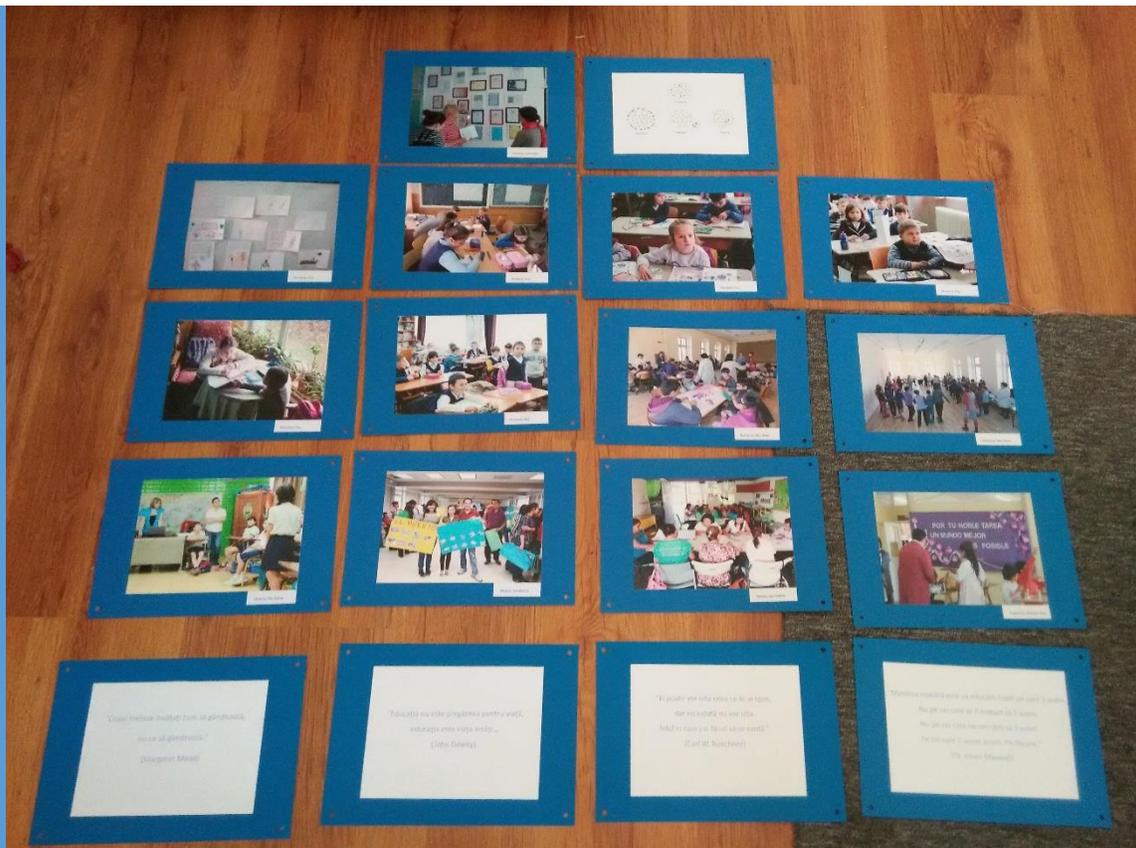


Inclusive School is sChOOL – Learn and live together in democracy



OVERALL RESEARCH REPORT OF THE PROJECT

January 2016

This report is part of the project named „Inclusive School is sChOOL – Learn and live together in democracy,, implemented by four partner organizations:



Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family (FRCCF) in Romania



Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC) in Argentina;



Educación y Desarrollo Sustentable, S.C. /Via Education, in Mexico



Center for the Research of Ethnicity (CVEK) in Slovakia and

and funded by the Open Society Foundation



For the full text of the case studies, country specific reports, pictures, team members and online resources please contact the project webpage:

www.schoolforeveryone.org

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CONTEXT

In all the participating countries inclusive education is crucial due to the big and widening social distance between the poor and/or members of minorities, disadvantaged groups and the rich and/or members of majority. Schools do not decrease the social gap, but on the contrary, they often contribute to its maintenance and widening. Segregation in schools and the big differences between the level of education that the segregated and majority pupils receive are common problems in all participating countries.

There is a huge need in each country to not only discover the good practices but to make them more accessible, and to prove that inclusive and democratic educational methods are adaptable and sustainable.

This project aimed to improve education quality and equity identifying inclusive schools, analyzing and disseminating their practices and results in order to help those who are aware of the need for change.

The original project proposal (2013) focuses on the school practices that allow a school community to foster inclusion in terms of access while maintain high educational quality (the second characteristic of inclusion). This analysis did not focus on understanding whether active inclusion of different actors within the school community in various pedagogical and management spheres is related to the school's ability to be an inclusive school.

Consequently we proposed in our second attempt (August 2014) to see what strategies are most successful in involving pupils actively in their own learning process and what strategies are most successful in involving teachers in the creation of pedagogical practices that fosters inclusion in learning opportunities.

Examining successful practices for inclusion from this “bottom-up” approach too, made possible to present a fuller picture of the kinds of practices needed, at all levels, in order to transform our schools into more inclusive learning communities. We explored the active inclusion in the classroom in order to discover the strategies that foster “bottom-up” inclusion in schools, and how teachers are actively involved in creating opportunities for pupils to participate.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

- 1) To learn about similarities and differences between inclusive schools in Eastern Europe and Latin America, by comparing the results of our research with INCLUD-ED and EPASI (**Desk research**);
- 2) Establishing a common model of inclusive education that can serve as a **shared theoretical framework and research methodology**;
- 3) Development of comparable **case-studies** on the existing inclusive democratic and educational models in the four countries, based on a common educational concept and methodology by jointly defined criteria;
- 4) To explore the relationship of inclusion in terms of access and in terms of quality of education to inclusion in terms of the student's active, participative involvement within the learning processes (**inclusive pedagogy**);
- 5) To determine which pedagogical strategies foster the inclusion of the student within their own process of learning and the positive involvement of pupils in class organization within their classroom and school;
- 6) To determine which pedagogical strategies help teachers within the classroom make all pupils participate as active agents in their own learning processes and in solving classroom problems.

TIMEFRAME

May, 2014 – January, 2016

First phase of the research: according to the original project proposal we examined inclusion in terms of access to education and quality of education by closely exploring the schools that meet the established criteria and defining best practices that foster inclusion at institutional levels, from a “top-down” perspective.

Second phase of the research: we expanded the notion of inclusion from *access* and *quality* to *learning processes* - deepening the observation of processes related to effective learning.

SHARED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our main target was to explore the theoretical background and former researches dealing with inclusive schools/inclusive education. We read and analyzed the already existing research materials in Romania, the INCLUD-ED and EPASI projects and other international bibliography. We discussed the understandings about the INCLUD-ED and EPASI projects via shared working documents and Skype meetings.

First of all, we focused on the results of the INCLUD-ED project (Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe from Education, CIT4-CT-2006-02863), a project supported by the European Commission. Then we studied the national teams' recommended professional literature (articles, books, publications, research studies, provided by NGOs, think tanks and research organizations) about inclusive education and inclusive school. We added the most representative studies and good practice guides to the *Library section* of our website in English, Spanish, Slovak and Romanian languages. After a quite long period of analysis of the bibliography, our conclusion was that the educational system, the discourse, the educational policies, the practice and literature of inclusiveness are strongly focused on children with special educational needs and not on socio-economically disadvantaged children, like poor, ethnic minorities or geographically marginalized children. Therefore, we agreed to deliver a common theoretical framework.

Definition of inclusive education and inclusive school

Inclusive education is not a marginal issue, but is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies. The fundamental principle of inclusive education is that all children should learn together anytime is possible, regardless of the difficulties or the differences between them.

The vision on the inclusive education is that all children reach their full learning potential and decisions are based on the individual needs of the student and founded on evidence: "Inclusive education is a pairing of philosophy and pedagogical practices that allow each student to feel respected, confident and safe so he or she can learn and develop to his or her full potential. It is based on a system of values and beliefs centered on the best interests of the student, which promotes social cohesion, belonging and active participation in learning, a complete school experience, and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community."¹

Inclusive education is about how communities develop and design their schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all pupils learn and participate together: "Inclusive education

¹<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/Definition%20of%20inclusion.pdf>

means that all pupils attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school.²

Most frequently, inclusive education is defined as a process of meeting pupils' needs within the mainstream education system by employing all available resources for creating opportunities for children to learn and be prepared for life.

