

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF A SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION TO A MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETY\*

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*Abstract.* Despite the fact that the integration model of education was introduced in Slovenia 17 years ago, the inclusion of persons with special needs into education and community remains a major challenge. In order to improve their opportunities, the largest special school in Ljubljana has for ten years organised an international festival *Play with me*, with the main aim of supporting inclusion of people with special needs with the rest of the population. The organisers aim to create opportunities for all to take part together in various play, sport and artistic activities. The paper presents the findings of a study in which the inclusive practices of the festival were researched and evaluated. The study was aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the role a special school can play in the creation of a more inclusive society. Data were gathered using an online questionnaire targeting the mentors and volunteers who accompanied participants at the festival. 132 mentors and 64 volunteers responded. The quantitative non-experimental empirical analysis of the data has indicated that the respondents recognised the inclusive nature of the festival. The festival proves that inclusion is a multifaceted phenomenon which can be supported by various activities and endeavours.

*Keywords:* inclusion in Slovenia, special educational institution, children with intellectual disabilities, inclusive society.

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## INTRODUCTION

Slovenian independence was followed in the mid-1990<sup>s</sup> by an extensive reform of the education system at all levels, including the education of persons with special education needs (hereinafter: SEN). The last major changes were introduced in 2000 with the adoption of the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (hereinafter: the Act), which has since undergone several amendments (Placement of Children with Special Needs Act, 2012). Following international recommendations (notably the Salamanca Statement, 1994), Slovenia has introduced an integration model of education for pupils with SEN: the aim of education authorities is to include as many SEN pupils as possible in mainstream schools, while not wholly abandoning education in separate special educational institutions.

Despite the inclusion-oriented Act, inclusive education in Slovenia remains a major challenge. A particularly urgent issue is the education of children with intellectual disabilities, who even today have very limited access to mainstream education and whose inclusion into society remains a tremendous challenge. In order to improve their opportunities, the Janez Levec Centre (*Center Janeza Levca*), the largest special school in Ljubljana, and the Society for a Culture of Inclusion (*Društvo za kulturo inkluzije*) have for the last ten years organised an international festival called *Play With Me*, the main aim of which is to support the inclusion of persons with SEN alongside the rest of the population. The festival is based on the concept of inclusion understood as a process in which conditions are created for the participation and optimal development of all, not only in school but also in the community. The festival takes place in the form of year-round activities (*Be an Artist, Be a Traveler, Be an Athlete*) and a four-day main festival that takes place in the centre of Ljubljana (and some other towns in the country) in the month of May. The organisers aim to create opportunities for persons with SEN and persons without SEN to take part together in various play, sport and artistic activities. Numerous schools, institutions, NGOs and individuals, including people who happen upon an individual event by chance, take part in the activities each year.

In this article we ask whether a special educational institution can contribute to the formation of a more inclusive society. Part of the answer to this complex question is formulated through research we carried out following the festival in 2015. Participants in the research included 132 mentors of pupils taking part in the festival and 64 volunteers running various festival activities. We begin the article with a discussion of the inclusiveness or otherwise of the education system in Slovenia, after which we introduce the festival and the concept of inclusion on which it is based. The central part of the article consists of the results of our empirical research.

### *Principal characteristics of placement of pupils with SEN in compulsory education*

The Act (Placement of Children with Special Needs Act, 2012) provides that the decision on the manner of inclusion of pupils with SEN in the education system is taken by the appropriate expert panel, which during the placement process defines the special needs of the pupils in question and places them in one of several education programmes for SEN pupils in accordance with their needs. The Act distinguishes between several types of education programme:

- *Education programmes with adapted provision and additional specialised assistance:* aimed for SEN pupils for whom adaptations in the provision of the programme, which is otherwise identical to the mainstream primary curriculum, are sufficient.
- *Adapted education programmes with equivalent performance criteria:* these programmes include adaptations to the actual programmes for various groups of SEN pupils (e.g. deaf children); organisation of lessons, assessment methods, etc. are adapted. Additional specialised assistance is also provided.
- *Adapted education programmes with lower performance criteria,* aimed in particular at pupils with mild learning disabilities.
- *Special education programmes for children with moderate and severe learning disabilities and other special programmes,* and
- *Education programmes* aimed at pupils with behavioural and personality disorders.

