

Family Sports with Disabled Children

Progress Towards Social Inclusion

By

**Benjamin Birzer, Sonia Galster, Sandra Müller,
Peter Kapustin, Joel T. Schmidt, Florian Kainz,
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Of course, special thanks go to our idea generator and project advisor, Prof. Dr. em. Peter Kapustin, who has been passionately committed to the research and promotion of these topics since the 1980s.

Prof. Dr. Sandra Müller

Project Lead

Foreword

Inclusion: A mindset for the future

Inclusion is not a marginal concern of modern societies; it is a measure of their humanity. How we engage with diversity, how we enable participation, and how we dismantle barriers determines whether social progress truly reaches everyone. For this reason, inclusion is more than a political programme or an educational framework: it is a mindset.

At the University of Applied Management, this mindset has been firmly embedded in our institutional identity for many years. As an educational institution, we understand ourselves not only as a place of knowledge acquisition, but as a societal actor with responsibility. The true value of research and teaching is not to be found within academic discourse alone, but through their impact on society. Inclusion is a central issue for us, and we are deeply committed to it on institutional, professional and personal levels.

In recent years, our university has gained valuable and compelling insights through various research projects, and most notably *Family Sports-Inclusive* and *Family Camps-Inclusive*. The findings from these projects help us to move beyond abstract theoretical reflection to the reality of designing needs-based and future-oriented inclusion initiatives. The projects reveal where concrete challenges lie, which structures prove to be sustainable, and how meaningful participation can be achieved in the everyday lives of families.

The present volume builds precisely on this foundation. It merges theoretical foundations with practical implementation, directing its focus towards a field of action whose societal relevance is essential: inclusive family sport. In this context, sport is understood as a social space—a place of social encounters, trust, network-building and mutual support. When families are able to be active together, irrespective of individual circumstances, a genuine sense of community emerges.

The research projects presented in this book effectively illustrate how vital structural anchoring, participatory development and sustainable implementation are for successful inclusion. An element of special significance is the approach of viewing inclusion not in isolation, but as a process engaging equally with families, municipalities, sport clubs and networks. This approach emphasizes inclusion as a multi-level process, where success occurs only when responsibility is shared and cooperation is actively shaped.

Consequently, this book can be seen not merely as a scientific documentation, but as a source of inspiration. It identifies fields of action, formulates recommendations, and encourages readers to explore new pathways. In a time marked by societal transformation, it is more important than ever to create spaces for connection. Inclusive family sport can be such a space.

My special thanks to everyone involved in this project, as they have helped to move it forward with expertise, perseverance and conviction. Above all, I extend my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Peter Kapustin, whose tireless dedication, profound knowledge and decades of experience have been instrumental in shaping the

conceptual development presented here. Without his commitment and scholarly depth, this work and the ongoing advancement of inclusive family sport in this form would not have been possible. Equal recognition is due to the project director, Prof. Dr. Sandra Müller, for her scientific guidance and for embedding the project sustainably within the university.

May this volume contribute to promoting inclusion on and across ever more levels, ensuring that becomes structurally anchored, and above all lived – in higher education, in sport and in our society.

Prof. Dr. Florian Kainz

Managing Director, University of Applied Management

Foreword

Inclusion by design: Rethinking digital futures

Contemporary society is confronted with profound and rapidly accelerating transformations driven by increasing digitalisation. Technological progress is reshaping structures, modes of communication and opportunities for participation across nearly all areas of life. This includes accelerated processes, digitized accessibility, and many analogue elements of everyday life are being dismantled and replaced by technical systems. These developments signal efficiency, innovation and modernisation—yet they also raise the central question of how equitable social participation can be ensured for all individuals under conditions of accelerated change.

Inclusion is therefore emerging as a fundamental future task for modern societies. This means it is not simply a discrete field of social policy, but rather it is shifted to the foreground as a structural principle permeating all domains of social life—education, public administration, mobility, employment, health and culture. An inclusive society does not measure progress solely by its technological achievements, but by the extent to which all people, regardless of individual circumstances, physical abilities or social conditions, can participate in this progress on equal terms.

The context of digitalisation clearly emphasizes that barriers are no longer solely physical; they are increasingly manifested in digital

environments. When analogue access points are replaced by digital systems, new forms of structural exclusion emerge if these systems are not designed to be genuinely accessible. Insufficient contrast, visually overloaded user interfaces, a lack of semantic structure and limited screen-reader compatibility reveal that accessibility is still far from established as a standard quality criterion in software development. There is more at stake in this context than just technical optimisation: inclusion concerns the societal responsibility inherent in digital design. Digital systems shape access, agency and participation. Therefore, inclusion needs to start at the earliest stages of conceptual design and development of technological systems.

