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Young Disabled Adults Facing Developmental Tasks and Life Choices – In Search of Daily Life Quality

KEYWORDS

young adult, disability, developmental tasks, quality of life

ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood, in numerous individual biographies, also in the case of disabled people, is the time of permanent need for self-actualisation and time of verifying one's subjective vision of "being an adult," i.e. being responsible for one's own decisions, pursuing professional and economic independence. Due to developmental acceleration, sociological shift in terms of undertaken roles and realized developmental tasks as well as their moratorium-linked delays, it is also the time conducive to educational activity. This psychological time of a young person, its course and specificity depend, to a large extent, on numerous (micro-, mezo- and macro-) conditions of family life and social life in today's world which is more competitive and less predictable than it used to be for generation of the late 1990s. All of these factors contribute to the fact that maturing to adulthood seems to be a state which is harder to achieve nowadays. It is displayed in the form of delaying the moment of taking up a job or other important decisions in family and relationship contexts.

The study aims to present the selected aspects of daily life of disabled young adults, described in the context of developmental tasks of this period and considering the perspective of investment in relationships, development of one's own resources, pursuing education and entering the job market which are all, from a temporal perspective, a chance of complementing one's own identity.

Success is not part of life, but
the fullness of life..,
not so much a state of satisfaction..,
as a result of the achieved goal, but rather the ability
to rejoice in the pursuitof the goal.[1]

In psychological literature, much attention is paid to discussing the stages of ado-
lescence and entering adulthood which are important from the perspective of tak-
ing up social roles and, what is relevant, ideas on how to live one's life.[2] The period
of turning into an adult, called adolescence in the literature on the subject[3], falls
into the category of young age in the broad sense of the term, treated as a biological
and age-related phenomenon, or a socio-cultural one.[4] It constitutes an important
element of social culture[5] which, like gender, wisdom and beauty (all being social

[1] J. Madalińska-Michalak, *Uwarunkowania sukcesu zawodowego nauczycieli. Studium przypad-ków* (*Conditions for Teachers' Professional Success. Case studies*), Łódź 2007, Wydawnictwo Uniwer-sytetu Łódzkiego.

[2] The stage of adulthood has received no less attention than other periods of human life devel-opment. Cf. e.g. B. Harwas-Napierała, J. Trempała (eds.), *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka* (*Psychology of Human Development*), Vol. 2, Warszawa 2000; Idem, Vol. 3, Warszawa 2003; A. Gałdowa, *Powsze-chność i wyjątek. Rozwój osobowości człowieka dorosłego* (*Universality and Exception. Personality De-velopment in Adults*), Kraków 2000, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

[3] In adolescence, cognitive processes are improved and autonomised, emotions – expressed by a tendency to labyrinth of behaviors, emotional instability, expressed in various forms of expression of varying intensity. Social personality matures, determined by the aspiration to report as well as to respect one's own and others' expectations and social needs (needs of contacts with peers, social groups). Moreover, as a result of searching for new world-view orientations and attractive points of reference, adolescents experience a crisis of family authority. All these phenomena dynamically, in a way reminiscent of pedagogical "waving of events" accompanies young people, determining the sense of meaning and quality of life. The problem of adolescence is discussed by many authors. This period of individual life became the subject of research only at the turn of the 19th century, which is indirectly connected with the development of industrialization, which contributed to the greater complexity of social phenomena. More about adolescence: L. Witkowski: Rozwój i tożsamość w cyklu życia. Stadium koncepcji E.H. Eriksona (Development and Identity in the Life Cycle. E.H. Erikson's Concept Stage), Łódź 2009, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Edukacji Zdrowotnej in Łódź; P. Szczukiewicz, Rozwój psychospołeczny a tożsamość (Psychosocial Development and Identity and Identity). Lublin 1998, UMCS, p.49-53; J. Basistowa, Istota i rozwój tożsamości w koncepcji E.H. Er-iksona (The Essence and Development of Identity in E.H. Erikson's Concept). In: A. Gałdowa (ed.), Klasyczne i współczesne koncepcje osobowości (Classical and Contemporary Concepts of Personal-ity). Kraków 1999, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, p.119.

[4] For broader information on the subject see, among others: D. Hildebrandt-Wypych, Fenomen pokolenia młodzieży (The Phenomenon of the Youth Generation). In: D. Hildebrandt-Wypych, K. Kabacińska (eds.), *Młodzież i sukces życiowy* (*The Youth and Success in Life*), Kraków 2010, Ofi-cyna Wydawnicza "Impuls," pp. 129-156.

[5] For broader information, cf.: E. Nycz, *Dorastanie w przestrzeni socio-culturowej miasta przemysłowych* (*Growing up in the Socio-cultural Space of an Industrial City*), Opole 2001, University of Opole, p. 94.

concepts) is a social value which is shaped by the structure and culture of society. This period is characterised by numerous biological, psychological and socio-cultural processes, which determine a specific way of thinking, feeling and acting.[6] A specific tendency to undermine self-confidence, disorientation (especially in the axiological-normative sphere as well as emotional dysregulation "up to the point of crisis of individual socialization process"[7] are the factors determining the social functioning of adolescent young person.

