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Creative Social Rehabilitation Outline of the concept for developing potential

Abstract: The assumptions of “new social rehabilitation” presented in the paper are an opportunity to recover the humanist dimension of social rehabilitation activities, dominated by economic-formal-utilitarian thinking. They can certainly become the subject of many discussions in academic environments and among practitioners gathered in penitentiary establishments and institutions. These discussions can produce positive and tangible results in the form of not only deepening social rehabilitation thought and deeper reflection on the occurring *crisis of change*, not only in Polish social reality, but also abroad, and above all bring a real change to the existing social rehabilitation and educational doctrine, which we are all witnesses of, participants and perpetrators at the same time. **Keywords:** social rehabilitation, potentials, identity, social rehabilitation change.

A few causes for the lack of social rehabilitation successes

Established terminology

The term “**social rehabilitation**” understood in the Polish penitentiary system *ex definitione* means repeated, second-time *socialization* of an individual who is socially unadapted, in order to enable his more proper functioning in generally adopted and normatively accepted life, social and professional roles. Therefore, it is meant to be *positive, intentional social education*, by assumption taking place in the conditions of prison isolation.

On the other hand, *social maladjustment*, as the main cause urging people to commit crimes, is identified as a result of the impact of various factors of biological, cultural or social character (among others, it is caused by a faulty process of socialization in the family, peer circles, school, developmental disorders of the cognitive sphere, personality deviations of different backgrounds, caused e.g. by prolonged intake of psychoactive drugs and others), and manifested by the inability or reluctance of the individual to satisfy one's own needs, specifying and implementing life priorities and solving problem situations in a way that is commonly accepted axiologically (moral standards), formally (legal standards) and socially (social standards).

Many years ago we accepted that the **social rehabilitation process** is to be carried out in institutions and facilities especially appointed for this, which are partly or purely isolating, where by law persons condemned by valid court judgments for committing legally prohibited acts are to reside.

Social rehabilitation myths

To what extent, and is it at all possible for isolation institutions of a semi-total or total character, such as corrective institutions and prisons, to effectively fulfil the statutorily imposed correctional duties?

This question is asked increasingly not only by traditional and electronic media, as well as public opinion in Poland, but also persons professionally engaged in this issue. Modern knowledge about social rehabilitation allows to conclude that its idea is burdened by three fairly commonly accepted social myths that have been functioning in Poland at the beginning of the 21st century.

Faith in the social rehabilitation role of the law

The most widespread view concerning the social rehabilitative role of the prison institution is overvaluing the role of criminal punishment (isolation punishment) and its participation in the process of educating criminals. This myth functions in the form of the deep belief that placing criminals in prison is already a corrective factor for him, and increasing the severity of laws results in a reduction in the number of criminals and effectiveness of their social rehabilitation. This well-established conviction has its historical sources in earlier cultural experiences and centuries-old severe social traditions in our cultural circle. Despite the lack of scientific evidence on the fairness of this thesis, it is heavily rooted in the wide social awareness and contributes to an austere climate of executing custodial sentence in prisons. Scientific research conducted in the past several decades both in Europe and on other continents proves that there is no such connection (there are only statistically significant dependencies between the number of crimes and the effectiveness of their detection). Despite this, policy-makers and administrators

overseeing the social rehabilitation reality, often in situations of social pathological phenomena increasing, try to draw severe legislative solutions, believing that in this way they will manage to achieve the intended results in the form of raising the effectiveness of imprisonment and reduce the level of social anxiety.

The tendency of increasing penal rigour observed in Poland over the last several years leads to a flawed interpretation of not only the essence of social rehabilitation, but above all, its effects. We can see that the activities of social rehabilitation, which by assumption have the advantages of help and service to another human being, are beginning to succumb to political and administrative influences before our very eyes. In addition, the clearly outlined administrative nature of the process of institutional social rehabilitation, as well as assessment of its effects, have shifted emphasis from the social rehabilitative essence of this process to its administrative-formal essence. Therefore, beliefs unsupported by any scientific evidence concerning the role of punishment and punishing in the process of social rehabilitation, accepted by political and administrative environments have had a negative impact on the Polish social rehabilitation reality.

Therapy is the same thing as social rehabilitation

Another view, which has settled in Polish social rehabilitation space is the belief that crime, as well as other negative social phenomena, should be subject to therapy or treatment.