The first two types of programmes are provided in mainstream schools, while the others are as a rule provided in specialised schools. An individual school can offer multiple programmes simultaneously, but in the case of lower performance criteria they are always provided in separate classes. The school prepares an individualised curriculum for every pupil enrolled in one of the above programmes. It contains all the adaptations the pupil requires in order to participate equally in lessons and achieve optimal learning objectives. At the end of the 2013/14 academic year and the start of the 2014/15 academic year, 8.4%<sup>1</sup> of all pupils were SEN pupils. A quarter of them were enrolled in separate specialised educational institutions, while the other three quarters were enrolled in mainstream primary schools (Osnovnošolsko izobraževanje

<sup>1</sup> The Act defines the following groups as pupils with SEN: children with learning difficulties, blind and visually impaired children, deaf and hearing impaired children, children with speech and language disorders, physically handicapped children, chronically ill children, children with deficits in specific areas of learning, children with autistic disorders and children with emotional and behavioural disorders who require the adapted provision of education programmes with additional specialised assistance or adapted education programmes/special education programmes (Article 2) (Placement of Children with Special Needs Act, 2012).

mladine in odraslih, Slovenija, konec šolskega leta 2013/14 in začetek 2014/15, 2015).

### *Obstacles to establishing a more inclusive system*

Although SEN education in Slovenia is better regulated than it was before the amendments to legislation in 2000, it is still insufficiently inclusive, above all for pupils with learning disabilities. While the Act does allow the enrolment of children with mild learning disabilities in mainstream schools, and thus the integration of standard and adapted programmes, this practice has not taken off because the basic conditions for the coordination of two programmes within a single class have not been met. There is not even an implementing regulation governing the content and form of certificates for pupils who have followed a programme with lower performance criteria at a mainstream school (Šelih, 2013).

One of the key reasons for the non-realisation of inclusion can also be found in the major differences of paradigm between experts, all of whom rely on different research findings. While one group of experts proves that, according to selected criteria, SEN pupils do less well in mainstream schools than their peers in separate specialised educational institutions (e.g. Rovšek, 2013; Slavec Gornik, 2016), another group proves exactly the opposite, namely that SEN pupils in mainstream schools make better progress (Seničar & Kobal Grum, 2012; Lesar & Smrtnik Vitulič, 2014; Lesar, Čuk & Peček Čuk, 2014).<sup>2</sup>

Another of the obstacles to establishing inclusion in Slovenia is the system of study followed by future teachers. This remains a two-track system and separates the study of special and rehabilitation pedagogy from general pedagogical programmes. While it is true that the education of SEN pupils receives more attention in pedagogical programmes than the education of other vulnerable groups of learners (Matović & Spasenović, 2016; Messner, Worek & Peček, 2016; Peček & Lesar, 2011; Peček Čuk & Macura-Milovanović, 2015), it nevertheless needs to be asked whether such programmes also represent a retreat from the medical deficit approach to special educational needs and discourses of inability/incapability and a movement towards a discourse of democratism and a pedagogical discourse that views everyone as being capable of learning (Fulcher, 1989; Lesar, 2009; Warnock, 2010) and true participation (Rutar, 2016).

A further challenge is represented by the Bologna competence-based teacher education programme (Peček & Skubic Ermenc, 2016), which may not

<sup>2</sup> The differences in assessment relate to different groups of SEN pupils and the differences between them. If we only look at data on the annual progression of SEN pupils from year to year in mainstream schools, we see that their rate of progression is similar to that of their classmates (Osnovnošolsko izobraževanje mladine in odraslih, Slovenija, konec šolskega leta 2013/14 in začetek 2014/15, 2015).

sufficiently support development of the teacher's core qualities (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005) or education of the teacher as a complete personality (Biesta, 2013), and therefore impedes the challenging of identified negative, inappropriate attitudes towards inclusion (Chakir & Peček, 2014), which require process-based education and systematic reflection on acquired knowledge (Štirn Janota, 2016).

