to have enough time for the transfer to be successful. This is a necessary consequence of the fact that the production of a text in plain language, is per se a matter of participation: people with learning difficulties must be included in the transmission of texts, even in simple language, because only they can really decide whether the resulting text meets the requirements.



The text panels in simple language hang on the barracks wall; Participants try to connect to the WiFi with their cell phones so that they can play the audio file using the QR code. . Modern technology needs the necessary equipment.

In general, it should be noted: The museum staff, especially the historians and educational officers at a memorial site/museum, may be aware that the resulting texts in simple language have less complexity and fundamentally different qualities. This potential for change must be consciously thought through and accepted productively. Texts in simple language are made for everyone.

The participants unanimously stated that the text, in contrast to the original text, was emotionally significant and illustrated central issues of Nazi terror from the perspective of the tortured victims. By reducing complexity, the text in simple language gains power and meaning for visitors. This is important in connection with the requirement to learn from history. It's about activating the imagination. This works extremely well thanks to the clarity of the simple language. Many participants were deeply touched and impressed by the effectiveness of simple language, which offers plenty of scope for clarity and conciseness.

A voice language interpreter emphasized how useful simple language was for him from the interpreter's point of view. It is much easier to translate for simultaneous interpretation.

A blind participant emphasized the advantage of real human voices in the audio. These are more convincing and pleasant than a synthetic voice.

One young man expressed the opinion that no one should be ashamed of using plain language. It is a good thing to simply say things. This was very clear from the prototype-text.

One participant expressed the negative experiences during visits to Nazi memorial sites without using plain language: Visitors are repeatedly confronted with far too many complex issues and stressful feelings in far too short a time. It is possible that automated expectations regarding the conveyance of difficult history need to be reconsidered: difficult history must also be allowed to be conveyed in a less difficult way. Offers for people who may be dependent on scientific complexity for professional reasons should be offered additional opportunities to deepen their knowledge. This material already exists anyway.

The drawings were perceived as non-intrusive and supportive. The music accompaniment to the audio recordings was described as successful.



The four text panels in German and Polish simple language.

The picture below shows the explanation of the difficult word barracks.

The Polish expert on plain/easy read language emphasized that the text in plain language in the Polish version also met the requirements and was a successful, inclusive example of overcoming barriers for people with learning difficulties. She praised the QR code and the audio recording, especially for people who cannot or do not want to read well. It is promising to offer history in various forms.

## Prototype 4 – Guided tour for the blind / tactile guided tour

### Cause

Similar to the issue of accessibility for deaf memorial visitors, when it comes to accessibility for blind and visually impaired visitors, it was obvious that a group would form a group together with the two blind participants from Poland. The needs analysis made it clear that the topic was unused at the Museum Stutthof.

### Form & Content



The team decided on the form and content of the prototype - a tactile tour for blind people to selected places and objects on the site as well as training for guides - during the needs analysis in September 2023. Details were given in Ravensbrück at the beginning of December discussed.

A German-speaking guide and two Polish blind participants took part in the development of the prototype. The German guide in particular was fascinated by his encounters with the “Remembrance – Inclusive” project and the entire team. It powerfully sensitized him personally; he was downright blind to the needs of people with disabilities. Of all people, the non-sighted people helped him to recognize his blind spots in relation to barriers in the museum, but also during his tours.



Participants of the tour for blind people on the grounds of the Museum Stutthof

During the presentation, the entire group went outside to the site. A visually impaired Polish participant had brought along glasses with varying levels of visual impairment: anyone who wanted could put on such glasses to simulate visual impairment or blindness. Some participants took advantage of this offer of a self-experiment, others were sure that this simulation was not a meaningful imitation of an experience that could not be replicated.

The guide explained a few rules: The directions to which he draws attention during his tour, he explains about the times: 12:00 p.m. (in front of you), 6 a.m. (behind you), 9 a.m. (to your left), 3 o'clock (to your right). He asks that you be considerate of each other and keep a certain distance and follow his instructions. By clapping his hands, he asked for the attention of the relatively large group.

The tour lasted 45 minutes. Unfortunately, some places were already closed. All in all, it was clear that the working group as a whole had not been able to use enough continuous joint preparation time. This was not least due to language barriers.

## Feedback



Blind people, people with good and bad eyesight, deaf people, hard of hearing and hearing people, people who learn faster and slower, talk together and learn from one another: it's all inclusive!