Already in the nineties of the last century legislative provisions were begun to be introduced, which sanctioned various forms of therapy in prisons as the basic methods of social rehabilitation. Therapy wards appeared, and in recent years there have been several thousand therapy programmes carried out aimed at a wide range of behavioural disorders of persons serving a prison sentence. This type of approach arises from thinking taken from medicine. Due to the fact that social rehabilitation does not have the means that medicine has (medication, antibiotics, surgical tools, operating theatres, accurate diagnosis methods, etc.), various forms of psycho and social therapy are being increasingly introduced to the social rehabilitation reality, through which new methods of “treating” criminals are being “discovered” (aggression replacement training, assertiveness training, motivational training, etc.). Serious diseases are treated in specially set-up clinics, therefore, such a role is beginning to be assigned to social rehabilitation facilities.

The uncritical transfer of psychological and medical teachings on the effects of social rehabilitation raises legitimate concerns. It should be remembered that the concepts, theories and psychological methods were aimed to help people who were frustrated, nervous and with mental health problems, and not criminals – socially flawed people, having deviated identity. In this respect, psychological and medical science has limited experience, because it did not deal with social rehabilitation from the practical side.

Social rehabilitation institutions change an offender into a better person

The third most common social myth, functioning almost everywhere in the world, is the belief that isolating a criminal from the rest of society is a good method to trigger his permanent positive change. It is difficult to determine how much these views are a camouflage for the obvious intentions, such as: the preventive need to isolate someone, who threatens other community members, as well as a desire to redress harm and meet the expectations of the victims, and to what extent is this an actual belief that in the conditions of prison isolation positive results of social rehabilitation can be achieved.

The matter in itself is not very logical, because if we take the process of social rehabilitation as a process of initiating and improving skills of functioning in social and life roles, then the form of isolation itself, as well as its current conditions (in Poland, prisons are overcrowded, where there are 90 thousand prisoners and 70 thousand with legally valid judgements are waiting in line for free spots), basically thwart the initially adopted assumptions. If we add to this that some people serving a prison sentence (approx. 20–30%) should not be in prison, then an image appears before us of an obsolete prosecution system and systemic powerlessness.

The problem is that sooner or later, the isolated individual will return to an open environment, and to a more or less active social life. Most known scientific studies quite clearly state that there is a small probability that persons residing in prisons have a chance to function normally with people and among people in a non-prison environment. This is, among others, due to the occurring problem of social stigma, and thus the phenomenon of “imposing” a kind of mark on people, who have functioned in deviant roles and have resided in social rehabilitation institutions.

To what extent social rehabilitation understood in such a way, like some believe, is an expression of cultural and civilization hypocrisy, arising from the idea of action in accordance with the rules of political correctness (because it is appropriate or this is how it is in other countries) – and to what extent is it a pedagogical ideal possible to fulfil?

And finally, can someone be forced to internalize (accept as one’s own) and apply in life the moral, legal, custom, cultural, etc. norms by isolating him for many years from the so-called “normal life” and subjecting him to absolute institutional obligation?

These and other questions about the nature and meaning of social rehabilitation have been appearing quite frequently recently in media public space. In the environments of social rehabilitation researchers and practitioners they have been asked for a long time. They have their origins and conditions. They also have a long scientific history. Certainly, however, they are not devoid of a deep sense.

The essence of effective social rehabilitation

The faces of modern social rehabilitation

Modern penitentiary social rehabilitation activity has two distinct faces, which is a legacy of its 20th-century theoretical bases (behaviourism and psychodynamism). Its *Mars (juridical) face*, most recognizable today, of a harsh and angry expression, gives its practical dimensions the form of isolating obligation, based on absolute obedience and formal and administrative ways of dealing with the sentenced. This causes the formation of a so-called *false social adjustment* in some prisoners, who in order to survive in prison only pretend that they have changed for the better.

The second, *Aesculapius (therapeutic) face* of modern penitentiary social rehabilitation is full of compassion and acceptance. Its essence is completing actions resulting from the formal obligation with therapeutic effect, in which one seeks a sense of positive internal change in isolated criminals. Most often, however, the achieved result here is either “addiction” of charges to their therapists, without whom they cannot function, or “simulation” by the convicted of “positive change” in order to obtain current regulatory benefits.

