



December 2022

**Find out what is happening in AAC
around the world.**

And connect.

In this edition:

- ❖ The History of AAC Development in Armenia
- ❖ News From ISAAC Español
- ❖ An AAC Report From Hungary
- ❖ Inclusive Outdoor Learning Environments and Digital Storytelling in Romania
- ❖ ATAAC 2022 – Assistive Technology and AAC Conference in Croatia recap

Co-editors:

Signhild Skogdal, Chair of the ISAAC Council

Miroslav Vrankic, Chair of ISAAC BUILD Committee



Table of Contents

<i><u>Path From No Tech to High Tech AAC in Armenia.....</u></i>	<i><u>3</u></i>
<i><u>ISAAC Español Joining Efforts and Creating Community.....</u></i>	<i><u>7</u></i>
<i><u>AAC in Hungary - Report 2022.....</u></i>	<i><u>9</u></i>
<i><u>New Outdoor Learning Inclusive Environments.....</u></i>	<i><u>12</u></i>
<i><u>2022 Assistive Technology and AAC Conference (ATAAC).....</u></i>	<i><u>15</u></i>
<i><u>Conference News.....</u></i>	<i><u>19</u></i>
<i><u>Farewell Note.....</u></i>	<i><u>19</u></i>

The CSWN Newsletter is published twice each year by the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC)

312 Dolomite Drive, Suite 216

Toronto, ON M3J 2N2

Canada

Phone: 905-850-6848

Fax: 905-850-6852

Email: feedback@isaac-online.org

Website: www.isaac-online.org

The June 2022 issue and CSWN archives can be viewed on the ISAAC website at: <https://www.isaac-online.org/english/news/cswn-newsletter/>

Path From No Tech to High Tech AAC in Armenia

by Armenuhi Avagyan, PhD, Associate Professor, Speech Therapist

I am Armenuhi Avagyan from Armenia, a speech therapist with more than 20 years of experience.

I had a Soviet education. There were a few materials in textbooks about communication disorders and their treatment but there was almost nothing about alternative communication. We learned that speech therapists work with people with speech disorders, and a good specialist makes every child speak. Also, consider that there was very poor access to professional literature in English.

Starting my career as a speech therapist, I soon realized that there was a gap in my knowledge about communication, and I needed to fill that. I had many opportunities to participate in trainings from professionals visiting Armenia from Europe and the USA. I had an opportunity to learn PECS and started to use it with children with autism.

Besides, my way of thinking about speech and communication was changed when I started to learn English, already being a speech therapist. I realized what is going on in my brain when I learn a language and what helps me to enlarge my vocabulary and communication.

At that time, I worked in the Childrens' clinic and had many students with autism attending my sessions. I started to actively use PECS in my daily work. This picture demonstrates my work with a child with autism using PECS in 2011:



Soon, taking into consideration the characteristics of grammar, syntax and flexibility of the Armenian language, I modified some symbols of PECS, created separated cards of auxiliary verbs, endings, conjunctions and so on (Avagyan, 2011). It helped me to teach children with autism to make sentences using the right order of the words and follow the grammatical particularities of Armenian language.

Below you can see some examples:



Of course PECS opened new perspectives for many Armenian children. Thus, some of them started to demonstrate good results, and we saw that pictures and communication books are not enough to satisfy their growing communication needs.

In 2016, I had an opportunity to visit Minnesota University and organizations working with children with special educational needs. I met people using AAC Apps. This was the time I started to dream about having such high tech means of AAC for Armenian speakers.

The dream gradually grew into the idea, and in 2021, I had an opportunity to apply for the grant of US Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund. I was lucky to get funds for developing the first Armenian speaking AAC App.

With the team of IT specialists, I developed the first Armenian talking AAC App called "ARMAV AAC." The App is available in the App Store and will be soon available in the Play Market. It provides two main dialects of Armenian: Western and Eastern, free of charge.