Inclusive education is the type of education responsible for ensuring the right to education of all children, without any discrimination, focusing on ensuring quality education. It aims to provide optimal learning conditions that give every child the chance for an equal start in life in terms of education.

Inclusive education fights against school leaving, school dropout and school failure through measures that go beyond the material, personal, family or social barriers which children are facing.

Inclusive education is based on the following principles: equal rights, non-discrimination, equal opportunities in education, focus on the child, early intervention, ensuring support services, cooperation, and partnership.

It supports and confirms that all children are able to learn and that they need a form of support for learning. It aims to identify and minimize the learning barriers.

It is more comprehensive than usual formal education, including family and community education, as well as other educational opportunities outside the school.

Definition of inclusive school

Using the information that has been already studied and shared, the national teams together agreed on the theoretical framework, criteria, and indicators to be used in the research.

The Inclusive School involves the widening of the goal of a regular school, transforming it in order to be able to respond to a greater diversity of children, especially marginalized, disadvantaged children and/or children excluded from education.

The Inclusive School involves a constant process of improving educational institutions, with the aim of improving human resources in order to reduce school dropout and social exclusion.

²<http://www.inclusionbc.org/our-priority-areas/inclusive-education/what-inclusive-education>

The Inclusive School/ Education offers unconditional access and adequate response to different educational needs of all children, in order to harmonize learning differences, differences in educational attainments and to provide an efficient education for all.

Principles assumed by the inclusive schools

- ✓ Inclusive education is based on the concept that every pupil has the right to get an education on the basis of equality of opportunities.
- ✓ No pupil can be excluded from education or discriminated on grounds of race, religion, color, sex, language, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, etc.
- ✓ All pupils can learn and benefit from education.
- ✓ Schools should adapt to the needs of pupils, not the other way round.
- ✓ Individual differences between pupils are a source of richness and diversity; they do not represent a problem.
- ✓ Children develop a positive understanding of both self and others. When attending classes which reflect similarities and differences between people, they learn to appreciate diversity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Argentinian team (CIPPEC) elaborated the first document describing the conceptual and operational definition of inclusive school, including the: **a) selection criteria/indicators**, and **b) instruments** for conducting the field work in each of the selected schools. As a result, based on our final definition of inclusive school, an indicator system was elaborated and adapted the best fitting models to the national particularities.

a) Selection criteria and indicators

First scenario: we agreed that **the first selection should include schools** which fulfil the following pre-requisites:

1. Schools are attended by *disadvantaged pupils* (or they are located in neighborhoods where disadvantaged population is significant).
2. The pupils' *average learning results* (based on scores reached in standardized tests) *are higher than other district schools* with similar socio-economic and cultural background.
3. School indicators of *access to education* (entrance, dropout and repetition rates) *are better than other district schools* with similar socio-economic and cultural background.

Then, the **second selection** should only include schools which show the best combinations of the three values (if possible, those which are in the upper –for learning results– and lower –for repetition and dropout rates– quartiles of the distribution).

After the quantitative analysis, **the pre-selection has to be cross-checked through qualitative research**. Some interviews with key referents will be carried out in order to make ourselves sure that, apart from good indicators, pre-selected schools have inclusive practices, good work atmosphere, teaches democratic values and understand “learning” as in a much more complex way than just the acquisition of basic general knowledge. Key referents should be identified in each context, but typical reliable informants are supervisors and education government officials.

We prepared also a second scenario: if no quantitative data on student learning results and dropout/repetition rates were available, a qualitative methodological approach needs to be carried out. In line with the principles of respect to diversity that underlie the inclusive approach, the qualitative research will be based on the **communicative methodology**, the research perspective which has based the INCLUD-ED Project.

The **“Guide for Observing Pedagogical School Management” (see Annex A)** was the main instrument to be used at this stage. It has been built upon the review of relevant bibliography on inclusive school practices, whose indicators go beyond the access and learning dimensions, and include aspects such as coexistence at school, the participation of families and the communities and the transmission of social cohesion-friendly values.

The methodological course of action to carry out the school selection in districts of which there is no quantitative information available was the following:

- Establish contact with intermediate actors of the education system (inspectors, supervisors) and carry out a workshop where the indicator system (see Stage I), which presents a series of indicators to evaluate the presence of inclusive practices at school, is presented and thoroughly analyzed. Afterwards, each inspector should be able to provide

at least 1 (one) example of a school which attends a disadvantaged population, and where both learning results are good and repetition/dropout rates are low.

- In order to be able to triangulate information, an interview with a government officer closely involved with schools should be carried out. The interview should aim to collect the officer's view on the schools mentioned by inspectors/supervisors after the workshop (and on other schools which may have not been mentioned but show inclusive practices as well).
- Furthermore, interviews with other specialists that have contact with schools, teacher trainers, NGO, etc. should be carried out in order to complement this initial information.
- Establishing telephone contact with the selected schools' principals in order to get initial information on the real presence of inclusive practices at schools is an additional step which could help making the selection more robust.

b) Instruments

The following instruments have been designed by the Argentinean team to collect information related to inclusive practices, through the views of different actors of the school community. There were **13 instruments**³ to be translated and adapted to the Romanian, Slovak and Mexican context.

1. Survey for school principals - Annex A) – selection phase
2. Interview for school principals/deputy Phase 1 (Annex B)
3. Interview for teachers Phase 1 (Annex C)
4. Interview for teachers Phase 2 (Annex C)
5. Interview for parents Phase 1 (Annex D)
6. Survey for pupils Phase 1 (Annex E)
7. Focus groups with pupils Phase 1 (Annex F)
8. Focus groups with pupils Phase 2 (Annex F)
9. Guide for observation of lessons Phase 1 (Annex G)
10. Observation matrix Phase 2 (Annex G)
11. Guide for observation of recreational time Phase 1(Annex H)
12. Interview for school special educator /psychologist / social worker Phase 1 (Annex I)
13. Interview for representatives of the County School Inspectorate Phase 1 (Annex J)

³ Please find attached the **Annexes** and the **Table “WorkingInstruments per phase”**.

SAMPLE – SELECTION OF SCHOOLS

A sample of 3 schools in each country was selected to conduct an in depth qualitative research.

Argentina – CIPPEC: Due to the Resolution 3906/04 which does not allow the dissemination of statistical information from schools, selection of schools was carried out by the Buenos Aires Ministry of Education, which ultimately let CIPPEC made the final selection based on the following criteria:

- Schools with people with the highest Social Vulnerability Index of the jurisdiction
- Schools with low Educational Vulnerability Index
- Schools with higher learning results (Quality Index and Educational Equity IECEP of the City of Buenos Aires).

*The selected institutions are School nº 3 and School nº14 of Villa Lugano and School nº 5 of Barracas, with an average of 700 pupils grouped in 24 sections. Pupils who attend these schools come from heterogeneous contexts where the socio-economic level varies between middle and low social strata, with a high percentage of children coming from the slums, which in Argentina are referred as “villas”. **School nº 3 and School nº 14** are located in the neighbourhood of Villa Lugano, southwest of the City of Buenos Aires. It is also one of the neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of slums, characterized by overcrowding, informality and poor working conditions. Between 2001 and 2010, the commune experienced an important population increase that quadrupled the jurisdiction’s average value (Di Pietro and others, 2013). This population growth is a distinctive phenomenon of the neighbourhood, which is mainly explained by the increase of settlements in slums“(32.9% of the total population of the neighbourhood). **School nº 5** is located in the area of Barracas, in the southern area of the City of Buenos Aires, capital of Argentina. Historically, Barracas was an area of country houses and mansions of the city’s upper class. However, during the twentieth century, it became an industrial and immigrant neighbourhood, which has now deteriorated and degraded due to successive crises, and policies to eradicate industries out of town.*

Mexico – Via Education: The schools were chosen based on a three-part selection process. First, all team did a cross-check of learning outcome indicators (specifically school results on the nation ENLACE achievement exam) and grade repetition/dropout rates for all schools in the state of Nuevo León, Mexico, identifying schools that have higher average learning outcomes and lower dropout and repetition rates than neighbouring schools.⁴

⁴ Data for ENLACE, grade repetition and dropout rates available publicly through the government website “Conoce tu escuela” found at <http://www.nl.gob.mx/servicios/conoce-tu-escuela>.

