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## INTEGRATING EX-PRISONERS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

**Abstract:** This article draws attention to solutions aimed at supporting convicts after they serve their time in prison. The basic thesis, argued and confirmed is the belief that work with former prisoners should be characterized by the integration of activities of many institutions, undertaken on the basis of a society functioning in a specific social environment. In theory it can be assumed that the resocialization process carried out in a penitentiary should be effective enough for the person leaving this institution to be prepared to live in a free environment and function in accordance with social, moral and legal norms. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The concrete evidence and statistical data indicate a significant number of persons relapsing into crime.

**Keywords:** social re-adaptation; resocialization; redistribution and recognition policy; local environment.

### Introduction

It would seem that in the current social reality characterized by the rapid flow of messages, the presence of various information channels, the situation of each person, regardless of their past, cannot be overlooked. Unfortunately, such beliefs are not confirmed by solid data. Both in a group of children and adolescents,<sup>1</sup> as well as adults, the number of people feeling lost, experiencing depressive states, escaping to the margins of social life is increasing. Considering the aforementioned issues that characterize the general public, it can be assumed that in the case of former prisoners living free, among people experiencing various existential problems, is

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<sup>1</sup> The PISA 2018 report showed that Polish students at school do not feel safe, in the level of satisfaction with learning, resistance to failure and a sense of belonging they occupy third place from the end. And school violence is the greatest problem.

even more challenging. Theoretically, it is assumed that the resocialization services in penitentiary centers should successfully prepare a person leaving this institution to live in a free environment and operate in accordance with social, moral and legal norms. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The concrete evidence and statistical data indicate a significant number of persons relapsing into crime. For example, in the years 2009-2015 the ratio of repeat offenders (Ministry of Justice, 2017, p. 6) (defined in Article 64 § 1 and 2 of the Penal Code) in relation to the total number of convicted adults with sentences in force – in 2009 increased by 3.5%, and in 2015 by 5.6% (Ministry of Justice, 2017, p. 3). From the total number of 373 542 formerly convicted adults in 2011, 95 248 committed a crime again in the following 5 years, representing 25.5% of all convicts. The largest number of people who relapsed into crime in the period 2011-2015 among the initially convicted, were sentenced to unconditional imprisonment – 33.7% and the penalty of conditional sentence – 32.7%. Of the 49 797 people who left prison or custody in 2011, 40.1% (i.e., 19 973) committed a crime again within 5 years (Ministry of Justice, 2017, p. 3). Equally worrying is the data showing that in about 50% of the cases of persons committing a crime after leaving the penitentiary institution, they did so immediately in the first year after serving their time (Ministry of Justice, 2017, p. 3).

Certainly, this situation requires a constant reflection, and above all systemic changes that will not only eliminate the opportunities for repeat offences, but will also support former prisoners after they serve their time. The research conducted by Fidelus (2012) shows that people who leave prison experience evident problems with adapting to living free. The difficulties arise from multiple sources. One of them are the conditions inmates have to exist in a restricted institution. It is typical for convicts to develop appropriate adaptation mechanisms that facilitate life in prison (Goffman, 2011). The prisoners returning to live free use techniques developed in isolation, which often hinders their positive functioning. Problems after leaving prison can also result from the lack of effective actions taken in a prison, appropriate solutions in an open environment, etc. Diagnosing the difficulties has been the subject of many scientific studies. Both scientists and practitioners functioning in the field of penitentiary assistance have a smaller or greater knowledge in this area. However, there is clearly a need for further analysis to develop more effective solutions in the area of support services provided to former prisoners. This article focuses on solutions aimed at supporting convicts after they leave the prison. The basic thesis, argued and confirmed is the belief that working with former prisoners should be characterized by the integration of activities of many institutions, undertaken on the basis of a society functioning in a specific social environment.

### **From socialization to social re-adaptation**

From the earliest times, problems with the process and conditions of the socialization have aroused the focus and care of societies that are interested in the proper,

socialization process of their members according to the principles and norms. The fate of a given community, state, and all humanity depends on every representative of social life. In the case of people who did not succeed in the process of primary socialization – solutions referred to as resocialization, i.e. those related to secondary socialization, are analyzed, designed and implemented. Within the determinants of the process of the social rehabilitation of persons who have been incarcerated, issues most often referred to as factors of social re-adaptation are considered (Bałandynowicz, 1993, Ambrozik & Kieszkowska, 2012). They are most often analyzed in the context of solutions taken in an open environment, including activities conducive to social adaptation of convicts at large.