My path towards promoting AAC in Armenia was hard. Parents were doubting the effectiveness of AAC, insisting that AAC will slow down the development of oral communication. Professionals were unfamiliar with AAC and expressed resistance to new knowledge. I tried to promote AAC with the help of trainings, but there was no license system for professionals here in Armenia, so professionals weren't much interested in gaining new knowledge.

Together with a few colleagues we took the following actions which gradually brought us to good results:

- We used social media and TV programs to demonstrate the effectiveness of AAC.
- We invited professionals from Scotland (Dorothy Fraser), Poland (Magdalena Gritsman), Switzerland (Dorotea Lage and Ingo Mroczec), USA (Marietta Janecky) over the last 8 years and organized their trainings for Armenian specialists.
- We included AAC in postgraduate programs of Speech Therapy in Armenian State Pedagogical University. I taught it for many years, so a new generation of specialists started to use AAC.
- We worked closely with local and international organizations attracting their attention to the people with severe communication needs.

As a result, now:

- Centers and schools that work with children with severe communication needs include the necessity of knowledge on AAC in their descriptions of job vacancies.
- The interest in AAC knowledge has increased. I provide 2 training sessions a year. About 30 specialists initiate participation in each.
- Starting from 2023, I am implementing a system of mentoring and supervisions for specialists using AAC.
- Professional community, especially those using PECS in their practice, were waiting for the App and are ready to implement it in their work as an effective and necessary tool.
- The US Embassy in Armenia funded the development of the App and UNICEF Armenia is willing to fund the development of a training module on the usage of AAC App.



Communication Support World Network *Newsletter*

We saw growing interest in AAC at the launching event of the APP that took place here in Yerevan (Armenia) on December 13, 2022.

Here are some photos from the event:

My team:



My colleagues:



Armenuhi Avagyan PhD
Associate professor
[Founder of ARMAV Continuous Education](#)
Chair of the Board of Trustees of the National
Association for Inclusive Education

For more information please visit:
<https://www.facebook.com/armavcenter1>

Here are my contact details for anyone
interested in making translations of the APP
Email address, **avagyan.aspu@gmail.com**

ISAAC Español Joining Efforts and Creating Community

by Gabriela Berlanga (AAC Specialist, Conference Vice-President of ISAAC), Marcela Manzur (CATIC, México) and Claudia Marimón (AAC Specialist, Chile)



ISAAC is a community that includes AAC professionals and users from different parts of the world, where diversity is a strength. But we also have things in common, one of them in our group is the Spanish language that has united us and motivated us to carry out a great initiative that has among its main purposes, uniting efforts and creating a community for people linked to Spanish-speaking CAA. We are working to become the ISAAC SPANISH Chapter.

ISAAC Español is currently a part of ISAAC International, and even though it will be launched at the ISAAC CANCUN in 2023, it now has an “Academic Group” that is currently formed by professionals from different countries who are working hard to put together content in Spanish (including a series of introductory webinars for those who are new to the field). Therefore, besides all the benefits that being a member of ISAAC ESPAÑOL through ISAAC INTERNATIONAL offers, people can access this series of webinars in Spanish, as well as all of the archived webinars that ISAAC offers.

ISAAC Español seeks to create a community to bring together all professionals, researchers, companies, families, and people who use AAC from the Spanish Speaking Community. It seeks to join efforts and advance the field in our language. As the saying goes, “Union creates strength.” I think that as a community we can have a more significant impact in public policies that need to change in order to recognize that communication is a right that requires more support from our governments.

During this year we carried out several initiatives to strengthen the links and networks in our Spanish-speaking community.

Communication Support World Network *Newsletter*

“Round Table of Mothers” and “Round Table of Fathers,” with the purpose of sharing experiences of users and their families. Online activities were carried out where a group of mothers and a group of fathers shared their AAC experience with their children and were able to meet and share with many families and professionals.



Ensuring that all Spanish-speaking ISAAC members feel involved, we held our first ISAAC Spanish Members' Meeting where we did a bit of history about the origins of this idea of grouping together by our language, which, incredible as it may seem, began in The ISAAC Conference, in Philadelphia 1992, was strengthened in Natal, Brazil 2004 and later in Barcelona 2010. Until, we are finally on the verge of concluding in Cancun, Mexico 2023.

