

**THE ASCEND PROJECT:
THE HUNGARIAN RESEARCH REPORT OF AN INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATION**

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Abstract

Our experience was that the social participation and active citizenship of young people with disabilities were low in Hungary. It was difficult to involve young people with disabilities in advocacy work at the national or EU level, because they did not recognize discrimination. The other problem was that they were not aware enough of the anti-discrimination systems that protect them. In many cases, they were skeptical about the effectiveness of anti-discrimination systems. We wished to explore and expand their knowledge of the democratic and anti-discrimination systems operating in their country (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, and Slovakia) Central and Eastern Europe. We also wanted to increase their trust in these systems. This was one of the main pillars of the one-year Ascend program locally lead by The National Federation of Organisations of People with a Physical Disability (in short: MEOSZ) In Hungary, the main goal of the study was to examine the phenomenon of discrimination and anti-discrimination in education. In the Hungarian part of the research, we used qualitative methods (focus group interviews, mind maps) for examination.

Keywords: active citizenship, discrimination and anti-discrimination, social participation, education, people with disabilities

Discipline: pedagogy

Absztrakt

AZ ASCEND PROJEKT: EGY NEMZETKÖZI VIZSGÁLAT MAGYARORSZÁGI FELMÉRÉSÉNEK EREDMÉNYEI

Tapasztalataink alapján alacsony a fogyatékossgal élő fiatalok aktív társadalmi részvétele. Nehéz bevonni az érintetteket az érdekvédelmi munkába nemzeti és európai szinten egyaránt. Ennek egyik oka, hogy sokszor a fogyatékossgal élő fiatalok nem észlelik az őket érő diszkriminációt, másrészt vélhető, hogy nincsenek kellőképpen tudatában az őket védő anti-diszkriminációs rendszerekkel, rendelkezésekkel. Sok esetben nagyon szkeptikusak az anti-diszkriminációs rendszerek hatékonyságát illetően. A nemzetközi kutatás elsődleges célja, az érintettek erre vonatkozó ismereteinek feltérképezése és tudásuk bővítése a

témával kapcsolatban. További célként fogalmazódott meg, hogy a kutatás segítségével növeljük a kutatásba bevont személyek bizalmát a Magyarországon működő anti-diszkriminációs rendelkezésekkel kapcsolatban. Az egy éves időtartalmú Ascend projekt magyarországi részét a Mozgáskorlátozottak Egyesületeinek Országos Szövetsége koordinálta és valósította meg. Magyarországon a diszkrimináció és anti-diszkrimináció jelenségét főleg az oktatásban vizsgáltuk. A kutatásban kvalitatív módszereket, fókuszcsoportos kikérdezést és fogalmi térképet alkalmaztunk.

Kulcsszavak: aktív állampolgárság, diszkrimináció és anti-diszkrimináció, társadalmi részvétel, oktatás, fogyatékosággal élő emberek ,

Diszciplína: pedagógia

Introduction

'Disability' is an umbrella term. This umbrella term is used for long-term impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, experienced by an individual with a health condition in interaction with their environment. Unfortunately, there is no universally accepted definition of disability. International legislation and recommendations, as well as the legislation of the given country, together form and shape it (KSH: 2011). "In accordance with the UN convention, the term "person with a disability" has become a generally accepted technical term. A person with a disability is interpreted according to the WHO 2001 ICF-FNO model in this research report. The ICF-FNO model emphasizes that the development of disability is not a private matter, but that the environment also has an influence. It calls attention to society's responsibility that it is often not the condition, but the environment itself (society and its expectations and norms) that make certain people disabled" (Révész-Kiszela, 2015, 25.).

In Hungary, according to the data of the 2011 census, 4.9% of the Hungarian population, 490,578 were persons with disabilities, of which the number of people with reduced mobility was 232,206. Numerous studies had examined the presence of people with disabilities in higher education (Laki, 2013; Laki, 2015; Mező, 2016; Barakonyi and Pankász, 2019; Hrabéczy and Pusztai, 2020; Laki, 2021; Fazekas, 2021). On the one hand, these studies provided some statistical data about people

with disabilities in the higher education system. On the other hand, they examined the obstacles to participation in universities.

