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Mapping Synthesis Report on Accessibility of Cultural Resources in Partner Regions

KMOP Policy Center

March 2025 | Belgium

Partners

Małopolska Region (PL)

Małopolska Institute of Culture in Krakow (PL)

Maramures County Council (RO)

Hajdú-Bihar County Government (HU)

Perifereia Stereas Elladas (Region of StereaEllada) (GR)

Collectivity of Corsica (FR)

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1. Executive Summary

The OpenRegioCulture project focuses on enhancing the accessibility of cultural resources for people with disabilities and varied needs across eight European regions. This synthesis report presents the findings from a comprehensive mapping exercise conducted between September 2024 and February 2025 to assess the current state of accessibility policies, implementation practices, and challenges in these regions.

This report serves as a foundational document for the OpenRegioCulture project by establishing a clear baseline understanding of the current accessibility situation across partner regions. By synthesising findings from desk research, surveys, and focus groups, it provides a multi-faceted analysis of both commonalities and differences in how regions approach cultural accessibility. The report is designed to inform future project activities, particularly the identification and exchange of good practices, and the development of improved policy instruments to foster more inclusive cultural environments.

The mapping exercise and resultant synthesis report were guided by the following specific objectives:

Analyse existing policy frameworks at regional, national, and European levels that influence the accessibility of cultural and natural resources for people with disabilities and varied needs.

Identify gaps and implementation challenges in current accessibility approaches, highlighting both common barriers and region-specific obstacles.

Assess the current state of accessibility across different dimensions (physical, digital, informational) and for different types of disabilities (mobility, sensory, cognitive) in cultural and natural resource settings.

Compare stakeholder perspectives on accessibility, including the views of policymakers, cultural organisations, and people with disabilities, to identify potential perception gaps and areas of consensus.

Document good practices and innovative approaches already being implemented in partner regions that could be shared and potentially transferred to other contexts.

Develop evidence-based recommendations for improving accessibility policies and practices based on the identified needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Establish a foundation for interregional learning by creating a shared understanding of the accessibility landscape across partner regions.

The findings reveal a complex and varied policy landscape across the partner regions, with multiple governance levels influencing accessibility standards and implementation. All partners operate within the broader framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and relevant EU directives, though implementation approaches differ significantly. While comprehensive legal frameworks exist in most regions, significant gaps remain between policy aspirations and implementation reality.

Survey results demonstrate a consistent perception gap between how policymakers and organisations assess accessibility versus the experiences of people with disabilities. Physical accessibility has generally seen more progress than digital, sensory, or cognitive accessibility across all regions. Libraries and museums are typically rated as the most accessible cultural resources, while concert venues often lag behind.

The most commonly identified barriers include physical obstacles, lack of sensory accommodations, absence of sign language interpretation, and insufficiently accessible digital platforms. Budget constraints emerged as the primary challenge to implementing accessibility improvements across all regions, followed by lack of expertise and coordination challenges.

Based on these findings, the report offers strategic recommendations in five key areas: policy development and implementation, knowledge development and capacity building, addressing specific accessibility gaps, awareness-raising and communication, and strategic funding and resource allocation.

The OpenRegioCulture project, through its facilitation of interregional exchange and collaborative learning, provides valuable opportunities for regions to learn from each other's experiences and challenges, working together to create more inclusive cultural environments across Europe.

2. Introduction

The OpenRegioCulture project focuses on enhancing the accessibility of cultural resources for people with disabilities and varied needs across eight European regions. This synthesis report presents the findings from a comprehensive mapping exercise conducted between September 2024 and February 2025 to assess the current state of accessibility policies, implementation practices, and challenges in these regions.

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The mapping exercise and resultant synthesis report were guided by the following specific objectives:

- **Analyse existing policy frameworks** at regional, national, and European levels that influence the accessibility of cultural and natural resources for people with disabilities and varied needs.
- **Identify gaps and implementation challenges** in current accessibility approaches, highlighting both common barriers and region-specific obstacles.
- **Assess the current state of accessibility** across different dimensions (physical, digital, informational) and for different types of disabilities (mobility, sensory, cognitive) in cultural and natural resource settings.
- **Compare stakeholder perspectives** on accessibility, including the views of policymakers, cultural organisations, and people with disabilities, to identify potential perception gaps and areas of consensus.

- **Document good practices** and innovative approaches already being implemented in partner regions that could be shared and potentially transferred to other contexts.
- **Develop evidence-based recommendations** for improving accessibility policies and practices based on the identified needs, challenges, and opportunities.
- **Establish a foundation** for interregional learning by creating a shared understanding of the accessibility landscape across partner regions.

3. Country-Specific Analysis

3.1 Desk research findings

3.1.1 Overview of current policies on the accessibility of people with disabilities and varied needs to cultural resources in the region

The regional desk research reveals a complex and varied policy landscape across the partner regions, with multiple governance levels influencing accessibility standards and implementation. Regarding the **EU and international framework**, all partner regions operate within the broader framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the European Accessibility Act, and other EU directives that establish foundational rights and standards. The CRPD has been ratified by all countries represented in the project, creating a common legal baseline, though implementation approaches differ significantly.

On the other hand, **national policies/legislation** forms the primary regulatory framework for accessibility in most regions:

France (Corsica): The 2005 law on equal rights and opportunities establishes the principle of equal participation for people with disabilities. This framework extends to all public buildings and requires accessibility for four types of disability: motor, sensory, mental, and psychological.

Greece: Law 4488/2017 promotes accessibility to public and private spaces, including cultural venues. Emphasis is placed on physical accessibility, cultural programs, and online accessibility.

Hungary: Act XXVI of 1998 establishes rights for persons with disabilities, while the National Disability Programme (2015-2025) emphasises the right of access to culture.

Latvia: The Disability Law and Plan for Promoting Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2024-2027 form the primary framework, supplemented by sector-specific guidelines, including the Accessibility Guidelines for Cultural Organisations (2024).

Netherlands: The Equal Treatment Act and constitutional protections combined with the 2024 National Strategy for CRPD implementation create a comprehensive legal framework. Additional technical standards (NEN 9120, IT standaard 2018) guide building accessibility.

Poland: The Act on Equal Treatment (2010) prohibits unequal treatment based on disability, while the Digital Accessibility Act and Act on Ensuring Accessibility establish minimum requirements.

Romania: Law 448/2006 creates a comprehensive legal framework for accessibility, while the National Strategy "An Equitable Romania" 2022-2027 prioritises accessibility and mobility as its first domain.

Finally, regional policies determine the **regional and local implementation**, which demonstrate varying degrees of specificity regarding cultural accessibility:

The **Corsican** Regional Authority actively works through its Heritage Department to improve accessibility, considering it a key dimension of the ERDF ESF+ Operational Programme.

In **Central Greece**, the implementation focuses on physical accessibility infrastructure, cultural programs, and online accessibility of venues.

Hajdú-Bihar County's Regional Development Programme 2021-2027 identifies accessibility as a critical component, though specific elements for cultural heritage sites remain undefined.

