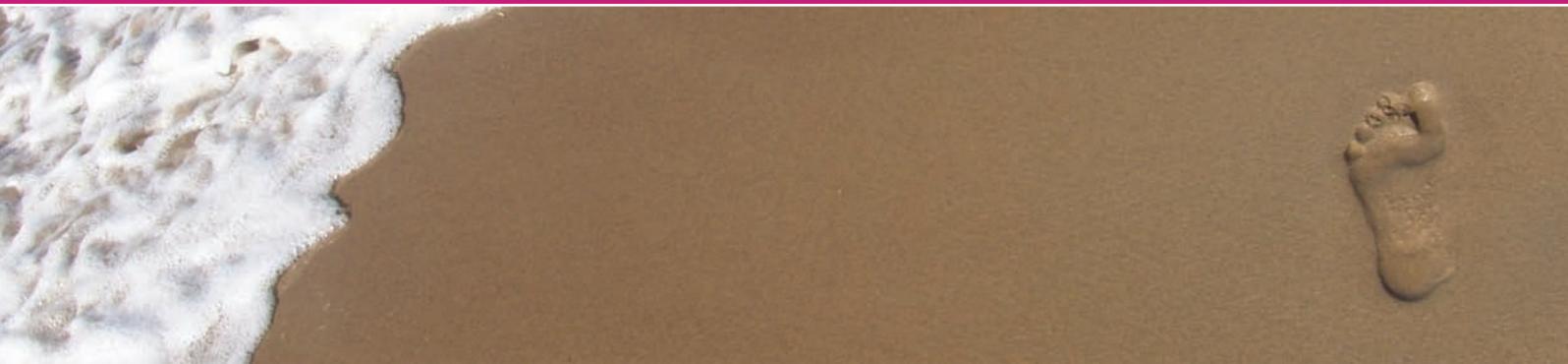




Tourism Notebook



## Holidays are for everyone

Research into the effects and the importance of holidays for people living in poverty



Tourism Flanders & Brussels  
Holiday Participation Centre

## Colophon

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## Preface

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It is important for everyone to visit a different environment occasionally, to recharge their batteries and to relax. We look forward to a holiday and think about it for a long time afterwards.

Holidays are necessary, for everyone.

From October 2007 to February 2008, the Holiday Participation Centre (a service of Tourism Flanders & Brussels) and the Centre for Tourism Research of the University of Westminster, collaborated intensively on research that studied the effects of holidays on people living in poverty.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to all who participated in this research. The level of response to the written survey was very high and attendance at the focus groups was more than satisfactory. The high degree of involvement on the part of all partners makes the conclusions inspiring and compelling.

Tourism Flanders & Brussels believes in the positive effects of holidays and wants to ensure that everyone can share in them. This notebook discusses in detail the research conducted, gives you an overview of the needs and requirements of these holidaymakers and suggests a way forward for the Holiday Participation Centre.

Flanders has a long and strong tradition of social tourism. The results of this research are important to Flanders, but can also inspire other countries and regions. We are exploring the international context and exchanging experiences.

Because a holiday is more than 'a short time away from home' - it increases the quality of life and results in improved integration of specific groups into society. Therefore, tourism must be possible for all, literally "Tourism for All".



Luc Gobin  
Department head Investments



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## Introduction

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The Holiday Participation Centre, a service of Tourism Flanders & Brussels, was founded in May 2001, and quickly grew. It targets persons and families in poverty who, for diverse reasons, are unable to take a holiday. This target group is reached via social member organisations.

The Holiday Participation Centre is the intersection between supply and demand. On the supply side, we find the tourism sector, which offers social rates for persons who would otherwise not be able to make use of these facilities. The demand side is embodied by the many social organisations in Flanders. They ensure that these rates are available to those who need them. Only close cooperation on the part of all concerned can make growth possible and address the challenges raised in this new development phase.

In the space of just a few years, many organisations have found their way to Holiday Participation. Growth has occurred at several levels. The number of members, the number of holidaymakers and the offerings themselves have risen each year. Past evaluations also confirm our concern for quality - holidaymakers, tourism suppliers and social organisations are positive about their collaboration with the Holiday Participation Centre. As a growing organisation, it is very important to keep our finger on the pulse of all the partners that contribute to making these social holidays possible. Thus, time to reflect for a moment, look back and think ahead.

This report, in collaboration with Dr. Lynn Minnaert (University of Westminster - Centre for Tourism Research), presents the results of an intensive research process that took place in 2007 and 2008. The research process concentrated on the different pillars that make it possible to go on holiday. The focus was intentionally placed on the effects of the holiday. The many reactions from holidaymakers indicate that a holiday can be more than just "a short time away from home".

Flanders is playing a pioneering role in this research (research into the effects of social tourism is currently scarce). In several countries and regions in Europe (with Flanders occupying a prominent place), social tourism is financially supported by government funding. Effects such as increased confidence, improved family ties and a more proactive attitude are often attributed to social holidays. Yet there is very little scientific research to support this.

Special attention was also paid to supporting the holiday offerings. Here, the member organisations play a central role. They often help the holidaymaker with multiple aspects of this process, such as selecting a destination, bookings, packing, route planning and assistance upon return. Support by the member organisations appears to be a critical element in achieving positive effects after the holiday. Part of this research is focused on investigating how this support can best be organised by these social organisations.

Two methods were used in this research. An expanded **written holiday survey** served as a quantitative component. In addition, a series of **focus groups** was organised to qualitatively support the statistical data.

The results of this research are important to Flanders, but also internationally. The Flemish system of holiday facilities aimed at persons living in poverty, coordinated by the Holiday Participation Centre and supported by the private sector, is somewhat exceptional.

Flanders has a long and strong tradition of social tourism and thus the results of this research can serve as inspiration for other countries and regions that might wish to strengthen their social tourism. Hence, Flanders can offer support to the proposal of the European Economic and Social Committee that "each European country develop a national social tourism programme with diverse forms of management" in which European organisations are encouraged to share experiences (EESC, Barcelona Declaration 2006).<sup>1</sup>



Tourism for All



## 1 Tourism for All

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### 1.1 From social tourism to “Tourism for All”

The introduction of the annual holiday and holiday pay are at the basis of social tourism. This goes back to 1936 when trade unions linked the right to paid holidays with the possibility for labourers to escape their hard daily life. The establishment of vacation centres thus allowed labourers to go on holiday outside the commercial circuit at an acceptable price. The first holiday experience was then usually a group holiday.

The centres for social tourism enjoyed their glory days in the post-war years. The period of economic growth was one of hard work, and the average Belgian had little time and limited means for holidays. Social holidays were subsidised by the government, and more holiday homes saw the light of day in Belgium and abroad.

Society was subject to constant change and progress. A large group became wealthier and wished to leave behind the socially tinted vacation centres. They explored the commercial circuit and found their way from social tourism to tourism. This is referred to as a democratisation of the sector. The trend shifted from group holidays to more individual holidays. Not everyone, however, benefited from financial advancement, and a substantial group remained behind, also in the area of tourism.

In the 1990s, a number of sources of subsidies dried up and vacation centres found it difficult to survive. They sought alternative sources of financing and continued to exist, but the social objectives became blurred. The centres were accessible to all and the target group became more diverse. In the same period, the commercial sector launched low-budget offerings that met with an eager audience.

On 1 October 1999, the World Tourism Organisation underscored the right of everyone to travel and in this way to get to know other regions and countries.

The desire to see tourism as a universal right and to make it accessible to all is a basis for social tourism. “The right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay” is included in article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948).

We note that today 26.5%<sup>2</sup> of our compatriots are unable to afford a holiday. One out of seven Belgians is poor. People living in poverty must make choices, and often not much is left over for leisure. They spend on average 75% less on tourist travel than the average Belgian. Those with a limited income must make choices. Often little or nothing is left for leisure and recreation.

Since holidays are a basic right and bring people back into contact with others, the Holiday Participation Centre is working on affordable holiday offerings. For all.

### 1.2 A decree in 2003

In 2003, the decree “Tourism for All” replaced the Royal Decree of 1980. It was a response to the changing societal context and gives new interpretation to social tourism. “Tourism for All” refers to a non-commercial form of tourism and recreation, with the focus on objectives that differ from merely economic activities. On the one hand, a choice was made for a target group -focused approach to support the manner in which specific target groups experience holidays.

On the other hand, “Tourism for All” implies a new structure for supporting the organisations that focus on these target groups.

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## → TARGET GROUP-FOCUSED APPROACH

Tourism for All concerns different target groups.

Often, **persons living in poverty** do not have access to the commercial holiday circuit. This target group is directly supported by the organisations that organise holidays for and with this target group. Furthermore, work done by the Holiday Participation Centre is fully focused on this target group.

Making holidays possible for **the disabled** also implies providing the requisite supporting initiatives. The initiatives for this target group principally concern the quality of the accommodation infrastructure. The adaptation of the infrastructure for the disabled also increases the accessibility of the accommodation for all. In making the adaptations, requisite attention must be paid to the four priority target groups, i.e. persons with a motor disability, the hearing-impaired, the blind and visually handicapped, and persons with an allergy or asthma. Accommodations that do what is required to make their premises accessible are awarded an accessibility label with which they can clearly advertise their services to the target group.

**Children and young people** constitute a fully-fledged target group within "Tourism for All". Accommodations that are rented for youth holidays during the summer or other holidays must fulfil basic quality norms. The goal of the decree "Tourism for All" is to provide sufficient capacity, diversity and basic quality within the youth tourism sector, so that the youth work sector has a sufficiently extensive and diverse offerings at its disposal to develop its activity. International youth tourism also deserves special attention. Upgrading and continuously supporting the accommodation infrastructure that focuses on the individual international youth tourism market is also necessary.

In addition, many **families and senior citizens** still fall by the wayside when it comes to experiencing holidays away from home. The existing social vacation centres continue to play a very important role in support of this target group. Their social pricing policy, the basic quality of their infrastructure and their offerings of theme-related activities meet the requirements of this target group.

## → ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH

Under the new decree "Tourism for All", the centres for social tourism are given direct certification and support. They no longer need to be affiliated with an umbrella organisation to be eligible for subsidies. The certification criteria for the accommodations focuses on their non-commercial character, their accessibility and the target groups they are addressing. At the end of October 2008, 382 youth accommodations in Flanders already had final certification as "Tourism for All" youth accommodation centres. Another 76 youth accommodations obtained certification in principle. Of the vacation centres for adults, 39 accommodations have received final certification and three have received certification in principle as "Tourism for All accommodation".

Organisations specifically focused on organising holidays for children, young people and/or families living in poverty are eligible for direct certification and support by the government. These organisations are all characterised by a high level of volunteer work. In 2008, 13 social tourist associations, or 'intermediary organisations', were certified and subsidised in the context of "Tourism for All". In 2007, almost 3,000 people were able to enjoy a Belgian or foreign holiday via these organisations.

To ensure the dynamism and good management of the centres, support of the management of the tourist vacation centres is also important. The former umbrella organisations were eligible for certification as management support centres to undertake this task. The support centres provide for the requisite vision formation, product development and support in the area of training and marketing for the accommodations affiliated with them. In 2008, nine associations were certified as management support centres. Together, they provide support to 95 certified holiday accommodations for young people and adults.



# Holiday Participation Centre



## 2 Holiday Participation Centre

The Holiday Participation Centre focuses on one of the target groups of “Tourism for All”, namely people living in poverty. This publication deals with research into the effects of holidays on people living in poverty and the functioning of the Holiday Participation Centre.

### 2.1 Some background on the Holiday Participation Centre

The Holiday Participation Centre was established in May 2001 by Tourism Flanders & Brussels.

→ **Activities**

- contributes to social tourism policy;
- searches for tourism partners with a social vision;
- engages in targeted promotion to persons with a low income;
- organises training for social and tourism partners;
- organises evaluation, consultation and exchange to optimise effectiveness;
- investigates the international context and makes contacts.

→ **Tourism partners**

- attractions, events, youth accommodations, holiday parks, hotels, guest rooms, chalets, caravans, cabins, etc.;
- organised children’s camps or holidays for families or single parents, etc.

→ **Holidaymakers**

- alone, in a group, organised by themselves or registered for an organised holiday;
- from 0 to 99 years of age.

→ **Social member organisations and contact centres**

950 member organisations of all different guises, such as welfare centres, Welzijnsschakels (volunteer groups working to combat poverty and social exclusion), social services (OCMWs), family guidance services, VAWs, neighbourhood centres, all focused on an underprivileged target group (see p. 82).

### 2.2 Holidays are necessary

It is important for everyone to visit a different environment occasionally, to recharge their batteries, to relax. “Going on holiday is a psychological boost”, said one of the holidaymakers. The word ‘holiday’ almost automatically encourages thoughts of wonderful memories.

- We experience holidays as a delightful time, a moment of recreation, making time for others and yourself. They are the ideal opportunity to learn something new and expand your horizon.
- Holidays are healthy and offer numerous benefits to body and mind. They promote well-being and reduce stress.
- Holidays are necessary because they increase self-respect and create confidence, improve communication and consolidate family ties.

- 
- Holidays are instructive and bring us into contact with different cultures, places and customs. Holidays teach us new skills and open up perspectives.

People with a low income must make choices. Usually, there is nothing or very little left over for holidays. Poverty and health are strongly linked. It is a vicious circle that is difficult to break. Illness can place people in poverty and living in poverty generates a high degree of stress which damages one's health.

Tourism Flanders & Brussels believes in the positive effects of holidays and wants to ensure that everyone can share in them. Those who feel good about themselves, function better. Someone who feels appreciated looks at society in a positive way.

## 2.3 More than just a short time away

Holidays are not cheap. A cheaper ticket or accommodation is only part of the total cost of a holiday. Transport is a major expense, and once you have arrived, other costs begin to add up, e.g. a drink, swimming, an ice cream - these are all part and parcel of the holiday, but also cost money.

In addition to the financial threshold, practical concerns also keep people at home. Who will feed the cat when I'm not here, how will I get to my destination, what must I say when I arrive? People who have never been on holiday find many things to be anything but self-evident. What should I take with me to the holiday home? Won't the children be bored? They want to go, but do not dare take the step. Shame and guilt, poor self-esteem often rear their head, e.g. May I allow myself to do this? What will people think? Everyone will see that I don't have much? How will I tell this to my budget supervisor?

Holidays are a right for all. Lowering the financial barrier is a good beginning, but not sufficient. Tourism Flanders & Brussels aims to strengthen the lives of people living in poverty via holiday facilities. This gives them a grip on their own situation and surroundings. The Holiday Participation Centre finds a *raison d'être* in the stories that it hears, e.g. from a holidaymaker who finally finds the courage to deal with problems, couples who rediscover each other, families who can let go of worries. A day trip or holidays allow people to discover positive feelings that have remained hidden for too long. This positive energy is necessary, because it brings people into contact with other people and because it can break the isolation, generate new energy and make families stronger.

## 2.4 Poverty and social exclusion

### 2.4.1 Definitions

Poverty is more than having no money. It concerns work, income, health, housing, culture, exclusion. Everything at the same time. In the Poverty and Social Exclusion Yearbook, we find the following definition:

*"Poverty is a network of social exclusions that covers multiple areas of individual and collective existence. It divides the poor from the generally accepted patterns of living in society. They are unable to bridge this gap on their own." (Jan Vranken<sup>34</sup>)*

Tine Van Regenmortel<sup>5</sup> adds:

*"This gap can only be bridged when society calls upon the psychological capital of persons living in poverty and their surroundings. For this, society also makes the economic, social and cultural forms of capital available to them. In this way, everyone receives equal opportunities to non-offending social and societal interactions and to valuable links with oneself, others, society and the future."*

### 2.4.2 Causes of poverty

Are the poor too lazy to work? Do they not want to learn? Is this all due to their own failings? Those who want to can work and have an income. Those who spend their income wisely are not poor or is it more complex than this? Did it simply get too much for them and are they not in control of the situation? Is our society organised in such a way that poverty is an ingrained element?

The table below offers six explanatory models for poverty. Four models are located at the micro and macro level according to Jan Vranken (Vranken and Geldof, 1992). The table is supplemented by two explanatory models by Kristel Driessens<sup>6</sup> at the meso level (Driessens, 2003). The typology rests on two criteria, i.e. at what level is the cause of poverty sought (micro, meso, macro) and is the cause internal (debt) or external (accident).

Table 1: Explanatory models for poverty

Level of the cause	Nature of the cause	
	Internal	External
Micro	(1) Individual debt model	(2) Individual accident model
Meso	(3) Institutional debt model	(4) Institutional accident model
Macro	(5) Societal debt model or structural model	(6) Societal accident model or cyclical model

Source: Vranken J., 2006, *Jaarboek Armoede en Sociale Uitsluiting*

The first two models take the individual as their focal point. The underlying social processes are not considered here. The **individual debt model** (1) states that the poor are entirely to blame: lack of self-discipline, lack of perseverance, lack of sense of responsibility. This explanation does not deal with the circumstances in which people grew up. The **individual accident model** (2) seeks causes in personal setbacks such as illness, loss of work, disability. It concerns much more the reasons why a person is overcome than the actual consequences.

The third and fourth model take place at the meso level of society. The structure and/or functioning of the group, community, institution, organisation. Trade unions, schools and universities, companies, churches, associations and by extension also the family are located here. Judgements applicable at this institutional meso level are: "Institutions keep people dependent." "We give them opportunities, but they don't make use of them." The internal variant, the **institutional debt model** (3), seeks an explanation for the way in which the institutions are organised. An inaccessible or bureaucratic deployment of services, inadequate or 'different' socialisation by the family. The external perspective, the **institutional accident model** (4), looks for phenomena such as stigmatisation, stereotypes and inadequate policy attention for minority groups.

The macro level refers to the way in which society is organised. The **societal debt model** (5) is a structural approach that pays attention to the poverty itself and to the society that produces and maintains this poverty. The sixth model, the **social accident model** (6), takes changes and the economic situation as the central theme, for example an economic crisis or demographic changes. This social accident model also assumes that poverty will disappear when the economy improves.

Most approaches to poverty bring together characteristics from the different explanatory models.

### 2.4.3 Unable to allow themselves a week's holiday

In the annual SILC survey (EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, organised by ADSEI, the former Institute for Statistics), we find figures on the share or percentage of households that are unable to afford a week away from home. The SILC figures concern income quintiles, level of training and work status. These figures are included each year and are similar to other countries and regions in the EU.

The number of Flemish people who for financial reasons are unable take a holiday decreased from 18% in 2004 to 14.5% in 2006. This applies to most groups, except for the lowest income group, sick people, the disabled and non-EU citizens.

Table 2: Share or percentage of persons in households who cannot afford to leave home for one week according to income quintiles, level of training and total for Flanders 2006

	Income quintiles					Level of education			Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Low	Average	High	
Cannot afford a week's holiday	38.8	23.3	11	5.9	1.7	21.6	13.4	6.4	14.5

Source: EU SILC 2006 (ADSEI)

Table 3: Share or percentage of persons in households who cannot afford to leave home for one week according to work status and total for Flanders 2006

	Work status					Total
	working	unemployed	retired	sick or disabled	other inactive	
Cannot afford a week's holiday	8.8	25	16.6	36	18.8	14.5

Source: EU SILC 2006 (ADSEI)

14,5%<sup>7</sup> of Flemish people live in a family that cannot afford a week's holiday away from home. This concerns over 880,000 people. In the lowest income group, this is as high as almost four out of ten. Under the 60% poverty threshold, this is 43%. This relative poverty level is 60% of the national median equivalent income.

More than one out of five elderly people (+age 75) do not go on holiday for financial reasons. People with lower levels of education (22%), the unemployed (25%) and especially the sick and disabled (36%) are groups that are able to go on holiday less often. The group with the greatest level of exclusion is single-parent families where one out of two cannot afford a week's holiday, this compared to 15% of total families with children. Among families with children without paid employment, 67% are unable to take a one-week holiday.

Table 4: Evolution in holiday participation between 2004-2006 according to different risk (target) groups

	lowest income deciles	+age 65	single-parent families	single persons	unemployed	sick and disabled	non-EU citizens	non-skilled	Total
Cannot afford a week's holiday	↔	↓	↓	↔	↓	↔	↑	↓	↓

Source: OASeS, De Boyser, K (based on EU SILC 2004-2006, Flanders)

↔ no change between 2004 and 2006

↑ more persons were unable to afford a holiday in 2006

↓ less persons were unable to afford a holiday in 2006

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## 2.5 Holiday Participation Centre: intersection of two sectors

Marketing, economy, trend research are not foreign terms in the tourism sector, but sometimes appear to be miles away from objectives such as combatting poverty, equal opportunity and emancipation. They perhaps do not (yet) go hand in hand, but certainly are not disharmonious. With mutual understanding and sufficient engagement, two sectors that appear to be totally different can achieve 'fruitful cross-fertilisation'.

### 2.5.1 Combatting poverty and tourism

A holiday will not relieve the world of poverty, but it does get people back among other people, give strength and reinforce confidence. Holidays are healthy and have numerous positive effects on body and mind, such as promoting well-being and decreasing stress. They increase self-respect and create confidence, improve communication and consolidate family ties.

Holiday offerings do not solve structural social problems. For this, political forces must come together, and develop and implement long-term solutions. On 25 November 2005, the Flemish Government ratified the **Flemish Action Plan for Combatting Poverty (VAP)** (2005-2009). The general objectives are based on three principles, i.e. participation, prevention and an inclusive policy. The Holiday Participation Centre can be found in the chapter 'Culture and leisure'.

Making tourism and holidays financially feasible addresses a number of basic rights, i.e. for everyone, regardless of income or origin. Everyone is entitled to recreation, leisure and holidays. Holidays bring us into contact with different cultures, places and customs. Holidays teach us new skills and open up perspectives. Holidays are necessary.

The VAP gives an overview of a complete series of objectives and measures that were grouped around the ten basic rights taken from the General Report on Poverty. The Action Plan thus provides for a yearly picture of the forest, the trees of which are spread across the different departments. The **Permanent Poverty Consultation Committee (PAO)** was established within the Flemish public services. Holiday participation has a part to play based on its own tourism perspective.

The PAO consists of a **horizontal component** and a vertical component. The horizontal component contains representatives of the poor (via the Flemish Network of Associations Giving Voice to the Poor), together with the public officials tasked with focusing attention on the issue from the different Flemish departments that engage in combating poverty. The assignments of these public officials tasked with focusing attention on the

issue and the horizontal PAO include preparing, implementing, coordinating and monitoring the measures in the VAP. In addition to representatives of the poor and public officials, a number of experts are also part of the horizontal consultations. The horizontal consultations take place approximately four times per year.

**Vertical poverty consultations** with the representatives of the poor take place within each policy domain. Together with these representatives and the relevant public officials, third parties may also participate in this consultation. Each minister establishes the way in which the vertical consultation is organised for his or her policy domain. The vertical consultation takes place twice per year for each policy domain.

### 2.5.2 Tourism partners with a social vision

Many are astonished to discover that the tourism partners receive no direct financial benefit in exchange for the social rates they offer. The attraction or accommodation determines how large its social commitment can be. A number of very good examples can be found in the holiday guides compiled by the Holiday Participation Centre. Various tourism partners give a discount of up to 50%, sometimes even up to 95%, on their normal rates.

Accommodations that achieved certification under the decree "Tourism for All" make a minimum number of nights available, depending on their capacity. The offerings for individual holidays are extremely popular and are constantly being expanded. More and more people are discovering this formula.

### 2.5.3 Role of social organisations

It is critical that the social rates are only used by those for whom they are intended. Consequently, social organisations fulfil a fundamental role as intermediary. More than 950 social organisations are (free) members of the Centre and guarantee that the social rates are given to the right people. The positive effects of a holiday remain longer if the correct preconditions were created. Herein lies an important role for the member organisations.

These organisations are screened according to their ability to reach a target group. They demonstrate, based on their annual report, that they are reaching those living in poverty. Examples of these social organisations are Social Services (OCMW), associations that give voice to the poor, neighbourhood centres in underprivileged neighbourhoods, Welzijnsschakels, family guidance services, asylum centres, naturalisation centres.

