



MEASURES OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT OF CIVILIZATION IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF USE OF ICT BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract:

An important element of social functioning is the ability to adapt to and use of cultural goods. At the present stage of social development the ability to use information technology, the Internet, which has become a part of social engagement and social exclusion, is an indispensable element. The study shows the possibilities and limitations of social exclusion in selected, but according to the authors the most excluded, social groups - persons in need of economic support and intellectually disabled people. Availability or rather unavailability, capabilities and public interest may serve as an example of social exclusion in the field of technology.

Keywords: digital divide, disability, social exclusion, quality of life

1. Introduction

People with disabilities face many adversities in their lives. Some of barriers that prevent their full participation in society lie within themselves (self-imposed barriers, often referred to as endogenous factors - resulting from their state of health). However, a substantial portion of barriers are the external ones (exogenous, environmental). Exogenous barriers are often related to the use of the latest means of communication - the computer and the Internet. In the case of persons with disabilities, these can play a more important role than for people without disabilities and the adapted individuals. For example, they can be used in the broad sense in the process of compensation and rehabilitation. It can be assumed that the use of computers and the Internet by people

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with various developmental and functional disordersⁱⁱ and disabilities may be an indicator of not only their social engagement, but also a measure of the civilization of a society - social inclusion.

It is therefore necessary to ask questions, to what extent people with disabilities in Poland have access to the Internet, how they use it (the purpose of its use), what steps should be taken in order to improve and extend the social engagement of people with disabilities. The first study on the use of leisure time for students with intellectual disabilities (M. Orłowska, J. Bleszyński, 2016; J. Bleszyński, M. Orłowska, 2016), pointed to a significant element - the lack of creative use of information and communication technologies to create a system of support and education. Inspired by the research results, the authors undertook a further analysis concerned with the assessment of social development - especially of those excluded - by the availability of electronic forms, their adaptation, the use in contact with people with disabilities. The authors of this study examined whether slogans of inclusion, openness to other people translate not only empowerment but also a full-fledged participation in society at the level of rights and obligations through active involvement in the system.

2. Discussion

Secondary analysis of statistical material collected by a government agency - the Central Statistical Office and the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Persons with Disabilities. The advantage of the analysed statistical data is the size of the examined population. It refers to the large research trials - 24 thousand families of the population adults in Poland - as in the case of the National Census of Population and Housing which amounts to more than 28.9 million people.

2.1 The size of the disabled population

In Poland there are 4.7 million disabled people, which accounts for 12.2% of the population (www.niepelnosprawni.gov.pl/p,78, demographics 18/10/2016) In the age group of 0 to 30 years this figure is less than 4% and increases twice for 30-50 year olds and is four times larger for 50-70 year olds, and rises to 2/5 of the population (10 times more) in the group of over 70 year olds (The health status of the population in 2014 GUS 2016, p 112)ⁱⁱⁱ. In the case of children under the age of 14 disabilities remains below 5%. The number of disabled boys was twice higher than girls and regardless of sex increased with age (niepelnosprawni.gov.pl ..., p. 115). In Poland the dominant causes

ⁱⁱ It is important to consider the type, the severity and co-existence of different types of disabilities causing partial and global disorders (J. Bleszyński, 2006, p. 313-336; J. J. Bleszyński, 2013, p. 11-52; compare with. J. W. Jacobson, J. A. Mulick, J. Rojahn, 2007, p. 3-40).

ⁱⁱⁱ Compare with *Stan zdrowia ludności w 2014 r.*, GUS 2016, p.105.

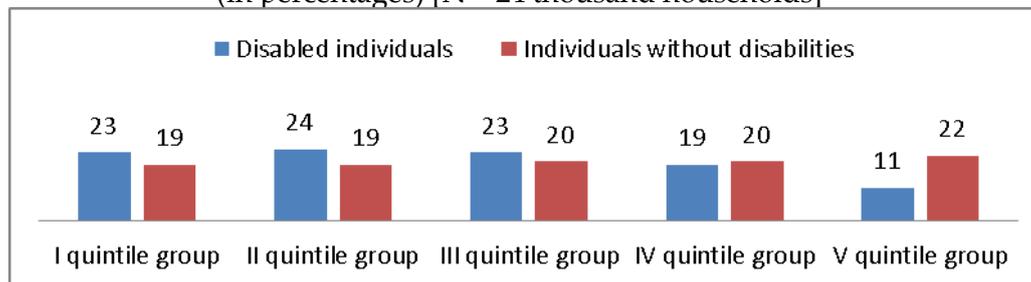
of disabilities are locomotor dysfunctions, cardiovascular and neurological disorders (www.niepelnosprawni.gov.pl ..., p. 114).

