

JAKUB NIEDBALSKI<sup>1</sup>

## An Analysis of the Institutional Practices and Pedagogical Actions in Sport of People with Disabilities

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the conducted research was to analyze the processual dimension of the transformations of a disabled person's life which take place under the influence of experiences related to practicing sport. Therefore, the article attempts to discuss the issues related to the influence of sport institutions responsible for the organization of sport practiced by physically disabled individuals in their care.

In the article, I try to prove the similarity of the sport structure with the educational system structure where, apart from the strictly educational functions, there are also socialization processes taking place, diverse in terms of measures and results.

The basis for the realization of the purpose mentioned above was the personal experiences of the researched individuals. Hence, the research exploits qualitative data collected during participant observations and in-depth free interviews conducted among the disabled practicing sports. Analysis and interpretation of the research material was performed in accordance with the procedures of grounded theory.

The article has been prepared as a consequence of research carried out between 2012 and 2015 among the society of the disabled who practice professional sports. The studies are related to the characteristics of a sports career of the disabled, which, regarding its specificity, is deeply rooted in institutionalized initiation practices regarding inclusion, continuance and the maintenance of the main action, i.e., practicing sport.

### Keywords:

sport, disability, educational practices, rituals, institutional rules and principles

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Organizational Sociology and Management, Institute of Sociology, Economy and Sociology Faculty, University of Łódź, Poland, E-MAIL: jakub.niedbalski@gmail.com.

## INTRODUCTION

The subject of this article<sup>2</sup> is the matter of the special educational experiences of the disabled who practice sport at a professional level. I present this notion by referring to Bourdieu's institutional concept, as well as the theory of interaction rites by Goffman, and the assumptions of symbolic interactionism according to the Chicago School. As a result of a combination of those perspectives, I demonstrate that the designed conversion, required within the educational system of sportspeople with disabilities, corresponds to various experiences that actually lead to a complete transformation of an individual. At the same time, I make every attempt to prove that the educational influence has been designed in a manner that allows the handicapped pupils of sports institutions to perceive themselves as independent individuals who break the stereotypes of people burdened with disability, and to experience distinction through their involvement in doing sport.

In my analyses, I do not try to deliberate or reconstruct the personality of disabled people engaged in professional sport. I am more interested in the social process of activation and the maintenance of a basic action, i.e., practicing sport, and the accompanying procedures that are carried out by institutions responsible for the organization of that action, rather than in any underlying personality features, which are not the subject of analysis in this article.

The problem to be addressed which is raised in the article is the notion of experiencing conversion in disabled people's lives, under the influence of sport that they practice professionally. Therefore, I put forward a thesis that practicing sport means continuously working on oneself, which is related to the never-ending struggle to improve as a sportsman. Furthermore, I believe that the process of creating this role is usually connected with their entering a new environment, which in turn necessitates familiarizing themselves with its principles, while the most important element is to gain a specific scope and type of knowledge. Finally, I claim that disabled individuals go through various attempts, the intention of which is to eventually legitimize them as fully-fledged sportsmen. They are of a testing character, and they mean reaching turning points in their sporting careers, providing it with an individual character which is, at the same time, acceptable by everyone.

Therefore, the subject of my interests is posed by issues related to the principles and rules that accompany the process of including a disabled person in

---

<sup>2</sup> The article has been drawn up on the basis of research carried out within the scope of a project financed by the National Science Center, SONATA 9 (project No. 2015/17/D/HS6/00184).

a group of members of a given sports institution, the description of initiation rituals, and the adoption of the role of a sportsman, as well as the presentation of institutional practices that accompany the process of becoming a sportsman, or actions consisting in training a disabled person in their struggle to be a 'fully fledged' sportsman.

## **THEORETICAL INSPIRATIONS AND THE METHODOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE STUDIES**

For the theoretical framework for the analyzed notions, I chose the approach of symbolic interactionism, in a version developed by Blumer (the so-called Chicago School) (Blumer, 2007, 1984, 1975, 1969) and his continuators (cf. Hałas, 1987; Krzemiński, 1986; Ziółkowski, 1981). According to Blumer, within the course of the mutual adjustment of activities of particular entities, joint actions emerge which provide the basis for social life. Society is not a permanent structure of relationships, but a constantly developing process adjusting itself during the interaction of the entities operating within a specific social context. However, it does not mean the denial of social structures, rather it suggests that they are included in the interpretation and definition process, during which the joint actions are shaped.

The selection of particular data collection techniques was dictated, as far back as the design stage, by the richness and diversity of the researched area, as well as the logics and dynamics of the course of the study (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2000). I would rather call my research a process of generating data than collecting them. The second notion has some positive connotations, as it suggests that a researcher can collect information in a neutral way. In the research perspective that I assumed, the researcher is seen as an entity actively developing knowledge in the field of their interest, and this is the opinion that I feel closer to.

