



## LARGE-SCALE LISTENING HOLIDAYS FOR EVERYONE: HOW TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE

THE NETWORK 'WHY HOLIDAYS MATTER' IS LISTENING AND LEARNING ON A LARGE SCALE

## COLOFON

Why Holidays Matter makes holidays possible in Flanders for people who experience holiday barriers. In order to do this properly, it is necessary to understand what is and what is not already working. Numbers alone are not enough to make this clear. We need stories as well. We want to make visible that which is unmeasurable. What are the experiences of counsellors, holidaymakers and tourism providers? What moments made a difference? We heard many different and personal experiences. We can learn from that abundance. That is why we collected 1,004 experiences that, together, give us a varied and fascinating picture of how we in Flanders make holidays possible for one another.

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D/2019/5635/26/4

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**Flanders**  
State of the Art

**VISITFLANDERS**

# LARGE-SCALE LISTENING: MAKING HOLIDAYS POSSIBLE FOR EVERYONE HOW DO WE DO IT?

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THE NETWORK, WHY HOLIDAYS MATTER, LISTENING AND LEARNING ON A LARGE-SCALE

**RESEARCH** Tourism is based on living roots. In Flanders, holidays are a basic right for everyone. There is a firm belief in the positive effects of holidays and the wish for everyone to be able to experience them. People who feel good about themselves have more strength to make something beautiful out of their life. People who feel appreciated have more faith in other people and look at society in a positive way. Holidays contribute to feeling good about yourself and being open to different people and things. They spark a desire to discover and learn, and to find time to deepen your relationships with family, friends and others. Bringing quality holidays within the reach of everyone, means investing in the well-being of people, contributing to the open mind of future generations and helping to make our society hospitable, healthy, inclusive and supportive.

The task of VISITFLANDERS is to make holidays accessible to people who are experiencing barriers. The Steunpunt Vakantieparticipatie (Holiday Participation Centre) was set up for this purpose. In order to do this properly, it is necessary to understand what is and what is not working. Numbers alone are not enough to make this clear. We also need an abundance of stories. We want to make visible that which is unmeasurable. What are the experiences of counsellors, holidaymakers and tourism providers? What moments made a difference? We heard many different and personal experiences. We want to learn from that abundance. That's why we collected 1,004 experiences that together give us a varied and fascinating picture of how we, in Flanders, make holidays possible for one another.

With what we learned from this beautiful large-scale listening exercise, we can strengthen what is already working well, and take initiatives in areas where there is still room for improvement...together with over 2,000 of our partners, of course! After all, beautiful stories are what drive us. This includes the difficult ones, too, where we work with the greatest of interest and determination.

Marianne Schapmans,  
Director of the Holiday Participation Centre, VISITFLANDERS



**7** THE NETWORK ‘WHY HOLIDAYS MATTER’

**11** LARGE-SCALE LISTENING:  
LEARNING FROM STORIES

**31** WHAT DID WE LEARN:  
9 THEMES

**57** REFLECTION  
ON 9 THEMES

**65** CONCLUSION

# INDEX







**PREAMBLE** Within the context of social tourism, the **2014-2019 policy paper** by the Flemish Minister of Tourism, Ben Weyts, aims to bring tourism within the reach of every Fleming. The Minister wants to provide a suitable offer for every age, for every budget - for every Fleming, able-bodied or not.. Of course, in addition to focussing upon existing target groups, new target groups and their barriers to participation first need to be identified, studied and mapped out and this was the dedicated project of the Holiday Participation Centre. The result has been the development of an **integrated approach toward holiday participation able to reduces all possible holiday barriers** for Flemings – and, the reason for the 2018 name change to **Why Holidays Matter**.

Social challenges such as poverty, diversity, social exclusion, loneliness, inclusion, ageing and health care are often so complex that one organisation or policy area cannot tackle them on its own. Indeed, these issues require the knowledge and strength of an entire society. However, a small but important step in the right direction can be a relaxing holiday or a nice day out with your family. While this won't miraculously cure poverty or social isolation, it does provide part of the answer as holidays can create a healing space for people whose life situation is precarious and often difficult to bare.





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**“Everyone Deserves a Holiday:  
a unique network in Europe.**



# NETWORK 'WHY HOLIDAYS MATTER'

At the beginning of 2000, the government and its partners established that not all Flemish people had access to holidays. To this end, VISITFLANDERS set up the Holiday Participation Centre in May 2001. Its aim is to enable those living in poverty to go on holiday. The European 'poverty line' is the norm applied here. Since 2014, this network has also been working on barriers other than the financial one.

The Holiday Participation Centre has developed into a **unique concept in Europe** - and by extension the whole world - to make holidays possible for everyone. The Holiday Participation Centre is neither a traditional government service nor office; rather, it is a partner network that brings together expertise, goodwill and social responsibility to realise the right to holidays for all Flemings. As such, the Holiday Participation Centre is located at the intersection between supply and demand as its services are offered to both Flemings and all partners. Of course, while these services can be tailored to individual needs, it is important to highlight that they are not a form of assistance. Indeed, the social organisations themselves are best situated to assess this as they know the people who want to go on a holiday or day trip. As such, the holidaymaker does not have to tell their story again or prove their income in order to apply for a holiday. The Holiday Participation Centre has confidence in the social organisations with regard to their support and screening of the holidaymakers - support that includes filling in the forms, preparing for the holiday, and so on.

The Holiday Participation Centre forms a network and cooperates with more than 1.800 **social organisations** in Flanders: PCSWs, voluntary organisations and associations reaching a wide range of target groups. These organisations discuss the offer with potential holidaymakers in their customer group or member base via holiday guides and the website [www.iedereenverdientvakantie.be](http://www.iedereenverdientvakantie.be) (English website: <https://whyholidaysmatter.wordpress.com/>).

In order to strengthen the right to a holiday and to have more of a local presence on the ground, in recent years there has also been a strong focus on starting up and developing **Rap Op Stap offices**. People experiencing a financial barrier can easily get in touch with these local travel agencies, without any risk of stigmatisation. These offices are largely set up with the help of various organisations 'in the field' and are often run by volunteers and, from the very start of the expansion of these offices, they have proven to be highly successful for the target group.

The **tourism partners** from our network commit to a specific offer, and it is they themselves who determine the extent of this commitment. They make their accommodation accessible, provide a social discount rate, and offer specific support. In this partnership, these entrepreneurs are able to show their emotional engagement, reach more visitors, discover new opportunities, launch innovations and work on a positive image. With its Holiday Participation Centre, VISITFLANDERS acts as a cross-pollinator and a lever, and helps create connections, promotion and mediation.

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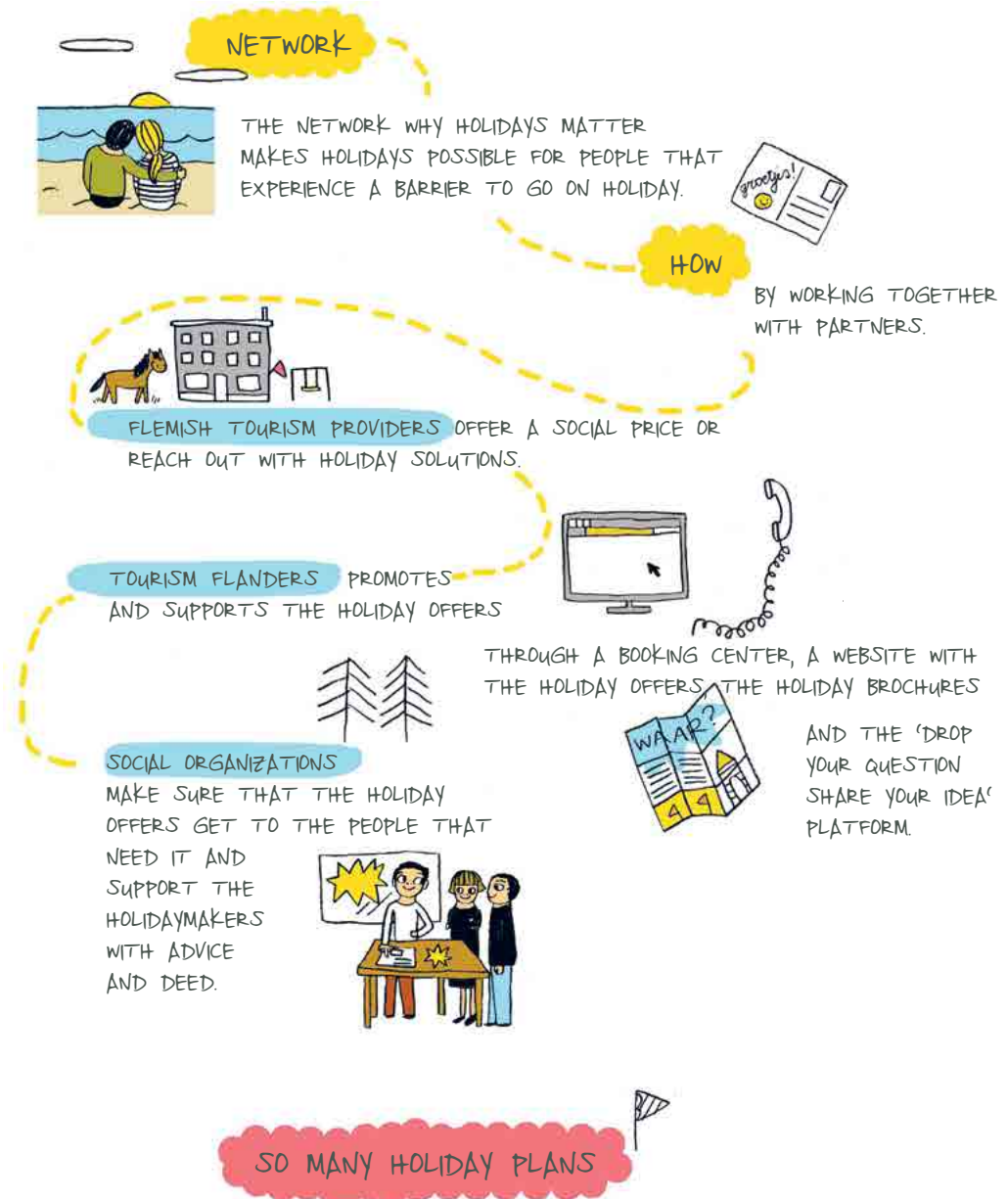
**"It's the unique interplay of 1,800 social member organisations and more than 600 tourism partners that makes holidays possible, even when faced with difficulties.**

The Why Holidays Matter network reached **166,779 holiday makers for a day trip or holiday in 2018.**

## How does it work?

The network Why Holidays Matter is a unique partnership between Flemish tourism partners, social organizations and people with holiday plans.

Scan this code and discover the network video.





## SO MANY HOLIDAY PLANS

THE HOLIDAY OFFERS PROVIDE IN SHORT, LONG, GROUP AN INDIVIDUAL HOLIDAYS. SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE!



DAY TRIPS, ORGANIZED HOLIDAYS, INDIVIDUAL HOLIDAYS, GROUP HOLIDAYS

## SO MANY HOLIDAY PROVIDERS

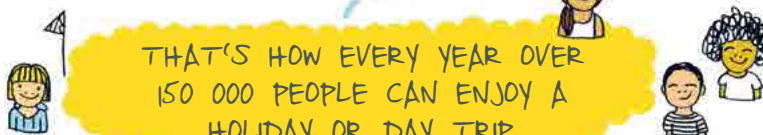
TOURISM FLANDERS WORKS WITH MORE THAN 600 TOURISM PROVIDERS, SPREAD ALL OVER FLANDERS.

WEST FLANDERS,  
EAST FLANDERS,  
ANTWERP,  
LIMBURG,  
FLEMISH BRABANT

MORE THAN 1800 SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS MATCH THE RIGHT VACATION TO THE FAMILIES AND PEOPLE WHO NEED IT.

WEST FLANDERS,  
EAST FLANDERS,  
ANTWERP,  
LIMBURG,  
FLEMISH BRABANT

THAT'S HOW EVERY YEAR OVER 150 000 PEOPLE CAN ENJOY A HOLIDAY OR DAY TRIP.





**“What are the experiences of  
social organisations, holiday  
makers and tourism partners?”**



# LARGE-SCALE LISTENING: LEARNING FROM STORIES

Making tourism accessible to people who face holiday barriers. In order to succeed in this, it is important to have a good understanding of what already works and what can still be improved. Numbers alone are not enough to make this clear. We need context and an abundance of stories to do that. We will strengthen practices that work. We can creatively tackle the issues that people face.

The experiences of holidaymakers, holiday counsellors, social organisations and tourism providers are crucial. Experiences are difficult to detect in standard studies. Facts and figures do not tell us everything about people's perceptions, as opinions are easily swayed. This is why we chose to collect a wealth of stories from our partners and holidaymakers. We asked them: what moments make a difference with regard to the way you view holiday opportunities?

In order to carry out our study, we opted for the **narrative research method: 'SenseMaker'**. The listening exercise was largely carried out by voluntary 'Ears' who listened to and wrote down hundreds of stories.

People tell big and small stories: about a suitcase someone let them borrow, a neighbour who gave them a lift to the station, or that specific focus or special attention paid to them by the holiday location. We heard a multitude of different and personal experiences, and we want to learn from them.

## SENSEMAKER METHOD

SenseMaker is a learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation method that focuses on peoples' stories and experiences. The method is used in research, learning pathways, follow-up and impact assessment for complex change processes. This research method truly gives people a voice. It provides quick insight into what is going on with a particular group or system, and the method generates information about things that are often more difficult to measure than with ordinary questionnaires (such as behaviour, motives, values, perceptions and underlying dynamics).

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### WHAT IS SENSEMAKER?

#### SenseMaker collects micro-stories

SenseMaker is based on gathering a large number of stories (500 - 3,000) that are interpreted by the storytellers themselves.

**“SenseMaker gives everyone an equal voice. Even those voices that are not often heard.**

- Stories are regarded as 'micro-narratives'. These are descriptions of experiences, anecdotes, moments, situations, etc. people have lived through. These mini stories are expressed as one would share them in the office, on the street, in a lift, on the bus, etc. with friends, family or neighbours.
- We are not looking for well-constructed stories that aim to make a particular point, or which follow a tight storyline. SenseMaker collects experience fragments from many different people.
- It is the number (quantity) and variety of the experiences and perspectives that enable us to identify patterns in the themes or target audiences we want to study. In a similar way to oriental carpets or frescoes which have finer patterns and more detail if more threads are used, SenseMaker's reality becomes more visible if we are able to collect more fragments of experiences.

### Storytellers give their own meaning

In most qualitative research methods, researchers assign meaning to the stories they collect. Under this method, the storytellers do this themselves by answering questions about their experience or anecdote. This allows us to also understand what took place in the context or underlying layers of the experience, that is, through feelings, dynamics, values, situation, the people involved, etc.

### Everyone has an equal say

SenseMaker gives everyone an equal voice, even those voices not often heard. It literally gives everyone a voice and 'reads' a system from within.

### Discovering patterns

In research based on stories, it is often difficult to discover patterns in the stories themselves. By allowing the storytellers to interpret their story themselves, these patterns become visible. This gives us insight into underlying values, motives, feelings, dynamics, etc. as

the storytellers' interpretation adds new meaning to the stories. The text of the mini stories provides additional narrative and qualitative information about the patterns that emerge.