Adaptation to social conditions characteristic of a particular environment is a long-term process. This process depends on many factors related to both the person - participant in the process of social adaptation, as well as the environment – the environment in which this process takes place. Characteristic regularities related to the process of social adaptation can also be applied to the participants of the process of re-adaptation, i.e. to those people that have been involved in the process of primary social adaptation that did not follow the rules, norms or norms specific to a given society (e.g. stay in isolation) and disturbed the proper course of the process of social adaptation. Strengthening actions should be taken against this group of people, particularly targeting at a specific person that is socially maladapted, referred to as re-adaptive. The statement in the previous sentence about ‘undertaking strengthening actions directed at a specific person’ suggests that the struggles were based solely on external actions. This is obviously a misinterpretation, because the conditions for the success of positive social re-adaptation should be sought in a much broader spectrum of activities. It should be noted that the essence of external solutions is to reach individual beliefs and feelings of the person participating in the process of social re-adaptation, in order to maximize their stimulation and strengthening, towards undertaking such behaviors that would allow and favor social re-adaptation. The assumption put forward in the previous sentence about the need for reaching the internal sphere of man, as a basis, even a guarantee of a positive course of the process of social adaptation, poses huge challenges both for people adapting to new living conditions, for people working with this group of people, as well as for social environment in which a specific person adapts to live in specific social conditions. The greater the task is even more overwhelming the participants of the process of social re-adaptation are persons with a criminal past and a imprisonment.

#### **A support system for prisoners based on a policy of redistribution and recognition**

Determinants of the process of social re-adaptation of convicts can be analyzed through the prism of the integrated policy of “redistribution and discretion”.

By recalling Nancy Fraser whose theory proposes a two-dimensional concept of justice, including redistribution and recognition, we should emphasize that the combination of the two lines of action will help convicts return to life in a free environment. Redistribution is an action taken in response to economic injustice, while recognition acts against cultural injustice. The group of people with a criminal past is a bivalent community, subjected to both economic and cultural injustice.

First of all, the arguments for the need to take actions in the area of economic injustice will be considered. People with a criminal past are mostly characterized by a lack of education by skills that only allow them to perform activities for which there is no demand in the modern economy. They are people who were victims of economic injustice as children. Staying in care and education or resocialization institutions is not beneficial to their charge. Lowered educational requirements further strengthen their belief that they are “worse”, which increases their low self-esteem. Faulty systemic solutions of the state that do not generally provide equal “capacity to act” (termed by Amartya Sen) will not be analyzed in detail here. The state’s strategy, which would limit social injustice, could be political and economic reconstruction. In its area, redistribution of income, transformation of economic structures, the educational system, care, social assistance, etc. should be included. I believe that redistributive actions should be characterized by a transformative approach (reconstruction of the basic generating principles, aimed at repairing the inequality of social relations) as opposed to affirmative remedies (repairing the unequal results of social relations without disturbing the basic principles themselves). In contemporary systemic activities directed at a group of former prisoners, an affirmative approach is being applied. It comes down to post-penitentiary assistance, programs in the area of social welfare, i.e. benefits, ad hoc assistance, organization of lodging houses, etc. affirmative redistribution - unfortunately, deepening the antagonistic relationship with convicts. People who are provided with affirmative help feel stigmatized, get used to the situation of a person in need, experience the consequences of symbolic violence. Transformative countermeasures “reduce social inequality, but without creating stigmatized classes of people at risk of being seen as beneficiaries of a special class”, include “[...] universalistic social welfare programs, highly progressive taxes, macroeconomic policies to ensure full employment, a large non-market public sector, significant public and/or collective ownership, and democratic decision making on basic socio-economic priorities. They try to secure employment for everyone, and at the same time break the link between primary consumption and employment” (Fraser, 2006, p. 1142). However, negative consequences of solutions typical of the welfare state are noticed. It is confirmed by the results of studies that showed a correlation of negative tendencies in the process of social re-adaptation with the attitude of passivity, the withdrawal of those convicts who, after leaving prison, operated in situations characterized solely by free-lunch type of distribution and by imposing their specific activities (Fidelus, 2012). Anthony Giddens noticed that

“social dependence is a real deal, not a myth conjured up in the heads of the right-wing politicians – examples can be multiplied” (2009, p. 250).

