INCLUSIVE TOURISM
AS BUSINESS GENERATOR

A methodology to uncover potential business opportunities for Universal Design

Elke Ielegems[1], Nele Bylois[2], Evi Knuts[2], Ryanne Lemmens[3], Anouk Tuinstra[3] and Jan Vanrie[1]
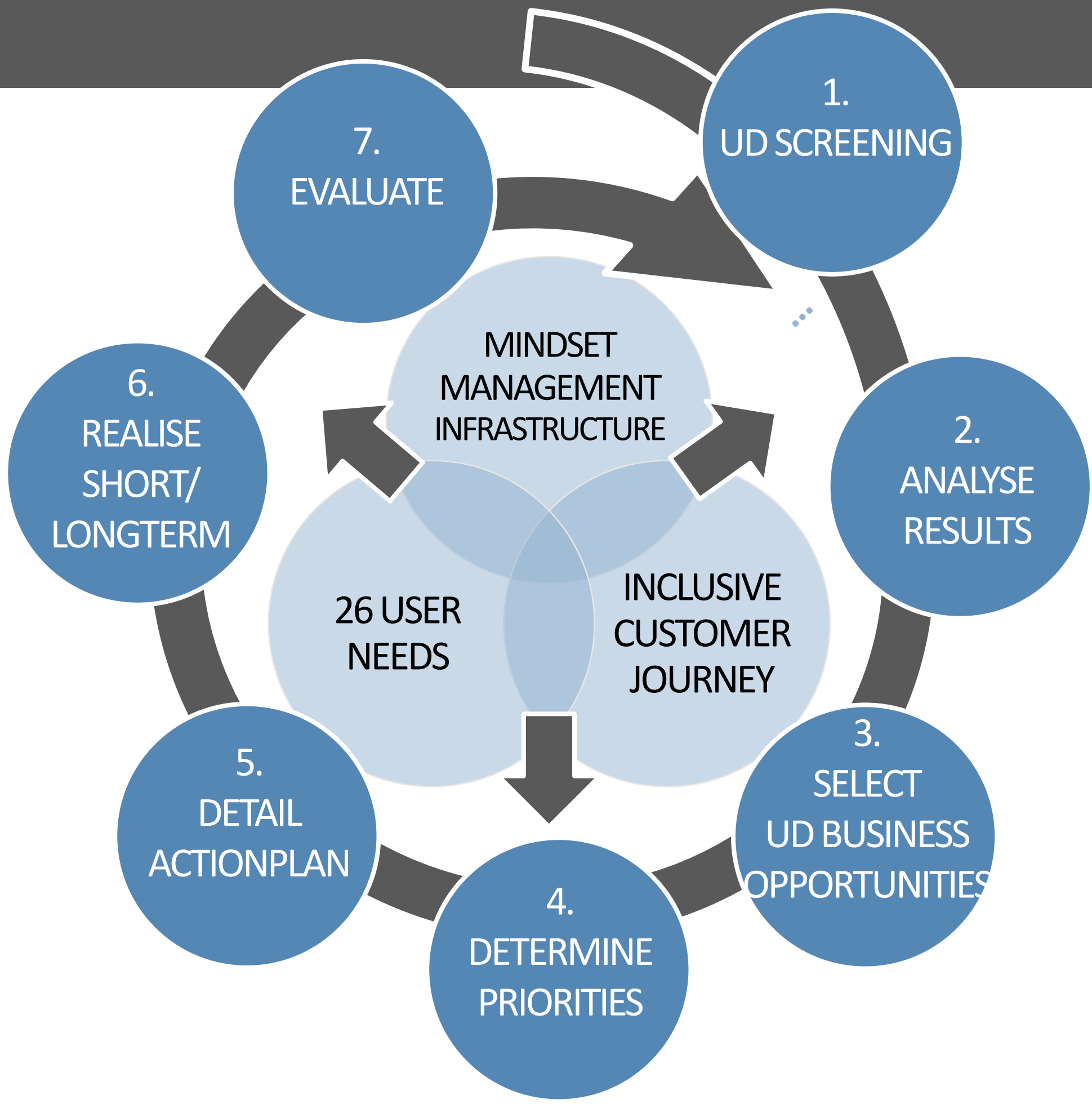
Figure 01: 7-step-process

SET - UP

BACKGROUND

Here, we describe the set-up of an ongoing 2-year project, in which we explore and test the potential of Universal Design (UD) in the field of Inclusive Tourism. The goal of the project is to apply UD as a strategy to uncover potential business opportunities and stimulate tourism accommodation providers to improve inclusion for their business case. As such, employing UD as a strategy could allow businesses to increase their target audience.

