



Inclusive Excellence in Student College

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Abstract

The frequently used notion of inclusion may be understood correctly if we do not only consider it as a social idea or a political requirement, but we may observe it in its practical realisation. Owing to this, in the following I will show a relevant example of the opportunity of providing inclusion in a community of a college (szakkollégium) set into the framework of higher education. Based on the theoretical framework I will analyse the practical implementation. I would like to show that inclusion can be gained in all fields with providing the appropriate means and theoretical approach. The example of the practical implementation that I will present is the Wlislöcki Henrik College of the University of Pécs. This institution has solidified the basic theoretical characteristics of the notion of inclusion during its functioning of more than a decade. This established a stable foundation for a complex programme supported by considerable resources. This project aims at providing a constantly more inclusive system of services, supporting more than 30 underprivileged, in its majority roma members in their advancement in higher education.

Theoretical framework

First and foremost, we should highlight the social context characterised by equality. This is a basic requirement in democracies and without this it is impossible to speak about the rule of law in a state. This is a guarantee of the provision of fundamental rights for every citizen without discrimination, thus providing equal legal status. It should be stressed, however, that there could be fundamental differences between the legal status and the real position in society. So real social equality could only be provided if the law itself also takes into consideration the remaining inequality and handles these differences accordingly. The most considerable differences between people exist in the socio-economic sphere, both in connection with the access to socio-economic goods and the ways of gaining access to these socio-economic goods. Among the cause of this there are factors such as the differences in the ownership of capital (including symbolical capital as well), or the different social reputation of gender, racial-ethnic groups or handicapped people.

Based on the legal approach provision of equality requires interference of two types. In the political field these are shown at the notional level as well. We make a difference between equality and equity. Equality basically means the provision of equal access in similar ways, in other words equal treatment. Equal treatment enables the prevention of outcasting certain people and groups from the access to opportunities available in the society. Hence equality provides the democratic social minimum which ensures that nobody would be in a disadvantaged position due to perceived or real individual abilities, or belonging to a certain group. So equality in our context means an opportunity provided so that different individuals and groups together with other groups in the same space would obtain access to information, activities, services, resources in the same way and in the same amount.

It should be noted, however, that the opportunity of equal access does not necessarily lead to success. According to the principle of equity the exclusion of disadvantageous discrimination is an essential, but not sufficient condition of the implementation of real equality. In the process of ensuring minimal conditions it is indispensable to take into consideration the differences in the society and it is indispensable to take actions, measures that would establish access to all opportunities for everybody at the level of the whole society. To sum up, in the society actions should be taken to ensure that groups in unequal position would really gain access to the provided goods. // In Hungarian the term 'méltányosság' is used as the equivalent of the English term equity. // In conclusion, it could be stated that the democratic minimum in itself would imply more disadvantages than advantages. It is necessary to provide assistance to eliminate the gap between the theoretical and real access to goods by offering compensational activities providing real equity. This may lead to real equity for all groups having different situations concerning all fields (Varga 2013).

Examining the questions of equality and equity in its evolution, we find strategies determined by majority groups in the society. (Kozma, 1993) We may observe that these strategies provide or exclude the opportunities of equity for different groups and individuals in distinct ways. At the same time these strategies show a certain development from the viewpoint of equality. On the theoretical level they apparently evolve towards inclusive approaches in societies on the way of becoming more and more democratic. We should refer to the strategy of assimilation that was predominant during centuries. It considered important the assimilation of different groups, so this way it provided chances for those who followed the models, cultural and ideological features set by the ruling classes of the society. This type of providing chances lacks the rights associated with equity in the efforts of considering and conserving the individual differences. Opposed to this, the frequently appearing segregation often does not aim at integrating the individual differences of groups and individuals, but strives for segregation. It was assumed that segregation, which in itself would establish a situation of inequality, would be the efficient method. The strategy of integration declaredly aims at the living together of individuals and groups with different backgrounds. However, examining the question of integration from the viewpoint of equal chances, we may draw the conclusion that integration without doubt means that the integrated group should adapt to the values, customs, lifestyles, strategies of the majority group. Consequently, integration would mean per definition a certain loss of the properties of the integrated group, either completely or partly. We may see that the term integration is used for that co-existence in the common space when there is no special attention paid to the individual needs and demands of the integrated groups, so equity is not provided. In schools this type of integration is referred to with the term 'rideg integráció'. In our times it is becoming evident that among the different strategies inclusion is the most frequently applied term, and this reflects the demand of the society about the application of successful strategies enabling the successful co-existence of individuals and groups with the provision of equity.