All organisations that are a member of the Holiday Participation Centre are required to follow training on screening, guidance and the procedures and functioning of

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the Centre. The European poverty level is used as the standard, but other factors, such as the costs for treating an illness, level of debt, etc. are also taken into consideration.

- In 2007, 72 new organisations and 34 contact centres became a member. For the first time, a distinction was made between contact centres and member organisations.
- In 2008, 137 organisations and 33 contact centres joined.
- 556 member organisations applied for a holiday or day trip in 2007 – this figure rose to 656 in 2008.

There are many organisations interested in the offerings. If their target group is too broad and diverse, they do not receive collective access to the offerings. Schools, youth centres, centres for volunteer work, health centres, etc. often encounter people in poverty in their daily work. The aim is certainly not for our target group to be denied this holiday opportunity.

These organisations with too wide a target group cannot become a member, but can play a role as point of contact. We encourage them to refer individuals and families in poverty to the Holiday Participation Centre. They can then make an individual application (possibly with support from the point of contact). The Centre handles the income screening. This allows these people to also make indirect use of the offerings.

- In 2008, the 33 organisations that were points of contact together requested 177 day trips.



## 2.6 Concrete functioning

### 2.6.1 Signing-up via an organisation or directly

The Holiday Participation Centre is not an advisory service. The services are tailored to individual needs, but are not a form of aid. Social organisations know the people and are able to assess their situation. When applying for a holiday, a holidaymaker need not tell his or her story again or show proof of income. There is confidence in the social organisation regarding guidance and screening of the holidaymakers. The social member organisations offer the holidaymaker among other things support in filling in the forms and preparing for the holiday.

People who wish to register directly for the offerings, and thus not via a member organisation, must provide proof of income. Here the European 'poverty level' is used as the standard. This relative poverty level is 60% of the national median equivalent income. Concretely, for a one-person household this corresponds to a net monthly income of €860. Each additional adult 'household member' is awarded half of this amount, children under 14 almost one third or €258. In the case of direct requests, no consideration is taken of the multi-complexity of poverty as a whole.

## 2.6.2 Training for better mutual understanding

“A tourism partner has more than enough money, why can’t it do more?; “A poor person doesn’t need a nice room!; “Every day is a holiday for the unemployed!” Preconceptions still exist. Consequently, the Centre organises training for providers and users. All parties also meet each other at the annual forum. We can achieve more with mutual understanding.

- There were six regional training sessions (in Brussels, Bruges, Hasselt, Mechelen) for social organisations held in 2007, serving 86 participants. Two organisations requested custom training and brought together 36 participants.
- In 2008, the Centre organised eight regional training sessions for a total of 166 participants.

## 2.6.3 High transport costs keep people at home

Many who live in poverty do not have their own car and thus must use public transport. Trains and buses are not cheap and represent a serious chunk of the budget. A discount on a ticket to an attraction loses its value if the destination is inaccessible due to high transport costs. Since 2006, De Lijn has been making free day and week passes available. Holidaymakers can request these for use on a day trip or while on holiday.

## 2.6.4 Finger on the pulse

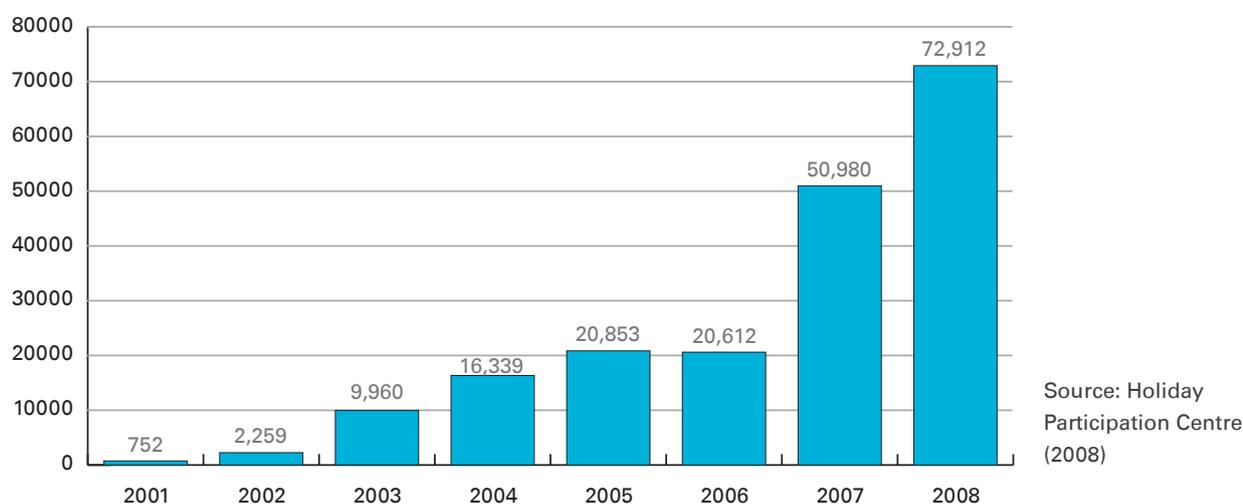
There is an information booklet and evaluation postcard for each holiday accommodation booked. The cards are addressed to Tourism Flanders & Brussels and do not require a stamp. We are able to stay on top of general impressions and the mood thanks to the numerous reactions and vacation greetings.

Each year, Tourism Flanders & Brussels brings all partners together at the Holiday Participation Forum. Tourism providers, social organisations and holidaymakers exchange thoughts and get to know each other’s world. The new holiday guides are released on this day.

## 2.7 Holiday Participation offerings: four pillars

Since the start of the Holiday Participation Centre, both the offerings and the number of participants have grown. The table below shows the total growth of the number of participants. The largest increase occurred in 2007, the year that requests for day trips were automated. The evolution in the various pillars will be explained later in the chapter.

Figure 1: Evolution total number of participants via Holiday Participation Centre 2001-2008



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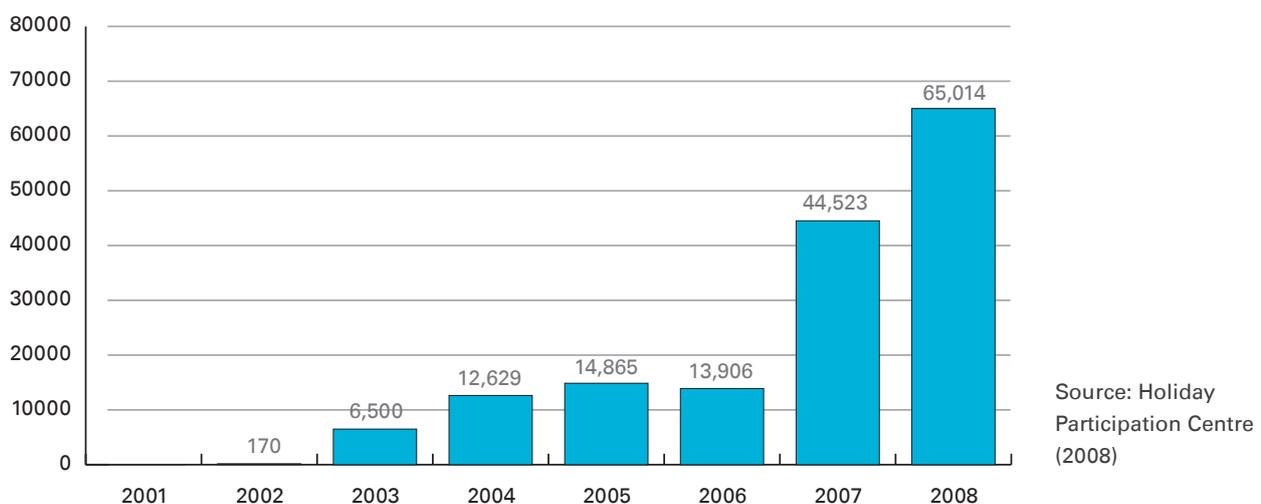
## 2.7.1 Day trips

Day trips represent a low barrier. It is often easier to save for a day trip than for a holiday of several days. For some people, one day is a good start to overcoming the holiday barrier.

Via the website, social organisations make bookings directly with the attraction. The website [www.vakantieparticipatie.be](http://www.vakantieparticipatie.be) automatically generates a unique booking number that the holidaymaker takes along and which the provider can check. The social rate is paid on location. It is a system with minimum administrative burden and convenient for providers as well as users.

- The 2008 offerings comprise 83 tourism attractions that open their doors at social rates for people with a low income:
  - 18 in the Province of Antwerp
  - 10 in the Province of Limburg
  - 8 in the Province of East Flanders
  - 8 in the Province of Flemish Brabant
  - 31 in the Province of West Flanders
  - 8 events
- 44,547 persons via 4,484 approved requests from member organisations went on a day trip in 2007 (figure from 18 December 2007).
- in 2008, 65,014 persons went on a day trip via 6,418 approved requests.
- The smallest number of visitors per attraction is three, the largest is 16,986 (2008).
- The discounts that these attractions are able to offer vary from 30% to 95%.
- The offerings that are free for everyone regardless of income are only published on the website but not included in the reservation system. As a result, the figures are not fully comparable over the years. Since 2007, requests for day trips are automatically reported and organisations do not need to report them afterwards. This partially explains the huge increase in the statistics.

Figure 2: Evolution number of participants in day trips 2001-2008

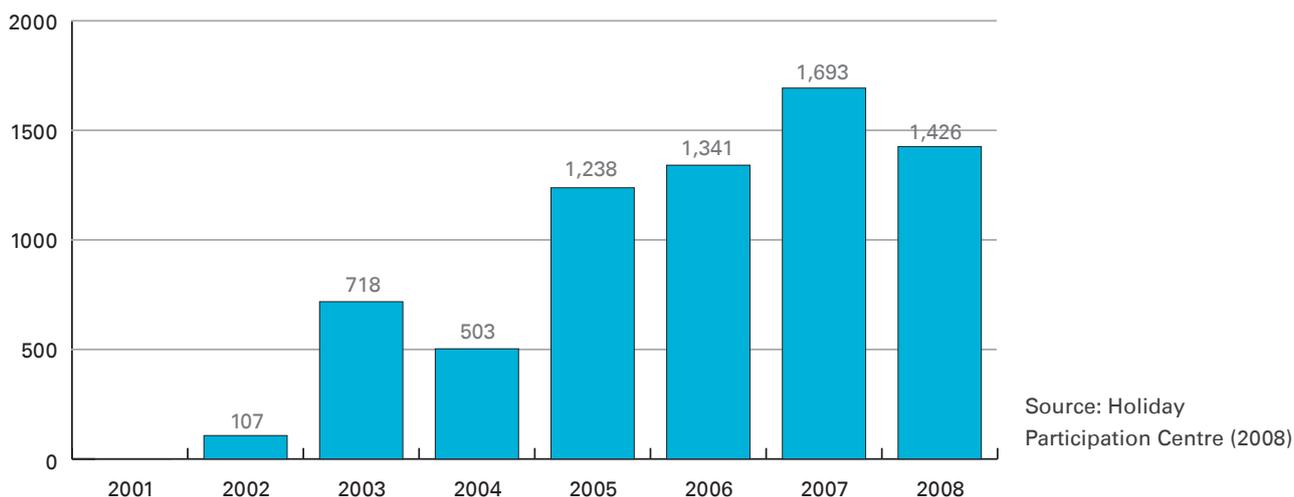


## 2.7.2 Group holidays and group stays

Those who have never been on holiday can take a first step in a group. Not being alone and having a safe group to fall back on often makes it easier to relax. More than 200 group accommodations have an offering for people with a low income. The social organisations themselves organise the group holidays.

→ 1,426 persons via 63 organisations visited a group accommodation in 2008.

Figure 3: Evolution number of participants in group holidays 2001-2008

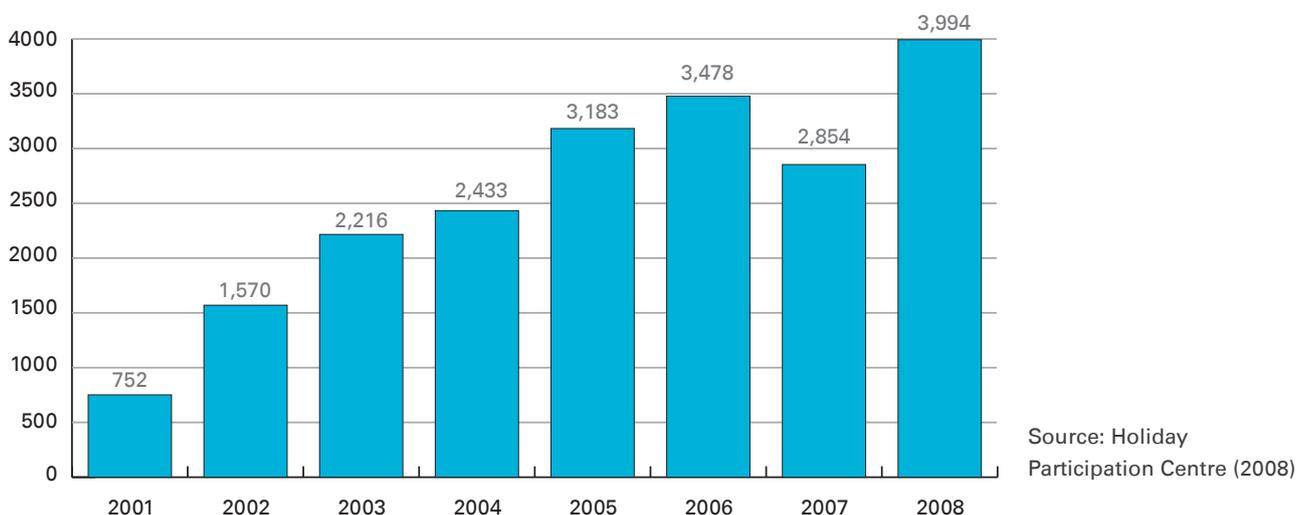


## 2.7.3 Organised holidays

It is also possible to register for a fully organised holiday. 24 associations together organise more than 117 holidays for children, young people, families, single mothers, etc. They also make their offerings available at a social rate. The organised holidays are offered by intermediary organisations (social tourism associations), youth work and other leisure organisations. The reactions to these holidays have been unanimously positive to date.

→ In 2008, 376 people went on holiday with 109 organisations booked by the Holiday Participation Centre. The figure we received from the intermediary organisations is 3,618 (these children handled their bookings directly with these organisations). This makes a total of 3,994 participants on organised holidays.

Figure 4: Evolution number of participants in organised holidays 2001-2008



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## 2.7.4 Individual holidays

Alone on holiday, with friends or with the family, in a hotel or a holiday home, the individual holiday offerings are very diverse. Something for everyone. Requests for a holiday accommodation are handled by the staff of the Holiday Participation Centre. They handle the reservation, act as intermediary and provide the information to ensure quality service to the customer and the supplier. It is an intensive and personal approach that is highly appreciated.

→ 79 accommodations for individual holidaymakers offered their rooms at social rates in 2008.

- 36 in a nature setting
- 35 on the coast
- 8 in the city

→ In 2008, 2,478 persons went on holiday via the Holiday Participation Centre.

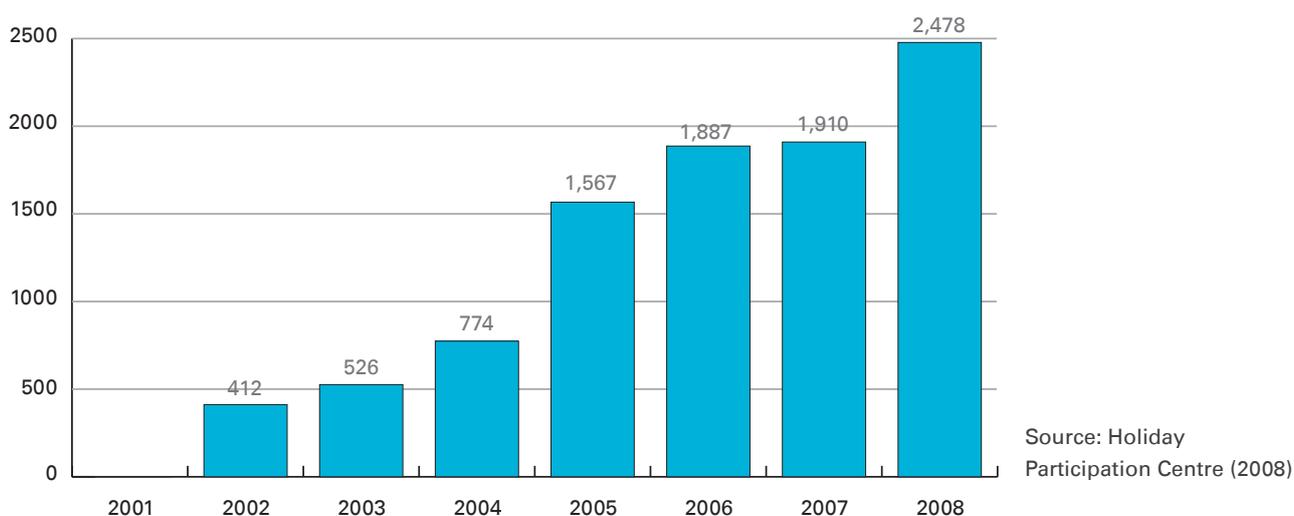
→ Most holidays last seven days.

→ 75% go on holiday during the high season.

→ This is a total of 4,021 nights.

→ 91% of the requests are received via social organisations.

Figure 5 : Evolution number of participants in individual holidays 2001-2008



## 2.7.5 Expansion and deepening of the offerings

More and more people living in poverty are finding their way to the social rates. Demand is increasing much more quickly than supply. Deepening all four of the pillars is certainly necessary. We are striving for more offerings within the existing pillars. The prospecting and communication plans are designed to attract more providers.

Widening the offerings is also desirable. People who for diverse circumstances become isolated wish to start again. They want to take part in an organised trip. Social organisations do not have the manpower to meet this demand. Social tourism associations (intermediary organisations) principally organise children's camps and are unable to meet the huge demand. Many ideas surface at the annual forum that require further examination.

Expansion is never a goal in itself, but is always linked to quality.

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Table 5: Summary table: evolution holidaymakers via Holiday Participation Centre, 2001-2008

	Day trips	Group stays	Organised holidays	Individual holidays	Total
2001	0	0	752	0	752
2002	170	107	1,570	412	2,259
2003	6,500	718	2,216	526	9,960
2004	12,629	503	2,433	774	16,339
2005	14,865	1,238	3,183	1,567	20,853
2006	13,906	1,341	3,478	1,887	20,612
2007	44,523	1,693	2,854	1,910	50,980
2008	65,014	1,426	3,994	2,478	72,912

Source: Holiday Participation Centre (2008)

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holiday research



### 3 Holiday research

#### 3.1 Research process

The Holiday Participation Centre has sent out a holiday survey for a number of years in a row in order to learn the opinions of the various groups with whom the Centre works, i.e. the member organisations, the accommodations, the attractions and the holidaymakers themselves.

- **The member organisations** are the social partners of the Holiday Participation Centre. This group is comprised of a variety of organisations, from government (for example OCMWs) as well as the charity and volunteer sector. The size of the organisations differs considerably, as does their target group. Some organisations work with children, others with adults or families. Possible target groups are underprivileged, refugees, young people in difficult family situations, etc.
- **The accommodations** are those lodgings that make a part of their offerings available to the target groups at a reduced price via the Holiday Participation Centre. Some do this for specific months of the year, others all year round.
- **The attractions** are, for example, amusement parks, museums, cultural activities and zoos that offer tickets to the target group at a reduced price via the Holiday Participation Centre.
- **The holidaymakers** are those who have made use of the holiday offerings for a holiday or day trip.

Like the previous years, a part of this research aimed at measuring the satisfaction of these target groups with the functioning as well as the printed and online materials of the Centre. New in 2008 was the focus on the motivation of the holidaymakers before their departure and the effects of the holiday after their return. This part of the survey contained questions to the member organisations with which the Centre wanted to test which roles they saw themselves playing in this process.

The questionnaire was drawn up by Marianne Schapmans, (Holiday Participation Centre) and Dr. Lynn Minnaert (University of Westminster - Centre for Tourism Research). The MAS agency processed the data and provided the tables. 1,522 questionnaires were sent out in November 2007. The participants were given three weeks to respond. To add to the motivation, a contest with a number of prizes was linked to the survey. Across the four target groups, two out of three of the addressed persons or organisations responded.

Table 6: Number of respondents to the holiday survey and level of response 2007

	Attractions	Accommodations	Holidaymakers	Member organisations	Total
Number surveyed	73	76	534	839	1,522
Number of answers	44	54	318	594	1,010
Level of response	60%	71%	60%	71%	66%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

The social tourism motto is that we all deserve a holiday. This survey brings together the opinions and experiences of the organisations that make this possible and of the holidaymakers for whom a holiday might not be possible without this initiative. The first paragraphs discuss the satisfaction of the various partners and users of the Holiday Participation Centre, the general functioning of the Centre, the brochures and the website. The experiences of the attractions and accommodations are then examined. Then follow the experiences of the holidaymakers and their profile, their motivations for the holiday and the possible effects the holiday might have had. Finally, there are the experiences of the member organisations, with an emphasis on the role of holidays in their functioning and their attitude with respect to aid. The report finishes with a conclusion.

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## 3.2 Results

### 3.2.1 General functioning of the Holiday Participation Centre

#### → ATTRACTIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

The groups surveyed were very enthusiastic about the collaboration with and the service of the Holiday Participation Centre. The survey among the attractions, for example, shows that 98% of those surveyed were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the collaboration. The result was the same for the accommodations, with a 93% satisfaction level. One of the accommodations said:

*“I am very satisfied with the collaboration. The Holiday Participation staff is very motivated. I would especially like to say: ‘Keep it up!’”*

Table 7: Satisfaction of the tourism partners with the collaboration with Holiday Participation Centre/Tourism Flanders & Brussels (N= 44 and 54)

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Total
Attractions	0%	0%	2.3%	62.8%	34.9%	100%
Accommodations	0%	0%	7.4%	46.3%	46.3%	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

#### → HOLIDAYMAKERS

The holidaymakers are also positive concerning the functioning of the Centre. Of all the holidaymakers who talked to a Centre staff member on the phone (68% of all surveyed holidaymakers), 92% were satisfied or very satisfied with the telephone service. One of the holidaymakers writes:

*“I was very satisfied with the telephone contacts with your staff member. She was a good listener. This gave me a good feeling and a sense of belonging. I felt I also had a chance to travel inexpensively in Belgium without fear of shame.”*

#### → ONLINE RESERVATION PROCEDURE

The online reservation procedure, launched in 2007, also appears to be a success. The member organisations make the most use of this and are very satisfied with it. 91% of the answers were in the category “satisfied” or “very satisfied”. Also in the case of the surveyed attractions, 86% were satisfied or very satisfied. Those surveyed mentioned as benefits:

*“The online reservation procedure is a smoother, quicker way of working. You receive a clear view of the various offerings.”*

*“I am happy that as of recently we have been able to cancel planned visits online.”*

*“This was the first year of your online booking system ... and we had no problems with it ... thus only positive reactions from our side!”*

Less than 2% of the surveyed member organisations were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the online booking system. The most often mentioned negative aspect of the system concerned the online confirmations of the attractions, i.e. sometimes they took too long, failed or were mailed to a staff member who was on holiday.

