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## The process of social and vocational rehabilitation of people with disabilities in occupational therapy workshops, and the prospects of finding employment for graduates of these institutions

### Summary

The aim of the study is to present the important role of occupational therapy workshops in the process of social and professional rehabilitation of people with disabilities in Poland, and to indicate that the formation of social cooperatives by NGOs, conducting workshops together with district authorities along with the help of active support of local businesses, there is an opportunity for the professional activation of people with disabilities participating in occupational therapy workshops.

Occupational therapy workshops are the first link in the vocational rehabilitation of people with disabilities; they were to become, according to the idea of the legislator, the method of introducing the participants on protected or open labor market. Vocational rehabilitation facilities were meant to be a staging post between classes in occupational therapy workshops and work on the open labor market for persons with disabilities in accordance with the Law on employment and vocational rehabilitation of people with disabilities. The potential of the workshops would be better used if there were more vocational rehabilitation facilities founded in Poland.

The highest percentage of people with severe disabilities find employment in vocational rehabilitation facilities. They are recruited from occupational therapy workshops. However, a small number of vocational rehabilitation facilities is due to the fact that they do not fulfill hopes pinned on them to create new jobs for the workshops graduates.

An innovative solution that allows for the creation of jobs for the participants of occupational therapy workshops are social cooperatives, created by non-governmental organizations leading workshops, together with district authorities and with the help of local business support.

This social cooperatives are becoming a new link between occupational therapy workshops and active forms of work for people with disabilities.

Keywords: disability, occupational therapy workshop, social and professional rehabilitation, vocational rehabilitation facility, social cooperative.

## Proces rehabilitacji społecznej i zawodowej osób niepełnosprawnych w warsztatach terapii zajęciowej a perspektywy znalezienia zatrudnienia dla absolwentów tych placówek

### Streszczenie

Celem pracy jest przedstawienie istotnej roli warsztatów terapii zajęciowej w procesie rehabilitacji społecznej i zawodowej osób niepełnosprawnych w Polsce oraz zasygnalizowanie, że tworzenie spółdzielni socjalnych przez organizacje pozarządowe, prowadzące warsztaty wraz z władzami powiatu i pomoc w aktywnym wsparciu lokalnych firm, daje szansę na aktywizację zawodową osób niepełnosprawnych – uczestników warsztatów terapii zajęciowej.

Warsztaty terapii zajęciowej są pierwszym ogniwem w rehabilitacji zawodowej osób niepełnosprawnych; miały stać się, według koncepcji ustawodawcy, sposobem wprowadzenia uczestniczących osób niepełnosprawnych na chroniony i otwarty rynek pracy. Zgodnie z Ustawą o zatrudnieniu i rehabilitacji zawodowej osób niepełnosprawnych placówki rehabilitacji zawodowej miały zapewnić uczestnictwo w poszczególnych zajęciach w warsztatach terapii zajęciowej i pracę na otwartym rynku pracy dla osób niepełnosprawnych. Potencjał warsztatów byłby lepiej wykorzystany, gdyby w Polsce powstało kilka obiektów rehabilitacyjnych.

Najwyższy odsetek osób o znacznym stopniu niepełnosprawności znajduje pracę w zakładach pracy chronionej. Zostają zatrudnieni po warsztatach terapii zajęciowej. Jednak z powodu niewielkiej liczby zakładów pracy chronionej nie spełniają one pokładanych w nich nadziei na tworzenie nowych miejsc pracy dla absolwentów warsztatów.

Innowacyjnym rozwiązaniem, które pozwala na tworzenie nowych miejsc pracy dla uczestników warsztatów terapii zajęciowej, są spółdzielnie socjalne, tworzone przez organizacje pozarządowe prowadzące warsztaty wraz z władzami powiatu i przy wsparciu miejscowego biznesu.

Spółdzielnie socjalne to nowsze połączenie warsztatów terapii zajęciowej i aktywnych form pracy dla osób niepełnosprawnych.

Słowa kluczowe: niepełnosprawność, warsztaty terapii zajęciowej, profesjonalna rehabilitacja społeczna, rehabilitacja zawodowa, współpraca społeczna.

## Introduction

The quality of life in a community is measured largely by its commitment to assist the weaker and needier members with respect for their dignity as men and women. The world of rights cannot only be the prerogative of the healthy. People with disabilities must also be enabled to participate in social life as far as they can, and helped to fulfil all their physical, psychological and spiritual potential (Message of John Paul II on the occasion of the International Symposium on the Dignity and Rights of the Mentally Disabled Person. From the Vatican, 5 January, 2004).

