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Do NEETs Have Employability Value? Study of the Mazovian Labor Market*

The issues of employability among individuals belonging to the NEET group (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) are significant from both an academic and practical point of view. The academic perspective is directed at recognizing and understanding factors that determine the lack of attempts and/or ineffective attempts at finding and keeping employment by young persons aged 18–29. The practical perspective is related to activation practices and educational solutions that might be effective in the case of this group of individuals. The paper focuses on the academic approach to this issue. The main aspects of employability of NEET group members were identified on the basis of studies conducted within the Support for the Young on the Mazovian Labor Market Project, designed as commissioned by the Voivodeship Labor Office in Warsaw. The analyses suggest that the lack of employment of on the part of the investigated population may be the result of the low level of their employability.

Key words: employability, NEET, Mazovian labor market

Introduction

The employability of young people—i.e. an individual's competence and psychological potential to find employment and to effectively hold such employment—has been the subject of academic interest for several decades [Dacre, Pooli, and Sewell,

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2007]. Analyses most often focus on the competence profile of school graduates who enter the labor market [Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin, and Zehner, 2013], the skills and attitudes expected of young people by employers [Mishra, 2014], and educational programs that are supposed to lead such individuals to professional success [Devanney, 2009]. Less attention, however, is paid to disadvantaged youths, professionally and educationally passive young people, and groups characterized by specific difficulties (family problems, health issues, etc.) [Beck and Quinn, 2012; Seddon, Hazenberg, and Denny, 2013]. An example of people who meet two such criteria can be identified at this point. Such individuals do not have jobs and are not active participants of training or education processes. They are referred to as NEETs—Not in Education, Employment, or Training [Thompson, 2011]. According to Eurostat estimations, NEET group members constitute a cohort of over 16% of all young people (aged 15–29) who are unemployed in Poland. On the European scale, the estimated share of that group ranges from 7% for the Netherlands to as many as 29% in the case of Greece. Obviously, there is a need to examine this population more closely and to assess their employability potential. In order to design a suitable education and activation policy directed at this group, not only the improvement of professional qualifications and competencies must be taken into account, but a wider perspective should be considered so as to shape their employability. By way of an appropriate combination of activities aimed at the development of competencies and the development of constructive attitudes towards work and career, it should be possible to incorporate NEETs into the labor market in a more efficient manner.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the phenomenon of employability among individuals from the NEET group and to assess the extent to which NEETs living in the Mazovian Voivodeship possess indispensable skills, competencies, and attitudes that might predispose them to finding and maintaining employment.

Conceptual Framework

Employability: Behavioral Perspective

The issues of employability have been discussed in topical literature for over a century [Berntson, 2008:5] by economists, sociologists, and psychologists who strive to understand the main determinants enabling individuals to find and keep employment. Although the topic has functioned within academia for a relatively long period of time, neither a consistent definition of the term nor its conceptual premises have been established so far. As pointed out by Dacre Pool, Qualter, and Sewell [2014:303], employability constitutes a “slippery concept,” which illustrates difficul-

ties that experts encounter while attempting to precisely identify the phenomenon. It is, according to Berentson [2008:13–14], a consequence of the differences in treatment of professional success factors. On the one hand, employability may be analyzed from the demand–related perspective, which examines employers’ expectations with respect to future employment candidates [Vidya and Kartik, 2015]. On the other hand, it may be studied from the supply–related perspective, which accounts for individual predispositions, attitudes, and skills predisposing individuals to find their expected occupation [Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin, and Zehner, 2013]. Moreover, some authors identify this phenomenon with individual career development [Fugate et al., 2004:16]. Thus, employability is a term that not only describes whether an individual will find employment (and how quickly such employment will be found) and presents how the processes of education and training allow an individual to find such employment, but also covers subjective expectations on the part of the individual towards future occupation and the individual’s convictions as to their competencies and capability to freely explore the labor market [De Cuyper et al., 2014].