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### USING SENSEMAKER

SenseMaker can be used in an exploratory or evaluative way. Through an exploratory process we attempt to understand what is going on in people's lives, their thoughts, the dynamics at play, what drives them, the challenges they face, etc. It often also comes down to literally understanding the kind of stories that people tell about a theme.

When SenseMaker is used in an evaluative manner, the stories and additional questions are used to obtain feedback on certain interventions or themes, such as a satisfaction analysis or impact analysis in people after a training or an intervention.

The 'large-scale listening' learning pathway is clearly **exploratory in nature**.



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**“Collecting stories requires care and attention, especially when it comes to people in a socially vulnerable position.**



## COLLECTING STORIES IN 9 PHASES

### PHASE 1

SenseMaker questionnaire design

### PHASE 2

Questionnaire test

Holiday Participation Forum 2016

### PHASE 3

Two-day training for story gatherers

We call the story gatherers

our 'Ears'

### PHASE 4

Facilitator sessions

### PHASE 5

Follow-up day for Ears

and facilitators

### PHASE 6

Analysis of the stories

and patterns

### PHASE 7

Conference with the first results



### RESULTS: 9 THEMES

What did we learn?

### PHASE 8

Holiday Participation Forum 2017

### PHASE 9

Next steps

We consider some of the steps in the process we want to explain in more detail so that the reader can better understand the unique nature of our approach. This research goes further than purely qualitative research. After all, collecting and analysing stories requires extra care and attention, especially when it comes to people in a socially vulnerable position.

## QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Through an exploratory process, we attempt to understand what is going on in people's lives, their thoughts, the dynamics at play, what drives them, what challenges they face, and so on. Often, it also comes down to literally understanding the kind of stories that people tell about a theme.

We seek out that which we want to understand, questions to which we ourselves have no answers. An exploration of our own curiosity, about what can help to better understand the power and the mechanism of the network, 'Why Holidays Matter'.

### LARGE-SCALE LISTENING KEY QUESTION

We formulated a key question. That question was adapted for holidaymakers and holiday facilitators.

#### The questions we asked holidaymakers:

- Think back to a moment/experience in which you were or were not able to contribute to holiday opportunities for others.
- Think back to a moment/experience in which a holiday was or was not made possible for yourself or for your family.

#### The question we asked holiday providers, social organisations and sympathisers:

- Think back to a moment/experience in which you were or were not able to contribute to holiday opportunities for others.

### FOUR TYPES OF QUESTIONS

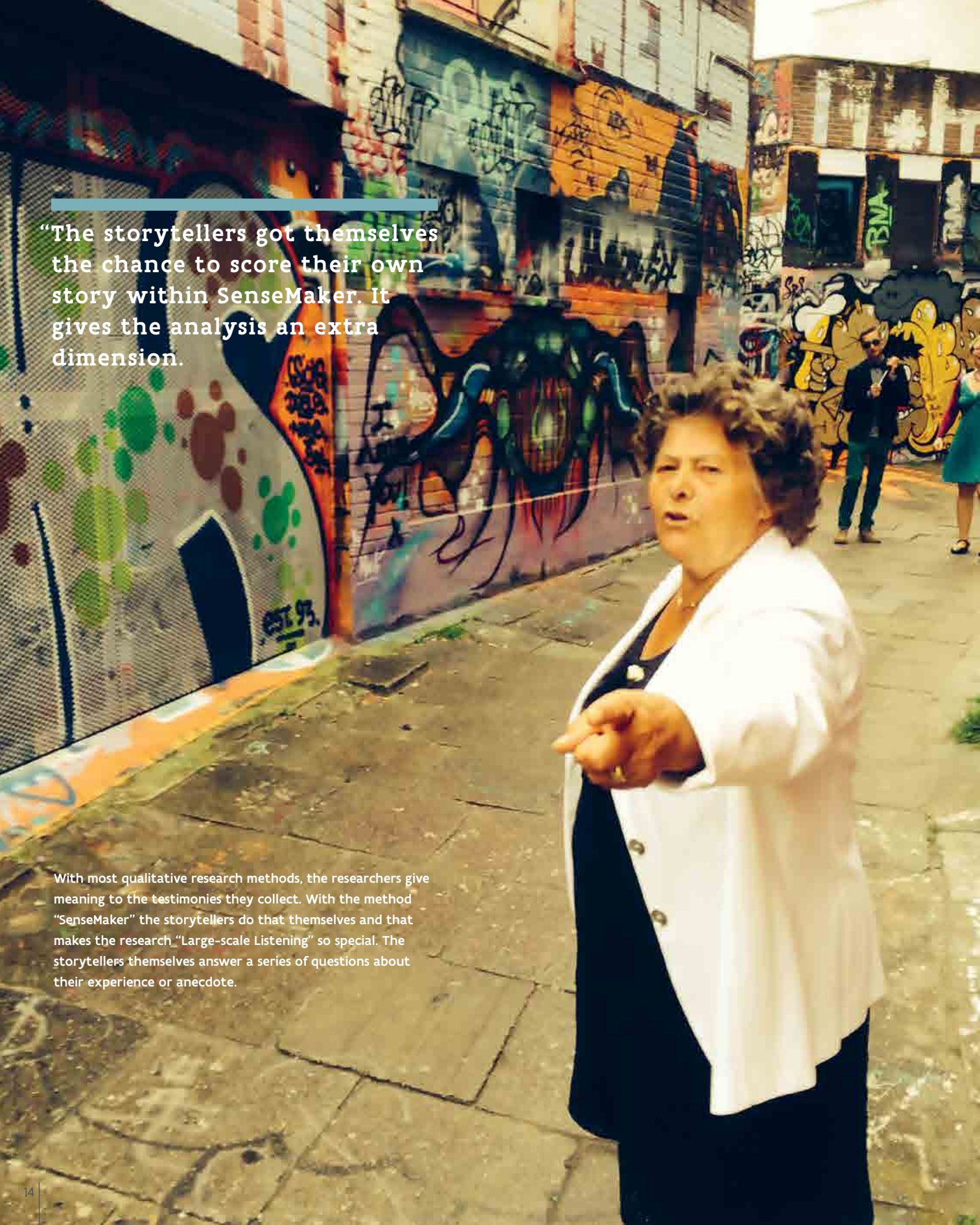
Four types of questions were used. These were answered by the storyteller to give more meaning to the stories.

#### 1: Multiple-choice questions

Multiple-choice questions search for easily defined values. They are useful for 'tagging' the stories. This way, you can categorise these stories during the analysis and use them as a search filter. This enables us, for example, to quickly detect and read stories that make people 'happy' or 'sad', stories about 'barriers' or stories that very rarely occur (see example on next page)

#### 2: Triangular questions (triads)

Triangular questions allow respondents to provide a nuanced answer between 3 answer options. The closer the 'dot' is moved to one particular corner, the more weight is given to this option, and consequently less weight to the other answer options. The corners work like magnets on the 'dot'. The answer to the question is therefore not only limited to 1 option.

A woman with short, curly brown hair, wearing a white blazer over a dark top, stands on a sidewalk and points her right index finger towards a wall covered in colorful graffiti. The graffiti includes various styles, including bubble letters, tags, and abstract designs. In the background, other people are visible, and the scene appears to be an urban street. The overall tone is vibrant and artistic.

“The storytellers got themselves the chance to score their own story within SenseMaker. It gives the analysis an extra dimension.

With most qualitative research methods, the researchers give meaning to the testimonies they collect. With the method “SenseMaker” the storytellers do that themselves and that makes the research “Large-scale Listening” so special. The storytellers themselves answer a series of questions about their experience or anecdote.

Field questions allow respondents to position different elements in an X-Y 'field'. Actors can be placed in the field to indicate how much interest and influence they can exert to improve the situation in the story. Given the complexity of the exercises, it was decided to add only one such question.

### EXAMPLE of a multiple-choice question

5. In my story holiday is seen as a... (max 1 option)

☐ luxury  
☐ reward  
☐ evidence  
☐ right  
☐ need  
☐ other...

6. Who should hear my story? (max 2 options)

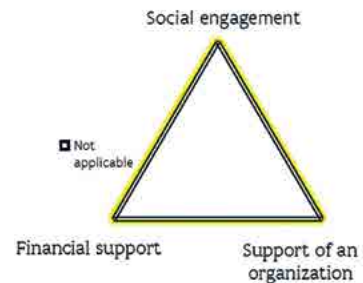
☐ Holiday Participation Centre  
☐ holiday provider  
☐ broad audience  
☐ colleagues  
☐ media  
☐ holiday participants  
☐ social organizations  
☐ family or friends  
☐ government  
☐ other...

7. My story is mainly about a... (max. 1 option)

☐ problem  
☐ opportunity  
☐ solution

Line questions allow respondents to give a nuanced answer between two extreme answers. Respondents can indicate where their answer fits on the spectrum. Respondents therefore don't have to choose between one of the two answers.

12. What contributed to my story was...



20. Which persons/ authorities do I think are important/less important to better or strengthen the situation in my story?

Place the numbers in the field where you think they belong. Only fill in the ones that are important for your story.

- 1 Me
- 2 My organization
- 3 Holiday Participation Centre
- 4 Social sector
- 5 Tourist sector
- 6 Transport sector
- 7 Government

		The interest to better or strengthen the situation in my story	
		LOW	HIGH
The influence to better or strengthen the situation in my story	HIGH		
	LOW		

21. The situation in my story occurred because of a...

Personal initiative      Common initiative

Not applicable

22. The people in my story...

Do as they usually do  Are going against the stream

Not applicable



Patrick Vandenberghe is a policy advisor on communication and behavioural insights at the Department of Chancellery and Governance of the Government of Flanders. This department is a centre of expertise on how the Government of Flanders can create better policy. Its tasks include: sharing expertise on innovative forms of policy, participation and coordination in order to tackle complex social challenges.



**Patrick:** 'During the Holiday Participation Forum 2017, I saw the results of the listening exercise and a short demo of the SenseMaker tool. I realised then that VISITFLANDERS is truly working on this in the long term. Patiently and persistently, starting with the foundation, then a floor, followed by another floor. It also listens to people, which makes them feel appreciated. VISITFLANDERS thus also creates warmth in society, and more respect or credit for the government as a brand. Everything fell into place, which made me very happy. So happy in fact that I decided that I wanted to further spread this message to the Government of Flanders.

**Patrick:** The bottom line is that I see a government agency at work here that does not simply approach its objectives concerning

poverty and disadvantaged groups in a top-down manner, but chooses to hear what is needed from the people themselves. And so, it puts a structure in place for that, which pays off over time. This involves truly listening to people's stories, combined with a solid analysis of those stories. You can find inspiration in the positive stories, and learn from the negative stories. Incidentally: the fact that the Holiday Participation Centre has set up a network with voluntary 'Ears' for this purpose is wonderful. What a gift it is to empower people!

Also, this is not the result of a typical, large, all-encompassing plan that was devised in Brussels and rolled out without much thought. This is what really struck me: the Centre had the courage to experiment with stories.



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**“VISITFLANDERS thereby creates warmth in society, and more respect or credit.**

**It listens to people, which makes them feel appreciated.**



## THE STORY GATHERERS – THE ‘EARS’

After the first test of the questionnaire at the 2016 Holiday Participation Forum, it became clear that large-scale listening would only be possible if we made an effort to truly listen in the literal sense of the word. Listening means, ‘letting people tell their story and giving their story all the space it needs in a personal conversation’.

In order to make this possible, we engaged ‘Ears’. These were people who, within the Why Holidays Matter network, had already demonstrated that they wanted to make an active contribution to the realisation of the right to a holiday. We launched the question

in our network and personally spoke to people. Their assignment was to conduct 10 to 15 conversations with people they could reach in their area and with whom they wanted to exchange ideas about how we make holidays possible for one another in Flanders. Some 25 people responded enthusiastically to our question. Their willingness to go out and collect stories in the period from April to October 2017 went on to become one of the key elements that contributed to achieving our intended results. Of the 1,000 stories submitted, more than 600 were contributed by the Ears. This wonderful result is the outcome of a caring process of connection, encouragement and involvement.



The Ears group collected more than 600 listening conversations. They were coached during two training weekends.

PROCESS

Team formation and training

The volunteer Ears were invited for a two-day meeting in an environment that stimulated the holiday spirit. We focused a lot on getting to know each other and forming groups. The training component included:

- An introduction to the large-scale listening exercise
- Practising personal interviews in which interviewers focused on the dignity of the interviewee.
- Becoming familiar with and learning how to use SenseMaker’s online tool
- Thinking about what contacts they wanted to make with people around them to listen to stories.
- Making agreements

We organised the two-day training course twice, each time for a group of up to 14 participants.

Encouragement and support of the Ears

Two participants in the first training course took the lead in the coaching and support of the Ears.

They set up a Facebook group in order to retain the connection after the training course. The Ears were contacted by telephone from time to time to check whether they were on the right track, and if they were encountering any difficulties or whether they needed any help.

The team of Why Holidays Matter created extra listening opportunities (for example through the Holiday Tour June-October 2017 and the Forum 2017) and supported the Ears by providing them with tools, such as Interview Guides.

Interim meeting with the Ears

The Ears came together at the halfway point of the listening process. Over the course of a day, they told stories about their experiences and had the opportunity to ask each other questions. Discussing their experiences helped them to strengthen their own listening skills and sparked enthusiasm. During this session, the Ears were also given a picture of the interim results of the study, and talked to each other about the meaning of the themes and concerns that had arisen.



DIGNITY-MAINTAINING PRACTICES

Conversation tactics that ‘suppress’ the other person  
Avoid ...

- Judging and evaluating
- Assuming you understand
- Recover, solve problems, intervene
- Placing the problem ‘in’ the person (‘I am...’)
- Giving advice and reframing
- Remain neutral
- Knowledge about
- Ignorance of the power of knowledge
- Confirm, applaud

These practices arise when you assume that you know things about people they don’t know about themselves.

Conversation tactics that ‘liberate’ the other person  
Feel free to ...

- Be considerably curious
- Ask questions that you don’t know the answer to by using the narrator’s vocabulary
- Elevate the narrator to the primary author of the story
- Separate the problem from the person: make it an ‘it’
- Listen generously and be open to being surprised and changing your mind
- Stand alongside the narrator, as your fellow traveller
- Get to know one another
- De-construct the power of knowledge
- Share your reflections and the gifts you received from the conversation

These practices arise from an attitude of ignorance about the other with a deep appreciation for their uniqueness.

### Conference with the Ears

Upon completion of the study, and after an initial analysis of the results, the Ears came together again to discover the results over an entire day. They discovered patterns in the results and substantiated them with their stories and reflections. They provided us with important directions that helped us in the further interpretation of the stories. This conference set the tone for the final in-depth analysis of the results.

### Forum 2017

At the 2017 Forum (the yearly gathering of the network), the Ears were given a prominent place in the organisation. Those who wanted to contribute further were also able to take on a task at reception, listen to stories in the 'Connect your Story' booth, etc. Two volunteers told about their experiences on stage. A third Ear recounted a few of the discovered stories to the audience.

**“Individual stories  
that are nonetheless  
connected.**

**We can't isolate results in this  
connection.**



## THE FOUNDATIONS OF LARGE-SCALE LISTENING

### Opening remarks of the

**Large-scale Listening Conference, oktober 2017**

'Without small stories, there can be no big stories.'

There is a network of partners in place, all of whom have agreed on something. 2,200 partners and a multitude of people agree that everyone deserves a holiday. They agree that holidays are good for the body and mind and that everyone should be able to enjoy these beneficial effects. Community workers, hotel and accommodation owners, social workers, museums and attractions, volunteers and professionals... all agreed and so joined the network.

