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The Social Climate of the Institutional and Family Educational Environment

Abstract: The author discusses the social climate of the institutional and family educational environment. She makes a detailed study review of the social climate in social rehabilitation and welfare-education institutions, compiling them with the results of her own research, describing the prevailing dimensions of the social climate in family children's homes.

Key words: social climate, social rehabilitation institutions, welfare and education institutions, family children's homes.

Introduction

In the understanding of the precursors of studies on the social climate of institutions – Andrew W. Halpin and Don B. Croft (1963) as well as R. Moos (1975) – the social climate is a kind of "personality of the institution". In the course of institutional functioning a specific "organizational personality" is formed, which determines the structure and organizational culture – diverse, unique behavior of members of an organization operating in the network of structural dependencies, formal and informal interactions, and communication feedback. Difficulties in the accurate diagnosis of the social climate and in its generalization (taking into consideration the specific type of the institution, e.g. social welfare, educational or social rehabilitation institutions) are due to the high dynamics of organizational life, employee fluctuation, and unpredictability of the behavior of

members of the organization in difficult situations, particularly those demanding rapid response.

With regard to the social climate of the institutional educational environment, Lesław Pytka (2000, p. 175) formulated a definition, which defines it as "a set of subjectively perceived by charges and educators characteristics, situations, and events, which are relatively lasting in the effects of its functioning within the adopted organizational and pedagogical system, shaping motivation and behavior of individuals and social groups of that institution". Other features are attributed to the social climate of the educational institution by Marek Konopczyński (2006, p. 170), defining it as "a system of interpersonal and mutual relations of the educational and administrative staff and other people from the nearest environment", recognizing its fundamental role in creating desirable, innovative, and unconventional pedagogical activities.

Considering both of the positions cited above, it can be assumed that the social climate of the educational, social rehabilitation or welfare-education institution is the result of the formal structure and organization of the center, the adopted pedagogical axiology, the attitudes and behaviors of educators and charges, the methods and forms of educational interactions used, as well as the participation of the center in the local network of interinstitutional cooperation and interaction with public benefit organizations.

The social climate of the institutional educational environment is not easy to diagnose. It is usually considered in the perspective of the specifics of charges of a given institution, the competence structure of its employees, and the efficiency of the welfare and education or social rehabilitation process. The diagnosis of the social climate is based on three basic dimensions distinguished by Moos (1975), consisting of:
— interpersonal relationships (e.g. emotional involvement, friendship, mutual assistance);
— personal development – attitude of entities of interaction to satisfy their own and other people's needs and aspirations;
— organizational order, which consists of structural and functional aspects of the institution's activity (including channels for communication, organizational transparency, and the type of controls and sanctions applied).

The social climate of the institutional educational environment is indeed determined by many factors, but an extremely important role in its creation is played by the pedagogical staff. Crystallizing certain dimensions of the social climate to a large extent determines the personality traits of educators, their level of preparation for employment, as well as social roots (level of identification with the workplace) and institutional roots (seniority and related work experience).

The social climate of social rehabilitation institutions and welfare-education centers

In Poland, the problem of the social climate in social rehabilitation institutions is currently the subject of interest of many educators and psychologists. Research initiated by Pytka in the 1980 on the social climate of correctional facilities for juveniles and the penetration of this research area in the following years (Pytka 1983, 2000) were focused on the identification of the dominant character of the climate of social rehabilitation institutions and the identification of relationships between the various dimensions of the social climate and:

— biographical features of charges and the competence structure of the pedagogical staff (among others Pustkowiak 2000; Zalewski 2004);
— the ratio of staff to the processes of welfare and education or social rehabilitation (Frąckowiak 2006);
— the efficiency of welfare and education and rehabilitation social processes (Sobczak 2007);
— the structure of the institution (Staniaszek 2014).

The vast majority of existing Polish research on the social climate of the institutional educational environment was conducted by using R. Moos's Social Climate Scale, in the adaptation and translation of Pytka. The social climate of institutions is identified by comparing the average results obtained by educators with the average results of charges – the larger the discrepancies in the results, the more likely it is that the social climate of the surveyed center is unfavorable.