2.2 The conditions of using the computer and the Internet by disabled people

Disability is one of the most important aspects of health. This problem becomes extremely important, as people live longer. There is no need to prove that longer life is inevitably associated with the deterioration of both physical and mental efficiency. The problem of disability does not only affect the elderly. It can also occur among very young people, and even small children, as a result of birth defects, chronic diseases, accidents or injuries. Regardless of the cause of disability it is a serious social problem. There is no single, universally accepted definition of disability. The definition used by the WHO assumes that for people with disabilities are those with reduced long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may limit their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other citizens. In Poland, there are at least two definitions for the disabled. The first is the definition arising from legal regulations and the legal basis for qualification to the group of persons with disabilities. The second, much wider, is used in the statistics of the Central Statistical Office. The statistical definition applies not only to people with disabilities according to the law, but also people who do not have a certificate of disability, but declare that they have limitations in the performance of selected activities (a so-called biological disability). The research tools used by the statistics (2 separate questions on disability legal and biological) allow for the presentation of data on the population of people with disabilities, divided into three basic groups, i.e. people - disabled by law and biologically - disabled only by law - disabled only biologically.

People with disabilities and their families (those taken care of and starting their own families) are in a worse financial situation than families and people without disabilities (in spite of the disability allowance and financial support). Disability is one of the factors responsible for exclusion and limited social participation, as a result of inability to fully participate in social life, eg. financial means which are necessary for the use of all cultural, material goods and social interaction. The confirmation of this assertion is found in the study of Central Statistical Office, where the division of wealth in five income groups of people without disabilities and the disabled was shown.

Chart 1: Equivalized net income inequality of disabled people and people without disabilities
(in percentages) [N = 24 thousand households]^{iv}



(Source: Own study of *Stan zdrowia ludności w 2014 r.* GUS 2016, p. 111)

The chart indicates that data on equivalised net income of more than 70% of the disabled population qualified for the three lowest income groups, while it was less than 60% in these groups for the healthy population. Only one in nine people had high income (V quintile group), while this figure for people without disabilities was more than one in five (www.niepelnosprawni.gov.pl..., p. 111). Despite the support provided by the state and non-governmental organizations families with people with disabilities have limited financial resources and targeted expenses. In the first place they must cater for the living expenses and medicines, then the cost of therapy and rehabilitation necessary to protect health. Only after satisfying these needs families spend part of the financial means on other purposes, eg. purchase of a computer and paying for the Internet access, which in Polish reality is not cheap. The economic priority for these families is providing means of livelihood, medicines and access to treatment and rehabilitation which is necessary to protect health.

Statistical studies (Table. 1) indicate that every fourth Polish citizen does not have access to a computer and the Internet (more in M. Orłowska, 2016 pp. 118 - 123). This is not a comfortable situation because of the different dimensions of the needs and possibilities of social participation in satisfying the needs of the individual and society, such as: participation in social and political life or shopping. Nevertheless, the situation of the disabled ranks even lower. As the results the research conducted on nearly 30 million people such access is less than for every second one of them, and the situation is even dramatic of disabled people benefiting from social assistance. They are in a much worse situation than the standard recipients of social welfare.

^{iv} The term quintile group should be understood that households qualify for the appropriate quintile group based on the amount of disposable income per person. For this purpose, a list of people who are in the surveyed households is prepared. They are sorted according to the increasing disposable income per person. Then the list is divided into 5 equal parts. The first (I) quintile group represents 20% of people with the lowest income, about a fifth (V) - 20% of people with the highest incomes (*Budżety ... 2013*, p. 21.)

Table 1: The use of social assistance and the use of means of information and communication
[N = 28 941 422].

	Altogether	Individuals benefiting from social welfare	Disabled individuals	Disabled individuals benefiting from social welfare
Use the computer	73,7	59,3	46,0	40,2
Use the Internet	72,9	57,9	44,9	38,2

Source: Own study of *Wykorzystanie technologii informacyjno-(tele)komunikacyjnych w gospodarstwach domowych w 2015 r - ZIP archive, unpacked size 14 724 096 bytes.*, (2015) Warsaw: GUS (Central Statistical Office).

When analysing the data, it is important to find the cause of this state of affairs. The easiest and most populist explanation for the restrictions on access of disabled people to information and communications technology would be a reference to financial status. Meanwhile, in the received responses to the question: "*why did you not use the Internet in the last three months,*" economic aspects are marginal. The predominating answers relate to the issue of needs and skills. It is possible that an important element of the use of these techniques is skills that significantly determine the need (as well as the necessity of having the equipment). It is difficult to expect the desire to use something that one cannot operate. While the "*lack of skills in using the Internet*" was an obstacle for every 5 Pole, this problem affected almost every second disabled person (40%). This lack of ability deepened the exclusion determined by "*the need of using the Internet*" (see. Tab. 2).

