

**University of Western Hungary
Faculty of Economics**

**SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF DISABLED PERSONS BY MEANS OF BRINGING
COHERENCE INTO EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND REHABILITATION
UNDER HUNGARIAN CONDITIONS AND FACING EU EXPECTATIONS**

Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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OBJECTIVES, HYPOTHESES

Disabled people's rehabilitation and social acceptance is a human rights issue and a task for society throughout the world. A single specialized area, that is, special needs education is not sufficient to tackle this task. The organizations and administrative bodies which are involved in these problems have to cooperate, and wide ranging regulations have to be developed in order to achieve our goals.

A disabled person's lifelong needs require a day-to-day attention and care. Apparently, the disabled person's closer environment plays key role in providing the necessary support. However, the social administrative regulations determine whether the wanted goals can be reached and the interests of the disabled taken into account.

Let us consider how the disabled person lives, which limits arise from his condition and how full a life he can live. The results of these observations depend generally on a certain quality of society. The way in which society handles these problems has a strong influence on the circumstances in which disabled persons and their families live. These, in turn, can influence how the politics related to the problem of disabled people will work.

The disabled persons can remain defenceless and without rights, or on the contrary, they can achieve their goals and can be part of society.

It is the duty of society in which the disabled person lives to provide a legal environment in which the disabled person receives individual chances and can be integrated into society. The essential means for reaching these

goals are education and employment. Here the bipolar nature of rights and expectations has to be taken into account.

This doctoral dissertation discusses these processes. The objectives of the author are reached by proving the hypotheses and by formulating the results.

The aim of the research

- demonstrating the stages in historical development of handling the problems of disabled persons: from primitive support-actions to a system in which the disabled persons are treated as a social group, and complex economical, social and rehabilitation strategies are applied.

- detailed analysis on the social acceptance of disability, showing that the social acceptance of disabled persons requires an administrative preparation, a cooperation between different branches, and social cohesion. Even if there is a law for equal chances, the disabled people face difficulties in achieving their goals and using their rights.

- giving a comprehensive account of the educational level and qualification of young disabled persons within the Hungarian educational system. These persons can have different types of disabilities, and the severity of these disabilities varies as well.

- observing the interactions between disabled people's qualification and their opportunities in the labor market.

- discussing the compatibility of employment policy, the available funds for employment-rehabilitation, and social equality.

- introducing tendencies in the disability policy within the EU and in Hungary from the viewpoint of providing equal opportunities.

- based on empirical data and results, confirming that disabled people can achieve more social effectiveness by special management in education and employment, by providing accessibility and by involving civil organizations more intensively.

The author has based her research work on confirming the following hypotheses:

- Disabled people's social acceptance requires interference on an administrative level. For disabled people, individual self-realization is more difficult, even with egalitarian laws and the national disability program, compared to the non-disabled.

- Equal opportunity policy of the EU has greatly influenced the theoretical conception of Hungarian disability policy which is manifested in the legislation of the relevant fields.

- Disabled people's social integration in terms of quality and rate is much more advanced in the welfare states of Europe than in Hungary, as can be seen in the conditions of education and employment.

- A higher percentage of disabled people is educated in segregated institutions, in spite of the fact that integrated education is provided by the 1993 educational law. For those with a more severe disability, opportunity for higher education and employment is more limited than for those with a lighter handicap.

- Parental background and qualification is determinative in young disabled people's higher education. However, the condition of disability is strongly influential in the choice of high-school / university and profession.

- Although the majority of disabled students are aware of their rights and allowances, only few of the disabled students admit disability status, which can be attributed to deficiency in the scope of duties of the disability coordinator, as well as to the personal right issue of self-definition.

- Disabled students need to invest significantly more financial and human resources in their studies and to obtain their degrees. Based on their experiences, they are not confident that after having received their degrees they will find an adequate job.