*“When reserving a day trip, no confirmation was sent, causing us some problems.”*

*“On one occasion, no confirmation mail was received for the day trip, and thus it could not take place.”*

Table 8: Satisfaction of member organisations with the online booking system (N=44 and 533)

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Total
Attractions	0%	4,5%	9,1%	54,5%	31,8%	100%
Member organisations	0,2%	1,7%	7,1%	46,3%	44,7%	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

→ WEBSITE

The member organisations were specifically asked about the user friendliness and functioning of the website. The results were extremely positive:

- The website is clear/well-organised: 90% (completely) agree
- The website is complete: 86% (completely) agree
- I can find everything easily: 85% (completely) agree
- The website works without a problem: 82% (completely) agree

Table 9: Member organisations on user friendliness and satisfaction with the website (N=540)

	Do not agree at all	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree	Total
Website is clear/well-organised	0.7%	1.5%	7,8%	49.6%	40.4%	100%
Website is complete	1.0%	2.7%	10.5%	50.8%	35.2%	100%
Everything can be found	0.8%	2.4%	11.8%	48.6%	36.4%	100%
Works without a problem	1.0%	4.8%	12.5%	47.8%	34.0%	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

A number of reactions from the member organisations:

*"It took some getting used to the first time, but afterwards there were no problems."*

*"I found the general information on the trips good."*

*"The link to proceed with the reservation is not easy to find."*

→ HOLIDAY GUIDES

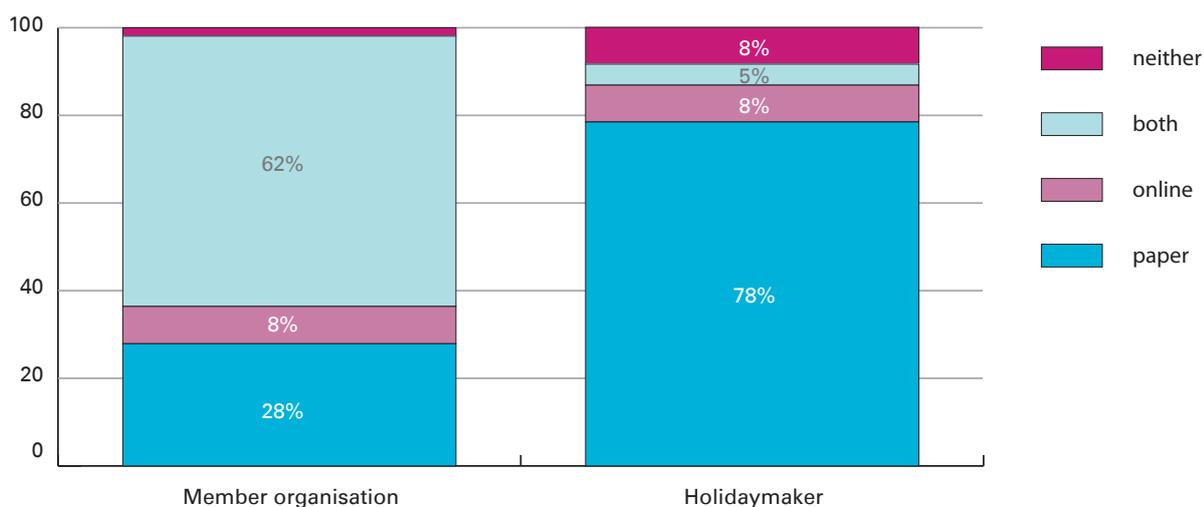
Asked about their use of the website versus the holiday guides, it appears that both play an important role for the member organisations: 28% use the paper brochure, 8% the online version and 62% use both. For the holiday-makers, the paper version appears to be more important: 78% use the brochure, 8% the online version and 5% use both. The reason for this probably lies with the general limited access to the Internet in this target group. Two member organisations explain:

*"The website is less accessible for the target group. They often take the books with them to read at home."*

*"We would like to have more paper brochures. The client can then view the offerings beforehand. This would require less time on the part of the social workers. Their workload is already quite heavy."*

The attractions appear to be generally satisfied with their description in the promotional materials: 93% of those surveyed were "satisfied" or "very satisfied".

Figure 6: Use of the holiday guides by member organisations and holidaymakers (N=566 and 877)



Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

### 3.2.2 Experiences of attractions and accommodations

#### → CONTACT AT THE RECEPTION AREA

The first contact of the holidaymaker with the attraction or the holiday accommodation generally occurs at the reception area. Pleasant contact is often a positive signal for both parties – visitor and tourism provider – that the visit or accommodation will go well. The holiday survey shows that this first contact is usually positive in most cases. 91% of the attractions and 95% of the accommodations mention that the contact was good or very good.

The reactions of the holidaymakers indicate that the contact with the reception and the staff of the attraction/accommodation was very important. Negative contact can lead to a feeling of inferiority, positive contact can lead to a lasting positive memory. Below follow examples of both:

*“The bookings are done in a discrete way, but registration at the reception of the hotel is not. Some still dare to look down on you. Never make a judgement until you know the person well!”*

*“Very nice holiday. I fell into a coma due to my diabetes, and the hotel clerk handled it perfectly. After a day in the hospital, I was able to return to the hotel and still enjoyed the holiday very much. The hotel clerk deserves the highest marks.”*

Table 10: Contact at the reception area (N=43 and 54)

	Very poor	Poor	Neutral	Good	Very good	Total
Attracties	0%	0%	9.3%	67.4%	23.3%	100%
Verblijven	0%	0%	5.6%	51.9%	42.6%	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

#### → VISIT/STAY AND PAYMENT

The survey indicates that the vast majority of the attractions and accommodations have experienced no problems with the holidaymakers that they reach via the Holiday Participation Centre. 93% of the attractions and 82% of the accommodations say that there are no problems. If there are problems, in the vast majority of the cases these concern the same problems that also occur with other guests.

*"The collaboration was very smooth, also with the customers."*

*"Very pleasant public and very satisfied customers."*

Table 11: Problems with the holidaymakers (N=44 and 54)

	Yes	Exceptionally	No	Total
Attractions	2.3%	4.5%	93.2%	100%
Accommodations	5.6%	13.0%	81.5%	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

The problems mentioned generally concerned cancellations or visitors who make a booking but then do not show up.

*"Many problems with numbers. This year, twice as many registered than showed up/paid. Thus, we had to refuse other guests even though in the end we still had empty beds."*

*"There is a need for clear arrangements related to cancellations by groups. If groups cancel 30 beds two days beforehand, this is really too late for us."*

*"Too often, people did not show up, while a reservation was made for a specific day and time. This requires unnecessary administration and time, which is unfortunate."*

Accommodations were also asked about their experiences with payment. There appear to be few problems here. 93% of the accommodations stated that payment for the holiday was 'good' to 'very good'.

Table 12: Payment to the accommodation (N=54)

	Very poor	Poor	Neutral	Good	Very good	Total
Accommodations	0%	0%	7.4%	53.7%	38.9%	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

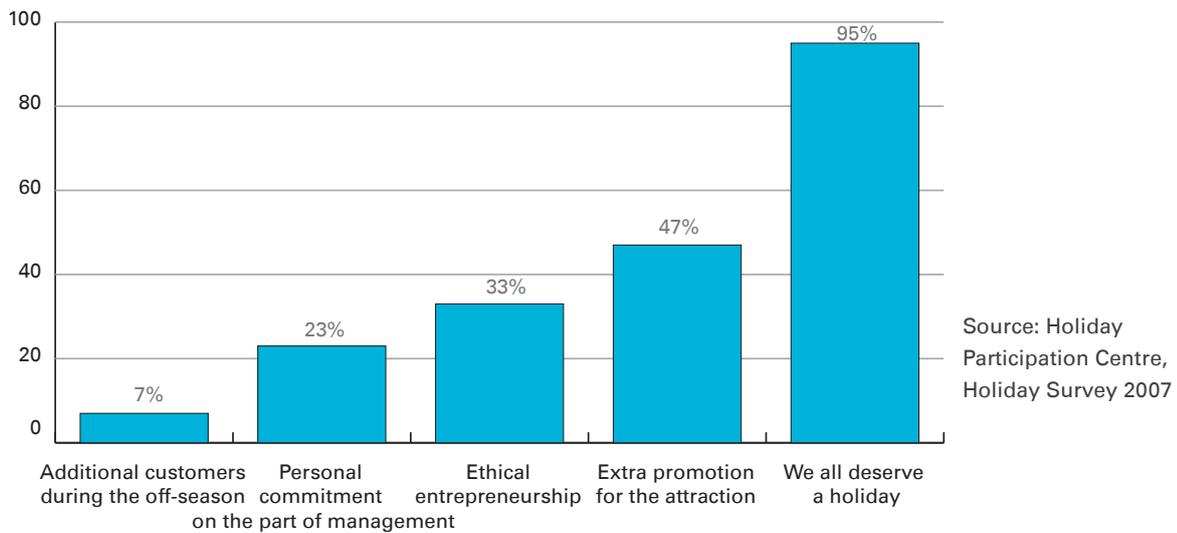
The positive experiences of the accommodations were also reflected in the experiences of the holidaymakers themselves. They were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the service they received in the accommodation. 85% were satisfied or very satisfied with their accommodation.

#### → MOTIVATION FOR THE ATTRACTIONS

The attractions were also surveyed concerning their motivation for offering a social rate for the Holiday Participation Centre target group. The attractions first chose which of the following motivations applied to them. In this question, however, multiple answers could be chosen. The results were as follows:



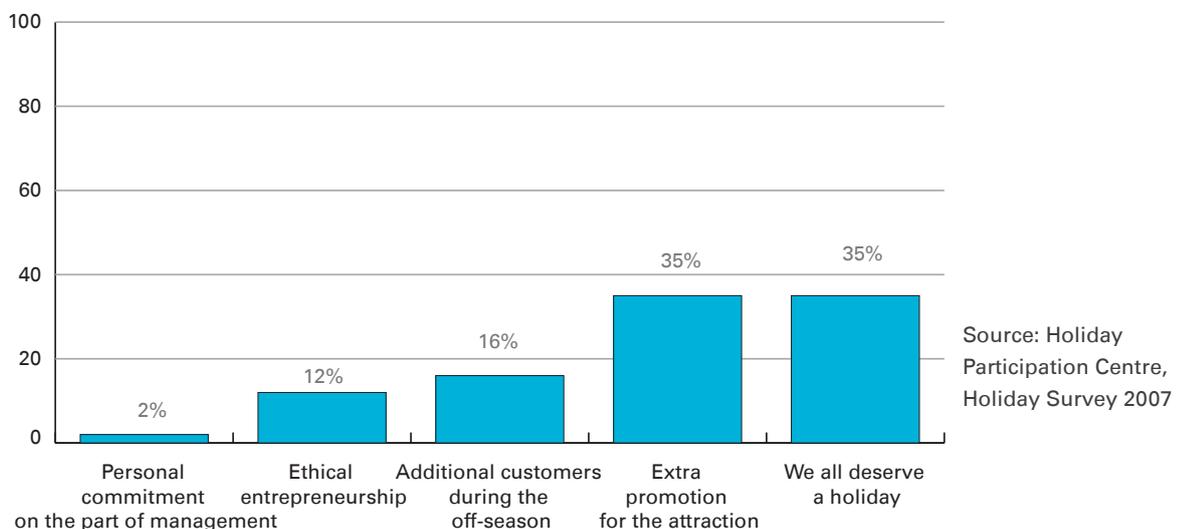
Figure 7: Motivation for attractions to collaborate with the Holiday Participation Centre (N=43, multiple answers possible)



The motivation can be placed in two categories. The first three types of motivation — extra promotion for the attraction, ethical entrepreneurship and additional customers during the off-season — are especially focused on better and ethically responsible business and thus fall into the “business” category. The last two types of motivation — we all deserve a holiday and personal commitment of management — are more “humanitarian” motivations and thus fall into the category of “charity”. The results above show that Flemish attractions demonstrate a strong humanitarian motivation in supporting the Holiday Participation Centre. 95% of the attractions are convinced that everyone deserves a holiday. Thus, social tourism is being partially supported out of charity considerations, which demonstrates how strongly social tourism and the right to a holiday are a part of the Flemish tourism industry.

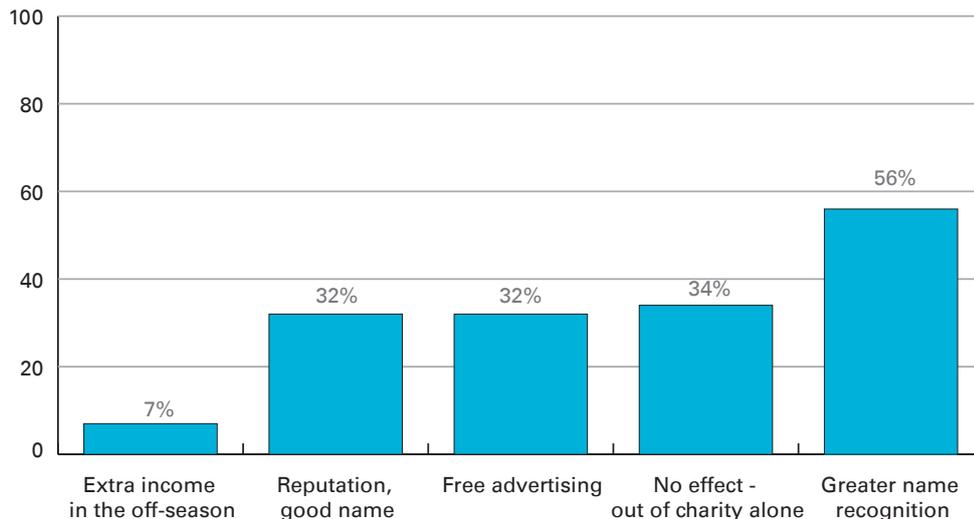
Yet Flemish attractions are not blind to the benefits that social tourism can offer at a business level. Almost half of the attractions regard the mention they receive in the Centre holiday guides as a form of extra advertising. The international trend toward the importance of ethical entrepreneurship is also felt in Flanders, with almost one third of those surveyed indicating this as a motivation. Additional customers during the off-season is a less important motivation. The attractions were then asked which of these categories were the greatest motivation in supporting the Holiday Participation Centre. Consequently, for this question only one answer could be ticked. The results were as follows:

Figure 8: Most important motivation for attractions to collaborate with the Holiday Participation Centre (N=43, only one answer possible)



The two biggest motivations, each obtaining 35% of the answers, were extra advertising for the attraction and the fact that we all deserve a holiday. Ethical entrepreneurship and additional customers during the off-season also play a rather large role.<sup>8</sup> While the combined “business” motivations exceed the “humanitarian” motivations, both are strongly represented. The fact that Flemish attractions cooperate with The Holiday Participation Centre for humanitarian reasons is perhaps remarkable, but the possible effects of the collaboration in the business area are also remarkable, as is emphasised in the following question concerning the effects of the collaboration on the organisation. Four possible “business” effects were proposed, plus an option for “no effect - out of charity alone”. The results were as follows:

Figure 9: effects of the collaboration with the Holiday Participation Centre (N=41, multiple answers possible)



Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

These results show that a large number of the surveyed attractions recognise and experience the business benefits of collaborating with Tourism Flanders & Brussels. Greater name recognition among a new target group and free advertising were clear examples here. An improved reputation or the effect on the good name of the organisation can be linked to the importance of ethical entrepreneurship to an organisation’s image. Extra income in the off-season again scored lower.

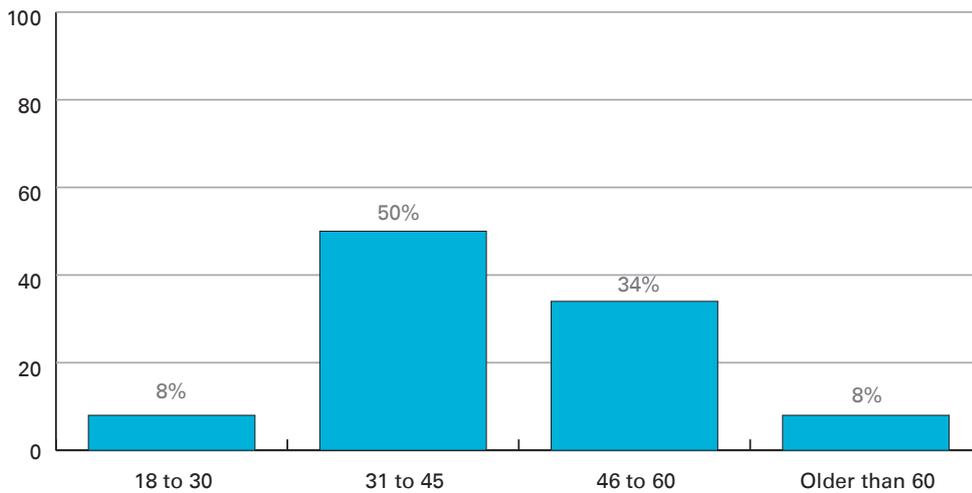
Noteworthy is the fact that 34% of the surveyed attractions experienced no effects and collaborated with the Holiday Participation Centre for charity reasons alone. More research is needed to assess why the “business” effects were not experienced and whether something can be done to make the collaboration more attractive at a business level. With growing demand for the services of the Holiday Participation Centre and stagnation in the number of offerings, this can be a major asset in appealing to attractions that do not yet participate and in retaining attractions that are already participating.

### 3.2.3 Experiences of the holidaymakers

#### → PROFILE OF THE HOLIDAYMAKER

At the beginning of the survey, the holidaymakers were asked a number of questions concerning their personal profile. This indicated that 50% of those surveyed were between 31 and 45 years of age. 34% were between 46 and 60. The youngest and the oldest group were the least represented. They each obtained 8%. Further research is needed to assess why the Centre reaches a broad group between 31 and 60 years of age, but much less young people (or young families) and those 60 and over.

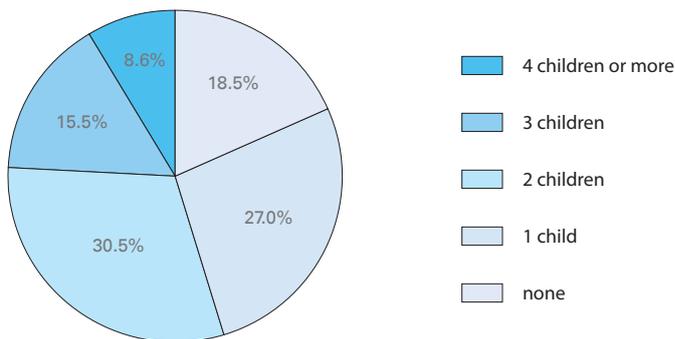
Figure 10: Age profile holidaymakers (N=317)



Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

Families account for the greatest share of participation in the Centre’s holidays: 82% of those surveyed had children. These are generally families with up to three children, this group constituting 73% of the holidaymakers surveyed. 19% of the holidaymakers had no children.

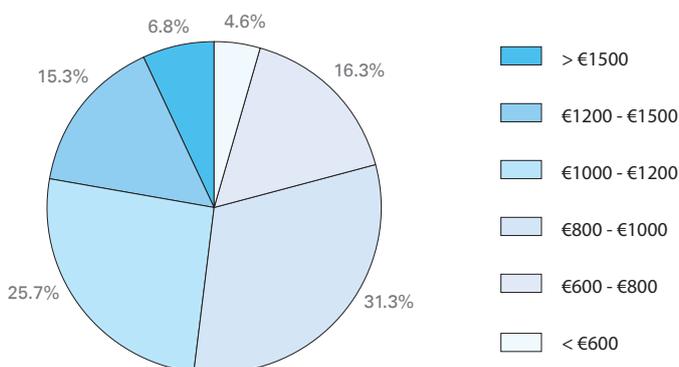
Figure 11: Family composition holidaymaker, number of children younger than 18 (N=233)



Source:  
Holiday Participation Centre,  
Holiday Survey 2007

The average net household income of the holidaymakers is just under €1,000 per month. The largest group (31%) earns between €800 and €1,000 per month. 52% of those surveyed earn less than €1,000 per month, for 5% this is even less than €600 per month. 48% earn more than €1,000 per month and 7% earn more than €1,500 per month.

Figure 12: Average net monthly income holidaymakers (N=307)



Source:  
Holiday Participation Centre,  
Holiday Survey 2007

39% of those surveyed had a paid job. The remaining 61% were unemployed and the most common reason for this was disability or sick leave (46% of the 61%). Job seekers (23%) and (early) retired employees (14%) are also part of this group.

The survey also contained a question on holiday behaviour on the part of the target group. A notable finding is that 55% of those surveyed went on holiday at least once in the two previous years before their holiday with the Holiday Participation Centre in 2007. The data must be further examined to determine how many of these holidays were also taken via the Centre. This result may demonstrate the success of the Centre in making holidays regularly available to persons with a lower income. This is in stark contrast to, for example, the charity Family Holiday Association in the United Kingdom. Participants can only go on holiday via this organisation if they have not taken a holiday in the past four years.<sup>9</sup> This also supports the commitment in Flanders for holiday facilities for persons with a low income. On the other hand, 13% of those surveyed had never been on holiday and the last holiday was more than five years ago for 20%. Further research can indicate how the Centre can play a greater role in reaching these groups.

Table 13: Holiday behaviour of the target group - time of the previous holiday (N=308)

Previous holiday	%
Previous year	44.2%
2 years ago	10.4%
3 to 5 years ago	13.0%
More than 5 years ago	19.5%
Never	13.0%
Total	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

## → EFFECTS OF THE HOLIDAYS

This paragraph focused on the effects of the holidays on the holidaymakers after their return. The European Economic and Social Committee described social tourism in the "Opinion on social tourism" (2006) as a "miracle" with positive effects on health, social circumstances and development of the holidaymakers. Examples of positive effects are, for example, increased confidence, expanded social network, improved family ties, stronger mental health and a more proactive attitude to life (see also Minnaert, 2006). While these effects are often attributed to social tourism, there is little scientific research that demonstrates these effects. This paragraph investigates which effects take place, how often they take place and what this means for the organisation of social tourism.

The holidaymakers were surveyed concerning a series of potential effects of the holidays. These can be divided into four categories.

**Social network:** these propositions aimed to test the extent to which the holidaymakers found that their social network had been strengthened since the holiday. A strengthening of the social network can be linked to an increase in "social capital". This in turn can be linked to a reduction in social exclusion and the effects of this. Propositions that were related to this are:

- Since the holiday, family ties have been strengthened
- I feel closer to the people with whom I went on holiday
- Since the holiday, I like to meet new people
- Since the holiday, I socialise more often

**Attitude to life:** these propositions aimed at assessing the extent to which the holiday contributed to a change in attitude to life on the part of the holidaymakers. The propositions in this category ask about the view on life or a more active attitude after the holiday. Propositions that were related to this are:

- The holiday changed my view on a number of things
- The holiday was a new start for me
- I have been more active since the holiday
- I try new things more often since the holiday
- I have more contact with my social organisation since the holiday

**Mental strength:** these propositions aimed at assessing the effect of the holiday on the emotional life and mental strength of the holidaymakers. Propositions that were related to this are:

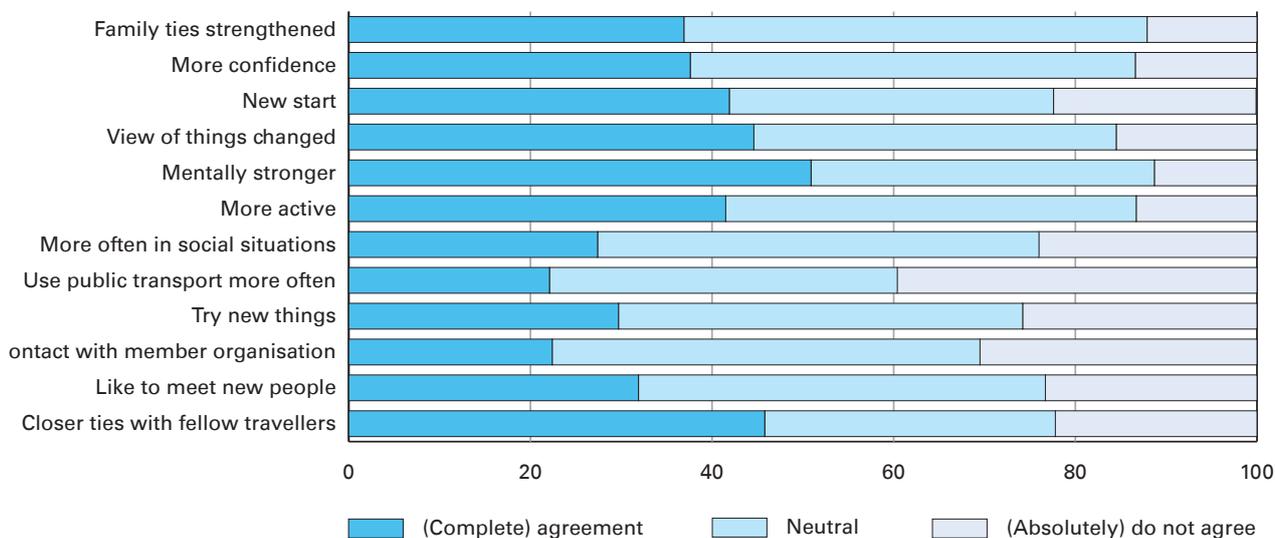
- I feel mentally stronger since the holiday
- I have more confidence since the holiday

**Public transport:** this proposition aimed at assessing the extent to which the use of public transport while on holiday was an opportunity to also use public transport more often after the holiday. The proposition made in this regard is thus:

- I make use of public transport more often since the holiday

Below follows an overview of the reactions to these propositions. The proposed percentages represent those surveyed who ticked “tend to agree” or “agree completely” as an answer.