Both cited faces of modern penitentiary activity, conducted in conditions of prison isolation, clearly do not meet the social expectations and indicate clearly the occurring problem of “social rehabilitation crisis”, which not only journalists write about and politicians speak about, but also scientific environments, professionally involved in this issue.

Searching for “a way out” of the *social rehabilitation crisis* stems both from the need to make real the effectiveness of the institutional and non-institutional social rehabilitation process for effective social readaptation of former charges of correctional facilities and the non-transferable need to preserve the sense of security of citizens, among whom former charges of social rehabilitation institutions will be placed sooner or later.

“Creative Social Rehabilitation”

At the heart of thinking caused by the “social rehabilitation crisis” is this paper’s author adopting a different from previously accepted theoretical-methodical perspectives – a scientific cognitive perspective, treating this kind of activity as a process of *creative change*, rather than a process of *forced change or voluntary change under the influence of therapy*, characteristic of hitherto penitentiary practice based on the classic concepts and criminological, psychological, sociological and pedagogical theories.

The theoretical basis for a new understanding of the essence of social rehabilitation activity are interdisciplinary interactive, cognitive concepts adapted to this space and concepts arising from psychology and creative pedagogy, and especially modern heuristic theories.

The orientation at **creating positive dimensions of a person** socially maladjusted (his potential) in place of the existing ways of correcting (correction or psychocorrection) his deviant behaviours and attitudes, results from adapting to the social rehabilitation space a different axiological-theoretical base and different techniques and ways of methodical conduct.

Social rehabilitation is essentially a positive change of a person who is socially maladjusted as a result of methodically planned interactions, initiating his personal and social development (thus far blocked). Therefore, since such a developmental change is so difficult to achieve in the conditions of the currently functioning social rehabilitation institutions, the legitimate question arises about the reasons for this state of affairs.

First of all, it is a mistake to use an archaic form of institutional obligation in social rehabilitation facilities, based on a bankrupt vision of behavioural social rehabilitation, consisting in applying regulatory punishments and rewards (known as point economics). Obligation in fact generally causes so-called false adaptation, thus an apparent (faked) adaptation and can lead to aggression and rebellion.

Secondly, social rehabilitation change is not caused by therapy, as both criminal behaviour and its causes are usually not founded in disease. Their causes are shaped parameters of deviant identity, which cannot be “cured” in prison. It can merely be modified under the influence of certain specialized activities and favourable social circumstances.

Thirdly, the very fact of sentencing to prison has no social rehabilitative values, so it does not produce positive changes. Rather the other way around. It causes a sense of frustration and rejection, rebellion and desperation, as well as a desire to retaliate once free again. Numerous scientific studies prove this. Scientists in the field of social sciences dealing with the problem know about this phenomenon. Unfortunately, lawyer-criminal law specialists, who assign criminal law the social rehabilitation power, do not want to accept this.

Fourthly and finally, the condemned leaving prison walls, even if he really wants to function normally among people, has slim chances of it, as he often lacks postpenitentiary care and assistance. The former prisoner is left alone, left to the grace or disgrace of the lame social assistance system. In addition, former prisoners face indifference and social distancing, as they have a negative stigma of “condemned”, which means a person with whom it is best not to associate.

Therefore, the proposed concept of Creative Social Rehabilitation **differs** in five essential areas from the existing, traditional ways of understanding the essence of implementing the social rehabilitation process in conditions of prison isolation: **firstly**, it determines social rehabilitation as a process of **developing**

and creating potential, rather than as it is adopted, a corrective change of social and personal parameters. **Secondly**, it deals with social maladjustment as a problem of **incorrectly shaped identity**, and not defective attitudes¹, not accepting and respecting social standards², inappropriate attitudes, beliefs and attitudes³, dysfunctional interpersonal relationships and defective social roles⁴ or pathological behaviours, personality traits and axiological preferences⁵. **Thirdly**, the aim of social rehabilitation is indeed to create **new identities** of charges, and not a corrective change of beliefs, attitudes and axiological preferences or forms of reactions, behaviours, attitudes and social roles. **Fourthly**, the means for this aim is the **development** of structural factors and mechanisms of **cognitive and creative processes**, and not forced change of defective forms of social functioning, through educative correction, psychocorrection, psychomodification or other methods of anthropotechnic educative interactions⁶. **Fifthly** and finally, the proposed method, that is the **method** of achieving this objective is social rehabilitation through **trained autopresentation of visualized identity parameters**.

