

DISABILITY STUDIES CONFERENCE: 'THE ART OF BELONGING'

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Culture for Everybody? Museums and Galleries Accessible for Deaf Pupils in the Czech Republic, France and Sweden

Aim

Culture is crucial for our identity, the feeling of belonging. It is the keystone of education. There is a group of children though, who are from the education perspective considered as having special needs. At the same time these children represent members of a cultural and linguistic minority. Who are they? They are Deaf. The question remains are cultural institutions accessible for deaf children.

Methods

80 deaf primary school pupils and 40 teachers were surveyed on issues related to cultural institutions (terminology, experience, implementation into school education programs). 75 Czech, French and Swedish museums and galleries were questioned about the accessibility for deaf visitors on the level of human resources and technical measures, about programs offered to deaf children and the level of cooperation with the outside network.

Results

The results show that deaf children have problems with understanding the basic terminology despite of experiencing multiple visits. Teachers and institutions see the lack of information about deafness as a key factor for better mutual cooperation. French institutions are the only ones offering a variety of programs for deaf pupils by cooperating with deaf staff and using new technologies.

Conclusion

I conclude that unlike national legislation and policies, cultural institutions are not enough prepared to welcome deaf visitors. On the other hand, growing number of institutions have employees responsible for accessibility, the number of programs offered for deaf children is increasing and institutions claim they are willing to change their approach toward deaf visitors.

CULTURE FOR EVERYBODY? MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES ACCESSIBLE FOR DEAF PUPILS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, FRANCE AND SWEDEN

Culture is crucial for our identity, the feeling of belonging. It is the keystone of education. There is a group of children though, who are from the education perspective considered as having special needs. At the same time these children represent members of a cultural and linguistic minority. Who are they? They are Deaf. The question remains are cultural institutions accessible for deaf children.

I will try to respond to this questions as well as present my research focused on the accessibility of cultural institutions for deaf pupils in the Czech republic, France and Sweden. First, I will compare education systems in those countries with closer attention to special needs education and schools for deaf. Secondly, I will focus on the issue of culture and cultural institutions in deaf pupils education together with different measures of accessibility practicable by public institutions. The aim of the last part of my paper is to introduce results of my research targeted on how are the Czech, French and Swedish museums accessible for deaf pupils.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is a general pattern that defines who we are and which norms and values we hold to. It is strongly connected to the education we received and to the surrounding we live in. Deaf children are in a specific position relative to education and culture. From the disability angle, they are entitled to gain access to education and culture with respect to their special needs. From the point of view of language minority, they should be given information through sign language – their mother tongue. And finally, from the perspective of cultural minority, they have a right to learn not only about general culture, but to know Deaf culture as well.

On next pages, I want to present the issue of culture in deaf education and the issue of accessibility of cultural institutions for deaf child visitors in relation to three different European countries: France, Sweden and the Czech republic. First, I will compare education systems on the basis of legal context and curricula reform with closer attention to children with special needs. Second, I will present the issue of deaf education with the emphasis on the status of sign language followed by Accessibility and Discrimination Acts. Regarding to culture, the third part of my paper will focus on the issue of culture in education for deaf concerning cultural policies of each state. The last section is dedicated to the issue of museums and galleries and their relation to deaf visitors. The level of accessibility for deaf children explored in this part is grounded in information from the ongoing research targeting Czech, French and Swedish museums.

Concerning terminology, when I am referring to "deaf pupils" I mean children of compulsory school with profound hearing impairment (severely hard-of-hearing or deaf) or children with cochlear implant if they choose sign language as their primary communication system. A term "Deaf" relates to linguistic minority or its culture. In other cases, I respect the original name of policies, laws and school subjects.