The greatest emphasis was put on individual interviews. The premises behind my decision arise, first of all, from the accepted ontological (human experiences, interpretations, knowledge, evaluations, and interactions are significant features of the social reality that I researched) and epistemological assumptions (the legal manner of data generation on the basis of those ontological assumptions comprises interaction, conversations with people, listening to stories and gaining access to the knowledge, evaluations, and impressions of the individuals). An interview is seen here as "reflecting greater depth than other research techniques," and this is because it is determined based on "a continuous relation between the informer and the researcher" (Burgess, 1980, p. 109; cf. Silverman, 1994, p. 95). Apart

from that, the contextuality and situational character of the knowledge held by the respondents required a specific approach – flexibility and sensitivity to the dynamics of interactions, so the questions could be tailored to each respondent. What is more, I was eager to obtain qualitative data that could not be provided by structured questionnaires, which is reflected well in the words by Rubin and Rubin (1997, p. 205): “Qualitative research is applied in the case of notions that require deeper comprehension, which is served best by detailed examples and expanded narration.” Finally, my choice is supported by pragmatics. The data that my research aimed to obtain would be hard to collect via any technique other than an interview.

In my research, I refer to the subjective perspective of the respondents, making their own point of view a required reference for development of theoretical generalizations (Włodarek & Ziółkowski, 1990).

The ontological and epistemological assumptions mentioned above that provided the frameworks for my research dictated the choice of the particular methodology somewhat naturally. Hence, the selected techniques comprise observation, applied especially at the initial stage of the studies, and enriched with informal interviews. Together with the advancement of the research and the broadening of knowledge with notions interesting for me, I included other techniques in the project, first of all unstructured interviews, as well as analysis of existing materials, mainly articles published in specialist branch magazines and stories with sportspeople. They also included biographies and memories, allowing me to reach the perspective of the most recognized representatives of the disabled sportspeople’s environment, who it would have been hard to establish direct contact with in order to perform an interview.

As for the purpose of the research, I chose to identify the social actors’ perspective, and to capture the processual dimension of the observed phenomena, so I perceived the grounded theory methodology as being especially helpful (Glaser, 1998, p. 11). It provides possibilities to reach the perspective of the social actors and grasp the processual dimension of the researched phenomena, thus, it became popular and continues to spread, especially among researchers associated with symbolic interactionism (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; cf. Konecki, 2000, p. 25). It needs to be mentioned that, in accordance with grounded theory methodology, I made attempts not to cover the researched area with a conceptual framework in advance. It emerged as the research progressed, and the numerous described categories are characteristic of *in vivo* codes.

## **EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIALIZING CHARACTER OF SPORT**

According to Tomecka (2012, p. 175), the structure of practicing sport and its associated culture have an influence on the personalities of those who practice it. The internalization of values located in this field of social life takes place within the socialization process to and through sport. In turn, the participants, hosts and recipients of sport on the market of goods may become ambassadors of the development of its new, more humane image. However, the condition for any future involvement in the culture of sport is established by previous sport-encouraging attitudes, behaviors or dispositions.

The socializing potential of sport is also expressed, as stated by Heinemann (1990, p. 246), in “strengthening the ability and readiness to carry out standard social actions.” According to the author, it happens because the applicable standards and principles, as well as the assumed social roles, are “especially clear and unambiguous, they exist within a transparent and strictly determined field of operations; other behaviors, violations of rules are met with immediate sanctions, taking place according to a determined scheme” (Heinemann, 1990, p. 246). As a result, sport can make a valuable contribution to prophylaxis as well as being a therapy of social maladjustment. This was confirmed by Purdy and Richard (1983) in their research, showing that sportsmen are characterized with a lower degree of social maladjustment and involvement in adverse social behaviors than individuals who are not sportsmen. The literature in the field of resocialization policy is also very rich. One of its representatives, Sage (1986, p. 24), notices that “social competence must be learnt, and a human learns through social experiences; some of those experiences have a greater social dimension than others. Regarding the social character of games and activities, they present a useful factor that supports social development. Children learn a wide variety of social skills thanks to their participation in games. Therefore, they become a condition for successful social adjustment during childhood, and they constitute a foundation for adults’ functioning in society.” In turn, Collingwood (1997, p. 12), who specialized in notions of resocialization through sport, claims that sport should provide “one of several spheres of modern life, where we can experience particular and honest verification of reality. Thus, an every-day training session becomes an exercise of self-control and self-discipline. Exercises provide a daily dose of control over one’s environment, even if the rest of life is totally disordered [...]. The intensity of exercises makes us realize that we are alive. The results convince us that we are worth it.” The socializing influence of sport can also be expressed in teaching tolerance and developing the feeling of community with representatives of various

