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Individual Time Perspective of Convicts on Imprisonment Sentences: Implications for Social Rehabilitation Interactions

Abstract: The authors of the paper present a new look at the temporal perspective, which might supplement social rehabilitation of people serving sentences of imprisonment in prison conditions. The neglect of personal temporal preferences of convicts in hitherto social rehabilitation concepts may be the cause of failures in undertaken interactions. The individualization of social rehabilitation proposals in reference to the dominant temporal orientation of a prisoner makes them more suitable to the personal mechanisms of psychological functioning, more cognitively available for the convict, motivates to greater involvement in social rehabilitation planned in such a way, and also promotes balancing temporal perspective in the future. A balanced time perspective is a resource, which may increase the likelihood that individuals will avoid engaging in criminal behavior after being released from prison.

Key words: time perspective, prison sentence, social rehabilitation.

The time aspect of the punishment of imprisonment

Despite the frequently raised arguments against the punishment of imprisonment (cf. Ciosek 2008a), and despite the existence in the penal code of a number of other, sometimes even more severe punishments for convicts, punishments of imprisonment are still the most commonly and widely used (cf. Bałandynowicz

2009). The punishment of imprisonment imposes a number of limitations on the prisoner. First of all, they are required to stay in a limited space, in conditions that lead to the deprivation of many needs. Both biological needs (physical exercise, individualized nutrition, sleep time, hygienic conditions) and psychological and social needs change. Prisoners are not free to decide for themselves and their daily rhythm, they live in conditions of stimuli deprivation, they must be in contact with other prisoners in conditions of a confined space. They are devoid of social status prior to serving the penalty, and their prison position depends on physical strength, aggressiveness and ruthlessness. They are subject to the processes of prisonization, social degradation and stigmatization (Ciosek 2003; Bałandynowicz 2010).

The sentenced length of imprisonment is the primary criterion of punishment. In this situation, it is natural to be constantly aware and observe time periods, which in passing brings the convict closer to awaited freedom. Prisoners try to control this period, using a variety of methods for marking off consecutive days, months and years of imprisonment, counting the time left until release from prison.

It should be stressed that prison time differs significantly from that in freedom (Cope 2003). On the one hand, it is strictly organized and supervised by personnel, and everyday rhythm of the prison, its structure is imposed from the outside, and prisoners are deprived of the possibility to control it; on the other hand, within the existing structure, prisoners have excess time and little possibility to use it at their own will, which in conditions of isolation is particularly burdensome.

Prisoners in different ways try to get used to the specific nature of “prison time”, which drags on, particularly when it is not organized and passes idly. Then, the desire appears to fill it with activities that accelerate its course. These classes may differ in character – from constructive (engaging in self-service activities, paid work available in the prison, education, entertainment – reading, solving crossword puzzles) to destructive (causing brawls, organizing violent activities against other prisoners – material or sexual violence, engaging in a so-called “second life”). Also, the use of drugs can be a kind of strategy to cope with the time that has remained until release (Cope 2003). Whenever something is happening, punishment goes by more quickly and becomes easier to bear.

In the Polish prison system there are a number of different instruments and social rehabilitation means used (Ciosek 2008b), which, depending on the period on which they are focused and which include, can be divided into three categories. The first one includes a reference to passed time. Conversations of educators with prisoners include topics on the committed crime, how they affected the life of the prison, sometimes of remorse or regret. When contact is deeper, also in conversations with the prison psychologist, traumatic childhood experiences of convicts may reveal themselves, for example, from families where there was violence and sexual abuse, or from a more recent period, like failed relationships,

betrayal, break-ups. Depending on the depth of the problems, the prisoner may require therapeutic work, social therapy (Sawicka 2008) or only enable abreaction and providing advice by the educator, who builds a personal contact with them, becoming an authority, teacher of proper conduct, and at the same time support.

Another category involves focusing on what happens in the course of serving the sentence. The behavior of a convict, their activity, relations with other inmates, possible conflicts, completing duties, observing regulations – all this requires to be discussed and properly directed. In the face of the deprivation of many stimuli, some organized classes have not only an educational nature, but are also activating. The proposed training programmes aim to develop a variety of competences (mainly interpersonal and social) in the prisoners involved in them. Walking, developing interests, sport activities, entertainment are conducive to maintaining the psychophysical condition. All interactions are aimed at socializing convicts, as well as their gaining the identity of a human being who made a mistake, but wants to and is trying to fix it, and not the irrevocably criminal identity.