Returning to the second level of injustice – the cultural level – attention should be paid to specific representations, interpretations and stereotypical perception of prisoners rooted in the society. People with a criminal past live mostly on the margins of social life (regardless of their current situation and behavior), they are depreciated in the environment, humiliated, neglected, even overlooked in social life. The confirmation of this statement is visible in the results of research in the area of social attitudes towards former prisoners.

A lack of appropriate measures in the field of economic disparities certainly deepens and strengthens cultural gaps. However, it should be emphasized that actions only in the sphere of economic inequalities, even those of a transformative nature, will not automatically eliminate cultural injustice. There should be efforts to apply remedies that strengthen the recognition. In the case of a group of convicts, the media have a significant role to play. Biased communication certainly does not favor the recognition policy. People most often learn and watch criminal behavior, stereotypical images of prisoners, showing them as primitive, ruthless, and worse people. The participation of people representing this group is minimized in various types of activities and social events. The research results clearly show the longing of former prisoners for participating in various types of local activities.

Discretionary activities help minimize or even eliminate the consequences of economic injustice. A man who is valued and respected in society will get a job faster than a person who is marginalized in social life. The relationships work in both directions, especially in modern times where the value of money dominates. People whose economic position is higher than those who live in poverty are more respected and recognized. Emphasizing the role of solutions of a discretionary nature addressed to former prisoners, one should also emphasize the need for taking into account and use the reflectiveness of convicts themselves. Despite their criminal past, they are people with a specific potential that should be noticed, discovered and, above all, utilized. Once we know former prisoners better it may turn out that people from outside the criminal environment can also learn a lot from them.

In conclusion, the process of social re-adaptation of convicts should include both redistributive and discretionary measures. Because they complement each other, they improve the situation of this group of people.

### **Solutions to support convicts in an open environment – practical recommendations**

In recent years, there have been many changes in the scope of the modification of legal provisions, conducive to expanding the offer of rehabilitation activities addressed to prisoners, former prisoners and their families. A wider range of options

are implemented both by state institutions and by non-governmental organizations. The scope of activities carried out by non-governmental institutions for convicts is significant. Undoubtedly, they facilitate the convicts to return to society and bode well for their future as free people. However, next to these positive images, there are some areas that need immediate modifications. A lack of coordination and coherence of interactions between the government and non-government institutions is an important problem in the area of post-penitentiary solutions. The direct implementers of projects that prepare and strengthen the positive course of the social re-adaptation process are prisons and custodies, probation court service, social assistance organizational units, labor market institutions, churches and a variety of non-governmental organizations that statutorily deal with supporting people at risk of social exclusion. However, there is no harmonization of activities carried out by individual units. Very often, the same people receive overlapping services from several institutions, while a significant group of convicts is left behind. It is noted that the above-mentioned entities operate independently of each other. They plan and implement actions in the area of post-penitentiary assistance only within the scope of their concepts or legal provisions resulting from acts, ordinances or statutory regulations. I do not obviously intend to question individual projects and intentions of individual entities, but it is reasonable that institutions and organizations operating in the area of their own projects should cooperate with one another. Assigning the activities to support the process of the social re-adaptation of former prisoners to various government departments and non-government organizations without coordination and common policies is not conducive to achieving the set goal, which is streamlining the course of social re-adaptation of former prisoners.

Another issue that requires reflection is to activate the entire society in solving social problems, including those related to the situation of people with a criminal past. The process of social re-adaptation of persons released from prison cannot be considered solely from the perspective of actions taken in the prison or in the period immediately after leaving prison, implemented by individual institutions, associations, or families and friends of the released person. The whole of society plays a huge role in the positive course of this process. People should realize the need for learning about and understanding the problems of people socially excluded, unable to adapt to life in society, affected by various diseases or dysfunctions. The society should keep their eyes open to the problems of the "Other" and stop perceiving them as a kind of threat. This attitude of people means that they are increasingly distancing themselves from the need for responding to similar human dramas. They believe that the best solution is a constantly evolving social care and resocialization system, while in fact society should get reorganized to recognize all types of social problems and feel responsibility for their resolution (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2005, pp. 270-297).