At the same time, new technologies—especially in the field of artificial intelligence—offer significant potential to enhance social participation. Accessible information formats, the interpretation of visual content and intelligent assistance functions can become powerful tools in the everyday lives of people with impairments—provided they are designed consciously, ethically and inclusively.

Within this societal and technological field of tension, the present work becomes highly relevant. Rather than focusing primarily on abstract concepts or theoretical models, the book highlights concrete practices of lived inclusion. Inclusive family sport is presented as a social space of encounter, where participation and community can be directly experienced. Here, sport does not function as a performance-driven system, but as a social arena of connection, shared activity and low threshold participation.

This work is an expression of a continuous and long-term scientific examination of inclusion, which has been shaped in a special way by the work of Prof. Dr. Peter Kapustin. His scientific work, his conceptual approaches and his many years of commitment have played a decisive role in shaping inclusive family sport and establishing it as an independent field of action. With Prof. Dr. Sandra Müller in the role as scientific director for the overall project, the project team has succeeded in creating a scientifically sound work that provides both meaningful theoretical reflection on inclusion and best-practice examples of its effective implementation in practice. It vividly demonstrates that bridges can be built through sporting activities – between people, realities of life and individual conditions. In an ever faster changing world, spaces are being created here that enable all people to participate.

On behalf of the University of Applied Management, we would like to thank Prof. Dr Peter Kapustin for his many years of dedication and his significant contributions to creating new pathways and directions for inclusion. The results of the research projects *Family Sports-Inclusive* and *Family Camps-Inclusive*, culminating in this work, are examples of outstanding achievement that not only describe participation but also demonstrate it in a practical way through innovative opportunities in sport. The entire project team are to be commended for this achievement, which provides new impetus for science, practice, politics and civil society.

Prof. Dr. Benedikt Schumm
Vice-President, University of Applied Management

Introduction

Inclusion and family: Theoretical perspectives and research context

The inclusion of people with disabilities is one of the central social issues of our time and is widely supported by both academia and politicians. It is now considered a key concept for understanding and interpreting disability and social diversity (Degener, 2009). In a broad sense, inclusion is one of the fundamental principles of modern, pluralistic societies that are characterized by an appreciation of human diversity (Gieß-Stüber et al., 2014).

The need to remove structural, cultural, and mental barriers ensuring natural and unrestricted access for active participation in social, cultural, and professional life, is firmly established at institutional levels and widely discussed in public debate in Germany, as well as in many other industrialised countries (Radtke & Tiemann, 2014). This goes hand in hand with the recognition that inclusion is not merely a theoretical ideal, but rather a guiding principle requiring implementation, which allows its effectiveness in everyday life to be evaluated and firmly established over the long term (Hinz, 2002).

Our book focuses precisely on this practical implementation perspective and seeks to illustrate how local initiatives and low-threshold measures, developed in direct contact with the community, can strengthen relationships and generate impulses that encourage a genuine shift in perspective. This applies

especially to contexts where institutional and media narratives on inclusion are not yet fully established.

Inclusive thinking has spread across nearly all areas of social life over the past decades, ranging from advertising to children's and youth literature and extending to public discourse, forms of representation, and sports initiatives. Disability is now increasingly understood as a natural form of human existence and is visible in a wide variety of cultural, communicative, and sporting contexts (Kleindienst-Cachay et al., 2012). At the institutional level, this understanding is increasingly reflected in legislation, policy communication and social participation strategies.

Since the 1990s, the international and European legal framework has shifted toward an inclusive perspective. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD), adopted in 2006 and ratified in Germany in 2009, marks a paradigmatic shift toward a model that places the responsibility for equal participation not on persons with disabilities themselves but on society (UN-CRPD, 2006a; Degener, 2009; Degener, 2016). Article 30 is central, as it calls for equal participation in cultural life as well as in recreation, leisure, and sport.

The processes analysed in this book are based on local case studies carried out between 2020 and 2025 as part of the *Family Sports-Inclusive* and *Family Camps-Inclusive* programmes at the University of Applied Management, with support from the Bavarian State Ministry for Family, Labour, and Social Affairs. The analysis focuses on strategies and practices that help promote the

participation of people with disabilities and their families, to ultimately generate positive effects for the wider community.