social groups and categories. The potential of sport in this scope is also seen by Heinemann (1990), who lists a series of functions of sport, including those related to the socio-integrating function. At the same time, it is emphasized that sport may play a significant role in moral education, which is claimed by Bredemeier and Shields (1995, p. 2). The same authors suggest that effects in the scope of moral education must be seen as the most important category of educational impacts, because it is the moral character that dictates how the qualities from the volitional sphere and the social character are used (Shields, 1995, p. 2). Lipiec (2013, pp. 16–17) highlights that sport socialization – for sport and through sport education – may contribute to strengthening or directing the socialization processes also in other fields and in other periods of life. This author also finds that regardless the instrumental assets, sport is a domain of natural and primary, thus strong, socialization, thanks to which the sport itself can exist and develop. Lipiec (1987, p. 6) also states that sport is a discipline where “contradictory tendencies clash.” It can support the educational process, but it can also disrupt it, and in some cases it can be neutral for the process, or at least for some of its dimensions (that were traditionally joined with sport). Which option will prevail will depend, first of all, on the conditions in which the process of sport education runs. Hence, as stated by Sas-Nowosielski (2004, p. 78), instead of repeating this corny slogan that sport educates or shapes your character, we need there to be some educational potential in sport that may be triggered or forfeited regarding the socio-moral atmosphere that a young person encounters during their sporting careers. As noticed by Clifford and Feezell (1997, p. 94), “we have a lot of possibilities in sport to help young people become successful and respected not only in sport but also in life.” These are just some possibilities, and if we want them to materialize and be reflected in reality, we must give them in such a way that practicing sport is carried out according to its laudable aims. This task relates, first and foremost, to PE teachers, instructors, and coaches, who are direct representatives of such institutions as sport clubs or associations, or foundations led by non-profit organizations (Sas-Nowosielski, 2004, pp. 77–78).

## **THE ROLE OF RULES, PRINCIPLES, AND RITUALS IN SPORT OF THE DISABLED**

Each institution is governed by its own rights, principles, and rules of conduct which are obligatory for its members. Hence, all those connected with an institution are required to be engaged in the process of understanding the principles,

rules, norms, and values that stand behind them. All of this to become a member of an environment which the given person aspires to.

The rules and principles related to the behavior of the disabled in sport are a kind of formal and informal instruction of a symbolic – and at the same time pragmatic – character. They introduce interaction order, but they also provide a possibility to control particular people, and are communicated via direct orders by more experienced members of a given environment, or they become internalized spontaneously within the course of everyday interactions.

The group of principles needs to encompass all of those formulas which arise from official and formalized guidelines on sport generally, as well as from particular disciplines. Since their character is generally known and comprehended, they do not provide a topic of interest in this article. For me, what is interesting is, first of all, those principles of rules applicable to representatives of disabled sportspeople which are of a less official character. Their characteristic feature is the fact that they are shaped within the course of mutual interactions of the social actors, and they provide the result of their negotiations. These principles occurring within the environment of the disabled practicing sport, to put it simply, mean transposing the fair play principle from the pitch, stadium, or track, into other dimensions of interaction. Despite the fact that they have an unwritten and informal nature, they are generally applicable in the social world of sport of the disabled, playing a significant educational function. On the one hand, they influence the disabled individuals, causing them to behave in a certain manner according to environmental expectations, and on the other, they create a specific regime of self-control and environmental discipline of the individuals. As suggested by Goffman (2006), it happens because “breaking a rule of conduct exposes two people to embarrassment: the one that was obliged and should become subjected to the rule, and the second who expected something and, according to this principle, should be treated properly” (p. 52). Elsewhere, this author adds (Goffman, 2006): “generally speaking, an individual sees rules of conduct in two ways: directly, as obligations, determining their moral job of behaving in a certain manner, and indirectly, as expectations towards how others, morally obliged, should behave towards them” (p. 49). At the same time, the people that break a given rule are likely to have some problems and are also evaluated negatively by the environment. The evaluation and selection of a sanction depends on the scale of the occurring problem. It might just be a warning, and the situation is determined to be a lesson or simply an element of acquiring experience according to the principle of learning from mistakes. In the case of more serious faults, the sanctions for violating principles of conduct may be related with temporarily

losing face,<sup>3</sup> or being described with a specific negative label, together with the permanent stigmatization of a given person and their exclusion from the environment (cf. Goffman, 2006). Although the rules and principles are not the only source of regulations of behaviors, in this context a special role is played especially by those with ritual dimensions (2006, p. 49). As stressed by Sztompka (2006), they are of a conventional character, and they are produced spontaneously within a community, being related to the everyday course of a social life. The same author (Sztompka, 2006), when writing about rites, presents the following definition: “Rituals provide individual or group manners of actions, coming in line with a precisely and formally specified scenario which needs to be followed by all participants under great pressure” (p. 48). In turn, Goffman (2006) spoke about “actions leading to, through their symbolic aspect, actors demonstrating the degree to which they deserve to be respected, and the degree to which other people, according to them, deserve respect” (p. 19). According to the definition mentioned above, rituals functioning in the world of sport of the disabled are of a more spontaneous and rewarding character. They also pose an instrument of emotional work. Furthermore, the rituals are embedded strongly in the temporary dimension of the everyday life and functioning of the disabled. Therefore, they may usually be placed in a kind of a renewable scheme of differentiated levels of repeatability.