In Hungary, the phenomenon of discrimination was primarily investigated at the workplace (Dajnoki, 2012; Tardos, 2015). Neményi et al. (2013) conducted a national representative study focusing on discrimination. In the above mentioned study, Neményi et al. (2013) explored discrimination among people with disabilities. Neményi et al. concluded that people with disabilities had serious struggles in education or at work, and in the study, only a quarter of the respondents thought that society accepted them as equals. The majority thought that their acceptance is only relative, people were often indifferent with them. In fact, they were sometimes downright dismissive of them. Neményi et al. (2019) stated that people with disabilities were characterized by frequent discrimination in the field of institutional services, and in this regard, their most disadvantaged position remained for the entire period 2010-2019 decade.

Although within discrimination, there have already been plentiful publications by Hungarian authors (Nagy et al, 2012; Buda, 2015; Mező and Mező, 2017 a, b; Berta and Dombi 2017; Várnai, 2019) on the various forms of harassment and abuse. However, we found that there has been little research done so far that specifically deals with the discrimination suffered by people with disabilities in the field of education. Therefore, although our

research is not representative, it can certainly fill gaps and enrich the research dealing with discrimination with new knowledge.

Methods

Participants

The target group of the research was young adults with disabilities between 18-30 years old. 17 people took part in the study. Of the 17 participants, 7 people were a few years older than 30 years old. The majority of the participants were women, 9 out of the total number. Most of the participants lived in Budapest due to their studies or work. The majority of the participants had IT qualifications. In addition to the diverse IT qualifications, pedagogical qualifications or studies were dominant. 9 participants were born with cerebral palsy. We used the 3 grades index defined by Perlstein in 1952 to determine their movement abilities. 6 out of 9 belonged to the III. degree (severe), which meant that they needed help in daily activities they could not walk independently. 4 persons from III. degree (severe) category used electric wheelchair. 3 out of 9 belonged to the II. degree (moderate or medium) category which meant that they needed some help in their motor performance but they were still able to walk independently. Besides movement disabilities in the study 2 deaf-blind persons, 1 blind person, and 2 persons with hearing disabilities were involved. The participants were informed in advance about the goal of the research and other relevant information such as the anonymity. The whole experiment was carried out with ethical rules in mind.

Examination tools

We ensured content validity with a pre-written precise focus group interview plan before the whole examination process started. This plan divided into 3 major sections. The 1st section was the introduction. The introduction part was further separated into a moderator part and a participant part. The 2nd section dealt with the positive and

negative discrimination in education. The 3rd part contained our second examination tool which was the drawing of structured mind maps. In this 3rd section, we presented a demo map with demo analysis as well. In order to the participants to be able to successfully draw the structured mind map, we sent them a list in advance by e-mail even before the data collection began. From this list, they could choose the concepts to create mind maps. The data was recorded with a voice recorder. The mind maps were analysed as described in Sántha's 2009 book. We kept this in mind and paid accurate attention to the triangulation model.

Description of the research

We met with the participants who took part in the experiment at a pleasant neutral place at the Central European University three times on 24.10.2022, 25.10.2022, and 3.11.2022 for the purpose of data collection, and this ensured triangulation of data. On each focus group's occasions, different persons joined which established the triangulation of persons. We paid a careful attention to their special needs so the building of the university was fully accessible. We gave assistance in drawing maps to those participants whose fine and coordinated mobility of the upper limbs was affected and persons with visual impairment too. Each group meeting started with eating pizza together so as to create a calm, homely environment. After this 20-30 minutes warm up we started 1,5-hour long focus group discussions. We selected some special tasks as it was described by Vicsek 2009 within the focus groups. These special tasks included analogy between inclusive and exclusive education, sentence supplementations, and drawing of mind maps. The triangulation of methods was secured by combining the two qualitative research techniques with each other.

Results

Sentence supplementations

The participants were asked to complete the following sentences see some examples in Table 1.

Then we further analysed the positive discrimination category into 3 sub-codes (Table 2.). The majority of the participants' associated positive discrimination with self-development. Participation

and help were the 2nd frequently coded concepts in their answers. We did the same with negative discrimination where the most frequently used code was a dismissive attitude (Table 3.).

Table 1. Sentence supplementations for defining negative and positive discrimination. Source: The author.

