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## Identity of the inmate and new spaces of re-socialization after leaving the correctional institution

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### Abstract

For anyone, entering into a correctional institution means an important effort to adapt to the institution itself that already has a specific policy, organization, hierarchy and its own relationships system. This entrance implies a deep change in the behavior of the intern, which creates a distinctive identity: that of the inmate.

The inmate adjusts to a system characterized by the deprivation of freedom and the strong influence on one's identity. It is a break with the social reality and therefore, the former inmate will need the intervention of several professionals at the time of his or her release for their social reintegration. In this paper, we defend the importance of re-socialization spaces that exist between prison and society from the personal experience of former inmates at a Foster Home in Antequera. Once he or she has left the correctional facility the re-socialization spaces must provide the person the tools to develop his or her potential in order to it is achieved while acquiring social habits and practices which are essential for life outside prison.

Co-existing with former inmates in the spaces which mediate between the correctional facility and the social environment, the main deficiencies of the individuals are found and set the basis for the intervention towards their favorable social integration.

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## **1. Introduction**

For anyone, entering into a correctional institution means an important effort to adapt to the institution itself that already has a specific policy, organization, hierarchy and its own relationships system. This entrance implies a deep change in the behavior of the intern, which creates a distinctive identity: that of the inmate. Specifically, Ordóñez (2006:189) states that when entering in prison the person builds a new identity defined by three stages: separation of the previous social life, social isolation and indetermination and re-incorporation to a new society, that of the prison, to which the person must inevitably adapt. According to Larrad (2011:78-79), life in prison indeed entails a new society demanding necessarily an adaptation to its routine and rules, which include very severe schedules and no space for resting such as weekends or bank holidays. As a result, the inmates depend upon the structure and regime of the prison, being subordinated to its control and security, and forced to share all of their time with strangers.

From a legal and constitutional approach, the main role of the correctional institution consists of the re-socialization of the person. Thus, the internment in prison and the creation of this new identity entail the idea of correcting the inmate's social behavior in order to achieve the social re-insertion.

According to Muñoz Conde (1982:133), this re-insertion must consist from a penological point of view on helping the inmate to accept the basic, and generally binding, rules governing the society. However, many authors believe that the goal of re-socialization is not achieved in practice. For example, Mathiesen (2003:224-225) points to the prison as an institution of total control, denying its supposed role of re-socialization, re-education, rehabilitation or reinsertion and assigning it a purgatory role of consumptive power, distraction, symbolism and execution.

Along the same lines, Marcuello-Servós and García Martínez (2011:49-50) indicate that the supposed reinsertion role of prison is devalued to add something else, an ideological legitimization of social deviation in favour of an established order. In this sense and as stated by these researchers, which is the main fallacy of the correctional system; while its objective and purpose is social rehabilitation, in practice the result is de-socialization.

It is true that, as noted by Segovia (2011:15), prison is not responsible for social ills and it does not reach the inmates reinsertion. Actually, the correctional institution is restricted to managing social ills and making them becoming chronic. Therefore, from these authors' lines of argument, the penal system and prison itself fail because instead of re-socialize and reinsert they cause isolation, increased violence and social marginalization to the inmates.

Nevertheless, avoiding further on the debate of correctional institutions and their practical orientation towards the inmate reinsertion or just towards the punishment to inmates for their criminal acts, the reality is that the inmate adjusts to a system characterized by the deprivation of freedom and the strong influence on one's identity. It is a break with the social reality and therefore, the former inmate will need the intervention of several professionals at the time of his or her release for his or her social reintegration. In this way, and following Moty Benyakar (2006:35), prisons can be considered as disruptive environments.

In this context of re-socialization and reinsertion on the correctional environment, we defend in this paper the importance of re-socialization spaces that exist between prison and society from the personal experiences of former inmates at a foster home in Antequera. Once an inmate has left the correctional facility, the re-socialization spaces must provide him or her the tools to develop his or her potential in order to succeed while acquiring social habits and practices which are essential for life outside prison.

Thanks to this experience co-existing with former inmates in the spaces which mediate between the correctional facility and the social environment, the main deficiencies of the individuals are found and set the basis for the intervention towards their favorable social integration, which are going to be exposed throughout this paper.

## **2. Re-socialization spaces for former inmates: guidelines for their reintegration.**

The re-socialization and reinsertion that we defend is implemented at the correctional institutions through different programs oriented to fulfill the constitutional mandate, which in article 25.2 of the Spanish Constitution

(1978) establishes that penalties involving deprivation of liberty and security measures must aim the re-education and social reinsertion [...]

Among the different initiatives adopted to achieve this goal by the Spanish correctional institutions, we can mention regulated teaching and formation programs, programs for social reinsertion (education for employment, work orientation, courses and occupational workshops, etc.), specific intervention programs, cultural programs and sports programs.