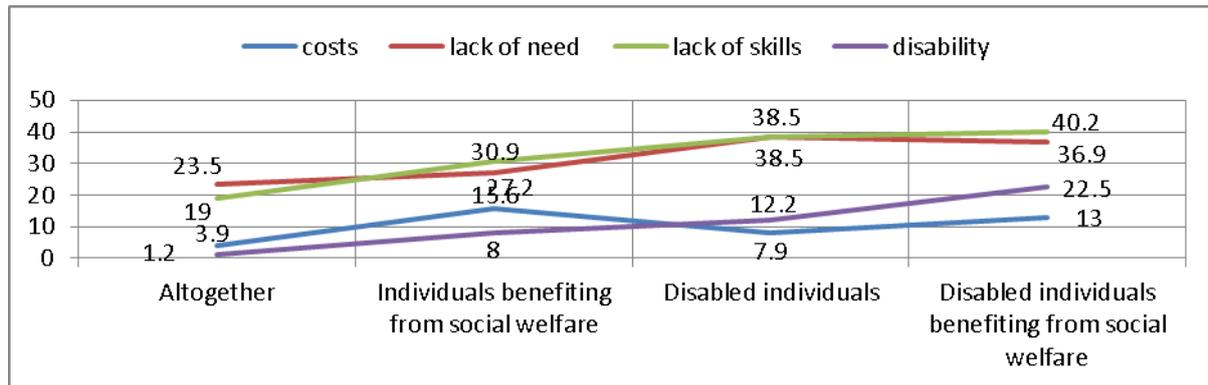
Table 2: The use of ICT in households in 2015 [N = 28 941 422]

	Altogether	Individuals benefiting from social welfare	Disabled individuals	Disabled individuals benefiting from social welfare
Did not use the Internet in the last 3 months due to	32,0	49,6	61,6	67,3
- costs	3,9	15,6	7,9	13,0
- lack of Reed	23,5	27,2	38,5	36,9
- lack of skills	19,0	30,9	38,5	40,2
- disability	1,2	8,0	12,2	22,5

Source: Own study of *Wykorzystanie technologii informacyjno-(tele)komunikacyjnych w gospodarstwach domowych w 2015 r - ZIP archive, unpacked size 14 724 096 bytes.*, (2015) Warsaw: GUS (Central Statistical Office).

This correlation is even more evident in graphical form.

Chart 2: Use of ICT in households in 2015 [N = 28 941 422]

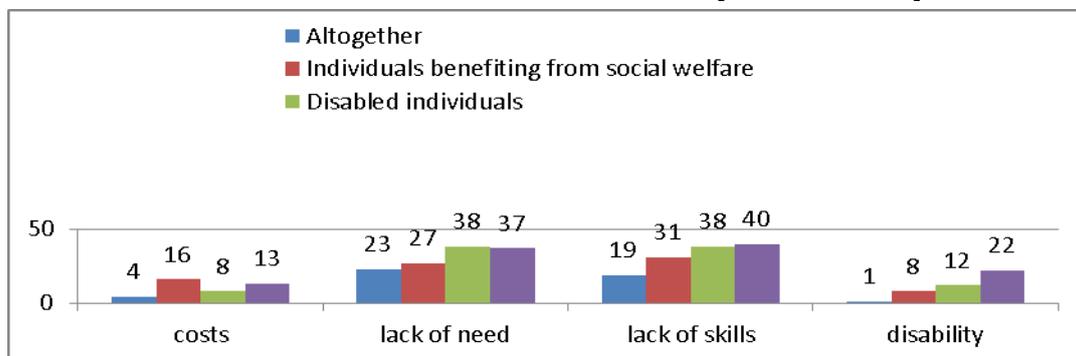


Source: Own study of *Wykorzystanie technologii informacyjno-(tele)komunikacyjnych w gospodarstwach domowych w 2015 r - ZIP archive, unpacked size 14 724 096 bytes.*, (2015) Warsaw: GUS (Central Statistical Office).

The graph clearly shows the distance that separates dominant obstacles for the use of the Internet - the lack of needs and abilities from others (eg. financial and social situation etc.). Economic obstacles are a factor with low impact, however they should arouse reflection as a barrier, an impediment related to the functioning of people with disabilities.

The chart below highlights another important issue. It is the high rate of the variable of "lack of skills" among people with disabilities and individuals affected by economic exclusion. Remembering that in Poland, social benefits are granted according to the income amounting to about 100 EU per person per month, it can be observed that these people are active individuals. Evidenced by the reduction in relation to the "no need" factor for the total number of disabled.

Chart 3: Use of ICT in households in 2015 [N = 28 941 422].



Source: Own study of *Wykorzystanie technologii informacyjno-(tele)komunikacyjnych w gospodarstwach domowych w 2015 r - ZIP archive, unpacked size 14 724 096 bytes.* (2015) Warsaw: GUS (Central Statistical Office).

3. Summary

People with disabilities in a much lesser extent, benefit from access to the Internet than people without disabilities. Meanwhile, it should be perceived as a civilizational indicator of social engagement. The collected statistical material reveals that the main obstacles are not economic aspects, but the lack of skills and needs. This applies to all Polish citizens. This problem is directly related to the way of using the Internet in life. It is primarily used to communicate and gather information, while to a small extent for social and political participation, professional development and continuing education and using online services.

Therefore, activation of society, and hence the disabled, in this direction becomes an urgent need. At the same time, actions should be conducive to the formation of this type of web sites, especially relating to the construction of social capital (large-scale activities of NGOs, political parties and associations).

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