The network exists. There is a lot going on, but the network is an intangible thing. There is no photo of it; it is invisible and visible at the same time.

Over the past few months, we listened to this extensive network. Why Holidays Matter - how is this made a reality? Or perhaps not? We collected 1,004 small stories, all of which are relevant; because without the small stories there is no big story. It's a treasure trove of insights and messages that help us understand Individual stories that are nonetheless connected. We cannot isolate results in this connection.

How do so many wonderful things emerge in this network? It's like the story of the seed and the tree. On its own, the seed has insufficient source material to grow into a tree. But that seed makes a crucial contribution, it is the place, the point, the locus from which the tree forms. The seed perfectly organises the growth process, it attracts water and nutrients. The seed is the gateway through which the future possibility of a tree visibly emerges. Each story is a gateway through which a future world in which holidays are possible for everyone emerges. Each story is a gateway that helps us better understand the bigger story.

In order to be able to look at and understand all these stories with an open mind, it is necessary to silence our minds and open our hearts.

It is not easy to have an open mind, to briefly silence all the ideas and patterns we have known for years in order to better hear the wisdom of the whole and the wisdom of our heart. What we see is often limited by what we already know. By remaining aware of this, we allow ourselves to be open to opportunities. To have a fresh and open mind.

We don't want to prove or refute. We want to learn from the stories and understand the beauty of this network. To understand what it takes to make a holiday possible.

I would like to invite you to hold on to this treasure out of an open-mindedness and to recognise each story as a seed from which the future of a tree emerges.

## RESULTS

Besides the fact that the Ears made an essential contribution to the collection of the 1,000 stories, this choice yielded unexpected results, for which the team is very grateful today

### 1- GROWING NETWORK OF AMBASSADORS

The network of **Ambassadors** for the mission 'Why Holidays Matter' has grown significantly.

25 people who listened to 600 stories together grew into a deeply lived experience of believing in Why Holidays Matter. Listening, the Ears discovered that while many good things are already happening in Flanders, too many people are still not enjoying their right to a holiday. The commitment—and sometimes indignation with regard to careless practices—was strongly felt in discussions with the Ears.

Ears on the road during the holiday tour.



## Hilde Gyselinck, Voluntary Ear

### Social workers, where are you?

Hilde listened to over 60 stories about how people in Flanders make holidays possible for each other. It was a wonderful experience, she says, an experience of hope, inspiration and emotion. And sometimes indignation. 'Holidays are a right,' says Hilde, 'but unfortunately we cannot say that all people have the same rights. There's much more work to be done. Hilde believes that everyone should be able to dream of a holiday and insist on receiving assistance if required. 'Social workers, where are you?', she often wondered. Hilde concludes: 'Whether or not people

have access to holidays in practice depends very much on who listens to your (holiday) request.'

### Just be happy

'Incidentally, I have met many people who are entitled to Holiday Participation rates but who are still paying full price. These are often even families who were assisted. Regrettably, I have discovered that social organisations still provide too little assistance when it comes to assisting people with regard to a holiday. Information is filtered, people don't hear about all the options, and often can't browse through holiday brochures in peace and quiet. And they're told more than once that they should just be happy, because it's cheaper anyway.'

60 holiday stories later, Hilde wants to invite social organisations to take a closer look at what people are entitled to and to give them the opportunity to make use of these rights. That's important. Because holidays are essential. And because everyone has to be able to rely on equal treatment.'





## Wendy Van de Cruys, Voluntary Ear

### **The right to a holiday: an obvious but still not obtained right**

Last summer, Wendy listened to dozens of stories about how people contribute to other people's holiday opportunities. She lent her ear for the large-scale listening exercise by the Holiday Participation Centre. Listening, Wendy entered a world in which poverty reigns, a world in which holidays, while necessary, are certainly not a given. What surprised her most about this experience? And what still needs to be done to realise the right to a holiday for more people?

### **Make the right to a holiday even more widely known!**

Wendy: 'Many people remain unaware of the existence of the Holiday Participation Centre. Some were quite shocked when I told

them about it. 'How has no one ever told me about it?', they asked in surprise, and sometimes indignation. I heard a similar complaint from people who do not live in poverty. After all, they often know people in their circle who are never able to enjoy a holiday. 'Why is it that I've never come across it before?', someone asked me. I think these people are an important link. If strong, caring citizens are aware of the options, they can make a big difference to vulnerable people in their neighbourhood

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## 2. DISTRIBUTION OF THE WHY HOLIDAYS MATTER MESSAGE

Ears told of numerous conversations in which it became clear that people were not aware of the existence of Why Holidays Matter. They often came across feelings of guilt and shame of people living in poverty or people with care needs. Throughout these conversations, Ears were also able to provide information and encourage people to take further steps towards the satisfying experience of a holiday. Sometimes they even arranged for the storytellers to go on holiday then and there.





Wim Caeyers, PCSW Mol chairman

#### **Rap op Stap<sup>1</sup> in Mol: this was lacking**

Sunday 25 March 2018 - Rap op Stap Mol kicks off festively. It is a logical next step in the municipality's inclusive leisure policy, says alderman and PCSW chairman Wim Caeyens. 5 years ago, with the Mol leisure vouchers, Mol opened the door to local leisure participation for underprivileged people. Today, another door will be opened to the world: the Rap op Stap office will assist residents with financial, mental or physical disabilities to find and book a day trip or holiday. The initiative is actively supported by the Disability Advisory Board and relies largely on the commitment of volunteers. This was a deliberate choice.

#### **Inspired by a good story**

One day in 2017 Wim was paid a visit by Marleen Vandecraen, a resident of Mol and a committed Ear in the Why Holidays Matter Network of VISITFLANDERS. Marleen talked to the PCSW chairman about holidays for people living in poverty. Wim: 'She presented it in such an enthusiastic and personal manner that I got involved immediately. Of course, people do not only want to enjoy leisure time in Mol. They also want to get away from their environment and see something of the world. A Rap op Stap office is therefore a logical next step in our inclusive leisure policy.'

<sup>1</sup>Rap op Stap are local agencies for leisure and travelling, for people on a low income. These agencies are specifically designed to reach people who are not members of a social organisation: this breaks down barriers.

### **3. LOCAL NETWORKS HAVE BEEN ACTIVATED**

The Ears were invited to listen to stories in their own environment, with people they can either easily reach, or with people they feel might be able to have an influence. In this way, various discussions were held with, among others, aldermen, PCSW chairmen, social workers from services for community development and welfare, local youth associations, etc.





## Mieke Deblaere, Voluntary Ear

### **'Being an ear literally changed the way I listen and talk'**

Imagine your strength as a bucket. You can carry whatever fits inside. The less heavy your bucket is, the easier it becomes to hold. Sadness, anger, pain, powerlessness, fear and loneliness are the water in the bucket. The space between the surface of the water and the edge of the bucket is your quality of life. Quality of life is breathing space. The more water evaporates, the more breathing space you get. Being able to be who you are and sensing that someone is listening to you, is the warmth that can make the water evaporate. We discussed it with Mieke Deblaere.

Mieke was an 'Ear' in the large-scale listening exercise by the Holiday Participation Centre. 'Being an ear meant that my concept of a good conversation really changed,' she says.

**'In the past, I often fell into the trap of telling my own story or giving advice during a conversation. That's what I thought a good conversation was, someone says something, then you say something I'm trying to not do that anymore. Now I listen.'**

The essence is simple: listen closely, without expectations and help translate what you hear into things that are possible. This attitude is useful in families, among friends, in care and assistance. But it can also help enrich the tourism sector. Counter staff, cleaners, managers of accommodation: people who are open to others, who listen and only give advice when asked, can really make a difference when it comes to how they are perceived by others.



The power of those conversations turned out to be: (1) an 'entry point' for influencers; and, (2) a moment in which ideas and commitment arose. For example, there are several stories of Ears who, after particular conversations, said that something had been sparked in their own environment.

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#### 4. THE EARS EXPERIENCED GROWTH IN THEIR LISTENING SKILLS

Much attention was paid during the training to listening based on a deep respect for the dignity of the other person. The dignity guidelines (see above) became a guide for the Ears. This listening attitude had an effect on the way participants relate to others, not only during the listening exercise, but also in their daily lives.

## 5. A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

Some Ears told us that the opportunity to participate in this project was a great gift that changed their lives. The seeds of this lie in a sense of belonging, being able to exert influence, and experiencing one's own personal mission more strongly.



### Marleen Vandecraen, voluntary Ear

#### **I now feel like I have a meaning in society.**

When the Holiday Participation Centre asked whether she wanted to take part in the large-scale listening exercise, she didn't have to think twice. A resounding 'yes' and a two-day training session later, in April 2017 Marleen Vandecraen began her personal journey. She listened to the stories of the people and organisations in her municipality Mol and during the stops of the Why holidays matter tour. Stories about how we in Flanders do (and sometimes do not) make holidays possible for each other. Her task is complete (for the time being).

Looking back, Marleen can see that her life has changed. 'I now feel part of a network of people who want to make holidays possible for others,' she says.

Marleen is chronically ill. She has to listen carefully to her body, which needs rest and regularity. She can no longer work away from home. She can, however, do volunteer work which she can tailor

to her body's needs. Participation in the large-scale listening exercise became an important period of change for her.

#### **How important is it to you to be of significance to society?**

'Very important. Certainly. I won't gain anything from it financially, but that's not the point. It does, however, give me warmth and affection. The trip I took this summer to collect many stories gave me a push. I got to know people and found out how many other people support the right to a holiday. When I'd sit down to relax after a day of collecting stories, just thinking about what I'd done that day brought a smile to my face. I now feel that I am part of a network built around a theme that is very important to me.

I was sometimes shocked by the things people said. For example, I once heard someone say that far too much is done for people in poverty. That truly shocked me. However, it also taught me that there are still people who think that way. Which is precisely why this work is important.'

#### **The listening exercise was an intense period for you. Would you recommend it to others?**

'Certainly. Don't even hesitate. Just do it. Because it's quite an experience. And, most certainly, if Holiday Participation has any more of these assignments I'll join again.'

#### **NATHALIE CARPENTIER**

is a journalist and cartoonist. She tells journalistic stories, combining her pen with pencil and paper. VISITFLANDERS asked Nathalie Carpentier to create cartoons. She experienced holiday moments with people suffering from dementia and carefully translated their holiday barriers into images. She has now done the same for other holidaymakers. You can read her stories throughout our publications.

Read the story **WATCH OUT** on the side.

About Tania, who knew the world in colour, until she lost her eyesight. Remembering what it's like to be able to go on a carefree holiday. Priceless.



# WATCH OUT

I used to travel a lot. I liked it.



I will never forget the trip I made to Japan with the company I dance with.



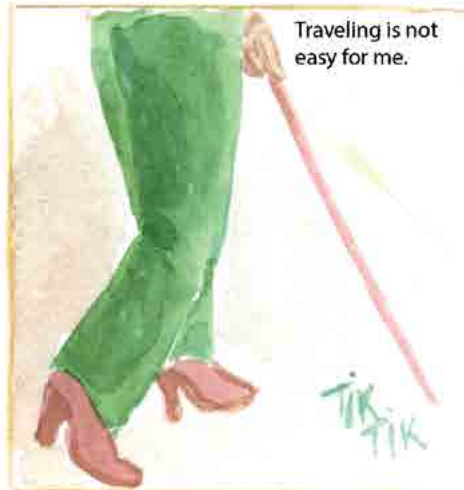
It was a complete culture shock.



While we were performing, people in the audience were eating and giving comments out loud.



Traveling is not easy for me.



When I was sixteen I lost my sight because of a disease.

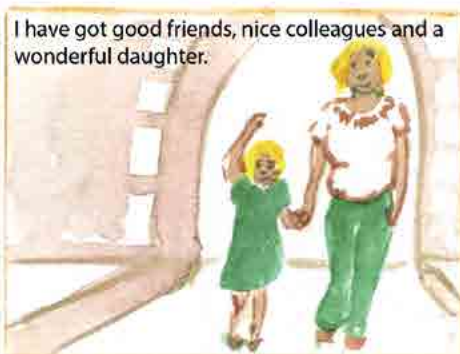
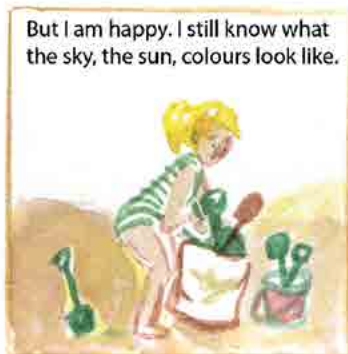


Moving around is the most difficult part of being blind.

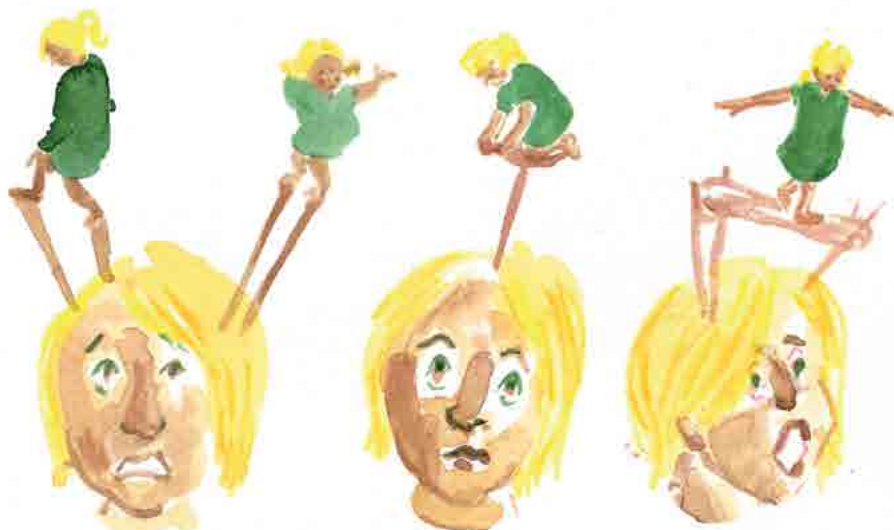


You always have to be on your guard.





Traveling has become more difficult since she is born.



As a blind single mom I can't keep an eye on my own child. I had to find alternative



Like traveling in group with families newcomers from the north of Belgium.



So many people from other cultures took care of her for me. It was amazing.



But I still longed to go to the seaside: a place where we could both enjoy ourselves.



Where I could also have some peace of mind.



But if I am out for a walk on my own, I always have to be alert. It uses up all my energy.



I can only relax if both my daughter and I are accompanied by someone.



But I can't afford that.

Fortunately I could go to the holiday residence De Kinkhoorn in Oostend,



where a friend could come along for a cheap price.



With her guiding me by the arm I could finally make a brisk walk, I could bike on a tandem with her without having to worry.



I could fully enjoy the odours and the sounds of the environment without having to think: watch out!



## STORY WORKSHOPS

The Holiday Participation Centre toured Flanders with its story workshops. All over Flanders, groups of holidaymakers and holiday providers came together for these sessions. Together with social organisations, tourist partners or holidaymakers, we worked out how we can cooperate to make holidays possible for people facing barriers. During the workshop we collected stories, talked about the importance of holidays, and looked for ways to further strengthen this.



