

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN THE PENITENTIARY

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(Ioan Durnescu, *Asistenta sociala în penitenciar*, Polirom, Iasi, 2009)

The book under focus here – *Asistenta sociala în penitenciar* – published by Lecturer Dr. Ioan Durnescu, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, expresses a *complex, original* and relatively *unitary* approach in the *field of interdisciplinarity*, of some social processes and phenomena with an impact over a *specialty in social assistance*, namely the *penitentiary one*. The special contribution brought by this book lies in the fact that it constitutes the foundation for *penal and post-penal social assistance*, outlining *the role and the attributions of the social worker specialized* to work with people convicted to prison or people freed from the penitentiary environment.

From this point of view, the work reflects the transformations regarding the modernization of the administration system of penal justice in our country, as prompted by the evolution of the delinquency phenomenon within the context of the global social progress. This results in more feedback from the community at the level of political, legislative and anti-crime practice, which influences, as the author shows, the penal justice on the whole, the *development of probation* and *the reform of the Romanian penitentiary system*, respectively.

Hence, the author took upon himself the difficult undertaking of investigating a *socio-juridical field* set at the border between deviance sociology, criminology, criminal law, criminal procedure and executional criminal law correlated with *the field of social assistance*, within the context of the transformations in the penal justice at international and European level. It is not by accident that the book begins by drawing up an “occupational profile” of the social worker as a result of the manner in which he situates himself, in comparison with the psychologist or the teacher, in relation to the European recommendations and standards.

Thus, the author makes an ample argumentation of the idea that the *new law regarding the execution of sentences and measures ordered by the judicial bodies during the criminal case* constitutes a “synthesis” of the *European Rules regarding Penitentiaries*, insisting upon the “visible progress” in comparison with the old law. *The aim of the deprivation of liberty sentences* is therefore studied with regard to *assisting the sentenced people* in their social reintegration and the

prevention of new crimes. The author shows that there result therefrom a series of “principles or mechanisms” implicit to the social reinsertion process, such as the “normalizing” of the intervention or that of “progressive” or “regressive imprisonment”.

The author dedicates the second part of the book to the theoretical aspects regarding the „etiology of the delinquent behavior”, as well as the *models of psycho-social intervention*, in a unitary and practical approach meant to enhance “the positive effects of imprisonment” and to decrease the negative ones. The third part of the book represents the natural follow-up of this approach, dedicated to *the penal and post-penal psychosocial intervention* studied with regard to the process of “planning the execution of the sentence” which is ultimately meant to “individualize the conditions for executing the imprisonment sentence”. At the same time, by approaching some special categories of beneficiaries of the penitentiary assistential services – “the prisoners with mental deficiencies”, “women-prisoners”, “minors in detention” and “foreign prisoners”, as well as “prisoners sentenced for sexual assaults” – the author opens up the perspective of *specializing the penitentiary social assistance* according to the area of issues or the category of beneficiaries it addresses.

To this end, the theoretical intervention models, as well as the practical models proposed as a result of the research, provide the solutions for some socio-juridical problems, these *solutions* taking the form of *research-action projects* or *intervention proper* which can represent *strategies and directions for social action*. For example, the author insists upon some aspects solved unsatisfactorily or even unsolved from the point of view of the purpose of the “social inclusion” of prisoners according to the new legislative framework that limits the individualization of sentence execution according to imprisonment regime – such as the permission to leave the penitentiary or penitentiary vacation – or which is deficient in what regards the “socio-juridical assistance” of the persons released on probation.

The importance of this book results, primarily, from the fact that it brings arguments to prove *the need for a unitary and specific character of social assistance in the penitentiary environment*, contributing to the *scientific demonstration of the solutions* regarding the *efficient intervention* upon the *penitentiary population*. Thus, *the emphasized theoretic-applicative solutions* aim at *the specialized psychosocial intervention*, focused not only on the positive articulation between *criminological theory*, *penal policies* and *anti-crime practice* in this complex field, but also at the *idea of the continuity between penal and post-penal assistance*. Last but not least, the scientific value of this work consists in the *particular methodological contribution* within which the proposed solutions are technically included.

In conclusion, I believe that the book „Asistentă socială în penitenciar” is more than a “theory and practice manual”; it is also an important *theoretic and*

practical guide for drawing up *strategies and directions for action* circumscribed by the *penal policies* and a real *working instrument* for researches, teachers, students and practitioners helping not only the specialists in this field, but also all the social actors involved in the *social inclusion of the vulnerable populations*, under the conditions of achieving and maintaining the *public security*.

Consequently, the book re-opens the perspective of criminological and victimological research regarding the reorientation of anti-crime practice towards the mixed model of social reaction against crime, which combines “prevention” with “treatment”, the equilibrium point being the “flexible, contextual component” of the *social assistance in the penitentiary*. The book therefore represents an excellent argument for the idea that the prison, surpassing its condition of total institution assuming its “re-educational” responsibility, delineates *prison trajectories* profoundly anchored in the life of the community, and *the penitentiary institution* becomes an *active partner* in the *community programmes of social inclusion*.