The **FrankfurtRhineMain** region utilises the Hesse Coalition Agreement (2024-2029) and Wiesbaden's Cultural Development Planning as frameworks, emphasising accessible formats and digital technologies.

In **Maramures**, the Sustainable Development Strategy 2021-2027 addresses accessibility through social and territorial cohesion objectives.

The **Riga Planning Region** Development Program 2022-2027 includes an action plan emphasising the creation and improvement of accessible environments and services.

Zuid-Limburg operates under provincial policies like "Every Limburger Counts," with municipalities developing local inclusion agendas as required by the CRPD.

Małopolska's Regional Development Strategy 2030 and EU Funds for Małopolska 2021-2027 prioritise improving accessibility to cultural facilities, with anti-discrimination provisions embedded in project selection criteria.

3.1.2 Gaps and areas of improvement identified

Despite the existence of policy frameworks across all regions, significant gaps and implementation challenges persist:

Policy Implementation Gaps

Lack of concrete measures: Many policies establish principles but lack specific implementation guidelines, creating a gap between policy and practice.

Enforcement challenges: Across regions, limited monitoring and enforcement mechanisms impede policy effectiveness.

Non-mandatory standards: Several regions note that accessibility standards are often recommendations rather than requirements.

Resource Constraints

Budget limitations: All regions identify insufficient funding as a primary obstacle to implementing accessibility solutions.

Staff capacity: Limited expertise and human resources dedicated to accessibility were highlighted across regions.

Coordination Challenges

Fragmented responsibility: In several regions, accessibility falls between different administrative bodies, creating coordination gaps.

Varied interpretation: Different interpretations of accessibility requirements, particularly for historical buildings, create inconsistency.

Specific Accessibility Challenges

Digital accessibility lags: While physical accessibility has seen improvement, digital and informational accessibility remains underdeveloped in most regions.

Sensory and cognitive accessibility: Solutions for visual, hearing, and cognitive disabilities are significantly less implemented than physical accessibility measures.

3.1.3 Regional-specific needs – unique challenges of each region

Table 1: Region-specific challenges and needs

Region	Unique Challenges	Specific Accessibility Needs
Corsica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geographical isolation with marked disparities between urban and rural areas Rich cultural heritage with 500+ monuments, many in remote locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bridging the "cultural divide" between major towns and remote areas Adapting historical sites while preserving authenticity
Central Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited accessible transport connections Lack of awareness regarding available facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructure upgrades in archaeological sites Staff training in sign language Accessibility signage and guidance systems
Hajdú-Bihar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban-rural accessibility gap Limited accessibility of natural sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing cultural precariousness Awareness raising to shape local community attitudes Focus on the needs of intellectually disabled and autistic individuals
Frankfurt Rhine-Main	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historic buildings with preservation requirements Conflicting needs of different disability groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessible dialogue formats for diverse groups Solutions for historic structures Professional communication training

Maramures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote mountain territory with challenging topography • 8 UNESCO wooden churches requiring special conservation approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing conservation with accessibility in heritage sites • Digital accessibility of cultural information • Improving rural accessibility
Riga Planning Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging population with increased need for accessible environments • Historic buildings with monument protection constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of sensory accessibility solutions • Creating accessible digital experiences for heritage sites • Public transport accessibility
Zuid-Limburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hilly countryside presenting mobility challenges • High concentration of heritage/monument sites • Aging population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting municipalities with similar circumstances • Balancing preservation with accessibility • Adapting to demographic shifts
Małopolska	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic city centres with protected status • Economic limitations in rural institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing unified accessibility standards across diverse institution types • Strengthening staff resources in accessibility competencies • Budget flexibility for accessibility adaptations

The desk research reveals that while comprehensive legal frameworks exist in most regions, significant gaps remain between policy aspirations and implementation reality. The primary challenges are financial constraints, limited expertise, inconsistent coordination, and the need to balance heritage preservation with accessibility requirements. Regional disparities within countries further complicate the application of national policies, with rural and remote areas facing particularly acute accessibility challenges.

3.2 Survey findings

3.2.1 Methodology

Three different surveys were conducted across all eight partner regions to gather comprehensive data on accessibility needs, attitudes, and perspectives:

Survey 1 targeted policymakers and public authorities to explore the current state of the policy-making process and accessibility frameworks. In total, **138 responses** were collected across all regions, with response rates varying from 7 to 35 respondents per region.

Survey 2 addressed organisations and stakeholders in cultural heritage sites to assess the implementation of policy aspects and provisions. This survey gathered **134 responses** from cultural institutions including museums, galleries, libraries, theatres, concert venues, and natural heritage sites.

Survey 3 focused on people with disabilities and varied needs (including family members and caregivers) to capture their personal experiences, challenges, and perspectives concerning accessibility. A total of **136 responses** were gathered across the regions, representing various types of disabilities including mobility, visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments.

3.2.2 Findings from Survey 1: Policymakers and Public Authorities

Current state of accessibility

Policymakers across regions generally assessed the overall accessibility of cultural and natural resources as "fair" to "moderate" (50-85% of respondents). Only a small percentage (10-25%) rated accessibility as "good" or "excellent."

Libraries were generally identified as the most accessible cultural resources (57-100% of respondents across regions), followed by museums/galleries (40-71.4%). Parks and natural sites also rate highly in accessibility across several regions (41.7-78.6%).

Concert venues and theatres were typically rated as least accessible. This pattern was remarkably consistent across all regions despite their different cultural infrastructures.

Key Strengths of Existing Policies

- Comprehensive guidelines and standards (identified by 35-58% of respondents)
- Inclusion of stakeholder input (20-58%)
- Availability of funding and resources (8-35%, with significant regional variation)
- Key Weaknesses of Existing Policies
- Insufficient funding (35-80%, consistently high across all regions)
- Lack of enforcement mechanisms (25-45%)
- Limited scope of application (28-42%)
- Outdated standards (20-36%)

Interestingly, 25-65% of policymakers across regions indicated they were unaware of whether specific accessibility policies existed in their region, revealing a significant knowledge gap even among those responsible for implementation.

3.2.3 Findings from Survey 2: Cultural and Natural Resource Organisations

Current state of accessibility at organisations/institutions

Most cultural organisations rated their accessibility as "fair" to "good," with significant variations between different types of accessibility:

- **Information and communication accessibility:** 26-46% rated as "fair", 25-79% rated as "good"
- **Architectural accessibility:** 21-55% rated as "fair", 35-67% rated as "good"
- **Digital accessibility:** 17-57% rated as "fair/average", 29-50% rated as "good", 23-33% rated as "poor"

Museums and galleries typically reported higher levels of accessibility than other cultural institutions, while concert venues and theatres reported lower levels.

Implementation aspects of existing policy frameworks

Only 20-64% of organisations confirmed they implement regional accessibility policies, with 30-45% being uncertain whether such policies applied to them. This indicates a critical awareness gap regarding policy obligations.