The teaching of John Paul II in relation to people with disabilities is full of surprising deep thoughts and remarkable insights. With the development of human civilization, public perception of the incomplete efficiency has changed; the transformation of social attitudes towards persons with disabilities has been visible as well as the explanation of their reasons and consequences for human beings (W. Dykcik, 2001, p. 46).

Any action meant to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities is particularly important when providing them with a sense of security as well as contributing to overcoming life's difficulties. An important part in these activities is rehabilitation. The basic principle of rehabilitation of the disabled is the principle of comprehensiveness, which means that all the problems and needs of persons with disabilities must be met. This holistic approach can provide a disabled person with preparation to lead an independent life as far as it is possible. The principle of full participation and equality of people with disabilities in society can be accomplished only in the broad sense of rehabilitation.

As defined by the Act on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons passed on 27 August 1997 (Journal of Laws of 2011 No. 127, item 721, as amended), the rehabilitation of a person with disability is defined as the set of activities, in particular organizational, medical, psychological, technical, training, educational, and social, that aim to achieve, with the active participation of these people, the highest possible level of functioning, quality of life, and social integration.

The ultimate goal of rehabilitation is to achieve the highest possible level of self-reliance and independence of people with disabilities, the transition from the recipient to the donor – a productive person who creates important social values, that is, full integration into society, which can find the expression in the full participation in society (R. Pichalski, 2002, p. 12).

## Discussion

An important form of activity to support the process of social and vocational rehabilitation in Poland, is the participation of people with disabilities in occupational therapy workshops. The functioning of therapy workshops in Poland has already had a fairly long history; the first therapy workshops started in 1992.

Therapy workshops are an important element of support for people with disabilities in Poland, a place of social and vocational rehabilitation, and are the first link in the vocational rehabilitation of people with disabilities. This therapy workshops were supposed to become, according to the intention of the legislator, the method of inclusion of people with disabilities on protected or open labor market.

Currently, detailed rules concerning the functioning of occupational therapy workshops are contained in the Act of 27 August 1997 “for social and vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities,” as amended (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 127, item 721, as amended) and the Regulation of the Ministry of Economy, Labor and Social Policy on 25 March 2004 on “Occupational Therapy Workshops” (Journal of Laws of 2004, No. 63).

Occupational therapy workshop represents a distinguished organizational and financial institution creating the possibility of social and vocational rehabilitation in gaining or regaining the skills necessary for employment for the people with disabilities who are unable to work (Art.10a paragraph 1 of the Act of August 27, 1997); about the vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 127).

Workshops are day care centers, the duration of the workshop schedule is not more than 7 hours a day and 35 hours per week. The activities of the workshop has a non-profit profile. Income derived from the sale of products, resulting from the work carried out by the participants during the revalidation course, is spent to cover expenses connected with their social integration.

According to Article 10a. paragraph 3 in the above-mentioned Act, therapy treatment is carried out on the basis of an individual rehabilitation program, which is determined by:

- a form of rehabilitation,
- the scope of rehabilitation,
- the methods and scope of getting the ability to perform activities of everyday life and personal resourcefulness and also, psychophysical fitness, basic and specialized skills enabling participation in vocational training or taking a job,
- forms of cooperation with family or careers,
- the effects of the planned rehabilitation,
- the people responsible for the implementation of the rehabilitation program.

To ensure the correctness of the process of rehabilitation and the realization of anticipated therapeutic aims, the workshop appoints the mandatory Program Committee, consisting of a workshop manager along with the appropriate specialists (Article 10 paragraph 4 in the Act mentioned above).

Advisory Board judges periodically and at least once every three years, the implementation of individual programs of rehabilitation therapy participants, indicating a possible extension of participation in the workshop, take their jobs, or refer them to appropriate support center. Advisory Workshop Board shall also qualify each participant individually to set the program of conduct taking into account their personal interests and opportunities.

The therapy is conducted by means of appropriate methods of work, forms of activities and ways of their implementation in line with the main principles of working with people with disabilities.

The most important method of work in therapy workshops is always occupational therapy, meant to improve physical and mental health through the use of various targets and timetables aimed at maximum development of skills that allow the body to carry out activities of self-service, lead an independent life and even find a job (T. Majewski, 2007, p. 43). Occupational therapy is accompanied by workshops, rehabilitation care, including psychophysical improvement and psychological support. Legally, the workshop participants may be described as people with mild, moderate or severe disability; moreover, decision and recommendation for the occupational therapy must be confirmed in their disability degree certificate. The legislator assumes that occupational therapy workshops are to restore their participants' psychomotor performance, knowledge and skills as they could be able to take up employment as a result of social and vocational rehabilitation.

