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### **Educational Aspects of Supported Employment as an Exemplification of Actions for the Policy of Social Cohesion Based on Polish Experiences**

### **Edukacyjne aspekty zatrudnienia wspomaganego jako egzemplifikacja działań na rzecz polityki spójności społecznej na podstawie polskich doświadczeń**

#### **Introduction**

Considerations on social cohesion have their source in a reflection on the mechanism of socio-economic development aimed at harmonizing economic phenomena and striving to achieve social balance by providing people with the necessary level of well-being.

The concept of social cohesion became the subject of intense interest to researchers and politicians at the end of the 20th century. This term now is acquiring a specific meaning in the context of counteracting the phenomenon of marginalization and social exclusion. This phenomenon takes a specific form in a post-industrial society, resulting from the organization of economic

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processes, to a large extent determining the conditions of existence of individual social categories of people. Another aspect relevant from the point of view of the organization of the life of human communities is the assumption by public authorities of more and more responsibility for the implementation of social functions, including education and health. The justification for such an approach, as noted by e.g. T. Piketty, is reflected in the adopted political and philosophical traditions that are exemplified in normative decisions of a legal nature (Piketty, 2015, p. 261).

An important premise for addressing this issue is the scale of the risk of poverty and social exclusion in economically developed countries, including the European Union. According to Eurostat data, around 24% of the population in the EU countries is at risk of poverty and social exclusion (without taking into account social transfers) (Eurostat - data for 2015). The statistically significant groups at risk of social exclusion include the category of disabled people, whose situation in society is determined by the type of impairment and the degree of disability, and in the cultural dimension by stereotypes, functioning in the social perception of this group of people. An important criterion for distinguishing this category of people in the context of the phenomenon of exclusion is the association of the disability factor with the symptoms of exclusion in many areas of social life, such as education, labour market, access to institutions or social activity.

### **The aim of the study**

Against this background, the aim of the research in this article is to undertake activities for the social inclusion of people with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, enabling their inclusion in the mainstream of social life. An important element of this activity is the involvement of the education system in the preparation of the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Supported Employment project, including job trainers as the basic link of this project.

### **Theoretical framework and research methods**

In the theoretical discourse, the issue of social cohesion is relevant in the areas of sociology, social psychology, pedagogy, economy and social policy. Such a broad interdisciplinary approach causes difficulties in unequivocally

defining this construct. In sociological analysis, the concept of cohesion is used to describe social groups. In these descriptions, consistency is treated as a feature of a group whose indicators are the display of the same attitudes, recognition of the same norms and patterns of behaviour, and joint actions (Szacka, 2008, p. 192).

In contrast to the concept of “group cohesion”, the concept of “social cohesion” acquires a specific meaning. The term gained popularity at the end of the 20th century and is associated with counteracting the phenomenon of marginalization and social exclusion. B. Szacka emphasizes that the phenomenon of marginalization is one of the important factors of differentiation in postmodern society. This differentiation in a post-industrial society takes a specific dimension, the basis of which are the changes, taking place in the way the economic processes are organized, and the phenomena related to the professionalization of professions, and the formation of the social category of people who are only united by the similarity of survival strategies (Szacka, p. 315). However, the concept of *sui generis* social cohesion derives from the cohesion policy that sets the directions for the development of developed societies. All this means that we do not have a commonly accepted term for this extremely complex phenomenon.

Regardless of the difficulties with formulating a commonly accepted definition of social cohesion, in practice, an agreed operational definition must be adopted. Such an example is the term used in the Council of Europe. Here, cohesion, presupposes social commitment to reduce disparities to a minimum and avoid polarisation. It is based on the four constituent dimensions of human well-being that are essential for the functioning of societies that recognize human rights and democracy as underpinning the way they are organized: fair and equal access, individual (and collective) dignity, the autonomy of the individual and participation in community life. These principles determine the “quality” of the bonds between individuals and between them and the community to which they belong (Concerted development of social cohesion indicators, 2005). In opposition to the concept of social cohesion understood in this way, there is the phenomenon of marginalization, leading to social exclusion. Preventing this phenomenon is an important element of the strategy for social inclusion of people at risk of exclusion.

In the contemporary practice of shaping the social order within the state, the basis of its organization is a certain normative condition relating to social

justice and equal opportunities for citizens to participate in social life. In conditions characteristic of a market economy, this requires the harmonization of the logic of a liberalized economy with the national income redistribution mechanism, the basic tool of which is the tax system. As A. Lindbeck notes, in the analyses of the practice of implementing the welfare state project, apart from theoretical justifications and factors of socio-economic development, political requirements should be taken into account, especially in the countries with developed liberal democracy (Lindbeck, 2006, p. 6).