COMPARISON OF EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, SWEDEN AND FRANCE

In 90's there was a huge drive on reforming education system in European countries. One of the trippers was a release of White Paper on Education aiming key competences and learning society. Among fundamental goals was a fight against social inequality and exclusion (White Paper, 1995). On the basis of this policy,

European countries have started heading towards inclusive education with a great emphasis on equal opportunities (Zeman, 2006). Despite of the fact that the Czech Republic, France and Sweden have a very different historical background, tradition of education approach and demographic situation, In the light of this transformation, education systems of the Czech republic, France and Sweden began new millennium by reforming their education system on the ground of new education acts and profound changes in curricula.

Czech, French and Swedish education system in the context of national legislation

After releasing new education acts¹, education systems in discussed countries have numerous common features. Education on the primary and secondary level is free, focused on the equality of chances, respect for democratic values, lifelong learning and proclaimed resistance toward any form of discrimination (compare 561/2004; 2010-121 and 2010:800). For one thing, there is a new complex phenomenon of strong support for pupils with special needs, concerning special counselling, modification of education content, integration and individual approach. For another thing, we can see a strong movement toward unification of education as a consequence of firmly structured curricula and the attempt to use blanket assessment testing.

On the other hand, there are obviously some differences, especially in the structure of authority, respect to minorities and the degree of integration. First of all, France and the Czech Republic shares centralized education system, in which governments run some of schools and provide finances to employees, while other expenses are on local authorities (region or communities). On the contrary, Sweden is a representative of a decentralized education system, where running and funding of the education is mostly delegated to the central administrative agencies independent of the ministries (compare Zeman, 2006; European Commission, 2011). Secondly, in relation to other countries Sweden shows much higher respect to minorities and their language in education. Despite the fact, that there is big minority of Roma, Vietnamese and Ukrainians in Czech society and people from Africa, Middle East and Asia in France², in both cases there is only one official language of education in public schools. On the contrary, Sweden with five official national minorities promotes the opportunity to learn, develop and use the minority language³ (2009:600). Swedish language policy is in minority-pro oriented: „Every pupil who has a native language other than Swedish has the right to receive extra tuition in that language. Pupils with a foreign background can study Swedish as a second language instead of Swedish but they must study one of these two options.“ (Skolverket 2011a, p. 21). Furthermore, the secularization of education, deep-rooted in the Czech Republic, is in France demonstrated by the official prohibition of symbols of religion at school, while in Sweden wearing hijab is naturally respected. And the third important distinction lays in the different attitude toward integration of children with special needs in the mainstream in comparison to segregation in special schools. France and Sweden share a high rate of pupils in public compulsory schools representing around 88 percent (compare Zeman, 2006; Ministère de l'Education nationale, 2012), which means a strong permeability of the education system. In the Czech Republic, the total number of pupils with special needs integrated in ordinary schools is only nine percent (Týdeník Školství, 2010).

To sum up this part, there are not many differences in education system on the basis of legislation. Education is provided for free regarding pupils with special needs. The difference leans basically on structure of authority, the accessibility of education for foreigners and the amount of special support giving to pupils with disabilities. More variances are to be found on the curriculum level.

¹ Czech Education Act 561/2004 Sb. amended for the last time by 472/2011 Sb.; French Education Act 2010-121 and Swedish Education Act 2010:800.

² Those three minorities represent together 13 % of population (The Economist, 2009).

³ In the case of Sami minority it means also education in Sami school in Sami language in compliance with Sami curriculum.

Status of sign language in the Europe and the Czech republic, France and Sweden

In agreement with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML, 1992) European sign languages belongs among non-territorial languages⁴, have to be protected and promoted as a part of Europe's cultural heritage. Furthermore, the Convention of the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, Article 21) declares that people with disabilities have a right to education without discrimination and states directly: „*People with disabilities have the right to express themselves, including the freedom to give and receive information and ideas through all forms of communication, including through accessible formats and technologies, sign languages...*“ On the other hand, logic of the European Charter protects and promotes only languages, not linguistic minorities. Due to this lack of support, Deaf sign language users as members of language and cultural minority are put in position of being totally dependent on national states, which have to decide how they will include this specific group into their legal and education system.