Given the lack of quantitative data on the social vulnerability of the student population within each school, the second step in the selection process was a consultation with state and district education leaders, focusing on identifying schools that attend a disadvantaged population. These two steps yielded a total of ten preliminary schools. The Mexican team initiated phone conversations with the principals at all schools and conducted an in-person interview with the principal at each school, guided by the document “Indicator system for the identification of inclusive schools” in order to narrow down the school selection to three final institutions.

The three selected schools have varied contexts: the *San Pedro School* attends to middle class families in the affluent municipality of San Pedro within Monterrey, the *Independencia School* is in one of the most violent and vulnerable neighbourhoods in Monterrey and the *Apodaca School* is in a semi-rural location.

*All actors at the **San Pedro School** are highly conscious of the social mission of the school of providing better educational opportunities for families who otherwise would not have access to them, and the school continues to provide generous scholarships to pupils whose families cannot pay the modest tuition fees. **Independencia School** is located in a highly marginalized zone within the city in terms of accessibility to public transport, green spaces, public spaces, and cultural and artistic offerings. Additionally the neighbourhood is known for its high levels of poverty and violence. In particular the neighbourhood has been strongly connected to organized crime and to the surge of violence in the state from 2009 to the present. The school has been known since its opening as one that attends to the most vulnerable children of the neighbourhood that have difficult or aggressive behaviour and have been kicked out of other public schools. **Apocada School** has a high turnover level among pupils since it is common for new pupils to arrive throughout the year as well as unexpectedly exit mid-year. Given complex family and economic situations, parents see the need to travel to other places suddenly. The school attends mostly to a low to mid income population.*

Romania and Slovakia: The initial fieldwork showed that **in both countries** there is a lack of available indicators for schools - especially in the case of the first two criteria, or eventually the existing ones were not reliable. Also, there are no official indicators that would determine which school is inclusive and which is not. Therefore, it was not possible to fully rely on the school statistics in the selection process, as they are not of a significant information value when it comes to the school's inclusive capacities. Moreover, the school statistics do not contain data on ethnicity of their pupils, just on nationality, which is a major hindrance considering the fact that the biggest group of children affected by the lack of inclusiveness are of Romani ethnicity, but Romanian/Slovak nationality. Due to this fact the decision was to contact the authorities and/ or NGOs active within the field of inclusive education and ask them for their qualified opinion on the selection of schools. Based on the recommendations of these actors a wider list of potential candidates was made.

Romania – FRCCF could only consult the results of the PISA tests (Programme for International Student Assessment / the most recently published results from the assessment in 2012), and a Unicef RO Study report (*Analysing the situation of out of school children in Romania, 2012*).

The statistical data of the educational units are centralised on county level (by the County School Inspectorates) and depend very much on their willingness to share them in public in spite of the fact that there is a law which makes compulsory the transparency and availability of data collected by the public sector.

We could only get some recommendations according to our criteria and the permission to perform the research in the selected schools. As a result, we decided that the qualitative methods were more efficient in establishing the most inclusive schools. We had to obtain the information on how inclusive are each school's practices from qualitative instruments built upon the main features of these practices at the school level.

First of all, we have chosen two cities to work in: Cluj-Napoca, because the desk research showed that this city was one of the two pilot locations where inclusive education was introduced as concept and practice in 1992. The second location chosen was Satu Mare county, because this one used to have one of the highest rates of school abandonment (especially in pupils aged 14-15), and also because it is inhabited by multi-ethnic population.

According to the agreed methodology, we established contacts with intermediate actors of the education system and performed interviews with other specialists that have contact with schools (teacher trainers, NGOs, social workers, etc.). This way, we were able to identify eight schools with (presumably) socio-economically disadvantaged population, and where both learning results are good and repetition/dropout rates are low. After establishing telephone contact with the selected schools' principals in order to get initial information on the real presence of inclusive practices at schools, and inquiring about their willingness to participate in this research, we selected four schools: two in the city of Cluj-Napoca and two in Satu Mare county (one school in a small town and one in a village). We will refer in this report to only to three of the four selected schools in order to keep the balance with the other countries

In Horea School from Cluj-Napoca, diversity is one of the pupils' strengths most often mentioned by teachers and parents, which proves that school is on the right way to become truly inclusive. It is the policy of Horea School to provide an educational environment free from discrimination of any kind, embracing diversity and equal opportunities for all pupils. The Roma and Hungarian parents' choice to send their children to this school simply proves the inclusiveness of this school. Horea School is located in the central area of Cluj-Napoca Municipality (the most important town of Transylvania, with 304,000 inhabitants), facilitating access of children from surrounding areas of Cluj-Napoca to the school. The school is ranked as "city-centre school", having a potential

*academic performance similar to famous schools in Cluj-Napoca. This is a public school, which offers classes to pupils from grades I-VIII, daytime type of education, in two shifts. The 756 enrolled pupils have the opportunity to study with qualified teachers, 43 in all. **School 1**, as everyone calls it, is a traditional school in **Carei**, being the first school in the city. It is a traditional public school in Carei, a small city with 40,000 inhabitants situated at the Romanian – Hungarian border. It is a multi-ethnic community formed of Hungarian, Romanian, Roma and German (Swabian) population. The school is considered by parents as an institution which offers quality education to their children, but its major strength is the fact that it offers a three-language instruction, ensuring a diversity that not many other schools in the country could offer. The 489 pupils come from various environments; while in some families they get support for better performances, in others they don't enjoy even the fulfilment of their primary needs so they would be able to participate in the school activities. **Culciu Mare Middle School** is located in a rural area, in Culciu Mare village in Satu Mare county. The 4,000 inhabitants are Romanian, Hungarian and Roma. One great achievement of the school is to be part for the third year in the educational project named "Come to school!" financed by UNICEF, due to the great success achieved in the first two years, reducing the school dropout rate. 228 children attend the school in one shift.*

Slovakia – **CVEK** decided to contact the authorities active within the field of inclusive education. These authorities were mainly representatives of non-governmental organisations active within the field of education who used to cooperate with the primary schools in the past and, therefore, could assess more precisely the school's ability/inability to promote inclusion towards its pupils. Based on the recommendations of these actors it was made a wider list of potential candidates.

Secondly, they used the available school statistics and triangulate the school profiles provided by the authorities with the statistical indicators such as achievement in the country wide testing of nine-graders, drop-out rates, number of the absent hours, and percentage of individually integrated pupils. They also took into consideration the geographical locality of the schools bearing in mind the potential regional differences. Based on this process they excluded from the list the schools that were underperforming in the above-mentioned indicators.

Third, they went through the websites of the schools and checked their philosophy statements and the extracurricular projects they were involved in. They searched for the signs of inclusions either on the declarative level, or through the involvement in the specific inclusion promoting projects.

*The schools selected for the project are located in three distinct regions of Slovakia and differ in their internal characteristics. As such they constitute an interesting mosaic and represent somehow authentically inclusive educational efforts in Slovakia with their successes and failures. The **Friendly school in Poprad** is based in a mid-sized city under the*

*Tatra Mountains in the eastern part of the country. It is an associated school that brings under one roof a kindergarten, a primary school and an elementary arts school. It works with all children based on the catchment area principle and is currently attended by 430 children. The **Welcoming school in Smolenice** is based in a small village in the western part of Slovakia. It is currently attended by 237 pupils and its inclusive character is mainly given by its capacity and willingness to work with physically and mentally disabled children. The **School under the castle** is located also in a small village in the eastern region of Slovakia. What makes it distinct from the other schools is the proportion of Roma children that attend the school. 242 children are currently enrolled, most of them Roma. This is mainly a result of the so called "white flight" which the school faced in the past few years. In this sense it should not be considered to be inclusive, but still the inclusive practices are somehow present.*

Indicators

Management, school atmosphere (first phase), classroom atmosphere (second phase), classroom activities, teaching strategies and content, learning support, spatial organization of the classroom, use of time, use of spaces, peer culture, methods and community relations the analyzed schools develop practices that are more or less on their way of learning how to be inclusive.