On the basis of comparisons with social rehabilitation institutions in other countries, four basic types of social climate were distinguished (Pytka 2000):

— **therapeutic-educational**, the most desirable for achieving social rehabilitation objectives, characterized by shaping friendly interpersonal relations with a distinct therapeutic character (control-repression functions are reduced to a minimum);
— **welfare-educational**, desirable but characterized by the dominance of orientation on autonomy and personal and practical problems of charges on the organizational parameters of the center;
— **controlling-welfare**, indicating the adverse trends in organizing the educational environment – placing the greatest emphasis on controlling the behavior of charges and interinstitutional order, and the smallest emphasis on shaping non-conflict interpersonal relations;
— **controlling-restrictive**, most undesirable, focusing on compliance with external discipline and rigor statutory, the characteristic feature of which is the neglect of social climate elements conducive to the production of the thera-

peutic environment, while maintaining the autonomy of charges and freedom of their expression and the formation of proper interpersonal relations.

The research of Pytka cited above have shown that in Polish correctional facilities there is the most detrimental controlling-restrictive climate from a pedagogical point of view. These results were confirmed by Grzegorz Zalewski (2004), Aneta Skuza (2012) and M. Staniaszek (2014), who noted this dimension in most of the social rehabilitation centers. It turns out, however, that with the passage of time, slow but gradual changes are occurring in these institutions in terms of creating a social climate, especially in the dimension of interpersonal relationships, personal development, and organizational order. This has been shown, among others, by P. Frąckowiak's (2006) and Sławomir Sobczak's (2007) research. It turned out that in most of the surveyed correctional facilities there was a favorable educational social climate, defined as therapeutic-welfare, while an unfavorable climate (controlling-restrictive) was found only in those institutions where there were gaps in the material base, where there was a high turnover of employees, and the teaching staff had low professional competences.

The research on the social climate in youth detention centers (MOW) and youth social therapy centers (MOS), performed and developed in 2014 by Mariusz Granosik, Anita Gulczyńska and Renata Szczepanik (2014), indicate a dominance in both types of centers with a controlling-welfare climate. This means that the social climate diagnosed in them, perceived as a system of relationships between the entities communicating with each other within the center and in non-institutional environments, provide the charges of these centers insufficient help and support in development. This results, among others, from the fact that the surveyed educators have a strong sense of external constraints, they are not satisfied with the effects of their actions, they have a generalized sense of their own professional role focused on the performance of controlling, disciplinary, and enforcement activities, and they perceive themselves as therapeuting and re-educating persons. This differs significantly from the pedagogical success defined by them as the effect of an in-depth relationship with the charge, trust and influence on positive changes in their life. In addition, these institutions recorded a deficit of organizational culture in the field of educational work – numerous problems in the management of the center relating to, among others:

— the defective system for setting the rules and methods for enforcing them;
— the lack of a coherent strategy of rewarding and punishing charges, and conflict resolution;
— setting the rules prevailing in the facility without the participation of charges;
— negligence in the scope of organizing free time for the charges;
— inadequate integration of the surveyed centers with the non-institutional environment (external).

The authors of the research concluded that despite the different functions of the two institutions (MOW and MOS) assumed in the legal and social system to

prevent demoralization and crime of children and youth, in both types of centers there is a clear convergence of principles of educational work and ways of perceiving, formulating and evaluating the achieved educational goals. A similar socio-educational climate dominates in them, swollen with communication problems and saturated with numerous manifestations of coercion. Such a unified state of affairs is contrary to the formal nature of each of the analyzed institution – prophylactic (MOS) and socio-rehabilitative (MOW).

In contrast, monographic research of welfare-education centers (dormitories and boarding schools) were carried out independently by Beata Maria Nowak (2006) and B. Zięba-Kołodziej (2009). The results of both cited studies indicate adverse trends in the organization of the educational environment in welfare-education centers. Observed is the dominance of the external discipline of behavior of charges, the formalization of relationships between educators and charges (relations of an instrumental character most concerning cases of the control of tasks given to charges by educators) and emphasis on external behavior control, order and compliance with regulations (Zięba-Kołodziej 2009; Nowak 2006, p. 76). Considering the above, the social climate in these centers can be determined – as in MOS and MOW – as controlling-welfare (Bielak, Czepczyńska, Sitarczyk et al. 2011), adverse in the perspective of the desired educational impact.

To conclude, the overview of research presented above points to the dominance of a social climate in social rehabilitation and welfare-education institutions that is unfavorable to pedagogical impacts. This is evidenced by, among others:

— scarcity of impacts associated with the formation of positive interpersonal relationships, both between charges as well as between charges and staff of the facility;
— overgrowth of activities aimed at enforcing control of charges complying with discipline, regulations and principles;
— little importance attributed to the personal development of charges and cooperation with their families;
— insufficient preparation of charges to function in society after leaving the facility.