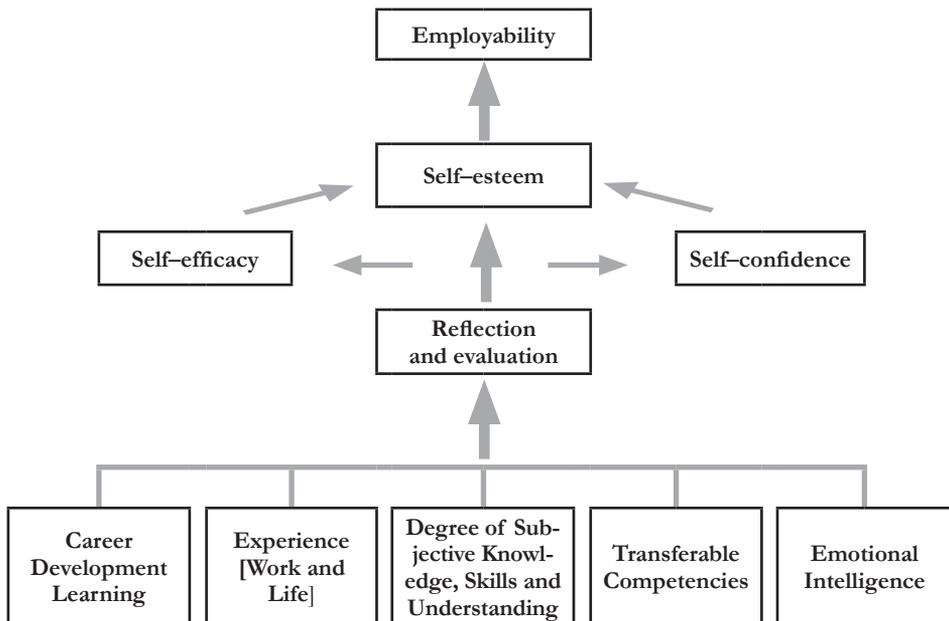
In view of such multiple perspectives for treating the phenomenon of employability, Hillage and Pollard [1998:2] suggest that: “In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self–sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment.” They propose that employability consists of five main elements. The first of these, a person’s **employability assets**, consists of their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The second, **development**, covers career management skills, including job search skills. Thirdly, presentation is concerned with job getting skills, for example résumé and CV writing, work experience **presentation**, and interview techniques. Finally, they indicate that for a person to be able to make the most of their employability assets, a lot depends on their **personal circumstances** (for example, family responsibilities) and **external factors** (for example, the current level of opportunities on the labor market).

De Cuyper et al. [2014:595–596] indicate that although competencies (mostly professional and social) are indispensable for finding and keeping employment and/or for free movement on the labor market, an equally important factor is the subjective evaluation of whether an individual is able to get the expected work or, in case they already have it, to change it for a different job. Here, the central focus is an individual’s conviction about their employability and their own perception of their predispositions and competencies enabling them to fulfill themselves on the labor market. Naturally, such convictions are based on the individual’s competencies (*competence based approach*), their specific traits and their predispositions (*dispositional*

approach), as well as on situational factors, but the condition for proactive activities and readiness to explore the labor market is to be found in the perception of opportunities that an individual faces together with the motivation to undertake employment-related challenges. What follows is that despite the significance of demand for competencies and qualifications on the part of employers, or the knowledge and skills achieved in the education processes, the key element is the subjective evaluation (optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and flexibility) of the fact that an individual possesses potential allowing effective application for a job and, later, of keeping it. This approach may be described as behavioral as it points out that activities that individuals undertake on the labor market are based on psychological and competence factors.

Dacre Pool and Sewell [2007], applying the behavioral perspective, prepared a factor model of employability (i.e. “Career EDGE” model) (Figure No. 1), which later underwent an empirical estimation (Dacre Pool, Qualter, and Sewell, 2014).

Figure No. 1. The “Career EDGE” model of employability



Source: Dacre Pool and Sewell [2007:280].

In this model, the elements that constitute an individual’s potential to find employment are experience (work and life), knowledge and skills, transferable competencies (e.g., communicative, social, cognitive, etc.), and emotional intelligence

as well as acquired skills in career management (e.g., résumé and CV writing, self-presentation, and seeking employment opportunities). These elements are, however, insufficient for an individual to be competitive on the labor market. Without a subjective evaluation of the potential at one's disposal and without planning one's future actions on the basis of one's talents, finding employment might be difficult. Still, reflection and evaluation must be supported by constructive mental schemata and convictions, namely self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Positive and realistic convictions about oneself, supported by a sense of self-efficacy, lead individuals to employment successes [Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007:287].

Thus, the behavioral perspective on employability indicates that although finding satisfactory employment or being able to move about the labor market depends on the demand-related factors as well as individual factors (such as difficult personal situation), the major determinants here are the evaluation of one's own competency potential and one's constructive convictions. As studies show, attitudes (whose main components are convictions) determine activities on the labor market undertaken by individuals [Berntson, 2008].

NEETs and Employability

Over recent years, special attention has been paid to the issues of employability of young people who remain unemployed for a prolonged period of time or who do not participate in any formal or informal structures of education and training—i.e. members of the NEET group [Beck and Quinn, 2012; Hazenberg, Seddon, and Denny 2012; Seddon, Hazenberg, and Denny, 2013]. On the one hand, this is caused by difficulties in the “traditional” professional activation of these persons and a need to search for new forms of influence, and on the other hand, by a necessity to prevent young people from “joining” the NEET group [Devanney, 2009]. It has been pointed out that among the various determinants of professional and educational passivity within this group of individuals, an important body is formed by personal factors—i.e. individual competencies, motivation, and attitudes [Meyers and Houssemand, 2010; Szcześniak and Rondón, 2011].

