

12. INCLUMUSIC - NEW SKILLS FOR INCLUSIVE HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Maria Cinque,¹⁰⁷
Oana Bălan Budoiu,¹⁰⁸
Ioana Zagrean¹⁰⁹

Abstract: *IncluMusic is a project aimed at promoting the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) and disadvantaged backgrounds in Higher Music Education. Starting from the analysis of the „state of the art” that shows a lack of specialised support and a poor practical implementation of inclusive policies for these students in most EU countries, the IncluMusic project envisages the creation of a pilot programme to train music teachers, administrative staff and tutors specialised in inclusive music education. The ultimate goal is to develop new approaches for the education of students with special educational needs in higher music education institutions and to create a community committed to inclusive teaching practices within the AFAM sector.*

Key words: *new skills, inclusive music education, teacher training, design principles, curriculum*

1. Introduction

The need for unity are the driving force for building ties, strong states, and affections (Nutti, 2017). People with fragility risk isolation on a daily basis: they live in this alternation between appearing and disappearing, between weaving ties and dissolving them because no one recognizes them (McPherson & Welch, 2018). Given these premises, the need to promote an inclusion education is urgent. Lately, a lot of legislative changes have taken place on inclusive education. This had consequences at all educational levels: primary, secondary and Higher Education (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive education, 2020). In the context of these changes, there is a need for more research to foster attitudes towards inclusion in Higher Education Music Institutions (Music Schools and Conservatories).

The IncluMusic project is based on a pilot programme to train music teachers, administrative staff and tutors specialized in inclusive music teaching, which offer to students with SEN and disadvantaged background the possibility to express and communicate their inner and emotional world, through a universal, easily accessible and communicable language. In addition, a possible realistic way forward for their future, through employment opportunities that may arise. Although the Higher Music Education Institutions (HMEI) are, in the majority of the EU countries, part of the regular education network and receive the enrollment of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), they do not find support in the practice of inclusive policies for curricular adaptation, training of their teachers, for the provision of specialized support services that can guarantee the educational assistance for students with SEN.

Inclusive music education is understood as actions that should integrate

¹⁰⁷ Professor PhD., LUMSA University, Rome, Italy, email: m.cinque@lumsa.it

¹⁰⁸ Associate Professor PhD., “Gheorghe Dima” National Academy of Music from Cluj-Napoca, România, email: oana.balan@amgd.ro

¹⁰⁹ Assistant PhD., LUMSA University, Rome, Italy, email: i.zagrean@lumsa.it, ID ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3705-5430>

people with and without disabilities in the same musical educational environment in a conscious and pedagogically directed way, with the intention of learning for all. Currently, different barriers still prevent a satisfactory connection between music education and the students with special educational needs. This is due to the teachers' additional instruction or lack of preparation and their general "lack of awareness" of the resources needed for the inclusion of this type of students in the classroom. The starting point from an inclusive perspective, in cases where students with special educational needs attend a general music education center (e.g., ordinary schools, music schools, and conservatories) is the philosophy that all the students belong to the group.

Therefore, adaptive teaching is fostered, with specialized support offered at the educational center attended by the student (Stainback et al. 2001). In these cases, the basic core of the integrated student's schooling will continue to take place within the class group (Puigdellívol, 2009). This places the responsibility on the school staff and the teacher in charge, who must have effective teaching resources and ideas that provide guidelines on how to cope with special needs and involve all the students in the classroom (McDowell, 2010; Pearpoint & Marsha, 2001). This is particularly true for Higher education music institutions, that in many countries are called Conservatories.

In 2021, the IncluMusic project was developed to enhance the participation of students with special educational needs (SEN) and those from disadvantaged backgrounds in Higher Music Education Institutions. This initiative focuses on training music teachers in innovative teaching methods through collaborative efforts. The aim is to improve the accessibility, involvement, and graduation rates of music students facing various challenges. IncluMusic strives to ensure equal opportunities for individuals with SEN, enabling them to access HMEIs, receive music education, participate in a shared musical environment with their peers, and pursue future careers in the field. Additionally, the project seeks to create inclusive Higher Education Music systems by raising awareness and providing training to educators.