However, we can also find some centres specifically focused on the inmates' social reinsertion called Social Insertion Centres (SIC). The Spanish General Secretary's office of Correctional Institutions define SICs as correctional establishments created to comply the penalty of deprivation of liberty with open prison terms, as well as to monitor the penalties with no deprivation of liberty established by the domestic criminal law and which execution is not assigned to the Spanish Ministry of Justice and/or Interior or to the competent Autonomous Institution. SICs must equally monitor those inmates on parole appointed to each of them.

Article 163.2 of Correctional Regulations specifies that the goal of these centres is to strengthen the abilities for positive social reinsertion of each inmate by developing activities and training programs to encourage their incorporation to the social environment.

Outside the correctional institution we can also find private initiatives oriented to social reinsertion, although these cases are focused on those people who have already served their sentences. The most important difference of these programs with the previously mentioned is that these ones take place outside the correctional institution and therefore, in a real social environment.

We can find an example of this at the foster home Juan Gil in Antequera (Malaga), where we participated as professionals in 2009 collaborating on its work of assisting the independence and favorable social integration of the inmates.

This foster home goal, created in 2003 and to which belongs 'Fundación Prolibertad' foundation, is 'promoting actions to improve the personal autonomy and the personal stabilization of the inmates and former inmates as well as helping them to return to their normal family, social and labor life; making possible to reduce within reason the risk of social exclusion that affects this collectivity', as written on its website <http://www.prolibertad.org>.

The profile of the average person admitted to the *Juan Gil Foster Home* is an adult male coming from a correctional institution who is on permission, day release and conditional release or if he has already left the institution.

According to the Foster Home's program, the attention is focused on three areas:

- Promotion: focused on rehabilitation and personal re-education for the beginning of the life outside the correctional institution.
- Socio-occupational insertion: labour orientation and professional training are offered in order to assist the socio-occupational insertion.
- Hosting: focused on the person basic needs and on a favourable cohabitation in a standardized social environment.

Our tasks developed in the particular area hosting and consisted of cohabitate, work and share with the inmates and former inmates the everyday life in the Foster Home.

The relationship and daily co-habitation with these people allowed us to learn the types of difficulties the inmates and former inmates may find outside the correctional institution, which make us consider the intervention on some facets as urgent.

For these reasons and due to such deficiencies, we present a series of guidelines which are essentials for the positive social re-insertion of a person.

### 2.1. Health education

Although the inmates and former inmates have embraced the basic health and hygiene rules due to prison habits and routines, it is necessary to address the addiction problems which, in some cases, have been acquired or even motivated during time in a correctional institution. In these cases, it is important to work on overcoming the

addiction in order to socially insert, on the one hand, or to avoid a possible re-imprisonment as a consequence of illegal actions related to the addiction itself on the other. It is equally important to avoid any possible addiction derived from exclusion or social maladjustment outside the prison environment.

### *2.2. Sexual and affective education*

Be imprisoned means changes in sexual life behavior, which is in general affected by the loss of affectivity.

According to Valverde (2011), the consequences of prison are very interesting, in which the author emphasizes the sexuality disorders. He maintains that although sexual intercourse is present in correctional institutions in all its variants —intercourse with a person external to the institution, homosexual intercourses between the inmates and masturbation—, within the correctional institution these are all characterized by the coldness and lack of emotion, taking place to satisfy the primary sexual needs.

The author even talks about sexual intercourse becoming more primal, an aspect that we consider essential to be treated in order to standardize the sexuality in their lives.

### *2.3. Socio-occupational education*

The imprisonment period means a break up with the established social rules in order to adapt to life and cohabitation in prison, which itself involves a subculture with its own, inherent rules.

As a result, we should consider as fundamental the acquisition of a new identity which can break with the identity adopted in the correctional institution and assist the social re-integration of the person. Additionally, it is important to strengthen the development of new skills that could influence in a positive way the insertion to the new social environment as well as increase the possibilities of entering the working world.

However, the social stigma caused to the inmate makes essential for the social insertion working with the inmate and, as the same time, with the new social environment since

‘the relationship that has traditionally marked the society and the inmate is caused by the link between the excluding agent —the society—, and the excluded—the arrested person—, even if the crash of the insertion objective of the arrested person with the nature of this exclusion relationship has been scientifically, technically and pedagogically proven because it is impossible to exclude and insert simultaneously’ (Añez et al., 2008: 66).

In consequence, the success or the failure of the former inmate socio-occupational insertion depends on the person him or herself, as well as the social environment.