- In the case of disabled employees too, success in labor market depends on their qualification level. Institutions which contribute to disabled people's employment ("Rehabilitációs Információs Centrum" = Rehabilitation Information Center, "Foglalkozási Információs Tanácsadó" = Office giving information to people looking for a job) are barely known amongst disabled people who are looking for work, nor are they more widespread amongst employers. In addition, their function and effectiveness is minimal.

- In Hungary, disabled young and grown up people do not feel themselves accepted by society. Although the state offers programs to achieve equal chances, disabled persons think that their situation is not secure, and they encounter obstacles.

- Civil organizations follow the principles of subsidiarity and social cohesion, and this way help disabled people to be more successful in their social and private integration.

In order to achieve the research objectives and to prove the hypotheses, publications and other documents of the field have been studied or processed; also, the collection of data has been extended by the use of question forms and interviews. Data processing was done by Microsoft Excel.

CONTENTS AND METHOD OF THE RESEARCH, JUSTIFICATIONS

In order to achieve the goal and support the hypotheses, the dissertation discusses the history of international and Hungarian special needs education. In order to do this, in the secondary research phase, publications of the field had to be found and studied. The author also discusses the social acceptance of disability status and the social situation of disabled people as a minority group, and the present criteria applied to disability. By processing the related documents, the author presents the process by which Europe – primarily the European Union –

and Hungary reached legitimization of equal opportunities from the initial steps of anti-discrimination policy. She has made comparisons with emphasis on Austria and Norway in terms of young disabled people's situation in higher education, as well as the systems used for their employment.

Based on their answers, the author analyses disabled people's opportunities in higher education, the capacity and conditions of schools for higher education, and also disabled person's situation related to employment

and rehabilitation, by means of questionnaires applied during the primary research phase.

The questionnaires were distributed in printed and in electronic form to the students through the rector's office, or some other offices for student's affairs, or through the special needs coordinator at 8 universities and their diverse faculties, and in addition, in 7 institutes functioning as independent schools in higher education.

As regards to the survey on employment, questionnaires with accompanying explanations were e-mailed as attachments to selected students who subsequently conveyed them to the disabled students, and in many cases they also helped in answering and returning the forms. Although the internet would have made it possible to use direct on-line questionnaires, this method was not selected because internet access and usage is less frequent amongst disabled people than the majority of society, and the type and severity of the disability could have prevented the adequate filling of the forms. Data processing was done by Microsoft Excel, percentage data are shown in circular charts.

The author applied interview as research method in order to support her hypotheses, and also to assure reliability of the conclusions deduced from the questionnaires. The results of the questionnaires are based on exact numerical data. Reliability of these results was confirmed by comparison of the deduced conclusions and the personal experiences and opinions communicated by the interviewed persons.

The interviews ran as partly structured and as structured and concentrated discussions. The interviewees agreed to provide their opinions

in written form as well after the discussions, thus they could conceive their thoughts in a more precise and meticulous way.

The interviewees are very much familiar with the society of disabled persons, their general and unique problems. They have gathered experiences either as disabled students, or as disabled adults searching for employment, or employees with disabilities; or by providing services to disabled people, they have a broad sight on the complex problems of disabled employment.

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Results and conclusions

Based on theoretical research and empirical examinations, the author established the following results:

Results regarding higher education

- It can be stated that the integration or segregation background in public education plays a determinative role in young disabled people's higher education. In higher education, the majority of disabled people had learnt in integrated institutions. If their early years are lived in a society of the majority, disabled people will more likely successfully manage their later lives in society.

- Apparently, parental background and school qualification also strongly affects their development, their intention to get higher education, and their successful completion of their studies. The majority of disabled people getting higher education are children of parents with a medium or a higher qualification. Unfortunately neither the public nor the higher

education can provide the capacity which could assure equal opportunities, educational or social accessibility for young people with severe disability in developing their skills or organizing their compensations.

For them, it is the limitations of segregated education which primarily prescribes educational perspectives.