A good beginning for any analysis of the level of employability of NEETs is a precise characterization and defining of the phenomenon of unemployment among youth, itself.

According to the definition included in the Polish version of EU Regulation No. 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 17, 2013 on the European Social Fund and Repealing Council Regulation No. 1081/2006 as well as the interpretation of the European Commission of December 9, 2013, the NEET category covers young people who simultaneously fulfill three conditions:

they are not in employment (i.e. they are unemployed or professionally inactive), not in education (i.e. they do not participate in formal education), and not in training. Some authors assume that inclusion of young people into the NEET group takes place when, apart from the age criterion (i.e. 18–29) they also fulfill the criterion of the length of period of remaining outside the labor market and education and training systems—at least six months out of the last twelve or twenty–four months [Bynner and Parsons, 2002].

A number of authors claim that the term *NEET* was used for the first time in 1999 in a British government report entitled “Bridging the Gap,” in the context of the situation of youth between 16 and 18 years of age who were neither in education nor in employment and did not participate in any form of skill improvement courses for at least six months [Arnold and Baker, 2012]. The abbreviation soon began to circulate throughout other countries [Yates and Payne, 2006] and at present it is commonly used both in topical literature and EU documents [NEETs – *Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training: Characteristics, Costs and Policy Responses in Europe*, 2012]. It is worth mentioning here that other terms denoting this group of young people also function in the field of sociology. For example, Spanish-speaking countries use the term of *generación ‘ni-ni’: niestudia, nitrabaja, niprojecta*, in Italy the term NEET functions as *generazione né-né: né studio, né lavoro*, and in Argentina the term of *los excluidos* is usually used. In the Polish language, the term NEET is also used, and the colloquial media often use the Polish version of *generacja NIC* (generation NOTHING) or *pokolenie ani-ani* (generation neither–nor) [Szcześniak and Rondón, 2011].

Although the criteria applied to define the NEET group are rather precise in their description of which individuals make up this group’s membership, the group still remains very heterogeneous. The authors of the report prepared for the European Commission [NEETs – *Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training: Characteristics, Costs and Policy Responses in Europe*, 2012:24] indicate that it is possible to single out at least several sub–groups within the NEET group, for example:

- Persons permanently or temporarily unemployed;
- Persons taking care of their families;
- Persons with disabilities;
- Emigrants;
- Persons who do not look for any employment whatsoever and who are not in education, including those who display risky behaviors (e.g., aggression, addictions);
- Persons who look for employment and who would like to be in training, but cannot find a suitable offer;
- Persons who travel or display other forms of activity related to the expression of their interests, e.g., in the art, music, religion, etc.

The heterogeneity of the NEET group is also related to a variety of motivations causing individuals to remain outside the labor market and systems of education and training. For instance, as indicated by the authors of the cited report, an increased probability of joining the NEET group is observed among persons with health problems or various types of disabilities, with immigrant status, with problems related to addictions, persons living in the areas particularly affected by unemployment, especially in villages and small towns, persons facing bad family situations (e.g., a single parent, having unemployed parents, with a drinking problem in the family, from a low income family, dealing with homelessness, having parents with a low level of education and qualifications), or in the case of young people (aged 15–24) who have one or more children.

OECD reports [Scarpetta, Sonnet, and Manfredi, 2010] show that the NEET group might be divided into two sub-groups: *youth left behind* and *poorly integrated new entrants*. The young people from the first group cumulate disadvantages (no diploma, an immigrant/minority background, living in deprived areas, etc.) and are at high risk of dropping out of the labor market. In Poland, they comprise a relatively small population (approximately 7%) of young people without employment. A significantly larger group (approximately 15% of all young people without employment) consists of those youths who often have diplomas, but frequently go back and forth between temporary jobs and unemployment, even during periods of strong economic growth. Focusing attention on this latter group, it is possible to indicate that its largest problem is not a difficult social or family situation, or even personal dysfunction (mental or physical disabilities), but competencies that do not fit the needs of employers, a lack of transferable competencies (social, communicative, etc.), and low motivation for job seeking combined with a lack of flexibility (e.g., readiness to undertake employment in a different town or in an occupation different than that acquired) [Seddon, Hazenberg, and Denny, 2013]. Persons who belong to this group do not experience a need to join into the labor market, on the one hand, while on the other hand, they do not possess suitable competencies as expected by employers. This ultimately results in such individuals remaining in a state of prolonged unemployment.