The primary responsibility for implementing accessibility policies typically rests with management (42-55%), while only 8-38.5% of organisations have dedicated accessibility coordinators. The frequency of policy compliance reviews varied widely, with 17-73% conducting annual reviews, but 25-33% reporting that they "rarely" or "never" review their accessibility practices.

Main barriers to implementation included:

- Lack of funding (45-95%)
- Lack of coordination and clear guidelines (27-63%)
- Lack of knowledge and skills (32-65%)

Awareness and learning levels of staff

Staff training levels were generally rated as "moderate" or "neutral" (40-69%), with relatively few organisations rating their staff training as "good" or "excellent" (6-26%). The most common types of training provided were:

- Emergency response training (45-70%)
- Disability awareness training (15-91%)
- Customer service training (16-42%)
- Technical training on accessibility equipment (10-38.5%)

Notably, 5-32% of organisations reported providing no accessibility training whatsoever to their staff.

3.2.4 Findings from Survey 3: People with Disabilities and Varied Needs

Specific needs of individuals with disabilities

The survey respondents represented diverse types of disabilities, with mobility needs (28-92%), visual needs (5-43%), cognitive needs (5-55%), and hearing needs (5-84%) varying widely between regions. Age distribution was also broad, with significant representation from older adults (65+ years) in most regions.

Perceived barriers and challenges

People with disabilities reported encountering barriers "frequently" (39-64%) or "always" (6-33%) when accessing cultural and natural resources. The most significant barriers identified were:

1. Physical barriers (61-92% across all regions)
2. Lack of sensory accommodations (26-76%)
3. Economic barriers (35-52%)
4. Unsuitable websites/apps (24-47%)
5. No translation into sign language (14-78%)

Overall satisfaction with accessibility was low across all regions, with only 7-24% of respondents expressing satisfaction with the current state of accessibility. The majority expressed neutral (26-61%) or dissatisfied (14-42%) opinions.

Implementation aspects of policy frameworks

The majority of respondents (51-80%) perceived cultural and natural resources in their regions as only "partially accessible," with 10-33% stating they were "not accessible" at all. Despite policies emphasising the involvement of people with disabilities in policy-making, only 9-64% of respondents reported being engaged in the creation or review of accessibility policies.

3.2.5 Analysis and Discussion

Key Trends Across All Regions

- 1. Perception Gap:** A consistent discrepancy exists between how policymakers and organisations perceive accessibility (typically "fair" to "good") versus the experiences of people with disabilities (predominantly "partially accessible" or "not accessible").
- 2. Hierarchy of Accessibility Types:** Physical accessibility consistently receives the most attention and resources, while sensory, cognitive, and digital accessibility lag behind significantly.
- 3. Resource Constraints:** Insufficient funding emerged as the primary barrier to implementing accessibility across all stakeholder groups and regions.
- 4. Implementation Disconnect:** Despite the existence of policies, there is a notable gap in their implementation, monitoring, and enforcement. Many organisations are unaware of applicable policies or lack the resources to implement them effectively.
- 5. Training Deficits:** Staff training on accessibility remains inadequate, focusing primarily on emergency responses rather than comprehensive accessibility competencies.

Significant Points of Interest

Institutional Responsibility: Only a small minority of cultural institutions have dedicated accessibility coordinators, with responsibilities typically assigned to management or general staff who have other primary duties.

Accessibility Knowledge: There is a widespread lack of awareness about existing accessibility policies and standards, even among policymakers and cultural organisations responsible for implementation.

Mobility vs. Other Needs: While progress has been made in accommodating mobility needs, the needs of people with sensory, cognitive, and multiple disabilities remain significantly underserved.

Surprising Insights

1. Policy Awareness Gap: The high percentage of policymakers unaware of specific accessibility policies in their regions suggests foundational knowledge gaps.

2. Stakeholder Involvement Disparity: While policymakers reported high levels of stakeholder involvement in policy creation, people with disabilities reported much lower levels of engagement, indicating a potential disconnect in effective consultation.

3. Digital Accessibility Lag: Despite the increasing importance of digital access, particularly post-pandemic era, digital accessibility was consistently rated as the weakest element across organisations, revealing a critical gap in modern accessibility efforts.

4. Sign Language Prioritisation: Organisations consistently ranked "lack of sign language translation" as a major barrier, while fewer people with disabilities identified this as their primary concern, suggesting a potential misalignment in priorities.

These findings demonstrate that while policy frameworks exist across all regions, effective implementation faces multiple challenges related to resources, expertise, prioritisation, and coordination. The perspectives of the three stakeholder groups reveal critical gaps that need to be addressed through more targeted approaches, improved coordination, and increased resource allocation to ensure that cultural and natural resources become genuinely accessible to all.

3.3. Focus Groups findings

3.3.1 Focus Group Methodology

Regional focus groups were organised in all eight partner regions between September 2024 and February 2025 to gather qualitative insights that would complement the survey findings. Each region employed a similar methodology with adaptations for local context:

Format and Duration: Most regions conducted in-person sessions (2-3 hours), though some like Corsica and Frankfurt Rhine-Main utilised a hybrid approach to accommodate participants unable to attend in person. Sessions typically included a presentation of preliminary survey results followed by facilitated discussions.

Participant Demographics: The focus groups engaged diverse stakeholders from the accessibility ecosystem:

- Representatives from regional and local authorities (cultural departments, social services)
- Cultural institution managers and staff (museums, libraries, theatres)
- Tourism and natural site operators
- Accessibility experts and consultants
- Representatives of disability organisations
- Individuals with disabilities and varied needs

Participant numbers ranged from 10 (Zuid-Limburg) to 40 (Hajdú-Bihar), with a complete number of more than 114 participants (the region of Małopolska has not specified the total number of participants clearly). The broad range of perspectives allowed for rich discussions on barriers, opportunities, and potential solutions.

3.3.2 Main Points of Discussion

The focus group discussions across regions converged around several key themes:

Institutional Barriers and Opportunities

Physical Accessibility Challenges: Participants consistently highlighted the challenges of adapting historical buildings and cultural heritage sites while maintaining their authenticity and meeting conservation requirements. As noted by a participant from Frankfurt: "It feels like we are all pioneering in this domain."

Digital and Communication Barriers: Discussions in multiple regions (Riga, Maramures, Hajdú-Bihar) emphasised that even when physical accessibility is addressed, digital accessibility and accessible communication often lag behind.

Resource Limitations: All regions highlighted budget constraints as a fundamental barrier, with the Corsican focus group noting that "cultural precariousness is a reality for certain segments of the population," limiting both access to cultural production and consumption.

Policy Implementation Gaps

Coordination Challenges: The Riga focus group emphasised that "the main obstacles in implementing accessibility policies are largely objective such as budget limitations, lack of expertise, and complexity of regulations," rather than attitudinal barriers.