The conceptual foundation of this analysis builds on the work of sport pedagogue **Peter Kapustin**. Between 1980 and 2007, Kapustin, together with the University of Würzburg and the University of Applied Management, developed theoretical and empirical foundations for family sports and established family sport groups as innovative spaces of socialization (Kapustin & Kapustin-Lauffer, 2014c). Kapustin's model does not focus primarily on the individual with a disability, but rather on the family as a whole. Disabilities are referred to at the family level, describing families with a disabled family member as "families with disability," who experience not only shared burdens, but also shared resources.

Already in the 1980s and 1990s, family sport groups were able to counteract stigmatisation and social isolation, thereby anticipating key principles later formalised in the UN-CRPD. The benefit of such social groups is twofold, in terms of strength and effectiveness. Strength, in the formal and informal relationship networks created by sports clubs, associations, and municipal stakeholders, which enable systemic forms of inclusion (Kapustin, 1991a). Effectiveness, in the low-threshold, easily accessible, and relationship-oriented design of the activities, emphasising the social function of sport more strongly than its performance-oriented dimension (Tiemann & Rulofs, 2017).

The research on which this book is based builds on Kapustin's understanding by highlighting the role of territory, understood as a social and institutional space shaped by specific governance

structures and local dynamics. The focus on low-threshold, easily implementable measures makes it possible to identify exemplary best-practice models that can be transferred to other regions.

Inclusion and its normative framework: From medical and social perspectives toward a sport-based model

Examining the topic of inclusion within the context described above offers valuable analytical insights, as it becomes possible to critically evaluate the extent to which declared principles for inclusion align with their actual implementation in local practice. Within the European framework, which also applies to Germany, the central point of reference is the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD)** from 2006 ¹. Through its ratification in numerous countries and the development of national action plans, the Convention has significantly shaped disability policy over the past two decades. It has not only guided the substantive direction of the measures to be taken but has also established a clear terminological basis for the concepts of disability and inclusion.

Since 2006, the topic of disability has undergone a fundamental re-evaluation, because for the first time it has been explicitly placed within the framework of **human rights**. In line with broader societal value shifts, this step marks the transition from a

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD). The convention was adopted on 13 December 2006 and signed by 82 states. It acts as a binding instrument under international law to enshrine the human rights of persons with disabilities and includes a differentiated categorisation of this group of people.

needs-based to a **rights-based perspective**. In this context, the 2006 Convention can be understood as an expression of a profound epistemological shift that has taken place within society and within the institutions responsible for shaping, organising, and governing the lives of people with physical or psychological impairments.

Already at the beginning of the 2000s, the **International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)** of the World Health Organization (WHO) ² had incorporated the paradigms developed since the 1960s within various “Disability Studies” and attempted to combine different interpretative approaches into a new conceptual synthesis. And with the 2006 UN Convention, this paradigm shift is set out clearly and in binding form, leading to a fundamental change in how disability can be understood.

The theoretical foundation of this new understanding is the so-called **social model of disability**. According to this model, disability is not viewed as an individual characteristic or deficit, but as the result of interaction between the impairment (physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory) and the barriers (material and immaterial) present within a given social environment.

² The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) is the World Health Organization's (WHO) framework for assessing health and disability at the individual and societal level. It was adopted as an international standard by all WHO member states in 2001. The ICF is based on the same conceptual principles as the International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD) and the International Classification of Health Interventions (ICHI) and thus follows a uniform understanding of health.

The perspective established since 2006 aims to overcome the traditional divide between care and oppression. Historically, this divide created a tension between protecting people with disabilities and simultaneously dehumanising them, often through notions of blame (both divine and human), pathologisation, dependency, and stigmatisation. This dynamic placed people with disabilities in a socially inferior and discriminatory position. Now, within the current **inclusive approach**, the person with a disability is no longer regarded as an object of care, pity, or medical treatment, but as a **rights-bearing subject**, an active member of society, and an agent in shaping their own life.

In line with the inclusive perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the concept of **accessibility** is highlighted as a key requirement for equal participation in all areas of life. The Convention emphasises that States Parties are obliged to take measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have access “on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas” (UN-CRPD, 2006b, para. 1).

In **Article 30**, the Convention places special emphasis on ensuring access to cultural, leisure, and sporting activities, stating: “With a view to enabling persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities, States Parties shall take appropriate measures” (UN-CRPD, 2006c, para. 5).

This includes, among other measures, promoting the participation of persons with disabilities in general sports and leisure activities, enabling the organisation and development of specific activities, ensuring access to appropriate facilities, and involving children with disabilities equally in school and leisure contexts.