PARTICIPANTS

A methodology has been developed and actively tested with 16 Flemish entrepreneurs (i.e., CEO's or owners) who exploit a tourist accommodation. An overview of all cases shows the range of accommodation types and scale:

B&B (< 10 rooms)	# 5
Hotel (10-40 rooms)	# 2
Hotel (40+ rooms)	# 3
Youth Hostel (40+ rooms)	# 2
Camping ground with vacation homes (40+)	# 3
Vacation home (< 10 houses)	# 1

GENERAL METHODOLOGY

We developed a methodology involving a 7-step-process (see figure 01), starting with creating a literature-based UD screening with 255 questions linked to three key building blocks, which are described below. This screening is the basis to distill and analyze possible business opportunities for UD together with participants (step 2-4). Each opportunity improves the level of inclusion of a specific part of the customer journey. To determine business opportunity priorities that fit the concept and potential of the specific accommodation, other variables including timing and cost indications, are integrated. For the selected priorities (step 4) a detailed and tailored action plan (step 5) is developed, including a concise checklist and a more elaborate guide with background information, relevant links, tools, measurements... This action plan supports participants to undertake targeted actions to a business transformation on short term as well as long term (step 6). Finally, the initial UD screening (from step 1) is repeated again to have an indication on the level of inclusion of the situation where short term actions are executed (step 7).

In addition to this main track, a parallel track was set up in this research project involving suppliers of the tourist accommodation sector (e.g., designers, website builders...).

BUILDING BLOCK 1+ 2

Building blocks

Three key building blocks are central in all seven steps of this process to uncover potential business opportunities related to UD:

1. Insight into an inclusive customer journey

It is important to examine the whole travel journey of guests with diverse needs in a way that accommodation providers could easily reflect on all stages of the journey. Each of the 4 stages are evaluated regarding their level of inclusion from the perspective of diverse users:

Planning and booking: How can potential guests with diverse needs find the accommodation and what kind of information is available to make a well-considered choice? How is the booking procedure (online as well as offline) experienced by various guests?

Traveling and arriving: Once guests have booked the accommodation, how are they informed about travel possibilities, the arrival as well as other practical information? How is arriving at the location experienced by guests with diverse needs?

Staying on site: The guests are there! They are getting to know the accommodation's facilities as well as its surroundings. How do guests with diverse needs experience, for example, circulation, public facilities, guest rooms, communication, safety...

Going back home and remembering: The last stage includes the procedure for checking out as well as how accommodation providers receive feedback from their guests and undertake actions to keep learning and improving.

2. Linking levels of mindset, management and infrastructure

In this project, Inclusive Tourism is approached from a holistic perspective, examining not only the level of inclusion of the infrastructure, but also taking the accommodation providers' mindset as well as management into account. Uncovering business opportunities for UD is mainly situated on a management and infrastructural level, whereas evaluating participants' individual mindset helped to uncover whether participants were open to UD and its implementation in practice.

