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Inclusion in the Scout Movement: Exploring Scout Leaders' Perceptions on Disability and Educational Co-responsibility

Inclusione nel Movimento Scout: un'indagine sulle percezioni dei capi scout in merito a disabilità e corresponsabilità educativa

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Abstract
Special Pedagogy literature, in line with recent legislative frameworks, has long emphasised the need to promote inclusive processes capable of embracing the full range of life environments that shape the existential pathways of people with disabilities within the Life Project, aimed at higher levels of Quality of Life. Such an approach calls for the need to investigate educational processes in a plurality of contexts, including leisure-related contexts, such as the Scout Movement. Although the Scout Movement represents the largest youth organisation in the world, limited research has investigated its preparedness and needs for welcoming youth with disabilities and promoting inclusive processes. To this end, the present study aims at analysing Scout leaders' perceptions on disability and educational co-responsibility through the administration of a structured questionnaire based on the SACIE-R scale. By evidencing opportunities and challenges perceived by Scout leaders in relation to the inclusion of people with disabilities, the results obtained from this study provide useful insights on educational practices and co-responsibility in leisure-related contexts.

Keywords: Special Pedagogy, Inclusion, People with Disabilities, Leisure, Scout Movement, QoL.

Riassunto
La letteratura di Pedagogia Speciale, in linea con i più recenti quadri normativi, ha da tempo sottolineato la necessità di promuovere processi inclusivi capaci di abbracciare l'insieme degli ambienti di vita che danno forma ai percorsi esistenziali delle persone con disabilità nell'ambito del Progetto di Vita, orientato a più elevati livelli di Qualità della Vita. Un tale approccio richiede di indagare i processi educativi in una pluralità di contesti, compresi quelli legati al Tempo Libero, come il Movimento Scout. Sebbene il Movimento Scout rappresenti la più grande organizzazione giovanile al mondo, la letteratura scientifica ha indagato solo in misura limitata la sua capacità e i bisogni emergenti rispetto all'accoglienza di giovani con disabilità e alla promozione di processi inclusivi. A tal fine, il presente studio si propone di analizzare le percezioni dei capi scout in merito alla disabilità e alla corresponsabilità educativa attraverso la somministrazione di un questionario strutturato basato sulla scala SACIE-R. Mettendo in luce le opportunità e le sfide percepite dai capi scout in relazione all'inclusione delle persone con disabilità, i risultati dello studio offrono insight utili sulle pratiche educative e sulla corresponsabilità nei contesti del Tempo Libero.

Parole chiave: Pedagogia Speciale, Inclusione, Persone con Disabilità, Tempo Libero, Movimento Scout, QdV.

1. Introduction

In line with the most recent legislative frameworks (L. 112/2016; L. 227/2021; D.Lgs. 62/2024), contemporary pedagogical reflections (Mura, 2016; Caldin & Giaconi, 2021; Friso & Caldin, 2022; Del Bianco, 2024; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025) emphasise the importance of supporting people with disabilities in the construction of meaningful and self-determined life paths, capable of sustaining trajectories oriented towards an authentic Quality of Life (QoL) (Schalock & Verdugo Alonso, 2002, 2006; Giaconi, 2015). This perspective calls for attention to the full range of life contexts in which such paths unfold, including leisure time and community life (UN, 2006; Bochicchio & Rivoltella, 2017; d'Alonzo, 2019; Miatto, 2022).

In light of these considerations, particular attention should be paid to the territorial networks through which community life materialises, which include the widespread presence of leisure-related associations and organisations. As noted by Lecce and colleagues (2021), third sector associations share a social mandate oriented towards care and inclusion, representing potential resources for the spread of an inclusive culture. The interpretation of leisure-related associations as means for creating worldwide inclusion is further reinforced by international frameworks (UNESCO, 2003; UN, 2012). In line with these considerations, related studies show how third sector associations can take on a proactive role in contrasting marginalisation and supporting active citizenship, representing educational outposts and public-spirited entities that are deeply rooted in the social fabric (Chaney & Fevre, 2001; Fazzi, 2013; Fujimoto *et al.*, 2014; Cullingworth *et al.*, 2024; Powell, 2025; Thompson *et al.*, 2026). In order for third-sector organisations to take on proactive roles in promoting inclusion and educational continuity, research highlights the importance of embracing and committing to the principles of inclusion as well as equipping organisations and their staff with proper knowledge, skills, and resources (Marques *et al.*, 2021). To this end, understanding how local associations can be both leveraged and supported in supporting the social inclusion of people with disabilities becomes particularly relevant.

Among third-sector leisure associations, the Scout Movement stands out for its scale and educational vocation: the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) is the largest youth educational organisation worldwide, rooted in local communities through a widespread network of groups led by adult volunteers. Despite its global reach, educational influence, and longstanding social commitment, the role of the Scout Movement in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities has remained largely unexplored by scientific research. Against this background, the present study investigates Scout leaders' perceptions on disability and educational co-responsibility, with the aim of understanding how scouting can be both leveraged and supported as a resource for the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The Life Project and Quality of Life

Consistent with the reference literature (Montobbio & Lepri, 2000; Canevaro, 2004; Cottini & Fedeli, 2007; Pavone, 2009; Cottini *et al.*, 2016; Canevaro *et al.*, 2021; Cottini, 2024; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025), the Life Project can be understood as a dynamic, evolving, and participatory process that follows the person throughout their lifespan by coherently integrating their aspirations, personal goals, living contexts, and available support systems. In this direction, the Life Project emerges as a frame of meaning that acknowledges the plurality and complexity of educational processes as dynamic pathways, deeply rooted in the person's everyday life contexts (UN, 2006; Bochicchio & Rivoltella, 2017; d'Alonzo, 2019; Miatto, 2022). In the Italian context, the principal legislative reference for the Life Project is Legislative Decree No. 62 of 3 May 2024, which establishes the legal framework for defining disability, conducting multidimensional assessment, providing reasonable accommodation, and developing and implementing an individualised, personalised, and participatory Life Project. From a conceptual standpoint, the Life Project stands at the intersection of two complementary dimensions: a prospective dimension, rooted in the person's imagination, aspirations, and future-oriented projections, and an actual dimension, grounded in con-

crete assessment and actions that are achievable at the present moment (Ianes & Cramerotti, 2009; Pavone, 2009; Croce *et al.*, 2014; Caldin & Giaconi, 2021; Canevaro *et al.*, 2021).

Accordingly, the care provision for people with disabilities is called to follow a systemic approach that aims at fostering opportunities for participation, self-determination, and social inclusion across a multitude of environments, extending beyond the boundaries of formal educational contexts (Giaconi *et al.*, 2023; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025). Such a view addresses how educational processes unfold through a network of interconnected contexts that accompany the person throughout their life – including family settings, peer groups, and leisure pursuits – and contribute to shaping personal identities, social relationships, and opportunities for self-realisation in co-responsibility (Canevaro, 2020; Domenici *et al.*, 2017; Giaconi *et al.*, 2023). Such a perspective underlines a renewed sensitivity to the transformative potential of inhabiting contexts to promote inclusion and social cohesion (Venturini & Graziano, 2016; Bochicchio & Rivoltella, 2017).