As a result of the situation described, many teachers and pedagogues, including those working in the special education sector, feel a lack of inclusiveness in the education system and wider society. This lack was the reason why a central special educational institution involved in educating a large proportion of children and young people with learning difficulties in Slovenia's capital city decided a decade ago to organise the festival mentioned in the introduction.

### *Inclusive elements of the international Play With Me festival*

The organisers of the festival aim to promote inclusion and strengthen inclusive culture<sup>3</sup> (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Mitchel, 2015) in the community via relaxed forms of social activity and spontaneous interaction. Their understanding of inclusiveness is a broad one, since it goes beyond the educational aspect of inclusion and emphasises the social aspect (Rovšek, 2010). They want to create as many opportunities as possible for the inclusion of individuals with or without special needs in different connecting activities, both in and outside school, including for those pupils attending separate educational institutions, while at the same time it is their intention to increase the active presence of SEN pupils in the public spaces of city life (hence the year-round activities of the festival). They understand inclusion as spontaneous interaction between different participants that is based on the participants' desire to observe and interact and their interest in and fascination with relationships and partnerships with others (Kotnik, 2011), since individuals with special needs are only able to exercise their rights adequately in a school or community that spontaneously accepts difference as a new quality of existence (Kroflič 2002; Warnock, 2010; Biesta, 2013).

### *Play as a key factor of inclusion*

The festival organisers see play as a key factor in the realisation of inclusion. They define play as one of the first social activities of human beings, which at the same time represents the individual's entry to socialising, joint activity and interconnection (Kotnik, 2011). These roles of play are confirmed both by studies of its therapeutic effect (Getz, 2011; History of Play Therapy, 2013) and by psychological (Marjanovič Umek & Zupančič, 2006) and pedagogi-

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from the festival website: <http://www.igrajsezmano.eu/ProjektIgrajbrsezmano.aspx>.

cal theories (Rogers, 2011; Paley, 1993). As Paley (1990) puts it: “Children see themselves, always, inside a story. And you become a friend when you take part in someone’s play. A child is truly accepted into the group when the other children include him or her in their stories and dramatisations” (Paley, 1990: 19). At the same time however, if play is not considered, well-planned, purposeful, it can also be a very exclusive practice (Paley, 1993; Harrist & Bradley, 2003).

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research method, research problem and research questions*

The research used the descriptive method and the causal non-experimental method. (Sagadin, 2004). The study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the role a special school can play in the creation of a more inclusive society. Data were gathered using an online questionnaire targeted to mentors and volunteers who accompanied participants to the festival.

We were interested in finding answers to the following questions:

- What were the views and attitudes of participating mentors and volunteers towards inclusion and persons with SEN?
- What reasons were given by participating mentors and volunteers for their participation in the festival and were there differences between them?
- In what way, in the opinion of mentors and volunteers, were stereotypes about persons with special needs eliminated (if at all)?

### *Sample*

In 2015 the international *Play With Me* festival took place in four locations around Slovenia: two large cities (Ljubljana and Maribor) and two small towns (Muta and Begunje). Each year, all institutions and organisations connected with education are invited to take part in the festival. At the end of the festival, all registered participating mentors and volunteers were invited to take part in a survey designed to evaluate the festival events. A link to the survey questionnaires was sent out by the organiser in June 2015 to the email addresses of 368 participating mentors and 204 volunteers.

The mentors’ questionnaire was completed by 132 mentors. Just over a quarter of the mentors (28%) had attended the festival for the first time, while the remainder (72%) had attended more than once. The largest proportion of mentors employed in educational institutions come from mainstream nursery schools or schools (47%, 62), while 22.7% (30) come from special educational institutions and just under a third (30.3%, 40) are from other institutions (NGOs, societies, university faculties, music schools, etc.). Of the mentors

employed in education (in our survey  $n=100$ ), 28% have been employed for less than 10 years, 43% have worked in education for between 11 and 20 years, and 29% have been employed in education for more than 20 years.