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**“Holidays aren’t always happy.  
They are sometimes painful.**

**These are stories in which financial support  
helps, but in which friendship means even more.**

It turns out that the word ‘Holiday’ has many different meanings. Holiday stories are sometimes cheerful, and sometimes bewildering. They can be a testament to great courage or intense compassion, or forever linked to sadness. And sometimes holidays make us stronger, even just because they teach us how to deal with things.





Would you like to organise something fun for your volunteers, holidaymakers or employees? Would you like to join us in looking into the ways in which we can make holidays possible for each other? Get in touch, and we'll gladly come and guide you through the story workshop. Free of charge. And with heartfelt holiday enthusiasm.

## Rap op Stap

**Leisure centre De Kruierie** immediately said 'yes' to the Holiday Participation Centre's invitation for a conversation about how we make holidays possible for one another; and, leisure agent Hanne Weckx invited 9 people to the ensuing meeting. Here, Mohammed, Saadia, Gerke, Wanda, Maryan, Nicole, Patricia, Helga and Eddy would tell one another stories, ultimately discovering how a 'holiday' is different for everyone, and how we need to work together to make holiday a wonderful time.

At the end of the night they all said how much fun it had been! 'It's so nice to be able to tell our stories!', 'It's so nice to exchange experiences!', 'It's so nice to talk to each other about holidays!' Talking about a holiday is a bit like already being on holiday.

### **Everyone has a certain feeling about holidays.**

The stories are about being given opportunities, being unlucky, showing courage and meeting people who help make something possible. These are stories in which financial support sometimes helps, but in which friendship means even more. 'We all have a certain feeling about holidays,' the storytellers conclude. Holidays aren't always happy. They are sometimes painful. Does that make us stronger? Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. And every once in a while, holiday sadness from the past continues to last a lifetime. 'It is what it is,' people say. 'We can only try to give ourselves, our children and each other the gift of beautiful holiday memories.'





—  
“Stories  
connect people.”

# WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE STORIES?

The listening exercise resulted in 1,004 micro-stories. It's a treasure trove of stories, insights and messages that help us understand how to make holidays possible.

The right to a holiday is still questioned here and there in professional and political circles. Not everyone is able to turn off their worries – even just for a few days a year. But there is also plenty going on that does work. 'Flanders is much more hospitable than we thought'.

We see how important holiday opportunities are for children. We find that commitment makes a difference from person to person, and that a satisfying holiday experience often depends on one person doing just that little bit more. However, although the Why Holidays Matter network contributes to making people feel more part of society, too many people remain unaware of the affordable holiday opportunities that are available. As such, there is much more to do and many challenges yet to face before the right to a holiday becomes a reality for everyone.

## WHO SHARED THEIR STORY?

The Why Holidays Matter network is very extensive and diverse. In order to involve as many different partners as possible, we cast our net wide - the Ears collecting stories outside of the network as well as inside. We finally ended up with the above distribution of storytellers.

Of these respondents, 665 (or 66%) were already affiliated with the Why Holidays Matter network. In total, 81% were aware of the existence of Why Holidays Matter. Approximately 19% of this group had heard of the network but did not know exactly how it works.

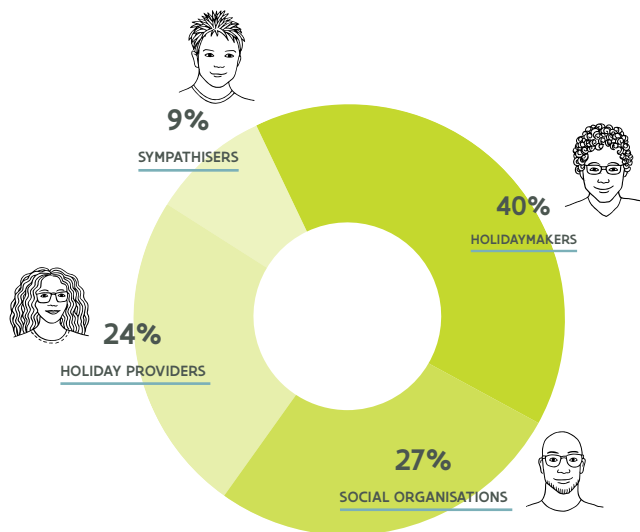


Diagram 'Who shared their story?', 2017

**"Flanders is much more hospitable than we thought."**

The results of the listening exercise will have a major impact on the agenda of the Why Holidays Matter network.

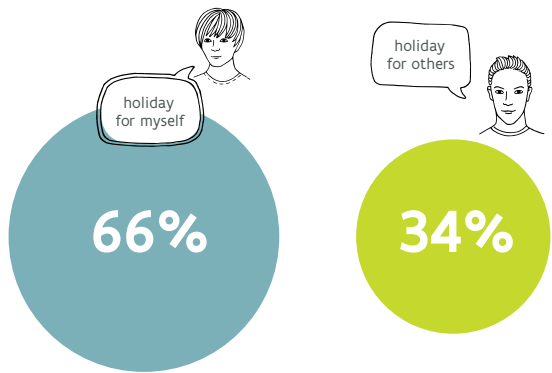
WHAT STORIES ARE SHARED?

The stories that are told are usually about making holidays possible for others. It should be noted that there are different approaches to questioning: the holidaymakers were asked both questions, but the providers, social organisations and sympathisers were only asked how they make holidays possible for others.

**The striking and remarkably fact is that even the holidaymakers often told a story in which they made it possible for others to go on holiday.**

In addition, questions were asked about the relationship with Why Holidays Matter. Approximately 40% of storytellers wrote a story about the network’s offer, while 60% did not relate their stories to the network at all.

Diagram ‘What stories are shared?’, 2017



MY STORY IS ABOUT ...

As the story themes already suggest, the feelings associated with the stories are predominantly positive, about 84% of the total. Only 9% of the stories were negative. A minority (7%) of stories were neutral.

Tabel ‘My story is about’, 2017

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES		22%
CONNECTION		15%
HAPPINESS		13%
BARRIERS		12%
MEETING		11%
SELF-CONFIDENCE		7%
POVERTY		6%
JUSTICE		5%
INNOVATION		4%
EXCLUSION		3%
OTHER THEME		3%



## HOLIDAYS ARE VIEWED AS ...

The storytellers were given the opportunity to indicate what a holiday means to them. How do they view holidays? Is it a right, a reward or a necessity? Holidays usually turn out to be perceived as a right. However, if we look at the answers per group of respondents, we get a more nuanced picture.

**Holidaymakers** view holidays as much more of a reward than a right.

**Social organisations** and **holiday providers** view holidays much more as a right and a necessity. This conclusion is interesting: people in vulnerable situations still (too) often think they have to 'earn' a holiday (as a reward or a luxury). It is particularly encouraging to discover that the partners in our network - providers and social organisations - agree that a holiday is a right and that everyone should be able to enjoy one.

Diagram 'In my story, holiday is viewed as a...', 2017

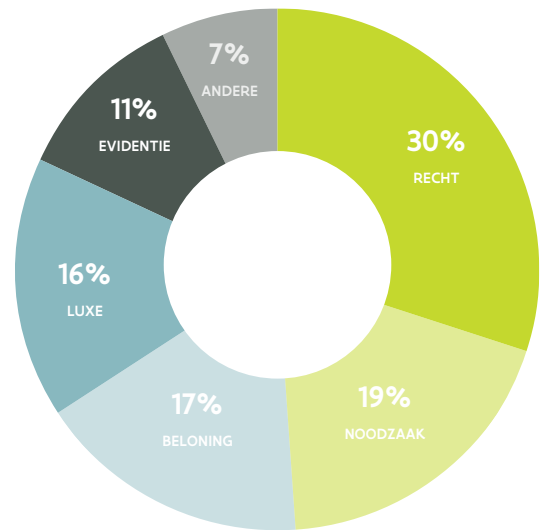


Diagram 'In my story, holiday is viewed as a...', subdivided by group, 2017

### TOURISM PROVIDERS



### SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS



### HOLIDAYMAKERS



### SYMPATHISERS

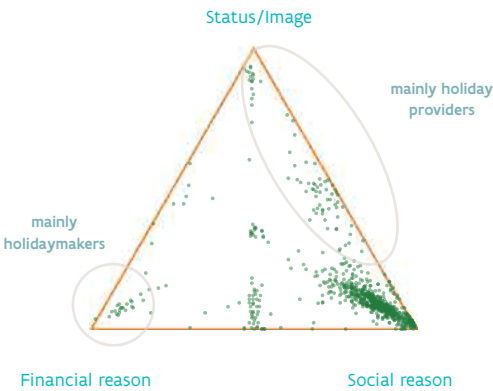


# 9 THEMES

## THEME 1 - FLANDERS IS MORE HOSPITABLE THAN WE THOUGHT

A surprising number of Flemings spontaneously make holidays possible for each other. We see this commitment both within and outside the Why Holidays Matter network. There's a lot of attention for one another. The hospitality, willingness, spontaneous solidarity are apparent.


Diagram 'The people **who made something possible** in my story were motivated by ...', 2017



In the stories collected within the Why Holidays Matter network, we see that financial support contributes to making holidays possible. Financial support can be a discount offered by a tourism

Diagram 'What has **contributed to my story** is...', 2017  
WITHIN THE NETWORK





As a **family counsellor** we are able to introduce families and children to an offer at a social discount rate. Some families can't afford a family holiday and choose to at least let their children go to camp. But sometimes these locations are difficult to reach by public transport. I often bring the children to the camp site, even if it's outside my working hours. Not everyone wants to do this, but I consider it to be a small effort when I see how happy it makes them.

partner, but it can also be an additional benefit provided by a social organisation or both. For people outside the network, we clearly see that social engagement is the most important contribution.

Diagram 'What has **contributed to my story** is...', 2017  
OUTSIDE THE NETWORK



## ACTIONS

Although Flanders is hospitable, it is even more hospitable than we thought. This is an important insight for the Why Holidays Matter network, and a good foundation for further awareness-raising campaigns.

Further develop the website 'Connect your story' and bring it closer to the daily operations by integrating it into the new umbrella website. Every week two stories are shared with the world. These are 'real' stories that highlight the importance of holidays and encourage people to dream about holidays.

The **Why Holidays Matter** tour travels through Flanders. We want to make the broad network more visible. We want to be where people go, to create solidarity around the idea of holidays and raise awareness about the possible barriers involved. We do this by singing together and spreading the joy of holiday vibes. Because music connects.



I am the mother of two growing children and have an average income. Since my divorce, I've been on my own. I took on an extra job over the weekend, as I don't want my children or myself to have to go without something. Directly after my divorce, I was in a very difficult financial situation. After paying for the schoolbooks and my children's hobbies, there was no money left for fun. With my sister's support, I was able to go on holiday for a few days after all. Together with her, I chose the Ardennes, which is nice and quiet and has an abundance of nature. There was little opportunity for unforeseen costs, and a little house where I could cook for myself. Thanks to my sister's push and all the research carried, I went on holiday. At the time I was unable to do this myself, my head was full of other problems and I literally could no longer see the forest for the trees. After these few days I felt re-energised, with new strength to go on.



The **Why Holidays Matter** campaign was launched. All flags hang from a single mast and can be found under one common name 'Why Holidays Matter'. The Holiday Participation Centre no longer communicates with the outside world, as this name no longer properly describes the organisation. The 'participation centre' is the name of the team within VISITFLANDERS that facilitates the network. We don't just support the network, we're part of the network; together we are the network. A network with one common goal, one website, one new name and one corporate identity.

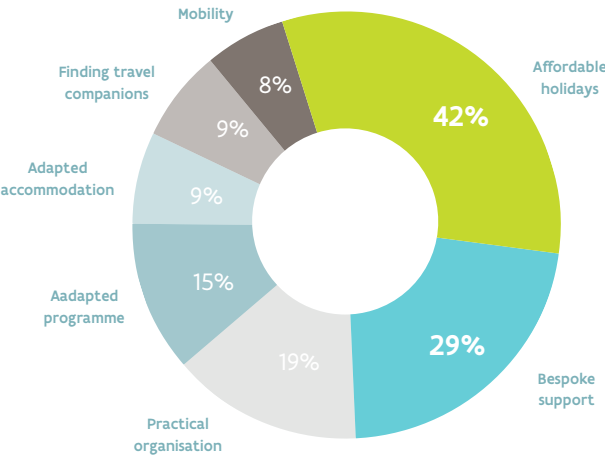
Holidaymakers got together for a few days and wrote a song together with Allez Chantez, with which they toured Flanders. This led to the creation of a video. Sing along:



THEME 2 – NETWORK CHALLENGES

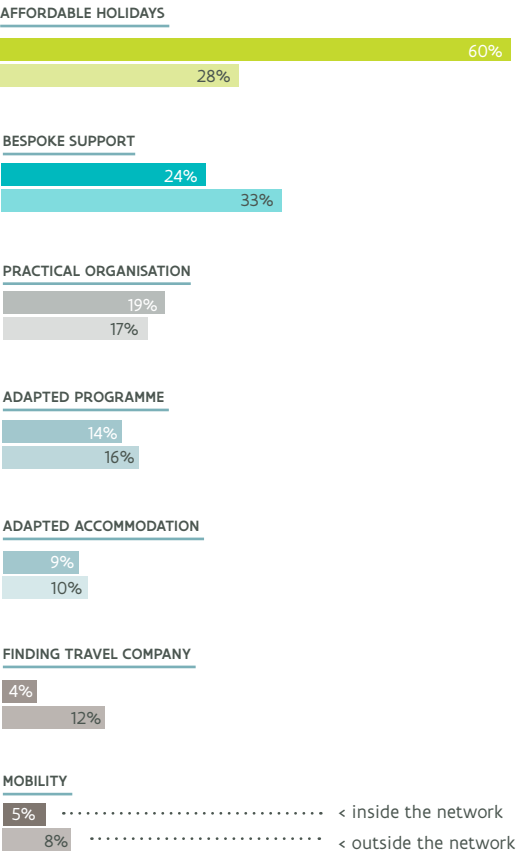
The challenges that emerge most strongly through the stories are an **affordable holiday bespoke support**.

Diagram 'The **challenges** in my story mainly concerned...', 2017



We see that affordability is the biggest challenge in the stories from within the Why Holidays Matter network (60% of the stories), while bespoke support is mainly a challenge for the stories that take place outside the Why Holidays Matter network (33% of the stories), mainly by employees of social organisations.