While serving the sentence efforts are also being made to plan the future of the prisoner. This happens during the entire period of serving the sentence; however, it is formally required in the 6 months prior to release (art. 164 of the Executive Penal Code). The educator, prison psychologist and – on the basis of the decision of the penitentiary commission – the penitentiary/court probation officer, knowing the situation of the prisoner, try to plan together with the prisoner – step by step – their actions after leaving prison. The most important are issues of living – documents, place to live, livelihood, at least a short-term source of income. No less important is to keep a former prisoner away from the criminal environment. Further plans largely depend on the relationships of the offender with loved ones and their support. Relevant issues include looking for a job or organizing one's own business, gaining professional qualifications, further education. Working with a convict in the last period of serving the sentence serves to prepare them for life in freedom and is conducive to social adaptation and getting away from crime (Ambrozik 2008). Interactions must be individualized, adjusted to the situation of the prisoner and their personal qualities and motivation. Among prisoners there are people who have good support in the family, who have a profession, are highly motivated to change their behavior, but there are also people who are helpless, not very embedded in the social network, with low professional competences and an unreal vision of their own future. They are primarily the addressees of intensive interactions involving diagnosis of the life situation and offer of aptly chosen means of post-penitentiary assistance. The development of the "liberty programme" (Liszka 2009) is the basis for their successful return to society and reintegration.

The perspective of the past, present and future is fully, in a personalized way, used in the Polish prison system. Unfortunately, despite the great effort

of penitentiary staff, results of work with prisoners are not always satisfactory. Supplementing the diagnosis of the prisoner with their personal temporal preferences may allow to achieve greater success. Effectively planning the future after leaving prison by the prisoner and realizing these plans seems impossible or difficult if their temporal orientation is focused on the past, and the future perspective is vague and imbued with fear. Similarly, it will not be easy to get achieve readiness of a convict to undertake efforts of cooperation in social rehabilitation, pass a road of vocational education in the prison, pay off alimony, if they are focused solely on the present to bring them as many pleasant experiences, stimulations as possible and the least possible burden. Finally, prisoners who cut off from past experiences do not learn from their mistakes and do not draw conclusions from previous experience. Hence there is every reason to think that knowledge about temporal orientation of prisoners will enable to reach those who did not entail any hope of obtaining positive interactions and provide an even higher degree of individualization of social rehabilitation proposals.

The concept of time perspective and its adaptive significance

According to Phillip Zimbardo and John Boyd's (2009) psychological concept of time, the daily flow of personal experience is shaped by the time perspective characteristic of the given person. In undertaking any actions, a person base them primarily on the memories (past orientation), on expected consequences (future orientation) or directly experienced stimulation (present orientation). Typically, one of these perspectives dominates and significantly affects the decisions and methods of action. People vary in time perspectives, i.e. by the degree of focusing on the past, present or future. The focus on a specific time dimension for a particular person may be the effect of the influence of many various factors of cultural, educational, religious character, associated with social origin or modeling in the family.

Zimbardo and Boyd (1999, 2009) have identified five basic time perspectives, which are: positive past (focus on the good memories), negative past (focus on what went wrong), hedonistic present (living in the moment and focus on what is pleasant), fatalistic present (taking in what happens, as inevitable and independent of activities undertaken), future (taking into account the possible consequences of current actions, planning)¹.

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¹ The method developed by Zimbardo, i.e. "Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory" (ZTPI), enables to measure the intensity of particular time perspectives and determine the temporal profile of the given person.

For maintaining physical and mental health and good social functioning – Zimbardo acknowledges *balanced time perspective* between orientation at the future, hedonistic attitude to the present (the ability to enjoy the moment) and a positive attitude to the past as optimal. Research shows that such an attitude to the dimensions of time involves, among others, a tendency to consider the possible consequences of current behavior, ambitious desire for the future, diligence, optimism, high level of internal control, reduced levels of anxiety and of depression, high levels of self-esteem (Zimbardo, Boyd 2009).

However, orientation at a negatively assessed past, present perceived fatalistically and lack of orientation at the future are recognized as non-adaptive. On the basis of conducted empirical research, Zimbardo links the unbalanced time perspective with a low level of emotional stability, elevated indicators of anxiety and depression, aggression, low level of self-control, a strong need to search for newness and thrill, lack of clearly defined goals, reduced self-esteem and effectiveness of own actions, lack of satisfactory relationships with others (Zimbardo, Boyd 1999; cf. Tucholska 2007).