Young adults and who they are

Adulthood appears to be a natural consequence of adolescence and youth, manifesting itself when the state of biological, mental and social maturity is reached. Although it is indifferent to the phenomena of dysregulation accompanying the search for one's own individual and social Self,[8] present in the adolescence period as well as the search for authorities, new, only one's own goals and life paths, adulthood is characterized by an increase in the need for emotional control and awareness of numerous life choices. It is a path that every person follows individually, and its direction and level of autonomy is determined by many factors that are integrated with one another, as a consequence of what changes have taken place at each stage of development and what they have brought with them.

Maturity at the level of adulthood is expressed in the ability to take up new social roles responsibly – both in the emotional and social sphere (resulting in the ability to build partner relations, starting a family, bringing up children, caring for them) and in the professional sphere. A special feature of an adult is the ability to assume responsibility for one's own life and to manage it autonomously. There-

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[6] In adolescence (according to E.H. Erikson) identity is formed in opposition to its disorders. During the process of establishing contacts, a young person may achieve communication success, which will make him or her perceive himself or herself as a person with specific characteristics and skills, which will strengthen his or her identity. When successes are sporadic or rare, his or her consciousness may be characterized by high instability and chaos. The way young people think about themselves determines how they live and act.

[7] Cf. J. H. Turner, *Socjologia. Koncepcje i ich zastosowanie* (*Sociology. Concepts and Their Application*). Poznań 1998, Wyd. Zysk i S-ka.

[8] A lot of attention is paid to both individual and social "Self" in psychological concepts. The experiences acquired by a child in the course of his or her own activity and subjective activities inspired by the environment become the basic source of knowledge as well as the basis for the formation of beliefs about reality and oneself. They carry the feeling of authenticity of emotional experiences, favouring the formation of the image of one's own self. For broader information, see e.g.: A. Brzezińska, *Społeczna psychologia rozwoju* (*Social Psychology of Development*), Volume 3, Warsaw 2000, Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar."

fore, it can be noted that adulthood also functions in a subjective dimension[9] – as a sense of being an adult, i.e. in situations when – being relatively independent of social status – a person meets the criteria of adulthood in a given society. Cultural systems refer to these criteria of adulthood in a highly individual way, formulating legal definitions of adulthood and pointing to their various functions. Therefore, objective criteria for treating a person as an adult are, to a large extent, dependent on taking up and fulfilling social roles, as well as on taking up developmental tasks[10] typical of adulthood (people of a similar age and living in a specific culture[11]).

It is thus essential for a young adult to have a sense of stability and continuity of his or her own "Self." What is also of utmost importance for a person at this developmental stage is the ability to make choices that are right from their perspective, especially when it comes to defining their own life goals, confrontation with authorities or distanced assessment of themselves.[12] This maturity of an individual also consists in a certain ideological polarization, i.e. the world view. The lack of stability in the development of social personality, the lack of a skillful insight into oneself and one's own needs, and finally the lack of a well-established worldview (or its collapse) count as only few examples of how an unresolved crisis may manifest itself, not only during the moratorium but also at every other stage of life. The moratorium period, however, is sometimes particularly sensitive, mainly because of the importance of the decisions made regarding one's own participatory future. Such a situation is conducive to potential problems that may arise through the self-actualisation of a young person. That is why – apart from personal potential – the

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[9] K. Piotrowski, *Wkraczanie w dorosłość. Tożsamość i poczucie dorosłości młodych osób z ograniczeniami sprawności* (*Entering Adulthood. Identity and Sense of Maturity of Young People with Disabilities*). Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar", s. 9; za J.E. Cote, An empirical test of the identity capital model. Journal of Adolescence 1997/20, pp. 577-597.

[10] Development tasks are related to age, at each stage of development they are differentiated by new constitutive elements in response to the needs of the individual and the expectations of the social environment. This pyramidal system overlaps with complex forms of functioning in the environment. At each stage, developmental tasks appear as a response to the individual needs of the individual and the expectations and requirements of the upbringing/socializing environment. More on the developmental tasks in the theory of psychosocial development by E.H. Erikson, R.J. Havighurst and D.J. Levinson.

[11] A. Brzezińska: *Społeczna psychologia rozwoju* (*Social Psychology of Development*). op. cit.

[12] For more on this subject, see: M. Sękowska, Neopsychoanalityczna koncepcja rozwoju psychospołecznego Erika H. Eriksona (Neopsychoanalytical Concept of Psychosocial Development by Erik H. Erikson). In: P. Socha (ed.), *Duchowy rozwój człowieka. Fazy życia – osobowość – wiara – religijność. Stadialne koncepcje rozwoju w ciągu życia* (*Spiritual Development of a Human Being. Phases of Life – Personality – Faith – Religion. Stadial Concepts of Development During Lifetime*), Kraków 2000, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, p. 126.

support received from the upbringing environment is so important as the environment introduces into independent social roles and teaches maturity in performing these roles while providing protection in situations that are difficult for development or threatening to the sense of fulfilment and autonomy. Creating favourable conditions for development is a priority task for parents and other significant persons. It is good if they have managed to take care of the emotional and social needs of an adolescent child, providing him/her with a sense of existential and emotional security and the strength to meet the challenges of adulthood, which brings many surprises for which young people are not prepared.

