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Determinants vocational activity and civic activity of the people with disabilities in Poland.

Abstract

The aim of this article is to identify conditions of the civic and vocational activity of the people with disabilities in Poland. Actually it seems that vocational activity as well as civic activity penetrate each other and, importantly, remain in mutual interactions. However, being active effectively prevents social exclusion of the persons with disabilities as well as their families since it allows for much broader social contacts, improves self-assessment, brings satisfaction and builds up a sense of being a member of a group. Therefore finding, starting and keeping a job under conditions of the current labor market is not the only argument for vocational rehabilitation of the people with disabilities but paves them the road to their social rehabilitation.

Thus the phenomena explained under the proposed project include vocational activity of the persons with disabilities and civic activity.

Keywords: disabled persons, civic activity, vocational activity, exclusion.

JEL: J14.

Introduction

Vocational activity is performance or readiness to perform a job for the monetary or other equivalent determined by the parties of the job contract [Gąciarz, Ostrowska, Panków 2008; Ochonczenko 2008]. Analysis of vocational activity of the selected population can be conducted based on the data obtained under BAEL [Study on the Economic Activity of the People]. **Civic activity** includes the actions aimed to consciously and jointly articulate, pursue

and defend interests [needs, aspirations] of a specific social group, undertaken by its members. Such definition highlights conscious participation in the social life [Klamut 2013; Gliński, Palska 1997]. Civic activity is manifested by active participation in general elections, use of passive electoral right, activity in trade unions, religious associations, foundations, civic journalism, associations and an interest in local affairs [Gliński, Palska 1997, p. 365-366]. Like healthy people, persons with disabilities have needs, wishes, inspirations, sensitivity as well as internal power to manage one's life. From the theoretical perspective, disability does not condemn people to helplessness and professional passivity and should not marginalize them and lead to their social exclusion. Disability is a difficult situation as an individual faces obstacles in one's actions or feels lack of impulses needed to perform tasks. Dysfunction concerns different spheres of human life. Such obstacles may include bad health condition, poor living conditions, social isolation, perception of each activity as a burden or improper choice of job. Therefore persons with disabilities pushed into the social margin oftentimes demonstrate only a demanding attitude towards the state and decide to benefit from social allowances such as social disability allowance or disability pension. Moreover, after being relegated to the margin of life they permanently lose an opportunity for vocational rehabilitation. Statistical data from Poland show that only one of four persons with disability work. A low willingness of the disabled people to take on a job was confirmed by the research carried out by the team led by M. Sochańska – Kawiecka [Sochańska – Kawiecka, 2017] and D. Kobus-Ostrowska in 2017 [Kobus-Ostrowska 2018, pp. 155-183]. Available data usually provide information about exclusion level and vocational deprivation of the persons with disabilities - prove low engagement of the Polish society in civic affairs.

Materials and methods of research

The analysis was done based on statistical-empirical material provided by the Central Statistical Office [GUS]. The author used the analysis and criticism of the literature, and supported it with statistical analysis.

Findings

Study on Economic Activity of People with disabilities in Poland conducted by the Central Statistical Office, given in 2017 that vocational activity rate accounted for 28.9%, employment rate accounted for 26.3%, while the unemployment rate was 9.3%. Note worthily, the aforementioned measures for the healthy persons in 2017 accounted for 79.8, 75.9 and 4.9 %, respectively. In 2002, disabled persons at the economically productive age

