

## Middelpunt - A unique concept - inclusive work for accessible tourism

### Presentation abstract

Middelpunt ([www.middelpunt.com](http://www.middelpunt.com)) is a unique hotel in Middelkerke, at the centre of the Belgian coast, ran by people with a disability in a partnership with local care providers.

Our project has 44 rooms and 88 beds, in a mixture of room types. 20 persons with disability find a paid job in the hotel. All rooms and infrastructure are fully accessible for everybody.

The project was started by an independent sheltered workplace Mariasteen ([www.mariasteen.be](http://www.mariasteen.be)), as a new element in the diversity of job types provided.

The hotel is inclusive: guests are a mix of people with and without disability. Guest come as individuals, as a family or as a group.

Moreover, we get more and more business-related visitors (seminars).

The hotel is also inclusive in another meaning: the employees of the project are also people with a disability. So, not only the architecture is designed for all, but also the work methods and procedures are designed so that they can be performed by our employees.

Moreover, the hotel was designed in a sustainable way: people, planet and profit were taken into account while creating the concept.

The hotel, which was designed by architect Dertien12 ([www.dertien12.be](http://www.dertien12.be)) has been selected to be presented at the World Sustainable Building Conference in Barcelona (2014)

In this workshop, we take you on a tour in how we designed the hotel and the working procedures.

- How the ideas for an inclusive hotel started
- How the architectural design takes into account accessibility
- How the design fosters inclusion and a non-stigmatising stay in the hotel
- How partnerships challenged us to provide in very high accessibility (e.g. also accessible for people who are completely paralysed)
- The challenges we encountered to combine accessibility with safety (e.g. how we collaborated with the local fire department to find solutions for the evacuation problem)
- How did we achieve the highest label for touristic accessibility in Flanders (Tourism for all - "A+")
- Which technology did we include in the hotel (both for sustainability and for accessibility)
- How the environment of the hotel strenghtens our accesssibility (local transportation, bikes for disabled people, accessible path to the beach, accessible beach, our accesssible beach cabin, beach wheelchairs ...)
- How did we insure the inclusive character of the project, with different target groups (i.e. a good mixture of groups, families, individuals, with or without disabilities ...)
- How do visitors react to the inclusive character of the hotel
- How do we run the hotel and support our disabled employees to be able to do their job

- How do we measure the results and keep a balance between our social purpose and the economic reality
- What difficulties did we encounter
- What we chose NOT to do
- Challenges for the future
- o How do we cope with the challenge of season-dependent fluctuations in the number of guests

The whole presentation will be illustrated with lots of pictures and concrete examples of how things were done. We will share the positive lessons we learned, but also tips on how not to do things.

Since our hotel is now running for about 5 years, we have sufficient experience to give a workshop that is useful for other project, and for people and organisations who are in search of accessible tourism. We will include a checklist of elements to take in to account to design accomodation for accessible tourism, and to take into account when booking an accessible accomodation.

**Lead speaker :** Desmet Tamara

**Organisation :** Middelpunt (Mariasteen vzw)

**City (Country) :** Middelkerke(België)

**Biography :** Tamara Desmet is the commercial manager of the Hotel Middelpunt. She is a driven woman with a burning passion for her industry. Middelpunt is a social employment project by the Mariasteen Company (a sheltered work place) which has its main office in Gits, West-Flanders. In such a company people with disabilities are offered the chance to do a job that matches their interests and possibilities. They work in smaller teams and are given manageable levels of responsibility. Tamara started her career at Mariasteen 9 years ago in Human Resources. She came into contact with disabled people on a daily basis and came to understand their wishes and needs. When she was asked four years ago to run Middelpunt, she gladly accepted. Tamara said: "To see people with a smile on their faces when they leave, makes me sincerely happy!"

**2nd speaker :**

**Organisation :**

**City (Country) :** ( )

**Biography :**