Sign languages have been part of the linguistic environment for many centuries. However, their official recognition is quite recent. The Swedish sign language was recognised as the first even though it does not belong among official minority languages (Heikkilä, 2010). Swedish sign language became the first language of Swedish deaf people in 1981: „*Deaf have to be bilingual to function amongst themselves and in society. Bilingualism on their part means that they have to be fluent in their visual/gestural language and in the language that surrounds them, Swedish.*“ (CD-P-RR 2005, p. 77). According to the Swedish Language Act (2009:600) public sector is responsible for promoting and protecting Swedish sign language. Moreover it also guarantees individual access to language: „*Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, and persons who, for other reasons, require sign language, are to be given opportunity to learn, develop and use Swedish sign language.*“ (2009:600, section 14).

Czech sign language was partially⁵ acknowledged in 1998 by the first anti-discriminatory law from the Velvet Revolution. A fully recognition was made by the amendment 423/2008 Sb. ten years later⁶. People with hearing impairment or with a combine handicap have a right to choose the communication system⁷ that suits them best for the everyday life and for education but without any notion of the mother-tongue aspect of the language or feature of cultural identity.

Despite of the fact that French sign language was used in deaf education since 80's, France recognized it officially many years after signing The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Five years after the national “silent” march for the recognition of French Sign Language in 1999 French Senate adopted a law on equal rights and equality of opportunity, participation and citizenship of people with disabilities recognized among other things French sign language as a fully-fledged language, eligible for education of deaf (2005-102, Article).

Status of sign language varies across the countries enjoying a massive support as a mean of education in French law and as a language of minority in Swedish legal system. In general, it is accepted and promoted as the language of education and everyday life of deaf people.

⁴ Those are defined as: „*Languages used by nationals of the state which differ from the language or languages used by the rest of the state's population but which, although traditionally used within the territory of the state, cannot be identified with a particular area therefor.*“ (ECRML 1992, Article 1).

⁵ Czech sign language, the natural visual-motoric language with its own grammar and specific features, was put together in the same group as Signed Czech. Signed Czech is an artificial system using signs and the grammar and structure of Czech spoken language. Both were called Sign speech.

⁶ The Act 155/1998 Sb. amended by the Act 384/2008 Sb. fully in the Act 423/2008 Sb. about Communication Systems of Deaf and Deaf and Blind.

⁷ Communication systems are newly divided into two groups: 1) Czech sign language; 2) Communication system derived from the Czech language.

CULTURE AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN DEAF PUPILS' EDUCATION

International conventions claim everybody to have free access to culture and cultural heritage. National conventions guarantee cultural rights to every single soul regardless of gender, race, state of health, age or disability. The Convention of the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities recognizes: „*The right of the persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life.*“ (CRPD, article 30). People with disabilities should have access to cultural materials in accessible formats, cultural services, theatres, museums and libraries. In line with this part of the Convention, deaf people shall have the access to general culture. Furthermore, the Convention pays extra attention to deaf people's own specific culture by saying: „*Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture.*“ (CRPD, article 30). The consequence of this point of view are many deaf people using different sign languages around the whole Europe sharing their national cultures and in the same time being acknowledged as having specific cultural identity (CD-P-RR, 2005). On plus, members of the EU should develop and maintain measures to protect and promote linguistic and cultural diversity: „*Sign languages should be recognized as an expression of cultural wealth. They constitute an important element of Europe's linguistic and cultural heritage.*“ (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 182). With regard to policy mentioned above, do deaf people in the Czech republic, France and Sweden have access to Deaf culture during education? And are they given access to general culture in frame of public cultural institutions? Those are questions I want to answer on next few pages referring to the issue of culture in special curricula with closer attention to national cultural policies.