These five differences between the concept of Creative Social Rehabilitation and the classically understood social rehabilitation, constitutes not only its methodical distinctiveness, but also the difference in the scope of the aforementioned theoretical contexts. Creative Social Rehabilitation dates back to the teachings dealing with the creative processes of man and makes them a base enabling to obtain the intended effects. In our considerations there are three key issues that constitute its basic methodological assumptions and determine the essence of interactions. These are respectively: creativity – social rehabilitation – identity. The presented concept is an attempt to show the correlations occurring between creativity understood as the effect of the structural work of factors of cognitive and creative processes, the social rehabilitation process and their impact on the development of the new identities of charges.

The concept of Creative Social Rehabilitation involves, on the one hand, heuristics, which is the interdisciplinary science dedicated to creative methodology, and on the other hand, with social rehabilitation pedagogy. This means that Creative Social Rehabilitation draws its theoretical premises both on heuristic theories on the development of creative problem-solving methods, as well as numerous

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¹ K. Pospiszyl, *Psychologiczna analiza wadliwych postaw społecznych młodzieży*, Warsaw 1973.

² J. Konopnicki, *Niedostosowanie społeczne*, Warsaw 1972.

³ C. Czapów, *Wychowanie resocjalizujące*, PWN, Warsaw 1978.

⁴ B. Urban, *Profilaktyka społeczna i resocjalizacja młodzieży*, Mysłowice 2004; idem, *Zachowania dewiacyjne młodzieży w interakcjach rówieśniczych*, Cracow 2005.

⁵ L. Pytka, *Teoretyczne problemy diagnozy w wychowaniu resocjalizującym*, Warsaw 1986; idem, *Pedagogika Resocjalizacyjna*, Warsaw 2005.

⁶ J. Konopnicki, op. cit.; C. Czapów, *Wychowanie resocjalizujące*, PWN, Warsaw 1980; K. Pospiszyl, *Resocjalizacja*, Warsaw 1998; B. Urban, *Profilaktyka społeczna...*; L. Pytka, *Pedagogika Resocjalizacyjna*, Warsaw 2005; H. Machel, *Więzienie jako instytucja karna i resocjalizacyjna*, Gdansk 2003.

criminological, sociological, psychological and pedagogical concepts defining the theoretical foundations of rehabilitation processes. So we are dealing with a view of social rehabilitation reality from the methodological perspective of creative internal and social creation of socially maladjusted people, in place of the perspective of almost solely correcting and improving their aberrant functions and personality structures.

The concept of “new identities” is a key concept in this concept. Creative Social Rehabilitation understood in this way is a science of the potentiality of social misfits. This means that its methods are designed to seek and develop both the potentials inherent in these people, as well as create prospects for creating a new individual and social identity of misfits. Such recognition of the problem does not contrast the concept of Creative Social Rehabilitation from traditional concepts.

The main objective of classical social rehabilitation pedagogy in its methodical dimension is correction, eliminating or improving dysfunctional structures and personal and behavioural mechanisms of pathologically functioning persons in their life and social roles. This eliminating-corrective approach of classic social rehabilitation pedagogy has its source in three principal groups of modern concepts, explaining the complex problems of social maladjustment. These concepts, interdisciplinary to a large extent, attempt to explain the multi-aspect and multi-dimensional aspect of the cause, mechanisms and consequences of human reactions and pathological behaviours. However, they have one common drawback: to a small extent they refer to the methodological issues of the social rehabilitation process itself and the circumstances of its effectiveness, focusing primarily on explaining the aetiology and phenomenology of this phenomenon⁷. At the sources of explorations and reflections relating to the practical functioning of methods and social rehabilitation forms, lies the view that in designing and implementing various methods and techniques of interactions which have the task of making real and effective the processes of social rehabilitation, we do not fully use the developmental potentials inherent in social misfits. I wrote about this already in the second half of the 1990s, introducing to Polish social rehabilitation the concept of Creative Social Rehabilitation⁸.