Such understanding of adulthood, as a period of permanent adolescence, maturation – achieving adulthood by young people – seems to be taking these days more time than in the past. This is probably related to many factors that can delay, block or limit the implementation of individual life tasks. An example can be, among others – so often occurring in contemporary culture: by choice and under the influence of an individual strategic plan, and sometimes out of necessity – delays in taking up work or other important decisions, building lasting relationships or starting a family. Analysing situations of postponing important decisions by young adults, we look for the answers in the development acceleration, socialization shift and the related chaos of information, values or bonds. One can also – as many researchers do – analyse assuming roles and carrying out development tasks from the perspective of a development moratorium[13], the course of which depends largely on the specifics of the living environment and the development of young adolescents or adults, as well as the specifics of the modern times. Then the interpretation of what is happening to the young person and how it is related to their behaviour, and the actions taken, is made taking into account the category of developmental moratorium. Regardless of the reasons for these situations and events, it is noticed that growing up into adulthood seems more difficult to accomplish today. However, the question arises about other interpretations of this phenomenon.

In a n attempt at seeking numerus conditions present in the period of early adulthood is referring to the concept of J. Arnett[14]. Psychological research con-

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[13] The author has described in detail the phenomenon and the phase of the development moratorium in the chapter concerning identity. It means the stage of "suspension between the childhood and the adult age", in which young people seek answer to the question "Who am I?" and "what is my place in this world?"

[14] A. Lipska, W. Zagórska, *Stająca się dorosłość w ujęciu Jeffreya J. Arnetta jako rozbudowana faza liminalna rytuału przejścia* (Emerging Adulthood According to Jeffrey J. Arnett As an Extended Liminal Phase of the Ritual of Passage), In: Psychologia Rozwojowa 2011, vol. 16, no. 1, 9-21. A. Kozłowska, *Antropologiczny kontekst nowego okresu rozwojowego stającej się dorosłości* (*Anthro-*

ducted on the grounds of the development of personality and taking up specific social roles are not indifferent to the category of an emerging adulthood[15] – the development phase occurring between adolescence and early adulthood. The adulthood phase is observed in particular in those countries and cultural areas where the 'knowledge-based economy' dominates. In such societies there is a system of acquiring qualifications and constantly raising them in the direction that is consistent with the expected standard of living and social position. Therefore, unlike late adolescence, the young man is obliged to devote many years to educating and gaining experience, postponing the tasks of adulthood until later, when he or she acquires a suitable professional and social position. Intensive exploration of own capabilities, work on individual resources, deepening knowledge and raising qualifications become the priority over readiness to enter into permanent partner relationships or to marry[16].

It is worth noting, however, that this assumption may apply only to selected groups of people, as well as socio-cultural conditions in which they live. Canadian and US research on this topic shows that in many cases, the comfort and well-being increase as the period of emerging adulthood extends. The self-esteem increases and the factor of risk of social functioning disorders decreases, including depressive symptoms, while people in the emerging adulthood period enjoy self-focused attention, freedom from obligations and restrictions associated with the social roles of adult life, which can cause them enjoying the path to self-sufficiency. Importantly, it is worth adding that the level of self-satisfaction depends on many extremely important, individual factors – related to both the formed approach to life, which is in a way inherited, and passed down by the upbringing by parents and other important people. It is therefore both inner-directed and – to a large extent – conditioned by external factors. This makes a young individual – when they see their capabilities in a social environment – feel more secure and motivated to act; however, in social sciences there are also other theories explaining the mechanisms of creation and development of life resourcefulness, indicating that the deficit of something important in life helps to activate one's internal

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pological Context of the New Development Period of Emerging Adulthood). Biuletyn Sekcji Psychologii Rozwojowej PTP 2010, 8, 13-21.

[15] The emerging adulthood category appears as a new, previously absent phase in development between the period of adolescence (maturing) and the period of early adulthood, as a response to socio-cultural changes, especially in the developed and developing societies.

[16] More in, inter alia K. Piotrowski, *Wkraczanie w dorosłość. Tożsamość i poczucie dorosłości młodych dorosłych osób z ograniczeniami sprawności* (*Entering Adulthood. Identity and Sense of Maturity of Young People with Disabilities*), Warszawa 2010, Wydawnictwo Naukowe „Scholar".

layers of abilities and capacities[17] to selectively carry out important and priority development tasks. The process of finding oneself, feeling the satisfaction of finding good alternatives in love, work and other areas of life can cause anxiety, just like it happens in the key time of a young person's life – the period of adolescence, with the difference that they trigger a growing cognitive maturity, enabling them to understand themselves and others better than before, and they make use this ability. Attention will be given to these issues further in the study.

The above analysis allows making a statement that the level of reaching maturity and the mature recognition[18] – similarly to the earlier period of adolescence – is divided into stages related to the execution of the abovementioned developmental tasks. They belong to the three criteria aiming at the ordering of the time of maturity. Apart from the developmental tasks which are the essence of social roles undertaken by the entity in the life cycle, there are changes in personality and life structure related to typical events for specific maturity phases, as well as life crises, which adult people happen to face. These categories are certain criteria, according to which the life of the adult person goes on, including activities related to work and own family, which becomes the most important point of reference. The activity of people at this stage of development is accompanied by both pursuit to maintain and complement own identity, as well as the development of autonomy related to independent decision-making and taking responsibility for it.[19] Social and civic maturity in this period of individual development is made – in particular – by means of own work – mainly professional, which facilitates earning one's livelihood independently and is an important area of self-actualisation. The place gained by work in the hierarchy of values is clearly drawn – both in the case of young people starting employment and those who lose the opportunity of professional fulfilment and financial independence, which is a serious obstacle to achieve success and maintain the social progression and a specific barrier

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[17] Compare inter alia T. Kocowski, *Potrzeby człowieka – koncepcja systemowa* (*Human Needs. A Systemic Concept*), Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1982, Ossolineum; T. Garczyński, *Potrzeby psychiczne. Niedosyt, zaspokojenie Mental Needs. Deficiency, Satisfaction*), Warszawa 1972, Nasza Księgarnia.