Figure 13: How do the holidaymakers assess a number of aspects related to the effects of their holiday (N=294)



Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

The answers in the categories “tend to agree” or “agree completely” vary between 22% and 51%. Circumstances that caused many of those surveyed to choose the “neutral” category were:

- Not all propositions were applicable to all those surveyed. For example, “strengthened family ties” were not applicable to the holidaymakers who had no children or went on holiday without family members. Holidaymakers who already used public transport were not influenced by the holiday. Further analysis of the data is needed to determine to whom the respective proposition is applicable from among those surveyed.
- Some holidays were very brief, in a number of cases only two days. The duration of the holiday in these cases is perhaps too short to obtain specific effects. Further cross-tabulation of the data could shed more light on this.
- Previous research (Minnaert, 2006) has shown that a number of effects require a longer “incubation period” and develop in the longer term. Negative holiday experiences are also inhibitors and sometimes prevent specific effects from developing.

Despite these factors, it is clear that for a **limited investment** — for the government in financial terms and for the participants in time — large numbers of those surveyed indicate a **wide range of effects**. Social tourism is one of the few types of social intervention that can bring about a wide range of effects in a short period of time,

in many cases in no more than a week. Compared to the cost of other social measures that aim for the same effects such as classes on parenthood, support for mental problems and awareness campaigns with respect to the use of public transport (which in some cases have less success), social tourism can be seen as **cost effective**. This does not mean that the other programmes can be completely replaced, but rather that it can replace other initiatives and enhance their success. Further research in this area is needed to determine how social tourism can best economically complement other social interventions. The example below indicates the direction such a study could take.

One example from the United Kingdom is the cost of classes on parenthood. These cost approximately €1,040 per person. In addition, it appears that those parents who need these classes the most, often do not wish to follow them. The result is an expensive form of intervention with limited success. A holiday for an entire family with the Family Holiday Association on the other hand costs an average of €900 for the entire family. This usually includes the full cost of the accommodation and often also the transport. Research shows that the majority of the families experience improved family ties after the holiday and that some followed classes made available on a voluntary basis, even if these were also available before the holiday. Therefore, in many cases, social holidays can achieve a positive effect and also enhance the success of other, existing initiatives (Minnaert, 2006).

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The following paragraphs examine the effects of the holiday in detail.

→ **social network**

The first four propositions refer to the social network of the holidaymakers and the effect of the holiday on this. The proposition that was most applicable to the holidaymakers was that they felt connected to the people with whom they had been on holiday. For a large group of these holidaymakers, this meant a strengthening of family ties. (Since not everyone with family members went on holiday, further research is needed to indicate how significant this proposition was for this specific group).

Wanting to meet new people and engaging socially more often were the other propositions in this category. Previous research (Minnaert, 2006) shows that these effects were especially applicable to holidaymakers who participated in group holidays. Further research can also show whether this is the case here for the participants in this survey. The fact that more than 25% of the participants were more often in social situations after the holiday is a surprising result: a holiday, often of a short duration, appears to increase the social network of the holidaymakers and stimulate the inclusion of the participants. It is important to emphasise again that not all holidaymakers needed a larger social network. Based on this, it is striking that a holiday had this effect for more than 25% of the participants. The following quote illustrates the importance of the holiday for the family:

*"It was really good for our family to get away and to enjoy life as a normal family. Our children were also able to tell about their holiday at school, just like all the other children."*

→ **attitude to life**

The following five propositions refer to personal development and a proactive attitude to life on the part of the holidaymakers after the holiday. The first three propositions in this group scored very high, each endorsed by more than 40% of the holidaymakers. This means that more than 40% of those surveyed experienced the holiday as an event that changed their view on some things, meant a new start and made them more active. This can be linked to previous research (Minnaert, 2006) in which it appeared that the holiday was a moment to leave behind stressful and problematic surroundings, so that holidaymakers could have a more positive experience and also reflect on how they could achieve these positive experiences at home. Other propositions in this category refer to doing new things more often and more frequent contact with the social organisation. The number of holidaymakers who experienced these effects was lower but still sizeable. Again, it is important, as for all propositions, to understand that they did not apply to every holidaymaker. An example of how a holiday can affect the personal attitude to life of the holidaymakers is:

*"After the holiday that my wife and I spent at the hotel in September 2007, we felt healthy, cheerful and happy."*

→ **mental strength**

The following two propositions refer to the mental strength of the holidaymakers. More than half of the holidaymakers stated that they felt mentally stronger after the holiday. This is especially important to the Holiday Participation Centre, since groups with a low income run a higher risk of suffering from mental problems such as depression, anxiety and stress. A substantial number of the holidaymakers also experience greater self-confidence after the holiday. Low self-confidence can be linked to a series of social and health problems such as loneliness, aggression, low work performance and depression. When people feel mentally stronger and have greater self-confidence, the chance is greater that they will take on a more positive attitude to life (see previous category). The following quote illustrates the effect of the holiday on both family ties and the mental strength of the holidaymakers:

*"The children were very happy and I also enjoyed it. I have five children, one grandchild and a second on the way. I hope that all of my children have it better than I did. I have been separated for a year and this week did me good, even after a severe depression."*

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→ public transport

The final proposition refers to increased use of public transport after the holiday. The answers indicate that the holidaymakers experience this effect the least, even though 22% of those surveyed still agreed with the proposition. Increased use of public transport can have different positive effects, not only on the holidaymakers themselves but on society in general - it can increase the mobility of groups with a low income (who are more likely not to have a car), decrease pressure on roads and parking areas and is a more environmentally friendly form of transport.

## CONCLUSION

These results show that social holidays have a positive effect on various aspects of the daily life of the holidaymakers. The survey of the member organisations confirms these conclusions. (Only 1% of the surveyed member organisations noted no benefits after the return of the holidaymakers.) As a form of social intervention, social tourism can be viewed as cost-effective since a range of effects can be achieved for a limited investment in money and time.

→ MOTIVATION

The holidaymakers were also asked about their motivation for applying for a holiday. For the first question, all applicable answers could be ticked. The results were as follows:

Table 14: Motivation of the holidaymakers for applying with the Holiday Participation Centre (N=315, multiple answers possible)

Motivation	%
To relax and rest	61.0%
To leave problems behind for a bit	60.3%
To interrupt the daily routine	40.0%
To spend time with family	39.0%
Last holiday was long ago	18.7%
To have a new experience	11.7%
To make a new start acquisition	6.7%
Other answer	6.7%
Total	244.1%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

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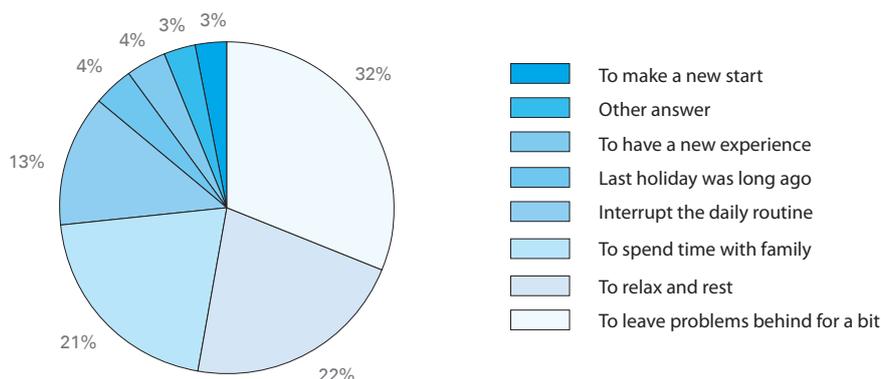
This showed that relaxation and relief from daily problems are the top motivations for the holidaymakers. Interrupting the daily routine also belongs here. This is in line with results from the United Kingdom (Minnaert, 2006) that showed that the daily problems and the daily routine sometimes make it difficult to deal with these problems or to look for a solution. A holiday, which brings with it new surroundings, can also bring with it the mental freedom that the participants need to muster the courage and do something about these problems.

Spending time with the family also scored relatively high given that not all those surveyed went on holiday with family. Further analysis of the data could indicate the percentage of families for which this was an important factor.

Other answers that scored less high: the last holiday was long ago, to have a new experience or to make a new start.

The following question in the survey aimed at studying which of these motivations played the biggest role. The results were as follows:

Figure 14: Most important motivation of the holidaymakers for applying with the Holiday Participation Centre (N=292, multiple answers possible)



Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

The results for this question are similar, except perhaps for the fact that “spending time with the family” scores relatively higher here. This can point to the fact that this was a special motivation for holidaymakers who went on holiday with family members.

#### → EXPERIENCES ON HOLIDAYS

The questions concerning the experiences of the holidaymakers were aimed at gaining an understanding of the extent to which the holiday met the expectations of the participants. In other words, can participants effectively relax and leave problems behind on holiday? Do they spend more time with their family? Is the daily routine interrupted?

The holidaymakers were first asked about their positive experiences, and then about their negative experiences. They were again asked to first tick all applicable answers and then the answer that was most applicable.

#### → positive

Asked what was good about the holiday, those surveyed gave the following answers:

Table 15: Positive experiences on holiday (N=310, multiple answers possible)

Positive experiences	%
Rest and recharge the batteries	61.6%
Leave problems and cares behind	59.7%
Spend time with the family	42.6%
Get away from tedium and the daily routine	32.6%
To be able to reflect peacefully on everything	28.1%
Do new things	20.6%
Een nieuwe start	8.1%
Other answer	4.5%
Total	257.7%

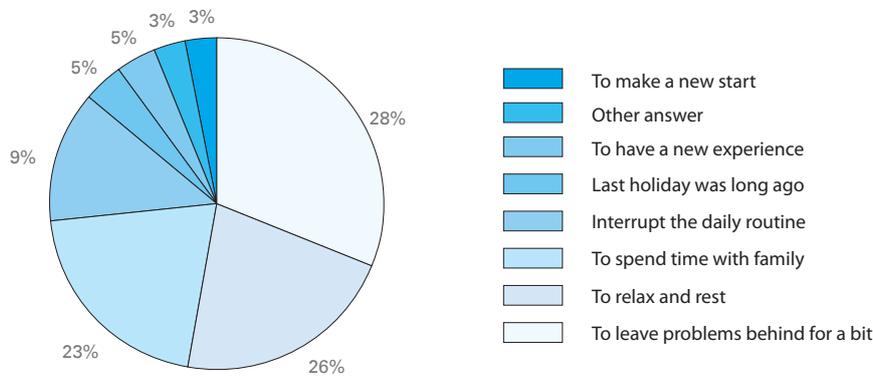
Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

The fact that these answers are in line with the motivations given in the previous question can indicate that most holidays meet the expectations of the holidaymakers. Resting and leaving problems behind again score very high, as do spending time with the family and getting away from tedium and the daily routine.

It is noteworthy that to be able to reflect peacefully on everything also scores relatively high with 28%. Approximately 20% of those surveyed had gained positive new experiences.

In the following question, the holidaymakers could then indicate what was best about the holiday. The answers were as follows:

Figure 15: The best experience on holiday (N=284, only 1 answer possible)



Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

The same categories are again strongly present, with resting and recharging the batteries indicated as the best experience, followed by leaving cares and problems behind and spending time with the family.

→ negative

The holidaymakers were also asked about negative aspects of the holiday. For this question, all applicable answers could be ticked. The results for this question were:

Table 16: Negative experiences on holiday (N=303, multiple answers possible)

Negative experiences	%
Bad weather	41.6%
There were no negative aspects. Everything about this holiday was good	36.6%
Financial cares and problems	15.8%
The accommodation was not up to expectations	14.2%
Other answer	9.2%
Bored	3.6%
Quarrelling	2.6%
Homesickness	1.3%
Total	125.1%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

Bad weather is a major villain, mentioned by 42% of those surveyed. On the other hand, 37% stated that everything was good on the holiday. Financial cares and problems were mentioned by 16% of those surveyed. This was expressed in comments such as these:

*"It is nice that you can go on holiday for less money, but it is still financially difficult to go on holiday. Everything is usually more expensive and the children sometimes want something extra."*

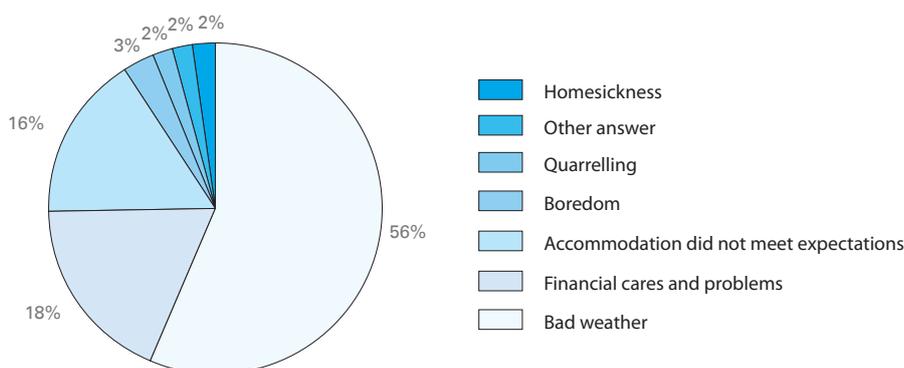
*"In fact, it is still expensive if you only receive €150 per week for a family of eight to live on."*

*“You had to pay extra to go swimming, and that was not mentioned in the brochure. That was a huge disappointment.”*

For 14% of those surveyed, the accommodation did not meet expectations. Boredom, quarrelling and homesickness were other factors that could have a negative impact on the holiday experience.

The following question assessed the most negative aspect of the holiday. For this question, only one answer could be ticked. The results were as follows:

Figure 16: What was the worst thing about the holiday (N=178, only 1 answer possible)



Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

The answers are in line with the previous question and again emphasise bad weather, the experience of financial problems and problems with the accommodation.

→ **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

The survey also indicated that the vast majority of the holidaymakers (82%) used public transport on holiday. Especially the train, the tram and the bus were used, the metro to a lesser degree. 87% of these holidaymakers experienced no problems with using public transport. The problems they experienced usually had to do with the transport of luggage, disabled users or use with children.

→ **DAY TRIPS ON HOLIDAYS**

57% of the surveyed holidaymakers made a day trip during the holiday and approximately 40% of these did this via the Holiday Participation Centre. Those who did not go on a day trip gave various reasons for this. Almost 40% did not feel like it or said there was enough to do at the destination. 31% found it too expensive. 16% did not know that the Centre was able to organise this and another 16% found it too difficult to organise this. Further research is needed to investigate how the Centre can reach and support this group (total 32%) in making full use of the offerings.

Table 17: Reasons not to take a day trip (N=130)

Reason	%
Didn't feel like it/There was enough to do at the destination	37.7%
Too expensive	30.8%
Too difficult to organise	16.2%
I didn't know it was possible	16.2%
Other answer	9.2%
Total	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

### 3.2.4 Experiences of the member organisations

#### → PROFILE OF MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

The answers in the survey show that a variety of member organisations were reached. Organisations engaged in special youth welfare work and the public social services (OCMWs) are the best represented, but other groups are also present, such as Welzijnsschakels, associations that give voice to the poor, initiatives related to supervised housing and centres for general social work, to mention but a few. Families appear to constitute an important part of the target group of these organisations, but foreigners, single persons, children and young people are also well represented.

The number of employees working at the organisations varies considerably. The largest group (27%) works with six to ten paid employees, 24% work with more than 20 employees. 19% work with two to five employees and 16% with 11 to 20.

When the member organisations are asked whether they work primarily with paid employees or with volunteers, we see that 71% work only or chiefly with paid employees. 24% work chiefly with volunteers.

Table 18: Number of employees member organisations (N=587)

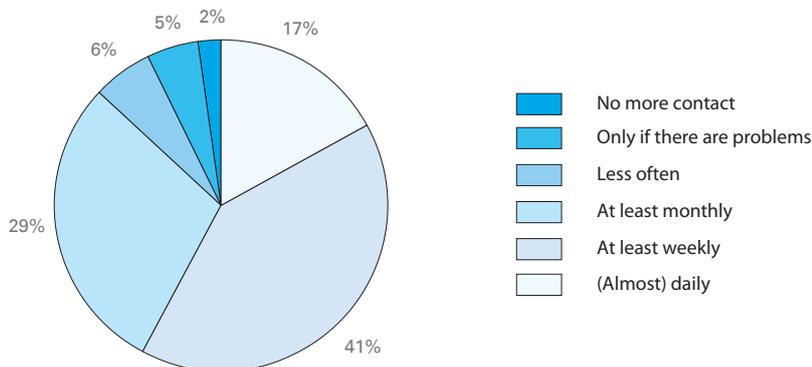
0	7.8%
1	5.8%
2 to 5	19.1%
6 to 10	27.4%
11 to 20	15.5%
more than 20	24.4%
Total	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

Holiday offerings are generally seen as an important aspect of the functioning of the member organisations. 78% of the member organisations find holidays important to very important. Almost all member organisations (94%) make use of the Holiday Participation Centre for day trips. Individual holidays and group holidays score much lower with 41% and 11% respectively. More research is needed to determine what specifically prevents member organisations from offering holidays, e.g. workload too high, low demand on the part of the target group or not enough offerings on the part of the accommodations are possible reasons.

Most member organisations see their clients regularly - 41% at least weekly and 29% at least monthly. 13% see their clients less often or only if there are problems, and 17% see their clients more often, i.e. daily or almost daily.

Figure 17: Number of opportunities for contact by member organisations with clients (N=460)



Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

Most member organisations (59%) offer no financial assistance for the holiday, and thus the holidaymaker pays for everything. Assistance is offered in 14% of the cases, but the amount of this assistance differs from client to client. 7% of member organisations pay the full amount.

**Table 19: Does the member organisation offer financial assistance to holidaymakers (N=497)**

No, the holidaymaker pays everything	59.0%
Yes, but the amount differs from client to client	14.1%
Yes, the organisation pays only in extraordinary cases	9.1%
Yes, the organisation pays the full amount	7.0%
Yes, the organisation pays more than half	5.6%
Yes, the organisation pays less than half	4.0%
Yes, the organisation pays half	1.2%
Total	100%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

The effects of the holiday on the holidaymakers that the member organisations mention largely follow the effects indicated by the holidaymakers. 59% of the member organisations say that their clients are happier and more peaceful after the holiday, 33% say that the holidaymakers have more courage and 33% say that they have made more social contacts. Greater self-confidence is indicated by 24% of the member organisations and 21% say that the holidaymakers are more involved with the organisation. Only 1% of the member organisations see no benefits after the return.

**Table 20: What effect did the holiday have on the holidaymakers according to the member organisations (N=484, multiple answers possible)**

Happier, more peaceful	58.5%
More social contacts	33.1%
More courage	33.3%
Greater self-confidence	23.8%
More involved with my organisation	20.9%
Improved family relationships	18.2%
A new start	11.2%
Improved health	5.2%
I notice no benefits after their return	0.8%
I am unable to judge this	17.1%
Other answer	4.3%
Total	226.2%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

## → SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE FOR THE HOLIDAYMAKERS

The member organisations were also asked about the support and assistance they offer their clients, both before and after the holiday. These questions were asked because previous research (Minnaert, 2006) showed that social tourism holidaymakers sometimes require more support and assistance.<sup>10</sup> This has to do with factors such as the fact that some have hardly or never been on holiday, some are less mobile or that single parents with young children can find it difficult to organise holidays.

A second reason is that previous research showed that the effects of the holiday can be increased when the holidaymakers receive support and assistance from their social organisations. This report showed that holidays can have different effects on holidaymakers, such as improved mental health, a more proactive attitude to life and an expanded social network.

Research shows that these effects can be reinforced and converted into permanent improvements in life if holidaymakers are given a helping hand. A holiday can have a very motivating effect, but holidaymakers are not always able to transform this motivation into reality on their own. Examples (from Minnaert, 2006) show that holidays can provide the impetus for a series of improvements, such as following courses, better management of financial resources and a healthier way of life. Most holidaymakers who succeeded in implementing these improvements were able to count on support from their social organisations. This means that holidays can be an important tool for the social organisations and not “just a holiday”.

But it also means that follow-up of the holidays must play a prominent role in the operation of the member organisations. This can present a difficulty for a number of organisations due to a lack of resources or personnel. Other organisations do not see their clients regularly, which can also hinder follow-up. Further research with the member organisations is needed to investigate how this follow-up can occur in a practical, effective and time- and cost-effective way.

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The member organisations were asked what assistance they offer their clients, both before and after the holiday. The results were as follows:

Table 21: What type of assistance is regularly offered by the member organisations (N=476, multiple answers possible)

Assistance offered	%
Help in entering forms	79.0%
Advice concerning transport / travel plan	57.6%
Help in choosing a destination	51.7%
Advice on saving for the holiday	36.1%
Help with packing	16.2%
Help and advice after return	14.7%
No help or advice	6.5%
Other answer	7.6%
Total	269.3%

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Holiday Survey 2007

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These results clearly show that the majority of member organisations offer assistance before the holiday. Help in filling in forms scores the highest, followed by advice on transport and help in choosing a destination. 36% of the member organisations also help with the financial aspect of the holiday and give advice on saving before departure. 16% also offer help in packing the suitcases.

Advice and assistance after the holiday are offered less often, and scored low with 15%. One reason for this can be that the assistance provided after the holiday is not seen as a result of the holiday, but as part of the normal operation of the member organisation. This aspect was further examined in the focus groups with the member organisations (see below in this report). Only 7% of the surveyed member organisations offer no assistance or advice before or after the holiday.

Asked how important the help and the advice are to the holidaymakers, the answers show that almost all member organisations (93%) consider this important or very important. This appears to show that the member organisations are aware of the important role their assistance can play in the holiday process. 32% of the surveyed member organisations stated that they would offer more help and advice if they had more time and resources.

These results show that the member organisations often offer help and support, certainly before the holiday. The extent to which this also occurs after the holiday needs to be investigated further.

The fact that Flanders has a long tradition in social tourism can cause social holidays to be considered as something "self-evident", something that everyone is entitled to and that is good, irrespective of the effects on holidaymakers. Both this study and the earlier study (Minnaert, 2006) indicate that the effects of social holidays often occur and can be stimulated. Greater awareness-raising concerning the possible effects and further research are needed to investigate how this can be implemented in the Flemish context.

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### 3.3 Conclusion holiday survey

The Holiday Survey 2007 of the Holiday Participation Centre shows that the different groups surveyed were in general very satisfied with their collaboration with the Centre. The new online reservation procedure is also generally viewed as positive. In the area of information and promotional materials, the online version of the holiday offerings are widely used by the member organisations, while the holidaymakers more often make use of the paper version. Limited access to the Internet by the latter group is most probably the reason for this.

