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# Employment of People With Intellectual Disabilities on the Open Labour Market in Poland – an (Im)possible Project?

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## Résumé

The employment policy for persons with disabilities and the system supporting the employment of this group of citizens built on its basis have been developed in the democratic Poland for more than thirty years. The implemented vocational activity support projects are also dedicated to persons with intellectual disability, who until recently were entirely excluded from the labour market. The situation of people with disabilities on the labour market in Poland is unfavourable. The activity rate of persons with disabilities is very low and the vast majority of this group of people is excluded from the labour market. The lowest figures for the vocational activity of people with disabilities are recorded for persons with intellectual disabilities. They are the group of unemployed who find it most difficult to find a job. This is due to stereotypes about the low value of their work and social recognition of them as unproductive. This situation was to be improved by policies promoting the employment of people with disabilities and the introduction of supported employment projects in 2001. They appeared as a new form of support for the employment of people with intellectual disabilities counteracting the exclusion and discrimination of this group of people on the open labour market. 2015 witnessed the establishment of the Polish Federation of Supported Employment, aiming to promote the supported employment model. The implemented projects are based on fundamental values and guiding principles including: normalization, integration, empowerment, "zero rejections", focus on abilities and capabilities, rejection of the concept of "readiness to work", real benefits and remuneration, focus on the individual person.

The aim of the presentation is to show how in contemporary Poland, in the Polish realities of capitalist free market economy, in Poland of "neoliberal productivism", in the Polish economy of profit and exploitation, it is possible to function and practice projects of supported employment. The aim of the presentation is to show answers to questions resulting from the clash/confrontation of these ideal assumptions and values of supported employment with the realities of the Polish labour market, which are: Is it possible to employ a person with intellectual disabilities on the open labour market? If so, on what terms? How do employers perceive such an employee? Which of the assumptions of supported employment are unrealistic or difficult to implement in Poland? What experiences with working in the open labour market resonate from the narrative of people with intellectual disabilities?

The presented analyzes are based on data from the project: *Intellectual disability and employment. The game of emancipation*. The data were collected in 5 NGOs that run supported employment project in various parts of Poland, by means of in-depth, semi-structured interview. The analysis of the collected interviews with job coaches, support coordinators and

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project participants shows a whole range of difficulties and problems, e.g. lack of continuity of project financing, lack of the Act on Supported Employment, employers' barriers, and not accepting to projects/rejecting from projects people with intellectual disabilities who have no chance of employment. Looking for answers to the above questions, I will also refer to the analyzes of Marta Russell (2017:231), who is of the opinion that, liberal society promotes equality by establishing social and political rights that are, in theory, but rarely ever in reality, distributed equally and universally."

Russell, M. (2017). What disability civil rights cannot do: employment and political economy. In R. Malhotra (Eds.), *Disability politics in a global economy. Essays in Honor of Martha Russell* (pp. 220- 240). Oxfordshire: Routledge.