For me, positive discrimination means...	For me, negative discrimination means...
People also notice the invisible limited mobility. They help not only the visible, such as the loss of a limb but they are also helpful when mobility disorders are not so conspicuous.	The university does not provide certain specific tools for people with disabilities, either because it does not aware of them or because it does not want to. I've met both of them.
I was able to finish primary school for 10 years without repeating a grade.	I have to notify my intention to travel two days in advance.
People recognize when I need help.	I face constant obstacles due to my disability.
I get a chance to participate in something or in a situation where I wouldn't have the opportunity otherwise. Because my condition prevents me from participating in that particular process without positive discrimination.	Due to my illness and disability, I cannot participate in several programs in which my able-bodied classmates easily participate.
I have the opportunity to carve strength out of my weaknesses.	My healthy peers do not receive enough information about their disabled peers.
They provide accessible, adaptive environments and conditions for all people in education.	Disadvantages are emphasized rather than strengths.
They provide opportunities for independence and development.	The majority do not accept my difficulties, they are not willing to have a constructive dialogue with me so that it is good for everyone.

Table 2. Sub-codes for positive discrimination. Source: The author.

Participation	Development	Help
I get a chance to participate in something or in a situation where I wouldn't have the opportunity otherwise.	I can be myself and develop, nothing prevents me from fulfilling myself and being myself.	People are helpful and no matter what happens, there is always someone to turn to for help in life.
I get a chance for opportunities; and participations that I wouldn't get if people weren't positive (to me).	I have the opportunity to carve strength out of my weaknesses.	People are helpful and they listen to my needs.
	The focus is on my abilities, they help me develop them in a special way.	
	They provide an opportunity for independence and development.	

Table 3. Sub-codes for negative discrimination. Source: The author.

Dismissive attitude	Lack of something	Obstacles
When people are labelled as disabled. This is a general term that covers all the injured, so I don't like it. I'm not disabled, just limited in mobility.	I'm excluded, I'm not included in the process, and I can't get information or learn anything.	I can't do something I want because of my disability and physical barriers.
The majority do not accept my difficulties, they are not willing to have a constructive dialogue with me so that it is good for everyone.	I don't have the opportunity to start with the same possibilities compared to the others.	Due to my disability, I constantly encounter obstacles.
People can't see beyond their noses and turn away when they see you and don't even want to know the person behind the limp.	The university does not provide certain specific tools for people with disabilities, either because it does not know, or because it does not want to.	
People build a wall around me and I can't break through the wall.	Due to my illness and disability, I cannot participate in programs in which my able-bodied classmates participate easily.	
People show a dismissive behaviour with toward me.	My able-bodied peers do not receive enough information about their disabled peers.	
The instructors want to insult me and don't care about us, they don't care about the fact that I can also prevail with not too much effort. He doesn't want to think about it, he sees his own things as more important.		

Similarities and differences between the focus groups

The majority of the participants' associated inclusive education mostly with the feeling of home. In addition, the image of a caring mother paying attention to individual needs appeared in their answers. Also, an animal, such as a loving dog or therapy cat was present. Negative discrimination was a very strong image and evoked associations from the research participants. The expression of unreachability, inaccessibility, and feeling of

closeness was dominant in their answers. For example, the image of the barbed wire fence and the high walls surrounding the person appeared. They were also most likened to unpleasant noises, such as chalk creaking and door slamming.

It was clear from their answers that they were aware of their special rights in education. The majority replaced the written parts of the secondary school-leaving exams with two oral ones. Longer preparation time was indicated most often, and waiver from physical education lessons was also

mentioned. Some also requested a personal assistant who mostly helped them with taking notes during the lessons. The participants considered it very important to provide adequate information to society in the action against discrimination, because in their opinion there was still a huge lack of information about people with disabilities. They believed that sensitization programs and various awareness campaigns played an important role in the fight against discriminative behaviours. During the group discussions, several participants reported that they had already participated in such an attitude-shaping program before, and that they would be happy to participate in such a program if they were invited again. They favoured more authentic and therefore would prefer to attend a presentation given by a lawyer with a disability who, according to their opinion, better understands their situation and their daily struggles. They also expressed their satisfaction with the advocacy work of organizations dealing with disabilities. At the same time, they believed that these organizations should play a more frequent role in the action against discrimination, unite and encourage people with disabilities to act and do something together. When we asked the participants to recall a negative experience related to education, they mostly noted the inappropriate attitude of the instructors. Most of the time, they emphasized that the teacher did not allow them to use certain special tools in class or at the exam.

