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## Developing Inclusive Infrastructure by Bringing AAC Knowledge for Special Education in Adjoining Countries to EU



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### ABSTRACT

Le développement des infrastructures inclusives en apportant des connaissances AAC pour l'éducation spéciale dans les pays voisins à l'UE. AAC est une abréviation pour le concept de remplacement et de suppléance à la communication, un terme commun pour les méthodes utilisées pour soutenir et développer la communication avec les personnes qui sont non-parlant ou handicapées communicatives graves. À partir de 2007, les universités de la Suède, la Biélorussie, la Russie et l'Ukraine ont coopéré pour élaborer des stratégies pour l'intégration de ces méthodes dans la pratique de l'éducation spéciale et l'éducation inclusive dans chaque pays. Le rapport présentera les résultats et les activités en cours. En Suède, AAC est bien connu et ces méthodes sont utilisées dans de nombreux milieux inclusifs. En Russie, il y a un certain nombre de paramètres d'habilitation où la formation en AAC-méthodes de communication sont disponibles et certaines conférences nationales et internationales ont été administrées ainsi que les rapports publiés. En Ukraine, certaines activités sont développées dans une université à Kiev et enfin en Biélorussie, AAC est bien intégré dans le curriculum central sur la formation de l'éducation spéciale des enseignants dans le pays. La coopération a été initiée à partir de la Suède grâce à des projets financés par les agences suédoises et un certain soutien des organismes internationaux AAC. Les résultats montrent que le développement de nouvelles structures dans l'infrastructure prend du temps mais que la coopération internationale entre l'UE et les pays voisins aide à soutenir le développement en commun inclusif.

The idea of this article is strongly affected by the open political, scientific and practical reflections of European countries on the development of inclusive education and the destiny of special education. Priorities of social communication within the provided ordinary classroom<sup>1</sup> are the basic idea

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. 2009. *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*. Paris: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

of discussions undertaken during about the last 40 years (as an example, in Sweden<sup>2</sup>). For former Soviet countries this process is going on differently. The political agenda of the discussion is much weaker and less experienced. Ukraine has ratified the Convention on

<sup>2</sup> Isaksson J. & Lindqvist R. *What is the meaning of special education? Problem representations in Swedish policy documents: late 1970s -2014 // European Journal of Special Needs Education*. Online publication: 22 January 2015

the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in February, 4, 2010; Russia – September, 25, 2012<sup>3</sup>. Belarus has not ratified the Convention yet. In all the mentioned countries, various activities of inclusive education are initiated under the dominance of scientific intentions and practice of special education, by society-based organizations. Local regulations and implementations are becoming

<sup>3</sup> [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=iv-15&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=iv-15&chapter=4&lang=en)

more flexible and fruitful comparing with the state regulations. Some of these proofs are witnessed from the project cooperation between Sweden, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus in the area AAC and proposed for the recognition in this article.

In 2007 cooperation with Russia (Pomor State University/PGU in Archangelsk) and Belarus (Maksim Tank University/MTU in Minsk) was initiated from Stockholm University and supported by the Swedish Institute/SI and the Swedish East European Committee/SEEC. The intention was to develop activities and an infrastructure for work in the field of Augmentative and Alternative Communication/AAC. A theoretical idea was that to develop participation in society as a part of inclusion, good communicative tools are necessary and individuals with severely limited communicative abilities from different reasons are dependent on different AAC methods. Another theoretical idea was that the common educational and societal ground for states formerly belonging to the Soviet Union would create common needs, attitudes and prerogatives. This was supported by the fact that a common East European biennial AAC-conference had existed for more than ten years when the project started. One year later (when the first project had been initiated in 2007) Ukraine was invited into the cooperation through the Institute of Correctional Education at Dragomanov National Pedagogical University/NPU in Kyiv.

AAC is defined as methods and technologies used to support individuals with severe communicative disabilities, even resulting in no speech at all. There is no clear evidence and reliable investigations on how many people/children over the world need AAC-methods. The ISAAC/ International Society of AAC organization suggests looking for the estimation of those who need AAC tools among the total number of disabled people/children on the planet and puts the figure to about 10% of the population. Among them

13 million are children with moderate or severe disability, in low income countries the children population of this group is about 12,7%<sup>4</sup>. It means that there is a very big group of children who needs to overcome different barriers to inclusion because of the impossibilities to participate in everyday societal life due to communication problems, experiencing exclusion. It was more complicated to understand the need of AAC tools for children in the involved project countries, since traditionally there were a number of closed institutions for children with severe disabilities in former soviet countries.

The cooperation was channeled through three projects financed by SI and SEEC. They were focusing on information and education as main tools and also the possibility to find the main actors necessary for each country. The structure for rehabilitation/habilitation service was identified through the help of each partner and was nationally mostly built upon municipal educational centres for children with disabilities, the universities themselves and their departments for special education and also regional educational centres for children with disabilities. The project was led by a project group with 2-3 members from each partner country under the leadership of Sweden.

The development of the project was fast and followed a strict structure of initial aac education on university level, according to formal demands on BA-level. The education was put into a three-stage programme following the demands of the Belorussian Ministry of education and aiming for formal academic points according to Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian demands.

The results of the project in accordance to the involved countries were implemented differently. In Belarus,

<sup>4</sup> Hartley S, Newton CRJC. *Children with developmental disabilities in the majority of the world*. In: Shevell M, ed. *Neurodevelopmental disabilities: clinical and scientific foundations*. London, Mac Keith Press, 2009.

the developed AAC infrastructure included the State Pedagogical University named after M.Tank, (the introductory AAC course on BA special education level as obligatory), municipal territorial educational centres for children with severe disabilities and parental organization. This model was implemented in Minsk - the capital of the Belarus. The Ministry of Education was actively involved and participated by the formal evaluation of the AAC Introductory course at the University. In 2015 the first AAC Guide for special teachers has been published.

In Ukraine, in the same way as in Belarus, the AAC course on BA in special education has been developed and implemented, but not as something obligatory, just recommended. Interaction with the special education institutions was fragmented and practical outputs of the project were not so evident even the 9th Eastern and Central European Conference in Alternative and Augmentative communication was successfully hosted<sup>5</sup>. Parental organizations were not involved actively. Quite problematic cooperation with the Ministry of Education was managed.

As far as Russia, the Archangelsk regional city became the main arena of AAC development. A model of AAC infrastructure implementation was constructed by several actors: the department of social work at Pomor State University named after M.Lomonosov (where a habilitation course was developed for BA in social work), City Municipality and Rehabilitation Centre for children with special needs. Cooperation with parental organizations was rather weak. The first Russian AAC international conference - 7th Eastern and Central

<sup>5</sup> *Materiali IX Shidno- that Tsen-tralnoveuropeyskiy Regionalnoy konferentsii s problems that alternative dopomizhnoy komunikatsii "Komunikatsiya for vsih" / ed. VN Sinova, MK Sheremet.[Materials of the of the 9th Eastern and Central European Conference in Alternative and Augmentative communication, June, 28 – July 2, 2013 ]- Kiev: DIA, 2013.*

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ugmentative communication<sup>6</sup> was  
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t work.

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