The UN-CRPD provides a major impetus for the development of inclusive structures in sport contexts. In Germany, it is often described as a “driver of inclusion,” since it initiated a fundamental shift in perspective. Persons with impairments are no longer addressed primarily as individuals in need of protection or assistance, but as self-determined subjects with their own rights and responsibilities, and in the sports context, as athletes who can participate in sport on an equal basis with others (Degener, 2009). Another highly relevant aspect is Article 30 (para. 5), which explicitly calls for equal participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport. This raises the sport policy question of how sports programmes at all levels, including community sport, school sport, and elite sport, can be designed in ways that genuinely achieve equality and ensure access for all (Radtke & Tiemann, 2014).

Sports associations and clubs, as well as coaches and instructors are called upon to create the structural and personnel conditions necessary for participation (Tiemann & Rulofs, 2017). Successful implementation requires a positive and appreciative basic attitude among all participants, as well as the development of a welcoming culture that recognises diversity. At the same time, structural, organisational, and communicative barriers need to be removed, and instructors must possess specific didactic and methodological

competencies in order to respond appropriately to the diverse physical, psychological, and socio-emotional conditions of the athletes (Tiemann, 2013). This includes, among other aspects, adaptations to equipment, rules, tasks, and social forms of interaction.

The current understanding of inclusion in sport is closely linked to the critique of the traditional concept of integration. According to Hinz (2002), this involves a fundamental paradigm shift. While integration has primarily referred to the incorporation of persons with disabilities into existing structures, inclusion aims at transforming those structures themselves. In public discourse, especially since the UN-CRPD, the term inclusion is often used primarily in relation to persons with impairments (Gieß-Stüber et al., 2013).

In contrast, Kleindienst-Cachay et al. (2012) define inclusion in a systems-theoretical and value-neutral sense as participation in communicative and social systems, without making any statement about the quality of that participation. This understanding stands in contrast to pedagogical approaches that view inclusion as a normative guiding principle grounded in equal opportunities and recognition (Gieß-Stüber et al., 2014). From an inclusion-pedagogical perspective, the focus is less on adapting individuals and more on changing institutional conditions so that diversity can be embraced and participation for all can be ensured (Radtke & Tiemann, 2014). In this sense, the concept of inclusion must be extended beyond the category of disability to encompass additional dimensions of diversity, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and age. This broader understanding

is closely connected to the diversity approach developed by Rulofs (2011).

Organised sport has also developed its own understanding of inclusion. The major associations, namely the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB), the German Disabled Sports Association (DBS), and Special Olympics Germany (SOD), have each formulated their own position papers (which are also authoritative for the Bavarian state associations). These three key organisations explicitly anchor their understanding of inclusion in the UN-CRPD and define inclusion as the self-determined, equal, and equivalent participation of people with and without impairments in sport (DOSB, 2013; SOD, 2012; DBS, 2011). Inclusion is thereby understood as a long-term and dynamic process that requires the commitment of all stakeholders. The more actively sports organisations engage, the more effectively this process can succeed. However, this presupposes a fundamental shift in thinking and the willingness to initiate sustainable processes of change.

All three position papers mentioned above emphasise the following areas for action that are considered essential for implementation:

- Understanding inclusion as a cross-functional responsibility
- Removing structural, communicative, and social barriers
- Promoting the participation of persons with impairments, including involvement in decision-making processes and volunteer positions

- Continuously developing structures and programmes to expand options for participation
- Enabling joint sporting activities and participation in club life
- Providing education and training, especially in the qualification and professional development of instructors
- Building sustainable networks between sports organisations, municipalities, special schools, and disability support services
- Expanding media coverage
- Ensuring barrier-free access to sports facilities and providing communication that is easy to understand
- Offering financial support programmes
- Strengthening and expanding scientific research on inclusion in sport

In addition, the German Association for Sport Science (DVS) adopts a clear position in its own policy paper. The DVS emphasises that inclusion is a cross-sector societal responsibility and that equal participation of all people, regardless of impairment, background, gender, or religion, must be ensured. However, it criticises the fact that many political decisions and structural frameworks have not yet been sufficiently grounded in scientific evidence. The DVS therefore sees its task as intensifying inclusion-related research, consolidating findings, and actively involving people with impairments in the research process (DVS, 2015). Furthermore, it highlights the need for stronger collaboration between different societal actors to effectively advance the complex process of inclusion.