The **attractions and accommodations** had generally positive contacts with the holidaymakers, with respect to both the initial contact at the reception and the further contact during the visit or the stay. Payment also appears to have occurred without a problem for the accommodations. The survey with the attractions shows that attractions work together with the Holiday Participation Centre for two reasons, i.e. "humanitarian" and "business". The goodwill of the sector and its commitment to a humanitarian cause are noteworthy. On the other hand, many attractions also have an eye on the benefits that collaboration can have with respect to advertising and numbers of visitors. These considerations can be important in encouraging new attractions to collaborate with the Centre, given that demand for day trips appears to be large and the offerings are increasing only slowly.

The survey also examined the **motivations of the holidaymakers, their experiences during the holiday and the effects of the holiday after return**. The principal reasons for applying for a holiday appear to be the need "to rest again", "to leave behind for a while the daily routine and problems" and to "spend time with the family". Most holidaymakers are able to achieve these holiday expectations, and except for bad weather, the experience is generally positive. A large group of those surveyed testified that the holiday had effects after their return. These effects concerned four areas of life, i.e. social network, attitude to life, mental strength and the use of the public transport. More than half of those surveyed, for example, felt mentally stronger after the holiday. For this group, the holiday appears to be able to have a motivating effect on various aspects of daily life after returning. On this basis, social tourism can be seen as a cost-effective form of intervention. More research is needed to determine how these effects can be optimised.

**Member organisations** play a central role in the functioning of the Holiday Participation Centre, and were also included in this survey. The vast majority of the member organisations find holiday offerings an important or very important part of this functioning, which points to a high level of commitment on the part of this group. Research has shown that support and assistance by the member organisation, both before and after the holiday, play an important role in the holiday experiences of the holidaymakers and in the potential positive effects of the holiday afterwards. The results indicate that the vast majority of the member organisations offer help and support at various levels before the departure of the holidaymakers, i.e. filling in forms, preparing the travel plan, in some cases even financial aspects of the trip. This element in particular was further examined in the focus groups, the results of which are presented below.

focus groups



## 4 Focus groups

### 4.1 Research process

In the period January-February 2008, a series of focus groups met. These were composed of representatives from Flemish member organisations that collaborate with the Holiday Participation Centre. These member organisations differ strongly with respect to objectives, size and way of working. Different types, from small non-profit associations to large public social services (OCMWs), were represented. Different target groups were discussed, such as the underprivileged, foreigners, people with a mental disability and children and young people. There were also major differences in the holiday offerings. A number of member organisations organise group holidays and joint trips, others limit themselves to individual holidays or day trips, while still others have a mixed offering. The focus groups took place at **five locations**, i.e. Ostend, Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels and Leuven. A total of 77 respondents took part in the research. A list is included as appendix of the different member organisations that collaborated on this research component (see 7.2).

Table 22: Focus groups

Number	Location	Number of participants
1	Forum Ghent	8
2	Ostend	4
3	Antwerp 1	8
4	Antwerp 2	11
5	Antwerp 3	12
6	Ghent 1	11
7	Ghent 2	7
8	Brussels	9
9	Leuven	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>77</b>

Source: Holiday Participation Centre, Focus groups 2008

The research presented here is structured around **four pillars**:

- A first pillar focuses on the principles underlying the holiday facilities and the motivation of the member organisations for cooperating in this.
- The second pillar investigates the practical side, i.e. the preparations for the holiday and the holiday itself.
- The third pillar focuses on the period following the holiday, i.e. the effects that the holiday has and the aftercare that is offered.
- Finally, the fourth pillar concentrates on the practical implications of this research for the functioning, and proposes a “best practice” model. This pillar also includes practical suggestions from those surveyed for the Holiday Participation Centre and the government.

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## 4.2 Research results

### 4.2.1 Social tourism in Flanders: a strong tradition

#### → GROWTH IN OPERATION AND FACILITIES

While the decree “Tourism for All” is quite recent (published in the Belgian Official Journal in 2003), the focus groups show that promoting tourism has a longer tradition in a number of member organisations. One of the participants stated that the organisation she represents has already been promoting holidays for 41 years. The organisation of another participant has been organising youth camps since 1982. Nevertheless, it appears that the decree and the Holiday Participation Centre have played a major role in the recent growth of social tourism in Flanders. The decree offers not only financial assistance, but also provides member organisations with a way to offer their holidays to a larger target group:

*“We have been organising holidays for the underprivileged for the past 41 years. It has grown in this way. For a long time, we organised holidays on our own with the help of volunteers and with very limited subsidies. And then we were able to join Tourism Flanders & Brussels, which provided the requisite subsidies for organised activities and for transport costs. We focused on these to a certain degree because of the possibility for subsidies. But also because of the possibility to address families via Holiday Participation who can then come on holiday with us.”*

The focus groups also show that organisations that have been involved for a number of years with holidays, or that were quite intensively engaged in such, often had **sophisticated mechanisms** to support the facilities. On the one hand, in different regions in Flanders there are non-profit associations that were founded specifically for social tourism. Often, these non-profit associations grew out of organisations with general objectives in the social field (e.g. working with the underprivileged). On the other hand, there are also member organisations that did not view holidays as their main activity, but that had built up considerable experience in the area of holiday facilities. Several of them organise, for example, information afternoons or holiday markets. The following example shows how attention is sometimes paid to this, even if there are time limitations on the part of personnel, by hiring a trainee for this purpose:

*“Next year, we will receive a trainee, in the third year of socio-cultural work, and this trainee will be tasked with organising a holiday market to increase accessibility. I can then also make use of this next year, because of course that is not my main task. But in this way we are nevertheless involved in the issue.”*

Another participant talked about how she in the meantime is so familiar with holiday facilities that she searches for affordable holidays in the commercial circuit herself, even if this requires considerable work:

*“At a certain moment I began to look on the Internet myself, outside the Centre. [...] I also have single persons, and they opted for example to go to a hostel by bicycle. Then I had to map out the entire route; by this I mean, go to the tourism department in our area to pick up a bicycle map [...]. And you just do it, but in fact you are investing a serious amount of energy.”*

In certain cases, holidays and day trips **were also integrated into the general functioning of the organisation** and linked to central objectives such as education and self-sufficiency. One of the participants referred to leadership training around organising trips offered by the organisation. Another organisation set up a working group related to day trips that could support the emancipation of the participants:

*“We now also have set up a group based on this. We teach the people to book tickets themselves, and the following week we go on an outing. Thus, this is a group we are teaching to be self-sufficient, and this also came about via the trips. Because we take a trip each month, we together with the educational centre Leerpunt say: “Teach these people to book the tickets themselves, find out which bus they must take, look at the schedule.”*

Several participants testified that their organisation’s work with holiday facilities also grew with respect to practical arrangements. The guidance and support of holidaymakers in the following example developed as the organisation gained more experience in organising holidays:

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*“Holiday Participation already exists, so we take part. Thus we grew with it. During our first holiday, the people turned a holiday accommodation upside down, because they had booked full pension and expected an all-in formula. They did not understand that if they ordered a beer with dinner, they would have to pay extra. So when you receive such signals already during a holiday, if you receive telephone calls from the management of holiday accommodations, or after the holiday, you know that next year you must provide more explanation on how everything is done and what you can expect. There are many things that we find self-evident, but that our people, who have never been on holiday, do not always find self-evident.”*

The participant testimonies also show that many of the organisations that work with the Holiday Participation Centre are thinking about **expanding their offerings**. This expansion can concern the type of holiday, e.g. an organisation that currently only offers day trips, but is considering also offering individual holidays in the future. Other organisations are considering involving a broader target group in the day trips and holidays, e.g. organisations that organise day trips for children and young people that would also like to involve the parents, often due to the training situations a day trip can offer. In other organisations, there is a shift taking place in which day trips and holidays are being offered in a more proactive way, as something clients are encouraged to make use of:

*“In fact, we sometimes must persuade the people to take advantage of the offerings, and that is new for a public social service, don’t you think? For years, we certainly did not discuss it in this way, but it is something they are entitled to. And something we also grant them.”*

On the basis of this, one can predict that as member organisations become more familiar with the offerings of the Holiday Participation Centre and its activities in this area, **demand for day trips and holidays will increase**. The growing success of the Holiday Participation Centre presents challenges for the future. On the one hand, on the supply side (are the current offerings sufficient to meet growing demand?), and, on the other hand, with respect to the member organisations (can member organisations handle increased offerings with their current financial resources and staff?). These questions are addressed below.

#### → **MOTIVATIONS FOR THE HOLIDAY OFFERINGS**

The fact that social tourism can count on so much support from the member organisations is proof of their strong motivation in offering holidays. Organising holidays and day trips is not the main task of most member organisations, yet they do free up time and resources for this. Thus, the participants were asked why they do this, even if it means extra effort and investment in time on the part of personnel.

A vision that strongly emerged is that holidays are a **right** for all, as appeared in reactions such as:

*“The right to a holiday is, I won’t say a human right, but in some way a recognised right for everyone.”*

*“The underprivileged also have a right to a day trip, a holiday. We believe that this is right.”*

One respondent pointed out that she considers a domestic holiday or day trip a right, and no longer a luxury:

*“I believe that a complete evolution has taken place in society. In the past, you were doing OK if you had food, drink, and a roof over your head. In the meantime, however, society considers a much broader range of needs as basic, thus a holiday in fact is no longer a luxury.”*

Holidays are also seen as a fundamental human need, something one must have. Having the possibility to leave problems behind for a while, to recharge the batteries and to relax, is often rated very high by the member organisations.

*“You notice that people step outside their normal situation for a short period, for a day or a week, because on the one hand it allows them to recharge their batteries and, on the other, because when people are able to do such things, it allows them to discover things that they had forgotten about themselves.”*

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A number of organisations also point out that these are the activities that are the first to go when savings need to be made, whereas such a break in the daily routine can stimulate people to view their situation at home with renewed courage:

*“A holiday can allow daily problems or daily routine to be left behind, gives you renewed energy and allows for a new start.”*

A number of member organisations also point out the role a holiday plays for the **family** and for the relationship between family members. Especially participants representing organisations that deal with special youth welfare work indicate that parents are often so preoccupied with their own problems that they do very little with the children. A holiday or day trip can serve as an impetus. A holiday can also have immense value for the family ties in the case of divorced parents.

*“If they are then able to say to the family, we did this together, the fact that they can once again do something together, instead of everyone doing their own thing, cheers them up.”*

*“For us, these are also people who are then able to give their children something extra. Fathers who never see their children, people who in fact are not able to do much for their children. They often do not have a bedroom. There are people who can almost never see their children simply because they have no sleeping accommodation.”*

A number of member organisations also recognised the importance of holidays or day trips for the children. The example is often given of the first week of the school year, when children are asked to say something about what they did on their holiday.

*A number of member organisations also recognised the importance of holidays or day trips for the children. The example is often given of the first week of the school year, when children are asked to say something about what they did on their holiday.*

For adults, **integration into society** and **extension of the social network** are often-cited motivations. This example was given by a participant who looks after the disabled:

*“I think that for our target group it is also a form of integration into society and that this barrier can be overcome in this way.”*

The role of the holiday as a means of drawing people out of their social isolation is also recognised as important. Holidays offer not only the possibility to expand one’s social network, but also to make people in the target group mentally stronger and to give courage. The following member organisation uses group day trips just for this reason:

*“And also that you can get these people to come outside, because otherwise they crawl into a corner and brood and think. They then feel even worse than otherwise would be the case. A simple day trip can often be enough, because they then come into contact with others and are able to talk about something different for a change.”*

A number of member organisations also indicate how the holiday can be more than simply a day or a few days away, but can also be part of a **learning process**, for the organisation as well as the holidaymaker. This links holidays directly to the objectives of the organisation:

*“And it makes them stronger and more self-sufficient. Take young people for example, 26 years old, who live alone, are handicapped, and if you can say “come on, let’s go to the hostel”, and we map out the entire trip, then they do something truly on their own for a change. This makes them strong again.”*

The role of the holiday as a learning process is further discussed below in this report, when treating the effects of the holiday (see section 4.3.3).

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## 4.2.2 Holiday facilities: preparing for the holiday oneself

### → BARRIERS

The holiday surveys indicated that the member organisations play an important role in the preparation for and selection of the holiday. This was again confirmed in the focus groups consulted for this research. The participants described holidays and day trips as a process, for which a number of significant barriers exist for many holidaymakers. The size of these barriers depends on two factors, i.e. the personal background of the holidaymakers (experience with holidays, culture, upbringing) and the type of holiday or day trip (group or individual, supervised or not).

While the target group of the Holiday Participation Centre is limited to people with a low income, the **personal background** of the holidaymakers can differ considerably. There are holidaymakers who have very little experience with holidays and day trips, because they belong to a group of generational poor, for example, who have never had the financial breathing space for holidays, or because they had little opportunity in their family or circle of friends to go on holiday. In these cases, holidays and day trips can often entail a fear of the unknown:

*“I think it is stressful because the people do not know what to expect. They have financial difficulties, even more than before. Their own family was in the same situation and often they also did not travel. What should I take with me? What will happen when I arrive? Where should I go? All things that are somewhat unknown and that I think are the cause of considerable stress.”*

*“Their network is also made up entirely of people who never go on holiday. So you have no other point of reference.”*

For this group, the presence of a familiar guide or the help of the member organisation in the practical preparations for the day trip or holiday can go a long way towards breaking down barriers. Other holidaymakers, who have more experience with holidays and are more self-sufficient, need this guidance or support much less often or not at all. For them, the barriers experienced by the first group are small or almost non-existent.

*“From the perspective of the public social service, we are faced with a varied target group. When I reflect on one group of people that come to us, it is not about “not being familiar with”, “not having done this before” or “not knowing”, but rather only about the financial aspect. People who are in a situation - simply due to circumstances - in which they simply can no longer afford it. They are in debt, or had the misfortune of being a part of a divorce, or have had an accident or something.”*

*“However, in our case, these are usually people who once had enough, but who landed in poverty due to circumstances. The divorced, independent contractors who go bankrupt, these types of people. We don't need to mention these practical things because most do not come from poor backgrounds, on the contrary, some are quite familiar with luxury.”*

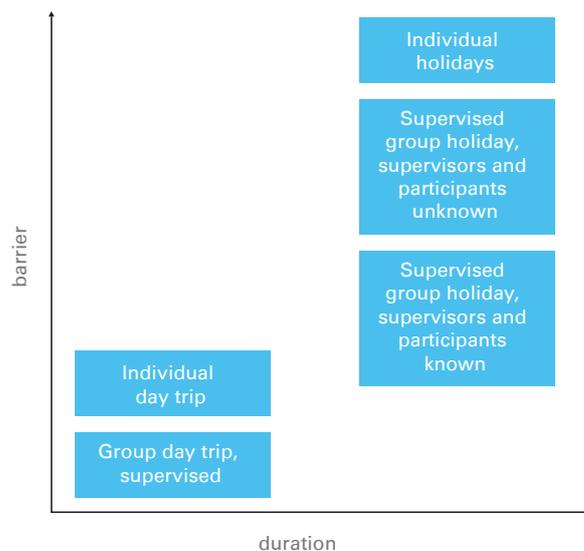
Help with preparation and guidance by the member organisation is less important for this target group, and the financial discount offered by the Holiday Participation Centre is often most important.

A target group that a number of member organisations discussed in particular is immigrant — especially Moroccan — families. Within this target group, travel and holidays are often not unfamiliar, given that many visit family members or friends abroad. But the barrier to taking holidays in Belgium or participation by the children in children's camps is sometimes very high:

*“We work with Moroccan families and I find it difficult to get across the notion of multiple-day holidays. This is a cultural aspect that is always somewhat of an obstacle, for the parents as well as the children themselves, that sense of attachment, the difficulty in letting go. And certainly with parents, because children travelling alone is a bit of a taboo. Even though they know there is supervision present, the step is still difficult to take.”*

This research expressly focused on exploring the visions of a wide range of member organisations. Thus, there were too few participants in the focus groups that represent this specific target group to draw further conclusions. Further research could indicate how immigrant holidaymakers view holidays, day trips and recreation, and what their needs are in this area.

The barriers experienced by holidaymakers also often differ **depending on the type of holiday or day trip**. The independence and skills expected of a holidaymaker for a supervised group trip with the member organisation differ greatly for example from those in the case of individual holidays to an unknown destination. In general, we can state that holidays have a higher barrier than day trips (which can also partly explain the greater popularity of day trips) and that individual holidays or day trips have a higher barrier than supervised ones. The figure below visually presents the various types of day trips and holidays with respect to a high or low barrier.



→ practical barriers

The specific barriers experienced by holidaymakers can be placed in different categories. A first group refers to the **practical organisation** of the holiday or day trip. Often this is especially focused on **luggage** and **transport**. Most holidaymakers must reach their destination via public transport since they do not own a car. Taking luggage on the train and keeping an eye on the children throughout the entire journey can present many problems and much uncertainty.

*“I think the barrier is often higher for a holiday. Never having taken a train before, they now need to change trains. How does this work and what do they need to pack in their suitcases? This is much simpler in the case of a day trip.”*

*“There is one person at our organisation who has already taken an independent holiday. We truly try to promote and offer this possibility, but no one dares take this step, because it is all so unknown, e.g. the transport, even the luggage - “what should I take?” That is a major step for these people.”*

Another practical problem can be **planning** the holiday. In the life of the holidaymakers, long-term planning can be a problem since many plan only for the short-term due to the situation in which they find themselves. Holidays, however, must be booked far in advance. This means that people in this target group opt more quickly for a day trip, since this can be arranged in a much shorter period.

*“These holidays also must be planned far in advance and I think that the women with which I work cannot always plan far in advance. Some are looking for work and do not know: “Will I have a job by then? Will I have the money to pay by then?”*

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Long-term planning can also be a problem for separated parents if they wish to also take the children on holiday:

*“Broken families, children placed in other homes, single mothers, the partner has the children, the school - a combination of all of these things will cause people to opt for a day trip.”*

→ **financial barriers**

The financial barrier is also important. With the day trips, the cheapest options are often the most popular, and holidays require a much greater financial investment. Coming up with the deposit, for example, can be a barrier:

*“If you book in advance, you must also pay in advance. If you are unable to go, you lose your deposit, and I think that puts a lot of people off. They must have the money available when they book, and for many people that is also a problem.”*

*“If they decide now, they cannot afford for anything unforeseen to happen in the coming six months, for anyone to become seriously ill or anything like that, because then they will no longer be able to pay. Nor can they afford to receive a large utility bill. They bank on the tax refund arriving on time.”*

An additional problem is that the cheapest formulas in holiday offerings are also the ones that are booked up the quickest. Thus, this can constitute a barrier even for people who are able to come up with the money:

*“A practical problem that I have heard from a few people is that if they finally get the financing in order and try to book a holiday via the Centre, they are forced to take something else that is more expensive. And this leads to still greater frustration.”*

→ **psycho-emotional barriers**

In addition to practical barriers, the member organisations also speak of psychological or emotional barriers on the part of holidaymakers. A number of focus-group participants said for example that their clients did not always have the feeling that they deserved a holiday or day trip or that something like that was meant for them.

*“I believe the people themselves must be ready for this, and to a certain extent they must determine this for themselves: “You see, we can in fact do this”. They must overcome this barrier: “We can also go on holiday”.”*

Again, this psychological barrier is easier to overcome in the case of a day trip than for a holiday, as this OCMW staff member says:

*“I think that many people, and here I am speaking from the context of the OCMW, are gradually getting used to the idea: “While we may have problems, while we have it financially difficult, going somewhere once for a day, that is something for us”. However, the idea of taking a week-long holiday doesn't appear to be something for them.”*

In addition, for some holidaymakers, fear of the unknown is too great and they hold on tightly to a known structure. They often feel emotionally more at ease in a group, or with supervision. The following example was given by a representative of a member organisation that looks after the disabled:

*“We look after a large number of single persons. These people opt more readily for group travel organised by a leisure organisation specifically focused on people with a disability, where they usually already know a number of people. [...] This lowers the barrier, and many of our people cling onto a certain structure and familiarity. Once they experience something that is good, they stick with it.”*

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This structure and familiarity also translates into a feeling of safety and less uncertainty and stress:

*“People must feel safe. And a day trip [...], that’s only one day, you return home in the evening, you’re back with the dog. But a holiday, then you might have to sleep in the same room with someone else, you don’t know with whom, and that gives rise to a lot of stress for the people.”*

The following paragraphs expand on how the process of preparation and the role of the member organisation as a trusted body can lower these barriers. The choice of destination also plays a role here.

→ **PREPARATION AND THE ROLE OF THE MEMBER ORGANISATION**

As demonstrated in the previous paragraph, the level of preparation that the holidaymaker needs depends very much on his or her personal background. Some holidaymakers are able to plan and prepare for their holiday very independently, while others need much more support in this regard. The focus group participants spoke of the different ways to handle these preparations, e.g. from help with booking to general practical support with transport, luggage and financing. Below follows an overview of the different types of support provided in preparing for the holiday. It is important to keep in mind that some member organisations offer a lot of help, while this is much less the case for others (due to time pressure, lack of personnel or different objectives). Later in this report, we will discuss how, in a “best practice” model, organisations can complement and support one another in this respect.

Part of the preparation can focus on lowering the **practical barriers** (see above). In the area of transport, for example, most organisations offer some form of support. Many member organisations help map out the itinerary via public transport.

*“Usually a camp site is chosen that also has chalets, but of course these are not located next to the train station. Thus, they also have to get from the train station to their destination. This requires a lot of preparation, also from our counsellors, to precisely map this out for them. And then you do this, and then you do that”.*

If the destination is too difficult to reach via public transport, several member organisations also look for alternatives, i.e. someone in the family who can drive or volunteers who are willing to handle the transport.

A number of member organisations also provide help in **deciding what to pack**. Often a discussion takes place concerning what the holidaymakers must take and, in a number of cases, help is even offered with the packing, or things that are missing are provided or purchased:

*“If we have to, we pack the suitcase ourselves. Because some people are unable to do this and they would forget to pack underwear and the like. We do make a list, but it is not because it is on paper that it necessarily ends up in the suitcase. The suitcase, or something to put the items in, is also a problem. It wouldn’t be the first time that someone shows up with plastic bags.”*

One of the participants also described how she assisted a mother who wanted to go to the seaside, but didn’t have a swimsuit for her son:

*“So we go together to the shop, and buy all of this. She doesn’t see well, and thus is concerned: “Will I lose sight of him and then there is that suitcase.” So we purchase a suitcase with wheels. This all requires a lot of work.”*

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A representative of a member organisation that organises children's camps, also said:

*"In single-parent families where there are sometimes five or more children, a decision is often made whether a child may go on holiday based on the toilet articles that are available, which is why we provided them with towels, washcloths, toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo, etc. We provide it all. We ensure that they don't need to take anything with them."*

A number of member organisations also offer **savings plans** that make it possible for holidaymakers to put aside a small amount each month or each week. Sometimes, this is even done one euro at a time:

*"Everyone can save with us on an individual basis, and we have a separate account that is only a savings account. And then they give €1 or €2 per week, some also give more. Once we organised a holiday, a weekend [...], and in fact saving began a year beforehand. We drew up an individual savings plan for everyone of €1 per week, because it cost approximately €60 for everything."*

Some member organisations are also strongly involved with the **choice of destination**. In the case of individual day trips or holidays, the choice is left to the holidaymakers, with the member organisations sometimes providing extra information. In the case of group holidays or day trips in a group, the member organisation itself chooses the destination, or the holidaymakers are actively involved in the choice via an idea box or a voting system. A number of member organisations talked about, for example, how they intentionally organised day trips in the neighbourhood, because this encouraged clients to visit the attraction on their own afterwards. Other organisations intentionally opted for destinations further from home, because they wanted to allow their clients to discover new places:

*"We see to it that a day trip is always local because we try to keep the costs as low as possible. If it is here in the neighbourhood, there is also the chance that they would perhaps pay a visit on their own sometime."*

*The offerings are numerous so that you have options for each age group to extend the destinations beyond their own city. That is also partly the goal. We don't often visit our home town. We go to other cities as much as possible, because we can then use the opportunity to see this city, and this goes down well.*

The type of activity or the destination can also differ considerably. While all member organisations emphasise that they do not wish to play a guiding role in choosing a destination, a number of organisations view day trips and holidays as a way to extend their clients' horizons. Other organisations, on the other hand, do not believe that this befits the nature of a holiday:

*"With a number of offerings you have the drawback that you can only go during the off-season. At that moment, I challenge people: "Why don't you try it? That's also very nice and very interesting, it's something different, but also good".*

*"The popularity of an amusement park is greater than visiting a museum. You can only get them to go there if you organise it yourself, and I would not like to say whether this makes them any happier."*

Member organisations that have considerable experience with day trips often discuss how they approach the different types of trips. Many organisations organise more cultural trips in a group in order to lower the barrier. The following organisation stated that for them small groups were the best formula for cultural activities:

*"For cultural activities, we found that the bigger the group, the more difficult it became, because there are always a few who say: "What are we going to do there?" And they discourage the others from participating. When planning a cultural activity, we now limit it to 20 people, and that goes quite smoothly."*

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Preparation for the holiday or even day trip can also mean a lot **emotionally**. The member organisation is something people can rely on, especially when the holidaymaker has little experience with tourism or when the outing or holiday generates a high degree of stress and uncertainty.