Present orientation of hedonistic type is related to the inability to control oneself and the lack of hope for the future (Sobol, Oles 2002). However, it can act as a defensive role against the traumatic experiences of the past and fearful future. The *carpe diem* type of focusing on the present, concentrating on the “here and now” and taking advantage of every moment of life is linked with satisfaction from life to a greater degree than temporal orientation towards the future or past – it is conducive to fully experiencing oneself and the world. Dominant temporal orientation at the hedonistic present, however, is associated with the tendency for risky behavior. Its link to the abuse of alcohol, cigarettes and drugs was indicated by Kelli A. Keough, Zimbardo and Boyd (1999). According to the results of research carried out by them, the presentist time perspective is associated with an increased tendency to take risks, while future time perspective – with a lower tendency for risky behavior. Studies conducted by Nancy M. Petry, Warren K. Bickel and Martha Arnett (1998) found in heroin addicts shortened time horizons, poor concentration on the future and reduced ability to predict events in the future, as well as low sensitivity to distant consequences of own actions. In contrast, Natalia Cybis (2012) treats temporal orientation as a kind of mediator between personality traits and behavioral variables, among others, a type of Internet addiction. Especially the negative past perspective proved to be important for most types of Internet addictions, except Internet erotomania, while the positive past perspective showed a negative correlation with addiction to online games, serving as a protective factor. The studies of Małgorzata Sobol and Piotr Oleś (2002) observed an interesting relationship between the length of perspective and length of retrospective – as concentration on the future diminishes, interest in the past also decreases.

Imprisoned in time

A kind of ideal dimension of temporal functioning of a human being is having a balanced time perspective, which means a full temporal horizon (i.e. awareness of one's own past, present and future, good access to content associated with them) and the capacity for flexible changes in temporal orientation depending on the requirements of the situation (Boniwell, Zimbardo 2007). Persons with a balanced time perspective freely “move” between remembering past experiences, the present situation and awareness of the future consequences of their actions. They do not feel “trapped” in any of the time dimensions or overwhelmed by unpleasant emotions (e.g. sense of guilt or sentiments in connection with the past, tension in connection with their present situation, fear of the future).

Very often, however, it comes to the development and consolidation of the tendency to re-emphasize one of the three time dimensions, which causes cognitive “tilting” towards the past, present or future (*time bias*). The consolidated tendency and narrowing of time perspective to specific time dimensions becomes a relatively fixed disposition (trait) and allows to predict how a person will react in most life situations. Stability of disposition, which an individual time perspective and temporal orientation is of a person serving the sentence of imprisonment, is associated with their previous life experiences, dominant emotional states, mental health, personality traits and affects the functioning of entities in all aspects. It also decides on how to deal with the time aspect of the punishment of imprisonment, and in particular with the use of social rehabilitation possibilities for rebuilding one's own life after serving the sentence.

Based on the concept of Zimbardo and Boyd (2009), we propose a brief characterization of prisoners, for whom narrowing the full temporal perspective is characteristic, which affects their functioning in conditions of imprisonment and chances for readaptation after leaving prison (Gulla, Tucholska 2012).

- “Prisoners of the past” run away to pleasant memories, which is connected with the idealization of the time before conviction (i.e. nostalgic withdrawal) or, fearing being moved and strong emotions, they completely cut off from them, not wanting to deepen their felt frustration (positive past orientation). Among prisoners for whom the past is still alive, they are also those who have not reconciled with it, often mulling over their own hurt, having a tendency for rumination and not being able to free themselves from memories of traumatic events (negative past orientation).
- “Prisoners of the moment” are those in whose experience the present dominates, especially painful experiences connected with serving the penalty; they focus on the gloomy everyday life, difficulties of prison life, the negative emotions associated with it – fear, anger, helplessness, hopelessness (present-fatalistic orientation).

- “Prisoners of the future” – although they think into the future, but this is often wishful thinking, unsupported by work for the future in the present. Many of them escape into fantasies about the future and unrealistic dreams that without determined efforts are doomed to fail. For others still, a strong fear of the future, anxiety and uncertainty causes to avoid thinking about it (negative future orientation).

Taking into account individual time perspective of the convicts in the proceeding allows to understand that the way in which they experience time will determine how severe imprisonment will be for the given person in relation to individual temporal predispositions. Focusing on a specific time dimension (past, present or future orientation), and the manner in which this dimension is perceived (positive or negative), probably plays a significant role in shaping the attitude of the prisoner while serving the sentence, and may determine the chances of making a positive change and getting away from crime after completing the sentence.

Past results of research on time perspective and orientation of convicts, and also their formulated short-term and long-term goals, should be regarded as partial (Barnaś 2010; Teuscher, Mitchell 2011). Given the limited number of such studies and inconsistency in their results (they result mainly from applying different measurement methods, whose results are difficult to compare), the issue appears to require further analyses. Identification of psychological phenomena associated with time could indicate new directions for social rehabilitation and forms of therapy addressed to prisoners.

