Chapter 5

Communication Media and Digital Literacy as Intervention Tools in Prisons: The Case in Spain

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ABSTRACT

In Spain, there are a few projects that link communication with social intervention in prisons. These projects have remained invisible to society, and similar initiatives taking place in other prisons were even unknown amongst themselves. It is not common to find radio, programs of digital literacy, magazines, or even television and cinema in prisons. These are activities that remain within the walls and come about from the restlessness of the educators who voluntarily produce them. The work presented comes about the doctoral research work that for 4 years explored these initiatives. Through qualitative methodology, based on the use of in-depth interviews, the authors give voice to 20 prisoners and educators that participate in these projects in Spanish jails. Without claiming to be representative, the results show that these activities can become a powerful tool for social-educative integration and personal transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

After the adoption of the Spanish Constitution in 1978, society in the country took a bold step towards its evolution, with an important change also produced in the legal framework and the penitentiary system. Since then, the physiognomy, the prisoner’s routine, and the way of life of the incarcerated has substantially changed. With a philosophy what that is based on re-socialization and re-education took its first steps what is now the Spanish penitentiary system.

The fundamental law that governs the prisoner’s way of life in Spain is the Organic Law 1/1979, from September 26th. The first article of the preamble of the General Penitentiary Law (LOGP) states that:

Penal institutions covered by this Act have as their main goal the re-education and social reintegration of those sentenced to custodial sentences and measures, and the retention and custody of detainees, prisoners and convicts. They are also responsible for the welfare of those released. (LOGP, 1/1979)

Also, the LOGP (1/1979) has in its preamble, a primordial aspect that gives foundation to this research work:

When upholding the re-socialization purpose of the punishment, the Law seeks to denote that the punished is not a being that is eliminated from society, but a person that continues to be part of it, and although subject to a particular regiment, is an active member, motivated by his previous antisocial behavior and aiming to prepare his return to freedom in the best conditions to socially exercise his freedom. (LOGP, 1/1979, Preamble)

In the legal context that the Spanish prisons find themselves immersed in, we see the emergence of communication experiments that are based on the production of content in different formats (radio, journals, blogs, etc.). These are created by people that are deprived of liberty, but accompanied by one or various educators, give voice to the day to day events in the prisons. These productions in many cases “escape” the confines of the walls to reach the general population, but with little or no visibility.

On the other hand, once the Spanish legal context has been explained, in the following chapter we will try to make progress on whether the use of the media in prisons, rather than considering themselves from a professional media production point of view, is in some way a therapeutic tool that helps these people to improve
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