Culture in special curricula

In agreement with European conventions and education policy, there are two necessary ways how to provide access to culture in deaf pupils' education – above all by offering information about Deaf cultural wealth and Deaf identity together with the opportunity to meet general culture. Those two goals are achievable only if sign language has to become the language of schooling and also the primary language to be learnt⁸.

From this point of view, only the Swedish special curriculum for deaf is defined with respect to those requirements (see Table n°6). Special subject Sign language for the Deaf and Hard of hearing was built up as a mother tongue subject with regard to deaf identity and different culture. Culture, traditions and habits of Deaf community as well as history of Deaf are provided mostly through this subject and partially in Social sciences. The last important factor in Deaf culture education is unique subject Movement and Drama focused not only on Deaf art and artists but also on storytelling, sign language poetry and ability to express through visual motoric language in artistic way. French and Czech education system for deaf don't take Deaf culture and information about Deaf history so much into consideration.

From the second perspective, education is originally entitled to provide access to general culture in cooperation with cultural institutions like theatres, libraries and museums. Conforming to the general outlines of education acts, the importance of culture is mentioned only in the Czech and French laws referring to education about world's cultural values and traditions (561/2004 Sb.) and acquisition of general and regional culture with respect to equal access to culture, cultural heritage and cultural institutions (2010-121). Concerning national curricula, culture is included in many subjects, mostly in Art education and special subjects Movement and Drama (Sweden, Czech Republic) and Art with Music education for Deaf (France). Despite of the fact that culture is one of the main issue of the whole education included on different levels in the curriculum, and inseparable part of prospective outcomes of compulsory education⁹ real visit of cultural institutions is mentioned only in two subjects: slightly as a visit of theatre in the Swedish subject

⁸ In that case special education for deaf shall include sign language classes in the same amount of major spoken language in ordinary schools and then classes of major and foreign languages adjusted for deaf.

⁹ According to the Czech curriculum, pupil shall be able to understand terms as library, theatre or museum; to use archives, libraries and museums as information sources and to express his or her opinion of theatre performance (RVP ZV, 2007). (Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 2008).

Sign language for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (Skolverket, 2011b) and in different ways in the French subject History of Art, which mentions visits of museums, galleries, theatres and even circus (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2008). However, due to the strong autonomy of schools, the connection between cultural heritage inside cultural institutions and deaf pupils lays on individual teachers, their organization skills, private contacts they have and headmaster' support.

According to the curricula for deaf education, pupils don't have much opportunities to get know Deaf culture that is offered mostly indirectly through the subject of sign language. General culture is promoted much more, mainly in Art Education. However, the direct contact with culture and art by visit of cultural institution is, in the most of the cases, given indirectly as well, whenever this experience is expected in prospective outcomes.

Cultural policy in the Czech republic, France and Sweden: Accessibility act, Discrimination act

With the turn of the century, cultural policies have started to point out the importance of the accessibility of culture for people with handicap. What is interesting is why they started to do it and what do they proclaim as a goal of this accessibility. On the authority of discrimination acts, no one should be treated less favourably than someone else pursuant to his or her sex, ethnicity, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation. Discrimination is prohibited on the part of education activities, public events, social services and support (compare 2008:567; 198/2009 and 2005-102). Owing to the policy of accessibility, elaborated the most by French Accessibility act on Equal Rights and Opportunities, Participation and Citizenship of People with Disabilities (2005-102) public institutions have to be accessible. Accessibility is not seen anymore only from the technical point of view (Czech experience) but regarding human aspects as well. The question is, how are those legal regulations implemented into cultural policies.