Social rehabilitation and experience of time by prisoners

A variety of social rehabilitation interactions are being developed for prisoners, however, the degree of involvement of prisoners and final effectiveness of proposed programmes in preventing recidivism is rather low. One of the reasons for the low effectiveness of social rehabilitation programmes can be disregarding their individual time perspective and temporal orientation. As mentioned, it has the character of permanent disposition, whose change is possible only in conditions of directed interactions (cf. Zimbardo et al. 2013), and which significantly determines the functioning of every person, in the case of a criminal, in the period of performing the crimes, as well as during serving imprisonment and after release from prison.

Modern social rehabilitation has a subjective, creative dimension, it is characterized by the lack of unification. Konopczyński (2009) indicates the need to individualize social rehabilitation interactions, stressing the importance of formulating individual goals and plans for striving to achieve the desired change in social rehabilitation. By postulating differentiation of social rehabilitation interactions with respect to the personal time perspective of the prisoner, one

can refer to the studies of clinical groups, which indicate the need to adapt offered therapeutic interactions to individual temporal orientation. In the studies of Jan Chodkiewicz and Katarzyna Nowakowska (2011) it was found that patients addicted to alcohol, starting rehabilitation therapy, exhibit temporal orientation focused on the past and the present (in the dimension of hedonism and fatalism), while they have low concentration on the present (in the dimension of perceiving values of every moment, *carpe diem*) and on the future. Women and men who are addicts differ in their preferred temporal orientation. Women with presentist temporal perspective had a more fatalistic attitude, while men – hedonistic. This points to the need to adapt therapeutic interactions to men and women who live with a sense of hopelessness, who are not able to defer gratification or predict the effects of their own actions. Men who completed an addiction treatment programme focused primarily on the future, which contributed to success of the therapy. Women, when ending therapy, to a lesser extent than those interrupting treatment, focused on the past and on a hedonistic present orientation.

Iwona Niewiadomska (2007) treats temporal orientation as one of the dimensions of personality associated with intentional activity. Autobiographical memory decides to take actions, which in the past proved successful. A retrospective analysis of achievements is the basis for building a prospective vision of the future – cognitive representations that allow the prediction of both successes and failures, indicating close and distant goals of actions. Niewiadomska and Joanna Chwaszcz (2010) show the critical importance of temporal orientation for the formation of the sense of self-efficacy. Low effectiveness of purposeful actions is related to the disregard of real own possibilities in planning for the future, setting unattainable goals, the inability to defer gratification and insufficient use of experiences of the past to predict consequences of action. Individuals perceiving the current situation as particularly difficult, which they cannot effectively deal with, and which they also try to control, feel a growing anxiety, tension and fear, which are the predisposing factors for deviant behavior and crime. By analyzing in the group of criminals personality determinants of the effectiveness of imprisonment penalties, Niewiadomska (2007) examines individual dimensions always in the past, present and future time perspective, thus emphasizing the importance of temporal framework for the entire functioning of the human being, including also for dispositions responsible for the effectiveness of imprisonment penalties (such as valuating orientation, sense of self-efficacy, remedial competencies, sense of coherence, perception of social reinforcements).

The importance of access to past experience and the ability to anticipate future events, as key to the process of social rehabilitation, building new relationships and creating a non-deviant identity is suggested by William R. Muth, Ginger Walker and Sandra Joy Casad (2014). The way in which a prisoner experiences time can be constructive or destructive for acquiring new experiences which enable to make the desired, from the point of view of social rehabilitation, change.

It can be concluded from the above-mentioned studies that there are relationships of time perspective and temporal orientation with effective or ineffective self-regulation. Acting without the ability to use past experience, directed towards vague and unspecified objectives, located in the short-term perspective, realized by a person with a high tendency for risk, unable to postpone gratification, and simultaneously with low sense of control and self-efficacy, must lead to failures and frustration. It can transform into impulsive, aggressive behavior or into criminal activity which allows to achieve fast benefits.

However, it should be remembered that the institutionalization of everyday life is conducive to shortening future time perspective (Landau 1975). Especially if it concerns a total institution, whose one of the characteristics is strict control over the time of its subordinates. Total institutions, which includes the prison, also limit members' contacts with the outside world, treating them in a uniform way, and any activities take place in the same place and environment, and they are strictly regulated by a plan imposed by formal ordinances and regulations, the implementation of which is guarded by supervisors (Goffman 2006). By structuring time in a specific, routine way, takes away from prisoners the opportunity to form a habit of thinking about the future, independent planning of daily activities, so that they can learn to better anticipate the consequences of their own actions, what seems to be the key for them. The prison institution is also – as if by its very nature – oriented towards the negative past. It continues to remind them what they did wrong. Staying in conditions of prison isolation itself, if not supported by proper corrective interaction and shaping in convicts the optimal, balanced time perspective, is not sufficient for effects of social rehabilitation interactions to appear.