Within this perspective, the construct of Quality of Life (QoL) provides a comprehensive theoretical and methodological framework for guiding educational planning and interventions within the Life Project (Renwick & Brown, 1996; Cummins, 1997; Schalock & Verdugo Alonso, 2002, 2006; Giaconi, 2015). The QoL framework offers a meaningful foundation for supporting people with disabilities and promoting inclusive processes across the diverse contexts in which they live and participate (Felce & Perry, 1995; Felce, 1997; Giaconi, 2015; Giaconi *et al.*, 2019; Verdugo Alonso & Schalock, 2024), as it can inform the co-design of personalised life trajectories centred on individuals' needs, preferences, and aspirations, while encompassing key dimensions such as self-determination, personal development, physical, emotional and material wellbeing, rights, interpersonal relationships, and social inclusion (Schalock & Verdugo Alonso, 2002, 2006; Giaconi, 2015). Grounded in an ecosystemic perspective, the construct also supports the definition of clear objectives and the evaluation of the impact of educational and support interventions (Giaconi, 2015; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025).

2.2 Leisure and educational co-responsibility

Against this backdrop, existing empirical studies and systematic frameworks highlight the importance of leisure contexts in contributing to Quality of Life (Schalock & Verdugo Alonso, 2002, 2006; Giaconi, 2015). The QoL model proposed by Schalock and Verdugo Alonso (2002, 2006) conceptualises leisure through two complementary perspectives. On the one hand, leisure is regarded as a *life enricher*, representing a subjective indicator that reflects the personal meaning and value attributed to leisure experiences at the micro-systemic level. On the other hand, leisure is understood as a *social indicator*, capturing the objective environmental conditions operating at the meso- and macro-systemic levels, including the availability of opportunities, services, and broader leisure infrastructures. Scientific research underlines how leisure activities provide meaningful opportunities to participate in community life, establish significant social relationships, develop a sense of belonging, and assume significant social roles (Schalock & Verdugo Alonso, 2002, 2006; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025). Additionally, research highlights the potential of leisure to foster empowerment and self-expression by enabling people to pursue activities that can meet personal inclinations and preferences, thereby promoting educational pathways and personal growth (Giaconi, 2015; Del Bianco, 2019; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025).

In the context of the Life Project, these reflections underline the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have genuine opportunities for engaging in leisure activities to achieve greater levels of QoL. Such a perspective thus addresses the planning and implementation of services and supports that enhance the accessibility of leisure environments, facilities, and opportunities (Giaconi, 2015; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025), recognising leisure-related rights and ensuring the material conditions that are necessary for their exercise (UN, 2006; WLO, 2020). On the whole, these considerations imply the creation of an inclusive leisure time system, which is grounded in sharing educational responsibility and acknowledging the contemporary plurality of contexts for learning and personal development (Aitchison, 2003; Wright *et al.*, 2019). Accordingly, the concept of an inclusive leisure time system addresses the role and impact of leisure-related associations and organisations in promoting individual and collective wellbeing, questioning their capacity to provide appropriate resources, supports, and opportunities for people with disabilities

(Canevaro *et al.*, 2021; Cottini, 2024; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025), highlighting the importance of educational co-responsibility.

In this regard, educational co-responsibility can be understood as the shared and negotiated assumption of responsibility for the educational pathway of the person with disability among the different actors who populate their life contexts, such as families, peers, educators, services, and associations (Canevaro, 2020; Domenici *et al.*, 2017; Amatori & Giaconi, 2025). However, a distinction should be drawn between two analytically distinct levels. The first concerns the *recognition* of co-responsibility as a pedagogical and ethical principle, namely the shared awareness that inclusion cannot be delegated to a single actor. The second concerns the *enabling conditions* for its concrete enactment, such as targeted training, clearly defined roles, time and organisational resources, stable communication channels with families and services, and forms of institutional support (Ianes & Cramerotti, 2009; Marques *et al.*, 2021; Cottini, 2024). Recognition of the principle does not automatically entail the presence of such conditions, and the gap between the two may represent a critical point for the sustainability of inclusive processes, especially in volunteer-based organisations. Educational co-responsibility should also be distinguished from mere collaboration among the actors involved. Collaboration refers to forms of cooperation, information exchange, or coordination of specific actions, which may remain episodic and leave each actor's responsibility separate. Co-responsibility, by contrast, implies that the different actors share the educational project itself: they jointly define goals, roles, and choices, and take on a common responsibility for its outcomes in relation to the person's Life Project (Canevaro, 2020; Amatori & Giaconi, 2025). Collaboration is therefore a necessary but not sufficient condition for co-responsibility.

Among the various leisure-related contexts that can be examined in relation to these challenges, the Scout Movement occupies a particularly significant position, given its worldwide impact and its mandate of promoting active participation, experiential learning, and community engagement. Precisely because it relies on adult volunteer educators who share responsibility for children's and young people's educational pathways with families and local services, scouting offers a privileged setting for examining both the recognition of educational co-responsibility and the conditions for its implementation. For these reasons, the Scout Movement was chosen as the context of the present research, which is described in the following section.

3. Research context

Representing one of the largest youth movements worldwide, the Scout Movement brings together over 60 million children, adolescents, young adults, and educators across 176 National Scout Organisations (WOSM, n.d.). Through outdoor activities, group life, and active citizenship experiences, scouting organisations aim to foster self-determination and social participation, representing a potentially valuable resource for the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities (Thompson, 2014). From the perspective outlined above, scouting can therefore be regarded as a potential node of the inclusive leisure time system, in which Scout leaders, as adult volunteer educators, share educational responsibility with families, peers, and local services.

In the Italian context, the largest scouting organisation, Associazione Guide e Scouts Cattolici Italiani (AGESCI), highlights how the educational experience of scouting is grounded in community life and shared responsibility, promoting what the Association describes as "a way of life founded on the acceptance of reciprocal diversity and fraternity" (AGESCI, 1999, p. 3). The Association has expressed its commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities both in its foundational principles (AGESCI, 1999) and in dedicated initiatives that brought together educators, researchers, families, and disability advocates to examine the inclusion of young people with disabilities in scouting (AGESCI, 2019). Within each local Scout group, educational planning is collectively entrusted to the Scout Leaders' Community (Comunità Capi), namely the group of adult volunteer leaders who share responsibility for designing and organising educational activities.

However, existing studies have only partially explored the inclusive potential of scouting organisations: research has mainly focused on its contribution to youth development, social skills, self-esteem, leadership, and citizenship education (Vallory, 2012; Du Merac, 2015; Broström, 2016; Asensio-Ramón *et al.*, 2020;

Wang *et al.*, 2021). As a result, limited attention has been devoted to understanding opportunities and challenges related to the creation of inclusive scouting experiences from the perceptions of Scout leaders, leaving their agency and the organisational conditions within which they operate mostly unexplored. Consequently, the educational potential of scouting as a community-based setting for fostering inclusion, participation, and educational co-responsibility remains underexplored and warrants further empirical investigation.

To address this gap, the present study aims at investigating Scout leaders' perceptions on disability and educational co-responsibility, examining both the extent to which co-responsibility is recognised as a guiding principle and the conditions (training, preparedness, perceived burden) that may support or hinder its actual implementation. The study also explores whether these perceptions are associated with years of service and previous direct experience with disability.