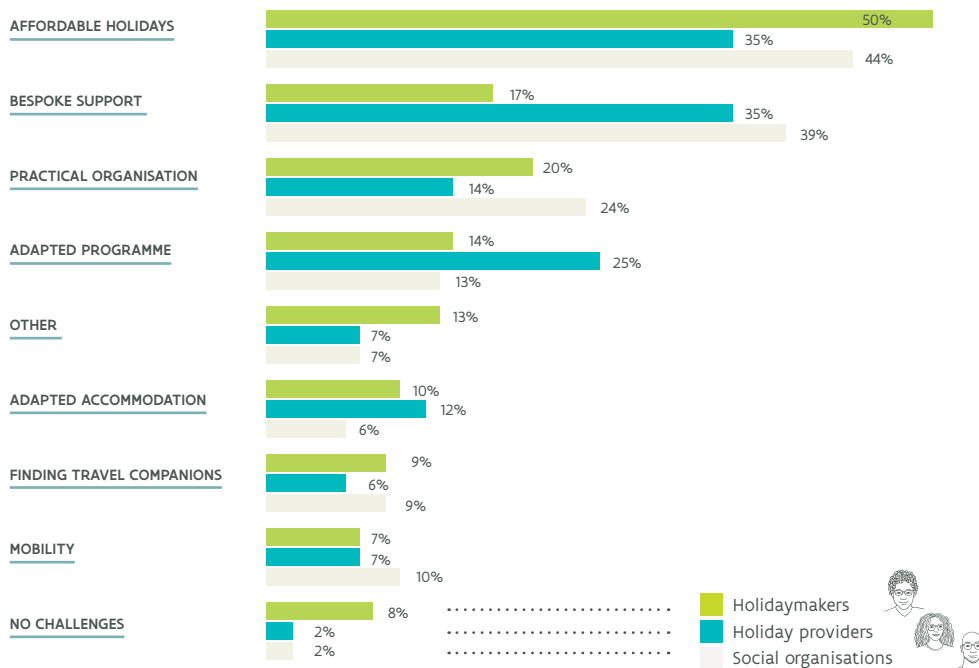
Diagram 'The **challenges** in my story mainly concerned...', 2017  
**INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE NETWORK**



I'm temporarily living with my sister-in-law. Until recently I worked in budget management, but now I have increased benefits. My mobility is impaired and I use a wheelchair. My sister-in-law and I were thinking about booking a holiday together at Zilvermeer. Her family is not entitled to a social rate, but faces financial difficulties as well. They are rarely able to go on holiday. But since I'm the only one who's entitled to a social rate, we were unable to book the accommodation. I was glad my sister-in-law wanted to take care of everything for me, but it didn't work out. I can't go on holiday alone. Nor can I organise everything myself.



Table: 'The challenges in my story mainly concerned...',  
Divided **by group**, 2017



It is not surprising that affordability is the biggest challenge for **holidaymakers** (50%). In addition, practical organisation is a not an insignificant challenge (20% of the stories). The stories often involve transport problems, a lack of travel essentials or not knowing how to get started.

Bespoke support only appears to be an issue for people who do not make use of the offer. The network appears to be addressing this challenge well.

In addition to bespoke support and affordability, the **holiday providers** see more challenges in an adapted holiday programme.. We see this in particular with holiday providers that are not part of the network but much less with providers that belong to the Why Holidays Matter network. Reference is made to forging personal bonds, offering personalised assistance, and offering adapted choices. Adapted accommodation is also a bigger challenge for holiday providers.

Stories by employees of **social organisations** mainly point to the challenges of bespoke support and practical organisation, in addition to affordability. The challenges mainly concern language

and communication problems, supporting people who are not entitled to support or for whom budgets are being cut and insufficient time and space to build a bond with holidaymakers. 'Finding travel companions' seems to be a bigger challenge outside the network (12%) than inside the network (4%). This often concerns children who do not have playmates during the holiday, or singles who are afraid to travel because they do not have travel companions or are unable to find anyone with which to co-organise the trip.

We've confirmed that mobility remains a challenge (many people indicate that they are 'on their own'). It is mainly social organisations within the network who have more stories about problems with mobility. Reference is made to the lack of transport facilities, financial barriers, a lack of information, problems with public transport (too late, too difficult, inadequate accessibility) that has not been adapted for people with disabilities, and the fact that parents do not dare to ask for help with transport (even if other issues have already been dealt with). In the stories where mobility is a challenge, people also indicate that they are often 'on their own'. Individual action and decisiveness are crucial when it comes to solving mobility challenges.

## ACTIONS

VISITFLANDERS submitted a **grant request** to support initiatives that remove holiday barriers. In order to stimulate, inspire and advise our network partners, we organised an inspiration session for the 2019 grant request. We provided puzzle pieces of new ideas to those who didn't yet have any. We encouraged partners who had already come up with ideas to make connections in the network and to shape project partnerships. Experienced experts from the previous requests came to provide information, sharing tips and tricks with possible new applicants; and, ideas were tested for feasibility and relevance. All this was to ensure that more challenges are tackled by network partners.

A number of '**strong coffee**' sessions were organised. These were discussions to which each party involved in a particular challenge was invited to help think about a possible solution. Colleagues, holidaymakers, advisory authorities and local partners all participated in the Strong Coffee sessions.

<sup>1</sup>A strong coffee session is a round table discussion with holiday makers, holiday providers and social organisations. The theme of this session is a question from the holiday provider. Its organisation is supported by the Holiday Participation Centre.



It was a story with a long preamble, but the holiday for the children was finally arranged. The parents had no money for a family holiday and were happy that a camping trip could be arranged for their children. The parents, the children, myself... Everyone was happy. It was set to be a lovely holiday. But in the end, the holiday did not end up taking place. The family's car had broken down and the parents couldn't find another means of transport. Such a shame, and it really is too bad that they didn't dare ask for help. Perhaps there would have been someone who could have brought or picked up the children.



### THEME 3 - THAT ONE PERSON GOING THE EXTRA MILE

In many cases, we found it is often one person going that extra mile who can make a holiday possible or make it a success. People who make a difference can be found in personal networks around holidaymakers, in social organisations and in tourism partners. They are often unaware that they are making a difference.

Diagram 'Who influences the situation of my story the most?', 2017



### ACTIONS

Being seen is important to people. Every day, we strive to ensure that everyone feels recognised in their work and as individuals. There is respect for everyone's input, everyone's efforts and everyone's efforts to achieve results, no matter how small or large they may be.

More and more attention is being paid to 'connect before content'. We start by talking to one another, and only then talk about the content. This is not only important to get everyone on the same page for things to come, it also gives everyone a place in the group. It gives them the opportunity to make a real connection with someone in their professional work environment who they didn't know before.

The box, '**Conversation Starters**' helps to promote this connection. The box is available for those who want to work with it.

The number of **network facilitators** has increased. In addition, they were each assigned a region in order to improve contact with all the partners involved. In order to build more personal and close relationships with social organisations and tourism providers, each partner needed to see and meet with one another sufficiently. Sincere connections are success factors.



A friend was diagnosed with a form of cancer for which there is currently no cure. After the amputation of her lower leg it remained a ticking time bomb. She desperately wanted to visit her daughter in The Hague while she was still able to. We brought her and her wheelchair to The Hague and together with her daughter, we visited this beautiful city.

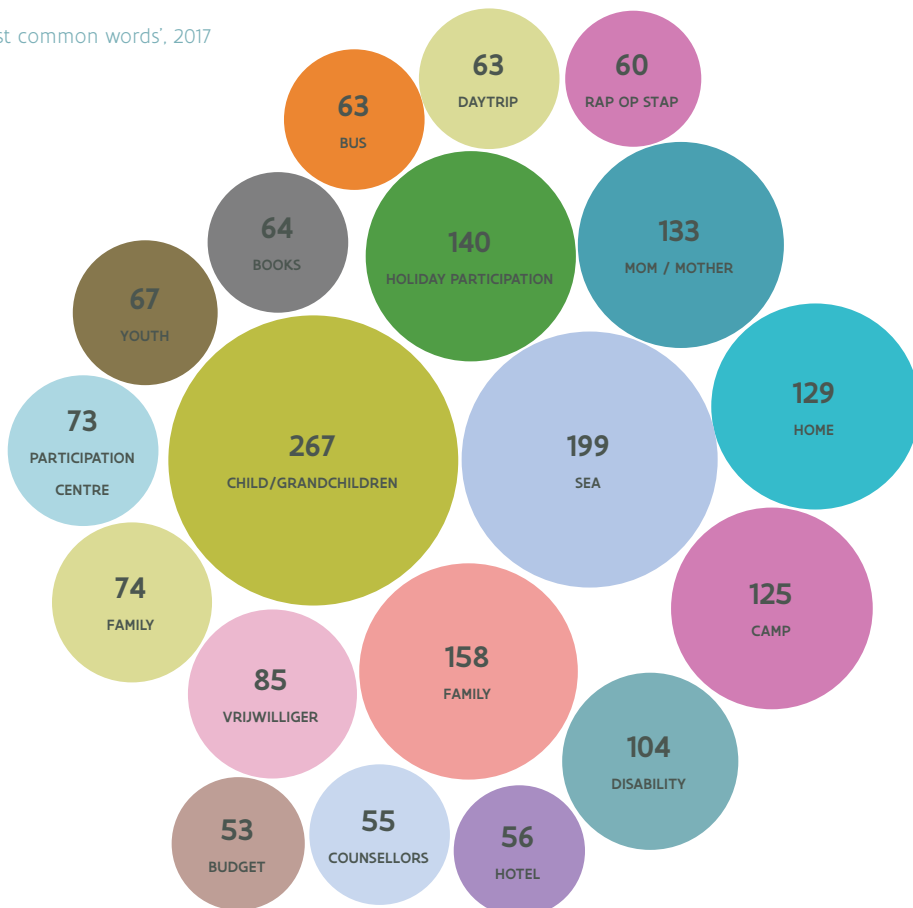
When we drove back home a few days later, she was touched, grateful and enthusiastic. She passed away a few months later... We're glad we were able to give her that opportunity.

#### THEME 4 - EXTRA EFFORTS FOR CHILDREN

It was noted through an analysis of each story's narrative that the word 'child' or 'children' was mentioned in 276 stories (27%) (see word cloud figure). Furthermore, within these collections of stories we found that the effects of holidays were more often discussed in relation to children to the extent that children often reflected the true meaning of and reason for the holiday itself.

There is greater consensus in society that every child deserves a holiday and, certainly, the stories we collected clearly show that volunteers, parents and social organisations are happy to make an extra effort when it comes to children. For example, whilst parents prefer to go on a family holiday, they will try to offer their child an (organised) holiday if this is not feasible. This is important as parents are aware that, on 1st September, their children's friends will return to school having had a holiday and want to tell their classmates all about it. Clearly, if their own children have not had a holiday, not only will they feel excluded, the parents themselves will also feel a strong sense of shame and powerlessness that they have not been able to make a holiday possible for their

Cloud of words 'Most common words', 2017





children. This can be extremely painful for all concerned and is an important reason for children to have a holiday.

The practical stress of organising a holiday is a significant holiday barrier for families. There's so much to think of, everything has to be packed on time, everyone has to be ready on time, transport has to be arranged, and there must be sufficient financial means. Moreover, in the collections of stories about children we read many stories about single parents.

The dominant feeling in children's stories is 'pride'. However, we also see that these stories are more about poverty, happiness and justice compared to the stories that do not feature children.

Diagram 'In my story, holiday is considered a right ...', 2017

## RIGHT

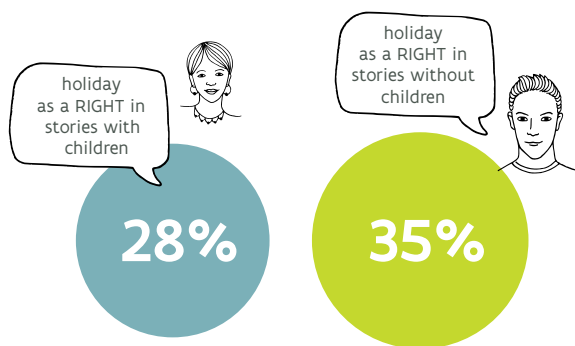
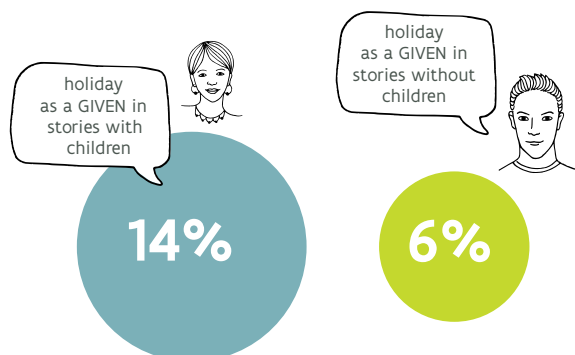


Diagram 'In my story holiday is considered a given ...', 2017

## A GIVEN



I'm fifteen and the oldest of a family with four children. Holidays are too expensive for us. Sometimes I'm embarrassed because there's always talk about holidays at school, a conversation I can't really contribute to. My little brother was given a ticket to the Planckendael Zoo at school. Rap op Stap helped us to book the holiday and prepare for the trip there. It was exciting and lots of fun. Mum gave us an ice cream. It was very expensive, but a big surprise for the little ones. It was the best day of the holiday. Now I have something special to talk about at school.

In stories about children we see that holidays are seen more as a right and less as a given than in the other stories.

## ACTIONS

Gil Géron **researched children's holiday and camp experiences**. She brought out the stories of children through music, stories, creative work and theatre. During that trip through Flanders, she also spoke to teachers, parents and youth work monitors. She played and talked to kids about going to camp because she wanted to understand how children experience camps, how adults feel about them, and what we can all do to offer more children a wonderful camp experience.



## THEME 5 – SHAME, FEELINGS OF INFERIORITY AND STRESS

Shame, or 'a sense of inferiority and stress' take away holiday opportunities as people don't dream about holidays due to a sense of shame (about their poverty). For some, the barrier is greater than they dare to admit. When we read the stories, this is something we often come across. They are so unfamiliar with the phenomenon of 'holidays' that they don't keep up with all the corresponding customs. These can be seemingly minor things, like the lack of sheets. Moreover, we should not underestimate the numbers of people who are unsure where to even begin when it comes to organising a holiday. Some people don't dare to ask for help.

People sometimes feel like they don't deserve their holiday. This feeling still appears to exist on a large scale. These feelings of inferiority probably stem from the image that society has of holidays where those who work hard are deemed to deserve a holiday at least once a year. After all, hard work results in making

enough money to pay for that holiday, and people living in poverty often unconsciously share this public opinion. A sense of inferiority and shame can also result from fear of the unknown, and we often hear people say: 'I don't know how to enjoy myself or 'I've never taken a holiday before, is it even right for me?'

Finally, we want to acknowledge that holidays do remain a complex challenge for many people. All the (practical) preparations and conditions of going on holiday stop them from even getting started. These holidaymakers often have to overcome a number of barriers, each of which has its own organisational concerns: 'My cat can't come, who will take care of it?', 'I can't pay for the sheet rental, who can I borrow sheets from?'. These seemingly trivial questions cause stress for people. In addition, people with



After my divorce, I ended up living in poverty. I was convinced that it was my own fault. I struggled with that for a long time. When I had everything back in order, I felt like going on holiday again. On the day of departure everything was going fine. I had a pleasant chat with someone on the train and reached the hotel easily. On the spot, I was suddenly struck by a strong feeling of guilt. Did I even deserve this holiday? Was I even worth it? Had I even earned it? I felt very inferior again and so retreated to my room. I got through the remainder of my stay in a kind of haze. I stayed alone in my room the whole time and only came out for the meals, which I ate alone in a corner. Since then, I haven't dared attempt it again. The organisation where I perform volunteer work has often asked me whether I'm going on a day trip, a weekend away or on holiday. But I feel uncomfortable about it. The fear of another failure is deeply ingrained in me.



a limited budget will also be less comfortable on a trip, and will continue to worry: 'Will I be faced with unforeseen costs?'. After all, we should not underestimate the fact that poverty has a significant impact on people's problem-solving capacity. The daily concerns for survival often take up so much energy that extra questions concerning holidays can hardly be answered, or cannot be answered at all.

## ACTIONS

If you want to tackle the feelings of guilt and shame of people who experience holiday barriers, solely focusing only on that is problematic. It's like asking you not to think of a pink elephant... That's why we opt to deal with this in a positive way and to

focus on what does work and what can work. How do you reduce feelings of guilt and shame? Give someone something to be proud of. Share stories. Together we search for hope and amazement.

