

Higher Education as the Social Inclusion Channel for People with Disabilities

Both in USSR and Russia until the middle 2000s, the social policy towards people with disabilities had been mostly following the compensational pattern resulting in providing universal financial aid and services. The network of specialized institutions, dedicated to provide people with disabilities education and employ them, was well enough in terms of getting an education and starting to earn, however, it was limiting the scope of their social contacts. The fact that the accessibility agenda had not been brought to the table resulted in many people with disabilities staying home. That created the illusion of a society with no people with disabilities. Currently, the situation is changing, and the social policy declares its goal to provide equal rights and opportunities to both people with and without disabilities. Having ratified the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP) in 2012, the Russian Federation became responsible for helping people with disabilities fully participate in the life of society. Professional education, especially an inclusive one, can be a key asset for people with disabilities to succeed in various spheres of life.

This research assumes higher education to be an institute which currently becomes inclusive to serve as a social inclusion channel for people with disabilities. It acts as a channel for social mobility as well as a channel and/or motivation for spatial mobility and a source a social capital.

We explain the function of education as a social mobility channel for people with disabilities with the help of the theoretical approach developed by P. Sorokin. By using J. Urry's approach, we evaluate spatial mobility of people with disabilities who have different levels of education and outline the relationship between social and spatial mobility. Education as the source of social capital and effects of social capital are revealed through the concepts developed by P. Bourdieu, J. Urri and R. Putman. We view the process of inclusive education institutionalization by using ideas of D. North.

We research the experience and results of inclusive education in a particular institution, Novosibirsk State University (NSU), in the context of the variability of educational opportunities existing in Russia and differentiation of social achievements by people with disabilities with different education level.

The goal is to find and describe the opportunities to engage in both physical and social space that become available to people with disabilities who got a university degree through studying in the inclusive format.

The research information base includes several datasets. (1) Dataset of Russian universities that have at least 30 students with disabilities (N=71) (2) Comprehensive Monitoring of Living Conditions (CMLC) by Rosstat (2014, 2016) (3) surveying and interviewing students and

graduates of NSU that have disabilities: online survey of students (36) and graduates (31), in-depth interviews with students (8) and graduates (N=8).

Unlike many authors researching problems and life potential of people with disabilities, we do not focus on social exclusion. Alternatively, we concentrate on inclusion and the consequences of studying in university and getting a degree, as well on the potential of people with disabilities and their efforts to overcome difficulties on the way to the full integration. We are the first to propose the approach to study higher education as the social inclusion channel for people with disabilities.

Evidence from Russian universities that have 30 or more students with disabilities shows that most of these universities do not clearly express that they take into account specific educational needs and do not have clearly articulated format for studying of such students. Even though a group of universities that have conditions and defined study format for students with disabilities is significantly smaller, the majority of students with disabilities study in such universities. It leads us to the conclusion that currently the existence of the system for teaching students with disabilities can instead be attributed to particular universities but not to the Russian system of higher education.

By using the data from the CMLC, we found the education level of people with disabilities to be positively associated with how active he or she engage in both physical and social spaces. People with disabilities that have university degree are more likely to have a job, family and higher income level. They use transport, travel and visit different places for art and entertainment more often than the people with disabilities who have lower educational levels.

Analysis of surveys and interviews with students and graduates of NSU that have disabilities was focused on the difficulties such students and graduates faced when studying in the university as well as the opportunities they have gotten or expect to get from inclusive education and university degree. This part of the research leads us to the conclusion that even inclusive education process alone is a multilevel overcoming of social exclusion but also create the ground for further social inclusion. Many of the graduates demonstrated intergenerational upward mobility, and the rest reproduced the educational status of their parents. After graduation, most of the graduates had several jobs and at the time of the interview were either employed, running their own business or both. Also, most of them become subjects to spatial mobility by relocating from small and medium-sized towns to regional centres and the capitals.

The key finding of this research is that the process of getting a degree from regular non-specialized university results not only in a diploma and some professional knowledge and skills but also acts as the social inclusion channel for people with disabilities. Inclusive education activates adaptation toward the conditions of the “big” society and stimulates an acquisition of

skills to overcome barriers and difficulties related to disability. It also helps to expand the network of social contacts that can be used to achieve different goals and improve spatial mobility. All of that ultimately leads to the expansion of opportunities to participate in various spheres of social life and increase chances for upward social mobility. The modern trend towards the inclusive form of education gives people with disabilities as a social group a future opportunity for upward social mobility of a particular kind to remove the stigma of inferred deprivation.