The second questionnaire was completed by 64 volunteers, 93.3% of whom were women. Men accounted for just under 7%. In terms of age, 23.3% of volunteers were 20 or under, 70% were between 21 and 40, 3% were between 41 and 60 and 3% were over 61. The proportion of volunteers attending the festival for the first time is significantly higher (60%), which was expected, since every year the organisers actively invite students from various fields of study at various university faculties, who are preparing to enter the teaching profession, to take part in the festival as volunteers.

### *Data collection and processing*

The organisers of the 2015 festival sent a link to the online questionnaire to the email addresses of registered mentors and volunteers. The link provided individual access to an anonymous questionnaire, which they then completed and submitted online. Once the survey was complete, the data were exported into SPSS statistical processing software. We presented the data in frequency and structural tables and checked the hypotheses using the independent samples t-test. In the event of there being more than two subgroups, we used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). We checked the suitability of using the independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA by means of Levene's statistics. In the event that the condition of homogeneity of variances was not met, we used substitute tests. We supplemented the results of one-way ANOVA with post-hoc tests.

We processed the answers to the two open questions in accordance with qualitative analysis procedures (Flick, 2015). We coded the answers and on the basis of common codes formed the main categories into which we placed the answers.

### *Presentation of instruments*

Both questionnaires, for mentors and for volunteers, contained a set of identical demographic questions [sex, age, participation in the festival (first time, second or subsequent time; location where they attended the festival)], which were slightly more specific for mentors (number of years employed in education, type of institution).

A Likert scales was created for the purposes of this research. We use it to measure mentors' and volunteers' general views on inclusion and attitudes towards persons with SEN. The scale consisted of 10 statements. Respondents expressed their degree of agreement with individual statements on a 4-point scale.

We also present the responses of mentors and volunteers to two questions of the open type. In the first of these we asked respondents about their reasons for taking part in the festival, while in the second we asked them to describe an event at the festival through which, in their opinion, the primary purpose of the festival was achieved – namely the elimination of stereotypes about persons with special needs.

## RESULTS

### *Some general views of festival participants on inclusion and play*

It is apparent from Table 1 respondents agreed most strongly that *play is a good way of relating to persons with special needs* ( $\bar{x}$  =3.6 mentors and 3.7 volunteers) and with the statement that *more such events would reduce fear of/uneasiness about persons with special needs* ( $\bar{x}$  =3.5 mentors and 3.5 volunteers). There are no statistically significant differences between mentors and volunteers in this respect. Both groups also give high values to other general statements on inclusion. All three statements (*We talk about inclusion when we take part in an event like this or a similar event; We talk about inclusion when we interact with ...; Inclusion has to happen spontaneously*) are rated  $\bar{x}$  =3.1 by mentors and between 2.8 and 3.0 by volunteers. Both mentors and volunteers express less agreement with the statement *I do not use the expression "inclusion" because better expressions exist that are closer to children/adolescents* ( $\bar{x}$  =3.0 mentors and  $\bar{x}$  =2.7 volunteers) and the statement *My attitude towards persons with special needs changed after I participated in the festival* ( $\bar{x}$  =2.3 mentors and 2.5 volunteers).



*Table 1: Views of mentors and volunteers on inclusion*

Views of mentors and volunteers on inclusion	n	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$	t-test $\alpha$
We talk about inclusion when we take part in an event like this or a similar event.	Mentors	3.11	0.67	1.355
	Volunteers	2.79	0.65	0.177
We talk about inclusion when we interact with ...	Mentors	3.05	0.73	0.426
	Volunteers	3.00	0.74	0.671
Inclusion has to happen spontaneously.	Mentors	3.13	0.71	0.348
	Volunteers	3.08	0.77	0.728
I do not use the expression «inclusion» because better expressions exist that are closer to children/adolescents.	Mentors	2.96	0.75	1.761
	Volunteers	2.75	0.78	0.080

