The Role of Education and NGOs in the Reintegration of Inmates in Hungary

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ABSTRACT

The period of imprisonment in a penitentiary institution has four overall purposes: retribution, incapacitation, deterrence and rehabilitation. Retribution means punishment for crimes against society; it purportedly prevents future crime by removing the desire for personal avengement against the convict. Incapacitation refers to the removal of criminals from society so that they can no longer harm innocent people, and it prevents future crime by removing the convict from society. Deterrence means the prevention of future crime. Rehabilitation prevents future crime by modifying a convict’s behavior and refers to those activities designed to change criminals into law abiding citizens. Rehabilitation may include providing educational and vocational programs in prison, teaching job skills and offering counselling with a psychologist or social worker. The rehabilitation does not necessarily come to an end at the moment of release, it can continue later. Recent scholarship indicates a shifting perspective on the responsibility of correctional institutions for successful reentry. Reentry begins on the first day of incarceration. Commonly, there are three phases of offender reentry programs: programs that take place during incarceration, which aim to prepare offenders for their eventual release; programs that take place during offenders’ release period, which seek to connect ex-offenders with the various services they may require; and long-term programs that take place as ex-offenders permanently reintegrate back into their communities, which attempt to provide offenders with support and supervision. In Hungary, the first and second phases are known and used, but currently the system lacks long-term programmes. In the short period (maximum 1 year) after release, the activities of non-governmental, church and other charitable organizations greatly contribute to realizing reintegration. To reach the goals of reintegration, it is important that the inmate voluntarily and actively participate; that all sectors of prison life be purposefully coordinated, and that ‘free society’ collaborate. This article describes how education is delivered in Hungarian prisons. The duty of correctional institutions is, along with detaining the convict, to facilitate inmates’ reintegration into society in the greatest numbers possible. Reintegration and resocialization starts in the correctional facility and after release, the inmates are assisted by non-government organizations (NGOs). In Hungary, the actions of authorities and social organizations complement each other to facilitate inmate reentry. The situation is, however, exacerbated by the fact the rate of social involvement in Hungary is slight, which seriously hinders successful reintegration.

KEYWORDS
Facilitating Resocialization, Hungarian Prisons, NGOs, Reintegration in Society

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations cooperating in the resocialization activities of penitentiary institutions, represent and lend credibility to the requirements and moral demands that provide the basis of coexistence between the individuals of a free society. Resocialization commences in the penitentiary institution and is continued after discharge. Without this process, there is a great chance that instead of social integration, resocialization focuses on prisonization, which refers to the “process wherein people incarcerated tend to take the elements of culture that are part-and-parcel to the institution (e.g. values, norms, beliefs) rather than the broader society (Clemmer, 1958, p. 299).” There is a strong correlation between the tasks of the inmate related to the specific world of the penitentiary system, its system of values and norms, and less to the civilian world “outside.”

In the past decades, there has been an increasing demand on penitentiary institutions not just in Hungary but elsewhere, to develop programmes that facilitate the retention and development of physical and mental skills which contribute to self-knowledge and can help inmates realize a life more in conformity with society’s requirements. The goal of education within the prison setting is to ensure that inmates are given the skills to enable them to pursue further training on release in order to live a “good and useful life;” as Walkin (2000) quotes in Watts (2010). Inmates are held within an artificial world in which the rules are different from those in the outside world. They have to follow all rules and regulations. These rules are intended to ensure safe custody, decent living conditions, and fair treatment during the incarceration. Also, the situation of inmates is distinctive due to the fact that their lives are built up of a chain of interrelated requirements: They act upon orders and are commanded to do each activity; the institution specifies requirements not only about what they should do, but also about how they should do it (Czenczer, 2008). Due to this unique circumstance, their perspectives and problems tend to be specific and narrowly defined, focusing mostly on the passing of time. Due to permanent exclusion from society, the inmates’ self-esteem and self-worth, living skills, and communication skills may decrease, but it should be emphasized that often this is so even when they arrive at prison. “Many prisoners are emotionally and mentally unstable with low self-esteem and negative, defensive attitudes…” (Watts, 2010, p. 62).

Non-governmental organizations, churches, and helpers work to help prisoners cope with these problems. The activities deployed by the institutions are closely related to those associated with everyday routines, with the goal of resolving tensions, developing character and self-knowledge, in addition to mitigating the prison’s incarcerating and isolating effect. “Their influence helps lower tensions within the institution and mitigate the prisonization impact, and a more direct and active relationship with the outside world promotes a more fruitful integration after discharge…” (Visher and Travis, 2003, p. 89). Reentry into society can be achieved if the inmate’s personality undergoes positive change, that is, during the term of the incarceration and punishment they develop an awareness of social usefulness, a feeling of responsibility for taking control of their own fate, they voluntarily and actively cooperate in shaping their life, and their independence increases. For this it is inevitable that the prisoner’s mental and physical condition as well as their general and professional knowledge are maintained and developed (Ruzsonyi, 2008).

A basic task of the penitentiary is to rule out and mitigate environmental effects enhancing antisocial propensities, as well as to delimit the opportunities to act upon antisocial needs. Ruzsonyi (2008) highlights the importance of mitigating disintegrational effects (prison harm). This primarily means “…the decrease of so-called “history” of damages (a history of victimization, a low level of intelligence, low qualification, illiteracy, functional illiteracy) and prison harm…” (Czenczer, 2008, p. 22).

If the prison is not able to realize the principle of general protection, then the inmates are discharged from prison in a state morally, psychologically, and physically worse than when they were incarcerated. “Inmates are usually insecure when they have to plan their life after release, their knowledge of the outside world is distorted and limited, they have meager and unreliable
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