[18] According to T. Lewowicki, the recognition is related to the existence of some internal structure of human organism determined in a number of ways, but also affected by people; biomental and social particularity (individuality), own identity – person-specific, consciousness of relations with the environment; understanding the environment and situations which exist in it, the ability to formulate tasks and programmes of own and social action; hierarchy of values, goals and standards; activities somehow creative and aiming at personal self-actualisation. Cf., e.g. T. Lewowicki, *Przemiany oświaty* (*Transformations of education*), Warszawa 1994, Wydawnictwo „Żak", pp. 58-59.

[19] E. Gurba, Wczesna dorosłość (Early Maturity), in: B. Harwas-Napierała, J. Trempała (ed.), *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka* (*Psychology of Human Development*), Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 229.

in everyday life. The very entry into the job market and finding one's place there is frequently stressful, particularly for those with weaker or more limited educational resources. Even the people with high educational rating are often forced to verify their ambitions, dreams, and high hopes related to their dream and expected future and they need to compromise. It proves, however, that majority of these people – in accordance with the growing satisfaction factors – adapt to the success-related situations. These choices, similarly to people growing up, are incredibly heterogeneous. Some of them experience serious problems mainly due to the fact that they play much fewer social roles than those they experienced in the period of adolescence and even earlier – when they controlled their everyday life, which was relatively structured by people close to them, thus ensuring the sense of safety. Some of these young people, therefore, experience the freedom and the sense of control over their own life, but some of them may feel lost and internally torn. Most surely, there are plenty of reasons for such diverse life situations, and one of them may be belonging to a group of some social or biological risk, of helpless, devoid of future prospects and limited opportunities. There are also many such groups of young people; these are members affected by the problem of social and/or economic marginalisation, sick people, suffering from mental diseases, or handicapped.

Young adult facing own disability and life goals

Approaching maturity is still a period of educational activity in many individual biographies, also in the case of disabled persons. It is a common belief that this moment of early maturity is more beneficial – since it is open for new experience – particularly in the case of healthy youth. The reality of social life in many situations confirms such observations; they refer to the dimension of building close interpersonal contacts with the opposite sex. Obviously, the possibility of continuation of education is a matter subject to several circumstances and it is related to the state of health, level of ability, social and economic status as well as the mental status of one's family. It also depends on the place of inhabitancy and macrosocial conditions. It proves, however, that an important criterion deciding about undertaking obligations related to further education is the need of achievement and financial autonomy, taking into account not the current moment, but the prospect of one's future. Results of research in the group of young adults indicate certain optimistic changes in the scope of performing social roles and taking care of autonomy among those young disabled people satisfying the criteria of mental health

and intellectual ability. Generally, education is undertaken by the people whose health condition allows planning the achievement of as high level of education as possible, which is supposed to help in taking up a satisfactory professional job. It has been proven that a large number of young disabled persons in Poland undertake further education in the period of approaching maturity, however only few of them work, even after completing a certain stage of education.[20] The similarity of these relations can be noticed also in the context of comparisons of the level of ability and independent inhabitancy of young adults away from their home. The criterion of self-reliance and everyday responsibility fits in the criterion of ability of these young people. A definitely bigger group of healthy peers has moved out of their family home and looks for at least a temporary job.[21] It can be noticed that healthy persons in this phase of life far more often and more intensively (with more conviction and involvement) look for the opportunity of autonomous life and self-actualisation. This fact is not surprising, since disability is a reason for a lot of objective problems in functioning, causing a significant barrier in entering maturity, visible in the area of self-esteem, self-assessment and self-confidence, the evaluation of one's abilities and realised need of close partner relations. These dimensions of self-esteem result from many factors with a direct social impact. They were created for years, since the early childhood, as well as from the moment of deteriorating health or the moment of diagnosing disability, defining risk factors as well as opportunities and prospects of receiving help. In this process of creating one's own self by the disabled people, active participants included also parents, caretakers, teachers and many other persons, whose messages, emotions, attitudes as well as the level of provided care, education, ability to diagnose and satisfy the needs of children with disability (or developmental disharmony) in a crucial way is decisive about these persons' self-esteem (be it a child, adolescent or young adult) and how these persons assess their life and what it offers. This assessment is subject to social perception, with a number of activators, but also de-motivators from other people, who become a mirror in which this other person can see himself or herself. In this process of development of a disabled person, therefore, there is a need of many specific interactions in order to help the ward come up with successful reme-

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[20] These are the results obtained by K. Piotrowski. Cf. K. Piotrowski, *Wkraczanie w dorosłość. Tożsamość i poczucie dorosłości młodych osób z ograniczeniami sprawności* (*Entering Adulthood. Identity and Sense of Maturity of Young People with Disabilities*), op. cit.