Knowledge and Awareness Deficits: The focus group in Zuid-Limburg emphasised that "organisations are often not aware of the problems people with varied needs encounter when visiting a location. It is only when they themselves come into contact with a person with varied needs that they understand this."

Regulatory Tensions: Several regions (Frankfurt, Corsica, Małopolska) highlighted tensions between accessibility regulations and heritage conservation rules, creating implementation dilemmas for cultural institutions.

Future-oriented Solutions

Training and Professional Development: All regions emphasised the need for comprehensive training programs for staff at cultural institutions. The Małopolska focus group specified that training should address "different needs and different groups of employees."

Collaborative Approaches: The Maramures group proposed "solutions for improving existing accessibility facilities and for the development of new initiatives... as an inter-institutional effort."

User Involvement: All regions emphasised the principle "not about us, without us," highlighting the importance of involving people with disabilities in the design and evaluation of accessibility solutions.

3.3.3 Analysis of the Discussions

Areas of Consensus

Several strong areas of consensus emerged across all regional focus groups:

- 1. Early Integration of Accessibility:** Unanimous agreement that accessibility should be considered from the beginning of any planning process, not as an afterthought. As the Frankfurt focus group noted, "retroactive adjustments are inefficient and often insufficient."
- 2. Multidimensional Nature of Barriers:** Broad recognition that barriers are diverse and not limited to physical accessibility, encompassing digital, sensory, cognitive, financial, social, and attitudinal dimensions.
- 3. User-Centred Approach:** Strong consensus on the necessity of involving people with disabilities at all stages of accessibility planning and implementation. The Riga group articulated that "cooperation and information exchange with target groups is necessary."

4. **Resource Allocation Challenges:** All regions agreed that inadequate funding represents the most significant obstacle to improving accessibility, with accessibility budgets often being the first cut during economic downturns.
5. **Need for Awareness Raising:** Widespread agreement that changing societal and institutional attitudes is fundamental to sustainable accessibility improvements.

Divergent Views

Despite broad consensus on principles, several notable divergences appeared across regions:

1. **Prioritisation of Needs:** Regions differed in their emphasis on which accessibility dimensions should be prioritised. For example, Maramures focused strongly on physical accessibility for mobility needs, while Corsica emphasised digital accessibility and Małopolska highlighted the importance of cognitive accessibility.
2. **Implementation Responsibility:** Views differed on who should bear primary responsibility for implementing accessibility improvements. Some regions (Central Greece, Hajdú-Bihar) emphasised government leadership, while others (Frankfurt, Zuid-Limburg) focused on institutional responsibility or collaborative approaches.
3. **Solutions for Heritage Sites:** While all regions acknowledged the tension between preservation and accessibility, approaches varied from technological solutions (Riga) to adaptation of nearby facilities (Maramures) to emphasis on staff training for personalised assistance (Corsica).
4. **Certification Approaches:** Zuid-Limburg proposed accessibility certification marks to guide visitors, while other regions emphasised clearer communication about actual conditions to allow visitors to make informed decisions.

Notable Insights and Quotes

The focus group discussions yielded several profound insights that transcend regional boundaries:

A representative from a Corsican regional authority observed that "accessibility to cultural resources is not only about adapting physical spaces but also about changing how we think about mediation and inclusion," highlighting the need for holistic approaches.

In Frankfurt, a participant noted that "accessibility cannot be simply outsourced to an agency but must be planned with the active involvement of the target group from the outset," emphasising the co-creation principle.

A museum representative from Hajdú-Bihar reflected that "experience shows there is a strong demand from people with disabilities to visit cultural venues," challenging the assumption that accessibility investments may not yield adequate returns.

In Małopolska, a participant illuminated a shift in mindset: "The purpose of accessibility is not to implement a regulation or create indicators, but to serve people who are to use them," emphasising the human-centred approach to accessibility.

The Central Greece focus group highlighted that "experiential learning plays an important role," suggesting activities where the general public can temporarily experience the challenges faced by people with disabilities to build empathy and understanding.

From Maramures came a profound recognition that integrating people with disabilities requires "awareness raising and people education in order to concretely aid the population in understanding special needs, develop empathy and train the civic spirit."

These discussions reveal that beyond the technical and financial challenges of accessibility implementation, cultural institutions across Europe are increasingly

recognising accessibility as a fundamental human right and an integral component of their public service mission. The focus groups demonstrated the value of regional exchange, as participants not only identified common challenges but also began developing collaborative approaches to address them.

4. Comparative Analysis

This section presents a comparative analysis of accessibility trends, challenges, and approaches across the eight partner regions. The analysis draws on both quantitative data from the surveys and qualitative insights from the focus groups to identify commonalities, differences, and emerging patterns in how regions address cultural and natural resource accessibility.

4.1. Comparative Analysis of Accessibility Perception

One of the most revealing findings across regions is the consistent gap between how accessibility is perceived by different stakeholder groups, as illustrated in Figure 1.