accounted for 59.5%; in 2014 – 58.1% and in 2016 – 55.3% of all disabled persons aged 16 and more. Although analysis of the data from earlier years reveals improvement of their situation on the labor market, a low level of vocational activity of the disabled people at the economically productive age is still considerable. Situation is further complicated by the fact that over 70% of the disabled people at the economically productive age declared that they were vocationally passive and, consequently, excluded from the labor market, which means that in the light of labor law and with assistance of active instruments of the labor market, a large number of disabled people was in position to take up a job. The longer they stay without any job the more difficult it is for them to find and keep a job as their skills oftentimes become outdated. For comparison, professionally passive people accounted for 73.2% in 2016; 72.8%, while in 2014 it was 72.7%. in 2013; 73.6%. in 2011; 77.4% in 2007 and 74.2% in 2002. Analyses conducted by A. Olech [2014] revealed that few Polish people actively participate in the public life-related decision-making processes in their communes. The reasons for the low level of vocational and civic engagement should be identified on at least three planes, pp. individuals, groups and local actions [or their lack]. The first plane manifest in a sense of rejection that affected people with dysfunctions in the past. Moreover, it was consolidated in the socialist economy and increased in the period of economic and political transformation when people with disabilities were relegated the margin of the economic and social life. In the 20th century, disability was perceived as a body or mind defect. Disabled persons were perceived as chair-bound and completely dependent on others; recognized as the second-category individuals or a burden for the society. Generally, persons with dysfunctions were deprived of the right to decide about their fate or had not much to say in such decisions. We now know that stress experienced by the disabled person due to the problems that he/she faces result in psychological changes, including decreased interests, attention and memory disorders, psycho-motor impairment, emotional indifference. When deprivations concern social life they cause loneliness and undermine a sense of one's value. When deprivations concern vocational life, disabled persons oftentimes withdraw from the labor market and – if such situation persists - gradually become professionally passive. A special threat to the disabled persons is posed by their perception by other people if this concerns a lowered self-assessment due to disability [Kotowska 2014, pp. 209-214]. Importantly, a sense of inferiority to a large degree depends on individual personality, present/past environment and social attitudes met when disability began [the second plane emerges here – a network of interactions between a disabled person and a group of people affected by dysfunctions or healthy persons in the close or distant environment]. Sometimes, disabled people with

disabilities are filled with a sense of grief, helplessness, despair, depression and defend themselves against changes too strongly. A sense of emptiness may trigger conviction about their helplessness even with regard to the most uncomplicated activities. A sense of deprivation may also manifest in their problems to find a proper job and marginalization in the public life [Misiak, Borek 2017, p. 143], which leads to a low level of civic activity. Moreover, in many cases such activity is impossible without the real help of the other person or even a group [first plane penetrates the second one]. Thus an assertion that “disabled people face many barriers in the economic as well as social reality” is right [Breaking barrier 2005, pp. 58 and subsequent; Allinson, Braidford, Houston, Stone 2013]. Certainly, people with disabilities are threatened with social exclusion and poverty. As they experience poverty they rarely resolve to join the other group and oftentimes keep to themselves and do not enter into any social interactions. Consequently, their social capital is low and they rarely decide to take up any civic activity.

The labor market of the disabled people is also very specific and sensitive. Moreover, there is a strict relationship between degree of disability, sex and vocational activity of the disabled persons. This is because the degree of disability definitely impacts vocational activity. In 2017 a percentage of the people with minor disabilities [at economically productive age] accounted for 32.5%; percentage with medium disabilities accounted for 26.0% and people with serious disabilities accounted for 8%, which means that only in the latter group no significant changes were observed compared to 2008.

General unwillingness of the disabled people to take up a job and their problems with finding a job are also revealed in the studies conducted by the team led by M. Sochańska – Kawiecka [Sochańska – Kawiecka 2017] and D. Kobus-Ostrowska in 2017 [Kobus-Ostrowska 2018, pp. 155-183]. When disabled people have no possibility and sometimes willingness to take up a job on the local labor market they not only permanently lose a chance for any occupational rehabilitation but consciously decide on the lowest allowances and benefits. Unfortunately, relegation of the disabled persons into the social and economic margin, which actually means their isolation, accelerates development of disease and impairs other spheres of their lives [Paszkwicz, Garbat 2005, p. 42]. Family, friends and commune seem to play a significant role.

Firstly, extension of the circle of friends and acquaintances involves extension of the network of contacts and improvement of the frequency of contacts in the environment of the disabled people and beyond it, which builds up material and non-material resources. From the theoretical perspective, their social capital accumulates and increases. Thus it should be

anticipated that higher vocational and civic activity of the disabled persons will result from their social restoration, [Bögenhold, Heinonen, Akola 2014, pp. 295-310, Kobus-Ostrowska 2014, pp. 305-314]. Therefore it should also be emphasized that despite huge efforts made to build and develop relations, much bigger than in the case of healthy people [through the participation in formal and informal social structures], people with disabilities may generate considerably larger benefits when they are accepted by the group [Masłyk, Migaczewska, Stojkow, Żuchowska - Skiba 2016, p. 41]. Given this, it is right to assert that “the larger social capital disabled people command, the higher their vocational and civic activity is”. Undoubtedly, such outcome can be achieved when disabled persons become integrated with their environment. Moreover, measurable benefits a diseased person gains owing to the integration with their environment were already highlighted by I. Bąbiak, K. Dziurzyński [2008, pp. 76 -.] and those that people looking after them gain can be found in B. Kołaczek [2006, pp. 67 -]. This is because the social position of the stakeholders and members of their families improves.