*“They are still afraid: “What is it? Where are we going?” While they already have the programme. “What do we need to bring with us? What is already available? What things can we do? Who will also be there?” They are already used to coming to our centre. So they come to me or a colleague, and we organise it. They do not need to be afraid of negative effects and the like. [...] They have someone to fall back on. They are not in it alone.”*

In the area of holidays, checking into the hotel is an especially stressful experience. Holidaymakers are often nervous about the reaction of the receptionist, that they will be treated differently than other holidaymakers or that the payment or the booking will not be in order. The member organisations can offer extra reassurance with respect to this type of “reception fear”:

*“We are sometimes asked: “Can’t you come along?” Not on holiday, but just to the door. Help with the hotel check-in, and then you can leave. The fear of entering the hotel remains deep.”*

In a number of cases, the emotional support of the member organisations ensures that holidaymakers actually go on a holiday or day trip, and do not cancel.

*“For example, a few have been requested and then around May/June they begin to have second thoughts. We find that it is especially ‘not daring to’, even if they have finally saved up the money.”*

*“Even for day trips, we as workers notice that we must expend considerable effort to ensure that they in fact go. “You haven’t forgotten, have you? Do you know how to get there?” It is truly intense.”*

In this preparation, the **trust** between the holidaymaker and the member organisation is very important. This relationship of trust allows member organisations to allay possible uncertainty and fears on the part of the holidaymakers. For holidaymakers, it is important that the intermediary accompany them, since assigning the task to someone they don’t know well, for example, often does not have the same effect, as illustrated in this example:

*“It prevents many from taking part. Without our guidance, not many would depart. Once, we tried to organise a day trip using volunteers for the supervision, but no one showed up.”*

Item 4.3.5 will show how this trust is also important to the communication and promotion around the Holiday Participation Centre and social holidays.

The above-mentioned examples show that preparation for a day trip or holiday can be a very **intensive process**. Not only do many member organisations offer practical and emotional support, they also stated that the organisation did not always go smoothly. Holidaymakers who cancel, extra fellow travellers who want to come along, family situations and financial circumstances that change are only a few examples of the “obstacles” faced by member organisations.

*“I mean, if you take part in something like this, you should expect problems. The more effort we make, the more we must also expect situations that have to be dealt with.”*

While most member organisations want clients to become more self-sufficient via the holidays and day trips, in practice the barriers are still too high for some. Several member organisations in the focus groups pointed out that their clients were too busy with their problems to organise their own holidays. Involving clients in the holiday preparations is often a goal, but this can be a long and intensive process in the initial phase.

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*“The ultimate goal is that the people do it alone, but we notice that people often have so many problems that they don’t get around to it. People have the idea that: “We embark on some adventure. I’m not someone who puts hours of time into this, because I want to consume. I would like just once to go on holiday without any hassle. I have enough other things to do, so I will just let this happen”.*

*“We have finally come to the point where people themselves now choose where we will go, but that has taken years. We have put a lot of time into this.”*

How the member organisations set up the supervision depends on their operation and structure. A number of organisations, for example, work with house calls, which offers them an excellent possibility to work on preparing for the day trip or holiday. Other organisations, for example, work with volunteers who support the preparation process:

*“We also work with volunteers who help support the process. I work with people with a mental disability. That is very difficult with respect to transport, reading, booking a ticket. Many are unable to do this on their own. And usually the preparation is handled by staff members and a volunteer together. The staff member does the administration, the volunteers take care of the practical things. Sometimes they run through the route to the station together: “Look, that is a train schedule, this is how it works, there is where you go to pick up your ticket.”*

For other organisations, intensive supervision is simply not possible since the required staff and the time or resources are not there. Often these organisations elect to offer only a limited selection of the offerings of the Holiday Participation Centre, for example only individual day trips and no holidays:

*“At a certain moment in the year we have the feeling: “We are almost a travel agency, we have no time to concentrate on problems that have arisen”.*

*“In fact, we only offer day trips to families. I think that if you organise holidays, you also must put much more time into it in terms of supervision in order take care of all the details. And we in fact don’t have the time to do this.”*

Thus, it is difficult for these organisations to build the barrier-lowering effect of the preparation process into their daily activity, while other organisations have more room for this. In section 5 and the proposal for a “best practice” model, it will be further discussed how their clients can also gain access to more intensive preparations.

## → GUIDANCE ON HOLIDAYS

In contrast to the individual formulas, guided holidays can also offer support during the stay. The same unfamiliarity that erects barriers during the preparations for the holiday can also lead to barriers during the holiday itself. An example regularly mentioned by participants in the focus groups is the **use of time** on holiday, especially in the case of families who are less self-sufficient:

*“I think that truly unstable families, once they reach their destination, would not be able to find enough things to do during their holiday.”*

*“I believe it is also how the day is spent. We have already organised a number of longer holidays with people, and we notice that if we as guides do not say: “Come on, let’s do this”, the people just sit there.”*

Member organisations with a great deal of experience organising group trips are aware of this need, and take specific measures in this regard:

*“On these group holidays, we also provide a plan for all of these days, without, of course, obliging people. We note that this guidance is very necessary.”*

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*“The people need someone who can help them overcome a specific barrier now and then. These are small things: for example, we are in Bruges and in the morning we take a boat trip, whereas in the afternoon they are free to walk around. I guarantee you in advance that more than 50% will remain with you. They have the feeling: “Such a huge city”.*

While group holidays often break down the barriers, not all organisations are able to organise and offer them. The “best practice” model will address this point in section 4.3.4.

### 4.2.3 Holiday facilities: after the holiday

#### → AFTERCARE

The majority of member organisations also offer a form of guidance or follow-up after the holiday. This can differ strongly in intensity and formality. Some member organisations **formally** dedicate a house call to the holiday, other member organisations **informally** discuss the holiday when the holidaymaker visits the next time. This also depends on the specific way the member organisations work. Some of these see their clients very regularly, others only have contact when there are problems. A number of organisations maintain a calendar of when their clients go on holiday or day trip, and call the holidaymakers afterwards. Other organisations trust that the holidaymakers themselves will talk about the experience.

*“I note in my calendar that he has returned, and then I call him on his mobile phone. Or sometimes they visit us at the meeting place, so there are also people who simply show up and tell their story.”*

One of the participants in the focus groups told how these moments after the holiday can be very **important** for her target group, which mainly consists of the homeless:

*“We meet with them afterwards, because many come back and then fall into a black hole. When we go on holiday or go somewhere, we always have someone at home to tell how it was. This is not the case for many of our people. So we make sure that they are well received afterwards by meeting with them again. Because otherwise we notice that many people become really depressed afterwards or fall into a black hole, since they have nothing with which to relive what they experienced, to keep the holiday experience in a positive light.”*

While this aftercare can be of major importance for the holidaymaker, it appears that finding the time for this is not always self-evident. Several participants point out that the quality of the aftercare often depends very much on the institution and possibilities of the individual social worker:

*“Part of it concerns an investment in time. How much more are you able to invest? And a part of course is being attentive: when you know people have just returned from holiday, that you at least ask how it was. Some talk about it spontaneously, others... you must pay attention to these people, that is always important.”*

With respect to content, this formal or informal aftercare often takes the form of an **evaluation**. The holiday is reviewed, and what was experienced as good and not so good is discussed. Lessons are often learned from this to apply to future holiday facilities:

*“Last year we reviewed after the holiday: how was the holiday, how were the days spent, how did it go with the budget, do we need to allow for a larger budget next year?”*

In some cases, the aftercare goes further than only a social moment and evaluation, and the opportunity is taken to involve the holiday further in the general operation of the organisation. A local non-profit association that, for example, organises children’s camps makes active use of the bond that is created by the holiday between parents and children, also after the holiday.

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*“And afterwards you continue to visit these parents. This in fact is also a win-win situation, because in a number of families there are children who are too young to go along, so these are future holidaymakers. So you continue to maintain this relationship. And we pick out the best parents in order to develop a sort of godfather-godmother system. These people become volunteers who provide guidance. And this allows them to go on holiday for free for a few years.”*

Certain organisations also use the aftercare in support of general **welfare services** (see also “Holidays as stepping stone” p. 61):

*“We have the impression that positive experiences remain a memory, and can serve as a starting point when things get difficult: “You remember, things went well there, it was a success there, they were wonderful then, the children can do it. And often you can further build on this, but it’s a slow process.”*

Other organisations on the other hand choose not to include aftercare in their activity or assistance. This can be due to the structure, setting and objectives of the organisation. Organisations that for example organise holidays throughout Flanders, and that are not engaged in further welfare services, often offer no aftercare since there is usually no contact with the participant after the holiday. Thus, it is important to remember that the organisation that provides the holiday is not always the one that is able to provide the aftercare. Other organisations are structurally or organisationally better equipped, but do not have the financial resources to engage in aftercare projects:

*“We organise for example a biking holiday for beginners. And they can come with us and truly get a taste for it, but you are taken up in that group feeling. And then they arrive home and there is no one in their surroundings to take them out for a bit of a bike ride. You feel it yourself, we would like to do a bit more in this regard.”*

## → EFFECTS OF THE HOLIDAYS

Section 3.2.5 discussed the motivations of the member organisations in providing the holiday facilities. They stated why they found holidays so important, that they wanted to make extra time and resources available for this. In a certain sense, this goes together with discussing the effects of the holiday. The participants in the focus groups were asked the extent to which they saw effects after the holidaymakers’ return and how these effects manifested themselves. The participants thus indicate the extent to which the holidays effectively achieve the positive qualities attributed to them. It is striking that the results of the holiday survey on the one hand are clearly confirmed here, and on the other hand, that new tendencies are also emerging.

A first positive effect that was often mentioned is the ability of a holiday to enable the clients to **enjoy** life again. Several member organisations mentioned that their clients no longer allowed themselves to enjoy things:

*“Allowing themselves and being able to enjoy [...], we note that this is difficult. Because many people think: “I don’t deserve this”.*

*“People have to get used to the idea: “That is something that was meant for me”. And once people do it a few times, they get used to the idea: “I can do this, I can allow myself to do this and I may also simply enjoy something”. I think that many people unconsciously deny themselves this right to enjoy something.”*

Thus, most member organisations that work with the Holiday Participation Centre see day trips and holidays as a means to a positive experience to which people living in poverty or with problems are entitled:

*“We are very satisfied with this collaboration, because it represents added-value for us. People are able to feel good again and enjoy things, because often this was no longer present in their lives. This means that they can again create the time and motivation for this.”*

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*"We have a social workshop [...] that has been offering jobs to low-skilled people who have been unemployed for more than five years. These people often come from a family that was also poor. These are then adults who often have seen nothing other than their native village [...]. They were never able to experience the nice things in life."*

The organisations also often indicate that the positive moments experienced on a holiday or day trip are still important after the experience itself. Even after the fact, they can be a source of courage and an incentive for a more positive attitude:

*"If you are able to offer a family a pleasant day out or a pleasant holiday in this way, then you notice that they take better care of themselves. But I think this is a circle. When people are able to enjoy things, they have more perseverance, they gain self-confidence."*

In this way, holidays can have a positive effect on the holidaymakers' general attitude to life. One member organisation describes this as an enrichment:

*"The encounter, the exchange, this is an adventure, it is discovering, experiencing. It enriches you as person."*

A practical example of this enrichment and more positive attitude to life can be that people again dare to make plans after a long time of not doing so. Thus, they are not only more focused on today but also on the future:

*"People also dare to make plans again. When people return from holiday and say: "Where is that book, can I reserve that again for next year?" Whereas many underprivileged people do not usually make use of planning. Instead, they live from week to week. The holiday allows them to set aside, no matter how briefly, the feeling of needing to survive."*

The holiday is often also a moment to start from scratch, to begin again, and to change one's behaviour. Several member organisations gave examples of this. One of them told of three children in a family, with the eldest son acting in a very negative way towards the younger children. When they all attended a camp together, his behaviour changed radically and he became very protective. Another participant in the focus groups told how one of her clients (a lady with a mental disability) never wanted to get out of bed in the morning. On holiday, however, she always got up on her own. The following example also shows how people correct negative behaviour on holiday (in this case, a group trip):

*"On the weekend, we were with four guides and a bit of panic set in. We had emergency scenarios in place for alcohol- and violence-related situations, but in fact it all went very well and the group kept itself in line. If someone overstepped the mark slightly, the group actually dealt with this person themselves by ignoring him for a while."*

Experiences such as holidays and day trips can also contribute to increased **self-confidence** on the part of holidaymakers.

*"Day trips do increase the self-image. In order to get somewhere, using the train, tram and bus can sometimes be daunting for people, and in this area they do become more self-confident, and are much more positive about it the next time."*

The self-esteem of the holidaymakers can also increase due to their experience with other people in society. While the following respondent views holidays with other people within the same target group as positive, he also emphasised the benefits of an individual holiday in which people are confronted with a mixed public:

*"What she found so positive was the fact that she was in an environment that did not just contain people with low incomes. So there are advantages to organising something for them separately, but I think that it is also very important in such a situation to function in a mixed public for a change. There they find that they in fact are not always being watched, and that perhaps it is not always so conspicuous that they are from this background."*

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Increased self-confidence can also lead to **self-sufficiency** on the part of the holidaymakers. The following examples were given by member organisations that work with the disabled:

*"In our case, often people do not have the courage to do anything. They don't know, for example, which bus to take, perhaps because they cannot read or something like that. There is then thorough preparation by our supervisors, and in the end they are able to function. This is also a victory in itself."*

*"And of course, at the end of the day, that is the main objective. Making sure that they are able to function, that they do not feel inferior, despite their disability."*

Member organisations that work with other target groups also note this self-sufficiency. This can be the case practically (e.g. using public transport, making a day trip on one's own), but also socially (having the courage to speak with the person responsible if there are problems):

*"People also learn. With each thing that they do, they also learn. They learn, for example, how to take the train or how to purchase a ticket on the bus."*

*"For a number of women who have not been here very long, it is also an introduction to everything that is available. Thus they also get to know what is possible for them, things they might want to try later."*

*"And due to this they become more self-sufficient. Because it can happen that something goes wrong during that week. Then the only thing they can do is go to the person responsible, explain their problem, and if this person listens and is able to help, you find that they will more readily appeal to someone for help in the future."*

Another effect that often occurs is a possible expansion of the holidaymaker's **social network**. Holidaymakers sometimes get to know other people via group trips or group travel or even on individual holidays. An expansion of their network helps them break out of their social isolation or to share their problems with others if they want.

*"I remember a single mother with five children. She said she had the telephone numbers in her mobile phone of a number of people she had met on holiday and that she called them from time to time. The social network, I find, is very important."*

*"And I see when the mothers get together. It actually has nothing to do with the day trip, but simply to chat, talk about what is bothering them and to be surrounded by nature. This is truly satisfying for them."*

*"I was thinking about the effects of the holiday on the people I supervised. Friendships arise, their network expands and that provides more support. This gives self-confidence. They visit people they met at the seaside. These are all positive things that continue to have long-term consequences."*

The network of the holidaymaker can also be strengthened within the family. Several member organisations mentioned that going on a day trip or holiday together can strengthen the **family bonds**:

*"The experience indeed also strengthens the family bond: "We did something together that was fun". Otherwise it is always: "We have problems and the only thing we can see is our problems". This is something hopeful, something that gives the family a perspective on the future: "There are also nice things we can do".*

*"I find it very important that you can also do fun things with small children at times of leisure. Because usually there is stress, and they never get to experience that being with their child can also be fun."*

*"For the children, to get away with their parents for a change is a way to be together and to escape the daily routine."*

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It can also give the family a feeling of belonging, and reassure the parents that they do not need to deny children something other families find normal:

*“I think also that being a part of the holiday crowd is important. Not having been able to go on holiday for years and years, and always seeing other families go and now they get a chance to do it.”*

The satisfaction received by the parents in being able to give this to their children is very great, and can be a source of joy and self-confidence in the future:

*“What I especially noted is that the people are very satisfied when they say afterwards that the children found it so much fun. And then they are so proud that they are able to provide their children with these sorts of moments. They then beam with pride for weeks. The travel ... yes, this makes them more self-confident, since they are also able to offer something to the children.”*

→ **HOLIDAYS AS A ‘STEPPING STONE’**

The focus groups indicate that the above-mentioned effects of the holiday affect the holidaymaker not only in the short term, but also in the longer term. While the day trip or holiday is usually relatively brief (one to seven days), the effects of participation in positive leisure activities can extend beyond the duration of the experience itself. A number of focus group participants stated explicitly that they see the holiday as a possible **“stepping stone” to other life experiences or skills**. This has directly to do with the potential effects of the holiday discussed above. After the holiday or day trip, holidaymakers sometimes assume a more positive attitude to life, and this can bring about a positive change in several areas. In the focus groups, one of the participants compared the holiday to “giving people handles, showing them how they can continue without us.” Another participant - who organises children’s camps - described the camps as the possibility to pursue a different path:

*“If children never learn, never feel that things can be different, they also are never given the opportunity to take a different path. Then they are certain to remain in their circle of poverty.”*

For certain member organisations, the holiday or day trip is not only a pleasant and positive experience, but also a resource that can support other objectives:

*“And I think it is especially relevant to say what we achieve gradually, over time. I always say: “You can offer something as much as you like, but what counts is what the others do with it and how they experience and retain it. This applies at all levels. Not only in the area of the holiday, but to everything in our sector.”*

The member organisations that see holidays as a “stepping stone”, agree that this is a slow process, as their clients’ problems are not miraculously solved with a day trip. However, they often find the motivating power provided by the experience an important reason to offer holidays and this can bear fruit in the longer term, as illustrated in the following example:

*“I remember a frightened woman who was psychologically crushed. She was divorced, had been mistreated and had a history of psychiatric treatment. She evolved into someone again able to live self-consciously and creatively. Then I think, you can’t achieve that effect with a day trip, but the knowledge that the possibilities exist is a serious boost for them.”*

The motivating power obtained from a day trip or holiday is also emphasised by the following participant:

*“It also gives them the feeling that they are special. You often hear that among people who have no more energy. It is appreciation. And if you give that to them, you can also work with people.”*

The structure and operation of the member organisations again influence the extent to which this “stepping stone” can play a part. Some organisations specifically opt for this and see it as the most important reason for offering holidays, while other organisations find this less important than being able to experience a relaxing moment:

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*“For a number of clients, it is sometimes the door to discovering something new, and continuing to build on it further. In most cases, however, it is simply a relaxing activity. Something different than sitting at home where there often is a negative undertone present due to the problems that exist.”*

*“We approach things from a very different point of view. Our aim is actually to allow the people to take responsibility as much as possible, to try to get them to take their lives back into their own hands. In the beginning, I also thought “that’s good, now they’ve been on holiday, now they’ve been on a day trip”. But no, ultimately our goal is that people take greater control of their own lives, and they learn how to do that here. We don’t organise these holidays so they can say they’ve been on holiday.”*

A series of examples emerged from the focus groups of holidays or day trips that were the motivation for or that supported **positive changes in behaviour**. Often, the increased self-confidence that resulted from the holiday was the basis for the new behaviour. The following example shows how a lady now takes public transport alone, while she didn’t dare to do this before:

*“She didn’t dare take public transport alone, since the transfer was very difficult. And now she says “I went to Sint-Niklaas alone for the first time to go shopping”. Something she had never dared to do before, so in this sense this was a great victory for her. After the forum, she went together with someone to Sint-Niklaas for a coffee in the city, and the next week she returned alone.”*

Another possible change in behaviour concerns greater financial planning. Thus, the following member organisation gave the example of a client who began to save on her own for the next holiday:

*“It was an endorsement to hear: “I certainly want to return next year”, and “I am already saving for it”. She tries to set something aside each month to be sure that she can pay for the holiday.”*

The following example illustrates the profound effects of increased self-confidence. The holidaymaker in question decided after the holiday to follow some courses:

*“I have a client who in fact had never been on holiday, who didn’t dare go with her children to somewhere so foreign: “If we attracted attention, we were looked at”, and she certainly had a feeling of “the people think I don’t have my children under control.” But [...] now she herself asks to go. When she returned, she was much more self-confident because it went well. Shortly thereafter, she started to follow courses in basic education. So there was a huge barrier somewhere, but once she had negotiated it, you could see real progress.”*

It can be inferred from the following that a holiday can sometimes bring about **changes in behaviour that are very difficult to achieve in day-to-day activity** or require much more intensive coaching:

*“For example, I was on holiday with someone who was a disaster when it came to housekeeping. The dirty dishes piled up, so you had to organise everything. While on holiday, he suddenly began to help with washing the dishes. Afterwards, I focused on this in my supervision and we have now progressed to the point where he does the dishes himself twice per week. These are very small things that allow people to accomplish something because they feel good at that moment in the group and are in a totally different environment for a while. Afterwards, you can achieve much more with them. This is more than simply going on holiday.”*

A holiday or day trip can sometimes also have a very motivating effect on children, encouraging them to push themselves or view the future differently. Thus, one of the participants in the focus groups spoke of a child who, after a series of day trips, registered for drawing school. Another example:

*“Thus, the day trip is truly a part of their lives, of their existence. It is not the case that they enjoy the moment and then it’s gone and that’s it. It has a deeper effect on them. There is a family who visited the new dinosaur exhibition. Their 12-year-old son now knows he wants to be an archaeologist. Ultimately, that is something all children do, but the target group with which I work consists of people who are primarily confronted with their problems. Their lives are primarily defined by the difficulties they encounter. And then that indeed offers possibilities to counteract this.”*

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These positive behavioural changes are often a major motivation for the member organisation to participate in providing the holiday facilities. But as can be seen in a number of examples, they often do not exist on their own, and **guidance and support** is often a precondition for their development. Previous research (Minnaert, 2006) showed that this support is the key that can help transform the motivating power of the holiday into practical changes in behaviour. The following example shows that without this support, the motivation of the holidaymakers is often not strong enough to deal with complex or problematic home situations. The member organisation refers to the relationship between three children that improved dramatically at camp:

*“When the mother came to pick them up, she was radiant and afterwards she was on the telephone for half an hour. But three or four days later, there were again major problems. Of course, this is an issue entirely beyond our control. You deal with families where seven to eight factors are at play.”*

Some of the member organisations attempt to offer support after the holiday by deliberately involving it in the welfare services. Group holidays, for example, can be used to identify and investigate the problems requiring extra attention:

*“This of course really helps us in our work. When you see what happens in a group setting, that is fantastic. Our work begins after the holiday. How men sometimes deal with women, how parents deal with their children, we only really see this on holiday. Because they are very good at keeping up appearances, since we visit the people only once per week and it is quite possible that things go well for one hour. But it is not possible to maintain these appearances on holiday for a week.”*

An organisation that provides support to young families in raising children explains how for them day trips are integrated in their daily activity in order to view the upbringing situation in practice on one hand, and because they believe it fits their goal of working preventatively:

*“We in fact often look for activities to do together with the children in order to provide support on the ground, to see the people in action. But also because this is preventative and an accessible form of support for raising children. So that people receive the opportunity to relax. Mothers and raising children, there is always a lot of stress. Thus, in this sense it both fits and supplements our offering.”*

The preparation for the holiday can also enhance the trust between the client and the member organisation, and make the work more pleasant.