In 2018, VISITFLANDERS launched the **Flemish Masters** project. This will continue in 2019. We often hear (from social organisations, among others) that this is a sensitive issue. It's a sensitive theme, it's not made accessible enough... It's a complex challenge that we enjoyed focusing on. It ended up becoming a theatre project, set up by holidaymakers themselves. No prior knowledge was required, no judgement, just theatre to explore this theme. The result is impressive. There was also an inspiration day, mood boards, a workshop series to share findings ... and a reference to the report in this series!

A follow-up project of 'the Ears' was set up, namely '**The Voices**'. Ten holidaymakers gathered for three days to tell and practice their story so that they could present it to a wider audience. In this way we don't 'talk about' the holidaymaker, but instead allow the holidaymaker to explain how transformative the holiday has been for them.

About **bandwidth**, the psychology of 'scarcity'. The scarcity-theory of Eldar Shafir and Sendhil Mullainathan is a good addition to existing frameworks surrounding poverty. It's about how lack of time and money determine our behaviour. As a conversation starter, we made a simplified version of the theory.



Human connection seems to be essential when it comes to making holidays possible. Simply providing enough support mechanisms and support bodies is insufficient. People are not always able to find their way around and having someone to guide them through this process is often desirable, even necessary. For example, information (Why Holidays Matter brochures, for example) won't be found without assistance. If people are not informed about it, it won't work. An extra step is required: human connection.

People asking for assistance require a safe environment and trust before they can ask a question about holidays, or even dare to dream about holidays. Organising a holiday is not always a given. In practice things are very different to what people often hear about in the outside world. Organising a holiday is not an easy or obvious task for everyone. That is why many holidaymakers are reluctant to ask for help.

When people help other people (instead of customers or clients), success can be achieved. The human connection is important to feel welcome and to feel confident that barriers can be crossed.



Thursday morning 9:06. I arrive and a woman is already waiting for me at our travel agency. Rap op Stap in Dendermonde. Traffic made me a little late. The people at the service centre had offered the woman a cup of coffee. 'She seemed a little nervous,' the people from the kitchen said. I asked her to come in. I gave her a book to browse because I suspected she had visited to obtain information about going on holiday. I sat down and listened to her. Hesitantly, she began to tell us that she was referred to us by the welfare organisation and might be able to go on holiday. I took out my folder and wrote down her details. I started telling her about day trips and holidays. I explained to her that she was entitled to it, too. Her nervousness gradually changed into calm and a smile appeared on her face. She left feeling good and promised to return with someone else who is also eligible to book day trips.

## **ACTIONS**

We bring the network together as often as possible at meetings. Cross-fertilisation can only occur if there are enough meetings where expertise can be exchanged and relationships established. Our meetings will continue to be organised and one meeting group was organised with a specific focus on this theme.

### **Inspiration day Authentic Hospitality**

On this day, together with the participants, we researched what 'hosting' and 'hospitality' mean, and why they are so important. Hospitality is relevant to every holidaymaker but it appears to be of particular importance for holidaymakers who are socially vulnerable. Many people would never have gone on holiday were it not for someone else connecting the network and the person in question. In addition, a warm welcome at the holiday destination makes people relax, and gives them the chance to really enjoy their holiday.

**Guest satisfaction.** The word rolls out of Hilde's mouth and she smiles. It's a special word. It's all about the joy of people when they feel seen and welcomed. And about the joy that hospitality brings the host. It illustrates the essence of how rewarding it is to work in the tourism sector. What could be better than that?

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**“Hospitality can only truly develop if it is given attention day in and day out. If that which you talk about frequently has the opportunity to grow.**

Hilde De Laet - Hidrodoo

See how human connection shatters barriers:





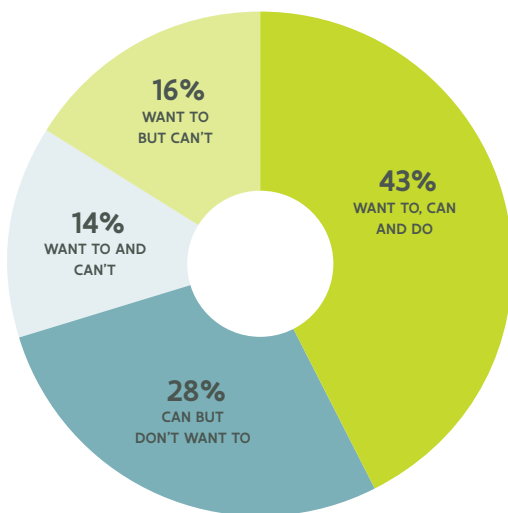
## THEME 7 – SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS: A CRUCIAL BUT DIFFICULT ROLE

The human connection shatters barriers. It therefore seems obvious that social organisations are an indispensable link in our network. They provide the necessary human connection and they form our link to the holidaymakers. They ensure that people know who we are, that the right people make use of the offer of our partners, and they guide people in the process towards a holiday.

### POWERFUL

We see plenty of stories about/by social organisations where people are strengthened. Various organisations are fully committed to making holidays possible. These organisations remove stress, offer practical solutions, offer just that little bit extra and go to great lengths to accomplish something.

Diagram 'What interest and influence do social organisations have with regard to improving the situation in my story?'. 2017



There are also plenty of painful stories: work pressure, insufficient time to look up information, holidays are not part of the job description, little internal support to make holidays possible, importance ascribed to holidays, etc.

Although holidays are badly needed, they are not vital, as it is sometimes bluntly put.

The following diagram shows that employees of social organisations share more negative stories and fewer positive stories about making holidays possible.



I work as an experience expert at PCSW Gent. I did an immersive traineeship at a district office and was allowed to tag along with a social worker who works with young people. One afternoon, a 19-year-old boy who lived with his grandparents came by. By then he'd already known for some months that his grandparents were going on holiday for a few weeks in August. He was unable to go with them and wasn't allowed to stay home alone, so he had to find a solution. He had only his wits and his smartphone to turn to. It looked like he was going to have to stay in a shelter. I was rather upset that the boy had not received any help with this. During my break, I attempted to find a solution for him. On the website of V8 I quickly found a trip to Budapest. The price was 30 euros for a week. The boy was actually a year older than he should have been, but after a phone call we were able to book the trip. He had the journey of a lifetime.



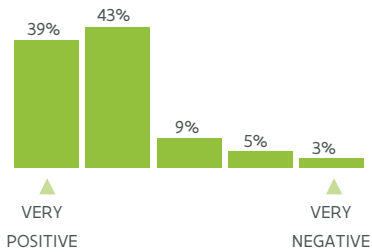


We have fewer counsellors. That's why we placed brochures in different places around our reception area. People browse through them, but don't end up going anywhere. People who are struggling have too little incentive to take action. If we don't actually provide guidance, people won't get beyond only reading brochures. Unfortunately, we have less time than a few years ago.

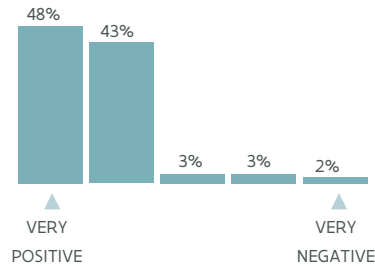


Diagram 'My story is...', divided by group, 2017

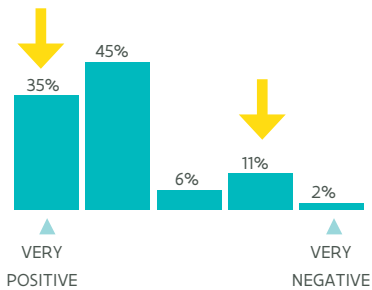
#### HOLIDAYMAKERS



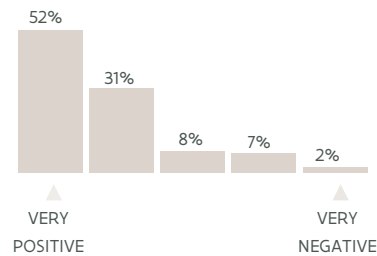
#### HOLIDAY PROVIDERS



#### SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS



#### SYMPATHISERS



Compared to other storytellers, employees of social organisations tell more stories in which people are alone and in which the challenges are much more difficult to overcome.

Social organisations are struggling with their role. Conversations show that many of them know that holidays are important, but

that they often don't get around to it because the pressure of work is constantly increasing. This causes many negative feelings.

We noticed that these concerns are more common than they were a few years ago. Organisations are under palpable pressure.

Diagram 'People in my story feel...', divided by group, 2017

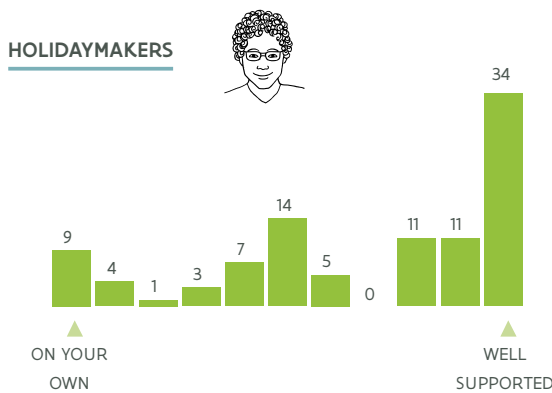
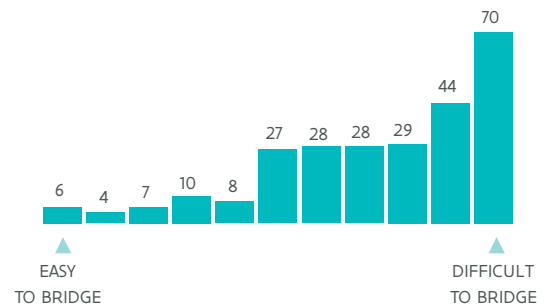
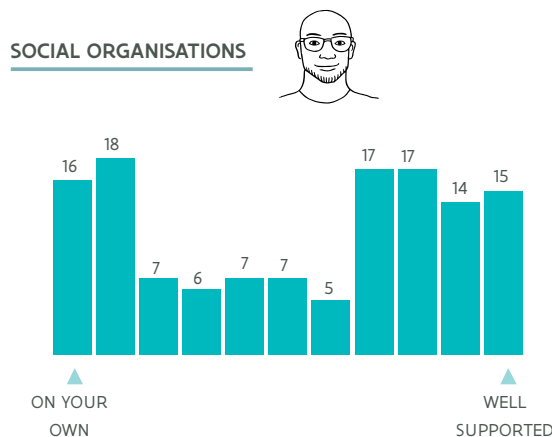
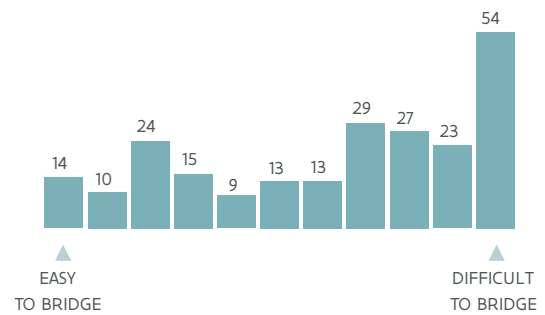
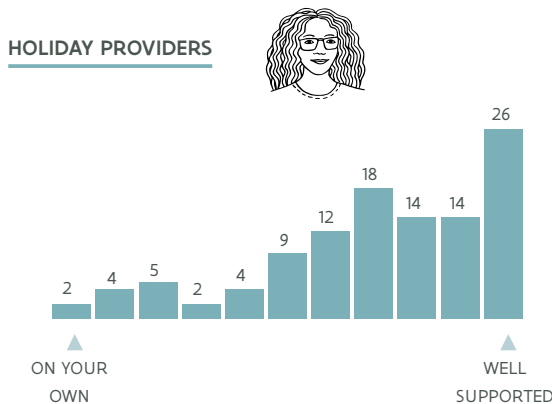
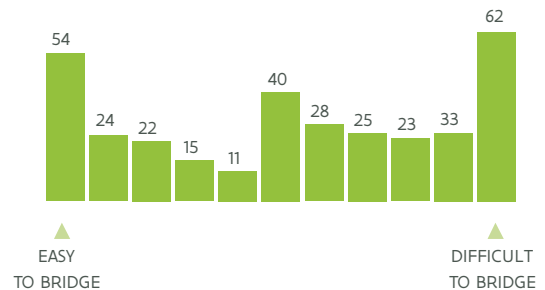


Diagram 'The challenges for the holidaymaker in my story are...', divided by group, 2017



## ACTIONS

Social organisations are struggling. Solutions to this are far beyond our reach and go beyond leisure and holidays. We want to highlight this part of the discussion and feed long-term visions.

In the short term, we want to make it **visible**. Despite many difficulties, this can be accomplished if we emphasise the wonderful work undertaken by each organisation whilst also showing just how significant the effects of holidays are for people with fewer holiday opportunities. Supervisors, volunteers and professionals work very hard to make the difference, both day in and day out.

We organise **'Strong commitment' sessions** with the message that, together, we will make things possible. We place great emphasis on the vital role of social organisations in the holiday chain. Social organisations are indispensable: we can only send more than 150,000 people on holiday or a day trip each year with their help. They share experiences and give tips on how to speed up certain processes or generate involvement with colleagues or employers.

In the 2018 Forum, **the tool Stoute Schoenenpad** (Naughty Shoe Path) was developed. This is a fun method for social organisations to talk about dander within the organisation and then to find the courage to change something about it. Through the game, participants are guided by things that surprise them and led towards the hopes they have for Why Holidays Matter.

Stories are also shared in this action. After all, numerous social organisations are a wonderful example of how you can make a difference, day in and day out.

See how employees of a social organization make the difference.



## THEME 8 - THE NETWORK REALLY MATTERS

The listening exercise contains stories from inside and outside the Why Holidays Matter network. This allows us to compare both groups and to see clear patterns with regard to the power of the network. There are undoubtedly more differences to be found in the patterns among the groups. However, we mainly wanted to look at coming up with solutions and working together.

In the stories and patterns, we see that the network inspires people and organisations, and that it encourages partners to find concrete solutions.

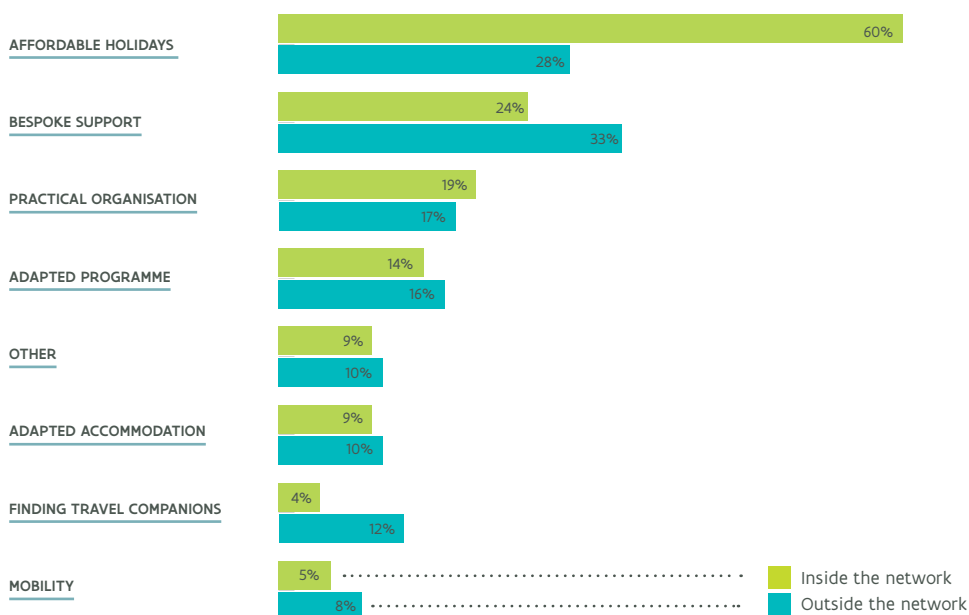
In the adjacent diagram, we note that the stories within the network focus strongly on the affordability of holidays. Given that, overall, almost all the other challenges were indicated as significantly less important, we can conclude that the network is working in a more solution-focused way.