Actual Czech cultural policy is quite terse. Among four main objectives, there is one slightly covering future effort to reinforce cultural education and cultural knowledge and to support access of handicapped citizens to cultural services: „More attention needs to be given to eliminating barriers blocking a more active approach of handicapped persons to cultural goods and services.“ (Ministry of Culture 2009, p. 18). Culture is presented above all as an economic advantage. Secondary, there is mention a non-material point of view referring among others to therapeutic benefit of culture for people with disability. The accessibility is mostly perceived as an overcoming of technical barrier. On the contrary, the French cultural policy provide many different aspect of embodiment of culture to everyday life including a number of measures¹⁰ concerning integration of culture into the education and accessibility for people with handicap (Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 2005). Moreover, there is a national umbrella organization "Accès culture" that provide information about accessible cultural institutions on national level including their program offer. Finally, Sweden possess action plan for 2011-2016, which has among its objectives increase access to culture for disabled people. Within the main aims is creating the possibility for people with functional disability to participate in cultural life and creating of establishment for a regular funding of disability perspective. Public cultural institutions must increase accessibility, eliminate obstacles and create accessible web sites (Kulturrådet, 2011). Sweden and France, they both stress out the importance of the cooperation between cultural institutions, government and organizations for people with disabilities to meet cultural policies' liabilities.

According to national cultural policies, the access to culture has to be given to everyone with special attention to people with disabilities. All three countries promote accessibility at least on the technical level. The objective of the last part of the paper is to discover the level of accessibility offered to deaf children in museums and galleries.

¹⁰ Those measures include creation of partnerships between schools, local cultural institutions and professionals, development of art education with emphasis on direct contact with art and cultural institutions, training for staff in cultural institutions and artists and finally use of new technologies.

THE ACCESSIBILITY OF CZECH, FRENCH AND SWEDISH MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES FOR THE DEAF PUPILS

In the following lines, I will present some of the results of the ongoing research between Czech; French and Swedish cultural institutions focused on the accessibility of museums and galleries for deaf primary school pupils. The research has started in February 2012 in France, continued with Czech institutions in October and November 2012 and will finish in December 2012 with results from Swedish museums and galleries. Hitherto I have responses from 33 Czech, 30 French and 13 Swedish institutions¹¹. The research uses electronic surveys concentrating on the accessibility policy of those institutions regarding to visit rate and target group, the accessibility for deaf visitors from the point of view of technical measures and human resources, communication and cooperation with extern institutions and finally to the obstacles museums and galleries face to in reaching for accessibility.

Deaf visitors as a target group

Museums and galleries concentrate more and more on visitors with special needs. However, deaf people are not so much represented in their target group. Except for French institutions, a little less than a half of Czech and Swedish museums and galleries are interested in deaf visitors. Those, which claim having deaf people among their target group, are slightly more focused on deaf adults than deaf children. One of the consequences could be a fact that visit rate is not high – the average number of visits in museums and galleries is less than 20 deaf visitors per year in all of the three countries. Concerning deaf children, there are two Swedish institutions welcoming between 20 and 50 pupils a year and two Czech museums claiming be visited among 100 and 150 children. Finally, there is one French museum with more than 150 deaf children visitors in one year.

Despite of the fact that some museums and galleries claim being interested in deaf visitors, there are not many special events organized for them. With regard to special program for deaf child visitors, there is a special offer in three Czech institutions. Only one Swedish museum offers a lecture in sign language aiming deaf children. The situation is little bit better in French museums and galleries when 16 of them have special visit tailored for deaf children needs on their regular program. Most of them organize regular guided tour in sign language (both with interpreter or deaf guide) and there is also a high number of additional creative workshops lead by deaf facilitators. On plus two institutions use tablets with special software invented for deaf visitors. These institutions belong to those with the highest visit rate.

In the upshot, only 15 from 76 institutions claim to be satisfied with the visit rate of deaf pupils; and 57 of them state being discontent. However, among those institutions, which declare be happy with their number, are only two French museums. The rest of satisfied ones are Czech and Swedish institutions whose special program targeting deaf is none or a very limited one.

On which level are museums and galleries accessible for deaf visitors?