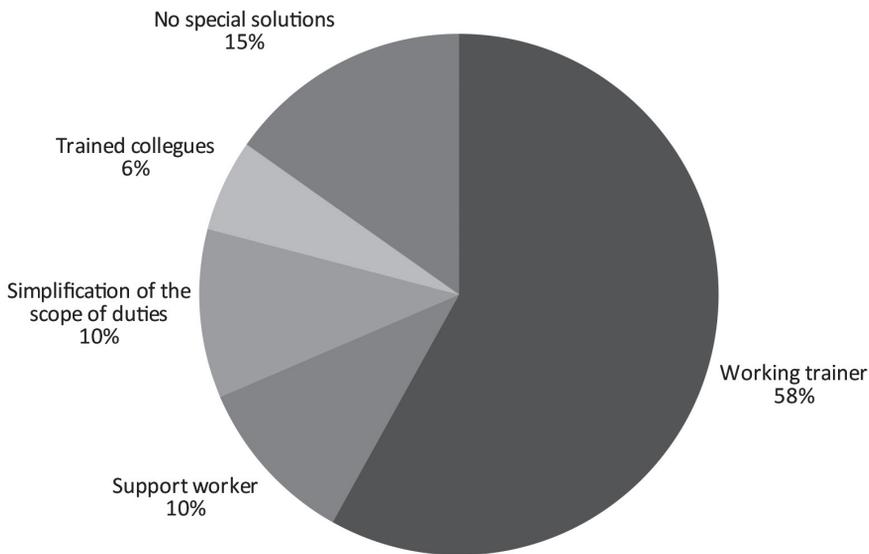
In the debate related to the issue of social exclusion, it is essential to define the possibilities of counteracting this phenomenon. An effective way of supporting people at risk of marginalization and social exclusion is Supported Employment, which should ensure that people with disabilities and other groups of excluded people obtain and maintain paid employment on the open labour market. The key element of this form of support is the function of the job coach, whose level of professional competences largely determines the success of this project. Hence, the process of preparing job trainers for Supported Employment was of interest. In the research undertaken on this subject, the following methods were used: direct observation, analysis of existing data and a diagnostic survey.

## Results

In the European Union countries, the preparation of job trainers to perform professional tasks is carried out on the basis of a standard developed as part of the activities of the European Union of Supported Employment. The previous experience in implementing this project indicates the need to supplement this standard with the issues of adapting the working environment to the needs of supported employment beneficiaries, with particular emphasis on disabled people, including those with intellectual disabilities (Final report of the Improving Supported Employment - Next Step project No: 2013-1-NO1-LOO04-06251). The research undertaken in Poland allowed the formulation of a diagnosis regarding the preparation of job trainers for supported employment, taking into account the issues related to the adaptation of the working environment to the needs of disabled employees and the development of instruments necessary for the implementation of practical solutions in this area. These studies were carried out in 35 workplaces, operating on the open

labour market. The data obtained in the research process show that, in the case of employing people with intellectual disabilities, the organization of the material work environment comes down to the compliance with the standards set out in the general regulations on ergonomic profiling of the workplace, taking into account the applicable health and safety at work regulations. On the other hand, in terms of work organization, the primary form of support for employees with intellectual disabilities is the participation of a job trainer or a support person. An illustration of the situation in this area is presented in Fig. 1.

**Figure 1.** *Special solutions for the adaptation of the working environment to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities*



Source: J. Sikora, *Shaping the work environment in the process of preparing job trainers for supported employment*. Difin. Warsaw 2020, p. 193.

In this situation, the job trainers should obtain the necessary preparation to perform the professional tasks and the necessary instruments for the proper shaping of the work environment of their charges. In this process, an important element is the way of defining the content of education. The necessary content of education in this area has been determined on the basis of a functional

analysis, in which the key goals have been set and the learning content necessary to master the necessary skills has been assigned to them. These goals concern the development and methods of implementing the procedure of adapting the working environment to the needs of intellectually disabled employees.

The advantage of the functional analysis method is a certain degree of formalization, which allows to make possibly the objective, pragmatic-oriented decisions. This method consists in determining the system of key goals and determining the activities needed to achieve them, and then drawing up a functional map as a system of key areas of activity and assigning them appropriate functions.

As regards the adaptation of the working environment to the needs of disabled employees, the key objective and the corresponding functions are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *The key objective and the corresponding functions in the field of adapting the working environment to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities*

<b>KEY OBJECTIVE</b>			
Acquisition by job trainers of the ability to create strategies and take actions to adapt the work environment to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities			
<b>KEY FUNCTIONS</b>			
<b>A.</b> Development of strategies for adaptation measures in the organization of the working environment for the needs of people with intellectual disabilities	<b>B.</b> Ensuring the correct adaptation of an intellectually disabled person to the work environment	<b>C.</b> Ensuring proper communication for people with intellectual disabilities in the work environment	<b>D.</b> Cooperation with the employer aimed at ensuring permanent employment for a person with intellectual disability

Source: J. Sikora, *Shaping the work environment in the process of preparing job trainers for supported employment*. Difin. Warsaw 2020, p. 193.

