

4. Relationship Assistance as Access to Social Participation – Friendship, Belonging and Self-Chosen Relationships

Initiator: Stefan Armoneit

Moderation: Herbert Fraydl

Inclusion is often described in terms of access to housing, work, education, mobility, assistance, supported communication or supported decision-making. Less systematically addressed is the question of how people with impairments gain access to the social sphere: to friendship, partnership, peer relationships, neighborhood, exchange, recognition, belonging and sustaining relationships beyond family and professional support.

The proposed Working Forum addresses this gap and asks about 'relationship assistance' as its own dimension of inclusive participation. This refers to support in building, maintaining and shaping self-chosen social relationships. Relationships are understood here not as a private matter of chance, nor merely as the result of individual social competence, but as a field of participation that requires conditions, opportunities, spaces for practice, protection, mediation and concrete assistance.

Many people with impairments experience social isolation or a strong attachment to their family home, institutions and paid support structures. As a result, they lack experiential spaces in which reciprocity, closeness, conflict, reliability, recognition, self-efficacy and social responsibility can develop. Relationship assistance therefore aims to open up access, reduce isolation and take social participation seriously as an independent component of inclusive practice.

The Working Forum will examine how people with impairments can be concretely supported in accessing the social sphere. How can they be accompanied in making contact, starting conversations, contributing their own topics, discovering shared interests and developing points of connection for relationships from this? How can people be supported in taking initiative, responding to others, extending invitations, perceiving closeness and distance, resolving conflicts and continuing relationships?

This is not about professionals creating relationships, but about the conditions under which relationships become possible. Relationship assistance can mean preparing social situations, creating occasions for conversation, making interests visible, enabling shared activities and supporting communication. It opens up spaces of experience and insight in which people can enter into conversations, develop interest in others, respond to what is said, find their own answers and make connections to their own life world. This also includes regulating uncertainties, accompanying conflicts and enabling resumption after disruptions.

The aim of the forum is to sharpen relationship assistance as a professional concept of inclusive participation. Perspectives from self-advocacy, practice, family experience, community orientation, pedagogy and inclusion research are to be brought into dialogue with one another. In keeping with the conference theme 'Generation Inclusion?', the forum asks how inclusive practice can be further developed when social belonging is understood not as a side effect, but as a central component of participation.

The forum aims to make relationships visible as an independent field of inclusive support. For inclusion becomes concrete where people find access to self-chosen relationships, build friendships, share common interests, cope with conflicts, feel a sense of belonging and shape their life world together with others.