Secondly, the assessment of the measures undertaken by the local institutions for the disabled people differs, depending on the fact whether it made by the real beneficiaries [people with disabilities] or local and regional institutions that statutory provide such assistance. For example, the studies conducted in the years 2005-2007 showed that communes poorly exploit the potential of non-governmental organizations operating in their area. Reservations concern local and regional policy pursued by the public institutions offering support to the disabled people since there is no cohesion of the tasks performed by the public institutions addressing needs of the people with disabilities in Poland, region, county or commune. Despite the fact that this problem was highlighted many times [Kołaczek 2010, pp. 78-120], responsible entities still do not cooperate [Kobus-Ostrowska 2018, p. 254]. Furthermore they do not exchange information or simply communicate to determine and lend comprehensive assistance to the disabled person, which is particularly discernible at the local level. As a counterbalance, in the countries such as Germany, Sweden or Great Britain vocational and civic activity of the disabled persons has become the norm [Meager, Hill 2005; Meager, Hill 2006; D’Arcy, Gardiner 2014]. It should be emphasized that a syndrome of weakness of institutional support lent to the disabled persons is typical of Poland. Local self-governments demonstrate the lack of coordination in respect of the measures and projects intended for the disabled persons. The measures are oftentimes short-time or addressed to a small group of recipients. Moreover, the local initiatives are not coupled with the real needs of stakeholders. Although the policy of integration of the disabled people at the governmental

level is pursued in a proper manner, the state does not undertake any real measures at the local levels of administration. Instead, legislators produce and implement regulations, set goals and rules of procedures that public entities should apply in relations with the disabled people. Transposition of such general premises for the support for disabled persons at the local and regional level should be effectuated by the public administration structures. Unfortunately, a mechanism of transposition fails or in some cases does not work at all as the information given to the disabled persons are incomplete or even contradictory. This is caused by the fact that legal instruments and/or resources government earmarks for the disabled people at the central, regional and local level do not address their real needs. Actually, instead of helping and supporting persons with disabilities, the measures originally intended to help them inhibit their initiatives and cause their social exclusion [Golinowska 2018]. Unfortunately, this results in the lack of any strategies of the mobilization of disabled people. This, in turn, results in the low activity of the non-governmental organizations. Even if they undertake to implement real programs designed for the vocational mobilization of the people with disabilities they face under-staffing and organization or financial problems. This happens more and more frequently in the areas of the local self-government units but actually affects primarily individuals with disabilities. Therefore, despite many favorable changes, globalization process makes it difficult for the disabled people to adjust to the still-changing reality. Oftentimes, they are unable – due to their mobile or mental limitations - to fully adjust without effective assistance of other people [Kawczyńska-Butrym 1996, p. 11].

Conclusions

To sum up, disabled people in a unique way – frequently depending on the degree of disability and a kind of dysfunction – seek for opportunities to overcome their weaknesses and come into contacts with other people. The environment in which they live and work may perform a number of functions, pp. be a crucial motivator for the professional or social activity; become a de-motivator if the barriers affecting disabled persons at work or in the social environment in the past or currently effectively prevent such people from any kind of activity. Noteworthy two interactions. The first means that unemployed people who cannot find a job for a long time lose motivation to continue job seeking and, which is equally crucial, their skills become outdated [this aspect was highlighted by the authors of human capital]. Consequently, there is a high probability that such people will no longer be in the resources of unemployment and become members of the group of the people passive in vocational terms. The results of the research conducted by R. Jackman, R. Layard [1991]

reveal that intensity of the job searching decreases, which effectively lowers the chances for employment. The second means that “the higher social capital disabled persons command, the higher their professional and civic activity is.” This results from their social restoration, which is possible due to the integration of disabled persons with their environment [Bögenhold, Heinonen, Akola 2014, pp. 295-310, Kobus-Ostrowska 2014, pp. 305-314].

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