However, regardless the kind, character, and the manner of celebration, rites are of great significance in the process of building and then maintaining the interaction order in the social world of sport of the disabled. The significance of rituals, customs, and practices is an especially important element integrating the whole environment, directly influencing the construction and reconstruction of social bonds among its particular representatives. They allow the realization of such aspects of their lives as control and submission to specific rigors, which are imposed in accordance with practicing sport professionally, but they also express the feeling of fulfilment of specific needs and life ambitions of those involved. On the other hand, it is also a form of communication and the provision of the whole spectrum of information, significant for the interaction order of knowledge, and the corresponding standards, values and patterns of behavior.

---

<sup>3</sup> A person keeps face when the undertaken line of conduct presents his/her imagination as internally compact and supported by evaluations and evidence provided by other participants of a given interaction (Konecki, 1992, p. 59).



## INITIATION AS A RITUAL OF ADOPTING A ROLE AND BECOMING A MEMBER OF AN ENVIRONMENT OF THE DISABLED PRACTICING SPORT

Initiation of the disabled in sport is realized through entering an existing structure – which is usually well-organized – of a particular training team, club, or federation, and a system of games of various national and international ranks (Lipiec, 2013, p. 18). As it has been the case since ancient times, when a person was able to participate in a tournament only as a representative of a given community, it is similar now, when a person may take part in the majority of official sporting events through a social organization – especially if it is commonly recognized. Therefore, the formal aspect of creating the role of a sportsman comes through participating in an institution or an organization which brings the disabled together, providing them with conditions which allow for the realization of a given physical activity. In other words, the sport activity of the disabled, as a consequence, is of an institutionalized and group character. In this context, it is worth recalling the words by Stanisław Ossowski (1966, p. 156), according to whom a collection of people becomes a social group only when they are aware of the social bonds, and when they appear in the behaviors of its particular members. Therefore, participation of the disabled in organized forms of physical activity forms the basis of their consolidation around a given problem. Despite the fact that there are numerous differences related to their material situations, support from relatives, or social status, regardless the differences of social, economic, or cultural habits, the members of a group experience consolidation around a common physical activity and practicing sport. Such a consolidation, which *de facto* distinguishes a group from other communities, according to Ossowski (1966, p. 156), is based on the *intentional cooperation* of its members. This process most of all refers to a set of actions involved in being a member of a group. In this context, one of the basic aspects is the temporal dimension, meaning the regularity of training and the successiveness of participating in any kind of meetings related to practicing sport. The cyclicity emerging in that manner means that a person becomes acquainted with the “scheme” of the operation. This poses one of the crucial aspects of the legitimization of its membership.

And it was like I started to find out gradually what all of this is about. I didn't know what to actually do straight away. I mean, I had this very hazy idea, because I think everybody knows what it means to be a sportsman more or less. But it wasn't until the training sessions and other meetings when I learnt what it really meant, and that now I need to arrange everything differently, subordinate it to what I do [w15.14].

It is important not only regarding basic requirements related to the commencement of practicing sports, but also in order to demonstrate one's involvement, to get acquainted with the principles and rules that a given discipline is based on. Therefore, a given person shows he is broadly interested in practicing sports, which additionally makes their involvement more honest (Hughes, 1958). At the same time, it becomes especially significant to become familiar with various secrets of the game, including the informal ones, which are passed on between members of the group as "expert knowledge". It often constitutes a resource of knowledge provided by experienced players to those who have just started their adventure with sport. Hence, the transmission of knowledge among the group members takes place, which additionally strengthens its internal unity, assuring functioning continuity. At the same time, this is the principle that governs the reconstruction of separate people's statuses, as on the one hand we deal with people that have the "authority" label attached, and on the other with "pupils".

I remember that an important example for me was Jarek [name changed by the researcher] who already had some great success behind him, and he was also a great guy to get on with in everyday contexts. But the thing that really got me was his history, which I discovered in the meantime, because he had had some bad experiences, and I think that not everyone would be able to deal with it as he had done. So, he was a kind of a pattern to follow for me, and I think he still is. Because I still respect him [w25.15].