[21] Temporary work provides young people with an equivalent of self-reliance. Its popular form is teleworking. I am referring here to studies conducted by author's student as part of Master's seminar in Gliwice School of Entrepreneurship in 2010. Cf. K. Krzywonos, *Rynek pracy osób niepełnosprawnych* (*Job Market of the Disabled*), Gliwice 2012 (unpublished MA thesis written under supervision of the author of the current study).

dial strategies helping to overcome own limitations, weaknesses and accompanying deformations of perceived reality. That is why, apart from specific institutional interactions, such as revalidation or education, undertaken in order to activate the person to realise their needs, an important mechanism of this reconstruction is weakening negative stereotypes and biases, which supports granting the disabled with rights and basics to lead the life, which is not fundamentally different from the life of people the society refers to as healthy or normal. The way leading to realisation in attempts to expected re-standardisation of life of the disabled should be their more and more common integration with the surrounding environment,[22] as well as activities to the benefit of social and professional activation, serving to maintain and realise these important life goals, making human existence worth living. The most significant among them are those realised in the area of widely understood social communication and professional activity. The kind, content and emotional saturation of social and cultural messages received by a disabled person and shaping relations in groups in which this person participates, become one of the factors modelling, and even shaping the level of this person's readiness and maturity to contact. These interactions prove to be indispensable due to the need or even necessity to develop lifelong communication competencies and – which is particularly important – incredibly flexible, according to objective abilities and needs – their understanding and ability to use them.

A prerequisite necessary at the threshold of undertaking developmental tasks of early maturity is a satisfactory condition of social readiness, at the level of positive emotions and motivation to act. In the case of persons whose mental and imaginational sphere as well as axiological and decision-making sphere develop properly, it is important to enhance this level of readiness in the direction of developing such a need of self-creation.[23] Entering into commitments leading a young

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[22] A. Maciarz, *Trudne dzieciństwo i rodzicielstwo* (*Difficult childhood and parenthood*), Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak", 2009, p. 13.

[23] Self-creation – which is an element of personal development – is a process of exceptional difficulty, susceptible to external factors. Therefore, while searching for proper developmental processes in the area of social "I" concept, it seems helpful and justified to take into account contextual and dialectic mechanisms of development. It allows illustrating the social and cultural background of the person, who – along with the increasing interdependence between various cultural contexts in which this person participates – seeks own originality and uniqueness. Therefore, all developmental stimuli are of immense importance, as they regulate the social ability of adjustment, communicative skills, readiness to take part in dialogues with Others, to develop own individual cognitive skills as well as axiological competencies in further stages of life. This process consisting of various phases, its multiple conditions and characteristics, prove to be crucial for creating the final self-projection – the concept and condition of personal and social "I" at the threshold of adulthood.

adult to gain satisfaction from their maturity is very important in this respect. However, ideas of young people regarding their future should not be blocked by parents, which is equally important, since the latter are likely to do so in fear of disappointment, crisis, defeat, sometimes a "mishap" perceived by them; therefore they want to protect their disabled child. Then they do not increase their motivation but even block their activity, suppress their ideas for self-reliance and instead of delivering an instrumental support, they raise the level of insecurity and fear of the young person.

In many environments, persons with disability are exposed to alienation, the limitation of access to cultural goods, social capital and sometimes self-isolation. Many factors decide about the experience of these persons and how their self-esteem shapes them. It seems important, therefore, to take into account the individual situation of the disabled person and situating this person in the space of their own individual possibilities, both internal and external. It is a condition of adopting the right thinking about the life of the disabled in multi-faceted and varied society, in which striving towards knowledge and ability to use it in order to improve the quality of life becomes an important developmental criterion.

Young adults facing developmental tasks and life goals

Observations and conversations with young adults and social studies regarding this age group indicate they have a problem with self-identification, because they do not perceive themselves as either adolescents or adults. Most people in this period can specify the areas in which they declare the sense of maturity and such areas in which they expressly lack the sense of being adult. This is particularly the case of young people with disability. Identifying with own maturity is related with defining oneself as a person taking their own decisions, responsible for themselves, and financially independent. It illustrates the fact that the change from the adolescent to the adult takes place in one's own mirror – mental self-assessment along with the changes of self-perception.

Autonomy in the life of the disabled as an important developmental task

In the subject literature, a lot of space is occupied by the issue of person's autonomy, which becomes a key assessment criterion of development of one's recognition

in the life environment, as well as the key value in the life of every disabled person, acquired and educated way to accept oneself. Autonomy building is a process that has its beginning in overcoming developmental difficulties, adaptation problems, barriers and limitations, real, as well as psychological and mental. Important factors in creating the sense of autonomy are the abovementioned internal and external mechanisms of behaviour regulation, personality, situational (social and cultural) as well as task-related factors. The defined framework of the cultural system in which the disabled person lives is also of importance. They might become a factor generating social barriers, stereotypes of perception as well as the risk of marginalisation. The realised need of autonomy of functioning in any of these important areas of life activity provides the sense of self-confidence and satisfaction, compensating for the deficits in other areas.