4. Materials and Methods

In order to explore Scout leaders' perceptions in relation to the inclusion of youth with disabilities within the scouting movement, the present study adopts a quantitative research approach (Slater & Hasson, 2025). Specifically, a structured questionnaire based on an adaptation of the Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (SACIE-R) scale (Forlin *et al.*, 2011; Aiello *et al.*, 2019) was administered to a sample of 87 Scout leaders volunteering in various local Scout groups of the Marche Region (Italy). Participation was entirely voluntary, and no selection criteria were applied beyond being an active Scout leader in a local Scout group of the Marche Region at the time of data collection. The questionnaire link was disseminated through local Scout groups and district coordinators, and all leaders who chose to respond were included. The study is therefore based on a convenience sample, so the findings are not intended to be generalised to the wider population of Scout leaders.

Specifically, the questionnaire is organised into four sections. The first section gathers demographic information, including participants' age and gender. The second section explores the participants' previous experience with people with disabilities and inclusive training within the Scout context. The third section examines personal perceptions towards disability inclusion through an adaptation of the SACIE-R scale, contextualised for the Scout setting, in order to assess participants' emotional responses to disability, attitudes towards the inclusion of children and young people with different support needs, and concerns regarding workload, stress, acceptance within the group, and perceived preparedness to support inclusive practices. The adaptation was limited to the lexical level. All 15 original items and their three subscales (Sentiments, Attitudes, Concerns; five items each) were retained, and only school-related expressions were replaced with terms familiar to the Scout context. For instance, "students" was rendered as "children and young people", "class" as "Scout unit" or "Scout group", and "should be in regular classes" as "should be welcomed and included in Scout settings". Likewise, references to academic performance were reworded in terms of Scout activities: "students who frequently fail exams" became "children and young people who frequently struggle to complete Scout activities successfully", and "an individualised academic programme" became "individualised support". The concern about lacking the knowledge and skills "to teach" students with disabilities was reformulated as lacking those required "to effectively support" them. These changes aimed to make the items meaningful for non-teaching volunteer educators while preserving the constructs measured by the original instrument and its Italian version (Aiello *et al.*, 2019). The original 4-point response format was replaced with a 6-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly disagree"; 6 = "Strongly agree"), in line with the format used in Section IV, in order to obtain finer-grained responses while avoiding a neutral midpoint. Lastly, the fourth section investigates broader perceptions about inclusion in the Scout Movement by addressing issues such as inclusive training, peer relationships, collaboration with families and community services, and sustainability. The items of this section were developed ad hoc by the research team on the basis of the literature on inclusive leisure and educational co-responsibility (Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025; Santilli, 2025) and rated on the same 6-point scale. Within the questionnaire, co-responsibility was operationalised on two levels. The recognition of co-responsibility was explored through the Section IV items on collaboration with families, local services, and peers. The conditions for its implementation were approached indirectly through Section II (availability of training) and Section III (per-

ceived preparedness, workload, stress, and attention to all group members). It should be noted that the instrument captures perceptions and agreement in principle, not actual collaborative practices. Table 1 illustrates the specific items for each section, as well as related answer types.

Section	Items	Answer type
I. Demographic information	Age	Short answer
	Gender	Multiple choice: M; F; Not specified
II. Personal experience in relation to disability	Years of experience as Scout leader	Multiple choice: First year; 2-10; 11-15; 16-20; 21-30; 31-40; More than 40
	As a Scout leader, I have had direct experience with at least one child or young person with a disability.	Multiple choice: Yes; No
	My Scout Leaders' Community[1] has welcomed at least one child or young person with a disability into the group over the past year.	Multiple choice: Yes; No; I don't know
	My Scout Leaders' Community has welcomed at least one child or young person with a disability into the group over the past three years.	
	Has your Scout group or local district organised any training sessions specifically focused on the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities?	
	Has your Scout group or local district implemented any structured training programmes specifically aimed at promoting the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities?	
III. Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (SACIE-R) scale adapted to the Scout context	I find it difficult to overcome my initial discomfort when meeting people with complex disabilities.	6-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponds to "Strongly disagree" and 6 corresponds to "Strongly agree"
	I feel uncomfortable making eye contact with a person with a disability.	
	I tend to keep my interactions with people with disabilities brief and end them as soon as possible.	
	I believe I would feel bad if I had a disability myself.	
	I am afraid of the possibility of acquiring a disability in the future.	
	Children and young people who experience difficulties expressing themselves verbally should be welcomed and included in Scout settings.	
	Children and young people who frequently struggle to complete Scout activities successfully should be welcomed and included in Scout settings.	
	Children and young people who need individualised support should be welcomed and included in Scout settings.	
	Children and young people who are easily distracted should be welcomed and included in Scout settings.	
	Children and young people who require communication supports or assistive systems (e.g. Braille or sign language) should be welcomed and included in Scout settings.	
	I am concerned that having children or young people with disabilities in my Scout unit would increase my workload.	
	I am concerned that it would be difficult to provide adequate attention to all children and young people in a Scout unit that includes members with disabilities.	
	I am concerned that having children or young people with disabilities in my Scout unit would increase my stress.	
	I am concerned that children and young people with disabilities may not be accepted by the rest of the Scout group.	
	I am concerned that I do not have the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support children and young people with disabilities.	

1 The Scout Leaders' Community refers to the group of adult volunteer leaders within a local Scout unit who collectively share responsibility for educational planning and organise the educational activities.

IV. Perceptions on inclusion in the Scout Movement	Welcoming a child or young person with a disability also means taking care of their therapeutic needs.	6-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponds to "Strongly disagree" and 6 corresponds to "Strongly agree"
	The successful inclusion of a child or young person with a disability requires specialised medical knowledge and expertise.	
	Including a child or young person with a disability may disadvantage the other members of the Scout group (e.g. by reducing the autonomy of the patrol).	
	The successful inclusion of a child or young person with a disability depends not only on Scout leaders but also on the attitudes of their peers.	
	Meaningful inclusion requires close collaboration with the family of the child or young person with a disability.	
	Meaningful inclusion requires collaboration with local services and the professionals involved in supporting the child or young person with a disability.	
	The Scout group is not an appropriate environment for children and young people with disabilities because it presents many barriers.	
	Participation in the Scout group is more important than how well children and young people perform during activities.	
	The Scout group should adapt to the needs of children and young people, rather than expecting children and young people to adapt to the group.	

Tab. 1: Questionnaire structure

The questionnaire was administered via Google Form application. Before accessing the survey items, respondents were informed about the aims of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the processing of the collected data for research purposes. By completing and submitting the questionnaire, participants provided their informed consent to the collection and processing of the anonymous data, in accordance with applicable data protection and ethical research principles.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical methods to examine the distribution of responses for each questionnaire item (Siedlecki, 2020). Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each item. For Likert items, responses from 1 to 3 were treated as disagreement and responses from 4 to 6 as agreement. Given the lexical and response-format modifications, analyses were carried out at the level of single items rather than on subscale or total scores. In addition, exploratory analyses were performed to identify recurring response patterns and preliminary associations among selected variables. Variables were selected for these analyses on theoretical grounds: years of service as a Scout leader and previous direct experience with children and young people with disabilities, both identified in the literature as potential correlates of attitudes towards inclusion, were each examined in relation to the Section III and Section IV items. Inter-item associations within and across these two sections were also explored. Given the ordinal nature of the data (including the categorical coding of years of service) and the limited sample size, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ) was used, with statistical significance set at $p < .05$. For these analyses, dichotomous variables were coded as 1 = Yes and 0 = No. As the analyses were exploratory, no correction for multiple comparisons was applied, and the results are interpreted as preliminary trends to be tested in future confirmatory research.