The acquisition of the status of sportsman means acceptance from the group of belonging, and requires proper actions consisting in, among others, a specific ritual of "buying one's way" into the group. It may adopt various characters, but its essential purpose is to stress loyalty towards the group. At the same time, belonging to the world of professional sport is related to transformations visible between the disabled people and broader social circles. This process is related to the perception of a disabled person practicing sport as being "different" from other people who are categorized as disabled, i.e., deviating from the stereotypes that are commonly assumed and deeply rooted within society. The sportsmen themselves care to stress this "difference", demonstrating their status in the manner, and are willing, therefore, to explain to the environment and themselves that they are disabled sportsmen. Generally speaking, such an action serves to reconstruct a person's identity, where the definition of sportsman either dominates or it occupies one of the leading places. Thus, the perception of being disabled no longer dominates their lives. The premise of the "difference" manifestation is behavior in the public sphere, related to, among others, playing the role of a sportsman in various cir-

cumstances. Therefore, belonging to an “elite” group is emphasized, i.e., a group distinguished from other groups, created by the disabled individuals. Belonging to such a group will be perceived as a significant source of developing a given person’s status, which places them in a position that is privileged in relation to other disabled people. Here, a distinguishing factor will be above-average physical fitness, as well as the fact that the people practicing sport professionally may, through their activity, create an image of themselves as a person breaking a social stereotype, i.e., presenting themselves as someone self-reliant, independent, free, but who also has special abilities, thus being distinguished when compared to others. Hence, a consecrated elite is created, which, as suggested by Bourdieu (1996), “is not only distinguishable and separated, but also recognized by others and by the self as worth it” (p. 102).

The adoption of the role of sportsman is also connected with a specific ritual of transformation, consisting in presenting publicly one’s own disability, especially its exposure to others. Here, it is worth recalling the words by Anselm Strauss, who believed that each of us presents to others (and oneself) by following their judgments (Strauss, 1959, p. 9). Therefore, the moment of “public performance” is seen to be important by a person with a disability. These circumstances include the elements of “facing a challenge”, but it is also connected with “public proclamation”.

For me, the first performance in front of an audience was unique. When you see all those people observing you, looking at you, and you don’t know what they’re thinking, it’s really paralyzing. You have a thought then, ‘wouldn’t it be better to run away, to pull the plug on it?’ But it would mean that you give up halfway, you’ll be defeated by your own fears [w17.13].

According to Strauss (1959), ‘presenting ourselves to others’ is an individual’s statement about their certain views or attributes. It is a particular transformation in the process of a disabled person’s coming out, which means that they have reached a particular turning point in their biography, making a decision to expose their dysfunction, but carrying it out in a context that is different than the generally known one, where disability is perceived as the powerlessness of the body. Through coming out in the physically active convention of a sportsman, a disabled person presents himself as a strong, brave, and determined individual, therefore stressing those features of their character which can be clearly attributed to a “fully-fledged” sportsman.

## **INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES THAT ACCOMPANY THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A SPORTSMAN**

Sport, if it is to be practiced professionally, requires “full” involvement. Therefore, a person who decides to start their adventure with sport, often understood as a professional career path, makes every effort to become successful in that matter. In practice, it comes down to the introduction of various, often highly radical changes to their life, related to how they organize their day, what food they eat, and how they divide their time among various activities. The matter of subordinating the majority of other life spheres to their involvement in practicing sport becomes visible at once.

Yes, it’s completely true. There’s not a chance to get halfway involved. Either you do what you need to, you make the effort and get involved, and then you may count on results, or you drop out quickly and give up. There’s no choice, you need to roll up your sleeves and move forward. Of course, different things happen, but if you don’t strive, you won’t succeed for sure. That’s the truth [w.9.14].

From the perspective of my analyses, it is of the utmost importance to draw attention to the notion of activating the proper attitude and motivation of a given person, to make a specific effort related to training both the body and mind. A disabled person practicing sport professionally needs to acquire abilities which include achieving a proper level of training, usually representing broad physical and mental skills, which will allow them to compete with other competitors. In other words, they should achieve a state where they are able to control their own worries and anxiety, especially in stressful situations (e.g., related to participating in championships), as well as to obtain the ability to maintain the desire for self-improvement and the acquisition of better skills.

You can have the best coach, great conditions and other assets, but if you don’t have enough self-denial, and actually the faith in your own possibilities, you won’t achieve much. I saw it many times that different people came and left, not staying for too long. And it was not about lack of physical condition, but what was in their heads. They had no motivation or willingness to work [w.4.15].

A disabled person who is willing to practice sport professionally goes through a certain transformation in the way they live, which, on the one hand, means subordination to strict training and coaching principles, and on the other, is of an ascetic character, which means that such a person is burdened with a series of orders and prohibitions, often regulating various spheres of their lives in a highly

detailed manner. Therefore, they are not only ordered in what they should and what they should not do in order to support their career development process to the greatest extent, but also the vital powers and experiences of such people are channelled – who should concentrate on practicing sport, understood as the main action, which the remaining life spheres become subordinated to.

‘Concentration, concentration,’ that is what my first coach used to say. And he added, ‘if you want to achieve something, you need to sacrifice yourself to it. There’s no fertility without generosity.’ He was right. I couldn’t understand it at first. When you’re young, you’re stupid. But I finally understood this over the course of time [w.21.13].