The scale of social difficulties (e.g., difficult family situation, living in areas with a high level of unemployment, etc.) and personal difficulties affecting youth from the NEET group causes experts to indicate that such individuals have a relatively lower level of employability [Seddon, Hazenberg, and Denny, 2013]. They lack work experience, knowledge and skills, transferable competencies, prospective thinking with regard to their career, and flexibility in actions and motivations [Arnold and Baker, 2012:72].

In order to verify this thesis and explore the employability of young people living in the Mazovian Voivodeship, the Voivodeship Labor Office commissioned the design and conducting of quantitative and qualitative empirical studies.

Methodology

Research methodology and the studies themselves were designed and conducted within a project entitled Support for the Young on the Mazovian Labor Market, created within the Mazovian Observatory of the Labor Market Systemic Project III Sub-measure 6.1.1 POKL. (No. ZP.U.326–69/14/MC). Project duration was from September to December of 2014 and its main aim was to diagnose the situation of youth from the NEET group on the Mazovian labor market [Turek, Wojtczuk–Turek, and Marczak, 2014].

During study procedures, the social–economic characteristics of NEETs were analyzed, together with their competencies, attitude towards work and professional career, and lifestyles. Due to such a relatively wide–ranging approach to the issues of the functioning of NEET group members, it was also possible to draw conclusions as to their employability potential.

The studies were conducted with the use of two separate methods—i.e. (1) Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing – CAPI and (2) individualized In–Depth Interviews – IDI.

The CAPI study covered a group of 700 individuals from the administrative area of the Mazovian Voivodeship, aged from 18 to 29, remaining unemployed and inactive from the point of view of education and training over a period of at least six months during the last twelve months. The CAPI study was conducted in accordance with the method of selection of respondents in their gathering places. Because of the specificity of the group, the optimal places were the seats of District Employment Agencies during their opening hours. The interviewers, having received the approval of the heads of individual agencies, conducted CAPI interviews using tablets/laptops, with young people meeting the criteria—i.e. youth (aged 18 to 29) belonging to the NEET group.

Persons who represented the NEET group, but did not use the services of District Employment Agencies, were reached via the method of sample selection steered by the respondents—i.e. the “snowball.” This method is used in the cases when it is valid to assume that a member of the studied population belongs to what is known as the *hidden population*. Such populations are characterized by an absence of sampling frame (the population’s size and location are unknown), and by a fear

related to anonymity and confidentiality of the collected data (e.g., a sense of social stigmatization or affiliation with groups that display illegal behaviors) [Heckathorn, 1997]. While sampling members of hidden populations, it is assumed that members of a studied group or individuals frequenting the same places where the study is conducted have greater opportunities for indicating and reaching the assumed number of people belonging to a given population than the researchers themselves.

In the sample selection, an assumption was adopted that every CAPI interviewee will be granted an opportunity to indicate one additional person for the study who meets NEET criteria and, simultaneously, is not interested in using the services of the District Employment Agency (which means, that chances for encountering such a person in the gathering place are slim). Such an approach made possible the gaining of valuable data from youth who belong to the NEET group, but are not interested in using support offered by the District Employment Agencies.

Due to the same reasons, following the suggestions of pilot study respondents, additional recruitment was conducted in places where the NEET group representatives supposedly gather—i.e. in generally accessible public space consisting of parks, greens, squares, street markets, school sport fields, bus stations, cultural centers, shopping centers, and eateries.

Apart from the quantitative studies, 132 IDI interviews were also conducted with persons from the NEET group and representatives of labor market agencies.

Results

From the point of view of the aims of the present article, the most significant data gained during the study is related to the qualifications and competencies of NEET group members, their attitude towards work and professional careers, convictions about themselves, and, as indicated by, for instance, Hillage and Pollard [1998], elements that constitute employability in the form of personal and social conditions (barriers).

Firstly, worth examining are the qualifications of the respondents in order to assess their employability potential (Table No. 1).

The presented results show that the respondents from the NEET group are not without qualifications—65% of the respondents have at least secondary education and 26% of respondents have higher education, including BA/engineer/MA university diploma. However, it is not surprising that they remain within the NEET group, as even persons with high qualifications, according to European statistics, often remain outside the labor market [Drozdowicz–Bieć, 2014].