Now we should examine the advent of inclusion as a social strategy. As we have already summarized it in several publications, several decades ago the starting point of the notion of inclusion was the set of measures and activities in connection with the acceptance of children with special needs, which was termed inclusive pedagogy (Kalocsai-Varga 2005, Forray-Varga 2011). However, in the past decade the content of the notion of inclusion changed considerably. One of the apparent changes is that in addition to the original group in focus (children with special needs), other groups have started to receive attention, taking it into consideration that they are also in danger of exclusion in schools. Therefore inclusive education, as a set of methods successfully applied in cases of children with special needs, was increasingly extended to groups of different cultures (migrants or minorities) and individuals coming from families of low social status (Varga 2010, Réthy 2013).

These days the notion 'Local Defined Minorities' (LDM) is often used referring to a group in focus from the viewpoint of inclusion.¹ This means that the scope of the potential target individuals and groups of inclusion is being extended. In all cases it is the local community that defines who those local inhabitants are who could be excluded from the processes of access to socio-economic goods. This modern approach further stresses that the focus of inclusion is not primarily on the target group, but on the continuously developing environment. This is capable of securing the mutual acceptance of any individual with the prevention of exclusion.

The other change is that inclusion is considered as an important approach on the level of the society (social inclusion), replacing this way the approach characterized by the term of social integration. This shift could be described by the process of taking political measures in order to prevent social exclusion based on placing inclusion on a community level and analysing social venues (labour market, education, health care, housing, politics, access to services). It was highlighted that field politics should move towards inclusion both at the individual and the community levels so as to be more successful. (Percy-Smith 2000, Kenyon, S. Lyons, G. and Rafferty, J. 2002, Miskovic 2013)

We may explain the expansion of the features in the focus of inclusion. It seems obvious if we realise that it is advantageous to extend the scope of activities aimed at the successful inclusion of learners with special needs to other individuals and groups that are also frequently excluded from education, consequently from the society due to other reasons (Hitz 2002, Potts 2002, Ainscow-Booth-Dyson 2004).

In the background of the replacement of the term of integration with the notion of inclusion, we may observe a gradual change of theoretical approach towards the concept of mutuality. Integration, as we have pointed out before, refers to a process where adaptation is expected from the person helped to 'integrate' by the society, but without the society wishing to change the requirement systems of its own. The society requires the change of the integrated person.

The inclusive approach is completely different. The main point of its attitude is that the focus of acceptance is on the environment itself. If the environment is able to react to the demands, necessities of its people suitably, then the mutual inclusion of everybody will be successful. Consequently, inclusion intends to make the eco-social environment inclusive, with focusing on the actions that are capable of preventing the exclusion of certain groups or individuals. From the viewpoint of equal chances it means that in

¹ The expansion of the term could be connected to the SIS Catalist international project, which extended the content of inclusion during its work connecting different youth-support programmes. the reason for this is that this was the way how the target group was identified as common point of the implemented projects. The definition of LDM: those individuals that could be excluded from local services, sources of information etc. in a given place and time setting (<http://www.siscatalyst.eu>, date of downloading: 16/05/2014)