MAIN FINDINGS

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT – FRAME FOR INCLUSION

Argentinian experience shows that at the level of management, the factors that have improved schools' performance were the integral vision, pedagogical project, resource management, pedagogical support, information management and leadership. Social segregation, practices and conceptions of traditional schooling were changed by the schoolteachers and administrators to promote a more inclusive school. To achieve that, sharing a common vision was crucial. Teachers and Principals understood that everyone can learn, that every situation can be reversed, so they tried to provide new opportunities for children with more difficulties. Bridging networks, prioritizing efforts and resources, implementing a strong leadership and the constant search for external support and the creation of networks to achieve joint collaboration have helped the school principals to address situations that they were unable to solve before. An innovative idea was to create a horizontal leadership. Instead of representing the "head" of the institution, the principals positioned themselves as part of the team. They managed to create horizontal relationships, in which they encouraged not only the involvement of various parties in the

decision-making process, but also exercised leadership prioritizing the review and analysis of their own strategies and measures. Before putting the emphasis on the problems of children and their families, they choose to reflect upon their own practices.

In all three **Mexican schools**, the principal is a key player who sets the tone for the entire school. All principals are admired and respected by their colleagues for their moral and professional leadership. More than any other actor they embody and live the vision of the school in all their interactions and encourage others to do so. Each school also has a vision which is shared by all school actors. Equally important as having a vision is that in each school all the relevant actors recognize, can articulate and understand the vision that unites them: in all three schools, the vision is almost palpable in the sense that it feels “lived” every day at the school. The school managers pointed out the importance of having time and space set aside for face-to-face time between all team members. Two of the three selected schools in Mexico actively cultivate the monthly meetings as a valuable space to check-in with the entire team and create a stronger sense of a team between staff members. At school level these sessions are carefully planned in order to ensure the best use of time, and teachers claim that it is a valuable space to them in order to remind themselves they are part of a team, discuss specific cases of pupils, analyze strengths and weaknesses and understand progress toward school and grade level goals.

In the **Romanian** schools, the main concern of the institutions’ managers is the interest of the children. The school principals have an interest for everything happening in the school, so they analyze the facts on site and collect the information from the children, parents and teachers as well. The school principals don’t put neither bureaucracy nor image on the first place; they simply want things to really work and all involved persons to be satisfied. School principals strive to ensure that the schools are functioning in harmony with their purpose, so that pupils should find their place in life, be ready for life and be able to earn their living. The Board (Administrative Council), the school principal and the deputy director form the management team of the school. They are responsible for coordinating all matters pertaining to school mission, school governance and management, educational leadership, standards and procedures, national accreditation, human resources, professional development, communication, budget and other matters related to administration. A positive fact mentioned during the interviews was that the teachers enjoy the support of the school management whenever they want to do something new in the classroom. This kind of communication facilitate a real community of the teaching staff, the teachers help each other as they can while feeling overwhelmed by the children who really need their attention.

In **Slovakia**, what proved to be absolutely crucial in the schools capacity to promote inclusion was the presence of those persons who would take the inclusive principles for their own and would be willing to introduce them in the school. These actors would be the key figures to set the

school's inclusive character. The selected schools, however, differed in the extent the inclusive principles were widely shared among the team members. Whereas in the Welcoming School in *Smolenice* the school's inclusive policy was mainly a result of an active involvement of a special pedagogue who had been trying to create the inclusive milieu in the school for the past 15 years, in the Friendly school in Poprad it was observed a more widely shared consensus about the need for inclusion. In Poprad School inclusion is something which is being discussed on a regular basis during team meetings every week and, therefore, it is not a distant concept, but becomes a tangible set of practices. An important aspect that helped to promote inclusion on the institutional level was related to the school's involvement in extracurricular projects. May it be the enrollment into UNICEF children-friendly school program, or a wider cooperation with schools from abroad with the aim of information and teaching methods exchange, these projects have created an important frame for school's further development.

INCLUSION – AS A SCHOOL POLICY

Common findings

Although the 12 schools were carefully selected, it is important to emphasize that neither of them is completely inclusive in its practices. Each presents both specific strengths and weaknesses in terms of inclusion around different elements. The knowledge and skills developed in these schools, which counterbalance daily problems/barriers and have a positive impact on the final results, should be recognized, strengthened and brought to light in our case studies.

Argentina

In terms of management, atmosphere, teaching methods and community relations the analysed schools develop practices that are in the process of being inclusive. Argentina is one of the countries with the widest achievement gaps between schools (OECD, 2010). In spite of the socio-economic and systemic barriers, we discovered hidden and unconsidered value in the educational system. Therefore, it is still possible to identify institutions that comply with the responsibility to teach and include children living under poverty conditions. These are schools that, even in contexts of high social vulnerability, manage to achieve real inclusion at school and in the world of knowledge. In all the three analysed schools social segregation, practices and conceptions of traditional schooling among other things constructed a homogenizing vision that schoolteachers and administrators changed to promote a more inclusive school. To achieve this, *sharing a common vision was crucial*. Teachers and Principals are now convinced that everyone can learn, that every situation can be reversed and they therefore seek to provide new opportunities for children with more difficulties.

Mexico

Though it is important that all schools keep advancing in order to truly embody inclusionary schools, their varied degrees of success in this endeavour provide rich material for case studies. In particular, our case studies stress that inclusion in some aspects of the schools does not imply inclusion in all aspects of the school, and conversely that good practices can be learned from certain aspects even if the entire school cannot be classified as inclusive. In this context, the Mexican team examined three schools in the metropolitan area of the north-eastern city of Monterrey in order to study good practices in terms of educational inclusion. Although the schools were carefully selected, it is important to emphasize that none of them are completely inclusive in their practices. Each presents both specific strengths and weaknesses in terms of inclusion around different elements.

Romania

Schools that are on their way to inclusion are characterized by the widening of their objectives as opposed to a regular school, transforming themselves in order to be able to respond to a greater diversity of children, especially marginalized, disadvantaged children and/or children excluded from education. As for the implementation of the inclusive policy assumed by the school management at classroom and pupil level, there are some agreed practices with the teachers which differs from school to school. All the three schools fight against school leaving, school dropout and school failure through measures that go beyond the material, personal, family or social barriers which children are facing.

Slovakia

The schools selected for the project are located in three distinct regions of Slovakia and differ in their internal characteristics. As such they constitute an interesting mosaic and represent somehow authentically inclusive educational efforts in Slovakia with their successes and failures. The three selected schools in Slovakia have undertaken some major steps towards inclusive education. Despite the fact that neither of them could be considered to be fully inclusive, in the light of institutional drawbacks, lack of finances and lack of auxiliary team members their efforts to create an inclusive and friendly milieu for all children are outstanding and as such could serve as a source of good practices and successful methods for other schools.

Besides the above mentioned systemic barriers that prevent the schools to pursue inclusive principles more thoroughly, it is mainly the ability to get all the team members on one inclusive board that is crucial for the school. Also, the ability to seek support outside and include the parents and the wider community into the child's teaching process is something that the schools have to enhance even more. The major drawback also remains the fact that in some cases even the schools selected as good practices of inclusive education tend to stream pupils into different classes based on their performance. This points to the fact, that despite existence of good practices more systemic school reform in Slovakia is needed.

SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE – BETWEEN THE WALLS

According to **Argentinian** pupils, parents, teachers and management members, getting to know the realities, background and conditions of the pupils, as well as understanding their context, was crucial to create a work climate of harmony and compromise, to bond with families and to focus on teaching strategies and projects adapted to the real needs of pupils in order to enhance their performances.

The teachers at each of the selected **Mexican** schools comment that they feel like part of a team where they are welcomed, appreciated and valued as professionals. They feel the school is an enjoyable place to be and that its mission and vision match their own personal values, so it is a way to live out their beliefs and life goals. It is also crucial to ensure that parents, families and pupils also feel like part of the school.

The working atmosphere in the selected **Romanian** school is pleasant, „like a second home“. The emotional climate in the school ensures that the children feel comfortable when communicating with the teachers or other personnel in the school. Voluntary activities carried out by the teachers and pupils, designed to beautify the school environment, talk about the school atmosphere. Physical and psychological safety of pupils is a permanent and visible concern. Teachers are always present on duty in order to supervise pupils during breaks and take action whenever necessary. There is a “zero tolerance policy” regarding verbal violence within the school.