New results

- The majority of disabled students in higher education are aware of their rights originating from their conditions, and they do acquire the relevant support. In higher education, they are properly provided with information, and the coordinators pay special attention to their unique needs. They also keep contact with these coordinators. However, these students still heavily rely on their own private information channels, while the higher education information services are only partly used.

- The Ministry of Education considers it crucial that making the technical environment accessible have a priority in higher education institutes, and that institutes must include it as a concrete goal in their development plans, so that people can study in complex buildings without any obstacles to the disabled. It provides both legal information and information which is meant to influence public opinion. It constantly informs the institutions for higher education on how to achieve equal treatment in theory and practice in such a way that it is coherent with EU expectations. It maintains standards for the material support of students, dependent on the circumstances in which the recipient lives, but this will

reach the disabled student in the form of concrete help, if the special needs coordinator is in constant live contact with the student.

- The disabled young persons, who are in possession of a higher education qualification (degree), have satisfactory and realistic expectations concerning their own future. Trusting social acceptance, they consider their own strength and discrimination-free environment the most important in managing a successful and independent life.

- Compared to last decades, major changes have been brought about in the higher education in Hungary for disabled young persons by the improvement of the conditions of the equal chances policy. From year to year, entrance examinations and those who are admitted are increasing in numbers; these tendencies are strengthened by legal regulations, financial support and the improvement of the infrastructure.

However, the complex removal of obstacles (in the physical and human environment) is still not satisfactorily completed, and this hinders the everyday work and independence of the young people.

- Segregated institutional education is more characteristic amongst grown up disabled persons, and has a strong impact on the roles they subsequently play in society. An individual may spend 10-12 or even more years in a

special education institution, socializing him or her to an isolated environment for the disabled, making adaptation into a non-disabled environment difficult; which can result in vegetation at home and dependence on support and unemployment benefit, as opposed to employment.

- Labour market demands do not in general seem to influence the motivation of disabled young persons in their choice of career or higher education and the relevant pedagogical organizing activity. There are special schools with limited possibilities and conditions, where students receive qualifications for jobs for which simply there is no demand, either because of saturation or redundancy in the market (e.g. baker or tanner). It is almost impossible to achieve a balance between training and employment because of the lack of information on labour market demands or because these information is not taken into account. Progress in this direction is only possible with the cooperation of the particular ministries (education, social, employment, health).

Results of the research work done in the field of employment.

- The severity of disability is a basic condition of employment. Persons with a less severe disability have better possibilities in education and employment than those with a severe disability. One measure for the realization of social integration and equal chances is the number of disabled persons in the labour market. Presently only a minor portion of disabled people in an active age are employed, far from the levels observed in developed EU countries.

New results.

- There is a network of institutions organized on both county and regional level which support the employment of disabled persons, but their services reach only a minimal portion of the affected groups and

persons. This negative tendency has become stronger during the last 1-2 years, when the overall unemployment rates have gone up because of the global and national economical crisis. The offices of "Rehabilitation Information Center" and/or "Information and Advice on Employment" are less accessible for disabled persons looking for jobs. Although the network exists, the process of taking a job (looking for a job, taking a job, proving to be suitable for the job) depends on individual connections and resources.

- Social prejudices make it difficult for disabled persons to feel equal in both their global and local environment. In the everyday life the majority of the people without disabilities discriminate in a latent way against them. Not even today, with decrees of legal force can they enjoy human dignity, autonomy and freedom because there are people who have prejudices or who stigmatize the disabled.

- Civil rights groups support effectively the disabled people in their daily struggle for finding a solution to their problems. They do differential actions for social integration in local communities and on a macro-environmental level, following the principles of subsidiarity and social cohesion. They do much for law enforcement to help the disabled, and for the development of personality and identity qualities.

- Compared to previous years, there is an increase in the number of people who have a regular income without being active. This is the result of the possibility to be officially qualified as an invalid, and of the fact that more and more people, making use of a regulation, retire earlier than the normal age of retirement. The structure of the economy is changing and the markets are getting stronger; these new circumstances limit the employment

possibilities that the state offers to disabled people or for people with changed abilities.