Thanks to the activities described above, a disabled person practicing sport should believe that the actions undertaken for and by them, often adopting the form of self-sacrifice, are necessary to be able to strive for the greatest trophies, to be on the podium, thus enjoying successes, while building the profile of their career. Therefore, as already mentioned, a special type of pedagogics is revealed, which – according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) – can be called camouflage. The disabled are instilled not only with the possibility of unconditional self-sacrifice as the way to achieving the desired sporting successes, but also with rules, according to which the acquired experience is not just a mechanical ability, but also a certain way of organizing life.

Hence, practices related not only to education but also to disciplines which are applied within the coaching process (which is described in further section of the article) mean that the disabled individuals develop an attitude whose main feature is the rational systematization of their own way of living, and a rejection of everything ethically irrational from the internal world.

All the mentioned practices of familiarizing a disabled people with the role of a sportsman should activate their capability of symbolic “rebirth”, meaning the transition from perceiving themselves through the prism of disability, to developing a definition of a fully-able sportsman. The constant testing of professional qualifications through, among others, participating in tournaments, is focused on other attempts with the purpose of continuously confirming and maintaining the status of a “real” sportsman. This participation means a given person feels that they belong to the circle of the chosen ones, and they experience the guarantee of access to the “sacred life”, i.e., full of experiences of people achieving successes and successfully realizing their life ambitions.

Summing up the above deliberations, it needs to be stressed that the influence that practicing sport has on the disabled consists mainly in the fact that they

undergo strict ascetic practices. Therefore, a series of consecration acts takes place on the select few who are deemed “the most talented”, forming them into a separate group, but also improving their symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 102).

### **TRAINING AS A PROCESS SHAPING A DISABLED PERSON’S ROLE AS A SPORTSMAN**

The attitude of continuously verifying one’s qualifications, or as it was put by my interviewees, striving for “perfection”, is a result of pedagogical practices relating to the training relationship, which hides motives in the disabled for developing specific ethics of practicing sport. A system of prohibitions, which is connected to that relationship, suggests a connotation with ascetic practices. Declining, or at least decreasing the frequency of contacts with others, they go through a strict “school of toughening”, obtaining a component of sacredness and the feeling of belonging to the group of “the selected”. Within this process, a key role is played by training, the purpose of which is to improve the body’s fitness level as well as mental attitude towards these actions. Thus, the result is a grown-up human being, not only a trained sportsman. The role of teacher is adopted by coaches and instructors, and the place of school classrooms by groups or teams (Lipiec, 2013, p. 18).

And now I’m laughing a little, but I didn’t feel like laughing earlier, actually I hated school, and when I started to really practice sport, I actually was out of the frying-pan into the fire again, because I had my teacher, as previously, but this time it was a coach, and I needed to toe the line, to obey his instructions, and generally be so nice and easy going, but I had always been a type of a little devil [w.19.15].

The description of relationships between a disabled person practicing sport and someone making a sort of sign post, pointing to the desired action, may be applied to the notion of coaching, introduced by Anselm Strauss. The coaching relationship emerges when “someone strives to shift another person within a social space” (Strauss, 1959, p. 94). According to the author, all stages are clear only to those who have already gone through them. The “coached” person is not fully aware of the path they need to follow, or the significance of the medium stages. The main qualities of the coaching relationship are rooted in the fact that a pupil, while going through subsequent stages, needs a guide (Niedbalski, 2015, p. 37). This is not only about the conventional sense of teaching skills, but also about the fact that while the “coached” is moving within the social space, there

are highly important processes taking place inside them, requiring an explanation of the sense of a particular action, and the whole activity in general. As written by Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001), “teaching a profession, craft, trade, [...] requires a pedagogical approach that is slightly different from the one applicable in education. [...] There are numerous manners of thinking and acting, some livelier than others, transferred in a practical form throughout the exchanges and thanks to practices based on direct contact between the one teaching and the one being taught” (p. 220).

My teacher, or I'd say even more, my guide, and the man who shaped me, was my first coach, Mr. Kowalski [last name changed by the researcher]. He showed me not only how to train, to perform the exercises properly, but first of all, he created this positive aura around him, he was like my second father, who listens and advises, but also gives a good belting when needed [w.7.13].

A highly significant element of “coaching” is the time schedule. The coach needs to take care of the balance while going through subsequent stages, and they cannot allow impatience in themselves or in their wards, or any sluggishness (Niedbalski, 2015, p. 37). Various tactics may be applied while trying to maintain this balance. One of them is a “prescription” for how to act, namely the manner of self-realization and achievement of success in sport. Therefore, the coach's role is to point out what needs to be done, what you need to do to distinguish yourself, which qualities need to be developed and which need to be gotten rid of. In one word, it is a formula which may not guarantee success on its own, but the application of which may bring a given person closer to their goal.