Persons with disability at the stage of early maturity generally find it harder to build a vision of themselves and consequently confirming their own projection as time goes by. Temporal perspective brings about many new occurrences, not only positive, which provide a person of weaker health with a life-giving force to act, but also those demonstrating objective difficulties in the implementation of life resolutions, plans and goals, constituting close and distant developmental tasks. Undoubtedly, such a developmental task for young adults is entering into new commitments in the sphere of interpersonal relations and gainful employment. In the period of fully conscious early adulthood – as experts at psychology of this period emphasise[24] – an important role in the adaptation to conditions of adult life is played by the system of values underlying young age ideals implemented in the specific social and cultural as well as economic reality. These ideals certainly include a happy life, great partnership, marriage, and family relations and – what is important – a good, satisfying work. Undertaken developmental tasks, such as the choice of spouse/life partner, learning how to live together, forming a family, commencing work, clear formulation of dreams and expectations about the future, finding kindred social group as well as integration of experience from various activity areas are mutually supplementing tasks, creating a set of developmental duties at a certain stage of life. In these areas, the young adults look for their identity and seek autonomous personality. Such manner of thinking is indicated by received results of tests conducted among the disabled young adults at the age of 22-26[25] (which is the phase of approaching adulthood) with mobility and sensory

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[24] Psychological mechanisms of human development in the period of early maturity are described in particular by R. Havighust, E.H. Erikson and D.J. Levinson.

[25] Such studies were also conducted among the young disabled in the region of Silesia in the scope of studies to MA Thesis prepared under scientific supervision of the author of the current study. The

dysfunctions. Important goals for this group of young people include obtaining at least partial daily independence, development of satisfying relations with the opposite sex and gaining satisfaction this way. The means to realise this goal is financial independence and mature mutual relations in the social milieu. These expectations prove to be hardly realistic or very distant to achieve.

The experience of many young people with disabilities shows that there are still few decent job offers on the market for them. This is all the more true for the largest group of people with disabilities, which is made up of people with reduced mobility.[26] On a somewhat permanent basis, job offers that appear for such people often exclude them due to the nature of the positions available on the market, e.g. a cleaner, a business worker or a security guard. Not always (or even very rarely) can these people take up such a job. Despite having completed secondary school or even obtained a university degree, it is difficult to secure a better position in some cities. What constitutes an exception to this rule are those who are particularly talented in a particular field or those with outstanding educational and professional achievements. A large group of young adults with disabilities seeking employment report basic problems in getting a job. Such experiences, according to the surveyed disabled students/seminar-goers, trigger a mechanism of rejection, social depreciation and bring down the spirits. The surveyed mention that they have undertaken such jobs many times, mainly due to the need to "supplement their pensions in order to be able to live decently (...);"[27]however, these were low-income jobs with inadequate conditions. Still, in order to feel any improvement in their financial situation, sometimes in order to relieve their parents a little, they took up these low-paid jobs because, as they said, "it is always a possibility to subsidise their welfare benefits."[28]

Difficulties in getting a paid job have many personal consequences. One of them is the limited possibility of planning adult life, which includes engaging in serious partnerships or marriages, and even satisfying participation in culture. The awareness of being dependent on parents at an age that encourages, and in the case of an older group, even obliges them to at least partial taking care of their own needs and ideas for life, is a considerable burden and mental discomfort for most young disa-

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abovementioned work: K. Krzywonos, *Rynek pracy osób niepełnosprawnych* (*Job Market of the Disabled*), Gliwice 2012 (unpublished MA thesis written under supervision of the author of the current study).

[26] A. Migas, Problemy integracji psychospołecznej osób z dysfunkcją narządu ruchu (Problems with Psychosocial Integration that People with Reduced Mobility), "Praca i Rehabilitacja Niepełnosprawnych," Warsaw 2006, No. 10 (102), KIGR.

[27] It is a fragment of the statement by one of the students graduating from one of the Silesian universities. The research was carried out as part of the Master's thesis prepared under my supervision in 2010.

[28] Ibidem.

bled people. It is worth realizing that in the sphere of dreams and plans related to their own future, able-bodied people and those with disabilities do not display special differences, because life goals in both groups are associated with continuing education, getting a profession, living together with a partner or getting married, gaining independence, and beginning independent life. The problem, however, is that there are real barriers to achieving these goals for people with disabilities.[29] Therefore, it seems possible that in the sphere of social behaviour there may be the objectively lowered bar of everyday possibilities and aspirations and consequently, lower achievements (especially educational ones) of people with disabilities. Completion of education and premature entry into the labour market with a simultaneous lack of independence from parents most frequently entails not only a lack of professional success, but also problems of maintaining the job. It also turns out that in the professional area, regardless of age, men and persons whose disability manifested itself later do better, and these data are additionally correlated with a higher level of education and social status of the family.[30] The family can more effectively help young people in raising the standard of their lives, and protect, which often has place, while pretending that they do not really help but only accompany to make it a bit easier. In fact, however, the accompanying of an adolescent child with disabilities by parents and other adults is an important, often a permanent element of a long process, and may not lead to a low motivation for him/her to raise his/her own bar of daily requirements, including those related to work. The occurrence of such a situation would be particularly unfavourable as it would indirectly reduce the needs related to the sense of quality of life. A career that gives financial independence is one of the correlates and even indicators of the sense of meaning and quality of experience, including life quality.