Methods of Creative Social Rehabilitation have an effect on two planes. Firstly, they activate the developmental potentials in social misfits, and secondly, they create specific tangible and social works-effects of their creativity. Developed potentials of charges who are socially maladjusted affect their new relationship with the surrounding social reality, which they begin to see in terms of acceptable and soluble situations. New cognitive-personal skills obtained during interactions allow

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⁷ L. Pytka, *Pedagogika Resocjalizacyjna...*, 2005.

⁸ M. Konopczyński, *Twórcza resocjalizacja*, Editions Spotkania, Warsaw 1996; idem, *Metody Twórczej Resocjalizacji*, PWN, Warsaw 2007; idem, *Kryzys resocjalizacji czy(li) sukces działań pozornych*, Pedagogium, Warsaw 2013; idem, *Pedagogika resocjalizacyjna*, Oficyna Wydawnicza “Impuls”, Cracow 2014.

them to solve life situations in a different manner than before. Charges themselves contribute to and complete with content the frames of their new identity. Material and social effects of the impacts of Creative Social Rehabilitation Methods, which include both tangible creations such as: paintings, sculptures, written stories and poems (tangible creations) and theatre presentations, music performed or sport activities carried out (social creations), are designed to capture and instil the socially created identity of charges. Social rehabilitation activities affect two dimensions of forming identity parameters of the charge: the dimension of internal creation of the charge through the development of his potentials and the dimension of social creation of the charge by presenting his diverse, positive accomplishments. By using sociological terminology, it can be said that in this way the individual Me and the social Me of the charge are created. Creativity of a social misfit understood in this way can be called internal social rehabilitation development and external social rehabilitation development. Internal development is positive changes in personal parameters, while external development is the social results of these changes.

It should be clearly pointed out that the effect of creativity understood as modified functioning of structural factors of cognitive processes of social misfits is their innovative, creative way of solving problem situations. An important result, but a by-product in nature, is tangible creations of the creative activity of people who are socially maladjusted. In other words, a person working in the theatre, sports, visual arts or music and achieving some success in these fields (by playing a role in the theatre, painting a picture or good sports performances) is more quickly accepted by others, who do not show pathological disorders. We do not mean outstanding artistic creations and sports achievements, but arousing even the smallest interest in this work, and speaking of tangible creations of social misfits at least minimal success (theatrical presentations, exhibitions, playing in a sports team).

Methodical dimensions of Creative Social Rehabilitation are the essence of pedagogical assistance and outline the prospects for further development of individuals who are socially maladjusted. A deviant functioning person, to be socially accepted, must make triple effort. Part with his past, modify the present and create the future. The first involves analyzing and understanding the causes of one's faulty behaviour and social attitudes, justifying the resulting reactions of other people, and disclosing a readiness to change. In the wake of this attempts to modify certain parameters of individual identity should follow. Modifying news is intellectual and emotional inclusion in activities developing the structural factors and mechanisms of cognitive processes. In this way, the potentials of charges come out. While creating the future consists in initiating a process of social adaptation of own forms of activity based on revealed potentials. New social identities emerging in this way enable to undertake different social roles from previous ones.

The briefly presented concept of Creative Social Rehabilitation is the result of many years of theoretical studies of the author, verified empirically in the true social rehabilitation reality.

Its contents are part of a search for ways out of the crisis, which took over social rehabilitation space, coming together with fundamental political, economic and socio-cultural transformations in Poland at the end of the last century. But the effects of civilization changes directly impacting the social rehabilitation reality are much wider and more serious.

Here we mean a noticeable educational helplessness of the school, axiological and socialization-educational confusion of the Polish family, lack of career prospects of graduates of different schools or an unprecedented for this scale sensational and stigmatizing role of the media in the process of social change. If we add to this the dysfunctionality of the system of assistance services, the central-administrative method of solving educational and social problems and the real expansion of the zone of poverty, destitution and homelessness, then a real picture of the Polish crisis of change appears.

Until now, the recipe for this crisis has been the noticeable tightening of the criminal policy of many countries, resulting in prisons and social rehabilitation centres being filled up, and tighter organizational and administrative procedures. Also in our country there are penalization ideas of newer acts and behaviours, which in many countries in the world are not subject to such severity. Social rehabilitation educators know that this is not a good way to limit negative phenomena, but generally nobody asks them for their opinion. This sad observation is, unfortunately, confirmed by legislative and administrative practice.