*“It also makes the supervision pleasant, because you have something positive to talk about. You worked together for it, and they enjoy it. That in fact is the starting point, because they request it and find it pleasant. But there is also something else for me; you have something pleasant to talk about together, which also makes the contact itself more pleasant.”*

In section 4.3.3, where a proposal is elaborated with respect to a “best practice” model, this supporting role of the member organisations will be further discussed, as will how this form of aftercare can also be offered to clients of organisations in which such aftercare does not exist due to lack of time, money or personnel resources.

### 4.3 Proposals for a ‘best practice’ model

The previous points described the different practices that exist in Flemish member organisations in several areas with respect to holidays and day trips, i.e. motivations of the member organisations, preparation for the holiday, guidance on holiday, aftercare, effects and guidance. Based on these, in this section we will propose a “best practice” model for social tourism. A “best practice” model describes **effective processes for providing services**, taking into account the problems that occur in practice, and offers strategies to deal with these problems in a realistic and feasible way.

The aim of this “best practice” model is not to impose strict regulations on all member organisations and to make all their operations uniform. Not only is this unrealistic - a small non-profit association that works only with volunteers cannot use the same organisational pattern as a large public social service, but the variety of organisations that work together with the Holiday Participation Centre, and the wide-ranging holiday offerings that they provide, may be seen as a strong point for Flanders. What the “best practice” model does attempt to do is to draw lessons

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from the practical examples that were presented in the focus groups. In principle, these are applicable to the entire range of holiday facilities, even though there are differences possible in the area of scale and intensity.

Raising awareness concerning the progressive quality of holidays is a first pillar of this. Collaboration between different services and making optimum use of existing expertise being the second. Effective communication and promotion of the Holiday Participation Centre and its offerings is the third and final pillar.

#### 4.3.1 Progress within the holiday facilities

The previous sections already proposed the holiday as a potential learning process, a personal growth process. This image could be applied to the entire range of holiday facilities, not only for the holidaymakers, but also for the organisations that guide them. In offering holidays, the greatest effect is obtained when the facilities promote and support this progressive learning process. This progress can take place on the part of the holidaymaker in the area of attitude toward day trips and holidays, the type of holiday chosen, the destination or activity that is chosen and via the personal development of the client due to holidays. Regular experience with the holiday facilities can also result in a growth process for the member organisations.

#### 4.3.2 Progress on the part of the holidaymaker

The previous sections showed that a positive attitude on the part of the holidaymaker with respect to holidays can take time. This largely depends on the target group to which the holidaymaker belongs and his or her personal situation. Examples were given above of clients who would not allow themselves to enjoy things and how this attitude can change over time. A number of clients are also at a point in their lives where they have other, more pressing problems that first must be addressed before they can think about leisure activities.

A member organisation that operates a refuge for women gives the following example:

*“The women are with us for between three and six months. Thus, we make the offer as soon as the women are admitted to our facilities. We say: “We can make use of Holiday Participation. If you wish to go on holiday with your children, let me know”. But we often note that it is somewhat difficult, certainly when they first come to us. However, after they have been here three or four months and everything is in order and there is the prospect of a house, and everything seems to be going well, the women may ask: “You know what, in fact we would like to do that”.*

A home supervisor in special youth welfare work gave this example:

*“It is partly my job as home supervisor to search for meaningful leisure activities. That is when space begins to open up for leisure, which is not high on their list of priorities. But in principle we get to it during the guidance.”*

Consequently, holidays and day trips are experiences that must be worked up to in certain cases and for which the client must have the required psychological and emotional space. Clients who have travelled before, for example, have less difficulty with this barrier than clients who have little or no travel experience. Once clients have gotten past this barrier, however, they pass on this attitude to holidays to their children:

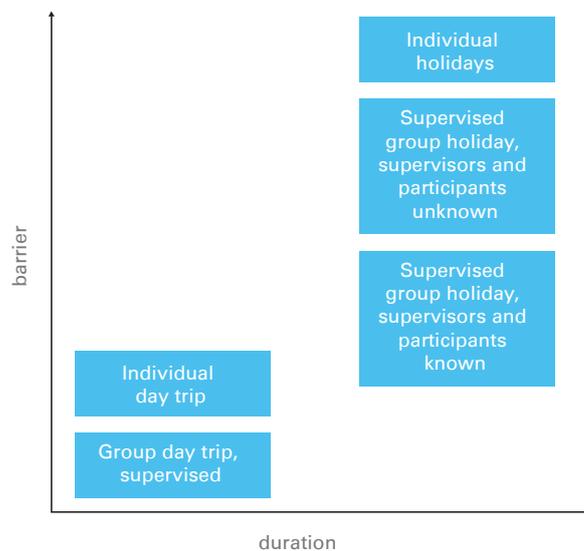
*“We in fact have been sending guests (to children’s camp) for a long time. We also see that people who now have children themselves also find it important that their children do something like this. And I think that it is also important that they pass this on to their children, i.e. learning to enjoy and relax.”*

*“I do notice that those who have been on holiday with their parents in the past also continue this tradition in their own family. That they also want to go on holiday more and will do more to see that it happens regularly.”*

Thus, while the barrier is lower for some clients, which makes the role of the member organisation easier, several respondents also saw it as their role to help other clients overcome the barriers that prevent them from taking a day trip or holiday. One of them said:

*“In our organisation, I find in fact that quite a few people go individually. Because we have already done this for many people, these of course are the somewhat stronger people. And it is up to us to also motivate, in one way or another, the people who are not yet able to do so. You must be careful to not always help the same people.”*

A different growth process is the **type of holiday** the client chooses. Often a progression can be seen in which holidaymakers begin with accessible forms (such as day trips in a group) and then move up to more sophisticated forms of holiday (such as individual holidays). The figure below shows the barriers associated with the different forms of holiday:



Several examples of clients who progressed from one form of holiday to the other were given in the focus groups. Holidaymakers for example decided, sometimes after several day trips, to also try a holiday. This applies to both group holidays and individual holidays:

*“I also have a family that has now been making seven or eight day trips per year for the last two years. This summer they again wished to make use of the day trip service. And next year, because their financial situation will be better, at least according to our calculations, they would like to perhaps take the step towards a holiday.”*

*“I think that there is a group of people in this category who view the day trips as a type of stepping stone on the way to a family holiday. I can imagine that someone who has never been away from home, and who then must do this in a group, would see this as a stepping stone to such a day trip.”*

The fact that holidaymakers take the step to more challenging forms of holidays usually has to do with a growing feeling of self-confidence:

*“This going away together has resulted in one of our families wanting to take the step to go on holiday. Now they want to do it together because they have already done it, because they already know a bit more, i.e. what they can expect, and what they can do and how they have to do it.”*

Member organisations often refer to the fact that this progress is not always self-evident and that their supporting and supervisory role is very important to the holidaymakers:

*“Such a day trip is well organised and not difficult to plan, i.e. simply depart in the morning and return home in the evening. Yet if you are not in the habit of being away from home for longer periods, it is a more difficult step for many people. Perhaps if all goes well, this can be worked up to gradually. For longer holidays, you need to help the people work up to this, this must be organised.”*

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*“The step from day trip to holiday is indeed a quite intensive process. I hear from a few who do this that extra time and energy are needed.”*

A different type of progress is the move from group day trips and holidays to individual forms of holiday. In the case of day trips, it first of all often concerns the holidaymaker who visits an attraction with a group, also visiting it individually. The following example was given by a member organisation that works with people with a mental disability:

*“We do this outing once together, but if afterwards they want to go alone, we handle all of the preparations but don’t go along. Consequently, you note that if they make a day trip themselves, it indeed remains local. And they will often repeat something we have already done often, because new is difficult.”*

*“We try to keep the costs as low as possible, and if it is then here in the neighbourhood, there is always a chance that they might be able to do it on their own sometime. [...] So if they’d like to go on an outing again, they can come to us. Perhaps we can first book it for them, in steps, so that they continually become more self-sufficient.”*

In another case, the progress made by holidaymakers is illustrated by their initiative to organise a group day trip together. The member organisation in question organises two group day trips each year for residents at supervised living initiatives. Organising an outing themselves demands a series of organisational skills that are not self-evident for this group:

*“They once organised something like this with five people. We couldn’t believe it, people getting organised based on group moments for a number of them to go somewhere. Because that is difficult: “Where shall we meet, and when will we be back, and I’ll come pick you up, but what time do you get up, etc?” But that takes a long time, because these people are socially isolated.”*

The **choice of destination or activity** is another area where progress is possible. From very familiar and accessible attractions such as amusement parks and zoos to attractions that most holidaymakers are less familiar with, such as cultural activities. For some member organisations, it is of the utmost importance that their clients have a new experience and for example take a day trip once. Where they go is much less important. By taking the day trip, they have already overcome a major barrier. The two following respondents give examples of this:

*“In fact, we are already happy when people are able to do something with their children. I think this is somewhat typical for the families with whom we work. They don’t do much at all with the children, and then if they do take them somewhere, it is a bit of a celebration for these children. We are already quite happy when they do something with mummy and daddy alone. We are not going to suggest that they should do this or that.”*

*“We will also not impose an activity on them when they get so much more out of an amusement park. Then we see it as a plus point that they at least go to the amusement park instead of sitting at home.”*

Other member organisations that, for example, regularly organise group day trips do try to add variety, so that the holidaymakers also have new experiences that are sometimes cheaper than the familiar attractions:

*“I find that it gives a type of support, that you also teach people other things, that more is possible than just amusement parks. We organise a weekly outing and we try to inject as much variety as possible. Not too many amusement parks, because, in the end, children can have a perfectly good time somewhere that doesn’t cost much money.”*

The choice of destination or activity thus depends partly on the experience and background of the holidaymaker, i.e. holidaymakers having very little experience with day trips understandably are inclined to choose an attraction that sounds familiar to them. This also applies to group day trips, and the group dynamic is often important. The following respondent describes how you must take account of what the group can handle:

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*“Last summer, we went with the people to a museum, but we weren’t there for more than half an hour. You have to read this, you have to do that and it was simply too much. They went outside and sat on a bench, which was much more pleasant. I think it also depends somewhat on what the target group can handle.”*

Based on all of these examples, it can be said that the destination, attraction or type of holiday chosen is not important in itself, but rather that this choice fits what the holidaymaker is able to handle. For a number of member organisations, the accessible forms and destinations are the most suitable; for others, the less accessible destinations are also tried. **It is important, however, that the member organisations are aware that this type of progress exists, so that they are able to give their clients the best advice and support.** If it appears, for example, that a client is not yet capable of an individual day trip, but the member organisation does not offer group day trips, it in principle is better to refer this client to an organisation that does offer this type of holiday. This point will be discussed further in 4.3.4. At the same time, it is also important that people who are ready to take the step to a form of holiday or attraction with a higher barrier are encouraged and supported in this. The goal of progressive holiday facilities is to optimise the role of the holiday as a **stepping stone to positive changes in behaviour.**

### 4.3.3 Progress for the member organisation

Just as the holidaymaker can progress via day trips and holidays, member organisations can also grow in the way in which they provide holidays. Member organisations that have considerable experience with holiday facilities regularly stated that they have adapted and developed their activity, often after initial problems. This usually comes down to further expanding the preparation process and the aftercare:

*“We’ve also grown with respect to these preparations. I think that this is a process that most of our people have to undergo, i.e. grow in this respect and gain self-confidence, become a bit more self-sufficient in this area.”*

The adaptations usually occur after it appears that holidaymakers have found it difficult to overcome certain barriers on their own. The following member organisation noticed for example that holidaymakers often did not go on booked day trips if the required support was lacking:

*“I think that it is indeed also a learning process for people. Because in the beginning, we also had people who requested this. And you did it then, and if you asked afterwards: “How was it?”, because I always did this, they would say: “I didn’t go”.*

Preparation and aftercare again appear to be key aspects to successful holiday facilities. Not every member organisation has the possibilities (financial, structural or with respect to personnel) to itself offer the full range. For this reason, this “best practice” model proposes collaboration between member organisations in order to optimally benefit from the strengths and expertise of the different organisations.

### 4.3.4 Collaboration between the member organisations

The basis for this section is that an **adequate form of preparation, support and aftercare** is extremely important to the holiday facilities if progress on the part of the holidaymaker is to take place. This progress occurs not only with respect to the experience of a holiday, but also with respect to personal development, when the effects of the holiday can be a stepping stone to positive changes in behaviour.

This “adequate form” of supervision can be minimal if the holidaymaker is very self-sufficient and only needs the help of the member organisation to book a reduced rate via the Holiday Participation Centre. For other holidaymakers “adequate” support is much more intensive, i.e. requiring assistance with transport, luggage and day planning or aftercare. While most member organisations that work with the Holiday Participation Centre can provide basic supervision, not all organisations have the time and resources to support more intense supervision or to offer the full spectrum of holiday types.

In one of the focus groups, a choice was made to provide centralised supervision, with a central contact point being created for the preparation, supervision and aftercare of holidaymakers. According to the respondents, while this can help with providing information, this is not a total solution since the personal trust that the member organisations have with their clients is an important part of the holidaymakers’ progress. The social field in Flanders is wide

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and varied. And this can be a strength, since the various organisations can each develop their own expertise and provide their target group with different forms of assistance.

To focus on this strength, this “best practice” model suggests **encouraging collaboration between member organisations**. Instead of imposing a uniform procedure, the model proposes that each member organisation that offers forms of holidays support and supervise them according to their own ability. For a number of organisations under time pressure, this means only organising individual day trips for clients who are already relatively self-sufficient. Other organisations with more room for a wider selection of offerings (such as group holidays or individual holidays that require a great deal of supervision) can offer these **so that clients at the local or regional level have access to the entire holiday offerings and the requisite support**. One of the respondents described it as follows:

*“What I do find, however, is that many organisations are each busy with a part. I think that it is important to organisations that the offerings are there, that they in fact are or can be available via the full range of welfare services. For a public social service that doesn’t have the time, it might be useful to ask: “Who else from your family is coming?” Because often there are others, often there is a budget supervisor or a local social centre.”*

The **public social services** (OCMWs) were often cited as an example of organisations that due to time pressure find it very difficult to offer a variety of forms of holiday. This doesn’t mean that they have no role to play in this “best practice” model, on the contrary, they can play a central role in referring their clients to other member organisations because they have contacts with a large group of clients and a confidential relationship:

*“The confidential relationship you have should not be underestimated, because this is indeed the basis for introducing holidays or day trips. And someone in an OCMW is often the first point of contact.”*

In practice, successful examples of such referrals appear to already to exist at local level, as witnessed by this non-profit association:

*“It has come to the point with us that the OCMW simply contacts us when something concerns Holiday Participation. They tell their clients: “You can contact (name of non-profit association) and they will help you further”.*

This model ensures that clients of organisations that do not have enough time or staff to invest in the holiday facilities nevertheless receive access to holidays. To make this possible, it is necessary to **identify the member organisations and their holiday facilities**, and bring the organisations into contact with one another. Many member organisations state that they are unaware of which other local organisations work with the Holiday Participation Centre. One of the respondents also proposed using a poster or logo to give clients a clear signal where they can obtain information on Holiday Participation.

While, on the one hand, this allows for broader participation in the holiday facilities, it also implies that as member organisations take up responsibility for a greater share of the holiday facilities, they must also have access to additional resources. Many member organisations presently do this voluntarily, in addition to their normal responsibilities. Many respondents indicated that while they are happy to do this at the moment, it would probably not be feasible for them to do so on a much larger scale without additional resources:

*“Should that be a success, I wouldn’t be able to handle it. Because I also have my regular work and I only have a half afternoon in the week for this.”*

*Extra resources could be provided on a pro-rata basis (depending on the number of holidaymakers that are supervised per type of holiday) or could be offered as project subsidies to member organisations that develop the appropriate mechanisms for this.*

The advantage of greater collaboration between member organisations can be that this prevents duplication, and fully recognises the **objectives of the different organisations**. Certain organisations, for example, work with a specific **target group** and thus are limited to this group for their offerings, even if they see additional possibilities. The following example refers to a member organisation that works with children. While they would like to provide possibilities for parents to go on holiday or a day trip with their children, this is outside the scope of their operation.

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Collaboration with other organisations could provide an answer here:

*“It also depends on the setting. If your service is home supervision, you work together with the parents. If, however, you are an institution that only works with the children, you have a different setting. And you’ve got to make do with what you have.”*

Some organisations’ objectives encourage the offering of supervised group holidays or day trips. For other organisations, this is inappropriate and irreconcilable with their objectives. Here are some examples of the two positions:

*“Take for example this amusement park. The danger exists that you as supervisor can go with the children to the attractions and then you must have a discussion with the parents while you’re there. In fact, this is your job. But then what are you doing there? The line in the sand is very vague. I think we could accomplish this better by playing a family game with the children together with mother and father for 30 minutes. I think then we would accomplish much more.”*

*“On the other hand, I think if we go to the seaside with the women, then our aim is that the women themselves are busy with the children. It is often an impetus. But I think if we were not with them, they would sit at the beach each day and the child would not be allowed to move. Then I think that it is better that we go along on holiday.”*

If both organisations work together, they can offer both options to the holidaymakers. They then have access to the advantages of both forms and they can choose the one that best fits with their development.

This model also takes account of the difference between member organisations that offer holidays alongside welfare services, and **member organisations that specifically focus on providing holidays to certain target groups**. The strength of the latter organisations is their expertise in organising an enjoyable holiday, often for a target group located in a larger geographic region. They deliberately distance themselves from welfare services and in this sense are not able to offer certain aspects of the supervision (such as aftercare, for example).

*“Our position has always been that we offer children and young people a very nice holiday, but we don’t care about possible problems or supervision, so to speak. We don’t get into this and we don’t wish to, because we don’t have the training to supervise such young people. We simply want to give them a nice time when they are at camp, a time in which they can enjoy adventure, playing, recreation. And that allows them to return home relaxed and happy. [...] These services supervise young people all year round. I don’t know if we can contribute much except for these ten days.”*

*“I think that you also must allow the holiday to assume its own value and leave welfare services to the professionals.”*

Here it is necessary that the social workers (in most cases another member organisation) are aware of the importance of preparation and aftercare. While they can count on another organisation to practically organise the holidays, this does not remove the need for follow-up and supervision. If the member organisation is unable to offer this follow-up and supervision, it might be desirable to work with a local partner organisation to handle this.

#### 4.3.5 Communication

A final element in the “best practice” model is communication. This element is often presented as a stumbling block with respect to the current holiday facilities. The standard communication materials often do not work for the target group eligible for holiday participation. The following examples show that **a more personal approach based on the trust** that exists between the holidaymakers themselves, or the holidaymakers and the member organisations, is often necessary to effectively reach the target group.

The standard communication materials that are often used with respect to holidays, such as brochures and posters, are less effective with many member organisations. Letters are also not an effective means of communication:

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*“You can’t compare it to regular youth holiday work; let’s call them the privileged. With this group, you can accomplish a lot with a brochure. As far as we are concerned, a brochure does nothing. You only need them because you receive a subsidy for them. Over and above that, they make no sense.”*

*“We could hang the posters that the Centre makes available in the consulting room or in the waiting room. But I notice based on lots of other posters related to other initiatives that when people come to an OCMW and are sitting in the waiting room, they pay no attention to these posters. Not much attention is paid to them. In this sense, you then have the effect that if people don’t understand what it is about, or don’t immediately receive an explanation, they themselves erect the barrier.”*

Inappropriate communication skills can be seen as an additional barrier that the member organisation can help the holidaymaker overcome. The focus groups indicate that **direct, verbal contact** with the client is often the most effective way to communicate a message:

*“You must be able to directly explain the basic idea and say that you yourself can provide additional explanation. I think this indeed is important for most people.”*

*“There is also a group of people with us that are offered this via the OCMW, but these books are in the waiting room and the social assistant never says anything about them. These people don’t really understand it, what the procedure is and the like, so they don’t say anything about it. People find these books and then say “what is this and how does it work?” and the supervision is completely lacking.”*

Member organisations that work via house visits find this a good setting for direct, verbal contact:

*“These first visits, certainly in most cases, have nothing to do with the goal for which you came, namely to offer a holiday. You start by listening to these people and they tell their story. And here you learn a lot. And you can also spot many obstacles by simply looking around. And fortunately, sometimes you can address these in time so that the children can go on holiday later. And only during the second or third visit do you discover that you indeed need to help with the medical forms or to pack the bags.”*

The trust that exists between the holidaymaker and the member organisation is also often present between the clients themselves. **Word-of-mouth advertising** appears to be a very effective way to spread the word about the day trips and holidays:

*“One influences the other, like a virus. That is positive. But on the other hand, we have seen that if someone says ‘That was worthless’, no one else will go.”*

*“If they then ask ‘How was it?’, and if you have people who have already been there, you have a bit more experience to pass on and the people rely on the experiences of others.”*

*“Two years ago, we first had a family that went to the seaside, and they were wildly enthusiastic. And our house is open each Tuesday and Thursday, the entire day, and it so happened that they encouraged the others. We did not have to.”*

Some member organisations also have their own **newsletter** or regular publications in which clients tell their holiday stories. This is also an effective form of advertising:

*“An issue was just published in which we asked the people who had been on holiday to write something about it’. And they were happy to do so. The day trip and the activities, for example, to that concert hall... and the self-image of the people, the fact that they were able to write something, that it appeared in a newsletter, that the newsletter is distributed to other people, I find that extremely important for the self-image of these people.”*

A number of member organisations also found that more personal and direct contact was needed between them and the **Holiday Participation Centre**. One organisation pointed out that this could help organisations where Holiday Participation was not yet well established:

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*“We also organise a client meeting each year, and a trainee from the Centre came to our meeting. She introduced the Centre, while the clients were present. And the clients then asked their supervisor: “I would like to see the book sometime”, or “I saw this and would like to go there sometime”, so that the request in fact originated with them and the supervisor had to respond to it. This makes it easier to establish.”*

*“I also find the contacts with the Centre important. In any case, even as supervisor, there is a barrier to getting to know the offerings in order to be able to describe everything in detail to the people. At the last forum, someone suddenly sat down at our table and told us who she was and what she was doing. Such direct contact makes it possible to get many families and many mothers to go on holiday. And if, as supervisor, I have to figure out these offerings in addition to my regular job, this requires a lot of time and energy and constitutes a barrier.”*

Thus, lowering the barrier in the area of communication is also an important means to reaching holidaymakers and member organisations.

#### 4.4 Practical recommendations

At the end of each focus group, the participants were asked which elements of the holiday facilities could be improved. This section presents their answers to this question. The recommendations can be divided into three categories, i.e. transport, offerings, and organisational framework.

##### → TRANSPORT

The majority of member organisations regarded the **price of transport** to and from the destination, especially over greater distances, as an important stumbling block to the holiday facilities. While the free bus transport provided by the Holiday Participation Centre was highly appreciated, train transport was often experienced as too expensive. In certain cases, this caused the offerings of the Centre to lose their attractiveness. Several member organisations testified that Belgian National Railway day trips were cheaper than the combination of a train ticket and entrance to the attraction, even with discount. This limits the options of the holidaymaker.

Proposals presented were the introduction of a discount on train transport or on the use of private transport companies, and creating a user-friendly guide that outlines the reduced tariffs available from the Belgian National Railway. The proposal was also made to organise day trips regionally, as a collaborative effort on the part of several member organisations, in order to reduce and share the costs of private transport.