The guide received much praise and recognition for his first attempt at guiding blind people. He was particularly successful at stimulating the plastic imagination of blind people. One participant commented that it was good, if the guide tried to remain as neutral as possible and refrain from making judgments. Another participant praised the fact that the guide showed feelings and that emotions were expressed in his voice.

The blind participants rated clapping as particularly helpful because it was an important orientation for them in everyday life.

A tour for blind people should be limited to ten people. A tactile tour should take at least two hours with sufficient breaks.

It is absolutely important that after a change of location or point of view, the guide always waits until all participants have complied and only then continues speaking.

The communicative interaction between the guide and the participants was rated positively. This was particularly successful with the offer to touch materials such as a replica of a prisoner's suit.

A tactile model for orientation on the site in the entrance area is essential.

A deaf participant emphasized that it is generally desirable to have a guide who knows the special needs for communication and learning in the historical location of people with specific disabilities. From a deaf perspective, this would be a deaf guide with good historical knowledge and experience guiding deaf people.

One of the blind participants concluded by expressing his joy at being invited to all three inclusive memorial trips. The removal of barriers for blind people must be experimented on together. He is happy to share his expertise as a blind person in dealing with all sorts of hurdles and obstacles here in the museum in this important context. He wishes the Museum Stutthof to be able to use the many suggestions and practical insights.

One participant who lives with Down syndrome shared her observation that putting on the glasses seemed like a "time machine" for her. Without being distracted by seeing, she felt particularly close to the of time and the fate of people during the guided tour. This approach helped her and took away her fear of getting mentally involved in the terrible Nazi era.

The German guide from the Museum Stutthof explained that he was enriched by participating in the “Remembrance – Inclusive” project because he had become more aware of the many hurdles that exclude people with disabilities, for example in the area of historical education work. He learned a tremendous amount from his practice as a guide. He looks forward to continuing to support the museum and the educational management, whose doors are open to the inclusive redesign of the entire memorial complex.



One participant listens intently.



Many praises for Prototype 4!



Imagine: living and dying in the concentration camp barracks.



The educational management is pleased that the guests are present again.



Questions from participants: What happens to the important findings?



Start of the tour in front of the former Commandant's office.



German-Polish friendship!



Help for guides from activists of inclusion: What is the best focus when giving a tour for people with different needs? What do I leave out as less important?



Great support from the moderators, three voice language interpreters and four sign language interpreters (not all in the picture).

In **conclusion**, we formulate the most important findings:

- The decisions to reduce barriers in memorial sites and other places of historical learning, as in all other areas, also take place within exclusive social conditions and boundaries. These boundaries can be pushed!
- Inclusion initiatives can start anywhere. There is no reason to wait for anything. There are good reasons to start at any time.
- Inclusive projects should be planned inclusively. Teams with only people who are not personally affected by disability should recruit experts experienced in inclusion for cooperation. Participation in the early planning phase is a prerequisite for success for inclusive projects.
- To actually break down barriers in memorial sites, it is essential that employees and management engage in a continuous, profound process of reflection on the meaning of inclusion. They must agree on the changes that will occur with the removal of barriers in the overall system of the memorial and its educational work. It is important to continue this process in dialogue with inclusion experts and to consult them. Without this learning process and awareness, the inclusive restructuring cannot succeed.
- Sustainable barrier reduction in memorial sites and when organizing inclusive memorial trips is successful if people without disabilities pay greater attention not to reduce people with disabilities to the characteristics in which they differ from the supposed normal state. This mechanism is called ableism; it prevents equal treatment and the creation of spaces for everyone.
- The [Index of Inclusion](#) offers a compass for strategic process design when removing barriers, including in memorial sites. It recommends starting at any point and creating inclusive culture (building community), establishing inclusive structures (one for all) and developing inclusive practices (tours and educational opportunities for all).<sup>1</sup>
- For the implementation of the “Remembrance – inclusive” project, which confirms the positive feedback from those involved, the Inclusion Index accompanied the German-Polish cooperation and provided it with orientation: It is a strong German-Polish network of people with and without Disability arose, we kept the project open to everyone and - albeit only to a limited extent - established inclusive practices.

We would like to thank everyone involved for their great interest and extraordinary commitment and look forward to continuing our important collaboration!

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<sup>1</sup> See also: <https://index-for-inclusion.org/en/>



## Imprint

"Remembrance – inclusive/Erinnern – inklusiv"

Event report with photos of the second inclusive memorial trip to the Museum Stutthof

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