Table No. 1. Qualifications of NEET group members

Education	Vocational – 18% Uncompleted secondary – 8% Secondary – 39% Higher BA/BSc/engineer – 17% Higher MA/MSc – 9%
Work experience	No work experience – 17% Below six months – 16% From six to twelve months – 18% From one to three years – 25% Over three years – 24%
Performed job activities	Simple services – 45% Simple manual labor – 29% Office jobs – 22% Hard manual labor – 21% Other – 30%

N=700

Source: Own study on the basis of Turek, Wojtczuk–Turek, and Marczak [2014]

These persons also have work experience (83%) and thus have already functioned on the labor market. Lack of experience, which is understandable, was more often indicated by younger persons, aged 18–24, as compared with persons aged 25–29.

In the majority of cases, respondents who had already worked performed simple services (45%), simple manual labor (29%), office jobs (22%), or hard manual labor (21%). Moreover, a relationship was indicated between education and previous work. The persons with uncompleted middle school education mostly performed simple manual labor (62%), while the persons with higher education worked in services (27%), teaching (12%), management (15%), or did office work (54%). This is a reflection of the fact that they possess competencies preparing them for fulfilling a wider range of various professional activities.

The persons with some work experience were mostly employed on the basis of a contract of mandate/contract for specific work (56%), but also on the basis of employment contracts (45%). A significant number of respondents, as many as 34%, worked with no contract at all, and 2% used to be self-employed.

The analyses conducted within the project indicated that both the form of job contract held by young persons and the type of work tasks performed influence the estimated length of the period during which they remain outside the labor market. It appears that when young people performed simple manual labor and simple services without any work contract or under a contract of mandate, the probabil-

ity of remaining longer without employment was significantly increased [Turek, Wojtczuk–Turek, and Marczak, 2014:152].

In accordance with the behavioral approach to employability, not only are qualifications or competencies significant, but so are their subjective perception and the readiness to undertake efforts to find employment. Thus, respondents were asked about their motivational and competency–related reasons for remaining outside the labor market. Among competency–related reasons they mentioned the lack of sufficient knowledge and skills to undertake work. Among motivational reasons they included waiting for their dream job, financial expectations, lack of time for work related to travelling and personal activities, and high financial status. Frequency analysis of the respondents' answers indicates that:

- 31% of the respondents indicated, lack sufficient education and competencies for performing the work in which they are interested;
- 24% of the respondents are waiting for their dream job;
- 45% claim that the remuneration offered on the market is not satisfactory to them.

The qualitative analysis allowed for a better understanding of the respondents' perspective. Among personal reasons for the lack of employment, NEET respondents mostly indicated lack of fit between their experience, education, and competencies and the labor market. As pointed out by one of the respondents: “Many people simply cannot find jobs, just like me, because there is no work, jobs are not paid highly enough, and one needs to have some incredibly sophisticated education or, as for people who do not have experience, the employers would most gladly want people straight out of school to have at least some experience, when they simply don't have any.”

On the other hand, an employee of a labor market agency remarked, that “[...] there are many job offers, as far as the youth are concerned, because job offers are mostly directed at young people. The employers see some potential here. But, on the other hand, they also demand experience, don't they? And now, these young people actually have nowhere to gain such experience. And this is really some kind of a vicious circle. A young person has some specific entitlements, so it's difficult for them to undertake a job, because they have no experience. And the employer, on the other hand, does not want to waste time to teach such a person. They would like to have an employee who will immediately sit down to work and become an efficient employee, who will be working.”

The respondents can see the need to improve their own competency potential (37% of the respondents). They need internship programs conducted by employers

enabling them to gain the necessary experience (33%), they also notice the need for greater activity on their own part—e.g., sending résumés (29%). The respondents were also asked a question about future actions they intend to undertake so as to change their work situation. The frequency analysis of the answers suggests that they mostly intend to supplement their education by way of training and courses (64% of affirmative answers), take additional language courses (49% of affirmative answers), and re-qualify in order to get a new occupation (45% of affirmative answers).

However, even persons who declare active development of their competencies are not ready to work at the rates on the level of the official minimum pay in Poland. The youths believe that it does not pay for them to undertake low paying jobs, often in positions that are not adequate to their acquired profession or qualifications, as the remuneration may not be enough to cover the costs of living and commuting. A slight improvement of the material situation does not motivate them to change the *status quo*. They claim that work should secure realization of their basic needs, which they described as renting an apartment and having the means to cover living expenses, for example. Also interesting is that NEETs display an unwillingness to work for corporations as a result of either their own, negative experiences or from preferring family values over employment.

As one of the respondents remarked “[...] if I am to work eight hours every day for PLN 1,400 and to work myself to death in this job, then I prefer to have dinner at home and wait patiently a little bit longer for this job. To do a course of some sort, to get some training, or more education, but not to take this kind of work.”