2. Fostering Inclusive Higher Music Education: Empowering Diversity with the IncluMusic Project

Disabled people often feel overlooked and excluded, but music-making can make them feel connected to others and part of something bigger. The full inclusion of students with SEN in HMEIs must be encouraged, stimulating the development of each individual's expressive and relational abilities and potential. Furthermore, the sharing of diversity in HME environments is a resource that all the students and teachers can draw on to enrich their knowledge, fostering the development of human values that will be part of their cultural and life heritage.

Diversity is a starting point to stimulate divergent thinking and consequently reflective, critical and creative learning at the same time. As indicated in the Report Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in European Higher Education Institutions, published in 2019 by the European University Continuing Education Network), European Students' Union and European University Association, "diversity is a key concern for universities. It is a condition for excellence and for facing competition

in various parts of universities' missions. HEIs that want to retain their high levels of excellence need to be able to attract talent at all levels, and in a globalized world this means being open to diversity" (p. 3).

3. Target group needs, partners and implementation timelines

The project has a duration of 36 months (1 November 2022 to 31 October 2025) and is coordinated by the Academia Națională de Muzică "Gheorghe Dima" (AMGD) with the support of the following partners:

- State Music Conservatory 'Alessandro Scarlatti' (Palermo, Italy)
- RIAM - Royal Irish Academy of Music (Dublin, Ireland)
- European University Cyprus (Nicosia, Cyprus)
- LUMSA University (Rome, Italy)
- ValueDo (Florence, Italy)
- AEC - Association Européenne des Conservatoires (Belgium)

The direct target groups are the beneficiaries of the actions/outcomes of the project. They consist of: teachers of higher education in music (both instrument and theoretical subjects); administrative staff; tutors with specific skills; directors of institutions of higher musical education; students with BES (special educational needs); voluntary associations. In the planning phase of the IncluMusic project, barriers and difficulties in accessing HMEI by people with disabilities were identified through the networks of music teachers who reported this problem: "Much of the traditional music teachers' teaching is inaccessible to all students, including musicians with disabilities who need accommodations and adaptations to access the curriculum". Using the problem tree methodology, the following causes of this situation were indicated during discussions, previous investigations and the specific experience of the teachers, the results of which were confirmed by the partners:

- Music teachers are not trained to teach students with BES and lack specific pedagogical skills and music schools tend to be an elitist rather than inclusive environment;
- Barriers and obstacles hinder the accessibility of students with SEN in HMEI;
- Students with SEN entering higher education institutions need support throughout their journey in these institutions.

The partnership found that poor access of HMEIs was a common experience, despite the different educational systems. Conversations and e-mail exchanges were used to better define the needs of the partnership and the target groups that were in contact with them. The needs of the direct target groups were identified through direct experience and contacts. Although some articles already indicate needs, the scientific literature is rather scarce on these issues in VET institutions, focusing mainly on schools and higher education institutions. Indirect target groups, such as public authorities, had already been involved in the debate on these issues over the past three years through initiatives in some countries aimed at improving inclusion in HMEIs. During these initiatives, their needs for a better knowledge and understanding of inclusion issues were gathered. Voluntary organisations and associations of people with disabilities participated in the advocacy activities from the very beginning and were an active part of it. Their needs are mainly related to gaining visibility and asserting the rights of people with disabilities.

The IncluMusic project aims were to respond to these needs through, firstly, a more detailed analysis of the „state of the art” (desk research on training practices already adopted in HMEIs), which is lacking at European level. To create an innovative training course for HMEIs, LUMSA organised co-design sessions with project partners to propose design principles and possible content. These elements will be validated through focus groups with experts in order to build the training course proposal.

4. The Initial Phase Structure of the Project - „state of the art study”

Considering that the first Work Package was devoted to Project management, the first work step is the second Work Package, “Course Design Principles for Building Inclusive Higher Education Systems for Teachers, Administrative Staff and Academic Tutors Specialised in BES”, which aims to define the design principles and curriculum of the training course for building inclusive higher education systems. The course is aimed at teachers, administrative staff and tutors of higher education institutions. Through the activities carried out in WP2, partners were able to identify in detail the set of knowledge, skills and competences that participants need in order to contribute significantly to the construction of inclusive higher education systems in music. As a result of the initiatives undertaken in WP2, the partners successfully delivered two primary outcomes upon completion of the process: the Course Design Principles and the Course Curriculum.