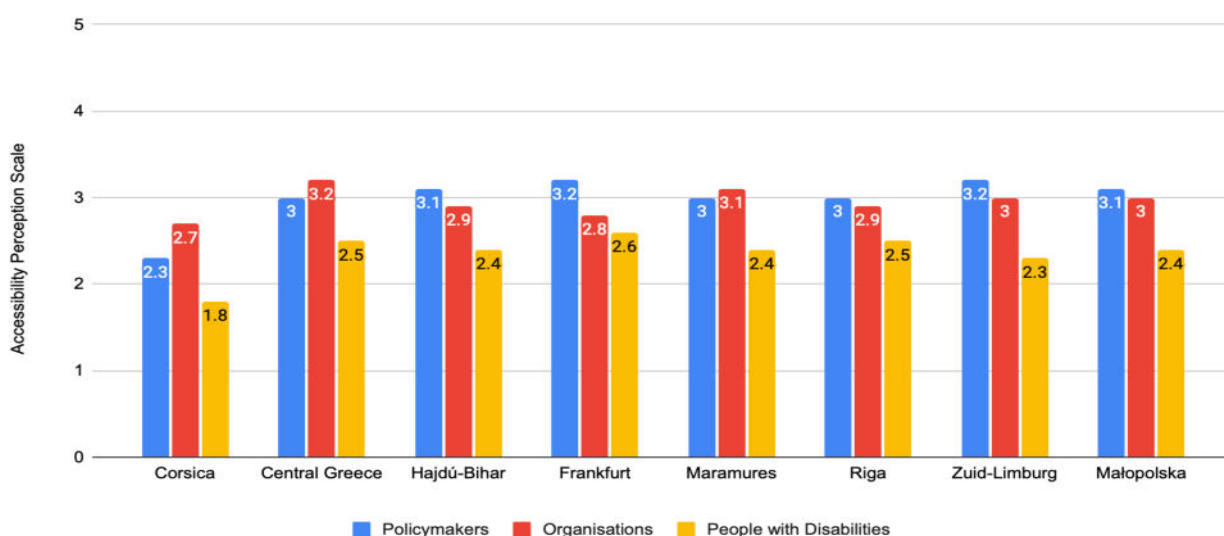


Figure 1: Accessibility Perception Gap Across Stakeholder Groups

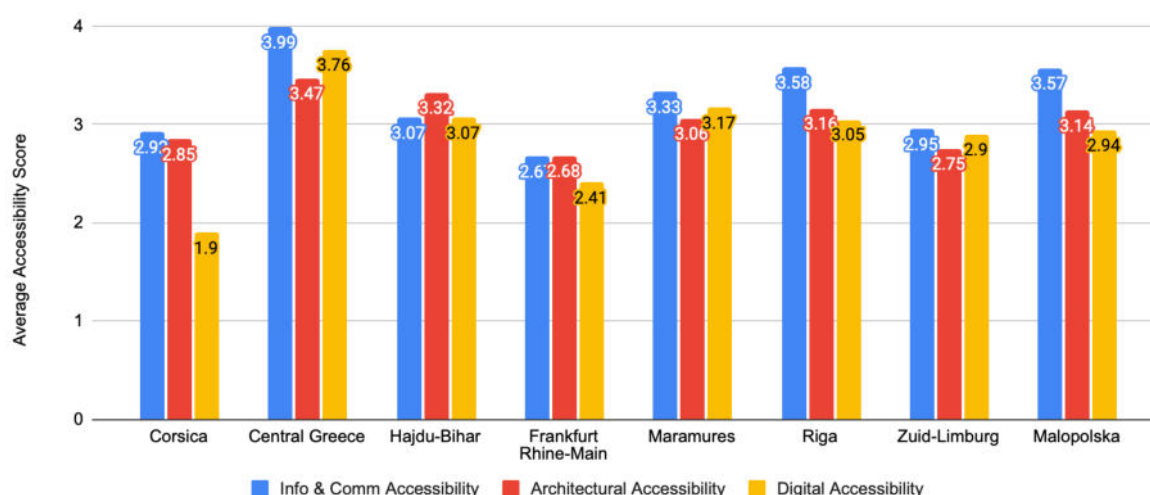
Methodological note: Figure 1 data was derived by converting qualitative assessments from each regional survey into a standardised 1-5 scale (1=very poor, 5=excellent). For policymakers and organisations, this reflects their responses to questions about the overall state of accessibility. For people with disabilities, values represent the average satisfaction ratings with current accessibility levels reported in the surveys.

The perception gap between policymakers and people with disabilities was most pronounced in Corsica, with a stark difference of 0.5 points on the 5-point scale, followed by Maramures and Riga, where policymakers consistently rated accessibility significantly higher than people with disabilities. Notably, the gap between organisations and people with disabilities was equally significant, particularly in Corsica and Maramures, where organisations overestimated accessibility by approximately 0.9 and 0.7 points respectively. The smallest perception gaps were observed in Zuid-Limburg and Frankfurt, suggesting these regions have more accurate institutional awareness of accessibility challenges. In these regions, the discrepancies between policymakers, organisations, and people with disabilities were less than 0.4 points, indicating a more nuanced and aligned understanding of accessibility issues across different stakeholder groups.

4.2. Regional Accessibility Performance by Domain

The survey data allows for comparison of accessibility performance across different domains. Figure 2 presents a regional comparison of accessibility ratings across three key dimensions:

Figure 2: Accessibility Dimensions Comparison according to Cultural Organisations



Methodological note: Figure 2 data was derived by converting qualitative assessments from Survey 2 of each regional survey into a standardised 1-5 scale (1=very poor, 5=excellent) and taking the weighted average of the results.

Notable patterns emerge from this comparison:

- Digital accessibility consistently lags behind physical accessibility across all regions
- The greatest disparities between physical and digital accessibility appear in Corsica and Riga
- Frankfurt Rhine-Main shows relatively lower scores across all dimensions compared to other regions

However, we should view this figure as a comparative guide rather than a normative assessment, as it is based solely on responses from Survey 2, representing the perspective of staff at cultural organisations. We know from our earlier analysis (Figure 1) that cultural organisations consistently show higher accessibility perceptions than people with disabilities or their caregivers. This perception gap underscores the importance of considering multiple perspectives when evaluating the true state of accessibility in cultural facilities.

4.3. Policy Implementation Approaches Across Regions

The desk research and survey findings reveal distinct patterns in how accessibility policies are developed and implemented across the partner regions. Rather than attempting to rank regions numerically, this section identifies key implementation characteristics and approaches that distinguish regional efforts.

Legislative Foundations and Policy Development

Western European regions (Frankfurt Rhine-Main, Zuid-Limburg) demonstrate more established legislative frameworks, with accessibility requirements integrated into multiple policy domains. For example, the Netherlands has amended several laws including the "Equal treatment on grounds of disability or chronic illness act" to implement the CRPD, while Zuid-Limburg has 12 out of 16 municipalities with established local inclusion agendas.

Central and Eastern European regions (Hajdú-Bihar, Maramureş, Riga) have more recently developed policy frameworks, often focusing initially on physical accessibility. In Maramureş, the Sustainable Development Strategy 2021-2027 is the main policy instrument addressing accessibility, though implementation mechanisms are still developing.

Southern European regions (Corsica, Central Greece, Małopolska) present mixed approaches, with Małopolska's "Empathetic Culture" programme representing an innovative regional initiative that has been operating since 2016, while Corsica's accessibility work is primarily channelled through its Heritage Department.

Implementation Mechanisms

Implementation approaches vary significantly across regions:

In Frankfurt Rhine-Main and Zuid-Limburg, accessibility requirements are embedded within standard planning and operational processes, with clear guidelines for both new constructions and renovations. In the Netherlands, the ITstandaard 2018 (integral accessibility norm) provides developers with clear and free guidelines for accessibility.

Małopolska has developed a distinctive regional approach through its "Empathetic Culture" programme, which coordinates efforts across 23 cultural institutions and emphasises relational understanding of culture and changing attitudes rather than merely focusing on physical adaptations.

Riga and Central Greece rely more heavily on project-based implementation, with progress often tied to specific funding opportunities rather than systematic institutional processes. In Riga, projects financed by Interreg at various levels have notably improved accessibility of natural and cultural sites.

Corsica, Hajdú-Bihar, and Maramureş show emerging implementation approaches, often with promising pilot projects but fewer established mechanisms for systematic implementation across all cultural and natural resources.

Resource Allocation

Resource allocation strategies also reveal regional differences:

Western European regions generally have more diversified funding sources, including dedicated municipal budgets, provincial support, and private partnerships. In Zuid-Limburg, funding comes from municipal budgets with supplementary provincial support.

Central, Eastern, and Southern European regions rely more heavily on EU structural funds and project-based financing. Maramureş County Council offers yearly support

for local NGOs and public institutions through specific project funding, while Hajdú-Bihar primarily uses EU project funding with limited alternative sources.

Across all regions, insufficient funding was consistently identified as a major implementation barrier, with 75-91% of survey respondents citing this as a challenge.