5. Results

The final sample consisted of 87 participants (45 women and 42 men). The age distribution was skewed towards younger participants, with more than half of the sample (56.3%) aged between 20 and 29 years. Smaller proportions were aged 30–39 years (16.1%), 40–49 years (11.5%), and 50–59 years (11.5%), while only 3.4% were between 60 and 69 years and 1.1% were aged 70 years or older. Demographic characteristics of participants are summarised in Figure 1.

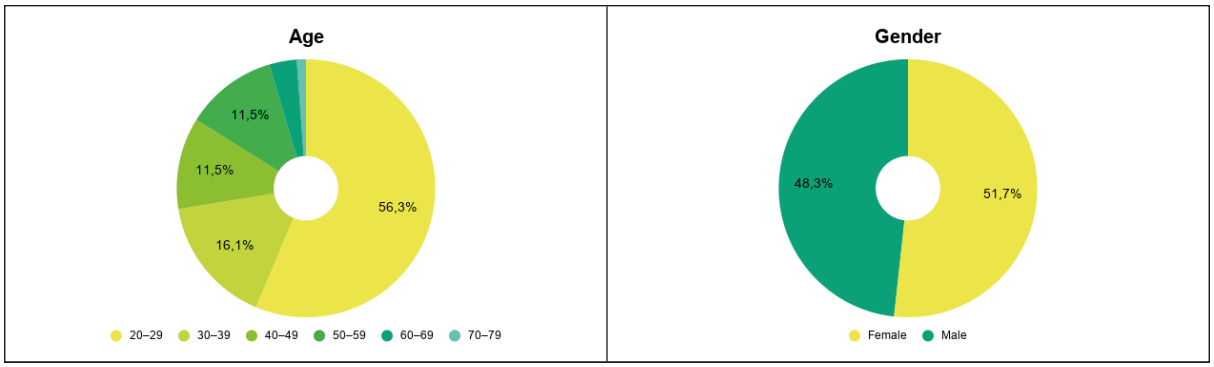
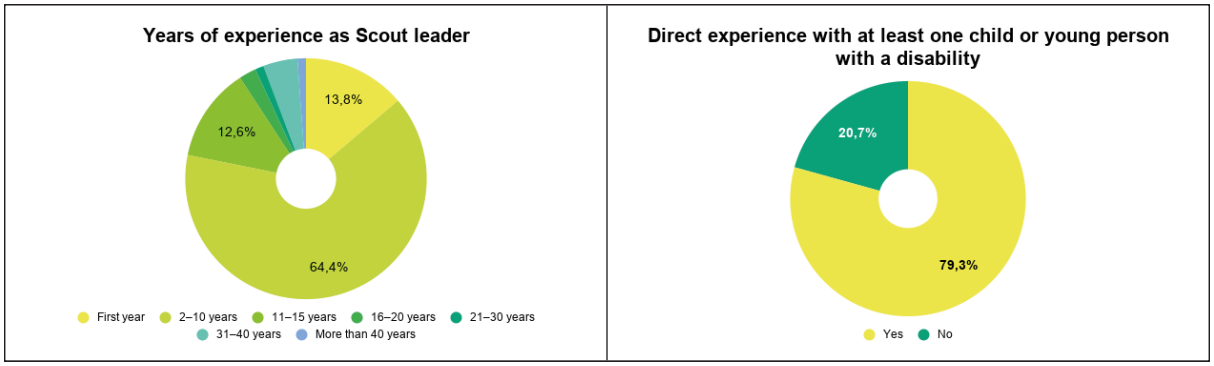


Fig. 1: Demographic characteristics of participants (Section I results)

In relation to the second section of the questionnaire, results reveal widespread direct experience with children and young people with disabilities, alongside heterogeneous levels of exposure to and awareness of inclusion-related training initiatives, as illustrated in Figure 2. The majority of participants (64.4%, *n* = 56) reported between 2 and 10 years of service within the Scout Leaders' Community. A further 13.8% (*n* = 12) were in their first year of service, while 12.6% (*n* = 11) had between 11 and 15 years of experience. Only a small proportion of respondents reported longer periods of service, including 2.3% (*n* = 2) with 16–20 years, 1.1% (*n* = 1) with 21–30 years, 4.6% (*n* = 4) with 31–40 years, and 1.1% (*n* = 1) with more than 40 years of experience. Most participants (79.3%, *n* = 69) reported having had experience with at least one child or young person with a disability in their role as a Scout leader, whereas 20.7% (*n* = 18) indicated that they had not had such experience. Regarding whether their Scout Leaders' Community had welcomed a child or young person with a disability during the past year, 58.6% of participants (*n* = 51) responded affirmatively, 34.5% (*n* = 30) reported that this had not occurred, and 6.9% (*n* = 6) indicated that they did not know. When asked whether their Scout Leaders' Community had welcomed a child or young person with a disability during the past three years, 80.5% of participants (*n* = 70) responded affirmatively, 12.6% (*n* = 11) reported that this had not occurred, and 6.9% (*n* = 6) indicated that they did not know. When asked whether their Scout group or local district had organised specific training sessions on the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities, 34.5% of participants (*n* = 30) responded affirmatively, 44.8% (*n* = 39) reported that no such initiatives had been organised, and 20.7% (*n* = 18) indicated that they did not know. Regarding the implementation of structured training programmes specifically aimed at promoting the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities, 17.2% of participants (*n* = 15) reported that such programmes had been implemented in their Scout group or local district, whereas 37.9% (*n* = 33) responded negatively. A substantial proportion of respondents (44.8%, *n* = 39) indicated that they did not know whether such initiatives had been carried out.