On the subject of accessibility, cultural institutions have several possibilities what to do with objective to be more open to deaf visitors. First of all, there is an issue of human resources. In a group of 76 museums and galleries, half of them have among their employees a person responsible for visitors with special needs. Once again the majority of those institutions has a French origin¹². In most of the cases, institutions cooperate with deaf lectors or sign language interpreters and organize training of sign language or about rules of communication with deaf for entrance staff. Second important thing concerning accessibility are technical measures. In a traditional way, it means equipment for overcoming a lack of sound such as light signals or loop system. However, the current trend is to use technology and new media with the aim to create a full

¹¹ There was a list of 60 Czech; 98 French and 30 Swedish institutions asked for participation in the research.

¹² In case of Centre Pompidou in Paris, there is even one person responsible only for deaf visitors. Moreover she is deaf and a sign language user.

access with respect to the needs and rights of every individual. According to this perspective most of the institutions see themselves as a place of visual culture in no need of special modifications. Despite the fact, they use lot of technologies only few of them offer a special place on official web sites dedicated for people with special needs or even for deaf including video in sign language and captioning. Concerning new media, the situation is even worst. Less than 10 museums or galleries offer to deaf visitors multimedia guide, tablet with a special software or at least a possibility to download the program or visual guide via QR code or use application for smartphones.

Communication and cooperation with the outside world

In relation to these 52 institutions claiming to have deaf among their target group, there is less than a half of them cooperating with some extern organization to improve their accessibility for this group of visitors. Those organizations are mostly providers of interpreting services, associations for deaf or university departments¹³. Only eleven institutions cooperate with special schools for deaf. However, some of them collaborate on a reciprocal level using deaf students for example as creators of new art vocabulary in sign language.

Concerning announcement of the program, most of the institutions use mailing list, posters and official websites, which in most of the cases are, as we know from information given above, not accessible for deaf. Only few of them try to inform potential deaf visitors in a specific way. Some of them by contacting teachers in special schools for deaf, others communicate through the contact with organizations for deaf people (see Table n°10). There is an increasing number of institutions using social network and special groups for deaf on those sites.

With regard to problems and obstacles institutions are facing to, the most claimed one is a lack of human resources directly followed by a lack of funds. Curious thing is that some institutions state they are interested in accessibility development and deaf audience but they are neither cooperating with some organization for deaf nor trying to motivate by any means deaf people to come. Overall, many of these institutions declare being short of information about the whole issue.

CONCLUSION

This paper has given an overview of the accessibility of culture to deaf pupils. By comparing education systems and cultural policies of three different countries – France, Sweden and the Czech Republic – it has offered outlines for results of enquiry aiming to analyse the accessibility of museums and galleries for deaf pupils.

As the consequences of the issues drafted above, we can see a huge effort at the national level to provide access to culture for deaf pupils with respect to their specific based on the membership of linguistic and cultural minority. However, the research shows the reality is far from the promoted intention. Unlike national strategies, legislation and policies, cultural institutions are not enough prepared to welcome deaf visitors (regardless to the fact that some of them don't see deaf people as a required audience). Results show a lack of program dedicated to deaf children using sign language or playful approach; a shortage of implemented measures – both on the level of human resources and technologies; but especially a lack of understanding what are deaf pupils' rights and needs. On the other hand, more and more institutions have people responsible for accessibility among their staff and the number of special program offered by cultural institutions for deaf children is increasing. At any rate, museums and galleries claim they are willing to change their approach, whenever they don't know how.

¹³ There are also some French exceptions when museums and galleries cooperate with association focused on accessibility and technical innovations.

To conclude, I propose to focus on simple changes and than to continue thinking bigger. From my point of view the major problem is not a lack of money or staff but the way in which we – major society, cultural institutions and deaf people as well – think. We have to break the psychological barrier and stop waiting when others make a move. The least we can do is to start telling the world what we offer and asking the others what they want to see. In the moment we change the way of our thinking, our institutions and our society become more accessible.

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