

Summary

Academic Diploma Inflation in Contemporary Society: A Study in the Sociology of Education

The publication is devoted to the phenomenon of academic diploma inflation occurring in modern societies, which relates to the decline in its value on the labour market. In the current conditions of academic diploma inflation, obtaining a university diploma does not guarantee professional success and high social status. It is related to the overeducation of society. The term refers to a situation in which there is a surplus of people with higher education in relation to the needs of the society and the labour market in this context. Recently, as a result of the democratization of education and increased access to higher education, the phenomenon of a glut or even an overglut on the labour market with graduates and the society with academic diplomas, sometimes also with ones of prestigious universities, has been observed in many countries. Thus it can be said that for many societies a university diploma no longer has such a great biographical and professional significance as it used to have.

The book attempts to analyse and interpret the phenomenon of academic diploma inflation and the overeducation of society, both in the theoretical context and in social reality. In the latter case, the problem is reconstructed as it manifests itself in Poland and the United States based on the literature on the subject, as well as the results of the author's own research relating to the perception of academic diploma inflation among graduates of those fields of study in Poland, in relation to which the analysis confirms the thesis of a fundamental imbalance between the number of graduates and the needs of the labour market.

The theoretical part consists of three chapters. The opening chapter discusses access to higher education institutions from a theoretical perspective. Theories of explaining access to higher education, such as the theory of structural functionalism and meritocracy, credentialism, as well as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis' theory of economic reproduction are described. The essence of academic diploma inflation and overeducation of society as well as their consequences are also explained. The chapter also refers to the concept of a "reversal effect" in relation to diploma inflation.

The second chapter is devoted to those changes that have taken place over the centuries in terms of access to higher education that resulted in the transition from an elite model of education to an egalitarian one. In addition, academic diploma inflation and overeducation of society are discussed using the example of Poland and the United States.

The third chapter discusses the issue of university graduates achieving professional success in the conditions of academic diploma inflation. The role of social origin and the concept of parentocracy in relation to the problem of using one's diploma on the labour market is presented. The theory of maximally maintained inequality is also described. In addition, this chapter discusses the role of the prestige of both university and secondary school as a factor influencing the professional fortunes of graduates in a situation of academic diploma inflation and overeducation. Moreover, the role of socio-personality and competence factors in achieving success on the modern labour market with reference to the current dominant ideology of neoliberalism are reconstructed.

The second part of the book presents the results of the author's own research. At the beginning, the specific nature and essence of both the management and legal professions is discussed. The methodological basis of the author's research is also presented. Management graduates were the participants of the first part of the study (the individual in-depth semi-structured interview method), while the second part of the study consisted of a thematic analysis of blogs maintained by law graduates.

The last chapter of the book indicates that academic diploma inflation is an obvious social and educational challenge for contemporary society. Four possible spheres of activity in this area are described as well.

This book undoubtedly fits into the Polish and international discussion on the relationship between the functions of the university and the labour market as well as social structure. It may contribute to the scientific exploration of an important phenomenon in the sociology of education, namely modern academic diploma inflation.