What is more, coaches apply schedules which determine the subsequent steps that need to be followed by a disabled individual to achieve progress gradually. A coach introduces the participant to the subsequent stages of their development, not only shaping their career, but also exerting a certain influence on their biography. Therefore, they perform continuous work on the participant's biography and identity. Other stages, and their completion, are not only the achievement of the next career levels for the disabled, but they also go beyond their own – often symbolic – boundaries, related to accepting themselves and their disability (Niedbalski, 2015, p. 38).

For me personally, the things I do here have a double value. Firstly, I have a chance to step out and stop being a poor disabled person, who always needs someone to wipe their butt. But secondly, it is a personal thing for me, because it gives me a possibility to defeat my worries and anxieties, which are often hardest to face [w.10.12].

Another tactic is challenging, which provides markers for development. This consists in stressing the proper tests available for a given person at a particular time which they are able to complete. It is significant here for these challenges to be “dosed” properly, i.e., given at the proper frequency, tailored to the specific person, and that it is possible to achieve them with a certain level of involvement and effort. Therefore, a coach may not only motivate the participant, but also trigger positive emotions within them related to the achieved successes, which pertain to the completion of subsequent challenges.

Hence, the coaching process of a disabled person should lead to their constant improvement, including both the physical abilities of their bodies and the development of cognitive skills related to the proper manner of reading and interpreting the changes taking place in their lives. In the personal dimension, it means reconstructing the image of self, consisting in the conversion of “I” from the disabled person. It is often based on a stereotype cognitive scheme which is actually a product of the internalization of social patterns related to the perception of the incomplete capability of an individual. It is also based on the other, proper self-perception as a fully-fledged sportsman. According to the operational paradigm of the institution responsible for training and educating a disabled person for the role of a sportsman, it is the transmission of specific rules, principles and patterns of conduct, and adapting to functioning within a sport environment.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The issue raised in the article was the notion of experiencing conversion in disabled people’s lives, under the influence of sport that they practice professionally. I sought sources of that influence in the organization of pedagogical practices, the education system, the ideology of organizations responsible for care over such activities, and also the actions of people who carried out particular pedagogic and educational tasks on their behalf. However, in order for the conclusions drawn from my analyses to have some weight, we need to refer to the broad theoretical-methodological context where my deliberations are situated.

While adopting the perspective of the interpretative paradigm in my deliberations, I paid attention to those aspects of the world of sport of the disabled which were related to the notions of constructing reality. I achieved the depth and richness of the content related to that process thanks to the application of “natural-ist” methodology, including lightly structured interviews and observations. These



techniques allowed me to identify a process applicable in the case of individuals exposed to the long-standing influence of particular educational institutions.

I also made an attempt to explain the phenomenon which consists in the transformation experienced by disabled people who had decided to practice sport professionally, referring to the organization of pedagogical events which are characteristic of the institutions responsible for such activities. In order to research the influence of those institutions on disabled individuals, I focused on the analysis of the principles, rules, and rituals related to the educational process practices.

The results of studies prove that practicing sport professionally means constant work on oneself, related to the continual strive for improvement in the sportsman's role, becoming better, thus often going beyond other barriers, often both physical and mental. The process of creating the role of a person who practices sport is usually connected with their entering a new environment, which in turn means the necessity to become familiar with its principles, and the most important element is to gain knowledge of a specific type and scope.

Those disabled individuals who were accepted by their environment and are specified by the coaches as being capable of becoming a professional take part in various subsequent trials which should eventually legitimize their role as a fully-fledged sportsman. They are of a testing character, meaning that they achieve turning points in their sporting career, providing it with an individual character, which at the same time is acceptable by everyone. It is individual in the sense that people practicing sport should be characterized with specific skills, combining those features which state their uniqueness and which are acceptable by others, thereby fulfilling the "objective" criteria of professionalism.

Furthermore, the process consists in becoming aware that the activity of a disabled person in the case of practicing sport will undergo a trial of social confrontation and evaluation in terms of the accepted rules, stressing the primacy of their own motivation and plans (cf. Lipiec, 2013, p. 17). Being recognized as a sportsman by others requires the completion of a social school of competence and the recognition of participants' rights on a broad scale. This must be related to proper certification, confirming their status as a fully-fledged sportsman.

## References:

- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism. Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Blumer, H. (1975). Implikacje socjologiczne myśli George'a Herberta Meada. In: W. Derczyński, A. Jasińska-Kania, & J. Szacki (Eds.), *Elementy teorii socjologicznych* (pp. 70–84). Warszawa: PWN.