A comparison of the understanding of inclusion within inclusion pedagogy, the sports federations, and the sport science perspective reveals a remarkable consistency in their core principles. In all approaches, inclusion is understood as a process that involves individual attitudes as well as institutional structures and societal conditions. The German Disabled Sports Association (DBS, 2014) emphasizes this understanding of inclusion as a foundational principle as it encompasses the possibility of self-determined participation for all in sport, with full participation and with the acceptance and recognition of diversity beyond the field of disability.

The process of inclusion in sport therefore requires structural, personnel, and material accessibility. To illustrate this developmental process, Conrads (2013) developed the inclusion pyramid, which describes the fundamental stages and prerequisites for inclusive sport development. Based on Conrads pyramid model, the following understanding of inclusion can be derived:

- Inclusion is a process of change affecting individuals, organisations, and society alike.
- Every person, regardless of impairment, can shape their involvement in sport autonomously to achieve full participation.
- Inclusion contributes to building relationships and strengthening community within society.

This makes it clear that inclusion can only be implemented successfully when all involved stakeholders actively support the process and recognise its potential (Gieß-Stüber et al., 2013). The

DOSB, as the umbrella organisation, together with national sports associations, state sports confederations, and regional associations, plays a central role in communicating, coordinating, and promoting an inclusive sports system (Radtke & Tiemann, 2014; Tiemann & Rulofs, 2017).

These provisions clarify the obligation of states to make all necessary adjustments and modifications to ensure genuine accessibility and equal participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of society.

From the UN Convention to the Bavarian reality of inclusion

Since its inception in 2006, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been signed by a total of 192 states through confirmation, accession, or ratification, including the European Union. Considering the considerations presented above, is a milestone in the societal development of the signatory states. Its significance has increased over the last twenty years since its adoption, warranting a critical examination of its impact: What has been implemented, achieved, and realized during this period?

The present contribution takes up this overarching question by examining strategies that are suitable for promoting a shift in perspective toward an inclusive orientation, particularly in contexts characterized by an interaction of innovative elements and traditional structures.

In Germany, the **ratification of the UN Convention** took place on 24 February 2009. Through its subsequent **involvement in the**

European Commission's efforts to develop strategies for the inclusion of people with disabilities during the periods 2010–2020 and 2021–2030 (COM, 2010; COM 2021), the goals, policies, and guidelines aimed at eliminating physical and social barriers were further consolidated, with the objective of shaping a more just and inclusive Europe. These strategies emphasized the importance of best practices based on cooperation between national, regional, and local institutions within network structures. A central element was the **participatory model**, which highlighted both the right to full societal participation in cultural, recreational, and sports activities and participation in political decision-making processes.

For **Bavaria**, 12 March 2013 marked a decisive step. On this day, the Bavarian State Government adopted its action plan “Key Areas of Bavarian Policy for Persons with Disabilities” (StMAS, 2013). This action plan contains central elements of the inclusive thinking described above. Foremost among these is the required **paradigm shift** from an integrative to an inclusive approach, meaning a move from a deficit-oriented perspective to one that is socially and societally oriented, involving society as a whole and placing persons with disabilities at its centre. The plan also formulates the goal of an **inclusive social environment**, understood as a barrier-free living space that is open to all people, with and without disabilities, young or old, with or without a migration background, and that they can shape jointly and autonomously (StMAS, 2013, p. 11).

The Bavarian action plan takes account of various fields of action and, in line with the UN Convention, explicitly includes the **fields**

of leisure, culture, and sport. While many aspects have been implemented, the Bavarian approach overall remains strongly oriented toward tradition and **institutional continuity**, which is exemplified by the continued maintenance of the traditional separation between mainstream and special schools. Without entering here into the educational policy debate on special schools, it is nevertheless of particular interest to consider those concrete strategies and projects that, even within a rather conservative framework, can generate transformative impulses and promote a shift in perspective toward greater inclusion.

Against this background and within this theoretical framework, the analytical significance of the two central axes of the projects *Family Sports-Inclusive* and *Family Camps-Inclusive* becomes more apparent: **sport** and **family**.

As a central element, **Sport** represents a privileged space for participation, exchange, and interaction. It allows individuals and groups from different backgrounds, abilities, and life circumstances to engage with one another in a playful and natural manner. The **playful dimension** provides opportunities for encounter and personal development that extend beyond school and working life. It is not by chance that the 2006 UN Convention also emphasises access to and participation in sporting activities as a fundamental right of persons with disabilities. The Bavarian action plan likewise explicitly recognises this field as “an excellent means of bringing together people with and without disabilities, made possible through the diverse sports programmes offered by disability sports associations” (StMAS, 2013, p. 58).