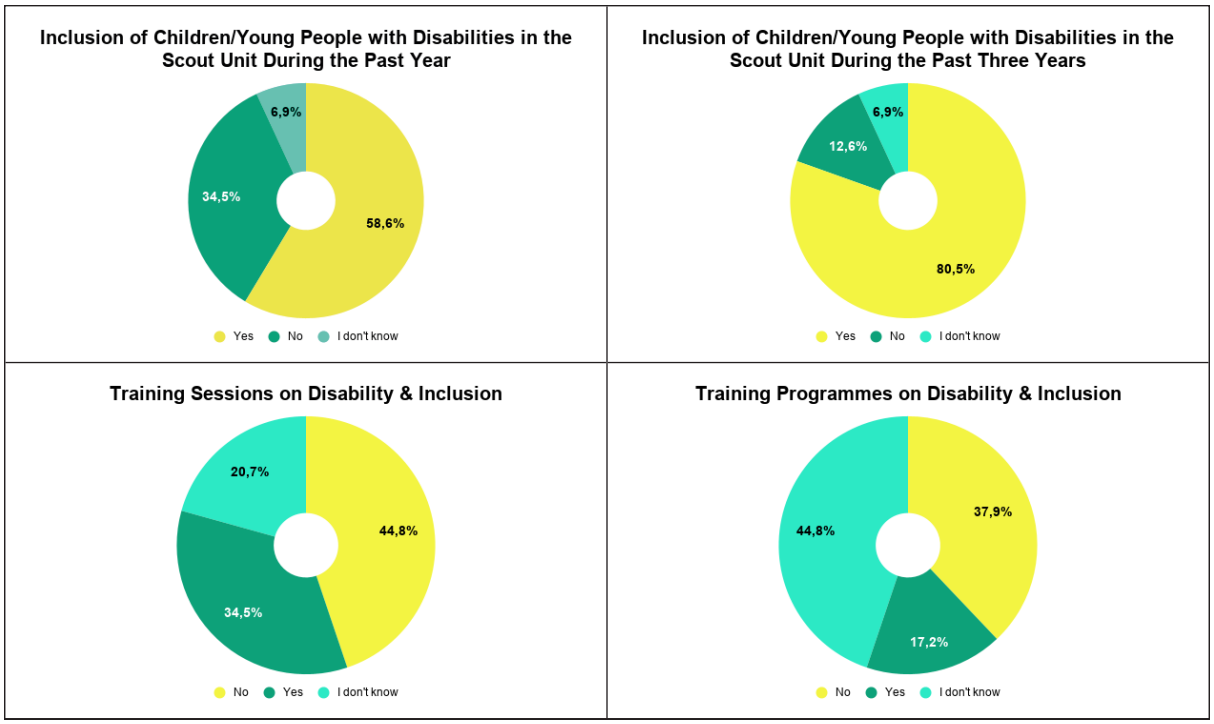


Fig. 2: Section II results

In relation to the third section of the questionnaire, based on the SACIE-R scale adaptation, findings revealed generally positive attitudes towards inclusion, although some concerns emerged with respect to preparedness and practical implementation, as shown in Figure 3. With regard to emotional responses to disability, the majority of participants expressed disagreement with statements reflecting discomfort or avoidance. Specifically, 86.2% (n = 75) selected one of the three disagreement options when asked whether they found it difficult to overcome their initial discomfort when meeting people with complex disabilities, while only 13.8% (n = 12) expressed at least some level of agreement. Similarly, 92.0% (n = 80) disagreed with the statement that they felt uncomfortable making eye contact with a person with a disability, and 89.7% (n = 78) rejected the idea that they tended to keep interactions with people with disabilities as brief as possible. By contrast, responses were more evenly distributed for the statements concerning personal fears of disability: 56.3% (n = 49) expressed some degree of agreement that they would feel bad if they themselves had a disability, and 52.9% (n = 46) reported some level of concern about the possibility of acquiring a disability in the future. Support for inclusive participation within Scout settings was consistently high across all proposed items related to children and young people with disabilities. In particular, 86.2% (n = 75) agreed or strongly agreed that children experiencing difficulties expressing themselves verbally should be welcomed and included in Scout activities. Likewise, 83.9% (n = 73) endorsed the inclusion of children who frequently struggle to complete Scout activities successfully, 78.2% (n = 68) supported the inclusion of those requiring individualised support, 93.1% (n = 81) agreed or strongly agreed that children who are easily distracted should be included, and 74.7% (n = 65) expressed agreement with the inclusion of children requiring communication supports or assistive systems such as Braille or sign language. The pattern of responses was more heterogeneous with respect to perceived practical challenges. While only 44.8% (n = 39) expressed some level of agreement that the presence of children and young people with disabilities would increase their workload and 35.6% (n = 31) anticipated increased stress, a larger proportion (59.8%, n = 52) agreed or strongly agreed that providing adequate attention to all members of the Scout unit could become more difficult in inclusive contexts. Concerns about peer acceptance were comparatively limited, with 32.2% (n = 28) expressing agreement that children and young people with disabilities might not be accepted by the rest of the group. Finally, 59.8% (n = 52) agreed or strongly agreed that they might lack the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support children and young people with disabilities.