However, NEETs look to the future with optimism. Among the respondents, as many as 65% believe that they will find work once they complete additional courses and training, and only 30% are convinced that they will find work without getting additional education first. It is, then, possible to see the positive attitude of youth towards job seeking and the possibility of finding employment.

Positive convictions about themselves are confirmed by the results related to optimism, resilience, and sense of self-efficacy. It turns out that the respondents declare a high level of optimism (3.87 on a 5-point scale), resilience (3.78), and self-efficacy (3.77). These results, therefore, are in opposition to current findings [Meyers and Houssein, 2010] that stress that NEETs are characterized by a relatively lower sense of self-efficacy and negative self-evaluation.

Also, the majority of NEET group respondents think themselves to be happy and satisfied with their lives. In only a few cases was it possible to notice lower self-esteem [Turek, Wojtczuk-Turek, and Marczak, 2014:102]. This is likely related to the fact that these persons place their reasons for unemployment within situational factors (e.g., unemployment in the region, structure of the economy, etc.) and not

competence factors. Thus, their self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy remains “untouched” by lack of employment.

What these young people lack, however, is self-presentation skills, the ability to prepare a proper résumé or CV and letter of motivation or prepare for an interview with a potential employer—the skills that Dacre Pool and Sewell [2007] called “Career Development Learning.”

As one of the respondents from a labor market agency said, “[...] the majority of the youth simply do not know how to look for a job. They think that, for example, if they look for it on the Internet, they will find it. Well, unfortunately, at the moment one simply needs to approach that employer and talk to that employer, this is one more issue. And here there is the problem with writing application documents. Generally, there is a huge problem, as I already said before, with self-presentation, which means the youth cannot speak about their strong points, it seems to them that can, to some of them, because they cannot at all. Some of them think that they do not have any such strong points whatsoever.”

Additionally, according to the employees of institutions that support the labor market, NEETs expect ready-made solutions, are unwilling to undertake activity in order to find employment, and resist the need to perform formal procedures indispensable to applying for work at labor market institutions. An opinion is often expressed that young persons who remain outside the labor market expect financial means without any effort.

The quantitative analysis related to ways of looking for employment also shows that 44% of respondents wait for the offers prepared by Labor Agencies, 58% use their own family and social contacts to find new employment, 64% browse press and Internet advertisements, and only 1% of respondents independently publish advertisements about their readiness to undertake employment.

It is also surprising that despite the use of social networks, declared by many of the respondents, practically no one makes use of business-oriented social networking services, such as GoldenLine, LinkedIn, or Profeo, which support professional career building and development through linking professionals with potential employers. Such types of service cannot compete with “social” networks such as Facebook or Nasza-Klasa. This shows a lack of skills in using the Internet as a tool for active job seeking.

The NEETs – *Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training: Characteristics, Costs and Policy Responses in Europe* [2012:53–54] report also indicated, apart from personal determinants, social factors that influence the youth’s staying outside the labor market and systems of education and training. Among them, the report mentioned, family, school, level of parents’ education, parents’ interest in a child’s educational

development, academic achievements, and social environment. The four factors mentioned last are, according to Arnold and Baker [2012], strong predictors of membership in the NEET group in the future, and, at the same time, as in the Hillage and Pollard [1998] model, the elements that constitute unemployability.

In the diagnosis of “the social causes for remaining outside the labor market,” two statements were used while examining the reasons for such a situation—i.e. *need to take care of a child, or elderly or sick person and remaining supported by the parents*.

From the frequency analysis of the indications of the first statement, it appears that taking care of a child, or an elderly or sick person limits the effective joining of the labor market in the case of approximately 16% of all respondents. In the case of the second statement—i.e. being supported by the parents—as many as 61% of the respondents indicated that “definitely” and “rather” they remain supported by their parents, while only 28% negated that statement. It can be concluded that motivation for young people joining the labor market is lower in cases when their basic needs are already satisfied. They prefer to spend time enjoying themselves and spending time with their friends. It appears that parents and guardians are indirectly responsible for prolonging the youth’s stay in the family home. This phenomenon is termed *old children, perpetual children, kidults, and bamboccioni* [Szcześniak and Rondón, 2012:242].

Discussion

The situation of the youth on the European, and especially on the Polish labor market, is objectively difficult. Eurostat reports show that over the years 2008–2013 the unemployment rate in the European Union in the group of young people below twenty-five years of age increased from 15.8% to as much as 23.4%. In this ranking, Poland’s place is slightly below the European Union average (27.3% of unemployed in this age group, with a prevalence of women above men – 30.1% and 25.4%, respectively). Unemployment rates among young people in the majority of the EU countries are also two to three times higher than among people aged thirty and over. This means that an increase in the unemployment rate among people aged thirty and above by one percentage point is accompanied by an increase in unemployment rate among young people by two to three (or more) percentage points [Chłoń-Domińczak and Stawiński, 2013].

