The project aims to analyze both formal and informal factors influencing the romantic relationships of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) from a socio-legal perspective. Achieving this goal will make it possible to determine the actual scope of autonomy of persons with disabilities in the context of close relationships. The starting point of the project will be an analysis "from the person to the relationship"—initially, I will examine the social and legal functioning of persons with IDD, which will allow for a deeper understanding of the context as well as the opportunities these individuals have to form close relationships. Of key importance here are the caregiving relationships in which these individuals are embedded, as these strongly affect the scope of their autonomy. The social and legal functioning of persons with IDD will be examined through an analysis of legal discourse, as well as through an analysis of individual autobiographies of persons with IDD reconstructed through interviews and observations. The starting point for the analysis will be the legal and social context of the functioning of persons with IDD in Poland, but the study also includes a comparative legal component. The analysis will cover English law, in which the capacity to marry is assessed *ad casum*; this capacity is understood as variable rather than fixed, meaning a person can acquire it over time. The study will also examine German law, in which a lack of legal capacity excludes the possibility of marriage. However, the German care system is based on the will of the individual and the gradation of the support provided. It is important to note that not every person with IDD is necessarily deprived of legal capacity. This raises the question of what the situation of persons with IDD looks like in relationships when their legal capacity (including the capacity to marry) is not limited—do they exercise the rights they are formally entitled to?

This project is a study of a certain kind of otherness, rooted in the enduring sense among some people that their true homeland is not of this world, and that in this world, they are never truly at home (Waśkiewicz, 2007). However, this otherness is not a choice made by persons with IDD—it is a social stigma imprinted upon them. People with intellectual disabilities are often perceived, on the one hand, as a threat—dangerous, irrational, immoral, hypersexual individuals, incapable of forming stable and deep relationships. On the other hand, they are also seen as helpless, sad, incapable of attaining happiness, even asexual and quasi-childlike. The figure of the "Other" throws society into a state of confusion while simultaneously provoking a need to subdue them, to make them more understandable. Persons with IDD are not socially or legally viewed as partners, spouses, or parents. And yet they do form various romantic relationships—some of which are successful and harmonious, while others are clearly struggling. Moreover, a significant number of persons with IDD suffer from chronic loneliness caused by social isolation and a lack of opportunities to establish close relationships. The everyday life of persons with IDD is shaped by their dependence on others. As one respondent with IDD said in a study, "When you're an adult, you still have to ask your parents"—this was in reference to dating. The “cloak of care” provides support but can also deprive individuals of the opportunity to develop an independent identity. The law itself rarely takes into account the subjective perspective of people with IDD. Their voices and needs are largely absent from legal frameworks. Persons with intellectual disabilities are not and have never been regarded as intimate citizens—individuals with the right to make autonomous choices regarding their feelings, identities, and relationships. Their right to enter into marriages or partnerships is significantly limited, and they also face serious restrictions in forming informal relationships not regulated by law. In exercising the legal opportunities available to them, they are generally dependent on institutions, therapists, and caregivers—and more precisely, on the extent to which these entities perceive them as autonomous. As empirical studies show, people with IDD often perceive the law as a barrier preventing them from forming romantic relationships. The project aims to at least partially identify the deficits in legal and juridical recognition of the needs of persons with intellectual disabilities. Legal scholarship to date has only marginally considered the diversity of relationship forms in which persons with IDD may be involved (e.g., non-heteronormative relationships), as well as their own subjective narratives through which they could express their needs and their perceptions of the law.

The position of persons with IDD can be characterized by epistemic exclusion—the practice of excluding them from shaping narratives about their own experiences by assuming they are incapable of self-representation (Muca, 2024). Strengthening the voice and visibility of persons with IDD is therefore crucial. This is also essential for designing legal solutions in ways that are accessible and meaningful for them.