Stakeholder Engagement

The depth and methods of stakeholder engagement vary across regions:

Małopolska's "Empathetic Culture" programme exemplifies deep stakeholder engagement, requiring each cultural institution to build relationships with people with different needs in their local environment and emphasising the "human rights model" that recognises the subjectivity of people with disabilities.

Frankfurt Rhine-Main and Zuid-Limburg demonstrate systematic stakeholder consultation processes, with experts by experience involved in policy development. Zuid-Limburg reports that 58.3% of respondents indicate that experts by experience are 'involved' or 'very involved' in policy creation and review.

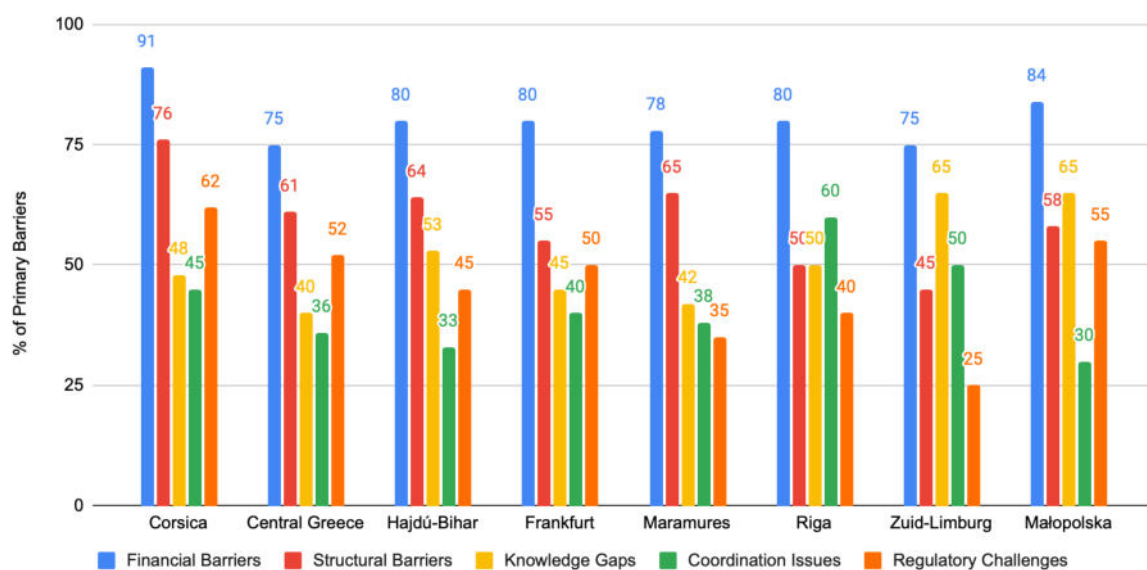
Other regions show emerging stakeholder engagement practices, though these are often project-specific rather than systematically integrated into policy development and implementation processes.

The analysis reveals that regions are at different stages of policy implementation, each with distinctive strengths and challenges. While western European regions benefit from longer-established legislative frameworks and more systematic implementation approaches, other regions demonstrate innovative pilot approaches and targeted initiatives that create valuable learning opportunities for all partner regions.

4.4. Barrier Analysis: Regional Comparison

A comparative analysis of the primary barriers identified across regions reveals both common challenges and regional specificities, as shown in Figure 3:

Figure 3: Primary Barriers to Accessibility Implementation



Methodological note: Figure 3 data represents the percentage of survey respondents in each region who identified specific barriers as significant challenges to accessibility implementation. For regions where exact percentages were not reported, values were estimated based on the frequency and emphasis with which barriers were mentioned in survey summaries and focus group discussions.

Financial barriers (insufficient funding, budget constraints) were unanimously identified as the primary obstacle across all regions, with 75-91% of respondents citing this as a major challenge.

Looking at the secondary barriers:

- Corsica shows high percentages for structural barriers (76%) and regulatory challenges (62%)
- Central Greece also emphasises structural barriers (61%) and regulatory challenges (52%)
- Hajdú-Bihar shows significant knowledge gaps (53%) and structural barriers (64%)
- Frankfurt Rhine-Main highlights structural barriers (55%) and regulatory challenges (50%)
- Maramures notes a significant percentage for structural barriers (65%)
- Riga has the highest percentage for coordination issues (60%) among all regions
- Zuid-Limburg shows the highest percentage for knowledge gaps (65%) and the lowest for regulatory challenges (25%)
- Małopolska has notable knowledge gaps (65%) and regulatory challenges (55%)

Furthermore, the secondary barriers also reveal certain regional patterns:

- Southern regions (Corsica, Central Greece) do emphasise structural and regulatory barriers more strongly
- Central European regions (Hajdú-Bihar, Małopolska) show higher percentages for knowledge and expertise gaps
- Northern regions (Riga, Zuid-Limburg) have higher percentages for coordination and implementation challenges
- Regulatory barriers related to heritage preservation were particularly pronounced in regions with high concentrations of historical sites (Corsica, Małopolska, Frankfurt).

4.5. Staff Training and Competency Development

The surveys revealed significant disparities in staff training approaches and competency development across regions, as illustrated in Table 1:

Table 2: Relative Emphasis on Staff Training Types by Region

Region	Disability Awareness	Technical Training	Customer Service	Emergency Response	No Training
Corsica	Low	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate
Central Greece	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Hajdú-Bihar	Low	Low	Moderate	High	High
Frankfurt	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	Low
Maramures	Moderate	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate
Riga	Low	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate
Zuid-Limburg	Low	Low	Moderate	High	Low
Małopolska	High	Moderate	High	Moderate	Low

Methodological note: Table 2 data represents the relative emphasis placed on different types of accessibility training provided to staff in cultural organisations across regions. The categories (Low, Moderate, High) were assigned based on the qualitative descriptions of training practices in the regional reports, with "High" indicating training types that were frequently mentioned or strongly emphasised, "Moderate" for those mentioned with less frequency or emphasis, and "Low" for those rarely mentioned or not strongly emphasised.

- Emergency response training is highly emphasised in most regions, except for Central Greece and Małopolska, where it receives moderate emphasis.
- Technical training on accessibility equipment is generally less emphasised across all regions, with most regions placing low emphasis on this type of training.
- Disability awareness training receives high emphasis in Central Greece and Małopolska, while it is moderately emphasised in Frankfurt and Maramures. Other regions place low emphasis on disability awareness training.
- Customer service training is moderately emphasised in most regions, with Małopolska being the only region to place high emphasis on this type of training.
- The proportion of organisations providing no accessibility training at all varies across regions. Hajdú-Bihar stands out with a high proportion of organisations lacking any accessibility training, while Central Greece, Frankfurt, Zuid-Limburg, and Małopolska have a low proportion of organisations without training. Corsica, Maramures, and Riga fall in the moderate category.