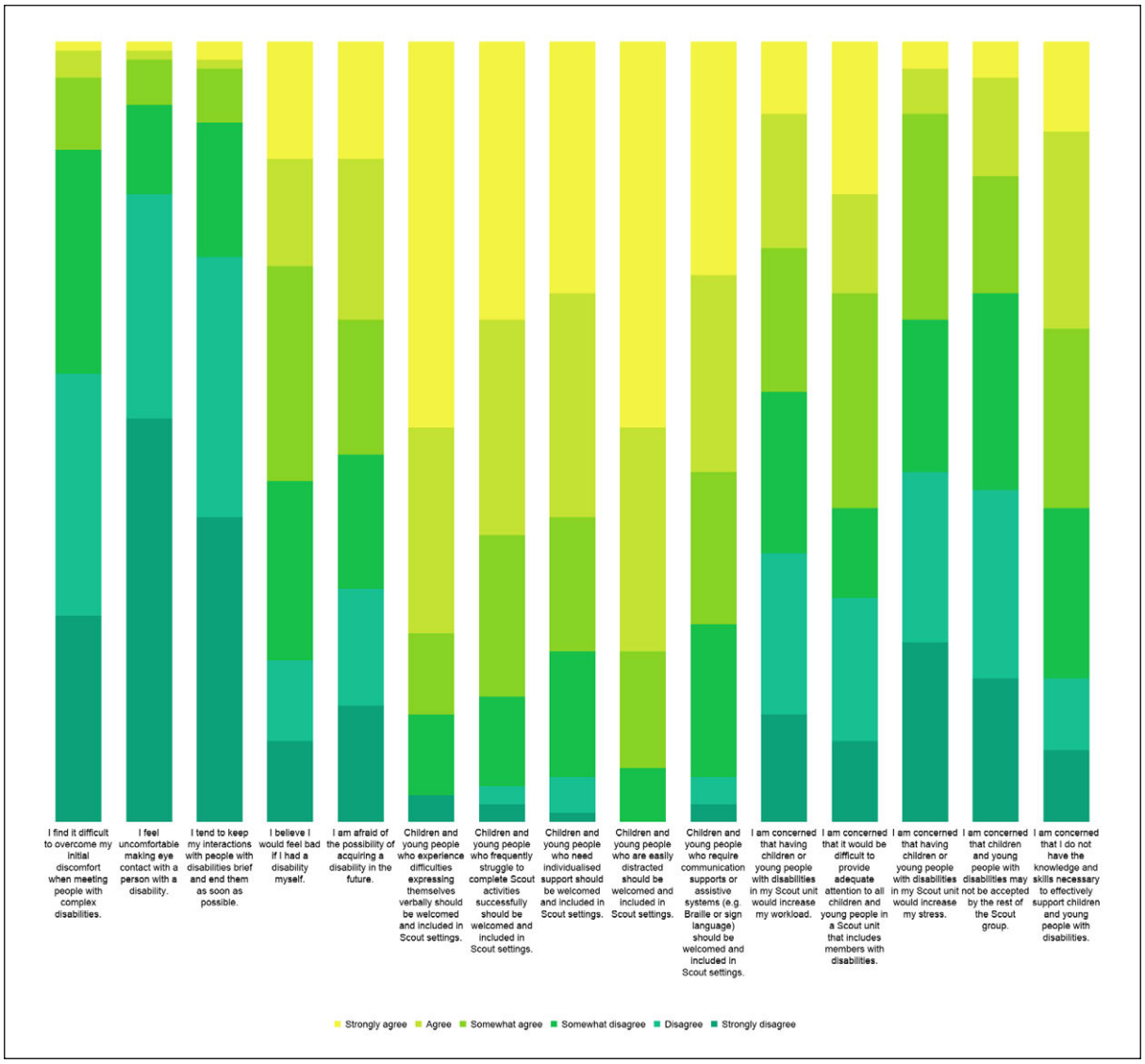


Fig. 3: Section III results

With reference to the fourth section of the questionnaire, findings highlighted a strong endorsement of person-centred approaches, alongside more heterogeneous views on the relationship between disability, specialised expertise, and the practical organisation of Scout activities, as highlighted in Figure 4. 66.7% of participants (n = 58) expressed some level of agreement that welcoming a child or young person with a disability also entails addressing their therapeutic needs. By contrast, opinions were more balanced regarding the need for specialised medical expertise, with 47.1% (n = 41) agreeing that effective inclusion requires specific medical knowledge, while 52.9% (n = 46) expressed varying degrees of disagreement. Responses generally rejected the idea that inclusion negatively affects other members of the Scout group. Specifically, only 37.9% (n = 33) agreed that including a child or young person with a disability may disadvantage their peers by reducing, for example, the autonomy of the patrol, whereas 62.1% (n = 54) expressed disagreement. Conversely, participants widely recognised the importance of peer relationships for successful inclusion, with 69.0% (n = 60) agreeing that inclusion also depends on the attitudes of the other children and young people in the group. Collaboration with families and external stakeholders emerged as one of the strongest areas of consensus. An overwhelming majority of respondents (93.1%, n = 81) agreed or strongly agreed that meaningful inclusion requires close collaboration with families, while 80.5% (n = 70) expressed the same view regarding cooperation with local services and the professionals involved in supporting the child or young person with a disability. Similarly, most participants rejected the notion that scouting is inherently unsuitable for children and young people with disabilities because

of existing barriers. In fact, 80.5% (n = 70) disagreed with this statement, whereas only 17.2% (n = 15) expressed some level of agreement. Finally, respondents strongly endorsed educational principles centred on participation and adaptation: 74.7% (n = 65) agreed that participation in the Scout group is more important than performance during activities, and 65.5% (n = 57) agreed that the Scout group should adapt to the needs of children and young people rather than expecting them to adapt to the group.

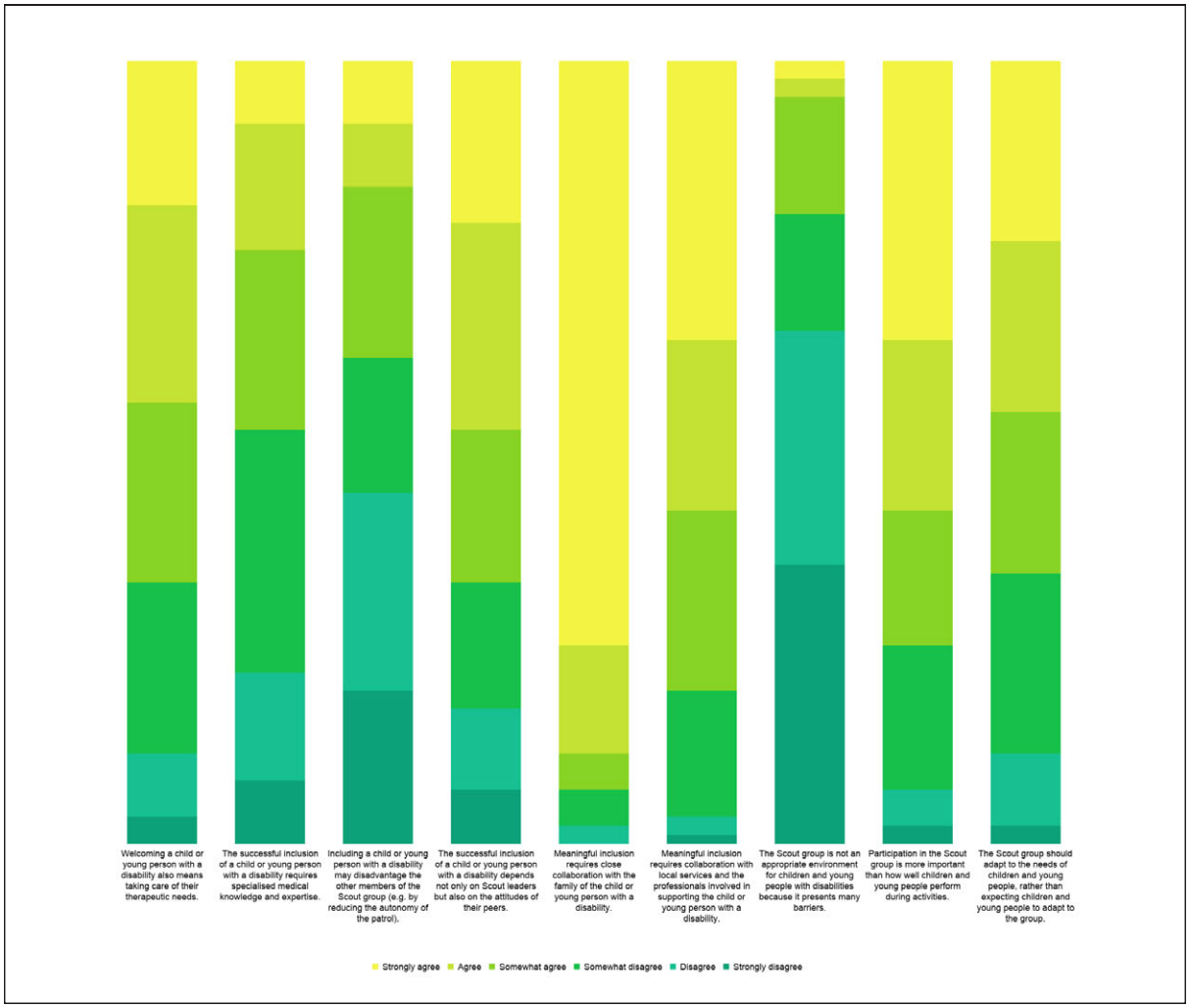


Fig. 4: Section IV results

Exploratory analyses were conducted to examine potential associations between participants' characteristics and their responses to the questionnaire items. Overall, years of service as a Scout leader showed limited associations with attitudes towards disability inclusion. A statistically significant relationship emerges with the statement emphasising the importance of collaborating with local services and professionals supporting children and young people with disabilities, with more experienced Scout leaders expressing stronger agreement (*Spearman*'s ρ = 0.24, p = .025). No statistically significant associations were observed between years of service and any of the remaining questionnaire items (all p > .05). Exploratory analysis also revealed that Scout leaders with previous direct experience of supporting children and young people with disabilities reported significantly higher levels of fear regarding the possibility of acquiring a disability themselves (*Spearman*'s ρ = 0.23, p = .029), whereas no significant difference emerged for the item concerning how they would feel if they had a disability. Correlation analyses further identified meaningful patterns among selected items. In particular, stronger endorsement of the view that effective inclusion requires specialised medical knowledge and expertise was moderately associated with greater agreement that the inclusion of a child or young person with a disability may disadvantage the other members of the Scout group (*Spearman*'s ρ = 0.53, p < .001). The same item was also positively associated with the view

that the Scout group is not an appropriate environment because of its barriers ($\rho = 0.48$, $p < .001$) and with concerns about workload ($\rho = 0.26$, $p = .016$), attention to all members ($\rho = 0.33$, $p = .002$), and stress ($\rho = 0.24$, $p = .024$). It was negatively associated with support for the inclusion of children and young people needing individualised support ($\rho = -0.29$, $p = .007$) or communication technologies ($\rho = -0.32$, $p = .002$). By contrast, agreement that welcoming a child or young person with a disability also means taking care of their therapeutic needs was not significantly associated with any of these items (all $p > .05$).

6. Discussion

The findings obtained in this study outline an articulated scenario in relation to Scout leaders' perceptions in relation to the inclusion of youth with disabilities in the Scout Movement.