We could distinguish the following things between the 3 groups: The groups had controversial opinions regarding the suitability and competence of the disability coordinators at universities. Half of the interviewees believed that they could adequately help students with disabilities integrate, while others felt that they were not sufficiently prepared and helpful. They also shared diverse thoughts about church schools. There were many people who shared very negative experiences. A small proportion of the participants spoke positively about this. There were also different comments regarding where people were more accepting of people with disabilities, in the city or in the countryside.

Mind maps

Purple, pink, green, blue and red were the most common colours used in the maps. Multi-coloured mind maps were typical, were, most of the time, the participants clearly separated with the help of colours which, in their opinion, falls under positive and negative discrimination from the previously published conceptual list. Most participants marked positive and negative discrimination with a + and - sign on the map, but some of them also drew emojis and other illustrations. There were two maps where mocking was the detailed concept of the map.

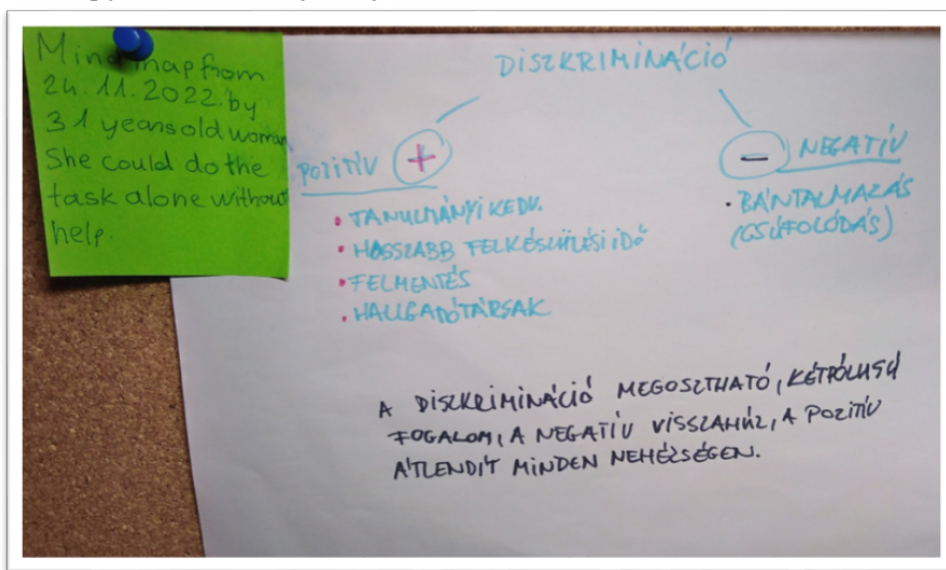
31-years-old woman: marked the elements of the map with light blue. The positive branch of discrimination was marked with a pink + sign. On the positive side, she listed: study discounts, longer preparation time, exemptions, and fellow students. Negative discrimination, was indicated with a black - sign. She wrote a single concept here, bullying (mockery). This was the detailed concept of the map, as she determined that the primary form of bullying for her was a mockery. „Discrimination is a divisive, bipolar concept: the negative pulls you back, the positive pushes you through all difficulties.” The number of concepts on the map: 8. The number of central concepts: 3 (discrimination, positive and negative discrimination). Number of directed connections (arrows) and edges: 0. (Picture 1.).

32-years-old man: discrimination was written in light blue. Positive discrimination was marked in dark blue. Negative discrimination is highlighted in red. „According to my experience, apart from special schools, education is often exclusive because most of the buildings are not accessible. Furthermore, able-bodied peers often do not accept and insult people with disabilities. The teachers gave me longer preparation time in order to achieve good results on the exams. When I came back from breaks, I was often given priority because the teacher made sure there was enough space in the class for my electric wheelchair. I always received positive feedback from my