These findings suggest that while emergency response training is widely prioritised, there are significant regional variations in the emphasis placed on other types of accessibility training. The low emphasis on technical training across regions may indicate a need for greater resources or expertise in this area. The high emphasis on disability awareness training in Central Greece and Małopolska could serve as a model for other regions looking to improve their staff's understanding of accessibility needs.

Moreover, the varying proportions of organisations without any accessibility training highlight the need for more consistent and comprehensive training initiatives across all regions to ensure that staff are well-equipped to serve visitors with diverse needs.

4.6. Resource Allocation Strategies

A comparative analysis of how regions allocate resources for accessibility improvements reveals diverse approaches, as summarised in Table 2:

Table 3: Comparative analysis of accessibility funding approaches across regions

Region	Primary Funding Mechanism	Secondary Approaches	Innovative Funding Solutions
Corsica	EU Structural Funds	Regional Authority Budget	Project-based public-private partnerships
Central Greece	National Government	Municipal Budgets	Collaboration with NGOs
Hajdú-Bihar	EU Project Funding	Local Government	Limited alternative sources
Frankfurt	State and Municipal Funding	Private Donations	Corporate sponsorship
Maramures	Local NGO Funding	County Council Support	Cultural project competitions
Riga	National Government	Municipal Support	Database of accessible locations (mapeirons.eu)
Zuid-Limburg	Municipal Budgets	Provincial Support	Cross-border collaboration
Małopolska	EU Funds	National Project Funding	"Empathetic Culture" program

A comparative analysis of regional resource allocation strategies reveals distinct approaches to funding accessibility improvements. As detailed in Table 3, several key patterns emerge across the regions:

- Southern and Eastern European regions (e.g., Corsica, Hajdú-Bihar) tend to rely more heavily on EU funding mechanisms as their primary means of financing accessibility initiatives.
- In contrast, Western European regions (e.g., Frankfurt, Zuid-Limburg) demonstrate more diversified funding approaches, incorporating state and municipal funding, private donations, and corporate sponsorships.

Notably, the most innovative funding solutions, such as project-based public-private partnerships and dedicated programs like Małopolska's "Empathetic Culture," are more frequently observed in regions with longer-established accessibility policies and a more mature approach to implementation.

4.7. Regional Approaches to Heritage-Accessibility Balance

The tension between heritage preservation and accessibility emerged as a common challenge across all regions. Table 4 compares regional approaches to addressing this tension:

Region	Primary Approach	Notable Innovations	Remaining Challenges
Corsica	Technological solutions	Mobile cultural programs	Remote heritage sites
Central Greece	Guidelines for adapting historic sites	Audio description technologies	Archaeological sites
Hajdú-Bihar	Staff-assisted solutions	Museum education programs	Funding for technological solutions
Frankfurt	Universal design principles	Accessibility consultants	Monument protection conflicts
Maramures	Virtual exhibitions	Audio guides	Conservation requirements
Riga	Alternate access routes	Digital experiences	Historic district infrastructure
Zuid-Limburg	Clear communication about limitations	Cross-municipal coordination	Hill country topography
Małopolska	Staff training for assistance	Language adaptations	Historic structure modifications

The strategies employed to balance heritage preservation and accessibility demonstrate a variety of approaches, reflecting the unique challenges and opportunities in each region. While some regions prioritise technological solutions or staff-assisted solutions, others are exploring innovative methods such as virtual exhibitions, digital experiences, and clear communication about limitations. This diversity highlights both the complexity of the issue and the ongoing efforts to find contextually appropriate solutions that respect cultural heritage while enhancing inclusivity.

4.8. Synthesis of Regional Approaches

The comparative analysis reveals both shared challenges and diverse approaches across the partner regions. While all regions operate within similar international frameworks (UNCRPD, EU directives), their implementation approaches reflect distinct regional contexts, including historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors, which significantly shape their priorities and available resources.

Several clear patterns emerge from this analysis:

1. **Implementation Gap:** All regions face challenges translating policy frameworks into effective implementation, though the specific barriers vary
2. **Resource Disparities:** Western European regions generally demonstrate more resource-intensive approaches, often with dedicated budgets and diverse funding streams, while Southern and Eastern European regions rely more heavily on project-based or external funding, such as EU structural funds
3. **Evolution of Approach:** Regions are at different stages of a similar evolutionary path from physical accessibility (most advanced) to digital and cognitive accessibility (least developed)
4. **Institutional Integration:** More advanced regions show greater integration of accessibility into institutional practices, while others maintain it as a specialised function
5. **User Involvement:** All regions acknowledge the importance of user involvement, though approaches and depth of engagement vary significantly

This comparative analysis underscores that while regions face similar challenges, their solutions must be contextually adapted. The interregional exchange facilitated by the OpenRegioCulture project offers valuable opportunities for regions to learn from each other's diverse experiences and collaboratively develop solutions appropriate to their specific contexts.

5. Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive mapping of accessibility challenges, policies, and practices across the eight partner regions, the following recommendations focus on key strategic areas to enhance accessibility of cultural resources for people with disabilities and varied needs.

5.1. Policy Development and Implementation

- **Integrate accessibility into core strategic planning and budgets** of cultural institutions rather than treating it as an optional add-on. Cultural organisations should dedicate a specific percentage (5-10%) of their annual budget to accessibility improvements.
- **Establish cross-departmental coordination mechanisms** between cultural, transportation, social services, and urban planning departments to ensure holistic approaches to accessibility, addressing the fragmentation identified particularly in Riga and Hajdú-Bihar.
- **Develop phased implementation frameworks** that balance ambitious goals with realistic timelines, allowing institutions to implement improvements gradually while maintaining clear accessibility targets, as highlighted in Frankfurt and Zuid-Limburg focus groups.
- **Harmonise heritage preservation and accessibility requirements** through specific guidelines and dialogue forums bringing together conservation experts, accessibility specialists, and people with disabilities, addressing a tension particularly noted in Corsica, Małopolska, and Frankfurt.

5.2. Knowledge Development and Capacity Building

- **Create regional accessibility resource centres** providing consulting, training, and practical tools to cultural institutions. These centres should employ experts with disabilities to ensure lived experience informs all guidance, an approach supported by focus groups in Małopolska and Central Greece.
- **Develop standardised accessibility training modules** addressing different accessibility needs, with a focus on sensory and cognitive accessibility training which was identified as lacking across all regions, particularly in Corsica, Riga, and Hajdú-Bihar.
- **Establish interregional mentorship programmes** pairing more experienced institutions with those at earlier implementation stages to facilitate knowledge transfer, building on successful models from Zuid-Limburg and Małopolska's "Empathetic Culture" programme.
- **Implement programmes that integrate the expertise of lived experience** that systematically involve people with disabilities in staff training, policy development, and accessibility audits, applying the "not about us, without us" principle emphasised in all regional focus groups.