We are waiting expectantly for you, and we will be so very happy to welcome you to this community. I'm sure you'll fall in love with it, just like I did. And we will be even happier if you can come to Cancún México in 2023, and together we will enjoy a tequila.



AAC in Hungary – Report 2022

by Monika Toth – Special Teacher on VI and Deafblindness: AAC-Professional

The history of AAC in Hungary dates back to the 1980's when during her study abroad, Sophia Kálmán learned and adapted the Bliss language and made it available to the Hungarian users. With the establishment of the Hungarian Bliss Foundation, a structured and systematic service was started for the people with AAC needs. In addition to the direct service for the target group, the Foundation pioneered to organise the very first Bliss - and later AAC courses for professionals and family members.

At the beginning as in other countries, in Hungary, the primary target group of AAC services were individuals with severe physical disability with normal intellectual level. In parallel based on foreign models, several professionals, especially those working with children with autism, had also started to adapt picture communication (e.g. PECS) in practice. At that time, this only considered as the so-called autistic method in the special education practice, and it was only applied to this target group.

AAC was personally introduced to me during my studies abroad. In 1993, I started working at the School for the Blind in Budapest with multiply and visually impaired children. In 2000, I attended a year long scholarship in the USA at Perkins School for the Blind. During that time, I learned about the total communication system used with deafblind and visually-multiply impaired children. Beside the theoretical knowledge, I also had the opportunity to observe how it works in the daily practice. After returning home I started to build up the communication sessions in a systematic way with my students.

In the meantime, the former communist country became a democratic country and there were many opportunities for the Hungarian professionals working with people with disabilities to expand their knowledge through various international projects.

In 2007, a project funded by EU brought a number of experts from different backgrounds together to work on ICT accessibility. Among these professionals, one group was asked to develop materials for people with complex communication needs. In this group I worked with several colleagues having AAC experience in different disability areas. It was a so-called WOW experience for all of us. We realised that we were speaking the "same professional language" despite of the fact we were working with different target groups (e.g. people with intellectual, with physical disability, with autism and with deafblindness). Since then, the professional relationship has remained close. We were trying to form a kind of AAC professional network, but it had not developed into a formal one yet.

In 2017, repeatedly an EU project provided the opportunity to develop AAC services in Hungary. I was involved as a coordinator in this project. Six AAC centers were established all over the country providing complex services: assessment, teaching/training and an AT & AAC equipment loan service with a very wide range of such devices. Along with this, an AAC training system was developed on three levels, and we produced AAC materials: handbook for assessing communication competencies and translated several English materials (e.g. Beukelman & Mirenda: *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting children and adult with complex communication needs.*)

Unfortunately, after the end of the project, only the equipment rental service remained in the countryside centers. Budapest Centre is the only one which provides the complex services.

For me personally, in addition to the coordination and administrative tasks, it is very important to stay in direct contact with the target group. I currently work at the Budapest AAC Centre, both as a coordinator and also as an AAC professional. I really enjoy having so many opportunities to gain experience with both people with congenital and acquired conditions with AAC needs.

We are presently working with some enthusiastic specialists to develop a more formal network of AAC, involving an AT & AAC equipment distributor. In our country, these tools are not financed by the health insurance. However, we would like to keep up with the very rapid development of the technology and the innovation concerning the AAC field.

Thanks to the pioneer work of Sophia Kálmán and the enthusiastic professionals, AAC is now known and available in Hungary, although the services are very uneven across the country.

I really like my job, it's very varied and colourful. Working with clients is essential for my own professional development and I get a lot from them. On the other hand, working with professionals and the coordination tasks provides me with an innovative environment and strengthens a whole other set of skills.

