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Alternative ways for supporting reintegration – how the NGOs function in the hungarian and polish prisons

Alternatywne sposoby wspierania reintegracji – jak działają organizacje pozarządowe w węgierskich i polskich więzieniach

Working with prisoners at penitentiary units is provided not only by the prison's corrective staff. Non-governmental organisations are intended to bridge gaps in the fields by providing support to prisoners, their families and prisoners who are about to leave their penitentiary units. In the situation when state institutions do not have sufficient material and non-material resources, non-governmental structures perform an essential role to public institutions and they also perform activities in the fields of re-adaptation and social re-integration of prisoners. In our article we are examining the following research questions: 1. What characteristics can be emphasized in Poland and Hungary concerning non-governmental organisations? 2. What are the features of the legal background in both countries in the field of the third sector? 3. What are the most important positive initiatives, best practices for NGOs in prisons in the two countries? In order to explore these circumstances in more detail, we examine in our article how the third sectors, NGOs work in Poland and Hungary in the field of penitentiary institutes.

Key words: NGOs in prison, Polish prison, Hungarian prison, inmates' opportunities

Pracę z osadzonymi w jednostkach penitencjarnych zapewnia nie tylko więzienna kadra korekcyjna. Organizacje pozarządowe mają za zadanie wypełniać luki w tych dziedzinach poprzez udzielanie wsparcia więźniom, ich rodzinom oraz więźniom opuszczającym jednostki penitencjarne. W sytuacji, gdy instytucje państwowe nie dysponują wystarczającymi zasobami materialnymi i niematerialnymi, struktury pozarządowe pełnią istotną rolę wobec instytucji publicznych, a także realizują działania w zakresie readaptacji i reintegracji społecznej więźniów. W naszym artykule postawiliśmy następujące pytania badawcze: 1. Jakie cechy można wyróżnić w Polsce i na Węgrzech w odniesieniu do organizacji pozarządowych? 2. Czym charakteryzuje się zaplecze prawne obu krajów w zakresie trzeciego sektora? 3. Jakie są najważniejsze pozytywne inicjatywy i najlepsze praktyki dla organizacji pozarządowych w więzieniach w obu krajach? Aby bliżej rozpoznać te kwestie, w naszym artykule badamy, jak trzeci sektor, organizacje pozarządowe, działają w Polsce i na Węgrzech w obszarze instytucji penitencjarnych.

Słowa kluczowe: organizacje pozarządowe w więzieniach, polskie więzienie, węgierskie więzienie, możliwości osadzonych

Introduction

Working with prisoners at penitentiary units is provided not only by the prison's corrective staff. Prisoners or former prisoners may obtain support from organisations and associations that offer assistance in entering or re-entering the labour market, in overcoming difficulties that may occur after the release from prison and also in establishing or fixing relations with one's family. Volunteer professionals can also help in solving similar problems. This type of support for prisoners should be emphasized in parallel with the activities of the prison. That is why we consider it important that the work of the penitentiary organisations is complemented by civil organisations and volunteers who can contribute

with their expertise to the quality preparation of prisoners for release¹. It is a fact that the idea of voluntary service and social organisations is based on providing non-profit aid to the society and to the state – not on relieving the state from their constitutional obligations. Passing tasks of providing support to prisoners, former prisoners and their families by the state administration and self-governments almost entirely on non-governmental organisations is a mistake.

Despite the fact that the role of non-governmental organization in the field of prisons is a very important question, this momentum of prison education has not yet been properly described. While researching the professional literature related to this subject matter we started processing the Polish and Hungarian theoretical and legal background, statistics and positive initiatives from prisons. Our research questions are the followings:

1. What characteristics can be emphasized in Poland and Hungary concerning non-governmental organisations?
2. What are the features of the legal background in both countries in the field of the third sector?
3. What are the most important positive initiatives, best practices for NGOs in prisons in the two countries?

In order to explore these circumstances in more detail, we examine in our article how the third sectors, NGOs work in Poland and Hungary in the field of penitentiary institutes.

Non-governmental organisations in Poland and Hungary

Non-governmental organisations define entities that operate in the third sector and

- are not oriented toward gaining profits (that is why there is another term to define them: *non-profit organisations*),
- are not included into the state structure, therefore, they are *non-governmental entities* in this respect.