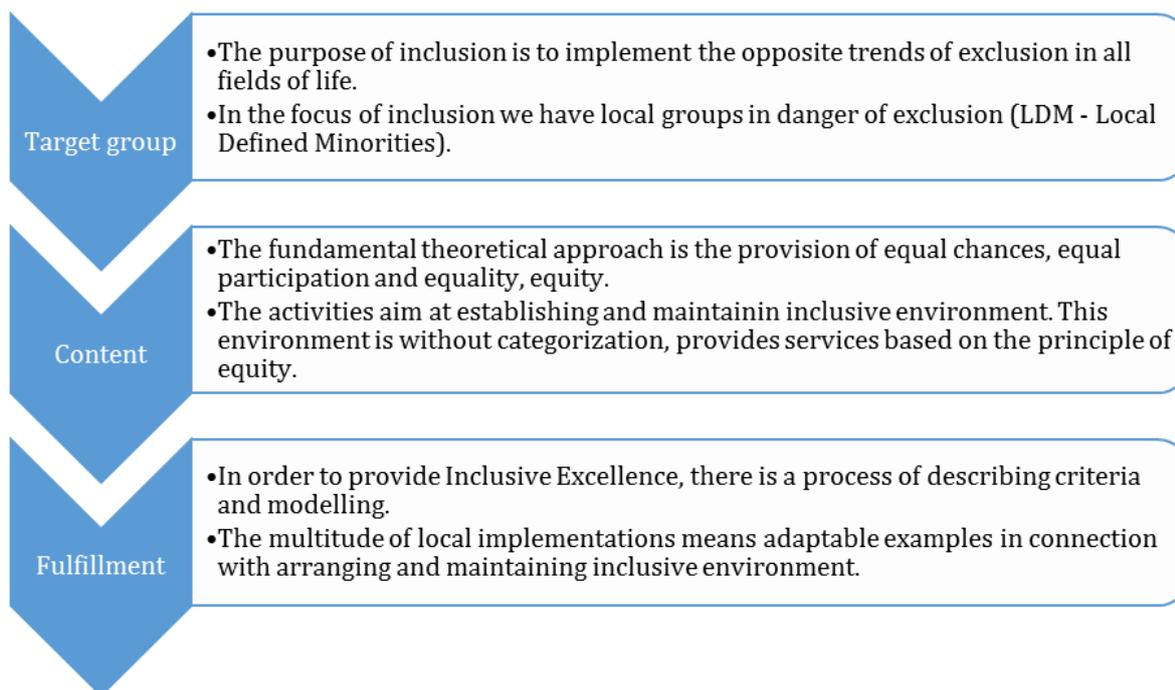
addition to providing equality, it is indispensable to offer appropriate means for the provision of equity, leading this way to inclusion.

In the United States we may observe a slightly different change of terms. The term 'diversity' has an important position among the applied notions. It refers to the appearance of different and easily identifiable groups in a certain place. The term 'multicultural' is also crucially important. It refers to groups of different cultures present in the same spaces. Segregation based on different social strategies, especially segregation based on different ethnic groups, and its elimination is a crucially important issue in the history of the United States. The use of the terms 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' used to refer to people belonging to different cultures and ethnic groups. (Williams e.al. 2005) In contemporary usage, a new term has appeared in a number of studies, 'inclusive excellence' (IE), surpassing the use of the term 'inclusion'. The notional development is to some extent similar to the difference between integration and inclusion: in the American continent they speak about 'excellent' inclusion when in addition to the equal participation and access, the environment becomes 'friendly', the variety and many-sidedness can be found in the contents of subject material and the learning and developing processes are provided for everybody with the appropriate means.

To sum up, it may be stated that the notional change of inclusion has taken place both in the domain of sciences and field politics in the past fifteen years. Today attention is mostly focused on how a certain area becomes more inclusive, so how the social idea of inclusion could be put into daily practice through continuous action. (Massarani-Merzagora, 2014)

In illustration 1. I summed up how these days inclusion could be defined in terms of its purpose, content and situation.

Figure 1. Inclusion these days



Based on the notional development described above, we agree with the definition approved by the UNESCO, and in the following we will apply this approach to define inclusion in the educational system.

„Inclusion is thus seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children” (UNESCO 2009).

Inclusion in practice

The notional framework with its content clarified above is not always well-known, but the scientific researches already use them and try to describe inclusive systems (models) and examine practical realisations based on them (Booth-Ainscow 2002, Williams et.al.2005). It is not debated that an environment of inclusive approach is needed to provide equity in society. The question now is how the process of successful inclusion could be formed in different life situations. The answer is the multitude of those cases that make an effort to establish inclusion reflectively and adaptably.²

² The term was created by SIS Catalyst Project. The participations of these Project use the new term for compare different inclusive practice all over the word. (<http://www.siscatalyst.eu>, date of downloading: 16/05/2014)

The talent-nurturing college that I intend to present, the Wlislöcki Henrik Szakkollégium is a concrete example of these fruitful processes of inclusion. At the turn of the millennium this project uniquely obtained a departmental background and it is connected to the scientific field of Romology at the University of Pécs. The first years of the development of the department were marked by the arrangement of subjects, involvement of colleagues and the increase in the number of students. At the same time, with the help of EU funding the talent-nurturing college of the students interested in Romology was started (Forray 2012).³