In the autumn of 2022, I was invited by Miroslav Vrankic to attend the ATAAC conference in Zagreb, representing Hungary. At the conference, the experts from the region agreed to connect in some form, even within ISAAC. The first online meeting was in November when we agreed on meeting regularly. I am not currently an ISAAC member, but I would like to join the organisation soon.

If I could have a dream, it would be to have a strong team at the Budapest Centre, as presently I'm the only one who works full-time and the others work as volunteers in addition to their



Communication Support World Network *Newsletter*

own jobs. We have several smaller ideas and to make them a reality, we can go on with small steps. Our ultimate goal is to bring together the results we have achieved so far and to make AAC available to the CCN individuals over the whole country.





New Outdoor Learning Inclusive Environments. The Balaur Bondoc (Stocky Dragon) and His World in Geological Stories Illustrated Through Storytelling with Digital Support

*by Loredana–Adriana Pătrășcoiu (PhD) - Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences –
Department of Special Psychopedagogy, University of Bucharest*

*Alexandru Andrasanu (PhD), Adina Popa (Associate Professor) and Cristina Toma (PhD student)
- Hateg Country UNESCO Global Geopark, Faculty of Geology and Geophysics, University of
Bucharest*

From the complex factors that compete with the success of policies and, implicitly, inclusive practices, we believe that learning environments represent, especially for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), a fundamental dimension that education for all must build and which must be a constant concern. When we talk about learning environments today, we think about both classes and the context created to generate students learning experiences. That is why we need to consider a wide variety of such learning contexts that can be invested as outside classroom learning environments, real or virtual.

The definition of the class today can be extended from its traditional connotations (a class is a room with certain equipment in a school seen as a building – an institution invested with the role of making education) because its defining aspect is given by the ethos itself, which is the only one that the class can define—the culture of the school group. In the same register, the culture of inclusion is the key factor that is born through the conjugation of school policies and practices for all, and it is necessary to be part of the ethos of the school and the constituent school groups. The learning environment directly influences each school group/class, and this relationship is evidenced by the developed interactions, by the motivation to participate in educational and therapeutic activities.

We perceive the learning environment from its perspective of a learning context that includes in the scenario developed by the learning actors both material resources and informational and emotional resources that generate meaningful learning experiences from the perspective of each learning topic.



Communication Support World Network *Newsletter*

In this context, it is important to highlight the UNESCO vision of learning with the living planet, which supports learning in all environments where life manifests itself.

The rewilding education metaphor is centred around the need to build education in new ways, which can reframe the relationship between education and the living planet as one of co-evolution and co-emergence ('rewilding' curricula by developing deep connectivity with the natural world and embracing the biosphere as an educational space- Reimagining our futures together — A new social contract for education, UNESCO, 2022, p.66).

Hateg Country UNESCO Global Geopark (GIUTH) is the perfect territory to apply rewilding education. UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. Their bottom-up approach combines conservation with sustainable development involving local communities (<https://en.unesco.org/global-geoparks>). In this context, GIUTH offers everybody the opportunity of a "Journey through Ages," a time travel to the history of planet Earth. The dwarf dinosaurs of Transylvania, unique in the world, are one of the most important landmarks of this territory, along with elements of ecological, archaeological, historical and cultural interest. Balaur bondoc (stocky dragon) is one of the most representative dwarf dinosaurs and the hero of the exhibition "Balaur, Dragons, Dinosaurs" from the House of the Geopark, the headquarter of the UNESCO site administration in Hateg town.

Storytelling techniques are used to build the stories (parts of the story, elements of structure, the role of "why" in clarifying ideas and creating the story, establishing the key message and impact, integrating emotions and appealing to the five senses, shaping the story and creating a memorable ending). All these techniques improve listening by overcoming specific barriers and increasing the understanding of some abstract concepts in the notional spectrum of sciences about the Earth's history.

Digital support is assured through the open-access tactileimages.org platform. Structurally, it presents Image Creator (an innovative software that allows creating or adapting common images as interactive tactile vector drawings that describe themselves through the audio output). Using a mobile application can be explored independently by any person (Universal Design of learning). The artificial intelligence algorithms can track fingers on the touch image, and the attached QR code reads the information through VoiceOver (a screen reader). The QR code facilitates the input of information into specific areas of the drawn space. Thus, educational and therapeutic interest is maintained, and tasks can be personalized.