¹ M. Kubala, *Rola organizacji pozarządowych w świadczeniu pomocy postpenitencjarnej w Polsce i w Niemczech – historia i teraźniejszość*, „Resocjalizacja Polska”, 12, 2017, pp. 41-57; K. Ostrowska, *Doświadczenie, perspektywy, ograniczenia w działalności organizacji pozarządowych na przykładzie Stowarzyszenia Penitencjarnego „Patronat”*, [in:] *Polski system penitencjarny. Ujęcie integralno-kulturowe*, „Forum Penitencjarne”, dodatek specjalny, Warszawa 2013, p. 321.

In Poland and Hungary there are several terms applied to define organisations operating in the third sector: non-governmental associations or NGOs, social, non-profit, voluntary, civil, independent or public utility organisations. Usually, non-governmental organisations or NGOs (and other entities mentioned previously) are referred to foundations or associations. Non-governmental organisations come as significant elements of democracy and civil society. They perform various social, political and economic functions. Non-governmental organisations are entities that are not included into the sector of public finance and do not operate for profit². In addition, they are legal persons or entities without legal personality established by the legal regulations, including foundations and associations³. Another important content characteristics of civil organisations include operational autonomy, public purpose, and public service. They only engage in income-generating activities to a limited extent. It is also important to highlight their community-building character, value creation, nurturing of values and embeddedness in society⁴.

In Poland, there are 138 000 non-government organisations registered, including 107 000 associations and 31 000 foundations, according to the data provided in REGON, as of the end of 2021. Every year new organisations are registered – only in 2021 about 5 000 new entities were entered into the register. Among registered organisations, approximately 70 000 entities operate actively. Almost 66% of the organisations estimate that their situation has worsened because of the result of the pandemic. An average non-governmental organisation brings together about 25 members. An average budget of such an organisation in 2020 was PLN 26 000 (EUR 6 000).

In Hungary, in 2021, 61 034 NGOs operated, of which 41 310 were social non-profit organisations (civil societies and associations) and 19 724 were foundations, according to data from the KSH. A slight increase can be observed in their number. Their total income is approximately HUF 2 971 306,4 million, and one organization receives HUF 48 683 000⁵.

² M. Wize, *NGO, czyli organizacja pozarządowa – równowaga pomiędzy polityką a biznesem*, <https://kruczek.pl/ngo-organizacja-pozarzadowa/>, 2020.

³ Act of 24th April 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work art. 3, item 2, Journal of Laws 2003 no. 96 item. 873; R. Skiba, *Prawne warunki działania organizacji pozarządowych*, Akademia Rozwoju Filantropii w Polsce, 2006, p. 11.

⁴ P. Kecskés, *A civil szervezetek legfontosabb jellemzői, statisztikai adatok, történelmi kitekintés*, http://www.nonprofitkutatás.hu/letoltendo/560_modszer.doc, 2021.

⁵ Central Statistical Office 2023.

At present, in the Polish social aid system and penitentiary policy, there have not been any efficient and comprehensive forms provided to support prisoners who serve their imprisonment sentence. This can be particularly observed in the context of numerous problems that prisoners have to struggle with. Such problems include death of family members (parents), family breakups, family members and friends' reluctance to maintain relationships with prisoners, poor mental condition, sense of helplessness, passiveness and a syndrome of learned helplessness. Serious problems at the moment of leaving prison also include threats of becoming homeless or unemployed and a threat of poverty⁶.

In both countries, non-governmental organisations are intended to bridge gaps in those fields by providing support to prisoners, their families and prisoners who are about to leave their penitentiary units. In the situation when state institutions do not have sufficient material and non-material resources, non-governmental structures perform the role ascribed to public institutions and they also perform activities in the fields of re-adaptation and social re-integration of prisoners.

Prisoners may also obtain support at organisations and associations that offer assistance in entering the labour market. Non-governmental organisations implement interesting projects and solutions to support convicts in this field. To solve the problem of unemployment among prisoners and ex-convicts, comprehensive actions are necessary along with cooperation among various institutions. It is also indispensable to develop various ways to approach the most difficult clients.