Naturally, there are numerous reasons for such a state of affairs. On the one hand, it is a consequence of lowered labor demand resulting from the economic crisis [Janankar, 2011], while on the other hand, the result of socio-cultural changes that cause young people not to undertake employment too early [Szcześniak and

Rondon, 2013]. It is also due to education and training processes that are often unsuited to the needs of the Polish labor market [Sztandar–Sztanderska et. al., 2010]. Another reason may be the lack of appropriate employability potential on the part of the persons themselves. It has been shown that NEETs not only display specific difficulties when attempting to establish themselves on the labor market (e.g., disabilities, addictions, difficult family situation, etc.), but also have less developed transferable competencies or lack career management abilities. Probably, both causes are interrelated—i.e. personal and social difficulties influence the qualifications, competencies, and attitudes of youth, and ultimately their less favorable situation on the labor market. While performing the analysis and interpretation of data obtained during the study, it might be worthwhile to focus on the characteristics of the strong and weak points of employability of NEETs rather than on the causes of this state of affairs. Current reports and studies have described the reasons for which young people join the NEET group well enough [NEETs – *Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training: Characteristics, Costs and Policy Responses in Europe*, 2012; Mascherini, Salvatore, Melerkord, and Jungblut, 2013; Arnold and Baker, 2012].

As to the model of employability proposed by Dacre Pool and Sewell [2007] and the personal and social factors suggested by Hillage and Pollard [1998], worth discussing are the results obtained during the study’s procedures (Table No. 2).

Table No. 2. Employability factors and the NEET group

Factors constituting employability	Characteristics of the NEET group
External factors	Difficult situation of young people on the labor market , which causes NEETs to find themselves in an objectively more difficult position and to encounter greater limitations in finding employment. Moreover, socio-cultural changes cause young people to enter the labor market later, which limits their employability competitiveness.
Personal circumstances	NEET members have relatively more personal and social limitations (e.g., disabilities, emigrant status, early motherhood, need to take care of the family, etc.), which cause them to be less competitive on the labor market.
Degree of subjective knowledge, understanding, and skills	Insufficient – NEETs are more likely to drop out of education and training processes and they are also characterized, as demonstrated by numerous studies, by a low level of knowledge and skills. The studies presented in this article suggest, however, that approximately 65% of respondents from the NEET group have at least secondary education. Yet, it is difficult to draw precise conclusions as to the level of their knowledge or skills. On the other hand, it is possible to state that they display a deficit of knowledge and skills in relation to the expectations of employers.

Factors constituting employability	Characteristics of the NEET group
Transferable competencies	Insufficient – Both the respondents and the representatives of the labor market strongly stressed the low level of transferable competencies. Current studies of NEETs also suggest an insufficient level of these competencies.
Emotional intelligence	Difficult to assess – This requires further studies.
Career development learning	Insufficient – The representatives of labor market institutions indicate very low skills in career management, professional development planning, and flexible exploration of the labor market.
Experience – work and life	Insufficient – NEETs are relatively young individuals and thus their experience, both personal and professional, is relatively small. Only approximately 24% of the respondents had work experience of more than three years, and 17% had no work experience whatsoever.
Reflection and evaluation	The respondents indicated a competence gap between their knowledge and skills and employer expectations. They perceive, however, that knowledge or skills gained in the process of further education or during internships offered by employers will allow them to find expected employment.
Self-efficacy/self-confidence/self-esteem	Although current studies suggested a low level of self-efficacy/self-confidence/self-esteem among NEETs, the studies presented here generally suggest other conclusions. In this context, the studies of Hazenberg, Seddon, and Denny [2012], who led training and educational activities directed at development of self-efficacy for NEET group members, school graduates, and temporarily unemployed persons are worth quoting. They found that NEETs react positively to this type of influence and reveal a higher sense of self-efficacy. It seems, then, that this issue requires further studies and analyses.

Source: Own study

The analysis presented in Table No. 2 shows that current studies, stressing the lower employability potential of NEETs [Seddon, Hazenberg, and Denny, 2013] find their reflection in the empirically collected data. Persons belonging to this group have more than just specific difficulties (personal and social) that make it difficult for them to function on the labor market. They also display insufficient, from the point of view of employer needs, professional knowledge and skills, and they are not fully skilled in managing their careers. Moreover, they are characterized by a lower level of transferable competencies. These competencies, which in accordance with various typologies include communicative, cognitive, and social competencies [Turek and Wojtczuk-Turek, 2010], are sometimes treated as the most important indicator of employability [Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin, and Zehner, 2013:684]. Their deficit or lower level decreases both possibilities of finding employment and achieving professional success [Clarke, 2008]. This thesis might be

confirmed by the meta–analyses and empirical study results of Grey et al. [2007], who having analyzed nineteen studies from all over the world and having conducted their own study, stated that the main competencies sought on the labor market by the employers include strategic thinking and planning, leadership and managerial competencies, communicative competencies, market orientation competencies, and client–orientation competencies, and thus, transferable competencies. However, NEETs do not always possess these competencies. This results in their problems on the labor market.