##### → OFFERINGS

The offerings of the Holiday Participation Centre were praised for their variety and development. A number of recommendations were made with respect to possible future expansions. A first element was the availability of accommodations during the holiday, especially with the cheapest formulas. Regarding this, it was regularly mentioned that demand far exceeds supply. Expansion of the offerings must especially be an “expansion toward the base”; said the following respondent:

*“I also find it important to say that there is continual development and the evolution towards more, better, larger and more expanded. In fact, I would like to see more expansion to the base, a broadening. The target group with which I work doesn’t need the latest novelty in order to visit something [...]. No, the people with us who want to go on holiday just want to get away for a while. They simply want basic infrastructure, but they don’t need so many extras, which they cannot pay for anyway.”*

Suitable offerings are also scarcer for large families and single persons. Large families often must book several rooms, which can make the holiday very expensive. Single persons prefer not to travel alone, and the offerings of centrally organised group holidays that they can book are often too limited.

Section 4.2.2 mentioned that long-term planning can be difficult for certain holidaymakers. This can create a barrier since holidays often must be booked long in advance. Which is why several member organisations proposed encouraging accommodations to communicate last minute offerings to the Holiday Participation Centre. This would allow the holiday to more directly complement the welfare services:

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*“There is indeed a lack of flexibility with respect to booking, or for people who decide late. With us, they are in an evolving programme. And at a certain moment, this is sometimes important. Then it appears that by the time the holiday arrives, they are able to get away for a few days, but then it is very difficult to plan.”*

The member organisations also made suggestions concerning directions in which the holiday offerings could be expanded. They indicate there is a demand for activities such as music festivals, company visits, workshops, theme holidays and TV shoots. Member organisations in West Flanders also regularly indicated that the offerings were heavily concentrated on the coast, while for them, attractions and accommodations in the hinterland were often more attractive. Finally, offerings in Wallonia or abroad were also suggested.

→ **ORGANISATION**

The final series of suggestions concerns the **organisational framework of the holiday facilities**. This point focuses on the collaboration between member organisations, the Holiday Participation Centre and other public services. An often-recurring suggestion concerned simplification of the current, fragmented government support for holiday and leisure:

*“Of course, there is more than holiday participation. Today, you also have cultural participation, sports participation, etc. For the people and the welfare services this is a complicated maze: “Where can I get subsidies and which ones can I get?” It is complicated. In Bruges, for example, you receive €125 for a PlayStation, or a pass to football matches or to purchase a book, etc. This falls under cultural participation. You also have sports participation, Internet participation, it’s all there.”*

A proposal was made to clarify this situation by providing a central contact point for leisure activities where one could go for information concerning the different initiatives. Organisations in Brussels also spoke of how it was sometimes difficult for them to provide the offerings only to Dutch-speaking clients. These organisations often have a mixed clientele, and at the organisations that work with foreigners or refugees, there are people who speak neither French nor Dutch. These organisations often feel punished because they are located in Brussels.

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## 4.5 Conclusion focus groups

Social tourism in Flanders is not new. Flanders has a **strong and long tradition** in the area of holiday facilities for people with a low income. The focus groups, however, indicate that this tradition has received a boost thanks to the “Tourism for All” decree and the Holiday Participation Centre. The activity of the Holiday Participation Centre is continually increasing and this research predicts that this growth will continue in the future. Many member organisations indicated that they wanted to offer more types of holiday or reach new target groups in the coming years, and none of the participants in the focus groups indicated that this activity might decrease in the future.

The member organisations play a central role in the holiday facilities. These organisations fulfil a **bridge function** between the holidaymaker and the Holiday Participation Centre, and between the holidaymaker and the attraction or accommodation. Which is why they were the focus of this research. Adequate **preparation, supervision and aftercare** will allow them to eliminate potential barriers on the part of holidaymakers. For a number of holidaymakers, who are self-sufficient or have greater experience with holidays, all types of holiday are accessible. For other holidaymakers, the barriers to individual holidays, for example, are much higher than those for a group day trip. What adequate preparation, supervision and aftercare precisely consists of thus depends on the individual holidaymaker.

By eliminating barriers, the member organisations can facilitate **progress** on the part of the holidaymakers. Holidays can be seen as a progressive learning process in two areas. In the first place, progress can take place from an easily accessible type of holiday to a more sophisticated one. A holidaymaker, after a number of day trips for example, may decide to book a holiday. This progress, however, does not come of its own accord. Secondly, progress can also take place on a personal level. A series of positive **effects** were linked to holidays and day trips in the focus groups, such as increased self-confidence, an expanded social network or strengthened family ties. Provided that there is appropriate support (what precisely this consists of depends on the holidaymaker), the holiday can also be a **stepping stone** to positive changes in behaviour. This means personal growth for the holidaymaker, but can also benefit the work of the member organisation itself, i.e. the focus groups showed that holidays and day trips can supplement and enhance the welfare services.

The “**best practice**” model proposed in this research takes account of the bridge function of the member organisations and makes the potential progress of the holidaymaker the focal point. In this sense, “best practice” is the practice that appropriately supports progress in the area of holiday experience and personal development for each holidaymaker. Not every member organisation is able to offer the full range of holiday types and support processes due to a lack of time, resources and personnel. But **collaboration and referrals** between the different member organisations could make this possible across the **entire range of welfare services**.

The “best practice” model with respect to the **communication skills** used for this process is personal, direct and based on trust between the holidaymaker and the member organisation, or between holidaymakers among themselves.

This “best practice” model is not only applicable to social tourism in Flanders, it can also be used as an example at international level. Hence, Flanders can offer support to the proposal of the European Economic and Social Committee that “each European country develop a national social tourism programme with diverse forms of management” and that European organisations should be encouraged to share experiences (EESC, Barcelona Declaration 2006).

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## 4.6 General conclusion and recommendations

At the end of the two research phases, **a number of clear and practical conclusions** emerged.

**Collaboration** by the different partner organisations with the Holiday Participation Centre is good. This finding is in line with previous holiday surveys, from which it can be concluded that the Holiday Participation Centre has developed an efficient working method. The new online booking procedure is also highly appreciated by the majority of member organisations and attractions.

Both the surveys and the focus groups show that holidays can have positive **effects**, also after the holiday experience itself. While the holiday cannot remove all of the holidaymaker's problems, it can be a "stepping stone" to positive changes. This stepping stone effect can bring about, for example, improved family relationships, an expanded social network or increased self-confidence. In this way, the holiday can be an integrated part of the full set of welfare services. In order to achieve this, this research also proposed opening up support of the holiday process to this full set of welfare services.

The surveys as well as the focus groups acknowledge the **prominent role played by the member organisations in the holiday facilities**. Their support is very important in effectively achieving the potential positive changes that a holiday can bring about. Yet it is unrealistic to expect each member organisation to offer all forms of support to each holidaymaker. Consequently, the "best practice" model proposes collaboration at local or regional level that respects and optimises the nature and expertise of the member organisations. The variety of methods used by the social organisations and the many activities that revolve around clubs and associations in Flanders, are strengths that can be optimally made use of in this regard. To this end, it is necessary that the present holiday facilities be examined and that possible local shortcomings in the facilities are addressed.

Finally, the **motivations of the private sector** in supporting the Holiday Participation Centre were looked into. It is the goodwill and voluntary collaboration of the private sector that makes the Flemish system of social holiday offerings so unique and cost-effective, and thus it is necessary to understand their motivations and attitudes. Many participating attractions appear to have strong humanitarian motivations and to grant discounts primarily based on these. There are, however, also more commercial motivations, such as extra advertising or the new trend toward ethical entrepreneurship. Since demand for day trips and holidays continues to increase, and many member organisations plan to expand their holiday offerings, an expansion of the offerings is vital. To obtain increased support from the private sector in the future, further specific research is needed into the effects of the support. More detailed information is also needed concerning what encourages attractions and accommodations to grant discounts. This could assist the Holiday Participation Centre in recruiting new suppliers.

summary



## 5 Summary

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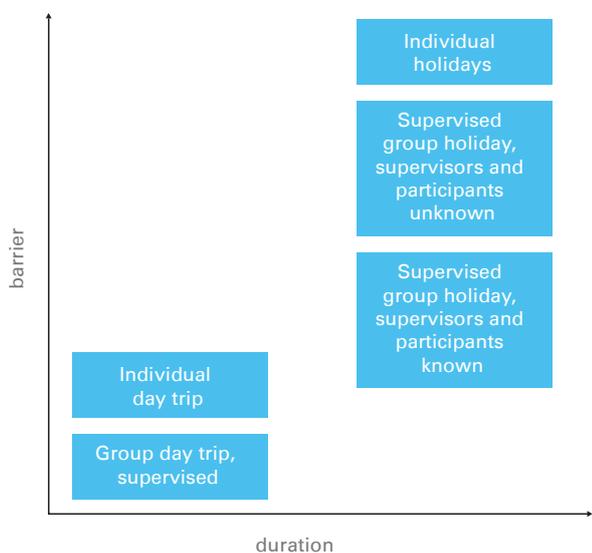
This report presents the results of an intensive research process, consisting of two components, that was conducted from October 2007 to February 2008. A first component was the annual Holiday Survey that was sent to the attractions, accommodations, member organisations and holidaymakers. A second component was a series of focus groups held with the member organisations. The two sets of data were intended to address the following questions:

- The Flemish social tourism facilities are unique due to the collaboration with the private sector. What motivates the private sector to give such discounts voluntarily to people with a low income?
- In Flanders, the position is often defended that everyone is entitled to a holiday, and thus that social tourism is a justified government intervention. Social holidays are also linked to a series of positive effects that increase the well-being and the integration of the holidaymaker, even after the holiday, such as increased self-confidence, an expanded social network, improved family relationships and a more proactive attitude to life. Are these effects noticeable in Flanders?
- Previous research showed that the role of the member organisation in achieving these positive effects is crucial. However, these member organisations in Flanders differ considerably in size, objective and way of working, and not every organisation is able to provide each form of support. How then can appropriate support be provided to each holidaymaker? Can a “best practice” model be developed for this?

The Holiday Survey examined in detail why the private sector voluntarily decided to grant discounts to the target group of the Holiday Participation Centre. The results show on the one hand that there is a strongly humanitarian awareness present among the attractions, i.e. that everyone has a right to a holiday and recreation. Thus, many attractions are involved in social tourism based on charity considerations. This is the most important motivation for almost 40% of them. Such an attitude is inconceivable in many other countries in the world, and this shows how strong the tradition of social tourism is in Flanders. On the other hand, a large group of attractions is not blind to the more commercial effects of the collaboration, such as greater name recognition, extra advertising, ethical entrepreneurship and greater numbers of visitors. Since demand for the attractions is increasing more quickly than supply, it can be important for the Centre to highlight these more commercial motivations. Further specific research is needed into the effects of the support on increased numbers of visitors and turnover. More detailed information is also needed concerning what encourages attractions and accommodations to grant discounts. This could assist the Holiday Participation Centre in recruiting new suppliers.

Both the surveys and the focus groups show that holidays can have positive effects for the **holidaymakers**, also after the holiday experience itself. These effects were grouped into **four categories**, i.e. an expanded social network, a more proactive attitude to life, greater mental strength and increased use of public transport. In addition to the right to a holiday, which is strongly respected in the long tradition of social tourism in Flanders, these positive effects are a further justification of the holiday facilities provided by the Holiday Participation Centre. A holiday is more than “a short time away from home”. It can increase the quality of life and integration of specific groups in society. While the holiday cannot remove all of the holidaymaker’s problems, it can be a “stepping stone” to positive changes. In this way, the holiday can be an integrated part of the full set of welfare services. In order to achieve this, this research also proposed opening up support of the holiday process to this full set of welfare services.

The role of the **member organisations** in the holiday facilities was emphasised in the surveys as well as in the focus groups. Their support is very important in effectively achieving the potential positive changes that a holiday can bring about. Yet it is unrealistic to expect member organisations to offer all forms of support to each holidaymaker. The reasons for this include, for example, the size of the organisation, its objectives (organisations that for example only work with children have little influence on family life), the expertise of the organisation (not every organisation can provide specialist help), etc. For this reason, this research report proposes a “best practice” model that can achieve this. The basis of the “best practice” model is the concept of **progress**, i.e. progress from one type of holiday to another, and the progress of the holiday experience to a positive change in the daily life of the holidaymaker. This is the “stepping stone” function cited above. The barriers that confront the holidaymaker differ from person to person, e.g. some holidaymakers have little experience with holidays and don’t know what to expect, whereas others prefer not to leave the home environment for a night. Some also find the planning very difficult (how to get to the destination, what to do once they are there, how to save money, what to pack?). Some holiday types present less of a barrier than others, and one of the Holiday Participation Centre’s strengths is the wide range of holiday types it offers. The graph below shows the progress in helping the holidaymaker overcome barriers and move from one type of holiday to another.



Such progress often occurs based on growing self-confidence, an improved bond with the member organisation or the support of a social network. These are also the elements that make positive changes possible after the holiday.

Progress can be made possible in various ways, e.g. by adequate preparation for the holiday, by offering an appropriate type of holiday, by supervision during the holiday and by support after return. The model proposes **collaboration** between the organisations, and an integration of the holiday facilities into the entire welfare services package. To this end, awareness needs to be raised concerning the role and effects of the holiday, and the role that member organisations can play in this. A proposal was also made to map out the holiday facilities and make local forms of collaboration possible. The “best practice” model also underscores the importance of **effective communication** to the target group, and shows that communication skills suitable for a general public are not always adequate for this target group. A personal approach, based on the trust between the holidaymaker and the member organisation, is often best obtained via direct, verbal contact.



inspiration from abroad

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## 6 Inspiration from abroad

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A number of examples from other countries are summarised below. For further information, we refer you to the websites of these organisations.

### 6.1 France

Social tourism in France is chiefly based on the democratisation of tourism via holiday vouchers (chèques vacances). This system is open to all employees, and in itself is not focused on people with a low income or the underprivileged. The value of unused holiday vouchers, however, is used to finance holiday projects specifically focused on these target groups.

The Agence National des Chèques Vacances (ANCV) is a public agency that was established in 1982. It makes holiday vouchers available to the working population, regardless of position or income. Employees can regularly save an amount of their salary - tax free - and this amount is supplemented by the employer and/or social organisations. The total amount can be converted by the employee into the form of vouchers that can be used for a wide range of products such as accommodation, transport, gastronomy, recreation and culture. The vouchers are only valid in France and it is estimated that the benefits for the French economy are four times as large as the actual value of the vouchers. Similar systems exist in Switzerland, Poland, Cyprus, Italy and Hungary. ANCV charges a fee for distributing and repaying the vouchers, and thus is financially independent from the government.

The value of unused vouchers is collected in the Bourse Solidarité Vacances (BSV), a fund that is also supported by the government. This organisation functions specifically for people with a low income, who are thereby enabled to take a holiday. Like the Holiday Participation Centre, the BSV operates via member organisations and social partners. The private sector makes tourist offerings available and the social partners present holidaymakers who fulfil the criteria for participation (Conseil National du Tourisme, 2004).

→ [www.ancv.fr](http://www.ancv.fr)

### 6.2 Spain

IMSERSO is a programme intended to involve the older population layers in tourism and at the same time to enhance employment opportunities in tourism during the off-season. It was started in 1985 and aims to improve the quality of life of older people and to provide them with the opportunity to take a holiday in a warm climate. At the same time, it has the economic goal of combatting unemployment in the tourism sector. The holiday offerings are distributed by travel agencies, and are financed to the tune of 70% by the holidaymaker and 30% by IMSERSO. The state recuperates these costs by cost savings on the one hand (for example in unemployment benefits) and on the other hand, by revenue (for example from VAT, tax on wages and social security contributions). Each €1 that the government invests in the programme results in €1.7 in cost savings or revenue (EESC, 2006).

→ [www.mtas.es](http://www.mtas.es)

### 6.3 Great Britain

In Great Britain, social tourism is not a part of government policy. This task is performed by charity organisations, with the Family Holiday Association (FHA) being the largest. Established in 1985, this organisation now makes holidays available to 1600 families each year. The FHA bears the full cost of these holidays and the holidaymakers are selected by social partners. The organisation also attempts to place social tourism on the government agenda in Great Britain, but this concept is still relatively unknown in Anglo-Saxon cultures.

→ [www.fhaonline.org.uk](http://www.fhaonline.org.uk)

appendices

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## 7.1 Glossary

Accommodations	These accommodations make a part of their offerings available to the target groups at a reduced price via the Holiday Participation Centre. Some do this for specific months of the year, others all year round.
ADSEI	Algemene Directie Statistiek en Economische Informatie (General Department of Statistics and Economic Information of the Federal Public Service Economy, formerly NIS; National Institute for Statistics)
Attractions	This term is used here to refer to attractions (amusement parks, museums, cultural activities, zoo, and so on) that make their offerings available at a reduced rate to members of the Holiday Participation Centre target group.
BITS	Bureau International du Tourisme Social (International Social Tourism Agency)
CAW	Centra Algemeen Welzijnswerk (General Social Work Centres)
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
Holidaymakers	This term is used here to refer to members of the Holiday Participation Centre target group who have made use of the offerings to take a holiday or day trip.
Member organisations	The member organisations are the social partners of the Holiday Participation Centre. It concerns a variety of organisations, such as government organisations (e.g. the public social services or OCMWs) as well as organisations in the charity and volunteer sector. The size of the organisations differs considerably, as does their target group, i.e. some organisations work with children, others with adults or families. Possible target groups are the underprivileged, migrants, the mentally impaired, young people in difficult family situations, etc.
OCMW	Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn (Public Social Services)
PAO	Permanent Armoede Overleg (Standing Poverty Consultation Committee)
Poverty	A network of social exclusions that covers multiple areas of individual and collective existence. It separates the poor from the generally accepted patterns of living in society. They are unable to bridge this gap on their own.
SILC	Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
Social tourism	Tourism projects intended to involve in tourism those groups that generally would be excluded. This exclusion can be caused by financial circumstances (unable to afford a holiday) or health and mobility problems (disability, illness or age).
VAW	Verenigingen waar Armen het Woord nemen (Associations that give voice to the poor)

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## 7.2 List of organisations that participated in focus groups

We would like to thank all the organisations that participated in the focus groups:

ACOM vzw	De Vrolijke Kring vzw
Anapneusis	Elegast
Apor vzw	HofTer Heide
Begeleid Wonen Antwerpen-Stad vzw	Home Boeckenberg
Begeleid Wonen Brussel	Humanistische Thuisbegeleidingsdienst Antwerpen
Begeleid Wonen Pajottenland	Inloophuis 't Sas
Begeleid Wonen Westhoek	Inloopteam Reddie Teddy
Beweging van Mensen met een Laag Inkomen vzw	Katholieke Arbeiders Vrouwen Intercultureel
Bewust vzw	Kind en Preventie vzw
Buurtservice vzw	Kindertehuis Dageraad
CAW Artevelde - afd. Vluchthuis	Kompas vzw
CAW de Mare - Vluchtelingendienst	OCMW Beersel
CAW De Viersprong	OCMW Bredene
CAW Den Durpel	OCMW Brugge
CAW Leuven - Inloopcentrum De Meander	OCMW De Pinte
CAW Metropool	OCMW Mechelen
CAW Metropool - afd. NOVA	OCMW St.-Laureins
CAW Metropool - afd. Het Zijhuis	Recht-op vzw
CAW regio Aalst	Rodekruisvakanties vzw
CAW Visserij - afd. De Schreiboorn	RSZ - sociale dienst
Centrum Kauwenberg vzw	Russisch sprekenden platform Solidariteit
CKG De Kleine Vos	Sociaal Centrum De Zon Linkeroever
CKG Klimop	Sociaal Centrum vzw
Cocon	Solidariteit Zonder Grenzen
Dagcentrum De Marbol	't Leebeekje
De Grijs Kat	't Vlammeke
De Keeting	T'ANtWOORD
De Kerseboom vzw	Uze Plekke
De Palmboom	vzw Jeugdorp
De Regenboog vzw	Warm Hart Houthalen vzw
De Stapsteen	Welzijnsschakels Puurs
De Touter vzw - afd. de Tichel	Wijkcentrum De Kring
De Touter vzw - afd. Thuisbegeleiding Terra	Young Women's Christian Association - Antwerpen vzw
De Vogelzang vzw	

## 7.3 Interesting links

[www.ancv.fr](http://www.ancv.fr)  
[www.armoede.be](http://www.armoede.be)  
[www.armoede-in-zicht.be](http://www.armoede-in-zicht.be)  
[www.bindkracht.be](http://www.bindkracht.be)  
[www.bits-int.org](http://www.bits-int.org)  
[www.eesc.europa.eu](http://www.eesc.europa.eu)  
[www.fhaonline.org.uk](http://www.fhaonline.org.uk)

[www.mtas.es](http://www.mtas.es)  
[www.toegankelijkreizen.be](http://www.toegankelijkreizen.be)  
[www.toerismevlaanderen.be](http://www.toerismevlaanderen.be)  
[www.ua.ac.be/OASeS](http://www.ua.ac.be/OASeS)  
[www.vacances-ouvertes.asso.fr](http://www.vacances-ouvertes.asso.fr)  
[www.vakantieparticipatie.be](http://www.vakantieparticipatie.be)  
[www.vlaams-netwerk-armoede.be](http://www.vlaams-netwerk-armoede.be)

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## 7.7 End notes

- <sup>1</sup> EESC: European Economic and Social Committee, advisory body for Europe
- <sup>2</sup> European Union, *Statistics on Income and Living Conditions*, 2005
- <sup>3</sup> Jan Vranken is a sociologist attached to the University of Antwerp where he coordinates the research group *Onderzoeksgroep Armoede, Sociale Uitsluiting (OASeS) [Poverty, Social Exclusion and the City]*.
- <sup>4</sup> Vranken J., De Boyser K. & Dierckx D. (Eds), (2007) *Armoede en sociale uitsluiting, jaarboek 2007*, Acco, Leuven
- <sup>5</sup> Tine Van Regenmortel is doctor in psychological sciences, head of research at the HIVA and professor in the Masters in Social Work at the Social Sciences department of the KU Leuven.
- <sup>6</sup> Driessens K. & Van Regenmortel T (2006), *Bind-Kracht in armoede*, Book 1, Leuven: Lannoocampus. Kristel Driessens is researcher and coordinator of the project *Bind-Kracht in armoede, krachtgerichte hulpverlening in dialoog*. KdG university college Antwerp.
- <sup>7</sup> 2006, EU SILC
- <sup>8</sup> The fact that "additional customers in the off-season" scores higher here than in the previous question probably indicates that a number of those surveyed did not properly understand the question.
- <sup>9</sup> Other differences are that the holiday is fully paid for with funds collected and that this initiative is not supported by the government or the private sector. The Family Holiday Association sends an average of 1,100 families on holiday per year. By way of comparison, the Holiday Participation Centre mediated in 6,706 holidays in 2006, combined with 13,926 day trips (see also paragraph 6).
- <sup>10</sup> Previous research (Minnaert, 2006) showed that the positive effects of the holiday could be strengthened if the holidaymaker receives adequate support from the member organisation before and after the holiday. What "adequate support" precisely means here depends on the holidaymakers themselves, i.e. some require no help whatsoever, others do. The aspects of the holiday requiring help can also differ.





Holidays do you good. They give you a psychological boost, promote the well-being of body and mind, and bring us into contact with other cultures, places and customs. Holidays are the ideal opportunity to learn something new and expand your horizon.

The desire to see tourism as a universal right and to make it accessible to all is at the basis of social tourism. Because not everyone is able to go on holiday. In Flanders, one in seven people (14.5%) lives in a family that cannot afford a week's holiday. The activity of the Holiday Participation Centre, a service of Tourism Flanders, addresses this group of people. The Tourism Notebooks offer professionals, students and other interested parties insight into current topics relevant in the tourism sector. The information is practical in nature, but always scientifically substantiated and justified.

Tourism Flanders is convinced of the right to a holiday for all, and of the positive effects of holidays. With this Tourism Notebook, the agency is taking an initial step in scientifically substantiating the effects of social tourism. Together with Lynn Minnaert of the Centre for Tourism Research of the University of Westminster, Tourism Flanders examined the effects of holidays on persons in poverty and the activity of the Holiday Participation Centre. In this, it is engaged in pioneering work at national and international level.



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The Tourism Notebooks offer professionals, students and other interested parties insight into current topics relevant in the tourism sector. The information is practical in nature, but always scientifically substantiated and justified.