**“Supervisors, volunteers and employees make all the difference and work very hard on that.**

Diagram ‘The challenges in my story mainly concerned...’, 2017  
INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE NETWORK





The network promotes various forms of cooperation between volunteers, staff and different organisations to make holidays possible. In the many stories within the network, we note that holidays are far more likely to become a reality when supported by organisations. Moreover, while social engagement remains very important, it is less so inside than outside the network. The storytellers are more aware of the fact that a holiday was made possible thanks to both social engagement and the support of a social organisation.

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## “Working with all partners.

Talk and hear more about ‘Why Holidays Matter’ with all partners: organisations, holidaymakers and holiday providers.



Diagram 'What has contributed to my story is...', 2017  
**INSIDE THE NETWORK**

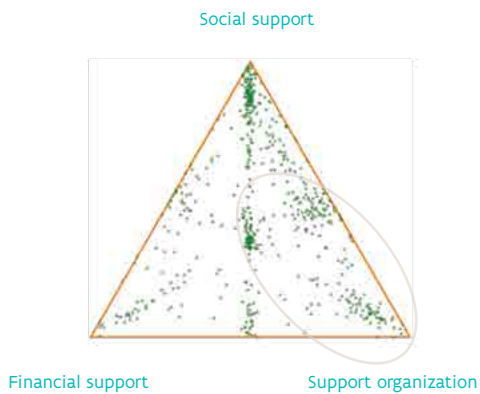


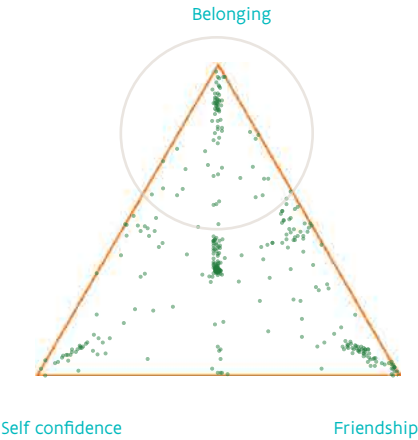
Diagram 'What has contributed to my story is...', 2017  
**OUTSIDE THE NETWORK**





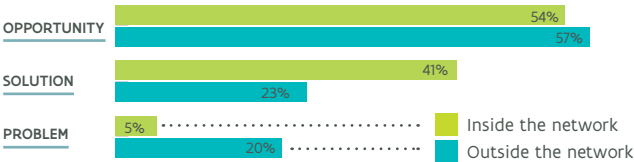
Holidaymakers within the network indicate that they feel a stronger sense of 'belonging'. This is a feeling that often emerges within the network, for example during the annual forum. Indeed, for holidaymakers, the network Why Holidays Matter represents one big family whose goal is to make holidays possible for everyone. As such, not only are holidaymakers a part of that network, they also have a commitment as ambassadors - as stimulators.

Diagram: 'Due to the situation in my story, people have more...', holiday makers within the network, 2017



Holiday makers inside the network tell more stories about opportunities and solutions compared to holidaymakers outside the network. The latter respondents focus more on stories about problems.

Diagram 'My story is mainly about a...', 2017  
INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE NETWORK



As a social partner within the non-profit organisation Tazazaza, in 2015 I had the opportunity to organise a weekend by the sea for around 50 disadvantaged people. I worked as a social worker at a PCSW. It was amazing to see many happy faces and their gratitude, all weekend long. Some had never seen the sea before! In 2018, we will organise another weekend trip, with twice as many people.



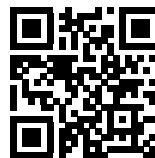


**“The team of ‘Why Holidays Matter’ handles any and all questions partners may have.**



## ACTIONS

We work day in and day out to **make sure the network matters**. We organise ‘Appreciative Inquiry learning Networks’, set up information sessions to involve new social organisations in the network, and are currently developing ‘Ask a question’. The network connectors try to bring together as many partners as possible and to connect initiatives. Training and education tailored to the needs of the network are provided. The Why Holidays Matter team handles any and all questions that partners may have.



My wife and I run a youth club. Together with the non-profit organisation Kompas, we developed a programme for its specific target group. They ended up spending a week with us. As the owner of the accommodation, you will very quickly be accepted by these groups. This greatly motivates us and encourages us to cooperate with the Participation Centre.

THEME 9 – WHY HOLIDAYS MATTER NETWORK,  
WHERE WERE YOU?

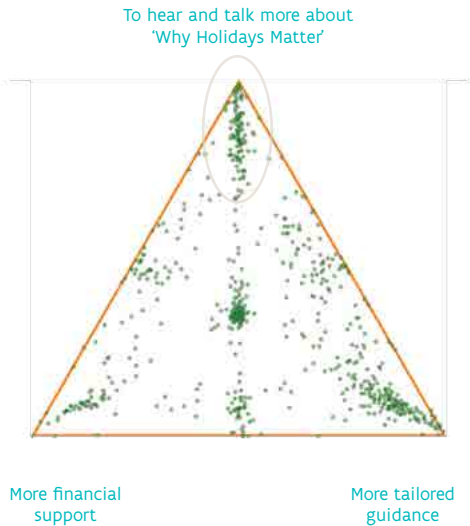
‘Why don’t I know about this, or why have I just learned about this?’ The stories and reflections of the Ears show that many people are not familiar with the network, Why Holidays Matter. This concerns holidaymakers and people with opportunities who make a difference in their network.

From this we can conclude that we must continue our efforts to bring the existence of Why Holidays Matter to the attention of the public.

Furthermore, holidaymakers make more of a difference than big promotional campaigns. Word of mouth by enthusiastic holidaymakers, Ears, Voices, tourist partners, social organisations and passionate volunteers provide a more caring introduction to our offer.



Diagram ‘To improve or strengthen situations like this, we need...’, 2017



‘We also inform the people who turn to social services about the holiday offer. They often don’t know that such a thing exists or is possible. We want to encourage them to go somewhere to improve, and to broaden and strengthen their world. They usually come for something else, but if we get the opportunity, we encourage them to do something together.’

‘Holiday brochures are on visible display at our organisation. We are expanding the services of Why Holidays Matter. Many people don’t know it exists. People don’t know what they’re entitled to. That’s why we have to keep telling them about it. More posters would help.’



## ACTIONS

Overall, we conclude that too few people know about us. That is why we want to become even **more visible and become known to the general public**.

The first step is to continue focusing on **Rap op Stap offices**. For the time being, this number continues to grow annually. In the meantime, there are already 80 Rap of Stap offices across Flanders. But everyone in the network hopes for even more of these social leisure offices. We therefore continue to encourage, inform and persuade social organisations and associations to take the plunge.

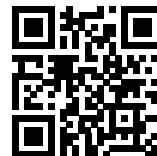
**A new programme will be set up with the SenseMaker software.**

Here, we will follow as many Rap op Stap offices as possible over the period of a year via an anonymous diary project.

Furthermore, **larger advertising campaigns** will highlight the importance of Rap op Stap and why social organisations should join/align themselves with it – for example, by joining Rap op Stap, social organisations can make personalised use of existing promotional material. Ultimately, we don't want everyone to phone up the Participation Centre - however, they should be able to find their way around the network and obtain support from a member organisation.

This is all taking place in **parallel to the existing promotional channels and methods**, such as campaigns on social media, the audio-visual material distributed and the distributed brochures.

Read more about Care Hotel de Ceder, which pioneers with its own Rap Op Stap office.







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**“With a focus on strength  
and a committed view of the  
future, partners join forces.**





# REFLECTION ON THE 9 THEMES

In 2001, it was decided to set up the Holiday Participation Centre. The objective was to ‘build a bridge’ between commercial tourism and the social sector with vulnerable target groups. Over the years, a large organic network of people and organisations that care about the same challenges and who share the same commitment has developed.

It is important to appreciate and acknowledge the existence of such an organic, growing network. It is equally important to keep a finger on the pulse and make the necessary adjustments to bring about renewed enthusiasm and commitment on the part of the partners. Not that this is at risk of disappearing, but it is also not something that remains equally tangible for everyone. Given how big it has become, partners can only see a small part of the network at any given moment. We want to feed, motivate and inspire our partners’ network, which is precisely why we launched a large-scale listening exercise. We wanted to find out what that invisible glue actually is.

An open question, with no reply and no direction in mind. The result ought to automatically lead us in the right direction. ‘Participation’ is part of our name for a reason. We are open to input from all corners of the network, without excessive control and with plenty of support. We get to work with the resulting experiences, insights and ideas.

Holidaymakers, social organisations, providers and sympathisers were given the opportunity to tell their stories about making holidays possible. Inside or outside the network. Every story was welcome. Telling stories made one storyteller feel they were ‘seen’, while for another it led to a concrete step towards a holiday. Storytelling helped some people to discover the possibilities for themselves and their loved ones, or simply to be able to express their opinions in an unfiltered way. Either way, every story is valuable and every anecdote offers a wealth of information and material to make people think. We collected 1,004 treasures, small pieces of a puzzle that we put together to form a larger whole.

## STORY OF BEING TOGETHER VERSUS BEING ALONE

The image that emerges from merging so many snapshots is one of togetherness. Of being part of something greater than yourself.

A feeling that is created by upholding three key concepts: choice, togetherness and individuality. If you belong to something, and are part of something, you’ll at least have decided to take a first step. This remains essential in order to not feel alone in the midst of a larger group.

Furthermore, there is a delicate balance to be maintained between solidarity and individuality. The sense of solidarity gives you the feeling that you are cared for, that you are part of something larger. You feel comfortable with the people around you. The most important thing is to feel this without having to sacrifice your individuality. There is respect for your own personality, character, shortcomings and talents. You’re able to excel in your talents and

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## “We want to feed, motivate and inspire the network.”

We launched a large-scale listening exercise. We wanted to know what the invisible glue in the network is.

there is space to make the kind of mistakes from which you can learn. Having all this makes you feel part of a group, and you do not feel alone.

In this story of making holidays possible, it becomes clear that everyone wants to feel at home in society. First and foremost, people want to ‘belong’. They want to feel strong and appreciated in contrast to the loneliness they often feel. How can we create this feeling within the network? How can we ensure that everyone

together opts for this story? There's no ready-made answer. Working on the right balance requires attention, day in, day out.

## WHAT KIND OF (POTENTIAL) HOLIDAYMAKER?

**Giving people who experience holiday barriers the opportunity to have a holiday:** that's our *raison d'être*, the reason we do what we do. People living in poverty often already feel excluded. Involving them in the network is an obvious commitment.

Holidays are not always possible for those living in poverty. People aren't given the option and are excluded. The network is trying to change this. Together with all our partners, we want to offer more choice and more opportunities to those who would otherwise fall by the wayside. As it turns out, we're succeeding at this. The network really matters. Not only by negotiating discounts with providers and supporting social organisations, but also by seeing the holidaymakers (note: there is a difference between seeing and looking) and giving them a voice.

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**“The language of holidays is a language that people with sufficient social opportunities can speak fluently without having to give it much thought.**

Once the holiday barrier is finally overcome, people living in poverty often fall back into social exclusion. After all, the language of holidays is a language that people with sufficient social opportunities can speak fluently without having to give it any thought. The use of words such as 'check-in' and concepts such as 'the minibar' are simply not in everyone's vocabulary. Booking accommodation, the habit of leaving luggage at the desk, taking the lift or turning on the lights in your room with your key card: you can only know how any of this works once you've done it yourself. When people in poverty are confronted with new language and new habits, this may give rise to feelings of shame and stress. The need to belong and the fear of exclusion continue to loom and overshadow the holiday.

It is therefore important that everyone is aware of the implications of using this language. **'Words create worlds.'** You create a world with the words that you use. You can choose whether that world includes or excludes our holidaymakers. We can therefore



consciously choose to use inclusive language: language, words and habits that do not exclude anyone. The network attempts to create sincere links between the different partners in order to involve and support the target group in the holiday story. To create a sense of togetherness in everyone, because everyone deserves a holiday.

## SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS

Social organisations are a crucial link in the holiday chain that make it possible for underprivileged people to enjoy a holiday as well. They are close to the holidaymakers, guiding them through their entire holiday pathway from dream to reality and back. With their guidance, attention to this holiday language makes a difference. Learn what check-in means, why you should perhaps hesitate before using the minibar, or how you can ask to drop off your luggage before gaining access to your room. It's small things like this that make people feel welcome and accepted in this world of holidays and travel. A world in which social organisations can create a network for our participants. Contact persons within our organisation and details of the accommodation and other providers in the vicinity are included in our information brochure. Where can I go in case of questions or problems? What is there to see and do in the area? These questions may be a bit tricky to answer if you're not in your natural habitat.



“Feeling at home on holiday. That’s what we all want.

People who live in vulnerable situations will only take the step towards a holiday if they feel safe. **Social organisations can reassure them if they are able to take the time and mental space to do so.** Holiday barriers can be shattered when you create an environment in which that person doesn’t feel time pressure and has the feeling that he or she is being listened to with genuine interest. This authentic connection makes holidays possible.

## PROVIDERS

People want to feel at home when they’re on holiday. It may sound contradictory, but it’s clear from the stories. A surprising number of stories are filled with words reminiscent of home. Often literally ‘home’, but also ‘family’, ‘household’ or ‘safe’. **Authentic and sincere hospitality is therefore of the utmost importance.** An unfortunate first meeting can ruin a holiday, and the same applies to our holidaymakers.

A receptionist who comes by to subtly ask if guests are happy with everything can already make a world of difference. This builds trust from person to person.

In this way, we create solidarity that can only be sustainable in balance with everyone’s individuality. Each holidaymaker has his or her own problems, identity and personality. Within the network,

we strive for a bespoke approach. Here, too, we are making a difference. Respondents who are far from the network experience more challenges in terms of bespoke holiday guidance. Although this does remain a considerable task – it’s a process of trial and error and a task for which the network is happy to make space and be patient.

Social organisations come in many shapes and forms. They are all close to the people and try to guide holidaymakers in the most appropriate way. Some of them set up intensive coaching programmes, while others are mainly service providers. All different and yet, in many ways, the same. Customisation is a common thread. This often requires a lot of time, tools and patience. **The providers often show a great deal of understanding for vulnerable holidaymakers and are not afraid to deal more flexibly with different conditions and services.**

The network, Why Holidays Matter, goes beyond understanding and showing respect for everyone’s individuality. We want to actively engage in appealing to passion and developing talents. After all, this listening exercise was carried out by various experience experts who felt a strong affinity with the theme. They learned how to listen carefully to stories and to write them down professionally. They enjoyed that work so much that various ‘Ears’ want to continue their efforts to collect stories.



They feel appreciated. They enjoy the pleasure and the emotions of a holiday story. To tell a story is to give someone the power and opportunity to create their own voice, to be seen in the midst of an anonymous mass of holidaymakers. Their eyes sparkle, and their memories become tangible again. It's more than just writing down a story, it's getting someone excited to go on holiday again.