The levels of efficiency of activities undertaken by the government and the non-governmental institutions that provide support to prisoners and ex-prisoners are varied and conditioned by the co-existence of numerous factors, such as legal regulations, progressing bureaucracy, financial capabilities and, first of all, human factors. Providing protection to the independence of an individual, by definition, the society should be sensitive to other people, especially when they are threatened by social marginalisation or exclusion. All the activities undertaken to provide assistance in social readaptation of former prisoners, also bring social benefits. They reinforce integrity, sense of security and respect for other people. The solutions suggested in that field include launching a campaign oriented

⁶ K. Jamróży, *Praca socjalna z osadzonymi w więzieniach – realne założenie czy mglisty postulat?*, „UR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences”, 2018. 1(6), pp. 58–74.

toward the elimination of stereotypes about prisoners and preparation of an open labour market to accept former prisoners, based on the principles similar to the current ones intended for people without any criminal records which is crucial concerning the incarceration rate is increasing in Hungary⁷.

During our research in prisons, we found many examples of the re-integration of prisoners being supported by organisations outside the prison, as well as volunteers. We ourselves have participated in such activities on many occasions, including organising film clubs, development group sessions, photo exhibitions and musical and discussion programs for groups of prisoners. In all cases, we were pleased to see that the legal background is available for the implementation of individual developmental programs, so we can say that the law supports the cultural development of prisoners.

Legal background

In Poland, there are several terms applied to define organisations operating in the third sector: non-government or NGOs, social, non-profit, voluntary, civil, independent or public utility organisations. These non-government organisations come as significant elements of democracy and civil society. They perform various social, political and economic functions, they are entities that are not included by the sector of public finance and that do not operate for profit⁸.

In accordance with Art. 38 of the Executive Penal Code, associations, foundations, organisations and institutions, such as churches and other religious associations, and trustworthy people can cooperate in execution of criminal penalties, penal, protective and preventive measures, in particular those related to imprisonment. These entities may, in agreement with directors of penitentiary units or remand facilities, participate in social rehabilitation, cultural, education, sport and religious activities at penitentiary units.

⁷ Prison Insider 2023, *Overview*, <https://www.prison-insider.com/en/countryprofile/hongrie-2021?s=vue-d-ensemble#vue-d-ensemble>; K. Wierzbicki, D. Gałek, *The institution of conditional early release in the Polish and Hungarian penitentiary systems – research report*, „The Prison Systems Review”, 118, 2023, pp. 267–292.

⁸ Act of 24th April 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work art. 3, item 2, Journal of Laws 2003 no. 96 item. 873; R. Skiba, *Prawne warunki działania organizacji pozarządowych*, Akademia Rozwoju Filantropii w Polsce, 2006, p. 11.

Examining the Hungarian legal background, we must emphasize three important sources of law, which are: Act CLXXV, 2011, National Crime Prevention Strategy, Act 240 2013, and IM decree 16/2014⁹. In Hungary, the concept of non-governmental organizations is defined by Act CLXXV, 2011 which is about on the right of association, the legal status of public benefit, and the operation and support of non-governmental organizations.

Based on this, an NGO is:

- a) a civil society,
- b) an association registered in Hungary – a party, a trade union and (with the exception of a mutual insurance association)
- c) a foundation (with the exception of public foundations and party foundations)¹⁰.

The National Crime Prevention Strategy states that one of the priority tasks of the prison organisation is to establish and maintain cooperation with social and non-governmental organisations, prison missions, churches and foundations in order to achieve reintegration efforts. Prison institutes organize a wide range of programs for prisoners to promote reintegration into society, with special attention to developing intellectual and spiritual development and sensitivity to social expectations¹¹. This government decision generally contains the objectives that the Hungarian state considers to be of paramount importance to develop and maintain cooperation with social and non-governmental organisations in order to achieve reintegration efforts. In addition to the general framework document, the basic rules are contained in the Prison Code. The prison organisation carries out many activities that outweigh classical justice, including educational and cultural programs, and other activities that do not affect these two topics.

⁹ 16/2014. (XII. 19.) IM rendelet a szabadságvesztés, az elzárás, az előzetes letartóztatás és a rendbíróság helyébe lépő elzárás végrehajtásának részletes szabályairól, <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1400016>. in; O. Czenczer, *Effectiveness of social rehabilitation measures against young offenders in Hungarian prisons*, „The Prison Systems Review”, 106, 2020, pp. 35–54.