Views of mentors and volunteers on inclusion	n	$\bar{X}$	$\sigma$	t-test $\alpha$
More such events would reduce fear of/uneasiness about persons with special needs.	Mentors	3.49	0.55	0.262
	Volunteers	3.52	0.67	0.793
My attitude towards persons with special needs changed after I participated in the festival.	Mentors	2.28	0.86	1.328
	Volunteers	2.46	0.92	0.186
Play is a good way of relating to persons with special needs.	Mentors	3.57	0.51	1.389
	Volunteers	3.68	0.47	0.166

We assumed that demographic characteristics (age, length of service, type of institution) affect mentors' attitude towards inclusion and persons with special needs. Statistically significant differences ( $\alpha=0.003$ ) appeared between mentors of different ages. We also found statistically significant differences ( $\alpha=0.014$ ) between mentors with different lengths of service. Mentors with between 10 and 20 years' experience in education express the highest degree of agreement with the statement *I evaluate each event separately and talk to the children/adolescents about what they have learned, experienced, etc.* This group statistically significantly differs from the group of mentors who have been employed in education for less than 10 years, who expressed the lowest degree of agreement with the statement (the result of the post-hoc test is  $\alpha=0.004$ ).

In terms of type of institution, we divided mentors into those employed in mainstream institutions and those employed in special institutions. Those from special institutions expressed a higher degree of agreement with the statement that *More such events would reduce fear of/uneasiness about persons with special needs.* We confirmed statistically significant differences between the two groups ( $\alpha=0.015$ ).

We found that those mentors who have already attended the festival more than once express a higher degree of agreement with the statement that *inclusion must happen spontaneously.* They also agreed more with the statement that *the attitude of the children/adolescents in their group towards children/adolescents with special needs changed after participation in the festival.* In both cases the differences between mentors who had already attended the festival multiple times and those attending for the first time were statistically significant ( $\alpha=0.040$ ,  $\alpha=0.050$ ).

Mentors who discussed events with their group after attending the festival expressed a higher degree of agreement with the statement that *they evaluate each event separately and talk to the children/adolescents about what they have learned, experienced, etc.* The difference between those who do not discuss events after the festival and those who do is statistically significant at the level  $\alpha=0.003$ . It is noteworthy, that there are differences in the understanding of the importance and implementation of evaluation between mentors who discuss events with their charges after the end of the festival and those who do not.

### *Reasons given by mentors and volunteers for participating in the festival*

We identified reasons for participation through the question *Why did participants decide to take part in the festival?* We divided the answers of volunteers into three categories (Table 2). The first category includes the answers of volunteers (21) who link participation in the festival to *studies and work with persons with learning difficulties*, while the second category includes an-

swers that demonstrate volunteers' *desire for (new) experiences*. The category *mission of the festival, positive experiences and opportunities for interaction* is the category into which we placed fewest answers from volunteers (13).

Table 2: *Volunteers' reasons for participating in the festival*

Category	f/f%	Examples of answers
Connection with studies, with work with persons with learning difficulties	21/35.0	<i>Because I am a student of special and rehabilitation pedagogy I want to get as much experience as possible in this field even while studying. Not only that but I enjoy working with children.</i>
Desire for (new) experiences	17/28.3	<i>Because I have never taken part in any festival and I was interested to see what it was like from the other side (not just as a visitor), and because I enjoy new challenges, meeting new people, learning new things.</i>
Mission of the festival, positive experiences and opportunities for interaction	13/21.7	<i>I was attracted by the idea of the festival. It seems important to me to spread the idea of inclusion through one's own contribution as a volunteer.</i>
Other	9/15.0	
Total	60/100.0	

Table 3 presents the answers of mentors. The first category contains answers where the *mission of the festival, positive experiences and opportunities for interaction* are in the foreground (64), the second category includes answers highlighting the *opportunity to present a specific activity or run a workshop* (33), while the third category is for answers where *opportunities for children/adolescents to perform* are highlighted (31).