The socio-educational climate of family orphanages (RDD)

With the entry into force of the Act of 9 June 2011 on supporting the family and the foster care system[1], the family type care and educational facility remained in the system of child and family care as an institutional form. However, this Act

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[1] Journal of Laws 2011, No. 149, item 887 as amended.

introduced a new organizational form of child foster care – family orphanages as a form of family foster care. It is functionally equivalent to the family type care and educational facility, but differs significantly in the organizational form.

This state of affairs has become an inspiration to try to identify the socio-educational climate of this family-institutional ephemeris. The study was conducted in November 2015 (Nowak 2015). One hundred parents and 62 children (biological and those in foster care) took part in it from 30 family orphanages operating in the Mazovia region. The study was conducted using the method of a diagnostic survey using Moos's Social Climate Scale[2]. It is an estimated scale, consisting of 90 items – expressions referring to various aspects of life, in this case – the family. The scale contains 9 subscales making up the 3 basic dimensions:

1. **Interpersonal relationships between family members**. Subscales: "commitment" – subscale determining the degree of conscious participation in daily life; "emotional support" – defining the level of emotional support; "expression" – indicating the degree of freedom in expressing emotions, including hostility in interpersonal relations.

2. **Personal development.** Subscales: "Autonomy" – subscale determining the degree of independence; "practical orientation" – used for the assessment of solving practical problems; "focus on personal problems" – allowing to measure the level of skills to overcome internal motivational and emotional difficulties and awareness of one's own "self".

3. **Organizational system.** Subscales: "order and organization" – a subscale used to assess the degree of disciplining, willingness to comply with the law and order and to behave according to certain social requirements; "clarity of objectives" – providing information on the degree of knowledge and understanding of the formal requirements; "educational control" – indicating the willingness of adults to fulfill the controlling-welfare tasks.

In each of the subscales highlighted above the respondents could obtain a minimum score of 0 and a maximum of 10 points. The result is the arithmetic mean for the different subscales, while it is assumed that the higher the value of the arithmetic mean for each subscale, the more the climate of the facility corresponds to the facility's name. It is also assumed that the higher the values obtained in the first six subscales and the lower the last three, the educational climate is more favorable to pedagogical interactions and the comprehensive development of children. In addition, the larger the recorded differences between the mean values obtained by adults and children, the more the social climate is unfavorable.

In the present study, all subscales were compared to the mean values obtained by children growing up in RDD with the results of their parents. In the

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[2] Taking into consideration the nature of RDD, only the wording of the questions changed, without interfering in their content (modification – M. Konopczyński).

course of research analyses, the occurrence of certain trends has been found within the distinguished dimensions of the social climate and the corresponding subscales (Figure 1).
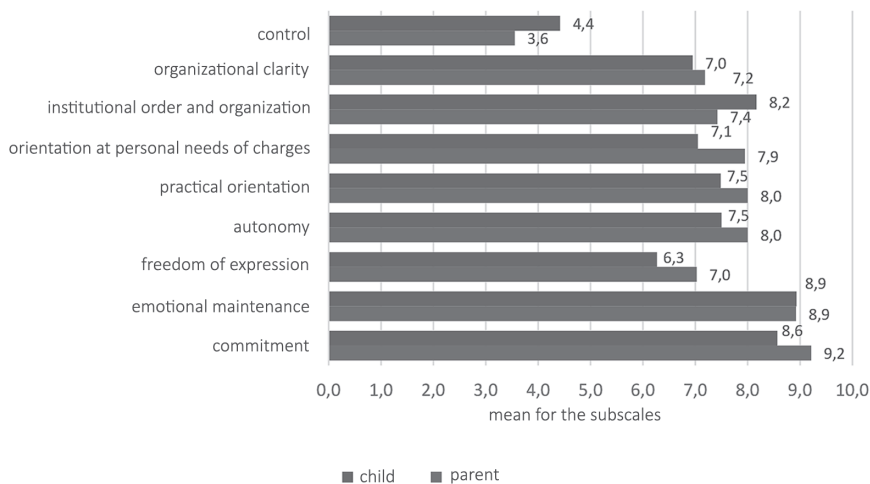

Fig. 1. Comparison of mean values of subscales of the social climate in the group of parents and children raised in RDD
Source: own study.

The results of the research **in the dimension of "interpersonal relationships"** were statistically significant in all three subscales. The highest means in both analyzed groups (children and parents) were obtained in the subscales "emotional maintenance" and "commitment", while the lowest were in the subscale "freedom of expression". This shows that in the surveyed family orphanages, the parents and children are joined by a strong emotional bond. Parents are committed to solving problems and overcoming difficulties experienced by the children entrusted in their care – both the surveyed parents and children highly evaluated the degree of involvement of family members in the performance of daily tasks and responsibilities.