Overall, the sample was predominantly composed of Scout leaders in the early or intermediate stages of their leadership experience. Results from the second section of the questionnaire suggest that disability is not an unfamiliar reality within participants' scouting context, as the majority of them reported direct experience as a Scout leader with at least one child or young person with a disability, and indicated that their Scout groups had welcomed members with disabilities in recent years. In contrast, structured training opportunities on the inclusion of people with disabilities appeared to be considerably less widespread, with relatively few respondents reporting the availability of dedicated initiatives and many expressing uncertainty about whether such programmes were promoted within their local context. Together, these findings point to a mismatch between the frequency of practical experience and the provision of systematic training on inclusive practices. In this regard, scientific literature underlines how the promotion of meaningful inclusive processes requires intentional and reflective educational approaches (Aiello & Giaconi, 2024; d'Alonzo & Giaconi, 2024).

With reference to results obtained in the adapted SACIE-R section, participants' emotional responses towards disability appear to be mainly positive, as they indicated that they did not feel uncomfortable when interacting with people with disabilities. While showing positive and not avoidant personal attitudes towards people with disabilities, participants still manifested discomfort at the idea of experiencing disability in their personal life. When asked about expressing agreement on the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in Scout contexts, participants' responses were highly positive. Indeed, it was possible to assess a high and widespread consensus across all the different situations that were presented through the items. However, willingness to welcome children and young people with disabilities should be distinguished from the actual conditions of their participation. Agreeing that a child should be "welcomed and included" expresses openness to their presence in the group, but does not in itself ensure that they can take part meaningfully in activities, relationships, and decision-making, which depends on accessible environments, adapted activities, adequate supports, and prepared leaders (WHO, 2001; CAST, 2018; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025). The concerns about preparedness and attention to all members discussed below suggest that, in participants' perception, this second level is less secure than the first. It is interesting to note that the highest levels of agreement were recorded in relation to the inclusion of children and young people who are easily distracted, followed by children and young people who experience difficulties expressing themselves verbally and children and young people who experience challenges in completing Scout activities successfully. Slightly lower levels were recorded with regard to the inclusion of children and young people who need individualised support or communication supports. Even though this pattern should be interpreted with caution, it may reflect a degree of uncertainty among Scout leaders concerning the nature and implementation of specialised supports, reflecting a potential perception of such supports as difficult to reconcile with the nature of Scout activities. Rather than reflecting opposition to inclusion itself, this pattern may indicate limited familiarity with assistive technologies and communication systems, as well as insufficient awareness of how reasonable accommodations (UN, 2006; Fantozzi, 2022; D.Lgs. 62/2024) and personalised supports can be successfully integrated into Scout settings through a Universal Design approach (CAST, 2018). Although seemingly expressing positive evaluations on the need to include children or young people with disabilities in Scout settings, participants also showed a moderate level of concern in relation to the practical implications of such inclusion. As almost half of par-

ticipants reported fearing an increase of their workload, more than half of participants expressed concern about not being able to pay equal attention to all children and young people in the Scout unit and not possessing sufficient knowledge and skills to effectively promote such inclusive processes. At first glance, the barriers that seem to be perceived by Scout leaders are therefore operational and training-related. This result echoes Special Pedagogy evidence, which underlines how the challenge of inclusion lies in the operational capacity to sustain it, evidencing organisational, cultural, and professional barriers (Ianes & Cramerotti, 2009; Cottini, 2024).

Turning to the final section of the questionnaire, results offer a nuanced picture of how Scout leaders conceive inclusion. In particular, more than half of the participants associated the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in Scout settings with the need to address their therapeutic needs, while nearly half agreed that effective inclusion requires specialised medical knowledge and expertise on the part of Scout leaders. In this direction, a smaller but significant portion of participants (nearly 40%) agreed with the idea that the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities might disadvantage their peers. These findings should be interpreted with caution, as the exploratory analyses suggest that the two items referring to the clinical dimension convey different meanings.

Agreement with the need to take care of therapeutic needs was not associated with any reservations about inclusion. This suggests that it does not necessarily reflect a medicalised view of disability. Scout activities frequently involve outdoor experiences, overnight camps, and extended periods away from the family. In these situations, attention to health-related needs (e.g. medication, nutrition, personal care, or the management of specific conditions) is an integral part of taking care of the child or young person. Responses to this item may therefore reflect an awareness of the complementarity between educational and health-oriented dimensions. This is consistent with the biopsychosocial model of functioning (WHO, 2001) and with the multidimensional assessment underpinning the Life Project (D.Lgs. 62/2024), in which educational, social, and health-related supports are meant to be integrated rather than opposed. The high level of agreement on the need to collaborate with local services and professionals further suggests that clinical expertise is largely perceived as a resource to be accessed through the network.

Conversely, the belief that Scout leaders themselves need specialised medical expertise was associated with the perception that inclusion may disadvantage peers, that the Scout context presents too many barriers, and with higher implementation concerns. It was also associated with lower support for the inclusion of children and young people requiring individualised or communication supports. For this subgroup of respondents, a partially medicalised understanding of disability may persist, which may reflect a tendency to frame disability primarily in terms of clinical needs and specialist intervention, rather than adopting a broader educational and ecological approach centred on participation, environmental adaptation, and the removal of contextual barriers. As highlighted by Aitchison (2009), the longstanding tendency to associate leisure for people with disabilities primarily with therapeutic and rehabilitative activities has profoundly shaped cultural attitudes and conceptions of this domain (Melbøe & Ytterhus, 2017). Such a perspective risks reducing leisure to an instrumental means of intervention, thereby overlooking its broader educational, relational, and self-determined value and depriving it of its deeper significance for the promotion of Quality of Life (Giaconi, 2015). At the same time, given the correlational nature of these associations, this pattern may also express uncertainty about one's own preparedness rather than an opposition to inclusion as such.

Nevertheless, it was possible to assess a high level of agreement regarding the importance of fostering positive attitudes among peers, as well as collaborating with families and local resources, including services and professionals involved in supporting the child or young person with a disability. This suggests a widespread acknowledgement of the principle of educational co-responsibility, understood as the coordinated action of a network involving peers, families, community services, and the wider educational context (Amatori & Giaconi, 2025). It should be noted, however, that the extent to which such perceptions translate into genuinely shared educational projects cannot be inferred from the present data. In addition, acknowledging the importance of co-responsibility should be distinguished from the conditions that enable its actual implementation. In this sense, the strong consensus on collaboration contrasts with the limited availability and awareness of training initiatives, with the perceived lack of knowledge and skills, and with concerns about workload and the attention to be devoted to all group members. Taken together, these elements suggest that the principle is shared, but that the organisational and training conditions needed to

translate it into stable practices may not yet be fully consolidated. Only when such conditions are in place can inclusion be fully understood as a shared endeavour involving peers, families, community services, and the wider educational environment (Amatori & Giaconi, 2025), reflecting the ecological and collaborative principles underpinning contemporary Special Pedagogy and person-centred approaches to disability (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Pavone, 2009; Bochicchio & Rivoltella, 2017; Canevaro *et al.*, 2021; Cottini, 2024; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025). This section also revealed strong disagreement with the idea that the Scout context is not suitable for children and young people with disabilities, and, conversely, consistent agreement with the idea that participation is more important than performance. Slightly lower levels of agreement were recorded in relation to the idea that the Scout group should adapt to the needs of children and young people, rather than expecting children and young people to adapt to the group. Such a positionality reflects a context-sensitive approach, recognising that the educational environment itself plays a crucial role in either facilitating or hindering participation. In this respect, respondents appeared to acknowledge the responsibility of the Scout context to provide appropriate accommodations and foster conditions that enable meaningful participation, consistent with ecological and person-centred approaches (WHO, 2001; Giaconi *et al.*, 2023; Amatori & Giaconi, 2025; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025).