*Table 3: Mentors' reasons for participating in the festival*

Categories	f/f%	Examples of answers
Mission of the festival, positive experiences and opportunities for interaction	64/48.5	<i>I was attracted by the purpose of the festival and the public it was aimed at. Because I believe that this is good for children – getting to know diversity – I support events of this kind.</i>
Opportunity to present an activity, run a workshop	33/25.0	<i>A demonstration of our work. We also cooperate in other ways with VDC Muta. Health education presentation, assistance, cooperation, etc.</i>
Opportunity for children/adolescents to perform	31/23.5	<i>I wanted my pupils to present our points to the other festival participants and visitors and at the same time gain something from the opportunity to appreciate the effort of the other participants and realise that all children have strong areas, regardless of the problems they might have.</i>
Other	4/3.0	
Total	132/100.0	

*Description of an event indicating the elimination of stereotypes about persons with special needs*

We asked mentors and volunteers to describe *an event at the festival through which, in their opinion, the primary purpose of the festival was achieved – namely the elimination of stereotypes about persons with special needs through interaction*. We divided the answers of mentors and volunteers into three main groups:

*Table 4: Categories describing an event that eliminates stereotypes about persons with special needs*

Category	Volunteers f / f%	Mentors f / f%
Did not observe such an event	9/19.1	/
Observed the opposite	3/6.4%	/
	Cooperation	35/74.5
Event observed and described in terms of	Children's perception	44/60,3
	The mission of the festival	/
		20/27,4
		9/12,3
Total	47/100.0	73/100.0

Nine volunteers answered that they had not observed such an event (example: *Probably because of the rain, the children did not make new acquaintances or did not seem to*), while three volunteers observed the opposite (example: *I did not have any such experience because those who came to the festival together and already knew each other tended to stick together*). A total of 35 volunteers and 44 mentors observed an event and described it. Some described it in terms of *mutual cooperation* (examples: *I myself took part in a brooch-making workshop where all the children talked, helped each other, observed each other while working; Cooperation of infants, pre-school children and primary school children, people with special needs, adults, volunteers... with physically handicapped adolescents – exceptional; Watching performers on stage, taking part in workshops with other participants, conversation*). Other mentors (20) described it through the experience of the children (example: *One of my pupils was sad because she didn't meet the blind man she played chess with at last year's festival. The same little girl said to me after a performance by a group of children with special needs: that was the nicest performance!*). Nine mentors described it in terms of the *mission of the festival* (*It is very important for the event to take place in the centre of the city, in a square for example, so that passers-by see our presentations. We certainly attract more attention this way. I always wonder how many people would come and see us if we were in a theatre, for example*).

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the research was to gain insight into the beliefs of those taking part in the *Play With Me* festival (mentors and volunteers) in order to evaluate the inclusively designed festival activities and answer the article's central question regarding the role of a special educational institution on the path to a more inclusive society.

We found that respondents agreed most with the statement that *play is a good way of relating to persons with special needs*. The respondents' opinion about the role of play is also reflected in their identification of an event at the festival that led to the realisation of the festival's basic mission: that of eliminating stereotypes about persons with special needs (third research question). They described it in terms of *mutual cooperation*, through *the experience of the children* and as *the mission of the festival*. The results are consistent also with other studies (Paley, 1991, 1993; Harrist & Bradley, 2003; Marjanovič Umek & Zupančič, 2006; Miller & Almon, 2009; Rogers, 2011) which leads us to a conclusion that mentors and volunteers recognise play as an important connecting activity that is suitable for co-creation involving the broadest possible group of different individuals. But we should not overlook the messages of those who are less positive in their accounts or who even observed the opposite at the festival (e.g. *I did not have any such experience because those who came to the festival together and already knew each other tended to stick together*).

Another statement that found a high level of agreement is that *more such events would reduce fear of/uneasiness about persons with special needs*. On testing hypothesis on whether demographic characteristics (age, length of service, type of institution) influence mentors' attitude to inclusion in persons with special needs, we found that mentors from special institutions agree with this statement to a greater degree. This finding was to a certain extent expected, since studies in Slovenia (Schmidt & Čagran, 2011; Rovšek, 2013; Štefanič, 2016) show that teachers in mainstream schools tend to believe that children with learning disabilities do not belong in such schools. Uneasiness can be recognised among teaching staff – something which is fairly expected, not least in view of the country's teacher education system (Peček & Lesar, 2011; Peček Čuk & Macura-Milovanović, 2015; Peček & Skubic Ermenc, 2016).

