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Eszter Gábor (2015): The individual and social aspects of living with disabilities in Hungary. Life stories of physically disabled students.

Source: Georg-August-Universität Göttingen eDiss 2015

Index

1. Introduction to the research topic.....	7
1.1 Background and development of the aims of the study.....	11
1.2 Thesis structure.....	14
2. On the subject „Disability“.....	15
2.1 Discussion about the concept of disability and its implications.....	16
2.2 Excursion on the understanding of stigmatization and discrimination according to the stigma theory of Erving Goffman.....	28
2.3 Exclusion as disability policy in Hungary.....	36
3. Status of discussion and research in the topic of inequality in Hungary.....	44
3.1 Patchy research into inequality in Hungary.....	44
3.2 Inequality research and social discourse after 1989.....	46
4. Research methodology and design.....	51
4.1 Basic methodological considerations.....	52
4.2 Data collection procedure – the narrative interview.....	53
4.3 The sample structure and the sample.....	54
4.4 Data evaluation – the method of biographical case reconstruction.....	59
5. Case presentations.....	65
5.1 Case reconstruction – Péter N.....	66
5.2 Success in every life situation – The case of Ottó T. (Globalanalysis)	109
5.3 Case reconstruction – Mariann B.	118
5.4 Case reconstruction – Lajos G.....	157
5.5 The denial of disability – Csongor H. (Globalanalysis).....	179
5.6 „I will never let myself be left in the lurch“– Tibor M. (Globalanalysis).....	185
5.7 The expert – The case of Éva K. (Globalanalysis).....	191
6. Discussion of the results.....	194
6.1 Conclusions drawn from a plurality of cases.....	194

6.2 Different types of handling stigmatization and discrimination on the basis of a physical disability.....	197
6.3 Stigma management and its changes in the course of life in connection with the social aspects of stigmatization and discrimination.....	203
Conclusions.....	215
Bibliography.....	217
Appendix.....	240

Summary

Hungary is a post-communist country where for long decades poverty or unemployment caused by disability, among other undesired social problems, was not made a subject of discussion or was ignored and considered self-inflicted. In Hungary people with disabilities were, and still are, repeatedly stigmatized and excluded. The lack of awareness of this problem and the low state support for people with disabilities, as well as their segregation in the field of educational and employment policies have a long tradition in Hungary. The situation is better understood when one considers that access to higher education for disabled people was first facilitated after the political changes in 1989, in particular through the new regulations of the higher education system in 2002.

In this biographic-theoretical study I concern myself with a topic hardly researched to date: the life stories and situations of people in Hungary with one or more disabilities, who were brought up and in particular educated before the political transformation of 1989, and for whom, exactly through the new political system and specifically through the changed circumstances in the educational system (2002), participation in education – in this case studying – was made possible. Previous school and educational research, but also social discourse in Hungary addressed predominantly the issue of explaining the failure of children with mental or physical disabilities in school.

This new phenomenon – students with disabilities – offered a new and exciting research field for me. What is interesting in this context is that these students are still reduced to their disabilities in interactions and continuously discriminated in society, although they are in fact not low-qualified, a label of deficiency that provides yet another *reason* for their stigmatization as „low-achieving people“; i.e. the disability (deviation) remains a *stigma*.

This study focusses therefore on the understanding of the process of stigmatization and

discrimination at an individual and social level, the problem of institutional restrictions of participation and their impact on and interaction with individual biographies. In the reconstructed life stories of this study *central importance* is given to the processes of discrimination and stigmatization based on disability in the context of self-assessment and assessment by others (how you see yourself – how others see you). These processes are shaped by own biographical experience, as well as on a collective level, e.g. through the historical and political traditions of the country. On the basis of the results of this study we can establish that disabled students show *great potential for development and action* in the course of their lives. However, they themselves rarely experience or perceive their achievements as positive. This is a result of the discrepancy between their self-image and the image of others, which are based on strong discrimination in society and are accompanied by the lack of opportunity for social participation. It was also investigated in this study what kind of a strategy of handling stigmatization and discrimination on the basis of a disability was induced by which experience, and that allowed the understanding of patterns of experience and action in the context of the full biography. Not only the stigmatization processes in current situations in Hungary could be thus analysed, but also how stigma management in the course of life, and also through the political and social transformation has changed. The empirically based typification of this study provides different answers to these questions. By the types I constructed for handling disability – to be more exact handling stigmatization and discrimination – conclusions were made from individual cases to similar cases working according to similar rules. Thereby, generalizations were made not to a numerical, but to a theoretical effect.

Hungary's historical and political circumstances directly intensified and deepened the processes of discrimination against disabled people. However, only through the results of this interpretative study can the impacts of the political and social transformation really be examined and in their complexity better understood. The analysis includes therefore not only the reconstruction of the biographical course of a personal handling of physical disability, and accordingly of stigmatization on the basis of a physical disability; but also society's behaviour towards disabilities and its changes. Society and individuals are thereby not regarded as dualistic opposites, but are examined in their interaction and their interdependence.