5.3. Addressing Specific Accessibility Gaps

- **Launch dedicated digital accessibility initiatives** providing technical assistance, evaluation tools, and implementation support to cultural institutions. Digital accessibility consistently lagged behind physical accessibility across all regions, with the gap particularly pronounced in Corsica and Riga.
- **Develop comprehensive sensory and cognitive accessibility standards** for cultural venues, including requirements for audio description, tactile experiences, and adapted programming for people with cognitive disabilities, addressing significant gaps identified in all regions.
- **Create regional pools of accessibility equipment** (audio guides, tactile materials, sensory kits) that smaller institutions can borrow, helping overcome the financial barriers particularly acute in Maramures, Central Greece, and Hajdú-Bihar.
- **Establish rural and remote access initiatives** including mobile cultural programmes and transport subsidies to address the urban-rural divide identified as a significant challenge in Corsica, Hajdú-Bihar, and Maramures.

5.4. Awareness-Raising and Communication

- **Implement comprehensive accessibility communication strategies** across all cultural institutions, providing clear, accurate information about accessibility features and limitations. This addresses the significant information gap identified in all regional surveys.
- **Develop accessibility certification or labelling systems** that accurately communicate accessibility features, building on suggestions from Zuid-Limburg focus groups while avoiding oversimplification of complex accessibility needs.
- **Create public awareness campaigns** highlighting the importance of cultural accessibility as a fundamental right rather than a special accommodation, addressing attitudinal barriers identified in Hajdú-Bihar and Maramures.
- **Establish regular feedback mechanisms** to gather input from visitors with varied needs and use this data to drive continuous improvement, addressing the consultation gap identified in Survey 3 across all regions.

5.5. Strategic Funding and Resource Allocation

- **Explore diverse funding mechanisms** including public-private partnerships, corporate sponsorships, and cross-sector collaboration with health and social services, building on innovative approaches identified in Frankfurt and Corsica.
- **Create accessibility innovation funds** that support pilot projects testing new approaches to accessibility challenges, particularly in heritage contexts where traditional solutions may be limited by conservation requirements.
- **Develop regional or cross-municipal funding pools** that combine resources from multiple institutions to achieve economies of scale in training, technical solutions, and expertise, addressing the efficiency challenges noted in smaller municipalities of Zuid-Limburg and Maramures.
- **Integrate accessibility requirements into all cultural funding mechanisms** at regional, national, and EU levels, ensuring that public funding supports inclusive cultural participation.

Implementation of these recommendations will require sustained commitment, adequate resources, and active collaboration among diverse stakeholders. However, the interregional exchange facilitated by the OpenRegioCulture project provides valuable opportunities for regions to learn from each other's experiences and collaboratively develop solutions appropriate to their specific contexts. By building on the strengths identified in different regions and addressing common challenges together, cultural resources can become genuinely accessible to everyone.

6. Conclusion

This synthesis report has provided a comprehensive overview of the accessibility landscape across eight European partner regions, revealing both shared challenges and diverse approaches to enhancing the accessibility of cultural resources for people with disabilities and varied needs.

The mapping exercise has demonstrated that while all partner regions have legal frameworks in place supporting accessibility—often founded on international agreements like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—there remains a persistent gap between policy and implementation. This gap stems from multiple factors including financial constraints, limited expertise, fragmented responsibility, and the challenge of balancing heritage preservation with accessibility requirements.

A consistent finding across all regions was the significant perception gap between how accessibility is assessed by policymakers and cultural organisations versus how it is experienced by people with disabilities. This disparity underscores the critical importance of involving people with disabilities directly in accessibility planning, implementation, and evaluation processes to ensure solutions address actual needs rather than perceived ones.

The comparative analysis revealed that regions are at different stages of accessibility development, with physical accessibility generally more advanced than digital, sensory, or cognitive accessibility. This pattern suggests an evolutionary path that regions follow, with important opportunities for interregional learning to accelerate progress through shared experiences and good practices.

Regional contexts significantly influence accessibility approaches, with Western European regions generally benefiting from more established frameworks and diverse funding sources, while Southern and Eastern European regions often demonstrate innovative project-based solutions within more constrained resource environments. The diversity of approaches across regions—from Małopolska's "Empathetic Culture"

programme to Zuid-Limburg's cross-municipal coordination—provides a rich tapestry of potential solutions that can be adapted to different regional contexts.

Staff training and competency development emerged as a critical area for improvement across all regions, with most cultural institutions focusing primarily on emergency response training rather than comprehensive accessibility awareness and skills development. This highlights an important opportunity to enhance the human dimension of accessibility alongside technical solutions.

The recommendations presented in this report aim to address the identified challenges while building on existing strengths and good practices across partner regions. By focusing on policy development, knowledge building, specific accessibility gaps, awareness-raising, and strategic funding, these recommendations provide a roadmap for enhancing cultural accessibility that can be adapted to the unique context of each region.

The OpenRegioCulture project, by facilitating interregional exchange and collaborative learning, creates a valuable platform for regions to build on each other's strengths and address common challenges together. This collaborative approach recognises that enhancing accessibility is not merely a technical or regulatory challenge but a shared commitment to creating inclusive cultural environments where everyone can participate fully in the rich cultural heritage of Europe.

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Annex - Regional Report Template

Please ensure that all reports follow the following template to facilitate uniformity and ease of comparison across regions.

Region Name:

Date of Report:

Introduction (max. 1 page)

- Purpose of the report.
- Specific objectives.

1. Results from Desk research (2 pages)

- Overview of current policies on the accessibility of people with disabilities and varied needs to cultural resources in the region.
- Discuss any gaps and areas of improvement identified.
- Regional-specific needs – unique challenges of each region.

2. Regional Survey Results (4 pages)

- Methodology: Brief description of the survey methodology (e.g., target groups, total number of respondents).
- Present summarised findings from the 1st survey related to:
 - The current state of accessibility of cultural resources for individuals with disabilities and varied needs.
 - The strengths and weaknesses of existing policies supporting accessibility for people with disabilities and varied needs in the region.
- Present summarised findings from the 2nd survey related to:
 - The current state of accessibility at the organisation/institutions.

- The implementation aspects of existing policy frameworks.
- The awareness and learning levels of staff in cultural sights.
- Present summarised findings from the 3rd survey related to:
 - The specific needs of individuals with disabilities and varied needs.
 - The perceived barriers and challenges.
 - The implementation aspects of policy frameworks.
- Analyse and discuss the survey results, noting trends, significant points of interest, and any surprising insights.

3. Regional Review Meetings (Focus Groups) results (2 pages)

- Brief description of the focus group methodology (e.g., duration and setting of sessions, participant demographics).
- Summarise the main points of discussion from each section of the focus group.
- Provide an analysis of the discussions, highlighting areas of consensus, divergent views, and notable quotes from the participants.

4. Recommendations/Suggestions for the Region (2 pages)

- Based on survey and focus group findings, recommend strategies to overcome identified barriers and weaknesses.
- Propose initiatives or policies to address the specific unmet needs highlighted through the assessment process.
- Offer strategic recommendations for stakeholders to support the accessibility for people with disabilities and varied needs.

5. References

- Reference list.

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