It should be emphasized that the workshops care for vocational rehabilitation of their participants by leading therapeutic classes in the studios where they acquire skills in professions such as tailors, cooks, carpenters, gardeners, or bookbinders. They are trying to develop in people with disabilities, who participate in the activities, a sense of perseverance, responsibility, a need to obey health and safety rules, care for keeping order in the workplace, discipline and compliance with regulations. But still too few persons with disabilities find employment after a period of rehabilitation at the workshop. The main reason for this is the lack of job offers for people with disabilities, as well as the participants' and their families' fear of starting a job. The second reason is that due to the unrealistic "recommendations for participation in occupational therapy," concluded in the judgments of the degree of disability, issued by the District or Municipal Assembly for Deciding on Disability Affairs, people who are often sent to workshops are those with poor social skills, and even after rehabilitation in these institutions they have no opportunity to take a job.

Nowadays, vocational rehabilitation system in Poland consists of four elements that perform different roles, but remain mutually complementary:

- therapy workshops (WTZ),
- vocational rehabilitation facilities (ZAZ),
- sheltered workshops (ZPCh),
- employers of the open labor market (ORP).

The idea of complementarity of the system means that each of its components should meet a different role in the rehabilitation process, and at the same time should be followed by the “flow” of people with disabilities from the position of people at risk of social exclusion through different parts of the system, that is: WTZ, RAS, ZPCh to the open labor market and full integration into society (T. Majewski et al., 2007, p. 126).

According to the Law on Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, vocational rehabilitation facilities were supposed to be an intermediate form between classes in occupational therapy workshops and work on the open labor market for people with disabilities.

The legal basis for the creation and functioning of the vocational rehabilitation facilities are two legal acts:

- The Act of 27 August 1997 “for social and vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, as amended (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 127 item 721, as amended).
- Regulation of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy of 17 July 2012 on vocational rehabilitation facilities (Journal of Laws of 2012, pos. 850).

Vocational rehabilitation facilities can be created by entities whose statutory task is professional and social rehabilitation of persons with disabilities including: municipality, county, foundation, associations, and other social organizations. ZAZ is not an independent legal form – it is organizationally and financially separated body that obtains the status of a vocational rehabilitation facility. These institutions are created to employ disabled people with severe or moderate disability, diagnosed with autism, mental disability or mental illness; it is important that the employment rate of disabled people with a moderate degree of disability cannot be higher than 35% of total employment. These facilities operate according to the principle of non-profit organizations. Obtaining the status of a vocational rehabilitation facility determines the employment of a minimum of at least 70% of disabled people in relation to the total number of employees. An entity that intends to create a ZAZ must provide adequate facilities and rooms suitable for people with disabilities. Apart from that, it has to provide immediate specialist medical care, counseling and rehabilitation services, as well as allocate income derived from business activity on capital activity fund, which covers costs of improving the working conditions of people with disabilities

and providing additional equipment. Also, money must be spent on direct assistance in meeting different needs of employees with disabilities and their rehabilitation.

Vocational rehabilitation facilities were created as part of the project “Supporting Centre of Social Economy” implemented by the Foundation of Socio-Economic Initiatives. The project was realized within 7.2.2 National Cohesion Strategy, Human Capital, Best Investment (pol. *PO KL*) co-funded by the EU within EFES. Currently, there are only 68 vocational rehabilitation facilities in Poland. Why those vocational rehabilitation facilities that were supposed to be an important form of support given to people with disabilities in entering the labor market, did not fulfill hopes pinned on them?

It seems that the most important reason is the fact that ZAZ is an entity subject to the laws of economics, while keeping these facilities is not of financial interest for the organizer; the entity maintaining such a facility must fight for its position on the market, for customers, funds, which is why, despite large financial support from the PFRON, entities entitled to create vocational rehabilitation facilities, do not show much interest in doing so. Moreover, the establishment of a vocational rehabilitation facility is connected with certain financial charges, the necessity of having business establishment and legal security of the grant received from the PFRON. All this makes that there is not too much interest in the development of such facilities. However, despite the above-mentioned difficulties, there are 68 vocational rehabilitation facilities in Poland; the first one was created in Stargard Szczeciński, established in 2000. The facility concentrated on the gastronomy business. Many vocational rehabilitation facilities succeed in the area of catering services.