The college that took up the name 'Wlislöcki Henrik Szakkollégium' had specific features due to its alignment with the Department of Romology. Primarily the students of the Romology major became involved in the activities of the association. A huge emphasis was put on the social-supportive services. This was partly owing to the requirements of the high-sum funding project that enabled the commencing of the supportive activities. Nonetheless, the pressure of the student demands also played an important role in this, as the majority of the students participating in the WHSZ come from socially underprivileged families, often with very limited financial background for funding university studies. Socially underprivileged students and students of roma background found their safety in this institution, this way replacing those safety-providing family environments that they could no longer rely on at the university. So the first period of one and a half years generated by the EU-funding was characterized by an exceptionally dynamic process of forming a community with several remarkably productive occasions (Forray 2013).

Due to these facts it is salient that the fund-deprived two-year period following the completion of the EU-funded project was marked by huge-scale decline. This stagnation and decline is understandable, as the Romology Department in the background of WHSZ was also in the period of evolution, so attention was primarily paid to its development. Moreover, the financial support that generated the commencement of the WHSZ did not flow into a functioning system, there was a lack of means, tools and experience at hand to facilitate the continuous development of the institution in the period without funding.

After this 'pause' of two years the circle of experts at the department was extended by the involvement of professionals who previously had established and had managed institutions in the non-profit sector with the purpose of supporting young roma/gypsy people.⁴ This re-establishment of WHSZ was based on non-profit experience. Since then different tender fundings and different thematic projects enabled the continuous work and development of the WHSZ institution. The experience of the experts from the NGO-sphere enhanced and further stressed the community support approach, as the new

³ OM – Phare Program 2002-2003. – support for underprivileged students's success

⁴ Gandhi Secondary School, Amrita OBK Association, Collegium Martineum Foundation, Faág BK Association, Khetanipe Association

'founders' possessed widespread relevant professional knowledge and experience. The students who joined the WHSZ almost without exception demanded the strong bonds of the community and were most willing to participate in community activities.⁵ Nothing proves better the need for the institution than the fact that since the foundation three higher education generations have replaced each other.

The present period is being reorganized with the support of the Roma Szakkollégium Projekt, which is a project of considerably bigger resources and a larger range of activities.⁶ However, it only meant structural tasks of development for the faculty and the talent-nurturing association, as the main theoretical foundations and the scope of activities were basically set in the previous decade. The RSZ continues to aim at providing an inclusive community-and service system that helps the mostly roma students studying at different faculties of the University of Pécs to advance successfully towards obtaining their diplomas while becoming socially committed adults with a conscious identity.

Referring back to the topic of inclusion, in the following I will focus on the practical tools that are necessary for implementing it. As an example, I will analyse the presently available student-supporting scheme of the presented talent-nurturing association from the viewpoint of inclusion. We have already seen that extra financial resources are essential for the proportionate development and maintenance of inclusion. The other important element is enabling that the community space, as the physically perceptible reality of the inclusion, would reflect mutual inclusion. It should be noted that a community space that is arranged and managed based upon the rules set by a part of the community ('the selected') would necessarily mean for the other part of the group ('the admitted') that in this hierarchical order they will have the role of integration and they have little opportunity for mutual inclusion and mutual acceptance. During the arrangement and management of the inclusive space it is necessary to involve all the participants, thus providing that everybody would be able to find the fulfillment of their demands either in connection with establishing the material requirements or the rules of using the space.

The WHSZ possesses a community space of its own in the building of the Romology Department. The students contributed to the furnishing and the arrangement of the space. According to their demands the community space is available every time when the university is open, even when the responsible worker of the department is not present. The space offers speaking corners, bookshelves, benches, IKT materials, a kitchen area, all according to the wishes of the students. The new 'Terasz' offers a venue for cultural

⁵ Some activities of the past decade: organisation of thematic movie clubs on roma-related subjects for university students of Pécs, providing a communal space, Roma major nights very semester, research on equality of chances in higher education, conferences, exhibitions, publications, volunteering in Roma communities, mentoring of Roma students.

⁶ Roma Szakkollégiumok támogatása – Support of Roma Colleges TÁMOP 4.1.1.D

programmes that the members may organize together with other students of the university.