People with disabilities, in particular young people, perceive work as an area where they can demonstrate skills as well as pursue professional and social opportunities. Work is sometimes the content of their lives, frequently giving it meaning. It can even be seen that, according to the research, unemployed people often define lack of work as impoverishment of life, not only manifested by a deteriorating financial situation, but also by the level of life optimism.[31]

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[29] See: K. Piotrowski, *Wkraczanie w dorosłość. Tożsamość i poczucie dorosłości młodych dorosłych z ograniczeniami* (*Entering Adulthood. Identity and Sense of Maturity of Young People with Disabilities*) op. cit.

[30] Similar socio-cultural conditions in Europe and beyond mean that such a relationship is also noticed (and perhaps even more) in Poland (see M. Wagner, L. Newnam, R. Cameto, P. Levine and N. Garza, An Overview of Findings From Wave 2 of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) (NCSER 2006-3004). Menlo Park 2006, CA.

[31] See B. Szczupał, Wybrane aspekty poczucia jakości życia bezrobotnych osób niepełnosprawnych (Selected Aspects of the Sense of Quality of Life of Unemployed Disabled People), in:

It is an area of activity that helps adapt to both changed physical and mental capabilities as well as the changing labour market.[32] In addition, it is a value that sets the criteria for self-attractiveness and a social framework for acceptance and self-fulfilment. Professional work and the resulting awareness of belonging to a work community also increases a sense of connectedness of disabled persons with the rest of the society (both locally and globally).[33] In terms of starting a professional career, apart from the problems of obtaining it discussed above, there are also many other barriers that young disabled people face. They concern mainly the choice of profession or its change due to incomplete disability (frequently because of an acquired disability). They relate to preparation for and obtaining a profession, to professional adaptation and to remaining in work. Vocational rehabilitation is necessary to reduce these problems. It aims to make it easier for a disabled person, to obtain and maintain appropriate work and then get a promotion, by enabling them to use vocational counselling,[34] vocational training (preparedness for employment) [35] and job recruitment.[36] Indeed, many people especially, young

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Z. Palak (ed.), Jakość życia osób niepełnosprawnych i nieprzystosowanych społecznie (Quality of Life of Disabled and Socially Maladjusted Persons), Lublin 2006, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.

[32] More on the labour market of people with disabilities, among others, J. Suchodolska, Młodzi niepełnosprawni dorośli na rynku pracy – szanse i bariery samorealizacji (Young Disabled Adults on the Labour Market. Opportunities and Barriers to Self-realization). In: S. Wrona, J. Rottermund (eds.), Praca na rzecz osób z niepełnosprawnością (Work for People with Disabilities), Sosnowiec 2013, Wyższa Szkoła „Humanitas", pp. 165-178.

[33] D. Kukla, Poradnictwo zawodowe i praca zawodowa jako integralny proces rewalidacji zawodowej osób niepełnosprawnych (Vocational Counseling and Profession as an Integral Process of Vocational Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities), „Edukacja Ustawiczna Dorosłych" 2004, No. 4, p. 69.

[34] Vocational counseling is used to assess a person's ability to work. This stage determines the success of the entire rehabilitation process. Vocational counseling is a process of helping people with limited work ability to make a professional decision. It should be preceded by learning about the professional capabilities of the disabled person and the requirements, depending on the profession and jobs available on the market. Such advice is provided on the basis of research carried out, the purpose of which is to learn the possibilities and professional limitations and to assess the suitability of a candidate for work. The analysis and recognition of a person's professional opportunities on the labour market are as important as knowledge and experience regarding the professional work of people with disabilities.

[35] It involves mastering by a disabled person of the necessary theoretical knowledge, practical skills and forms of functioning and behaviour in professional situations. The field of training or vocational education is determined on the basis of the results of the tests of work capacity and professional diagnosis. After completing this preparation, employment in the workplace corresponding to the psychophysical possibilities and acquired professional qualifications is offered.

[36] Assistance in professional adaptation in the workplace is particularly important in the first period of employment. Then, the adaptation is aimed at making it easier for a person with a disability to adapt to the performance of professional tasks, as well as to a new work environment, both phys-

ones, take advantage of these opportunities.[37] However, this does not change the fact that the modern labour market (especially for people with reduced ability) is difficult today, in particular for mentally healthy people but with physical, somatic, sensory and emotional and social deficits. They have the least normalized professional situation on the labour market; their start to financial independence is delayed or limited due to the existence of many barriers, depending on age, health (including the type of disability), family and material situation, education and vocational preparation,[38] as well as formal and administrative barriers. The types of limitations mentioned above, which constitute difficulties in accomplishing life goals related to taking up a job, can create a spectrum of emerging problems of mutual interaction.[39] However, at this stage of life, the most important factor that reduces the chance of people with disabilities on the labour market is their relatively low education. There is a lot of talk today about the chances of people with disabilities on the labour market which depend on their level of education. This is demonstrated by the increase in the economic activity rate and employment rate together with the level of education. People with considerable disabilities since early childhood have a relatively lower education. The implemented programmes taking into account special educational needs (also in the lifelong learning system) are very important for them. The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled People prepares and implements rehabilitation programmes that are aimed at increasing professional qualifications and employment opportunities for disabled people in sheltered workshops or on the open labour market. In addition, the rehabilitative

ical and social, in order to be able to fulfil the employee's tasks well, thereby meeting the employer's expectations. This assistance cycle determined by the stages of vocational rehabilitation is regulated by the Act of 27 August 1997 on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled people. (Journal of Laws of 2008, No. 14, item 92), Chapter 3, Art. 8.1