Performing key functions requires obtaining appropriate competences, and therefore acquiring appropriate knowledge and skills that will ensure their proper implementation.

Guidelines and checklists on the proper organization of work in this area are a good tool to support the job trainer in the implementation of this task. Checklists are a tool that can be effectively used at the stage of planning and verification of undertaken activities. Such lists are usually an ordered set of questions, constituting a kind of action algorithm. The advantage of this tool is readability, simplicity of use and an increased likelihood of avoiding cognitive delusions. With regard to the tasks of the trainer in the field of adapting the work environment, checklists have been developed to cover the tasks related to the adaptation of workplaces, company communication routes and the formation of a social work environment to the needs of an intellectually disabled employee (Sikora, 2020, p. 198-218).

In this context, it should be noted that currently the preparation of job coaches for Supported Employment is carried out as part of the preparatory courses for job coaches organized in various modes. Against this background, an important issue to be resolved is the method of validating the learning outcomes and certifying the training. Due to the lack of systemic solutions in this regard in the EU countries, the principles of conducting these trainings, developed under the European Union of Supported Employment, are only recommendations. In these circumstances and due to the social importance of the job coaches' activity, it is advisable to regulate the professional status of job coaches in the system of formal education. In Poland, legislative work was undertaken to regulate the status of supported employment and the professional position of a job trainer in 2018. However, the assumptions for the act developed so far have not been submitted for further parliamentary work.

Against the background of the presented considerations, it is possible to formulate recommendations on how to prepare job trainers for supported employment. These recommendations include proposals to supplement the training programmes for trainers with issues related to shaping the work environment for intellectually disabled employees and standardize the professional status of trainers.

Equally important from the point of view of the effectiveness of support programmes for people with disabilities, particularly at risk of social exclusion, is the involvement of the education system in overcoming stereotypes, according to which disability is perceived by the society as a form of social deviation and disease (Barnes, 2008, p. 8). One way of shaping attitudes conducive to breaking such stereotypes can be inclusive education, understood as equipping

people with competences necessary to create communities in which people, regardless of differences in health and personal potential, are full members of the community, and their diversity is perceived as a natural phenomenon.

## Conclusion

The modern social policy adopted the principle of departing from direct social transfers in favour of social and professional activation of the marginalized and at risk of poverty. Supported Employment is an example of implementing projects favouring such a policy. At the same time, the experience gained as part of the implementation of this concept of supporting intellectually disabled employees can be more widely used in activities for other categories of people at risk of social exclusion. An example of such a group in the European Union is the group of young people who are not in employment, education or training and are numerically comparable to the group of people with disabilities. This category of youth, remaining outside the desired areas of social activity, generates significant expenses for social security and at the same time is exposed to social marginalization. In the analysis of this issue, it is assumed that the fundamental issue for young people at risk of becoming NET-m is the support at the stage of transition from school to professional activity. Hence, the experience of job coaches could be used for the benefit of this group of people.

**Abstract:** The subject of the article are the considerations regarding the involvement of the education system in the implementation of the social cohesion policy on the example of Polish experiences. An example of a such involvement is the activity in the process of implementing the Supported Employment project, an important element of which is the preparation of job trainers to perform professional tasks. Against the background of the conducted research, the methods of determining the content of education in the process of preparing job trainers and the instruments needed for the professional organization of the work environment for the mentees of the trainer were presented. Attention has been paid to the principle of departing from direct social transfers for the benefit of social and professional activation of the people at risk of social exclusion due to disability, adopted in the modern social policy, for example in supported employment. Also, there was emphasized the importance of education for shaping attitudes conducive to social inclusion of marginalized people.

**Keywords:** education, social cohesion policy, supported employment, job coach, social inclusion

**Streszczenie:** Przedmiotem artykułu są rozważania dotyczące zaangażowania systemu edukacji na rzecz wdrażania polityki spójności społecznej na podstawie polskich doświadczeń. Przykładem takiego zaangażowania jest aktywność w procesie wdrażania projektu zatrudnienia wspomaganego, którego ważnym elementem jest przygotowanie trenerów pracy do wykonywania zadań zawodowych. Na tle przeprowadzonych badań zaprezentowano sposoby określania treści kształcenia w procesie przygotowania trenerów pracy oraz instrumentarium potrzebne do profesjonalnej organizacji środowiska pracy dla podopiecznych trenera. Zwrócono uwagę na przyjętą w nowocześnie prowadzonej polityce społecznej zasadę odchodzenia od bezpośrednich transferów społecznych na rzecz aktywizacji społecznej i zawodowej osób zagrożonych wykluczeniem społecznym ze względu na niepełnosprawność, której przykładem jest zatrudnienie wspomagane. Podkreślono znaczenie edukacji na rzecz kształtowania postaw sprzyjających inkluzji społecznej osób marginalizowanych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja, polityka spójności społecznej, zatrudnienie wspomagane, trener pracy, inkluzja społeczna

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