Beginning with 2008, new laws regulate the rehabilitation processes of disabled people and of people with changed abilities in a rational way. These include changes in the conditions for employment and for benefit payments, with the aim to bring about a harmony between the interests of the state and of the individual person.

- In Hungary there are essential deficiencies in the complex removal of obstacles and in employment policies, and these deficiencies make the situation of the disabled people much more unfavourable. This affects even the number of people receiving qualifications in public education, but more severe handicaps can be observed in employment and in the independent presence in the labour market. The growing rate of young people entering higher education is a good sign, but the removal of obstacles has to be completed, the human and physical conditions for equal chances have to be improved. The state has created an action plan and a program for the disabled in order to make a route-plan for equal chances, but because of the lack of social cohesion, unadvised actions hinder the improvement of the standards of living of the disabled people and the exertion of their civil rights.

- In developed EU countries disabled people are accepted by society on a much higher level. Norwegian young people enjoy complex removal of obstacles and social integration, they find that their identity as a disabled person is not a severe problem yet to be solved, but is a natural condition accepted by society. They feel themselves equal to their non-disabled fellow students. They consider any questioning related to their disabilities a

discrimination and violation of their civil rights, since emphasizing their peculiarities is hurting them.

PROPOSITIONS, FURTHER RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Starting from the results, the research has to give a plan for further actions so as to enable a relevant and effective operation of the system of inclusion in the areas of higher education and employment.

- The transition from public education to higher education of disabled young persons has to be supported by a wider and more easily accessible information background. In the high school, special methods have to be used to inform students about the available capacity in higher education and about the requirements.

There should be a connection between the institute receiving students and the high school; prior to the entrance examinations the special needs coordinator could get to know the young disabled person to be admitted to the institute, and in turn, the young person could get information on the higher education field of his choice.

- There is a need for the creation of a central office in higher education institutions which would offer an advisory mentor service to disabled young persons - such offices are already operating in a couple of universities in Hungary - and in which people with the necessary qualifications and with experience in matters related to learning and in handling mental and other problems could deal with those requiring help. The person of the coordinator for the matters relating to disability plays a central role for the quality of the special integration and support activities. In general, this job,

its scope, its financing and working hours differ from institute to institute. There has to be a unification based on local circumstances.

- In order to avoid positive discrimination and to have realistic expectations against disabled students, the author proposes a system of conferences and trainings on disability for teachers. This should lead to the development of information technology background enabling remote teaching.

- In higher education future teachers and social workers have to be given wide ranging and special knowledge and experience on how to provide adequate support to disabled persons within their particular field. Therefore, in all teaching programs there have to be parts for theoretical knowledge and for practical purposes.

- Higher education institutes and employment promoting offices should have a living connection with each other in order to give information on the possibilities of the labour market to the young disabled persons at the start of their working life, to help in finding a job, and to keep track of their employment.

- A wider employment of disabled persons can be promoted by a complex, preventive process based on a cooperation between branches of economy. Qualification of young persons could be based on a cooperation between public and higher education. At the same time, an appropriate qualified background could help in the choice of career so as to take into account the demands of the labour market.

- A motivating support system should be created in which the client does not expect to vegetate on a benefit payment as his sole income. Within a complex rehabilitation the individual state of the person has to be

improved, his personality developed. All these and the ability of the working place to receive him could ensure a successful employment, which in turn could lead to an improvement in his social status. After a successful rehabilitation he could be employed in a job appropriate to his abilities.

- In order to achieve a successful employment of young persons, the author proposes to keep track of disabled young persons who have received a diploma. In addition, the cooperation between the offices and institutions for employment and the institutes for higher education should be monitored.

- In order to make an international comparison, a new questionnaire written in English should be used in neighboring countries in order to study the situation of disabled students living there.

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