Collecting and listening to stories has made us think about the importance of the holiday experience of people in poverty and people who experience holiday barriers. Their lives and needs must be seen throughout the holiday chain, their voices must be able to speak and be heard. We are actively committed to giving them the opportunity, to give them a platform to tell other people about their holiday opportunities, to inspire and motivate them to take the step towards a holiday.



## OUR WISH FOR SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS?

In their professional life, they take care of others day in, day out, but does anyone actually take care of them? The pressure and burden of work is increasing, problems are becoming more complex, and the stress that comes with it is increasing. Realising that holiday desire is not always easy, sometimes it's something that one does in between other priority tasks. What place are holidays given within the organisation? It makes individual commitment even more difficult, and sometimes makes the social organisation the weakest link in the chain.

Fragile, but vital. Holidaymakers need them to guide them through the holiday chain. To stand beside them, with sincere commitment and powerful empathy to take the difficult steps towards a holiday together. With attention to the connection between people based on a spirit of equality, in which the person seeking help and the counsellor join forces and look for solutions together. A holiday or a day trip can change a person, act as a first step towards improvement, or be a life-saving moment of relief amid daily worries. Making holidays possible also means helping to restore people's dignity.

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### **“Making holidays possible means helping to restore personal dignity.**

The network calls on the social organisations to link the right supply to the holiday demand as much as possible. Is the step too big? Or the opposite, is it even exciting enough? Someone who has never been on holiday often starts with a day trip with a group of people they already know. Holiday skills are part of a growth process. And not everyone starts in the same place. Being close to people and helping them identify the most appropriate offer is an important step towards a successful holiday experience. Without them, even more people would go without the chance to have a successful holiday.

This is why it is extremely important that we, together with all our partners, take care of this fragile link so that they, too, can truly take care of those whose holiday may depend on



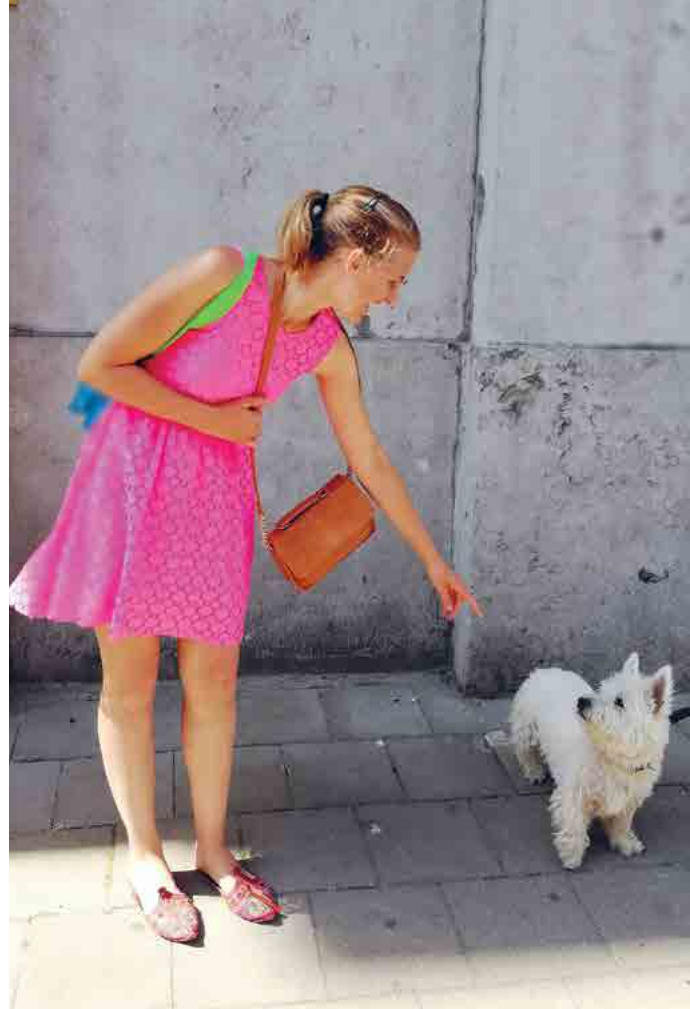
the organisations. Indeed, whilst the importance and effects of holidays and leisure are often seen and felt by employees on the ground, this is not necessarily the case by those within 'higher' organisational structures. Therefore, it is important for administrators and policy-makers within organisations to create sufficient time and mental space for employees, and to allow health caregivers to be more fully engaged.

In order to further support the organisations, we want to make the option of turning to social organisations more of a given. We want to collaborate with other bodies that already convene social organisations, bring them closer together, and give them encouragement as needed. To rekindle their intrinsic commitment is therefore the next step. After all, feelings of shame and guilt are powerful. All caregivers realise that holidays are important, but sometimes this awareness - and the time needed to make it possible - is overshadowed by other needs and requirements that seem to have priority. As one of our partners aptly put it: 'Holidays are necessary, but not assigned any urgency in the job description'. Follow-up sessions, reports and guidance of cases accumulate and form a visible piles on the desk – piles that can't compete with a dormant feeling of guilt that is deeply lodged in the back of the mind. The mental space to bring this tiny outpost to the fore is often lacking.

Despite the sometimes-difficult circumstances, our network consists of **incredibly committed people** who decide time and again to go that extra mile. This can mean informing and inspiring others about a holiday, freeing up 15 minutes of the day to make a few reservations, or driving a child to a campsite in their spare time. That's why we say a heartfelt 'thank you' to all those hospitable people at social organisations who are fighting for holiday opportunities day in, day out. There is so much determination and commitment.

We would also like to add: don't do it alone! When it comes to making holidays possible for everyone, we are stronger together. Surround yourself with those friends and fans, both personal and professional, and look for creative solutions outside your standard operating procedures. For example, look outwards to the community around your organisation. It will only need brief stimulation to change from dormancy to being full of life. From committed volunteers, to the small effort someone makes to fit an extra child in the car, to people with whom your holidaymaker can share costs, these are all small solutions to small problems - and they make your job easier.

Professionally you can also make more of an effort. Everyone collaborates with other partners to achieve win-win situations, so why wouldn't organisations do more? Share your experience and dreams with as many colleagues as possible so that you are



not alone. Shared joy and shared sorrow not only reduces the workload, but also creates a mutual bond. Opportunities also arise outside the organisation. Different organisations in the same region or with a similar objective can combine their budgets and expertise and achieve more together than they can alone. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Feel at home in our common network and realise there is room for experimentation. The network will happily support and guide you in this process. You don't have to be afraid to take the plunge. Every misstep or mistake is a learning opportunity. Adopt a different mindset, a growth mindset. Your organisation, and by extension your network, can only grow and evolve if there are learning opportunities. Everyone knows how difficult it is to get started, to jump into the deep, cold water. The network provides support, jumps along with you or helps you get back out after jumping. There is understanding and respect for the problems within the sector.

Let's certainly not forget **to focus on all the things that are already going well** and draw energy from this. Because many holidaymakers are already going on holiday and many organisations are already focused on holidays.

## OUR WISH FOR TOURISM PROVIDERS?

Providers of accommodation, organised holidays, attractions and day trips ensure that every guest feels at home. This might appear rather contradictory because people go on holiday to get away from it all. But being away from home doesn't necessarily mean you don't want to feel at home. It's impossible to fully be yourself and relax if you don't feel at ease. How do you get that feeling of home without bringing along the worries of home? What exactly does 'coming home' mean? How can you, as a provider, ensure you create this feeling the minute the holidaymaker arrives?

The key is found within authentic and sincere hospitality. Don't only make the holidaymaker feel welcome, truly give them the feeling that you were expecting them. Give them the feeling that you, as a provider, are really looking forward to finally being able to welcome them. Be aware that this first meeting is crucial as it will set the tone for the rest of the holiday. Someone who does not have the resilience, flexibility or a frame of reference to embrace this, will otherwise be excluded from holiday opportunities. **Providers can make a difference with a sincere commitment as it creates a connection that shatters multiple barriers.** However, above all, it increases the chance of repetition. A successful holiday lays the foundation for subsequent holidays or day trips.



**“What exactly does ‘coming home’ mean? The feeling that you’re expected.**

Listen to the story of Carina and Erik, how taking a holiday changed their live:





**“Amazement is the open gaze with which we see the pearls of beauty.**

Every guest wants to feel good in the place they visit or stay. Our holidaymakers need bespoke behind-the-scenes guidance, and the confidence that they have somewhere to turn to for an answer to any question they may have. However, other guests want to feel at home as well. This can sometimes be an area of tension for the provider. Do vulnerable holidaymakers behave noticeably differently? Might someone be taking advantage? How will my other customers/guests respond to this? Will they feel cheated because they are paying full price? Or be offended by behaviour that may be a little different? Or will they, in fact, enjoy coming into contact with societal diversity, or seeing social commitment? The provider sometimes feels doubts, shame and stress about these holidays as well.

How different are your guests? We are all human beings, often with similar wishes and desires. We would like to start a discussion. We want to make ambassadorship more visible. Be proud of your engagement, of your involvement in the network. Everyone contributes in his or her own way, thus helping our society move forward. Corporate social responsibility is more than

just a trendy concept. It is in the DNA of the younger generation. Empowerment, sustainability and commitment are key concepts that are increasingly important in the choices people make in everyday life. Moreover, Flanders is much more hospitable than we might think. In each of our 1,004 stories there are people who make holidays possible for others. It's more than just professionals: neighbours or mothers from school are equally committed to making sure that everyone gets a holiday. So, show your commitment with pride and be an ambassador for what we do and what we stand for. For a sustainable, powerful and committed society in which everyone goes on holiday and is given a place; a society in which no one feels excluded.

Getting together with colleagues is an essential factor in this. Share your experiences, learn from each other, be inspired and moved. You strengthen each other by exchanging practices and ideas; and, in getting to know new partners you feel less isolated in your efforts and commitment. You are a part of a larger group of committed like-minded people – people who, like you, understand and proclaim the importance of holidays.



## Pioneers

Travelling means coming back with a bunch of stories. For this reason alone, it is unsurprising that Why Holidays Matter became a pioneer in Flanders in making use of the **narrative SenseMaker methodology**. This is in addition to the existing work in narrative analysis and appreciative inquiry.

Why Holidays Matter has given form and direction to 'large-scale listening'. By listening to multiple voices with an open mind rather than from preconceived frameworks, and connecting with the power that comes from storytelling itself, Why Holidays Matter has been able to capture concrete experiences of what works and what doesn't work. Whereas SenseMaker often focuses on participatory analysis and collective 'sense-making' after collecting hundreds of stories, Why Holidays Matter has put the listening process itself at the heart of the methodology. By training a group of Ears who have listened to the stories of individuals and organisations within the network for months, a positive dynamic was created that continues to be felt to this very day. In addition, Why Holidays Matter has taken the time to read, analyse and understand all the stories with different groups and stakeholders. A process that resulted in insights, action points, concrete actions, and inspiration for the future. Why Holidays Matter has set up a practice that continues to inspire today. In the meantime, a number of socio-cultural organisations have taken the initiative to listen on a large scale and, thus, measure and discover in a different way.

**Steff Deprez**  
**Voices That Count**



## Conclusion

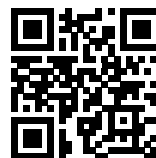
Starting from experiences and not from opinions made a crucial difference in this listening exercise. Every little experience tells us about something bigger, too: that which is already being done and that which still needs doing.

Stories tell so much more than simply the philosophical reflections they produce. We would actually like to publish every single story here because they are the essence of the large-scale listening exercise. A story about profound guilt touches a person more than a philosophical reflection that posits the notion of guilt as a major culprit in the holiday story. The compassion and emotion that you experience by telling your story is a stone that sends ripples across the surface of the water.

Therefore, read and share as many stories as possible to return to the true essence, and reconnect with what really matters. Dreams, desires, hidden gems and life-changing experiences. Being part of a larger group is very important to each of the partners in our network. Together, we must ensure that none of our partners feel they are on their own. Whether it is the

holidaymaker who feels excluded, the social organisation that feels it is lacking support in its commitment, or the provider who feels misunderstood and unseen. Each is struggling with doubts, but no-one allows it to bring them down. With a focus on strength and possibilities, and a committed view of the future, we are joining forces with the singular aim of getting even more people interested in our objective. Why Holidays Matter!

Read more about narrative work in  
'CO-AUTHORING THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL  
AND HOSPITALITY. AN UNFOLDING PRACTICE  
IN TOURISM IN FLANDERS.



## Thank you to

All the people who have contributed to this large-scale listening exercise.

The **1,004 people who shared their experience**, we can learn from this multitude of stories

The **story gatherers or Ears** for listening and giving people space in deeply personal conversations.

Thank you, Marleen, Marc, Joris, Hilde, Mieke, Els, Marie-Louise, Mia, Ann, Marina, Evi, Veerle, Jenneke (†), An-Katrien, Dirk, Anja, Annie, René, Bart, Ruth, Jean, Karine, Michelle, Saadia, Sarah en Wendy.

The **facilitators** Els Meersschaert, Gil Geron, Stijn Dujardin, Griet Bouwen, Jeroen Marijsse and Jan Somers for organising story workshops with groups of holidaymakers and holiday providers.

**Griet Bouwen** and **Hans Bouwen** who supported the training days of the Ears and helped shape the exercise.

**Hilde Gyselinck** (volunteer Ear) and **Mieke Deblaere** (volunteer Ear) who took the lead in coaching and supporting the Ears.

**Steff Deprez** from Voices That Count, who introduced us to the possibilities of 'SenseMaker'. This tool gives everyone an equal voice, even those whose voices that are not often heard.

The **team of 'Why Holidays Matter'** for keeping ears open and writing down stories.

**Marianne Schapmans**, Director of the Holiday Participation Centre. Thank you for leaving space and taking time for this exploratory process. We sought out that which we want to understand, questions

to which we ourselves have no answers. An exploration of our own curiosity, about what can help to better understand the power and the mechanism of the network, 'Why Holidays Matter'.

**Lore Moons**, student of community sciences, for her cooperation in story analysis.

**Chene Swart**, for her reflection on the nine themes.

The **participants** of the workshops and reflection moments.

**Dan Benn**, for translation support and general reflection.

Het **network** Iedereen Verdient Vakantie.

**The network Why Holidays Matter**  
We can use what we learned from this large-scale listening exercise to strengthen what is already working well and take initiatives in areas where there is still room for improvement – together with over 2,000 of our partners, of course. After all, beautiful stories are what drive us. The difficult ones, too: on which we focus with great interest and determination.

Jenneke has passed away. She was a stalwart of the Voluntary Ears team. Holidays were very important to her.





## LARGE-SCALE LISTENING HOLIDAYS FOR EVERYONE: HOW TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE

THE NETWORK 'WHY HOLIDAYS MATTER' IS LISTENING AND LEARNING ON A LARGE SCALE

## COLOFON

Why Holidays Matter makes holidays possible in Flanders for people who experience holiday barriers. In order to do this properly, it is necessary to understand what is and what is not already working. Numbers alone are not enough to make this clear. We need stories as well. We want to make visible that which is unmeasurable. What are the experiences of counsellors, holidaymakers and tourism providers? What moments made a difference? We heard many different and personal experiences. We can learn from that abundance. That is why we collected 1,004 experiences that, together, give us a varied and fascinating picture of how we in Flanders make holidays possible for one another.

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D/2019/5635/26/4

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# VISITFLANDERS