An important feature of the inclusive approach of the schools is the open communication. The basic demonstration of this approach in **Slovakia** would be the children' involvement in the creation of the school rules or the existence of the school parliament, but it could go as deeply as inviting opinion of the children on issues related to school's general modus operandi. Important part of the school atmosphere would also entail the trust and willingness to understand the specific situation of each pupil, may it be his/her special learning needs, his/her family situation, or his/her actual mood and state of health. In this sense could be the institutional setting altered towards more friendly and understanding setting.

PUPILS – IN THE FOCUS

Argentina

Pupils who attend the selected schools come from heterogeneous contexts where the socio-economic level varies between middle and low social strata, with a high percentage of children coming from the *slums (villas)*. While the context of socio-economic vulnerability from which the

children come from entails problems of another kind, such as a lack of support of families, domestic violence or illiteracy, the aim of these schools is to tackle those issues providing opportunities to constantly improve school performance.

Student's motivation is a permanent guideline at the three schools. Besides counting on their teachers, schools emphasize the importance of strengthening self-confidence of pupils. Being accepted and feeling of belonging are revealed as key elements that stimulate learning. For example, teachers are expected to give personalized feedback for each student in the School Report.

To support pupils with more difficulties, teachers work together with Support Teachers. Support Teachers focus on teaching and learning of pupils who need different and extra resources to keep up with the rest of the class. Through individualized work and alternative strategies, and also with activities within the grade, pupils are provided with more opportunities to improve their performances. In this way, they avoid labelling the most disadvantaged pupils while fostering a relationship of complicity.

Another key strategy that show teachers efforts to focus on pupils need is the use of nodal artistic projects like radio workshops and online journal in which space and place are provided for pupils to talk and write about their own interests.

Mexico

The San Pedro School focuses on the integral human development of the student, not only to achieve better academic results, but because its vision of a successful education is one that attends to all aspects of the child, holistically. All school actors are in tune and aligned to this vision and ensure that the way teacher treat pupils and in turn that the administration manages the school follows from these principles. Pupils receive psychological help when needed from the school psychologist. All teachers seek to create personal bonds with their pupils in order to understand where they are emotionally, not just academically.

Focus on the dignity of the student in a context of high vulnerability in the Independencia and the Apodaca schools', where staff are highly aware of the socioeconomic status of pupils that they serve and the difficulties at home that they face. Instead of ignoring this context or of wishing to do their work "in spite of it", the schools embrace the possibility of using that context to provide better services for children. Indeed, in both schools the teachers believe part of their role is to treat each student with love and respect that is particularly essential because they may not be receiving such treating at home.

Romania

The ethnical and religious diversity of the children in the *Culciu Mare School* (Romanians, Hungarians and Roma) is used by the teachers to introduce and study the idea of equality. The discussions, examples, models are used not to create a knowledge base but to build character in pupils: it is very important, because at home, the parents either have no time, either they do not know or they are not able to explain these issues to their children, so there should be supplementary work in the school on this aspect. Sometimes, class masters get to know very delicate, unpleasant issues about the children's families. These overwhelming problems impact children who tend to hide them from fear, shame or think it is their fault. While the school counsellor has little time for such subjects, the class masters are those who do their best to facilitate and solve these problems that can limit the child's success in school and later life. Records on children's socio-economic backgrounds are not available, so sometimes it is very difficult to help in due time.

Slovakia

One of the most crucial principles of inclusive education put into practice would be the focus on individual progress of pupils instead of on their marks. In this sense also the specific learning needs could be understood not as a limitation, but as a source of further development. All three schools tried to assess and map the progress and develop the specific talents each child possess. In this regard it seems to help when the school gets familiar with the child and his/her situation already prior to his/her enrolment, either through the kindergarten, or through consultations and if the school remains in close contact with the family.

Also, what seems to be helping to develop the children's rapport with the teachers and support the capacity of children to express themselves is the existence of so called communities: regular meetings in a circle with pupils and their homeroom teacher that are used for different purposes, but mainly to invite children's opinion and solve problems in the class.

However, all three schools identified lack of auxiliary team members as a major obstacle in their inclusive efforts. The lack of human resources in this sense prevents the school significantly to respond flexibly to the needs of the children, especially when it comes to specific learning needs. Even though the schools tried to tackle this through different initiatives (e.g. cooperation with the municipality and employment of people as a part of a specific internship), the shortage of human capital has been a reoccurring theme.

TEACHERS – EVERY DAY MODELS FOR INCLUSION

All analyzed schools in **Argentina** showed that the only way to keep pupils motivated and encouraged is by meaningful and contextualized content flexible planning. Teachers tend to

choose content according to the interests of the pupils. They also make efforts to bring up activities where pupils can express their views, provide hypothesis, and draw conclusions. Pupil's motivation is a permanent guideline in each of the three schools. Besides counting on their teachers, it is emphasized the importance of strengthening self-confidence of pupils. Being accepted and feeling of belonging are revealed as key elements that stimulate learning. For example, teachers are expected to give personalized feedback for each pupil in the School Report. To support pupils with more difficulties, teachers work together with Support Teachers, who focus on teaching and learning of pupils who need different and extra resources to keep up with the rest of the class. Through individualized work and alternative strategies, and also with activities within the grade, pupils are provided with more opportunities to improve their performances. In this way, they avoid labeling the most disadvantaged pupils while fostering a relationship of complicity.

In **Mexico**, the belief in the potential of all pupils, and subsequently the responsibility of teachers to unleash this potential in all pupils, translates into schools using a variety of techniques and tools in order to make learning accessible for all pupils. All schools use some system that allows them to closely track pupils' individual learning. Two opposite practices regarding the teacher selection process are observed in private and state schools. Private schools have rigorous teacher selection process that ensures that only those teachers with the right profile are working in the school. Also it worth mentioning the equally rigorous promotion and development process, where teachers are constantly accompanied, given feedback and supported in order to continue improving their teaching abilities. They have constant access to their supervisor for help and that the school also cultivates the importance of spaces that encourage teachers to share their experiences, learn from each other and continue their professional development. By contrast, in the public schools it is difficult to fire teachers who are doing unsatisfactory work, so the principals strive to ensure a hard-working team which makes it easier for newcomers to assimilate into the school culture and do good work as well.

To ensure maximum involvement of the teachers in the effort to turn the school into an inclusive one, the **Romanian** school principals are actively seeking the accurate training opportunities and encourage staff to take part in. Equitable distribution of pupils and teachers in classrooms is an important characteristic of the selected schools, since every child is given a real chance to be included in any of the study classes, by eliminating selection on various criteria. Still, there are teachers/class masters who would like to work only with children who demonstrate high intellectual level, good behavior, and increased motivation for learning, given the professional skills of a teacher can be seen among others in the way he/she connects the prior knowledge to the following learning contents. The differences between the pupils are used as a resource in the teaching process. The schools admit children with disabilities and they propose specific curricula and differentiated assessment for the children with SEN, with the help of the support teacher and the school counselor. The curriculum adaptation is made informally too, in the case of the

children who don't have SEN documents, but they could fit into the terms of the procedure; this approach benefits the children whose parents didn't want, accept or understand the need to complete this step.

The inclusive system which is meant to be implemented in **Slovakia** requires teachers to focus not only on the class as a whole, but until some extent also on each child individually. This puts an additional burden on their shoulders, therefore the motivation of teachers and constant and fluid communication with school management and parents play a crucial role. What proved to be even more important is a possibility to seek support by other auxiliary team members - teaching assistants, special pedagogues and school psychologists. It is the vital cooperation between these actors which makes inclusion possible. Not only are they able to assess the individual situation of the child, create an individual learning plan and help with its implementation, but they could also assist with solving out the situation during the classes and create the space where children could calm down/rest/seek support. However, all three schools identified lack of auxiliary team members as a major obstacle in their inclusive efforts. The lack of human resources in this sense prevents the school significantly to respond flexibly to the needs of the children, especially when it comes to specific learning needs. Even though the schools tried to tackle this through different initiatives, e.g. cooperation with the municipality and employment of people as a part of a specific internship, the shortage of human capital has been a reoccurring theme.