In addition to the material requirements, the environment could be considered inclusive if it is capable of running a cooperative community fulfilling the requirements of each and every member. Adjusting to the individual needs requires continuous personal follow-up starting from the mapping of demands and necessities and going through the whole process of advancement. The aim of the services selected based on individual needs is to provide continuous individual development, with the significant contribution of the cooperative community. The association carries out a wide-range mapping of demands and requirements based on the information collected in the membership applications, forms of measurement and personal interviews.

The admitted students have the obligation of asking one of their teachers to help their university advancement as their tutors. The tutor is in weekly contact with the student. They have the opportunity to establish a personal relationship that may mean a real follow-up. As all the students have a tutor, and one tutor is only allowed to have two students at the same time, truly personal contacts could be established.

The other part of the personalized support system is the mentor. The mentor is a university student in a higher year who joins the community as a peer assistant taking the responsibility of a certain task. So there is somebody who organises the conversation sessions in foreign languages, there is another one who assists the research projects of the students, yet another students is the manager of the applications and the administration, and there is one who organises programmes for the community. The mentors become involved in the everyday life of the members while they carry out their tasks. They build friendly relationships with the members of the association. In this community peer-help is directed to a lesser extent, and mostly develops along demands of the members spontaneously.

The personalized services of the association form parts of this community: foreign language courses, learning technique trainings, sessions of mental hygiene and identity-building sessions. The services could be used during weekdays in their community area or during the monthly three-day-long instay weekends.

Of course, the students may look for activities enabling their advancement in their university life, connected to their association. In order to assist their inclusion into scientific life, they carry out microresearches, organize miniconferences and publish their results in publications. Besides, they do volunteer work in organizations of their choice all over the county so that they would develop a sense of social responsibility.⁷

⁷ Faág Association, Gandhi Secondary School, Khetanipe Association, Számá da noj Association, Szent Márton Caritas Foundation

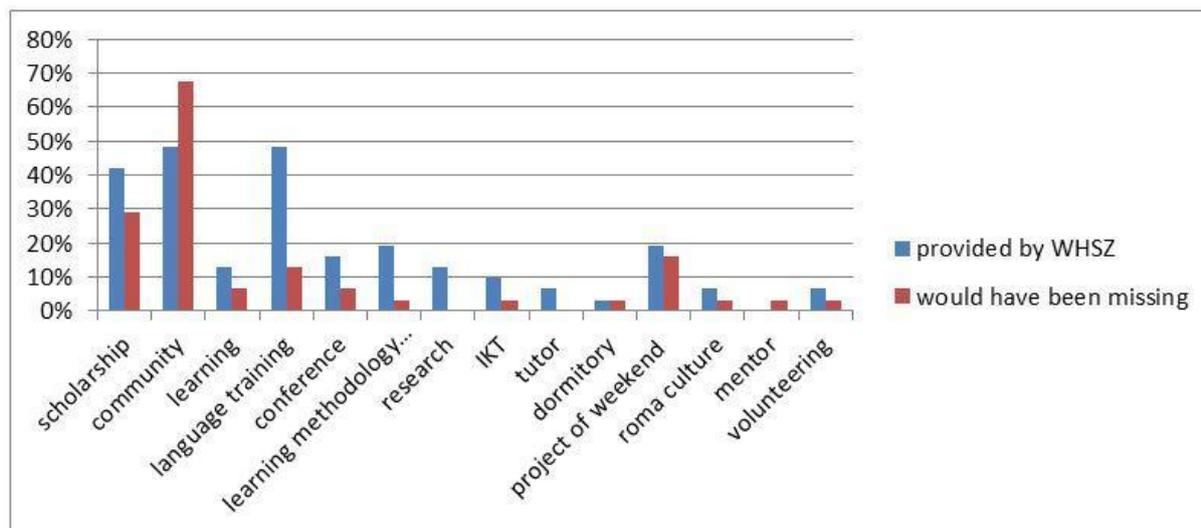
An apparently widespread framework of activities and opportunities surrounds the students in this supportive community. However, the real guarantee of inclusion is the conscious participation of the members in the advancement processes of their own. The first step of this is a written statement of the students about their goals for the school year. The students decide on these desired achievements together with their tutors, with relying on the tutorial assistance and supervision (!). These goals are in connection with the university studies, activities in the institution and career planning. There is a personal portfolio where students reflect on their advancement at the end of the semesters and there is a report that they have to prepare at the end of the year. This way the portfolio becomes an objective tool of measurement and makes members more conscious about planning their ways and making their decisions.