The implications for social rehabilitation interactions

The key assumptions of the psychological theory of time formulated by Zimbardo and Boyd can include the idea that the perception of the world, a way of life, decisions and actions are conditioned by the adopted individual time perspective. Personal perception of time is learned (acquired) and largely unconscious. Becoming aware of one's own perception of time perspective, one can change it to control the quality of one's own life. These assumptions underlie the therapy based on the concept of balancing time perspectives (Zimbardo et al. 2013) and the specific interactions of coaching (Boniwell, Osin 2015). We recognize that they can also be an inspiration for effective social rehabilitation programmes.

The basis of interactions aimed at understanding and modifying individual time perspective of a person serving a sentence of imprisonment should be a good

diagnosis². Thanks to it, in the course of social rehabilitation and educational work, it becomes possible to differentiate interactions due to the time perspective of prisoners by offering tasks that are suited to the dominating time orientation, which would primarily allow to harmonize the time perspective of people subject to interactions. Below we present proposals of directions of such interactions:

- **Interactions towards people with a dominating concentration on the past** should include working through the most significant sustained traumatic life experiences, searching for positive experiences in the past, successes and pleasurable sensations, and acquiring the skills to use past experiences to avoid mistakes and gain more favorable conduct in the present and the future.
- **Interactions towards people with a dominating concentration on the present** must take into account deconcentration in relation to unpleasant sensations of everyday life in prison, develop the ability to differentiate transitional, current and less significant matters, as well as permanent from those of major importance. And also develop the ability to treat current difficulties as temporary, take care of oneself, despite adverse conditions, to maintain good psychophysical condition in the future and motivate for social rehabilitation, treated as a stimulation of positive mechanisms and lasting changes.
- **Interactions towards people with a dominating concentration on the future** should include planning for the future in a way that is not wishful thinking, but real; building goals based on the real situation and possibilities of the prisoner, hierarchical and non-contradictory internally, and initiating actions in the present for a successful future, such as: taking up learning, a job, paying off alimony debts and others, maintaining contacts with relatives during imprisonment and treating bonds begun in prison as transient, situational, and not the primary sources of support in life outside the walls.

It seems that taking into account the nature of individual temporal orientation in social rehabilitation while serving a sentence of imprisonment could bring many benefits. If prisoners were not focused too much on the past – they would not be so frustrated and aggressive. If they were not overly focused on the present, the reality of prison, and the second life, would not constitute the only reality for them, they would treat it as due punishment for deeds done, but at the same time

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² Unfortunately, the Polish adaptation of “Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory” (ZTPI) (Cybis et al. 2012), albeit in an abridged version, only 15 items, does not work too well in prison conditions. The method is not fully understandable to prisoners, some items are difficult for them to interpret – convicts do not know whether to respond according to the situation as it was prior to imprisonment, or what it is during serving the sentence. They tend to present themselves in a better light, so they may not admit to having problems with understanding the statements or method of responding. Therefore, diagnosing using projective methods, allowing to capture the specificity of functioning in the temporal dimension, e.g. “Line test” (Cottle 1976) or “Circles test” (Cottle 1967; cf. Bajcar 2002) causes some controversy in use in prison conditions. The authors of the article started work on adapting tools enabling the correct diagnosis of the discussed disposition in a particular group, which is the prison population.

as a transitional state, where they can prepare themselves to change their lives for the better. If convicts were not concentrated in a naive, wishful thinking and idealistic way for the future – they would not commit mistakes again and could prepare for the realities of what awaits them in the difficult road to readaptation after serving their sentence. Therefore, a balanced temporal perspective is optimal, and its importance for building the motivation to participate in social rehabilitation – unmistakable.

Conclusions

Taking into account the time perspective of convicts enables to more effectively direct social rehabilitation interactions and their diversity. Without taking into account the time perspective and individual temporal orientation of prisoners, despite efforts and resources directed at these interactions, building an attitude of cooperation in the process of social rehabilitation and motivation for positive change is difficult and often ineffective. The lack of effectiveness translates into not only returning to crime of former prisoners, but also to occupational burnout of social rehabilitation teams and a negative social assessment of their huge efforts.

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