It is worth noticing that the highest percentage of people with severe disabilities, who were recruited from occupational therapy workshops, go to vocational rehabilitation facilities, but a small number of such established facilities are still a weak link in the vocational rehabilitation of people with disabilities in Poland. Also, the role of sheltered workshops that have been once the primary unit of the vocational and social rehabilitation of the disabled and the basic form of their employment on sheltered labor market in recent years, has fallen significantly. This has been presented by a gradually decreasing number of these entities since 2004.

Insufficient number of jobs in vocational rehabilitation facilities, sheltered workshops in Poland and difficulties in finding a job on the open labor market for graduates of occupational therapy workshops are sufficient reasons to look for yet another solution. Such an innovative solution that allows for the creation of jobs for workshop participants are social cooperatives. They are becoming a new link between occupational therapy workshops and active forms of work for people with disabilities.

The legal basis for the creation and functioning of social cooperatives are the following acts:

- The Act of 24 April 2003 on public benefit activity and volunteerism (Journal of Laws of 2003, No. 96, pos. 873, as amended).
- The Act of 2 July 2004 on freedom of economic activity (Journal of Laws of 2007 No. 155, item 1095, as amended).
- The Act of 13 June 2003 on social employment (Journal of Laws of 2003 No. 122 item. 1.143, as amended).
- The Act of 16 September 1982 Cooperative Law (Journal of Laws of 2003 No. 188, item 1848, as amended).
- The Act of 27 August 1997 “for social and vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, as amended (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 127).
- The Act of 27 April 2006, social cooperatives (Journal of Laws of 2006 No. 94, item 651, as amended).
- Regulation of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy dated 3 August 2007 on specimen of the certificates attached to the application for entry of a social cooperative to the National Court Register (Journal of Laws of 2007 No. 149, pos. 1051).

Social cooperatives of legal entities have the opportunity to become a new link in the system of social and professional rehabilitation of people with disabilities. The main objective of social cooperatives is to provide employment and vocational rehabilitation, and the profit gained by them is used in any further implementation of the assumed objective.

The social cooperative combines the features of a work cooperative and a non-governmental charitable organization. It conducts the activity in two ways:

- social – through vocational and social reintegration of its members,
- economic – by keeping the company on the basis of common work, the activities are granted a nonprofit status.

The property of combining the social function with the economic one makes a social cooperative a very attractive legal entity from the social and professional point of view concerning rehabilitation of persons with disabilities which should be used on a large scale in this process (M. Sobczyk, A. Sobótka, 2011, p. 35).

A social cooperative can be created by at least 5 individuals, the unemployed, marginalized or disabled. A social cooperative can also be created by at least two legal entities that are non-governmental organizations, local government units (commune, district, province) and church legal entities. However, there are too few social cooperatives whose members are legal entities; they are usually founded by legal organizations that are rich in business experience gained while working with people with disabilities by conducting workshops, occupational therapy or vocational rehabilitation facilities.

The chance to counteract the exclusion of people with disabilities in a local area is the creation of social cooperatives according to the formula of the “triangle of public benefit.”



Fig. 1. The formula of the „triangle of public benefit”

Source: Sobczyk M., Sobótka A: *The social cooperative of the disabled*. The National Guidance Auditing Committee of Cooperatives for the Disabled & Blind, 2011. p. 34

The formula of the “triangle of public benefit” clearly shows that the initiative to build social cooperatives can succeed on the basis of non-governmental organizations, municipalities with active participation of local businesses.

It should be noted that social cooperatives are not entities appointed only for graduates of occupational therapy workshops, but they are a certain way – yet so far a seldom used possibility – to find employment.

Very often people with disabilities are deprived of job opportunities; they do not feel appreciated and have poor social skills. The function of rehabilitation work is primarily to secure economic needs, as well as the improvement of disturbed functions of the broadly defined activities associated with the use of specific tasks, organization of time, obeying certain rules (E. Rutkowska, D. Filipek, 2008, p. 69).

Preparing people with disabilities – who participate in rehabilitation in occupational therapy workshops – for professional work is a very difficult and complex process. Therefore, it is necessary to continue the search for new solutions and ideas for job offers for the graduates of the workshops. Such an idea certainly creates social cooperatives by NGOs conducting therapy workshops, along with the municipalities and with the support of local businesses.