¹⁰ Act CLXXV, 2011: 2011. évi CLXXV. Törvény az egyesülési jogról, a közhasznú jogállásról, valamint a civil szervezetek működéséről és támogatásáról. §2/6, <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100175>. tv.

¹¹ Government decision 1744/2013. (X. 17.:9) (2013-2023), <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A13H1744.KOR&txtreferer=A1700001.BM>.

Examples of good practice in Poland and Hungary

In -prison reintegration programs appear in many areas. In the following, some examples and good practices from these are flashed.

In Poland, the programme named Post-penitentiary Aid is provided by non-government organisations with the use of the Justice Fund. The aim of the programme is to provide support to prisoners, former prisoners who are released from their penitentiary units and remand centres and their families. The development of a national programme of post-penitentiary aid comes as a response to the need of providing comprehensive support to prisoners, former prisoners who are released from their penitentiary units and remand centres. The need to develop such a programme has been expressed by non-government organisations and probation officers. The programme offers an aid system covering the entire territory of Poland in order to eliminate homelessness and recidivism among former prisoners. This programme is dedicated to entities not included in the sector of public finance and non-profit entities, such as foundations, organisations and institutions. Beneficiaries of the programme are prisoners, former prisoners who are released from their penitentiary units and remand centres and their families. Subsidies are granted, first of all

- to cover costs of temporary accommodation,
- to provide shelter in homeless centres,
- to provide periodic allowance for current rental obligations and payment for heating, electricity, gas, water, heating fuel for apartments the holders of which have legal titles to these premises,
- to organise and fund legal advice, promotion of employment and occupational activation,
- to organise and fund training courses that improve occupational qualifications; to cover costs of examinations that confirm occupational qualifications,
- to organise and fund programmes improving social competences in order to counteract criminal factors, especially aggression and violence, including family violence and addiction problems; to purchase materials, tools, equipment and indispensable appliances in order to implement programmes, training and courses improving occupational qualifications and to provide community service work,

- to cover costs related to specialist medical treatment, therapeutic rehabilitation and certificates of disability, degrees of disability or inability to work,
- to cover costs of special transport for the disabled in accordance with medical recommendation, costs of transport to the place of residence, education, therapy, work, especially community service work,
- to cover costs related to obtaining documents indispensable to obtain aid,
- to cover costs related to special medical tests required for the qualification to participate in programmes, training and courses improving occupational competences and community service work; to cover costs of accident insurance for people qualified for the participation in programmes, training and courses improving occupational competences and community service work,
- to promote and support initiatives and actions undertaken to provide efficient readaptation of prisoners, education and information actions,
- to organise and run training courses; to organise and commission scientific research on the situation of prisoners,
- to cover costs related to organisation and provisions of material aid in various forms, including food, food coupons, clothes, hygiene and cleaning products, urban transport tickets, medicines and medical products, educational aid, indispensable items of household equipment or other items facilitating social functioning at the place of residence or temporary residence, especially for disabled people,
- to purchase materials, tools and equipment indispensable to participate in occupational training courses, to perform learned occupation or to run business activities as a self-employed person,
- to provide funds to the purposes indicated by units or entities providing assistance.

The administrator of the Justice Fund has dedicated to implement the Programme of Post-penitentiary Aid¹².

Another example is the Skazani nie Straceni „Convicted Not Doomed” project dedicated to women serving their imprisonment sentences in semi-open penitentiary units. The project was implemented in favour of

¹² Ministry of Justice 2019. Programme of Post-penitentiary Aid 2020-2022, Warszawa 2019, pp. 2–6; Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości 2020, *Program Pomocy Postpenitencjarnej udzielanej przez organizacje pozarządowe z Funduszu Sprawiedliwości na lata 2023–2025*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/sprawiedliwosc/program-pomocy-post-penitencjarnej-udzielanej-przez-organizacje-pozarządowe-z-funduszu-sprawiedliwosci-na-lata-2023-2025>.

