

Małgorzata Michel

Kraków

**Renata Szczepanik, *Becoming a recidivist. The institutional careers of people returning to crime*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2015, pp. 410**

The most prominent theory and research trend in pedagogical social rehabilitation is the one which chooses prison reality as the subject of study. Researching the problems of determinants of crime, the effectiveness and efficiency of undertaken social rehabilitation interactions take up a large portion of Polish literature on social rehabilitation. Recent scientific penitentiary literature exposes the topic of issues relating to the process of social reintegration. The issue of returning to crime, or recidivism, is related to it. The reviewed book by Renata Szczepanik is in that trend, but it is noteworthy due to several issues, both theoretical and methodological. The Author presents the results of many years of research undertaken centered around the issue of the trajectory of fate of people returning to crime and their institutional careers. Thus she makes an effort to answer the question of whether there are “turning points” in that career that help to prevent recidivism, and at the same time can become spaces for social rehabilitation and therapy work.

In literature there are two research trends visible in the approach to the issue of returning to crime. The division, though often artificial and created only for the purpose of putting the reality in order, into quantitative and qualitative research strategies, causes that the majority of studies on the issue of recidivism is set in the normative paradigm. According to many researchers and theorists of research methodology, this division is the result of the mistakenly understood process of science, because the only justification for selecting the appropriate study strategy should be its subject. There are such phenomena of reality that we can grasp only from a quantitative perspective, there are those that expose their qualitative dimensions. Finally, the complexity of many subjects and problems forces research-

ers to take up quantitative and qualitative strategies. In the case of the issue of returning to crime, the researcher definitely has comfort in science, both in the mainstream of quantitative and qualitative research.

The Author of the reviewed book attempted to present the qualitative phenomenon of recidivism. It seems that so far the issue of crime, especially repeated, was not the subject of analyses kept in the interpretative paradigm, characteristic of the qualitative science. The presented study is therefore an attempt to fill this gap, especially on the basis of Polish social rehabilitation pedagogy.

Renata Szczepanik adopted a research perspective which makes it easier to look at the conditions projecting the dynamics of becoming a recidivist and the climb of a recidivist up the ranks of the institutional system of social rehabilitation. The Author does not explain these processes but attempts to understand them through the picture of subjective meanings, which participants of the study give reality, and the ways in which they reconstruct it. Due to the fact that according to the assumptions of symbolic interactionism people in interpersonal relations and in specific situations define and interpret their meanings and actions, a person is thus an entity producing these meanings and processing the information reaching him. At the same time, he learns new social situations and examines past experience, and as a result, acts accordingly. The Researcher was interested in reconstructing the process of becoming a recidivist with all its interactive and symbolic context. The subject of scientific analyses of the present study was to explore the ways in which repeat offenders interpret their own experiences and how they carry these interpretations onto their life activity.

The book is composed of six chapters. In the first chapter, the Author presents a theoretical approach to the research problem and focuses on presenting social and legal sciences covering the phenomenon of recidivism and persons returning to crime. Thus she reconstructs the legal, socio-demographic and criminological picture, outlining the silhouette of the person returning to crime. This chapter ends with leaving the Reader with dilemmas of Polish penitentiary pedagogy. The second chapter describes the theoretical and methodological basis of the research on the process of becoming a recidivist. Here, the Author focuses on the origin of qualitative methods of study on crime and presents to the Reader the assumptions of the interpretative paradigm with special emphasis on symbolic interactionism. It is worth noting the presentation of the interactive approach of the process of becoming a criminal.

What deserves special attention and makes the reviewed book especially valuable is the use of a specific procedure for collecting and developing empirical data, which is the methodology of grounded theory. It is also worth noting the high self-awareness of the Author and self-reflection associated with difficulties experienced in conducting the research in a prison, which can be found in the work. The author does not hide that the investigation was a personal experience for her, to which she devotes a separate subsection.

The third chapter of the book starts the presentation of the collected empirical data and their development and categorization. It contains an attempt to present the institutional career of returnees to crime from the interpretative perspective. Noteworthy are the separate categories of prisoners participating in various ways in prison isolation. Participation is related to roles and attitudes and perhaps strategies that prisoners adopt and implement within the prison.

Chapter four is a presentation of tactics of adapting to prison, which is undoubtedly a set composed of survival strategies in the institution of a total character. Chapter five constitutes a counterbalance to the previous chapter, and it is a presentation of tactics associated with adapting to freedom. How much is life in freedom determined by the lifestyle adopted in the penal institution and what are the turning points in the career of institutional recidivists? These are questions that the Reader will find answers to in this part of the study. A particularly interesting fact is that female partners of recidivists play a significant role in the development and inhibition of the institutional career of male returnees to crime. It turns out, what may be an important conclusion for the practice of social rehabilitation and readaptation interactions, that these roles are significant both in terms of the adaptation tactics in freedom as well as in terms of the turning points in the criminal career of recidivists.

The last chapter is an attempt to summarize the reflection in the educational and correctional context. It is completed by a proposal in which certain problems of the institutional career of returnees to crime, related to “resetting” the deviant identity, are located by the Author in the perspective of “new” social rehabilitation pedagogy.

The book by Renata Szczepanik is essential reading for a wide range of readers, both students of correctional pedagogy, psychology, sociology, as well as academics, but also for members of the justice system, educators at prisons and the entire prison staff, probation officers, mediators, social workers and even volunteers who are involved in the service of non-governmental organizations, where recidivists often come after serving their sentence of imprisonment. It allows to look at the career of becoming a recidivist from the perspective excluding judgment and evaluation, bringing the participant of interaction and social actors closer to understanding the phenomenon more than its interpretation.