In the analyzed dimension, in both groups the degree of freedom of children in expressing feelings was rated the lowest, including feelings of hostility in interpersonal relations, which may indicate the presence of inhibitions in the children or even emotional blocks. It can also be assumed that we are either dealing with parental deadening or quenching interactions (for various reasons) the natural need for children to express their feelings or with methodically tooled social rehabilitation interactions.

In the dimension of "personal development" high, sustained at the same level, distributions of answers of children and parents were noted in the subscale "autonomy" and "practical orientation" (means in both subscales: children – 7.5;

parents – 8.0). This result indicates a relatively high level of independence of children, both in the daily tasks of self-service as well as cleaning. In the opinion of the respondents, the practical needs of children, relating to education and professional training and empowerment are realized at a good level. Children growing up in the surveyed RDD have high expectations of the family but do not always apply them adequately for their abilities and motivation, which is probably why they have a low level of skills in terms of looking inside themselves and overcoming internal emotional difficulties. In this dimension only in the subscale "focus on personal needs" were there statistically significant results reported.

By analyzing the research data within the **dimension "organizational system"** it can be assumed that the members of RDD have a strong tendency to adhere to the outer manifestations of law and order and intrafamilial discipline, while the children perceive this dimension of the social climate in a more "severe" way than their parents. All members of the surveyed families perceive in the same way the objectives, tasks and rules of functioning in the family.

The lowest test result, both in relation to the whole analysis carried out and in terms of the subscale "educational control" (mean: children – 4,4; parents – 3.6), indicates a reduction of controlling-welfare activities by the parents to a minimum. This result is compatible with the high result in the subscale "autonomy" and "practical orientation". This allows to presume that children growing up in family orphanages are independent in everyday functioning, and their parents help them greatly to overcome the difficulties associated with attending school, professional training or preparation for independent life in society.

With respect to the types of social climate distinguished by Pytka, the analysis of the results obtained indicates the **co-existence of two types of social climate in family orphanages: the therapeutic-educational and the welfare-educational** (high results in the areas of "interpersonal relations" and the "personal development").

Statistical analysis of research data also showed that in RDD operating in rural areas, the level of organization of family life is the highest and the lowest in small cities (city size significantly affects the subscales "institutional order and organization" and "clarity of objectives, tasks and regulations" – $p < 0.05$). On the other hand, the more biological children there are, the weaker the organizational order in the family ($\tau_b = -0.243$, $p = 0.037$). There were however significant relationships between the results for any of the subscales and the number of people living in RDD and the number of children being brought up in them. On the other hand, the older the parent, the more autonomy it provides children ($\tau_b = -0.215$, $p = 0.043$). During the statistical analyses, in the group of parents significant, positive correlations were found between different scales – Table 1.

Table 1. Group of parents – the results of statistical analyses

Correlated social climate scales	Obtained results
"Emotional maintenance" and "commitment"	the greater the commitment of the parents, the greater their impact in providing emotional support to the children – (τb = -0.48, p < 0.001)
"Emotional maintenance" and "freedom of expression"	the harder the parents support the children in overcoming difficulties and problems of various kinds, the children gain more freedom in expressing their feelings and emotions (τb = -0.34, p = 0.006)
"Emotional maintenance" and "institutional order and organization"	the greater the emotional support given to children by their parents, the higher the degree of discipline in the children (τb = -0.369, p = 0.002)
"Emotional maintenance" and "organizational clarity"	the greater the emotional support given to children by their parents, the higher the degree of knowledge and understanding of the formal requirements (τb = -0.335, p = 0.007)
"Freedom of expression" and "institutional order and organization"	the more freedom the parents give children to express their feelings and emotions, the more they are disciplined and tend to behave according to specific social requirements (τb = -0.346, p = 0.004)
"Autonomy" and "focus on personal problems"	the greater the independence of children, the higher the level of their ability to overcome internal motivational and emotional difficulties and awareness of their own "self" (τb = -0.258, p = 0.035)
"Autonomy" and "institutional order and organization"	the greater the autonomy of children, the more they are disciplined and likely to behave according to specific social requirements (τb = -0.356, p = 0.003)
"Practical orientation" and "control"	the greater the parents' help in solving children's practical problems, the greater the educational control (τb = -0.338, p = 0.007)
"Institutional order and organization" and "clarity of objectives, tasks and regulations"	the more the children are disciplined and tend to behave according to specific social requirements, the higher the degree of knowledge and understanding of the formal requirements (τb = -0.264, p = 0.026)

Source: own study.