30 women who were serving their imprisonment sentences at the remand centres and penitentiary units in Warsaw. It was implemented in two 6-month editions. Each edition was divided into two 3-month stages. The first stage of each edition involved intensive occupational training combined with legal workshops on various aspects of returning to life in freedom. The second state of each edition involved intensive occupational practice, preparing the participants to the pursuit of a social worker career. The project was implemented in the years 2007–2008.

Each edition was divided into two stages: the first stage involved intensive training to prepare the participants to pursue the profession of elderly people's caretaker. It was divided into two thematic sections – occupational knowledge and legal workshops, including foreign language courses, to provide basic knowledge about the legal situation of people who leave penitentiary units with the information where to look for assistance. During the first stage, the participants volunteered twice a week in helping skilled staff to learn about practice of nursing techniques. The practical sessions included all activities related to proper care provided to the residents, including household work. During the second stage, the participants provided voluntary work at the Care and Nursing Centre and took care of its elderly residents. During each edition, occupational knowledge included training sessions on psychology, geriatrics, gerontology, medical rescue and nursing, rehabilitation, balanced diet dedicated to elderly people. The legal workshops included training sessions on active methods of employment searching, looking for offers, legal aspects of re-entering the labour market by former prisoners. Some of the sessions were implemented at the computer room with the assistance of a specialist to facilitate the process of making decisions in freedom for the participants, with the use of IT technologies.

The participants took part in a German course. All the activities became the tools for professional penetration of the labour market after being released from prison, also for finding employment abroad.

After the occupational and practical training, the participants obtained certificates that entitle them to pursue the profession of caretakers of the elderly at nursing centres and elderly people's own houses. The project came as a response to the need observed in the labour market. The demand for this type of nursing care is very high and the intensive training allowed the participants to find employment immediately after the end of the project. The acquired knowledge and work in the system

of volunteer service at the nursing centres provided the participants with the sense of readiness for work and restored faith in their own abilities and competences.

Most of the beneficiaries of the project found employment in their newly acquired profession. The project indicated numerous benefits that resulted from allowing the convicts to perform work and to acquire new occupational skills. There were economic benefits (in the case of paid work), psychological benefits (learning responsibility, awareness of material self-sufficiency) and social benefits (learning teamwork, preparing for the performance of social roles).

The Guardian Angel programme comes as one of the most interesting activities undertaken by the Sławek Foundation. It is aimed at the social readaptation of former prisoners who have finished serving their imprisonment sentences at penitentiary units. The programme provides assistance to prisoners serving their imprisonment sentences during their temporary release. In 2009, 56 prisoners exercised their temporary release. During the time spent in freedom, the prisoners had an opportunity to meet their relatives. Those who were alcohol addicts participated in „AA” meetings in freedom. Other activities under the discussed programme include psychological and social training sessions and Coping with Penitentiary Stress workshops.

Moreover, the above-mentioned foundation runs a Social Readaptation Centre that provides temporary accommodation and food to people released from penitentiary units and remand centres. The foundation also runs a Family Counselling and Consultation Centre, the place for the first and subsequent contact with people released to freedom, where they can decide to participate in occupational training courses, or they are directed to relevant units. The Centre remains in touch and corresponds with prisoners at penitentiary units and remand centres.

The Legal Advice Centre offers free legal advice on family cases, such as reinstating parental rights or financial issues, for example, issues related to running business activities. There is also a Civil Advice Centre which offers assistance in formal issues that are attended at various offices. The foundation also runs a Psychological Aid Centre dedicated to families whose members serve sentences at penitentiary units or remand centres to support them in a difficult situation.

The Occupational Activation Centre allows its wards to develop their occupational qualifications, providing them with the access to telephones,

the Internet and assistance in writing job application forms or obtaining employment agency services.

The Testimony of Former Convicts programme involves ex-prisoners who cooperate with the foundation and participate in meetings at penitentiary units to tell other prisoners about the stories of their lives to give hope for normal life in freedom. In the programme, individual talks of the foundation representatives with prisoners are possible through permanent telephone or correspondence contact. The support is also provided to prisoners who wish to reside at the centre run by the foundation after they finish their imprisonment punishment.

Mediation in civil, criminal and family cases is also an interesting idea. The organisation offers execution of alternative punishment decided by the Court – prisoners, under proper supervision, provide unpaid community service work in favour of the Sławek Foundation, its wards and the society.