It is generally the case that a strong element of conformism is apparent in answers that are connected to various social norms and societal values (Ellingson, Smith & Sackett, 2001), and this also makes attitudes towards inclusion difficult to measure. The respondents unanimously agreed with the following statements about inclusion: *inclusion must happen spontaneously; we talk about inclusion when we take part in an event like this or a similar event; we talk about inclusion when we interact with ...* Differences between mentors only occurred when we tested if the frequency of participation in

the festival influences mentors' views of inclusion and persons with special needs. We found that the frequency is important: those who had already attended the festival more than once more strongly agreed with the statement that *inclusion must happen spontaneously* than those who were visiting the festival for the first time.

Respondents expressed a generally lower degree of agreement with the statement *my attitude towards persons with special needs changed after I participated in the festival*. The statement held more true for mentors who had attended the festival more than once, which indicates that more time is needed to form an inclusive culture and that we cannot expect a more significant effect from occasional inclusion in inclusive practices. Furthermore, we should not overlook the possibility that the festival is attended by those who have a positive attitude towards inclusion from the outset.

We also wanted to establish whether there are differences in the understanding of the importance and implementation of evaluation between mentors who hold a discussion with their charges after the end of the festival and those who do not. We found that mentors who discussed events following participation in the festival expressed a greater degree of agreement with the statement that they *evaluate each event separately and talk to the children/adolescents about what they have learned and experienced*. We highlight the evaluation of festival events as an important step in the evaluation of the experience.

Our second research question helped identify mentors' and volunteers' reasons for taking part in the festival. We found that for a third of volunteers, their main reason for taking part was the desire to *connect their field of study with practice*, for a quarter it was the desire for *new experiences*, while for just over a sixth it was the *mission of the festival*. This finding can be linked to studies (Spasenović & Skubic Ermenc, 2014) in which the need for student teachers to connect their studies to practice is highlighted. The festival is an opportunity for such connection.

It is encouraging that just under half of the mentors linked their reasons for taking part in the festival to the *mission of the festival*. At the same time, we found that almost half of the mentors saw participation in the festival as an *opportunity to present their own activity* or an *opportunity for children/adolescents to appear on stage at the centre of events*. One of the basic ideas of the festival is that the main event always takes place in a central location. In Ljubljana this is Congress Square (*Kongresni trg*), which both by virtue of its historical description and in the sense of its architectural placement in the city belongs among those public spaces where the likelihood of a flow of passers-by is relatively high. It appears that the placement of festival events in a central location is among the important motives for participation in the festival. This is also indicated by the results presented.



## CONCLUSION

Existing systemic solutions in the education of pupils with SEN have shown that the total abolition of separate education of individual groups of SEN pupils (special schools and classes, separate provision of special pedagogical assistance) does not lead to optimal solutions (e.g. Italy) (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2013; Lesar, 2009; Lesar & Smrtnik Vitulič, 2014; Lesar, Čuk & Peček Čuk, 2014; Seničar & Kobal, 2012; Schmidt & Čagran, 2011). The organisation of events where pupils with typical development encounter pupils with SEN is therefore an important part of an inclusive education policy. The “ideal of inclusion” is not, in fact, a common location for the whole of education, but rather the search for the most appropriate forms of education for all children: “Inclusion should mean being involved in a common enterprise of learning, rather than being necessarily under the same roof” (Warnock, 2010: 32).