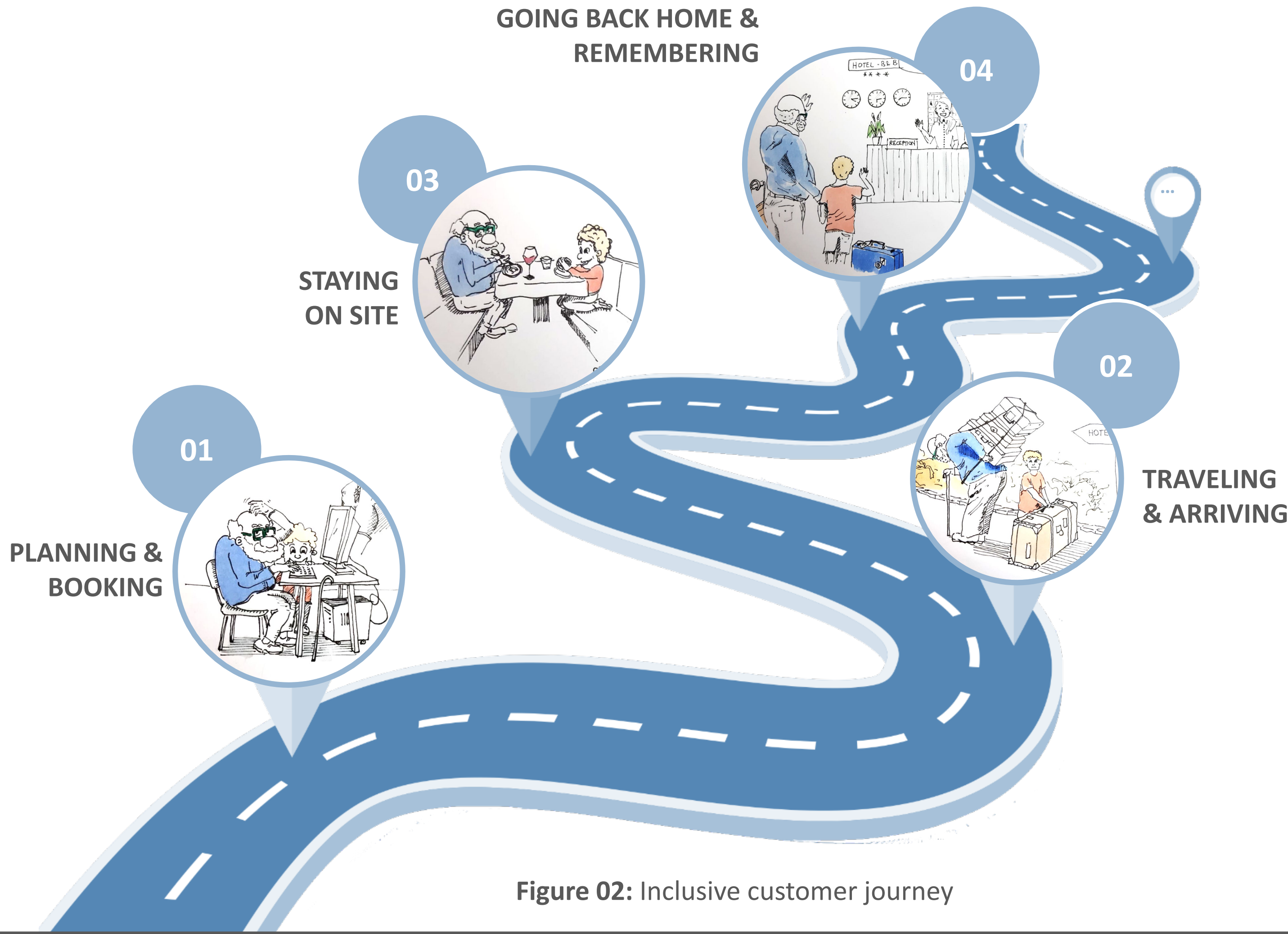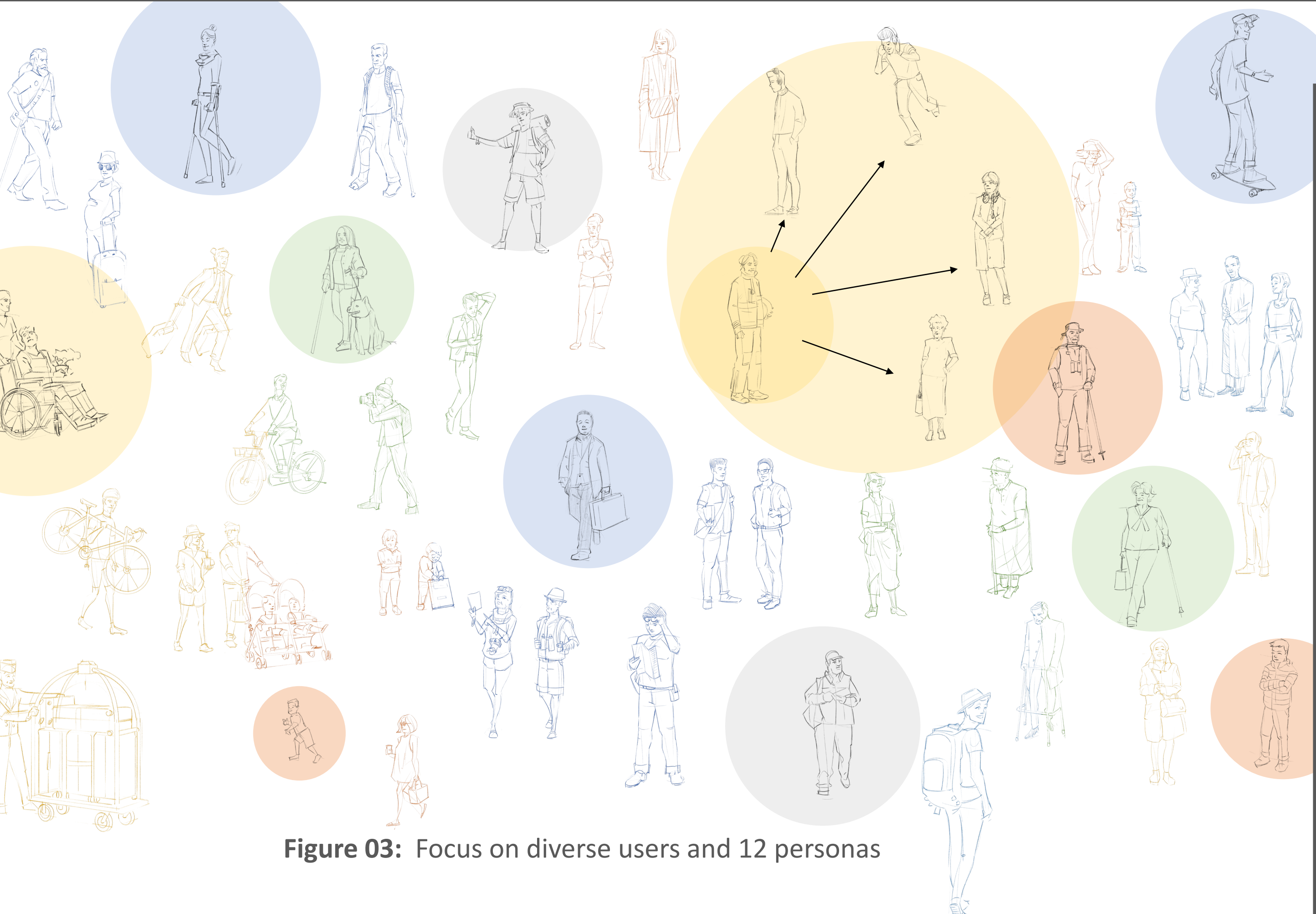**Figure 02:** Inclusive customer journey