A small number of vocational rehabilitation facilities (only 68) have been established thus far in Poland, and a decreasing number of sheltered workshops as well as reluctance to employ graduates of occupational therapy workshops on the open labor market are the reasons for insufficient number of jobs for people with disabilities and participants of occupational therapy workshops.

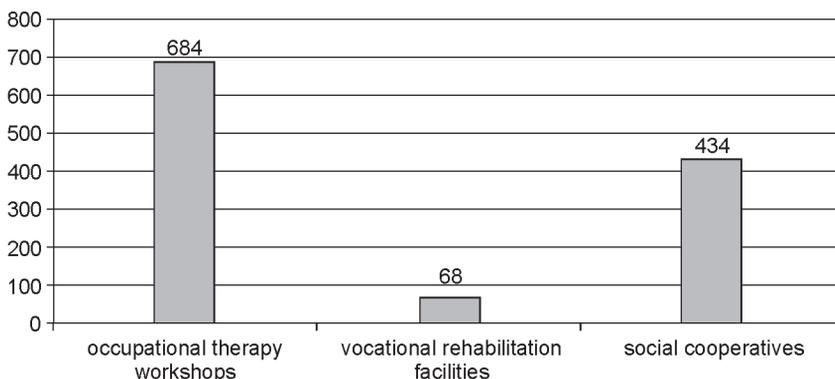


Fig. 2. The number of occupational therapy workshops, vocational rehabilitation facilities and social cooperatives

Source: The personal source based on data contained in databases: occupational therapy workshops, vocational rehabilitation facilities and social cooperatives formed under the project "Support Centre of Social Economy" implemented by the Foundation for Socio-Economic Initiatives. The project is implemented within 7.2.2 Human Capital, National Cohesion Strategy (Human – Best Investment) (Pol: PO KL) and is co-funded by the EU within the ESF, [http://bazy.ngo.pl/search/spis\\_baz.asp](http://bazy.ngo.pl/search/spis_baz.asp), 20.03.2014

The basis of all frustration felt by people with disabilities is always comparing them and their fate with other people. "Like other people – is an unattainable dream of people with disabilities – to act like others, be like others. The main source of frustration is the deprivation of what is a most natural right, that is to be 'like other people'" (J. Belzyt, 2012, p. 37).

CBOS reports show an increase in the percentage of respondents (from 58% in 1993 to 68% in 2000) who believed that a job done by a disabled person should be "in the ordinary workplace, among healthy people at workplaces specially adapted for them" (M. Orłowska, 2001, p. 209).

Nevertheless, the reality is far from the data resulting from surveys of public opinion.

Socio-economic situation of people with disabilities is a derivative of their situation on the labor market. In 2009, the economically active population was 15.7% of people with disabilities aged 15 years and more, and as far as people of economically productive age are concerned, the rate was 24.6%. In comparison, in the group of people with disabilities, these values were respectively 59.8% and 75.3%. The data clearly indicates a significantly worse situation of people with disabilities on the labor market regardless of their level of education (B. Jachimczak, 2011 p. 47); as far as the real participation of persons with disabilities on the labor market is concerned.

To sum up, therapy workshops play an important role in the system of social rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities in Poland. Furthermore, they are an invaluable element of support for people with dis-

abilities in becoming independent, and help to prepare them for professional work; they are also an important link between special education entities that employ people with disabilities; however, there is still need to seek new solutions so as to create new jobs for participants. Creating social cooperatives at therapy workshops is the attempt to find new solutions to this issue, for it may help getting an additional tool in the difficult process of activation of people with disabilities – that is, the participants of occupational therapy workshops.

## Conclusions

1. Occupational therapy workshops performing tasks in the field of social rehabilitation and occupational therapy aimed at overall development and improvement of efficiency necessary to lead an independent, autonomous and active life – an important link in the system of rehabilitation in Poland.
2. Vocational rehabilitation facilities, which in the statutory assumptions were to be an important form of support for people with disabilities, especially graduates of occupational therapy workshops did not fulfill hopes pinned on them due to the small number of these entities established in Poland.
3. Preparation of people with disabilities who participate in rehabilitation therapy workshops for professional work is a very difficult and complex process, it is necessary to continue the search for new solutions and ideas to create new jobs for those who have completed the workshops course.
4. Creating social cooperatives at therapy workshops by NGOs conducting workshops, together with the municipalities, along with the support of local businesses, is an attempt to seek a new tool in the difficult process of activation of people with disabilities who take part in occupational therapy workshops.

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