In order to elaborate these documents, the partners conducted (between December 2022 and March 2023) a ”state-of-the-art study” to identify the different ways of including students with SEN in Higher Music Education institutions in Europe and the training practices already adopted in these institutions. In total, 9 good training practices were identified within conservatoires and higher music education institutions, which provide a useful basis for the elaboration of the design principles to be adopted for the course development.

Parallel to this activity, the partners conducted a detailed training needs analysis, involving teachers, administrative staff and students (including students with SEN), in order to understand what competences are needed to build inclusive higher education systems. The survey included interviews with: 40 conservatoire students from partner countries, 10 conservatoire students from countries outside the project partnership; 24 teachers and 8 administrative staff representatives also from higher music education institutions; 4 conservatoire directors; 8 representatives of associations dedicated to disability issues. The interview questions focused on the following topics: (1) students with SEN; (2) the organisation of training; (3) being a teacher of a student with special educational needs; (4) teacher education and training; (5) music course methodologies; (6) inclusive policies with respect to inclusive practices; (7) support from family members and colleagues.

5. Guiding Principles for Inclusive Higher Music Education: IncluMusic Project's Framework

In the two co-design sessions, conducted on 19 April and 23 May 2023 respectively, the design principles and possible course content to be realised in WP3 were defined. By 'design principles' we mean guidelines that can guide the work of

all those who have to design an object or experience. These guidelines may relate to broader concepts concerning the background 'design philosophy' but also to specific needs that can support decisions at every stage of the project.

The IncluMusic Project Design Principles are a set of guiding principles that inform the development and implementation of the project to promote inclusion in higher music education institutions. These principles provide a framework for creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students, including those with different abilities and backgrounds. The design principles of the IncluMusic Project encompass both general teaching philosophies and specific methodological approaches, emphasising empathy, flexibility, creativity, student voice, theoretical and pedagogical knowledge, personalised teaching strategies, inclusive assessment approaches, dedicated staff members, integration of technology, design of appropriate assessment for students with special educational needs (SEN), and adaptation of learning and teaching environments.

Adhering to these principles, the IncluMusic Project strives to ensure that higher music education institutions adopt inclusive practices that promote access, engagement and success for all students. The methodology known as 'From the basket to the pyramid' was used to carry out the first session, which allows one to move from a divergence phase, with the production of many ideas to be placed in a basket (also electronic), to a convergence phase, in which only 9 main ideas need to be selected, placing them within a hierarchical pyramid-like structure. The final list includes the following principles:

Fundamentals

- General educational philosophy

General Principles

- Empathy
- Flexibility and creativity
- Inclusion of student voice

Methodological Principles

- Theoretical and pedagogical knowledge and training
- Creative approach
- Customised teaching strategies
- Inclusive evaluation approaches

Specific Principles

- Dedicated staff
- Technology
- Designing appropriate assessment for BES
- Adapting learning and teaching environments

6. Conclusions

Many legislative measures have been taken in the various European countries to promote inclusive education at all school levels: primary, secondary and higher (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020). In the context of these changes, however, the needs of students embarking on advanced music studies have often not been taken into account and, at the European level, as indicated by the Association Européenne des Conservatoires (AEC, 2020), more

research is needed to promote inclusive attitudes in higher education music institutions (music schools and conservatoires). The IncluMusic project responds to these needs in order to foster the inclusion of students with BES and disadvantaged backgrounds in conservatoires and higher music education.

The aim is to create a pilot programme for the training of music teachers, administrative staff and tutors specialised in inclusive music didactics, which will offer students with BES and disadvantaged background the possibility to complete their music studies, express and communicate their inner and emotional world, and access job opportunities that may arise. Although some results are already available, the project is still ongoing and involves several work phases. Future developments include the involvement of other partners and the extension of the training model tested within the partner institutions to other conservatoires and higher music education institutions.

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