THE CLASS LEVEL OF INCLUSION – INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

The second phase follows on the analysis on inclusive practices at the school level by focusing on inclusive strategies within the classroom at the Argentinian, Mexican, Romanian and Slovakian contexts. ***In particular, the analysis explores inclusive teaching practices with affective, social and intellectual purposes*** geared to expanding meaning and relevance of learning for all pupils.

These practices are guided by ***the inclusive pedagogy principles*** of co-agency, trust, unpredictability, collaboration and working together, and access for all.

With the goal of deepening the analysis of strategies that foster inclusion in schools, the second phase of the project accounts for practices that promote effective learning from a bottom-up approach in the Argentinean, Mexican, Romanian and Slovak contexts. A sample of schools from the 1st phase has been examined in their 'smallest' unit in order to focus the study on teacher-student relationship within the classroom as environments where learning opportunities are available for all.

The objective of this second phase was to explore the extent to which teachers' practices and beliefs at the schools under study are aligned to the inclusive pedagogy approach and the principles that guide them. This report presents a detailed description of teaching practices and tools identified as having an impact on pupils' involvement in each country. Based on each Country Report and the main findings, challenges and aspects to improve in each context, each country research was carried out in one school selected from the 1st phase sample. Data has been collected through interviews for teachers, focus groups with pupils, surveys for pupils, and class observations⁵.

Argentina. Success ingredients to enhance teaching practices with *affective purposes* in the Argentinean school involved teachers that care for each pupil's needs and that make pupils know that their learning and wellbeing is a priority. By showing them real interest in their learning, teachers increase motivation and commitment for academic success.

Offering alternative opportunities and paying close attention to their personal situations make teachers boost pupils' self-esteem, attitude and confidence towards learning. Standing on their side and stressing the value of everyone's work have proven to have impact on the most relegated pupils and their disposition towards learning. This caring attitude is complemented by mechanisms that help remove emotional obstacles and enhance pupils' trust in teachers and in themselves. In order to do that, teachers set time aside to ask pupils about their feelings and opinions. In addition, at the Argentinean school Art has become a key transversal component as a way to foster everyone's participation, precisely to strengthen self-expression skills.

Social purposes: to promote peer culture in the classroom, teachers at the Argentinean school stress the importance of sharing with parents and even classmates the responsibility for student learning. To do that, they design tasks and assignments that require teamwork, workshops, co-evaluation and discussions. Not only these strategies foster social values but also raise their engagement towards learning.

Activities that result in more success are those where pupils are asked to help classmates with more difficulties or even from lower grades. Teachers believe that in this way even the not-so-engaged pupils become increasingly committed when they are placed in different positions, when they are given a teaching or leading role. Pupils seem to learn twice through the metacognitive activity of thinking and planning how to explain certain content to others. That is why pupils are not separated according their ability, but to their interests, friendships and trust. In most cases they set activities where the fastest children are mixed with the ones who face

⁵ Please find attached the [Table "Working Instruments per phase"](#).

more learning difficulties. From the lowest to highest grades, from writing skills to Math and Art, this feature was observed in most interviewed teachers' classrooms.

Intellectual purposes. Teachers try to resist and oppose limits on learning created by external forces by adapting the curriculum content to contextual issues such as local elections, football cups, neighborhood matters; this allowed more pupils to be in conditions to participate and contribute and some of them happened to be surprisingly active. In addition to this, opening and widening the models of learning and approaches to planning enable the use of creative tasks and projects such as the radio program, the kiosk, and games that also expand learning opportunities by responding to individual's needs.

By organizing the content according to multidisciplinary projects or nodal questions, teachers manage to facilitate the generation of meaningful knowledge related issues that are relevant for pupils. According to teachers, one of the most effective ways to deal with children who lag behind in class is to adapt content to pupils' interests, backgrounds or previous ideas. Creating such learning opportunities extends what is ordinarily available for all learners instead of just for some. For instance, everyday issues and conflicts from the neighborhood and the news are highly strategic to engage pupils.

Mexico. Teachers emphasize that in order to guarantee the inclusion of all pupils and an opportunity for relevant and meaningful learning for all it is essential to establish a connection with each student. Practices with affective purposes linking feelings, values, motivation and attitudes in pupils are highlighted by teachers at the Mexican school as the "building block" on which a teacher can then promote a productive classroom environment, both in terms of learning and in terms of social interactions with other pupils. The practices highlighted by teachers for affective purposes include those focused on (1) building trust and a personal connection with each student; (2) understanding and accepting children's needs beyond the classroom; and (3) understanding and recognizing children's backgrounds, and responding to them adequately.

Affective purposes. All teachers emphasized the importance of recognizing the student as an individual and building a relationship with him or her in order to work effectively. Part of this connection is based on the trust and mutual respect between the teachers and the student. Teachers spoke of this role as a natural part of their responsibility, speaking of it as a kind of "fundamental base" on which to build further interactions with the student.

The practices highlighted by teachers for *social purposes* include those focused on (1) recognizing and being attentive to the social interactions of children, and (2) developing socio-emotional skills in all children to recognize their own feelings, those of others, and deal and manage conflict adequately. These practices especially reflect the inclusive pedagogy principles of co-agency, trust and working together.

The teachers interviewed emphasized in different ways the importance of social interactions between pupils. Even before mentioning strategies to include pupils in relevant learning, teachers highlighted the importance of bringing each student into the classroom, into the group, and making him or her feel a part of it. Being responsive to these dynamics allows the teachers to help promote a good classroom environment, which can then make learning for all easier. Teachers use this social awareness to observe interactions inside and outside the classroom, and guarantee that all pupils feel included in such a way that then allows them to focus fully on learning.

The practices highlighted by teachers for *intellectual purposes* include those focused on (1) using differences in student achievement to help everyone's learning; (2) participative learning that allows children to be the protagonists of their learning processes and (3) practices that help give teachers feedback about individual learning and techniques that allow them to respond to different learning styles.

Teachers in the classroom all emphasize that it is important to use differences in pupils' learning and achievement to strengthen the learning of all, instead of believing that differences in achievement are a barrier to this. In fact, a teacher mentions that this scheme also helps the more able pupils stay on task and engaged. For example, all teachers mentioned that a common strategy in this sense is that of "student tutors".

A second set of practices related to this purpose covered by teachers and observed in classrooms related to engaging pupils actively. Teachers commented first on the importance of tapping into pupils' intrinsic motivations for learning, while recognizing that they are often "constrained by the curriculum," also highlighted that there are often moments within each unit for introducing topics that pupils want to learn about. This engages more pupils and allows them to more actively interact with the material, expanding meaning for all. Though two teachers mention opening up subject matter to pupils, it is not clear from classroom observations how much of learning is actually dictated by pupils' interests versus a narrowly focused curriculum.

Romania.

Affective purposes. The atmosphere during classes – without exception – is warm; pupils and teachers respect and trust each other. Teachers usually give positive messages to pupils, encourage them to keep trying, and show trust in their capacity of learning – but this happens mostly for the whole classroom, not individually. Teachers are kind and patient, but they do not tolerate if pupils are not respectful to each other.

Theoretically, almost all of the interviewed teachers accepted and valued children's spontaneity. In practice, their behavior and acceptance varied from class to class. By the end of the day, teachers were asking for more discipline and were less willing to accept the children's spontaneous interventions. In classrooms with 25-29 children, it is impossible to meet the needs

of all the pupils, however, ADHD or SEN children are allowed all possible concessions: they can move around, stand or walk, eat or drink water during classes, provided they do not disturb the others.

Success ingredients of teaching practices with *social purposes* at the Romanian school are influenced by the new school system: pupils enrolled in the preparatory class at 6 years old, are benefitting from a better organized classroom layout, adjusted to their preschool age needs, and a friendly and easy program/curricula as well. Therefore, the context enables teaching practices to provide more leisure and artistic activities, which improves the quality of social interactions between them: meeting daily on the carpet at their first class, many classes for reading stories, playing, drawing, singing, and physical exercises/ relaxation.

During class observations, the beneficial effects of this different "starting school for the first time" are obvious: smiling, relaxed, cheerful, active, cooperative, confident children, and warm relationships with their teacher. However, the two primary school teachers' attitudes are different. The primary school teacher (an elder one, nearing retirement age) of the 3rd C grade is more authoritative, more eager to ensure discipline during classes, but very attentive to each child and full of devotion. The other primary school teacher (3rd A grade), who also has university studies in the field of special education, uses more alternative methods.