### *2.4. Boosting the self esteem*

Entering into prison unquestionably affects the inmate psychology. It can devalue an image and diminish a person’s self-esteem, which is conceived as the personal view a person values and maintains about him or herself (Coopersmith, 1959), an aspect that must be further studied.

In fact, by reviewing the bibliography about this subject numerous references to it are found. In general terms, it has been suggested that the ‘informal social system’ of prison may influence in a negative way the inmate’s self-esteem and self-perception (Smith & Hogan, 1973). (Quoted at Pérez & Redondo, 1991).

As a result, it is necessary to strengthen the individual work with inmates and former inmates around the ways in which they conceptualize themselves. The relevance of this matter lies in the fact that low self-esteem can lead into a lack of recognition of a life’s value and personal dignity, especially when the feelings of guilt are present in a person. Of course, these points should be treated.

Nevertheless, an influential factor in the promotion of dignity is the judgement of society itself over the inmate, which in many cases conditions or limits personal growth and has a negative influence on the former inmate’s self-esteem. Therefore, it is relevant to work on this specific aspect at these types of institutions.

At the same time, when working with the former inmates special attention must be paid to the recovery and

consolidation of their social identity, which is diminished when they enter prison and relegated, as already said, to a particular identity: the identity of the inmate.

### 2.5. Emotional education

As it was pointed out at the beginning of this paper, entering prison involves a great emotional effort of the person to be able to adapt properly to the correctional institution, which is defined as a constant and fixed environment with its own rules. This entry causes the inmates affective, emotional, cognitive or perceptive distortions (Clemente, 1997).

It is noted that at the moment of leaving the correctional institution the inmate suffers from specific emotional deprivations caused by the loss of liberty and, in consequence, by the rupture —or at least partial rupture— with the social and family network.

Additionally, the internment period forces the inmate —in many cases— to assume and project a hard and cold image of the person which, in a certain way, allows the inmate to protect him or herself and take a position inside prison according to the existing roles and statuses. In this sense it is interesting to study Valverde's considerations (1991:60-61), who, after his research, concludes that 'As the correctional institution is a powerful structure face to which the inmate reflects him or herself as a weak element in order to maintain a minimum level of self-esteem and is also forced to assure him or herself in that hostile environment. Because of the prison characteristics and the evolution of his or her *biographic adventure*, the inmate often assumes an aggressive self-restatement and develops a strong hostility against anything related to the institution'.

For these reasons, the importance of the therapist team's work in these types of centres with inmates and former inmates, whether individually or in groups, must be emphasized, paying special attention in the construction of a solid education and emotional maturity, which are essential for their re-adaptation to the social environment.

## 3. Conclusions

The aim of this article is to underline the relevance and necessity of venues which can be found halfway through the correctional institution and the social environment for those people exiting a correctional institution in order to assist a positive social re-integration. According to this premise, and following our experience in a centre that is created to work on this line, we suggest the main aspects that should be addressed at these venues. Consequently, we consider that by emphasising on the above-mentioned aspects we can ensure that the social rupture suffered by the person during the internment period does not create a handicap in the return to his or her social environment.

From the point of view of our experience we defend any initiative which, according to the actual Correctional Regulations (R.D. 190/1996), addresses the penalty of deprivation of liberty towards the re-education and social reinsertion.

As a result, we believe that these types of centres are an essential pillar to counteract the deficiencies originated in different levels at the correctional institution and which may interfere with the former inmate's life in society. Social Insertion Centres are an alternative which support the inmates' social reinsertion by giving them the necessary tools for their total participation on family, social and work life. However, the limitation of these centres is based, in our opinion, on its purpose of deprivation of liberty with open prison terms and week-end detention; so they exclude the inmates who obtain full liberty. Another disadvantage of these centres regarding re-socialization is related, from our point of view, to the centres' own facilities since they are similar to those of Correctional Institutions, particularly in terms of cell layout. Nevertheless, we consider that they accomplish an essential social role.

There is a further problem related to social reinsertion at correctional institutions, that of overpopulation in Spanish prisons. This real issue actually affects the re-socialization because prisons will probably be more effective and be of a higher quality if they have a smaller quantity of inmates and were more adjusted to the population capacity of each institution. In this sense, Spain presents a rate of 161 inmates over 100 000 inhabitants, well above the European average of 136.8 (Becerra, 2012:385).

In conclusion, we believe that in a social context the existence of other reintegration centres is indispensable

because they could be more appropriate to the social reality and in consequence they could promote the sociability of the inmates. In this paper we have exposed our experience with working in one of these private initiative centres, whose aim is to conclude the re-socialization and reinsertion process of those inmates who have been imprisoned and served their sentences by working in a real social environment outside the context of correctional institutions. For all these reasons, we consider as crucial creating more initiatives of this kind and granting more state financial assistance to promote its performance.

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