[37] Training and workshops on counselling for people with disabilities are most frequently conducted by employment offices. Many such projects are implemented in the Silesian Voivodeship. An example is a project co-financed from EU funds under the ESF. "Take the Challenge", addressed to disabled people with a disability certificate, the unemployed or inactive, living in the Silesian Voivodeship and being in the age range of 15-27 years. (www.bon.polsl.pl/bon/news/projekt-podejmij-wyzwanie-poradnictwo-warsztaty-szkolenia-staze)

[38] More in D. Becker-Pestka, Aktywizacja społeczna i zawodowa osób niepełnosprawnych – problemy i wyzwania (Social and Professional Activation of Disabled People. Problems and Challenges), „Colloquiom Wydziału Nauk Humanistycznych i Społecznych" Kwartanik 2012/4, p. 37;

[39] M. Chruściak, J. Michalczuk, K. Sijko, D. Wiszejko-Wierzbicka, D. Życzyńska-Ciołek, Bariery aktywności zawodowej oraz czynniki sprzyjające podejmowaniu i utrzymywaniu pracy (Barriers to Professional Activity and Factors Beneficial for Taking up and Maintaining a Job), in: W. Łukowski (ed.), Osoby z ograniczoną sprawnością na rynku pracy – portret środowiska (People with Limited Ability on the Labour Market. A Portrait of the Environment), Warszawa 2008, Wydawnictwo SWPS, p. 134.

function of work refers to the necessity of securing economic needs manifested by improving the disturbed functions and replacing them with non-disturbed ones; self-actualisation by confirming their ability and social utility, which includes relieving frustration as well as professional and social integration.[40] Despite numerous measurable effects, these activities are still insufficient, and subsequent reforms and amendments only mitigate the social and professional effects of disability. As indicated by the results of other studies concerning, among other things, professional and social activity, the professional activity of people with disabilities often satisfies the needs related to social activity, the need to "be needed" and therefore also to feel the need to reciprocate.[41]

In search of the meaning of effort and a sense of the quality of life specific problems of young people with disabilities

The biographical and social sense of adolescence phase is related to the time of preparation for fulfilling adult life roles. It would seem that today's young adults are experiencing problems that also their parents experienced. However, socio-economic and cultural conditions cause that these young people are exposed to many changes precisely in the area of employment. Among them one can enumerate the impact of factors caused by globalisation, rationalisation and labour market problems in connection with the reduction of employment. A derivative of these processes is, according to D. Hildebrandt-Wypych,[42] educational credential inflation. This situation causes "the erosion of the youth as preparation for professional life",[43] whose projection significantly forces the formation of a personality capable of independent life design, mobility, readiness for change and risk taking.

In these socio-economic and cultural circumstances, groups of young adults with disabilities are in a difficult position. On the one hand, this situation pro-

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[40] See A. Nowak, Bezrobocie wśród niepełnosprawnych. Studium pedagogiczno-społeczne (Unemployment among Disabled People. Pedagogical and Social Study), Katowice 2002, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, p. 42.

[41] D. Wiszejko-Wierzbicka made such conclusions. See D. Wiszejko-Wierzbicka, Niewykorzystana sfera. Partycypacja społeczna i obywatelska osób z ograniczeniami sprawności (Unused Sphere. Social and Civic Participation of People with Disabilities), Warsaw 2010, Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar", p. 57.

[42] D. Hildebrandt-Wypych, Fenomen pokolenia młodzieży (The Phenomenon of the Youth Generation), in: D. Hildebrandt-Wypych, K. Kabacińska (eds.), *Młodzież i sukces życiowy* (*The Youth and Success in Life*). Op. cit., p. 133.

[43] Ibid., p. 133.

vokes making (sometimes even forces to) a greater effort, verifying one's potential and increasing it with the participation of various forms of social support in the environment. On the other hand, it generates/co-creates a new type of development moratorium in which young people experiment endlessly and diversely in terms of effectiveness. People with disabilities in the post-adolescence period are in a more unusual situation because as a result of disability (its type and scope) and its social and educational effects, they are generally more dependent on their parents, family or environmental caregivers/life advisers than healthy individuals. This status is often difficult to change and determines the choice of a lifestyle that is an average version of potential expectations or a substitute for dream goals related to their emotionally developed vision of the future. In the case of this micro-social group, it is particularly difficult to determine the moment when youth ends and adulthood begins, mainly because such goals as starting full professional activity or activity in the area of relationships and family-oriented relations are a matter largely determined by the influence of independent life factors related to health, forms of support, as well as a real opportunity to overcome social and professional barriers. They, to a large extent, set standards and conditions for the transition from adolescence to adulthood, from dependence (and semi-autonomy) to independence, facilitating self-fulfilment in life. It happens that despite their involvement in satisfying social relations in their environment, people with disabilities in the emerging adulthood are not satisfied, they do not feel happy, which also actually reduces their quality of life. That is why policies that support education, activation and social participation of disabled people, with particular emphasis on young adults, are so important.

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