Exploratory analyses provide further insights that can contextualise the general findings obtained in this study. In the first place, years of experience as a Scout leader did not appear to be associated with any specific pattern of responses across the questionnaire. With the exception of a small positive association with the perceived importance of collaborating with local services and specialists, inclusive orientations appeared to be broadly shared regardless of participants' length of service. Contrary to what might be expected, Scout leaders who had previous direct experience with children and young people with disabilities reported higher levels of fear regarding the possibility of acquiring a disability themselves. Rather than reflecting negative attitudes, which were not observed in the other Sentiments items, this result may suggest that direct experience, when not accompanied by opportunities for reflection and training, does not automatically translate into a reduction of disability-related apprehension. This is consistent with the literature emphasising that meaningful inclusive processes require intentional and reflective educational approaches beyond mere exposure to disability (Aiello & Giaconi, 2024; d'Alonzo & Giaconi, 2024). Given the weak magnitude of the association and the small size of the group without experience (n = 18), this finding should be interpreted with particular caution. As discussed above, respondents who were more likely to view specialised medical expertise as a prerequisite for effective inclusion also tended to perceive the presence of children and young people with disabilities as potentially disadvantageous for the rest of the Scout group. Moreover, the three items addressing anticipated implementation challenges (namely increased workload, difficulties in providing adequate attention to all members of the Scout unit, and heightened stress) displayed consistent positive associations with one another. This pattern suggests that these concerns do not operate in isolation, but rather cluster around a broader perception of the practical demands associated with implementing disability inclusion in Scout settings, pointing to a shared construct that may be conceptualised as perceived implementation burden (Lingler *et al.*, 2014).

7. Conclusions and future perspectives

In line with Special Pedagogy studies, the findings of the present study contribute to the growing body of research investigating the opportunities for learning, inclusion, and personal development that unfold across a wide range of life settings, including leisure-related contexts. Within this framework, the Scout Movement emerges as a setting that is widely perceived by Scout leaders as welcoming and inclusive with reference to children and young people with disabilities, even though their perceived preparedness appears to be less solid when considering their responses.

Specifically, it is possible to assess a discrepancy between the widespread direct experience that Scout leaders have with disability and the relatively limited availability and knowledge on structured training for inclusive practices, which appears to inform the operational barriers that Scout leaders perceive in relation to inclusion when addressing concerns over stress, workload, knowledge, and competencies required to welcome youth with disabilities. Secondly, results suggest that, for most respondents, attention to therapeutic needs appears compatible with, and complementary to, an educational view of inclusion. For a

subgroup, by contrast, the belief that specialised medical expertise is required of Scout leaders goes hand in hand with a more problematic view of inclusion, suggesting that rehabilitative paradigms may still influence their understanding of disability, potentially obscuring the educational values of leisure pursuits beyond individual support needs. Taken together, these considerations hint at how misconceptions on disability and lack of proper knowledge and skills can negatively impact Scout leaders' perceptions on their capacity to welcome children and young people with disabilities and the sustainability of such inclusive processes. From this perspective, insufficient training might contribute to reinforcing assumptions that disability necessarily requires exceptional resources, clinical expertise, or fundamentally different educational practices, fostering the idea that Scout settings are less capable of accommodating diversity. Conversely, targeted training could help Scout leaders clarify the respective roles of educational and clinical supports, recognising health-related needs as part of a co-responsible network rather than as a responsibility to be borne by Scout leaders alone. However, participants also acknowledged the fundamental contribution of peers, families, and local services, reflecting an understanding of inclusion as a shared educational endeavour grounded in co-responsibility and intersectoral collaboration, closely aligned with ecological perspectives and with the principles underpinning the Italian Life Project framework (D.Lgs. 62/2024; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025; Giaconi *et al.*, 2025). Yet, the translation of this recognition into practice depends on enabling conditions, namely targeted training, organisational support, and structured networks with families and services, which the present findings suggest are still only partially in place.

On the whole, scouting may represent a strategic node within a broader and integrated leisure time system, capable of connecting educational agencies, families, associations, and community resources to promote inclusive life trajectories and Quality of Life. However, results suggest that such an inclusive potential cannot be taken for granted simply because of the educational mission or organisational values of the Scout Movement. Rather, these principles should be translated into explicit pedagogical practices and training opportunities capable of supporting authentic participation for all. To this end, targeted training paths grounded in the principles of Special Pedagogy can play a transformative role by challenging existing beliefs, promoting new understandings, and strengthening the attitudes, confidence, and practical competencies required to implement authentic participation. In this sense, the investment in inclusive training follows the acknowledgment of how inclusive agency plays a crucial role in sustaining equal participation opportunities, supporting Scout leaders in becoming proactive members of a wider network built around the person with disability to support their self-determination, personal development and Quality of Life (Mura, 2016; Caldin & Giaconi, 2021; Friso & Caldin, 2022; Del Bianco, 2024; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025).

Some limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted of 87 Scout leaders volunteering in local groups of a single Italian region: the findings thus cannot be generalised to the wider Scout Movement or to other national and cultural contexts. Second, the questionnaire captures self-reported perceptions and agreement in principle, rather than actual collaborative or inclusive practices, and responses may have been affected by social desirability, particularly with regard to items expressing support for inclusion. In this sense, the recognition of co-responsibility documented here cannot be taken as evidence of its enactment. Third, the SACIE-R scale was adapted to the Scout context and analysed at item level, and its psychometric properties in this setting have not yet been tested. Fourth, the analyses were descriptive and exploratory: the associations identified were of limited to moderate magnitude, were not adjusted for multiple comparisons, and should therefore be interpreted with caution. Finally, the study did not include the perspectives of other actors involved in inclusive processes, such as young people with disabilities, their families, peers, and professionals from local services, whose views are essential to understand how co-responsibility is experienced in practice.

Accordingly, future research should complement the quantitative evidence presented in this study with qualitative investigations capable of exploring Scout leaders' lived experiences, decision-making processes, and perceptions of inclusion in greater depth, while also involving families, young people, and local services and extending the sample to other regions and Scout associations, better informing the creation of targeted training paths. Such a follow-up could provide a richer understanding of the mechanisms through which organisational cultures, educational practices, and community partnerships shape inclusive participation and contribute to the development of person-centred and sustainable leisure opportunities for children and young people with disabilities (Giaconi, 2015; Giaconi & Del Bianco, 2025).

In conclusion, from a Special Pedagogy perspective, developing shared inclusive competencies among volunteers and educators may enable scouting organisations to fully realise their potential as community-based environments that foster participation, belonging, and self-determination while reducing environmental and cultural barriers. To this end, the creation of an inclusive leisure time system, founded on multisectoral cooperation and the coordinated development of inclusive competences across all actors involved (Aitchison, 2003; Boucher *et al.*, 2010; Wright *et al.*, 2019; Steinhardt *et al.*, 2021), including Scout associations, can empower youth with disabilities to engage fully in community activities and pursue meaningful life paths oriented towards an authentic Quality of Life (Giaconi, 2015).

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