The presented basic assumptions of Creative Social Rehabilitation come down to a few essential theses. One of the key ones is a verified view on the traditional way of understanding the essence of the social rehabilitation process, treated as an attempt to re-socialize charges in conditions of prison, corrective or educational isolation.

The author is convinced that this is a goal that is not only unrealistic, but also impossible to fulfil for fundamental reasons. Hence, one cannot expect such educational effects from the institutional social rehabilitation reality. Therefore, the recognition of social rehabilitation, not as a socializing process, but as a process of developmental change of individuals socially isolated, opens a new field of methodical social rehabilitation activity.

The effect of such social rehabilitation is to be an *identity transformation of a social misfit*, based on identifying and developing his potential, rather than how it has been thought thus far – an educational obligation to change defective attitudes and social behaviours.

The fundamental assumptions of Creative Social Rehabilitation

Social rehabilitation activities aimed at discovering and developing potentials should take into account several fundamental assumptions, which are its essence, affecting the achieved positive educational effects.

Firstly, the strategic objective of social rehabilitation is to obtain identity transformation of the person being socially rehabilitated. We can understand identity as a *relatively stable and functional way of thinking about oneself and one's own life priorities in the context of their social acceptance*. This means, to some degree of probability, that depending on what people think about themselves (who I am, what is important to me), that is how they act in social life. Changing the deviant way of thinking about oneself, thus also changing existing life priorities, is a relatively permanent change. Only after it is achieved can we talk about starting the process of socialization. But this task should then be performed outside the walls of a prison. Identity cannot be changed "by force". It is resistant to coercion and punishing. It changes when we see and develop in the socially rehabilitated person his "strengths" – potentials, and he believes that he can be accepted by other people.

Secondly, in every person, irrespective of his biographical experience and how he has functioned in the past and functions presently, there are developmental-creative potentials. These potentials, through special forms and ways of methodical effects, can be developed and shaped. One should understand developmentally-creative potentials as resources and personal and social predispositions, enabling innovative problem-solving of specific problem situations, satisfying needs and supporting interpersonal relationships.

Thirdly, potentials are shaped and organized by structural factors of cognitive and creative processes. Persons who are socially maladjusted, generally as a result of adverse socialization conditions, have, on the one hand, undeveloped structures of cognitive-creative processes, and on the other hand poor organization of these processes.

Fourthly, the methodical forms enabling the process of effective social rehabilitation are creating methods (including the method of creative social rehabilitation), which activate and develop those internal structure of a person, which are responsible for the development of potentials and, consequently, lead to identity changes. For this purpose, education (also past middle school and at tertiary level), theatre, sport and volunteering activities can be used. In general, however, in prisons education is not treated as a social rehabilitation tool, similarly theatre or sport. It is considered that these are "scientific whims".

Fifthly, persons with a "social rehabilitation past" (prison, corrective, etc.) through internal development and creating a "new" identity, become socially accepted people, as they begin to function like others, accepting the standards of social conduct. They do not feel less attractive interpersonally from others (less able, less talented, less resourceful, etc.). This attitude creates a real chance of positive social readaptation, through the started process of destigmatization (removing the stigma).

Social rehabilitation understood in this way has already been verified many times in practice of social life. Its advantage is that it can be carried out both in conditions of a penal institution and in the open environment.

Time for changes?

However, social rehabilitation institutions persistently keep to conventional rules and ways of dealing with charges, which do not generate quantifiable effects (more or less every second person convicted after being set free commits further crimes and returns to prison). This is not only the specificity of the Polish penitentiary reality, but also European and global. There are many causes for this state.

They result primarily from a particular model of political thinking, translating into creating law, resulting in imposing a clear formal-economic-utilitarian perspective in place of the humanistic perspective in the assessment of social phenomena and interpersonal relationships. This perspective clearly serves as a “tool” of social policy, which politicians and officials use to manipulate public opinion. Depending on the sequence of current events this perspective is attributed the characteristics of conservatism or social liberalism. And so, this manipulative tendency to view only substantive problems as problems of another type, nowadays constitutes the most important basis of the “social rehabilitation crisis”, co-creating the faces of modern social rehabilitation described above.

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