During the implementation of the „Stacja wolność” („Freedom Station”) programme, some models of occupational activation have been successfully implemented along with assistance provided to people who have finished serving their imprisonment sentences and their families. Furthermore, the activities undertaken by the Stacja wolność (Freedom Station) Post-penitentiary Aid Fund, as well as other projects implemented by the foundation, have made it possible to implement a system of cooperation for prisoners and people living in freedom and their families in other regions of Poland (Fundacja „Sławek”-Profil, ngo.pl).

In Hungary, there are currently nearly 300 cooperation agreements in force between the penitentiary and civil services, which provide for spiritual care, charitable activities, education, training, courses, professional circles, legal advice, representation, and assistance¹³.

According to our experience, in order to prepare prisoners for release, penitentiary organisations also need supporters outside the prison¹⁴. This statement is confirmed by the fact that „the role and activities of social organisations are on a much wider scale than those of market players, and their history goes back hundreds of years¹⁵”.

¹³ Government decision 1744/2013. (X. 17.:9) (2013-2023), <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A13H1744.KOR&txtreferer=A1700001.BM>.

¹⁴ M. Kovács, Mihály, *A foglalkoztatás és a szakmaképzés jelentősége a büntetés-végrehajtás reintegrációs feladataiban*, „Börtönügyi Szemle”, 2019(3), pp. 19–33.

¹⁵ M. Somogyvári, *A társadalmi szervezetek értelmezési keretei a büntetés-végrehajtásban*, „Börtönügyi Szemle”, 2014(1), pp. 65–75.

If we only look at the experience of the last ten years, we can find numerous examples of the work of non-prison organisations and volunteers supporting reintegration. While the prison concludes a contract with the civil organisations, with voluntary helpers, cooperation agreements are usually concluded.

In a ten-year period since 2012, support for reintegration outside prison has been implemented in the following areas and with the following organisations:

- enforcement of human rights (Hungarian Helsinki Committee),
- „Fairy Tale Department” (Tévelygőkért Foundation),
- Prison Radio (Give Your Voice Association),
- meditation (organized by individual volunteers),
- film club (organised by individual volunteers),
- photo exhibition (organized by individual volunteers),
- bibliotherapy (organized by individual volunteers),
- literature therapy (conducted by volunteers),
- drama pedagogy (by Ferenc Liszt prize-winning musician Andrea Várnagy),
- pet therapy (Rex Kutyaotthon Foundation),
- drawing course (Váltó-Sáv Foundation),
- job search (Váltó-Sáv Foundation),
- Santa’s Day program (Jószolgáti Otthon Public Foundation),
- theatre (Social Reintegration Support Association),
- group sessions within a reparation program (Esélyteremtő Foundation),
- support for prisoners and their relatives (FECSKE).

In the following, we present the main characteristics of the activities of the above organisations and volunteers.

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee wanted to take part in the prison’s tasks as a civil rights defender partner (the title of the program: The enforcement of human rights). Being in direct contact with the prisoners, he regularly documented the enforcement of human rights in the institutions. The purpose of this activity was to serve the interests of both the authorities and the prisoners.

A compilation of 11 fairy tale games was realized, with which the fathers presented to their children (50 to 60 children on each occasion) as gifts (the title of the program: Fairy Tale Department). The reintegration effectiveness of Fairy Tale Department is shown by the fact that, while

according to statistical data, around 50 percent of those released from prison in Hungary return to prison within six months, only 5 of the 65 inmates (who participated in this program during the examined period) were returned to prison.

Hungarian Helsinki Committee undertook the mentoring of the Prison Radio operators through its volunteers. Psychologists, radio journalists, technicians, and legal professionals carried out this support work, and through them, about 40 prisoners were able to do developmental mental work, with which they broadcast stress-reducing and reintegration-supporting educational content to hundreds of prisoners every day. One of the positive effects of Prison Radio was that the programs had increased the number of inmates participating in work. Another result of the prison radio was that they were able to employ two inmates „full-time” during its operation, and in the first four years of the program, none of the 30 released inmates relapsed.

In the following, we mention three individual offerings made within a voluntary framework, each of which received positive feedback from both the inmates and prison professionals.