While designing activation and educational procedures for this group of people, it is advisable to not apply the directions contained in EU documents, such as Youth Employment Package [Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, 2014], or “*Youth on the Move*” – *An Initiative to Unleash the Potential of Young People to Achieve Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth in the European Union* [2010] as a basis, but also to influence the sphere of competences and the dimension of attitudes towards work. Certain valuable indications can be found in the activities proposed by the authors of the [NEETs – *Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training: Characteristics, Costs and Policy Responses in Europe*, 2012] report, which worked out a specific path of procedures designed to aid young people in entering the labor market. It assumes that labor market institutions from individual countries should react even before the individuals enter the labor market. This means that they should work out a set of indicators that will enable stating whether a given person belongs to the NEET risk group or not (Stage 1). In the case of persons belonging to the risk group, it would be advisable to employ indicators evaluating chances of their return to further education and to encourage them to undertake this type of activity (Stage 2). In Stage 3 these institutions should pay attention to activities that enable young people to transfer from educational institutions onto the labor market (e.g., through suitable sets of instructions and counsel, or development of entrepreneurship). The next stage (Stage 4) consists of increasing “employability attractiveness” through professional training, internships, and development of transferable competencies. Finally, during Stage 5, removing employment barriers for the NEET risk group is indicated as it is of key value to remove those employment barriers.

Conclusions

The analysis of employability potential of NEETs is an important issue from both an academic and practical point of view as it is worthwhile to strive towards a better understanding of the conditions that cause young people to leave the labor market,

education systems, and training systems with increased frequency and for increasingly longer periods of time. The behavioral perspective on employability shows that this happens because, among other reasons, such persons lack basic professional competencies, transferable competencies, and career management skills and, on the other hand, properly developed attitudes toward work.

Practical application of the knowledge on employability of NEETs may be related to adopting activation practices on a national and regional level aimed at including these individuals into the labor market. The point is not only in removing barriers in order to provide access to employment or in creating various types of incentives (such as education vouchers), but also in designing activities that are related to the creation of young people's employability potential.

Although the studies and analyses presented in this paper show relatively new knowledge on NEETs on the Mazovian labor market, they are not free of limitations. One of the problems related to all studies of hidden populations (and the NEET group can be treated as such) is preservation of their representative character. In the case of the cited studies it is also possible to discern the weakness of this assumption because the cohort of respondents afflicted by specific difficulties (e.g., disabilities, criminal past, substance abuse, or emigrant status) was relatively small. This hinders definite conclusions as to the employability of the NEET group. Another limitation was the lack of possibility to compare the NEET population to persons with similar socio-demographic characteristics, but having employment. Such a comparison would allow the drawing of certain conclusions with regard to the issue of "employability attractiveness" of both groups by presenting their similarities and differences.

Thus, in further studies of this problem it might be worthwhile to undertake the indicated comparison issues and present employability factors that form key elements for securing employment and free movement on the labor market.

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Czy przedstawiciele grupy NEET posiadają zatrudnialność? Analizy z perspektywy mazowieckiego rynku pracy

Streszczenie

Problematyka zatrudnialności wśród osób z grupy NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) jest istotna zarówno z naukowego, jak i praktycznego punktu widzenia. Perspektywa badawcza nakierowana jest na poznanie i zrozumienie czynników decydujących o braku i/lub nieskuteczności prób znalezienia zatrudnienia i utrzymania go przez osoby młode w wieku 18–29 lat. Perspektywa praktyczna związana jest z działaniami aktywizującymi i edukacyjnymi, które mogą okazać się skuteczne wobec tej grupy osób. W niniejszym artykule skoncentrowano się na naukowym punkcie widzenia tego zagadnienia. Na podstawie badań przeprowadzonych w ramach projektu pt. „Wsparcie młodych osób na mazowieckim rynku pracy”, przygotowanych na zlecenie Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Pracy w Warszawie, ukazano główne elementy zatrudnialności osób z grupy NEET. Dokonane analizy wskazują, że brak zatrudnienia badanej populacji może być konsekwencją niskiego poziomu ich zatrudnialności.

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