We may observe a special evaluation of this inclusion-bound pedagogical effect mechanism if we assess a snapshot of the members, the results of short survey based on a questionnaire. This was filled out by the members in November 2013, in the middle of the semester, altogether 32 people, 16 boys, 16 girls. All of them are socially disadvantaged. In their large majority they belong to a Roma/Gypsy ethnic group. Most of them study in the framework of BA education (70%), but there are also students of master programmes (approximately 15-20%), the others have courses in special trainings of higher education level. They have different majors, almost all faculties are represented, lawyers, social assistants, would-be teachers, students of natural sciences, medical faculties, technical studies. They were given the 15-minute-long questionnaire by the attendant of the community space and they were required to fill it out themselves. The results were assessed by the assistant student of the department.⁸

In the first question after the basic personal data, the members had to mark on a 1-7 scale the extent to which the institution helps their advancement in their university studies. 5,1 points for assistance means an important data for the implementors of the project, but does not reveal further information about the methods of assistance. The next question referred to the ways how the WHSZ helps the success of the university studies of the members. In this part it was possible to fill in five elements based on free choice, ranked according to importance. The final question asked the members what they would miss if the WHSZ did not exist. In the same way, the questionnaire asked for five elements based on free choice. During the assessment we classified the answers given to the two content-based questions and compared them, in addition to the individual evaluation. This can be seen in the following graph.

⁸ Here I would like to express my gratitude to Scháffer János, leader of the communal space and Oláh Anita co-worker

Figure 2. What does WHSZ offer and what would you miss if you did not receive it? (N=32)



The most salient feature is that the most important services by far are the financial support and the community. This is not surprising as all of the members are financially disadvantaged young people who would have difficulties with financing their studies or would not be able to finish their studies at all without the financial support of this institution. There are examples among the students that they take up additional part-time jobs in addition to their university studies and college activities, because their income is the only revenue of the family. In spite of this, the value of the community comes before the financial support according to the ranking of the association services based on member demands. If we consider the question about what would be needed if the association did not exist, then the importance of the community among the demands becomes even more apparent.

This result unambiguously shows the first and most important step towards inclusion, so the situation when there is an inclusive environment that the member increasingly appreciates and where he feels safe and supported. The inclusive community is essential for those students who go through the gradual process of social mobility and gradually getting more distant from the community of their families. (Forray 2004) The features of the university environment are different from the patterns of behaviour and attitudes brought from home. This is further aggravated by experiencing the perceived or real discrimination caused by gypsy origin. Those young people with similar background who go through higher education without a supportive background are in apparent danger of exclusion. According to our experience and drop-out statistics the inclusive community of the talent-nurturing association in itself has a strong supportive power in this situation.

Further analysing the graph it is salient that the large scope of college services appeared to a considerably smaller extent in the listings of the students than the community itself. Of course this would not mean that these services are not necessary for the personal supportive systems and would not contribute to the results of the university. Instead, this highlights the fact that the students are not aware of the importance of these services in

the process of their academical advancement. Owing to this it is crucially important to raise awareness about the portfolio and the personal development supported by tutorial assistance. Following this scheme, the supportive system of inclusion builds up step by step in which the members can rely on supportive and safety-providing background of the community (!) in the process of making their conscious decisions and taking part in the services provided by the institution. With the increase of activities

With this example I intended to show how the social process of inclusion could be converted into a successful practice in higher education. In this environment the socially disadvantaged, mostly roma members of the special college would be in danger of exclusion without a supportive inclusive background. We could say that that they are the members of the LDM, locally defined minority. Due to this fact the apparent achievements of the examined college members (advancement at the university, scientific achievements, playing roles in public life) show the extent to which their environment is gradually becoming more inclusive. The results are the fruits of a conscious strategy: a community with the appropriate approach and practical means may be able to provide the chances and the continuous striving for 'excellent inclusion' (IE). Observing the process of development we consider it even more important to describe and promote models that would contribute to the creation and management of inclusive communities in ways similar to the presented example, but in other fields(!), supporting the social inclusion of a rising number of children and adults.

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