Meditation: in sessions supporting the acquisition and application of the basics of meditation, the focus is on the recognition of individual problems. The inmates who come voluntarily learn about the effects of relaxation and meditation as part of the adult learning process in the five-to-ten-part series of meditation sessions, as they try out the practical elements of this method. Based on the feedback, it can be said that the inmates generally experience a positive effect of meditation: by applying the method, they more easily achieve a feeling of calmness, which in many cases goes away with sleep, and also reduces (in some cases stops) the use of medication¹⁶.

Film club: in film club group sessions consisting of 5 to 10 films each time (including 5 to 10 times), the inmates watched works whose content conveys the values of social rules, family and other social relationships, and which also encourages them to take steps to deal with problems and conflicts. Watching movies bound by rules started a series of cultural

¹⁶ S. José, M. Philip, *The Silva Mind Control Method*, Pocket Books, New York 1977; A. K. Molnár, *Csoportos meditáció fogvatartottakkal a Balassagyarmati Fegyház és Börtönben – napló*. „Börtönügyi Szemle”, 2017(4), pp. 75–87.

programs that, in addition to watching movies, created an opportunity for group discussion of the content of the movies¹⁷.

Photo exhibitions: the presentation of the photo exhibitions, consisting of 25 pictures each, usually starts with a musical program, occasionally with a group discussion, and a ceremonial opening with a „reader meet writer” program. The aim of the program is to contribute to the cultural interest of the prisoners through the means of art, to strengthen the cognitive skills of the prisoners, and to increase the positive visual experiences of those living in prison. After the opening events, the prisoners can see the pictures and ask the artist questions in the context of the thematic exhibitions. This program was implemented in at Balassagyarmat Strict and Medium Prison, Győr-Moson-Sopron County Remand Prison, Zala County Remand Prison, Veszprém County Remand Prison, Heves County Remand Prison, Szirmabesenyő Regional Juvenile Penitentiary, Baranya County Remand Prison, Vác Strict and Medium Prison.

Bibliotherapy: it is a form of group therapy based on reading, was realized at the institute in Pécs. Bibliotherapy can be used as a processing of literary texts to develop self-awareness, creativity, empathy, communication skills, and emotional expression. The program implemented in the Budapest Penitentiary and Prison made it possible to identify with the work as an easy-to-implement method, which actually included playful group activities and tasks¹⁸.

Literature therapy: through the opening of certain channels, working with literary works helps the development of communication, the formation of fixed schemas, and thus the formation of personality, too. „The central theme of the short stories processed in the group sessions is organized around a personality trait, which can be used to shape the individual’s behavior, value system, and vision of the future¹⁹”.

Drama pedagogy: it is the acting out and processing of human life situations that contain conflict, so the drama game aims at personality formation in prison²⁰. In the meantime, the focus is not on acting, but primarily on a starting point, which provides the opportunity for argumentation through group discussion of problems.

¹⁷ A.K. Molnár, *Mentális gyakorlatok a börtönben*, „Börtönügyi Szemle”, 2015(2), pp. 69–77.

¹⁸ J. Rezsőfi, *Biblioterápia felnőtt férfi elítéltekkel*, „Börtönügyi Szemle”, 2018(2), pp. 67–88.

¹⁹ N. Gálosi, *Irodalomterápián alapuló csoportfoglalkozás a Békés Megyei Büntetés-végrehajtási Intézetben*, „Börtönügyi Szemle”, 2020(2), pp. 31–39.

²⁰ S. Szitka, S., *Új lehetőségek felkutatása a fiatalok büntetés-végrehajtásában, reszocializációjuk elősegítése érdekében*, „Börtönügyi Szemle”, 27(3), 2008, pp. 13-20.

Pet therapy: during the therapy programs, the presence and activity of the animal leads to the improvement of the physical, emotional, social and cognitive functions of the person²¹.

Drawing course: „The bv. institutes organized Right Brain Drawing sessions 183 times in 2021. With the support of the National Crime Prevention Council, a half-way housing program has been implemented since December 1, 2019, in accordance with the cooperation agreement concluded between the BvOP and the Váltó-sáv Foundation in a rented apartment for 6 people in Budapest²²”.

Job search “Organized by the Váltó-sáv Foundation, the 4-week training in the Kalocsai Penitentiary and Prison started in October 2020, which helps inmates find a job after release. The inmates participating in the Skype education were able to gain more knowledge about self-knowledge, behavior, dressing, writing a resume and other topics that they can use when looking for a job²³.