The summary of results in the individual subscales of social climate in family orphanages with selected results of similar studies of the social climate in social rehabilitation and welfare-education institutions (Table 2) indicates that in family orphanages the most favorable social climate is created, testifying to the efforts made by parents, focused on help and support in the development and preparation of the children entrusted to them to live independently.

This is evidenced not only by significantly higher mean values in the different dimensions of social climate but also as a coherent perception of family functioning by children and parents, in contrast to the situation prevailing in institutional forms – social rehabilitation or welfare-education facilities. Persons running RDD focus on shaping correct, friendly and vibrant positive feelings of interpersonal relationships in the family, reducing control activities to a minimum.

Table 2. Comparison of the mean results in individual subscales of social climate between RDD and social rehabilitation and welfare-education institutions

Subscales of social climate	Family orphanages (B.M. Nowak)		Social rehabilitation facility (L. Pytka)		welfare-education facility (B. Zięba-Kołodziej)	
	R – parents Dz – children	mean	W/N – educators/ teachers W – charges	mean	W – educators P – pupils (charges)	mean
Commitment	R	9.2105	W/N	5	W	7.0
	Dz	8.5667	W	4.9	P	3.7
Emotional maintenance	R	8.9211	W/N	7	W	7.7
	Dz	8.9333	W	4.8	P	4.0
Freedom of expression	R	7.0263	W/N	6	W	5.4
	Dz	6.2667	W	3.2	P	4.8
Autonomy	R	8.0000	W/N	7	W	6.9
	Dz	7.5000	W	2.8	P	4.5
Practical orientation	R	8.0000	W/N	9	W	5.7
	Dz	7.4833	W	6	P	4.3
Orientation at personal needs	R	7.9474	W/N	8	W	7.4
	Dz	7.0500	W	3.7	P	3.8
Institutional order and organization	R	7.4211	W/N	5	W	9.2
	Dz	8.1667	W	5.7	P	4.7
Organizational clarity	R	7.1842	W/N	5	W	7.5
	Dz	6.9500	W	4.4	P	4.7
Control	R	3.5526	W/N	6	W	4.1
	Dz	4.4167	W	5.4	P	6.0

Source: own study: on the basis of own research and research by Pytka (2000) and B. Zię-ba-Kołodziej (2009).

In contrast, the most unfavorable, controlling-restrictive social climate dominates in social rehabilitation facilities. Greatest importance is placed on compliance with external discipline and regulations, and less on the development of proper interpersonal relations, and the least on creating a therapeutic environment of an institutional community. On the other hand, in welfare-education facilities the prevalence of unfavorable components of the social climate is determined by the controlling-welfare type of social climate, which is characterized by the dominance of activities aimed at meeting the needs of charges and a focus on ensuring appropriate organizational parameters of this type of institution.

Summary

To conclude, in family orphanages such a welfare, educational and therapeutic environment is created which enables the development of interpersonal relationships allowing children personal development, meeting the needs of autonomy and freedom of expression. The research results presented in the article, however, tend to formulate methodological recommendations for parents who should pay particular attention to:

— shaping in children the skills to overcome internal motivational and emotional difficulties;
— broadening the scope of freedom in children for creating their own identity;
— focus on the parental impact of a more individualized approach to meeting the needs of children in terms of the intentional (volitional and reflexive) aspect of their functioning: mastering the ability to perform self-diagnosis, working out ways to cope with stress, and their own impotence or lack of motivation.

To conclude reflections on the social climate of the institutional and family educational environment, it should be emphasized that both family orphanages and social rehabilitation and welfare-education institutions are established to support the development of children temporarily or permanently taken away from the influence of their biological parents – children at risk of social maladjustment, socially maladjusted or abandoned by their parents for various reasons (death, limited or loss of parental rights). What's more, children placed in various forms of institutional care or foster care mostly come from families of many problems, deeply dysfunctional and/or pathological (more: Nowak 2011), displaying a deep socialization and education backwardness, and they are often affected by profound psychological trauma. A natural consequence of this state of affairs should be the creation of both family and institutional forms of care for the child, a social climate of a dual nature: therapeutic-educational and welfare-educational, providing charges and pupils the conditions for comprehensive, unrestricted development in an atmosphere of emotional security – mutual kindness, understanding, and respect.

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