Intellectual purposes. Teaching / transmitting new knowledge is generally perceived as serious work, conscientiously supported by all the teachers observed. They are striving to do their best and explain clearly and concisely, conduct classroom demonstrations even under difficult conditions (no Chemistry or Physics labs), prepare topic-specific tests and worksheets for the entire class, including special ones for children with learning challenges. Most of the teachers take into account what pupils already know and rely on their prior knowledge. Some of them use new methods (video-projector, grouping children and working on projects, or on nodal questions). But very few of them are really flexible, and interactive work with children seems to be the exception rather than the routine.

One of the essential elements of inclusive education lies in the fact that children are active subjects of their own learning. What is missing, is the pupils' involvement in establishing the learning content, in choosing methods or teaching locations. Teachers unanimously stated that it was quite difficult to get pupils involved and interested in the common goal/task. Teachers told us that children rarely came up, during a lesson, with their own ideas for an activity. It is also true that when asking about the reasons for this passive attitude, most of the teachers recognized that they did not even think about it or they did not even notice that children did not ask questions; or worse, some of the teachers probably ignored the children's questions or even directly discouraged them. Even when children come up with a certain proposal, it is always the teacher's decision whether to proceed with the idea or not.

Slovakia. In Slovak schools, teaching practices that promote *affective purposes* gave significant importance to the individual temperament, nature and needs of each child. Therefore, teachers tend to adapt their approach to children, forms of communication or class work to these different conditions. For instance, one of the most effective strategies that they implement are the “mind refreshers” which consist in singing songs, dancing or simply changing activities or pace of the class.

Another example of teachers’ respect for pupils’ needs has to do with the spatial arrangement of the class. Teachers tend to apply different criteria for sitting arrangements; pupils can sometimes sit as they wish, according to with whom they feel more comfortable with and whom they trust, while other times sitting is strategically planned in order to grant pupils a chance to interact with different classmates. Some of them also decide who will sit with whom directly as they try to “pair” talented children with those with special educational needs to ensure peer learning.

One of the most remarkable strategies of the Slovak school that enhances teaching practices with *social purposes* are the “community sessions” which are held twice a week before the beginning of the school day. Children and teachers discuss all relevant issues related to school life, but also the personal situation of children. In this way children have a chance to express their feelings and teachers are able to mediate potential conflicts or problems emerging at home or at school. Community sessions strengthen the sense of belonging to the class and help build deep relationships between children, as well as between children and their teacher.

Another mechanism that enhances integration relates to teachers’ beliefs on how to label pupils with disabilities or special educational needs. In many cases, children do not even know what diagnosis they have (e.g. dyslexia, Asperger syndrome, ADHD), so they do not get stressed by the fact that they are somehow different from their classmates. Although in practice this is still a challenge, it does contribute to strengthen inclusion at the school.

A powerful strategy of teaching practices that promote *intellectual purposes* at this school is teachers’ capacity to work with the flow of the class. This seems to make lessons more participatory and fitting to the needs of children. A highly significant factor that contributes to this is time constraints. The majority of lessons in the Slovak school last 90 minutes, unlike the usual 45 that are implemented in the rest. This is well appreciated by teachers who are able to plan lessons with greater depth and complexity.

Moreover, in order to implement mechanisms where there is enough flexibility to take into account everyone's interests, teachers tend to design activities in which pupils are assigned to create something or come up with a solution to a problem; these are reported to bring much

better results. Therefore, setting aside some time within a lesson in which children will be invited to come up with their own proposals seems to contribute to pupils' engagement.

The use of different resources, like technology, and media resources help teachers to increase pupils' motivation, not only for assignments but even for tests. Another advantage is that it helps teachers to work with children at different speeds. For instance, a Math teacher contrasts the usage of tablets to the usage of classical white/black board with highly different results. Whereas using the classical board the whole class waits for the pupil to complete the task, using tablets enables pupils to work and check their responses individually. Another useful instrument that characterizes teaching practices with intellectual purposes are the use of concept maps and posters. Whereas the purpose of concept maps is to write down what has already been learned and eventually to make connections with the other subjects, the posters are smaller projects done usually once in a month and devoted to a particular topic that are chosen by the pupils.

SCHOOL – PARENTS – COMMUNITY RELATION

Sharing responsibility with parents about pupils' learning is a strength of the inclusive schools in **Argentina**. To achieve this, schools tried to engage families by increasing their sense of belonging. They wanted to show to the families that school needs them as much as they need the school to improve their children's future. Schools succeeded to strengthen the family-school bond by implementing measures like storytelling workshops, celebrations like birthday and national days, where parents were called to participate with the decoration, cooking, or even with costume making. School offered them meaningful activities that captured the family's interests and abilities to empower them for their educational role. They try to generate an alternative space to foster dialogue in school. Schools aim to widen pupils' opportunities by showing what's outside their neighborhoods. Going on excursions, visit to museums, and general contact with other kind of cultures and forms of expression is a shared measure in the three schools. They strongly believe that the children should be recognized both by others and by themselves like equals and capable of performing activities related to knowledge.

In **Mexico**, all three schools actively promote the inclusion of the family in the learning processes of pupils. All three schools invite parents to events regularly, including ceremonies, assemblies and celebrations. Additionally to different degrees schools open their doors to parents who wish to participate in pupils' learning. Like most public schools, the selected schools from this country ask for voluntary donations from parents in order to be able to get school materials and basic necessities. In order to encourage more cooperation, however, the schools regularly report in finances to all parents and make their budgets completely transparent so that everyone can access and consult them. This inspires trust and cooperation on behalf of families as well as they feel more involved in school decision-making and policies. The schools struggle to get adequate

participation from parents for a variety of activities, including voluntary monetary contributions for the school, help and follow-up with pupil homework, and basic activities like ensuring that the children are fed, bathed and with shoes and clothes on for a full day at school. But instead of seeing parents and families as a kind of enemy that makes their job harder, teachers at both schools stress that they understand the difficulties that families face, i.e. tiring and time-consuming jobs, absent parents, financial stress, and that parents and teachers are working towards the same goal.

In **Romania**, the general opinion is that the teacher is the major influencing factor of the relationship between the school and the parents. There is a need to build a strong relationship with the parents and there is a hard work to do when forming a team for supporting the child in the learning process. The parents are open to communication, but the school has the power to initiate the process. Regular meetings with parents are to be held at least two times per semester, but in reality they are held more often. The parents' description of the teachers expresses their great respect for the teachers' work. The decision of sending the child to a school is motivated mainly by the proximity: it is the school from the village or the neighborhood, so it is convenient when speaking both about the money and time. For many parents, the image of a „good school” was important too, and sometimes they know the school because they attended it too. From the outside, the people from the community, the persons who haven't got any more children in the school or they haven't got yet children in the school, appreciate the schools for the children's performances, which they found out from the local televisions or the written media. As inclusion is a political commitment assumed by the school, community openness is also one of the most important objectives. In the case of *Horea School* in Cluj-Napoca, this is primarily visible through its "open door policy": the two exterior doors and the access door to the building are unlocked, unlike other schools in the region.

Despite the fact that in **Slovakia** all three schools' representatives were fully aware of the importance of working with parents, not in all cases the cooperation went smoothly. In one of the three schools, the involvement of parents into the school life was not sufficient and it would probably need more institutional support. But on the other two schools, the parents' involvement was not only recognized as highly needed and relevant, but also actively promoted through different modes of cooperation such as alternative PTA meetings, open classes or joint activities such as e.g. reparation of the playground. Despite the involvement of the community, it still does not seem to be a priority or common practice for neither of the three selected schools; however, there are premises for the successful efforts in this regard. May it be the tourist guide of the city of *Poprad* created by children under supervision of their arts teachers, the organization of different events such as Apples day or Children's day or a symbolic live chain in the name of the burned castle in *Krásnohorské Podhradie*, this kind of events helps to enhance the credit of the school, as much as provide their pupils with important social awareness.

SUCCESS INGREDIENTS IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

The selected schools have undertaken some major steps towards inclusive education. Despite the fact that neither of them could be considered to be fully inclusive, in the light of institutional drawbacks, lack of finances and lack of auxiliary team members, their efforts to create an inclusive and friendly environment for all children are outstanding and as such could serve as a source of good practices and successful methods for other schools.