- Blumer, H. (1984). Społeczeństwo jako symboliczna interakcja. In: E. Mokrzycki (Ed.), *Kryzys i schizma. Antyscjentystyczne tendencje w socjologii współczesnej* (pp. 71–86). Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Blumer, H. (2007). *Interakcjonizm symboliczny. Perspektywa i metoda*. Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *The State Nobility. Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.C. (1990). *Reprodukcja. Elementy teorii systemu nauczania*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, J. (2001). *Zaproszenie do socjologii refleksyjnej*. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Bredemeier, B.J.L., & Shields, D.L.L. (1995). *Character Development and Physical Activity*. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers.
- Burgess, R. (Ed.). (1980). *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Clifford, C., & Feezell, R.M. (1997). *Coaching for Character*. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers.
- Collingwood, T. (1997). *Helping At-risk Youth through Physical Fitness Programming*. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers.
- Covrig, D.M. (1996). Sport, Fair Play, and Children's Concepts of Fairness, *Journal for a Just & Caring Education*, 2(3), pp. 263–282.
- Glaser, B. (1998). *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions*. Mill Valley: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Goffman, E. (2005). *Piętno. Rozważania o zranionej tożsamości*. Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Goffman, E. (2006). *Rytuał interakcyjny*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Hałas, E. (1987). *Społeczny kontekst znaczeń w teorii symbolicznego interakcjonizmu*. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2000). *Metody badań terenowych*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka.
- Heinemann, K. (1990). *Wprowadzenie do socjologii sportu*. Warszawa: Centralny Ośrodek Metodyczny Studiów Nauk Politycznych.
- Hughes, E. (1958). *Men and Their Work*. Glencoe: Free Press.
- Konecki, K. (1992). Nowi pracownicy a kultura organizacyjna. Studium folkloru fabrycznego, *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Sociologica*, 24, pp. 3–191.
- Konecki, K. (2000). *Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych. Teoria ugruntowana*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Konecki, K. (2005). Teoria ugruntowana a kontekst odkrycia. Naturalna historia pewnego badania. In: J. Leoński, & A. Kołodziej-Durnaś (Eds.), *W kręgu socjologii interpretatywnej – zastosowanie metod jakościowych* (pp. 301–315). Szczecin: Economicus.

- Krzemiński, I. (1986). *Symboliczny interakcjonizm i socjologia*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Lipiec, J. (1987). Antynomie wychowania sportowego, *Kultura Fizyczna*, 3–4, pp. 5–9.
- Lipiec, J. (2013). Socjalizacyjna lekcja sportu. In: Z. Dziubiński, & K. Jankowski (Eds.), *Kultura fizyczna a socjalizacja* (pp. 15–23). Warszawa: AWF w Warszawie, SALOS RP.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (2000). *Analiza danych jakościowych*. (Translated by S. Zabielski). Białystok: Trans Humana.
- Molik, B., Morgulec-Adamowicz, N., & Kosmol, A. (2008). *Zespołowe gry sportowe osób niepełnosprawnych. Koszykówka na wózkach i rugby na wózkach*. Warszawa: AWF.
- Niedbalski, J. (2015). The Role of Sport in the Reconstruction Process of the Identity of a Person with an Acquired Body Dysfunction, *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*, 11(3), pp. 26–45.
- Ossowski, S. (1966). *O nauce*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Purdy, D.A., & Richard, S.F. (1983). Sport and Juvenile Delinquency – An Examination and Assessment of Four Major Theories, *Journal of Sport Behaviour*, 6(4), pp. 179–193.
- Rekowski, W., & Wilk, S. (1997). Rehabilitacja ruchowa. In: Z. Krawczyk (Ed.), *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku – kultura fizyczna, sport* (pp. 97–115). Warszawa: Instytut Kultury.
- Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (1997). Jak zmierzać do celu nie wiążąc sobie rąk. Projektowanie wywiadów jakościowych. In: L. Korporowicz (Ed.), *Ewaluacja w edukacji* (pp. 201–222). Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Sage, G. (1986). The Effects of Physical Activity on the Social Development of Children. In: Stull, G.A., Eckert, H.M. (Eds.), *Effects of Physical Activity on Children* (pp. 22–29). American Academy of Physical Education Papers, 19.
- Sas-Nowosielski, K. (2004). Wychowanie poprzez sport – między nadzieją a zwątpieniem (II). Współczesne poglądy na temat związków sportu z wychowaniem, *Sport Wyczynowy*, 42(7–8), pp. 64–79.
- Silverman, D. (1994). *Interpreting Qualitative Data. Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, A. (1959). *Mirrors and Masks. The Search for Identity*. New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Sztompka, P. (2006). *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Tomecka, M. (2012). Socjalizacja a zespołowe gry sportowe. In: Z. Dziubiński, & K. Jankowski (Eds.), *Kultura fizyczna a socjalizacja*. Warszawa: AWF w Warszawie, SALOSRP.
- Włodarek, J., & Ziółkowski, M. (Eds.). (1990). *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii*. Warszawa–Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Ziółkowski, M. (1981). *Znaczenie, interakcja rozumienie. Studium z symbolicznego interakcjonizmu i socjologii fenomenologicznej*. Warszawa: PWN.