Communication Support World Network *Newsletter*

This project will be completed with a Guide of the UNESCO International Geopark Țara Hațegului translated into five stories with multi-sensory digital support. It will also contain five interactive tactile maps of the Hateg Country UNESCO Global Geopark, available in at least three languages from the EU. The guide and tactile maps are important to support accessible tourism in the UNESCO International Geopark Hațegului country and promote outdoor learning.

The University of Bucharest supports this initiative through CNFIS-FDI-2022-0367: "Fundamental convergences in ensuring the quality of teaching activity and university ethics." and EduGeopark develop the curricula addressed all primary, secondary and high schools in the territory of Hateg Country.

Attached are two examples created in this project that can be used after downloading the tactileimages.org application.



2022 Assistive Technology and AAC Conference (ATAAC)

by Miroslav Vrankic

The 5th International Assistive Technology and AAC conference ([ATAAC](#)) was held on September 29 and 30, 2022 in Zagreb, Croatia.



ATAAC Zagreb is organised by E-Glas, Faculty of Engineering, University of Rijeka and Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb.

ATAAC is being held for the 5th year in a row, with the first ATAAC conference being held in 2016.

Before COVID, in 2019 ATAAC had 2175 registered participants from over 50 countries of the world, of which 700 participated online.

This is the first ATAAC conference after a 2-year break due to COVID, and the number of registered visitors was around 870, of which around 300 were online.

This year, over 20 lecturers from various parts of the world, through lectures, workshops and presentation of practical examples, presented the use of assistive technology and AAC in the everyday life of persons with disabilities. All lectures were simultaneously translated from English into Croatian and vice versa.



In addition to top lecturers, leading manufacturers of assistive technology from all over the world come to the ATAAC conference, so that the audience in Croatia was able to see the newest developments in the field of assistive technology.

The conference was free for people with disabilities, parents of children with developmental disabilities, students and unemployed people.

The conference also promotes the values of volunteering, and over 30 student volunteers participate in the organization.

This year at ATAAC, some more novelties were introduced:

1. ISAAC Section

At the ATAAC conference, an initiative to network the countries of Southeast Europe (SEE) was launched with the help of ISAAC. Representatives of 13 countries came to this special ISAAC section:

Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine and Israel and South Africa. Representatives from Israel and South Africa came as observers and advisors.

We hope that the result of this section will be a formation of a new ISAAC SEE chapter in 2023.



2. ATAAC NGO Section

All associations working with persons with disabilities could apply for free participation in the special section of the ATAAC conference. The goal was to further connect associations and come up with new ways for greater sustainability and better functioning of associations.

3. DATEurope

DATEurope is the European association for digital assistive technology. This year, their representatives held a special section during the ATAAC conference with the aim of discussing new opportunities for cooperation with an emphasis on the countries of Southeast Europe



4. ATAAC Playroom

In one hall, there was a playroom with various assistive technology devices. The workshop was led by volunteers, students of the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences of the University of Zagreb, and they showed everyone interested various games and activities intended for working with children with disabilities.



ISAAC is a partner of ATAAC and supports the growth of AAC community in Southern and Eastern Europe.





Communication Support World Network *Newsletter*

Conference News

ISAAC Conference Cancún is scheduled from July 24 – July 27, 2023 in Cancún, México!

Visit the [Conference Cancún webpage](#) for details.



From the Editors

Thank you to everyone who shared your ideas, resources and information and all of you who read CSWN, our global newsletter! Our next edition will be published in June 2023.

We would love to hear your news. Please submit your articles and/or news to signhild.skogdal@uit.no and miroslav.vrankic@eglas.hr. The font is Calibri 12. Our content guidelines are approximately four pages and five photos.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Wish all the best to all of you and stay safe,
Signhild and Miroslav