BUILDING BLOCK 3

3. Focus on diverse user needs and personas

26 user needs are considered when examining the whole customer journey. This selection of user needs does not cover the whole population, but it opens the perspective to a diverse group of people. When communicating and discussing results with participants, we do not refer to these user needs, but to 12 personas, in which user needs are integrated. Talking about personas is considered to create more understanding and awareness than talking about user needs (Schulz and Fuglerud, 2012). Figure 03 shows all 12 personas surrounded by people who could benefit from improvements made for this persona. Persona-type identification cards were developed. Figure 04 is an example of such an identification card.

This project is ongoing and we are currently in stage 06 (see figure 01). Final conclusions cannot yet be drawn but, so far, the methodology has generally been experienced effective in terms of uncovering potential business opportunities for UD as well as to raise awareness amongst accommodation providers for their decisive role in each stage of the customer journey.
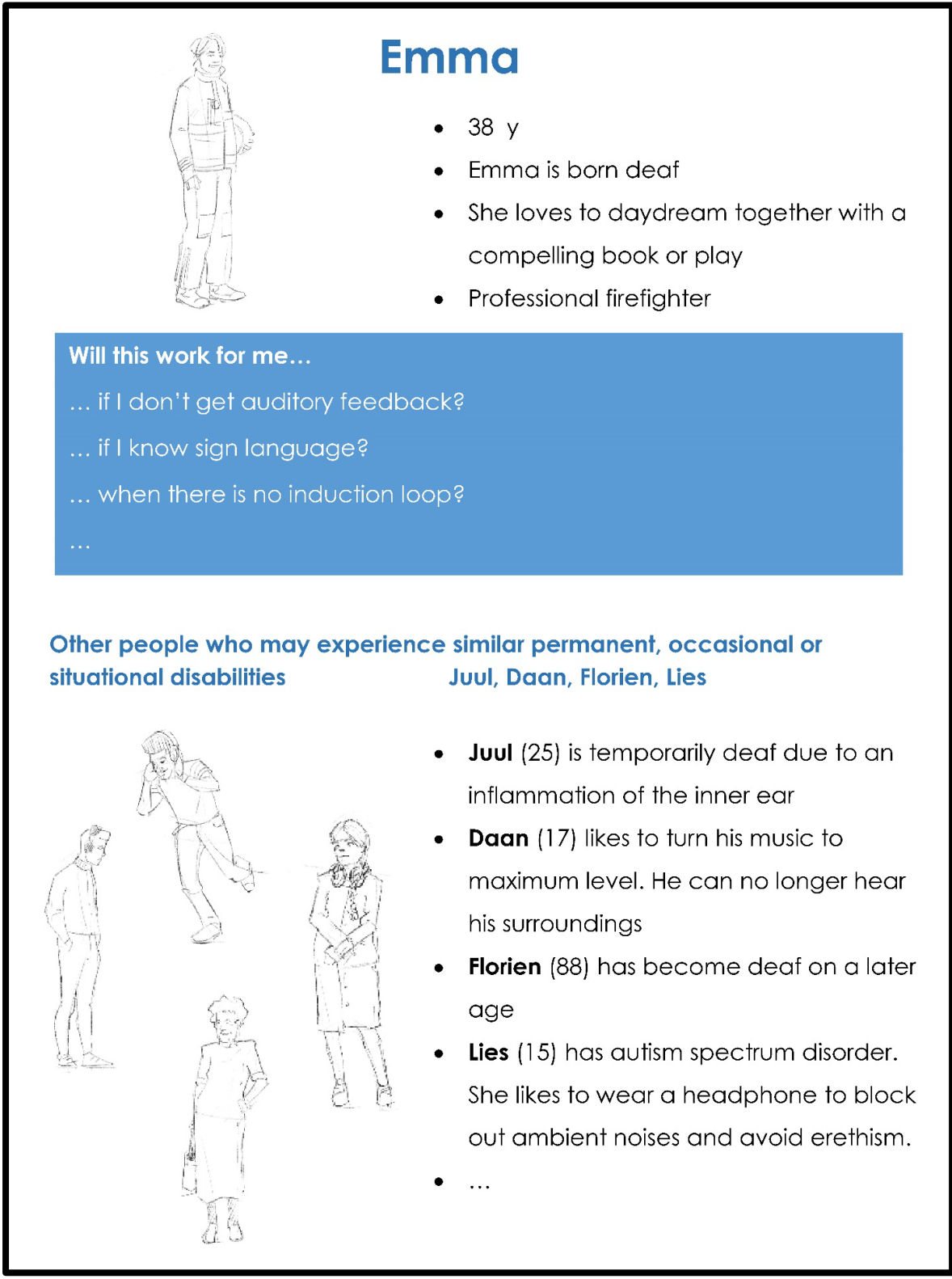

Figure 03: Focus on diverse users and 12 personas

Figure 04: Example of a persona-type identification card