Santa’s Day program: „The inmates of the Mélykút Sub-Unit of the Pálhalma National Penitentiary were treated to a Christmas program and a self-made gift at two locations of the József Attila Public Foundation²⁴”.

Theatre play: on December 20, 2019, a musical piece of St. Adorján was held on the occasion of St. Adorján’s Millennium Memorial Year, which was presented by prisoners as a public performance at the József Attila Theatre in Budapest²⁵.

Group sessions within a reparation program: on December 31, 2019, group activities were implemented for juvenile detainees organized by the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Prison Institute. The name of the reparation program was „Cavalcade of Colors”, which included in prisoners in groups of 2×5 people²⁶

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Várkonyi, Zsolt K., *A Büntetés-végrehajtási Szervezet Évkönyve 2021*, Büntetés-végrehajtás Országos Parancsnoksága, Budapest 2022.

²³ Várkonyi Zsolt K., *A Büntetés-végrehajtási Szervezet Évkönyve 2020*, Büntetés-végrehajtás Országos Parancsnoksága, Budapest 2021.

²⁴ Várkonyi, Zsolt K., *A Büntetés-végrehajtási Szervezet Évkönyve 2019*, Büntetés-végrehajtás Országos Parancsnoksága, Budapest 2020.

²⁵ Várkonyi, Zsolt K., *A Büntetés-végrehajtási Szervezet Évkönyve 2020*, Büntetés-végrehajtás Országos Parancsnoksága, Budapest 2021.

²⁶ Várkonyi, Zsolt K., *A Büntetés-végrehajtási Szervezet Évkönyve 2019*, Büntetés-végrehajtás Országos Parancsnoksága, Budapest 2020.

Comparison: conclude and implications for practice

Comparing the reintegration work done by NGOs in Polish and Hungarian prisons, we could make some findings.

As indicated by the facts discussed in the paper, in Poland there is a sufficient number of organisations acting in favour of prisoners serving their sentences at penitentiary units and those who are released to freedom. The organisations provide these people with opportunities to return to the society after serving their sentences and to function as any other citizens do, without a necessity of facing recidivism, addictions or social exclusion. The operation of the discussed organisations is based on the principle of making these people realize that it is possible to live in a different way and criminal records do not have to imply social exclusion. The organisations follow the idea that everyone deserves a chance to change their lives and frequently, these organisations are even more convinced about this idea than prisoners themselves. It seems that in numerous cases the only enemy of such organisations is social ostracism. Undoubtedly, there are also some exceptions, however, for the majority of people who leave penitentiary units, normal life is an unattainable goal, and they are given a chance to try to obtain it only by non-government organisations²⁷.

Our conclusions concerning the research questions are the followings.

1. What characteristics can be emphasized in Poland and Hungary concerning non-governmental organisations? In Poland, there are about 138 000, while in Hungary, there are about 61 000 non-government organisations (in 2021, the population of Poland was 37,75 million, while the population of Hungary was 9,71 million people)²⁸. In both countries, non-governmental organisations that are associated with prisons, are intended to support prisoners.
2. What are the features of the legal background in both countries in the field of the third sector?

Regarding the social reintegration of prisoners, it is encouraging that both Polish and Hungarian legislation greatly supports the reintegration programs to be organized for prisoners. With the widespread use of group activities supporting prisoners, in the last 10 years, many

²⁷ P. Tymczyszyn, *Organizacje pozarządowe na rzecz polskiego więźnia*, „Kultura Enter”, 47/48, 2012.

²⁸ Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 22.1.3.1. *Terület, népesség*, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0052.html, 2021.

educational and cultural programs have taken place in prisons with the help of the third sector.

3. What are the most important positive initiatives, best practices for NGOs in prisons in the two countries? Prisoners in Poland receive extensive support in the transitional phase of their lives after release, including help with integration into the workplace, housing, and financing of health care. In addition, the organizations also represent those involved in legal and other matters during the inmates' sentence. Hungarian prisons are also characterized by post-release support for inmates and the organization of numerous programs that strengthen preparation for release. Civil organizations take part in many cultural and educational programs as detailed above.

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