Comparing the research results we observed some differences and common characteristics between the observed schools in Latin America and Eastern Europe.

Differences:

In Latin America (Argentina and Mexico):

Schools are more open to pupils and their families: parents receive educational services; they actively contribute to school life and the school staff sees parents as partners and not outsiders.

- Community-involvement is actively encouraged and is a substantial part of education system.
- There is greater diversity in terms of ethnic composition of school population and material situation of children.
- School curricula is more permissive, which makes it possible to adapt to the real context of pedagogical act.

In Eastern Europe (Romania, Slovakia):

- Strong presence of traditional teaching practices focusing on discipline, control and generally speaking, there is a more authoritarian environment (teaching content is strongly supervised by educational authorities, local authorities are hiring the school-staff etc.).
- Modern technology (such as computers, video-projectors, internet-connection) etc. is until some extent available for majority of schools, but still not "organically" used by the teaching staff.
- Project-based teaching and cooperation between schools (including exchange of best practice) is financially supported various grant schemes (such as for instance EU structural funds) which makes more accessible to the schools. However, the major barrier of bureaucratic procedures remains in place.

The schools analysed in the four countries have lots of **common characteristics** such as:

- **Strong principals/headmasters** who have relevant leadership experience and who internalize, consolidate and effectively communicate and spread the school's social vision to all relevant school actors lead schools. School principals in all three schools set the tone for the school climate and ensure that the school lives out its social purpose and that all school actors also live up to this shared vision.
- **School vision and integral projects** that provide more and alternative opportunities for pupils from vulnerable contexts. Spreading a message from the head to the staff full of convictions against determinism and labelling following the motto "everybody can learn".
- **Schools are striving to adapt to the needs of their pupils and not vice-versa.**
- Inclusive and firm leadership that fosters a **welcoming environment for all key school actors**, from teachers to secretaries to the principal. School staff feel welcomed, appreciated and valued at the school and treated as professionals.
- Ensuring **a healthy, safe, friendly and peaceful classroom and school environment** for all pupils, either through specific programs focused on creating a healthy school climate or through specific teacher and administrator actions focused on the same goal. Ensuring such an environment is viewed as an end goal in itself, not only useful as an intermediate goal to achieve better academic results.
- **Committed teachers** view their job to develop the potential of every student in whatever ways work the student; teachers internalize their responsibility of engaging pupils differently and of connecting to each student personally.
- Most of the teaching staff of the selected schools **believe that all children are able to learn** and that they need a form of support for learning, so they aim to identify and minimize the existing learning barriers.
- **Motivation and acceptance are the key elements** of the school's work with pupils.
- Provision of pedagogical support to empower and back up teachers. **Support Teachers** became a crucial element to encourage and help those with more difficulties by working through projects or alternative methodologies.
- **Inclusive practices are more context-based** (needs and situations), and not so much "standardized" practices. Teachers declare not to be "taught" to do X or Y, but rather they adapt naturally to the classroom environment - which aligns with inclusive pedagogy concept that stresses the natural capacity of teachers to create solutions together with the children /the class.

- **Teachers use a variety of resources in order to engage each student individually** and also attend to different levels of learning within the classroom, and are supported by principals and support teachers in this endeavour. Classroom teachers use a variety of resources for this end, whether through technology, with support teachers who work with pupils individualized, or through techniques like mentoring and tutoring between pupils to ensure that all learn and no one stays behind.
- **These schools fight against school leaving, school dropout and school failure** through measures that go beyond the material, personal, family or social barriers which children are facing.
- **Involving parents** in school-life (open classes, workshops, events, etc.) in order to learn and participate as relevant actors in their children educations by building a sense of belonging to the school.
- **Networking** with institutions outside the school, where pupils are respected and valued.

COUNTRY SPECIFIC SUCCESS INGREDIENTS

Argentina

- *Resources management* prioritizing what benefits the school main goals and bridging networks to enlarge the school capacities Regarding the factors at management level that have improved school performance the most remarkable and shared elements where an *integral vision and pedagogical project, resource management, pedagogical support, Information management and leadership.*
- *Systematization of information* collected in the school in order to get a global picture of school performance with hard data.
- *Leadership through horizontal relationship* and strong and committed teams.
- *Deep and personalized knowledge of every pupil.* This contribute to a better understanding of reality and bond between members of the school, thus improving the school atmosphere
- *Contextualized and meaningful content* complemented with *flexible planning* giving place for emergent knowledge. Connecting curriculum with pupil's interest engages most of them enabling better access to knowledge.
- *Bonding with parents.* This factor was highly relevant in two of the schools under study. Offering workshops and activities to engage and empower parents had a significant impact on pupils' school performance.

Mexico

- *All school actors take the time and space to hold team meetings* in order to communicate key information, align all activities around a common shared vision, understand advances towards the school's yearly goals and reconnect as a team. This is often done through well-planned Technical School Council sessions that provide relevant and valuable to teachers as well as administrators.
- *Parents are involved in school activities* like celebrations and school-wide campaigns, but also *directly in pupils' learning* through attending open classes, workshops and collaborating with pupils through specific homework activities. Additionally providing activities where both parents and children come to the school to learn, stressing the view that the school is a place for everyone's learning.
- *Transparency in the use of school resources and constant communication* with the families regarding school priorities in terms of budget in order to promote voluntary contributions to the school from families. Additionally principals often search other resources (both private and public) in order to get the necessary infrastructure and materials for school operation and to enhance the school's capacities.

Romania

- For the *implementation of inclusive policies assumed by the school management at classroom and pupil level*, there are some agreed practices with the teachers which differs from school to school. E.g. in *Horea School* in classrooms with SEN children, support teachers are those who have the responsibility to explain to other pupils in the classroom (at the beginning of the school year) why and how support teachers or other school-staff will work differently with them and ask their consent and support for this.
- *Culciu and Carei Schools* and their practices of inclusion are more comprehensive than usual formal education, aiming family and community education. Children enrolled here learn to appreciate diversity and are encouraged to treat each person with respect.

Slovakia

- *Communities* or other forms of regular meetings between children and teachers promoting children's self-expression and inviting their opinions.
- *Partner-like approach to children* and their involvement in the formulation of the school rules.
- *Focusing on individual progress of a child/whole class* instead of measuring their performance based on the general criteria. This practice also invites children to become co-creators of their own learning as they are asked to set a learning goal for themselves, as well as for the whole class.

FUTURE CHALLENGES OF STUDIED SCHOOLS

The study also identified *common challenges* and aspects to improve across all the schools (to different degrees) in terms of promoting a fully inclusive education to all children.

- Teacher training and opportunities for professional development are often limited or not connected to the school and local context or the needs of teachers and school environment.
- Frequency and structure of teachers' class observations and opportunities for feedback from colleagues and the principal or a pedagogical leader on teacher practices and techniques can be higher and can be promoted more strongly at all schools.
- Attention of a principal to pedagogical topics, more than just to school management issues, is often not possible due to the extensive needs of each school in terms of management and the lack of administrative support, but should be encouraged.
- Inclusion of parents in the school, not only through activities, but also in actual school decision-making, is not encouraged very strongly in all of the observed schools.
- Inclusion and connection with the surrounding community around the school, beyond the families of pupils attending the school, and learning that uses the local context as a learning tool for children, is not witnessed very strongly in the schools.
- Infrastructure and management practices beyond the school's jurisdiction: the lack of necessary infrastructure for student learning, the lack of sufficient teachers to cover all groups or the lack of school psychologists, support teachers, etc., in addition to classrooms of over 35 pupils.
- Better networking and connections with outside public institutions that can support pupils, especially in contexts of high social vulnerability such as foster cares, social services, and health agencies, in order to more quickly link pupils who need these services with appropriate institutions.
- Increased quality of in-service trainings for ALL the staff in the school so as to include and fully accept the principles and values of inclusive education is needed.
- Ensure the sufficient number of support teachers/helping people for SEN children.
- Use of differentiated evaluation of all children, not only of those who are registered as SEN children.
- Children feel safe and happy in schools, but they would like to have more freedom to interact with others in their environment, to be more respected and heard.
Elaborate and implement within the school a variety of projects or activities on inclusive education, focusing on partnerships with families and communities.