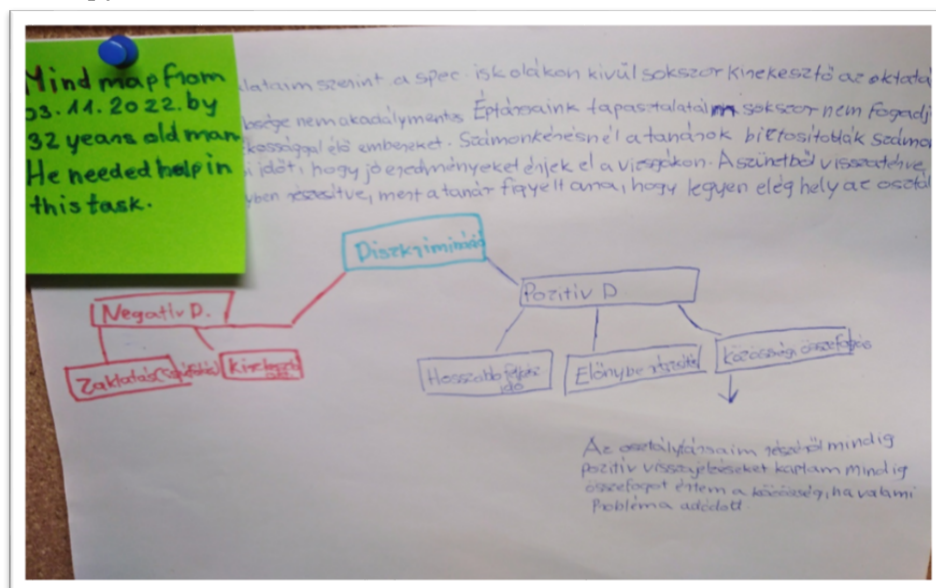
classmates, and the community came together for me when there was a problem.” The number of concepts on the map: 8. The number of central concepts: 3 (discrimination, positive and negative discrimination). Number of directed connections (arrows): 1. Number of edges: 8. Number of levels: 2. The 1st level consisted of the central concept of discrimination, positive and negative discrimination can be achieved with a single route. Level 2nd was

made up of the concepts resulting from positive and negative discrimination. Exclusive education and bullying (mockery) were related to the branch of negative discrimination. This was the detailed concept of the map, as it indicated that mockery was the essential form of bullying for him. Under positive discrimination, he wrote about longer preparation time, preferential treatment, and community cooperation (Picture 2).

Picture 1. Mind map from 24.11.2022.by a 31 years old woman. Source: The author.



Picture 2. Mind map from 03.11. 2022. Source: The author.



26-years-old woman: positive discrimination was framed in light green. She framed negative discrimination with an orange dashed line. The legal decree(s) thus also marked the related concepts in dark green, such as longer preparation time, oral or written exams, and study discounts. Between positive and negative discrimination, she wrote full or partial waiver, fellow students, instructor/instructors, language exam, personal assistant, and head of the institution. She clearly listed harassment, abuse (listed twice), and exclusive education on the side of negative discrimination. Based on the map, the students' council may have a role in exclusive education for teachers, heads of institutions, and language exams. In the case of bullying and abuse, she clearly identified fellow students. On the side of positive discrimination, the use of special equipment and community cooperation were included. She referred to the legal decrees as a full or partial waiver, teachers, and language exam. She wrote to give priority to the lecturers, the head of the institution, and the personal assistant. She connected the students' council, fellow students, and lecturers to the community collaboration. „It depends on each type of attitude whether we are talking about negative or positive discrimination.

The regulations contribute somewhat to equal opportunities. Full or partial exemptions both help and disadvantage people.” The number of concepts shown on the map: 20. The number of central concepts: 3 (discrimination, positive and negative discrimination). The number of directed connections (arrows): 4 written with a pen, of which 1 double arrow, 6 light green arrows, 1 dark green arrow, 8 orange arrows, and a total of 19 arrows are on the map. The number of connection edges: 7 (Picture 3.)

Conclusions and recommendations for further research

We can conclude that discrimination is still very common against people with disabilities at different levels of the Hungarian education system. Based on the results of this present study disabled people support organisations should play an even more active role in decreasing discrimination in the future. More effective training and information sharing on diverse forms of disabilities for the members(fellow students, instructors, and disability coordinators) of the higher education system is needed.

Picture 3. Mind map from 25.11.2022.by a 26 years old woman. Source: The author.



Compressive awareness and advocacy initiatives about special rights and anti-discriminative regulations for persons with disabilities in education should be launched in cooperation with educational lawyers to help combat stigma and discrimination. According to the opinion of the participants, it would even better if these referential presentations would be given by disabled educational lawyers because they would be more authentic. Social media and other media platforms could also help to take actions against discriminative and dismissive social behaviours. People with disabilities would be happy to take part in these advocacy and awareness work more willingly in the near future.

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