According to the concept of social reconstruction, it is necessary to “create completely new behavior patterns, new norms of behavior, new institutions that will replace or modify old ones and will be more in line with changed attitudes” (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1976, p. 111). There is a need for an urgent change in the stigmatizing and marginalizing attitudes of society in an attempt to replace them with attitudes of tolerance, subsidiarity, support and reliable care. According to Wiesław Ambrozik (2008), former prisoners still struggle with common stigmatizing mechanisms and unfavorable environmental conditions. In order to eliminate them, Ambrozik suggests creating a mediating link between the prison and freedom. Such an institution would be, for example, a hostel that would guarantee care, advice, continuation of education, work and any help in overcoming adaptation barriers. Such a solution would actually integrate resocialization facilities with the environment of the ex-prisoner.

In hostels an assessment could be carried out in the area of re-adaptation conditions (Ambrozik 2008, p. 193). Similar solutions are tested in Germany. There are the so-called transition homes for minors from correctional facilities with less than six months to end their sentences. The juvenile offender stays in the transition home for about a month, after which he returns to the correctional facility and awaits the end of the sentence. During the stay in the transition home, the minor prepares to live freely. They develop their personality and different useful skills. The personality sphere is supported by various types of programs, mainly shaping the prosocial skills of the mentees. They also learn how to search for a place of residence, work, school, produce necessary documents, sign up to a GP, establish cooperation with a social worker. During the stay in the transition home, the minor mediates through the mediators and strengthens relationships with family members and close relatives. This is also the appropriate time to mediate the offender with the victim and / or his family. During the stay in the transition home, the minor is assessed. When data is gathered, decisions can be made to implement additional and varied corrective and strengthening actions. After returning to the correctional facility, while waiting to be released, the minor continues the implementation of the tasks started in the transition house.<sup>2</sup>

German solutions applied to minors but would also work with adults. Given the significant expenditure of financial resources associated with the functioning of transition homes, such solutions could first and foremost be targeted at a group of young people. In addition to indisputable benefits for those staying in hostels or transition homes, such practices would bring unquestionable gains to strengthen the process of social integration. The functioning of this type of institution would better familiarize local communities with problems in the area of social re-adaptation of people leaving social rehabilitation facilities.

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2 Information obtained during the study visit at the Katholische Hochschule in Mainz in July 2011 as part of the Erasmus Program.

The basis of actions directed at convicts and their families should be a relational model of social re-adaptation based on self-awareness (Fidelus, 2012). Each convict is a different story, characterized by unprecedented, unique experiences, interactions, and cognitive patterns. Therefore, you cannot limit yourself to developing a universal social re-adaptation system. Each person with a prison past requires a unique approach and all types of solutions should be tailored to the individual situations. However, a general outline of the impacts necessary during the process of social re-adaptation of convicts is certainly advisable. The relational model of social re-adaptation based on self-awareness, along with strengthening many familiar and significant solutions in the process of social re-adaptation, postulates the introduction of actions that would promote the development of self-awareness of every convict.

The environment to which the convict returns is an important element in the process of social re-adaptation. The obtained results confirm favorable situations related to the return to an unknown community, different from the original one. This remark concerns mainly those prisoners who come from pathological environments. Returning to “their original social field” triggers the forms of behavior that in his perception are attributed to the primary habitat. Also images of the social environment towards their and their behavior are irrevocably related to the type of behavior characteristic of the period prior to imprisonment. Therefore, the environment expects criminal behavior from them, and the convict himself feels ill in this environment behaving differently than in the past. Different forms of behavior from those characteristic of the original habitus are embarrassing, even funny. The convict realizes that other forms of behavior “do not fit” into the environment. They feel bad, experience a kind of shame in front of people from a given environment, and they are also convinced that the people around them expect their former behavior. This is an extremely stressful situation for a former convict. The emerging tension (cognitive dissonance) is usually discharged by returning to the behavior characteristic of the primary home ground. This situation can be compared to the feelings described by Norbert Elias, who in the context of the functioning of the general public noticed enormous pressure exerted on individuals operating in the social network. He noted that people “feel constantly forced by the social structure to rape their” inner truth. [...] The pressure exerted on the individual by the social network, the constraints that its structure imposes on it, the tensions and dilemmas it produces in it are so powerful that the individual is growing in a real thicket of incapable of realizing and fulfilling inclinations” (Elias, 2008, p. 39). Although Elias’ comments relate to the general public, they also aptly refer to the group of society that has been left in isolation, i.e. convicts. Most often these are people with low self-esteem, and thus have no strength to resist the pressure of society.

In the context of the observations, it can be concluded that the situation of people returning to life at large on the unknown territory would be more favorable.