On the basis of the findings shown, we are able to confirm the central question of the article and conclude that the idea of inclusion in the existing system of education can also be realised by a special educational institution, which thus contributes its own share to creating a more inclusive community. In contrast to the other activities of special educational institutions, the events that make up the festival are transferred from the institution to the city centre. This opening up of opportunities to actively enter a space and the world is particularly important for those social groups for whom this was, for various reasons, impossible in the past (and sometimes still is today) (Foucault, 1998; Moss, 2014). Creating together in difference means formulating an opportunity to see the *face of the Other* (Levinas, 2008) and a uniqueness that supports processes of shaping the individual’s subjectivity (Biesta, 2013). The world of heterogeneity, plurality and public (democratic) space can thus be recognised as a basic step towards encouraging the individual’s freedom (Arendt, 1996), which is always the fundamental goal of educational activity. Such an enlightened goal of education can only be realised by a suitably educated and supported teacher. Despite the encouraging findings of the study presented here, the connection between learners from different education programmes and institutions should not be left merely to the engagement of teaching staff. Systemic provision (including relevant training of participants) should also be made for diverse and connecting activities (activity days, part of the extra-curriculum activities, etc.), where it will also be worth researching in a more targeted manner (including experimentally) the role of play in overcoming fear and uneasiness when faced with SEN pupils.

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## ДОПРИНОС ЈЕДНЕ УСТАНОВЕ СПЕЦИЈАЛНОГ ОБРАЗОВАЊА ИНКЛУЗИВНИЈЕМ ДРУШТВУ

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### *Апстракт*

Иако је интегративни модел образовања у Словенији уведен пре 17 година, инклузија особа са развојним тешкоћама у образовање и заједницу остаје велики изазов. Како би се омогућиле боље прилике за инклузију ових особа, највећа специјална школа у Љубљани већ десет година организује међународни фестивал *Играј се са мном*, чији главни циљ је да пружи подршку укључивању особа са развојним тешкоћама у остатак популације. Циљ организатора јесте да се створе прилике за све да заједно учествују у различитим играма и спортским и уметничким активностима. У овом раду представљају се налази студије која се бавила инклузивним праксама овог фестивала и њиховом евалуацијом. Студија је имала за циљ да пружи дубље разумевање улоге коју специјална школа може да има у стварању инклузивнијег друштва. Подаци су прикупљени помоћу интернет упитника намењеног менторима и волонтерима који су ишли на фестивал заједно са учесницима. Укупно 132 ментора и 64 волонтера одговорило је на питања у упитнику. Квантитативна неекспериментална емпиријска анализа података показала је да су учесници препознали инклузивну природу фестивала. Овај фестивал доказао је да је инклузија вишеслојни феномен који се може подстицати различитим активностима и напорима.

*Кључне речи:* инклузија у Словенији, специјалне образовне институције, деца са интелектуалним тешкоћама, инклузивно друштво.

## ВКЛАД ОСНОГО УЧРЕЖДЕНИЯ СПЕЦИАЛЬНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В ОБЩЕСТВО С ВЫСОКИМ УРОВНЕМ ИНКЛЮЗИИ

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### *Аннотация*

Несмотря на то, что интегративная модель образования в Словении была введена 17 лет назад, включение лиц с отставанием в развитии в образование и общество все еще остается крупным вызовом. В целях обеспечения более благоприятных обстоятельств для включенного обучения данных лиц, в Любляне уже десять лет организуется международный фестиваль *Подружи so мной!*, главная цель которого – оказать поддержку включению лиц с трудностями в развитии в остаток популяции. Цель организатора – создать благоприятные условия для того, чтобы все вместе участвовали в разного рода играх, спортивных и художественных мероприятиях. В предлагаемой работе сообщаются результаты исследования, направленного на виды инклюзивной практики упомянутого фестиваля и их оценку. Исследование было предпринято с целью обеспечить более глубокое понимание роли специальной школы в создании общества с высокой степенью включенности лиц, отстающих в развитии. Данные были собраны при помощи вопросника, предназначенного для руководителей и добровольцам, которые участвовали в фестивальных мероприятиях вместе с детьми. На вопросы ответили 132 руководителя и 64 добровольца. Качественный неэкспериментальный эмпирический анализ данных показал, что участники осознали инклюзивный характер фестиваля. Фестиваль доказал, что включение – это многоаспектный феномен, который следует поощрять разного рода мероприятиями и усилиями.

*Ключевые слова:* включенность в Словении, специальные образовательные учреждения, дети с интеллектуальным отставанием, включенное общество.