This is not true. The person starting the process of social re-adaptation in the new environment is also exposed to many threats. Strange surroundings, lack of ability to function in a completely unknown environment does not make free life easier. Former prisoners from villages or small towns feel ill after being in a big city. Similarly, people from large cities cannot find themselves in a smaller environment. In a new place, they search for elements that even resemble the climate characteristic of their earlier social field. Most often, the well-known, close elements are those reminiscent of their lifestyle before being in prison, and therefore associated with a group of people consuming alcohol, drugs or criminal activity. In the new environment, they often integrate with people who prefer a style of behavior reminiscent of their original habitus. It should be emphasized that the process of re-adaptation of former convicts without the help of supporters, especially in an environment foreign to them, will not be positive. The most optimal solution would be the possibility of starting the process of social re-adaptation in a new environment with the help of supporters. A return to the old environment can also be successful if it is accompanied by the support of a family or other people (probation officer, assistant, social worker).

After leaving prison, convicts need a role model in the process of social re-adaptation. As in the process of primary socialization, clear rules and norms that set a specific direction and character of human functioning play a significant role. They help in the implementation of specific roles and life tasks. It is important, therefore, that a person having left the prison had a chance to meet people who could be both a role model and a support in difficult situations. Such a role could be played by a parole officer, assistant to a former convict, social worker, tutor or other persons from the community of the former convict. After leaving prison, a former prisoner would need someone to be a role model assisting him/her in various difficult times and situations. Resocialization in an open environment creates real opportunities for a social support. It is very important for everyone, and therefore also for people who manifest social maladjustment, as well as for people returning from social rehabilitation facilities after serving a prison sentence.

It is important for a person with an isolation past to be convinced of the existence of people who can support them at any time. The belief that this is a significant number of both individuals and institutions strengthens the sense of physical and mental security of the individual. This is especially important in the case of the examined group of people returning from institutions of isolation nature. Staying in a confinement weakens the sense of security. That is why it is important for former prisoners in an open environment to have a chance to rebuild their trust in society. Supporting relationships are also important to increase the effectiveness of the process of social rehabilitation and re-adaptation. Family relationships cannot be overestimated. Unfortunately, for people with a criminal past, contact with their families is often limited. And their quality, unfortunately, is not associated with emotional or instrumental support. Therefore, there is a need to organize situations

that allow for the emergence of supportive relationships. This can occur, for example, by participating in support, self-help, school and employee groups. It is important that the mentee has a chance to meet a person with whom he could establish close relationships. An important condition for successful establishment of supportive relationships is the prior preparation of convicts to participate in the group's activities. People leaving prison or having mainly contacts in criminal groups do not really know how to develop proper interpersonal relationships. They quickly become discouraged by various failures in relationships with others. Accustomed to living today, they are unable to plan, anticipate reactions, understand others or be interested in what their conversation partners think.

Man is a being so mysterious and inscrutable, both for himself and even more so for others that stopping within certain theoretical and practical perspectives in the area of broadly understood social rehabilitation activities is not sufficient. It certainly motivates and inspires further challenges. In accomplishing the activities, even the smallest success brings satisfaction and fulfillment, which adds strength and allows you to carry out further challenges in the search for solutions that will help other people.

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## INTEGRACJA OSÓB OPUSZCZAJĄCYCH WIĘZIENIA W ŚRODOWISKU LOKALNYM

**Streszczenie:** W artykule zwrócono uwagę na rozwiązania mające na celu wsparcie skazanych po opuszczeniu zakładu karnego. Podstawową tezę, argumentowaną i potwierdzaną jest stanowisko, że pracę z byłymi więźniami powinna cechować integracja działań wielu instytucji, podejmowanych w oparciu o społeczeństwo funkcjonujące w określonej przestrzeni społecznej. Teoretycznie zakłada się, że proces resocjalizacji prowadzony w jednostce penitencjarnej powinien być na tyle efektywny, że osoba opuszczająca tę instytucję jest przygotowana do życia w środowisku wolnościowym i funkcjonuje zgodnie z normami społecznymi, moralnymi i prawnymi. Niestety, nie zawsze tak jest. Konkretnym dowodem potwierdzającym to stwierdzenie są dane statystyczne o skali powrotności do przestępstwa osób zwalnianych z jednostek penitencjarnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** readaptacja społeczna, resocjalizacji, polityka redystrybucji i uznania, środowisko lokalne