

The Contribution of Libraries to Education and Social Rehabilitation of Prisoners

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Abstract

"Equal opportunities" presuppose the provision of the same opportunities regardless of the social group, gender or class to which one belongs. The protection and enforcement of this right constitutes one of the most basic principles. Today there is still inequality, among other things, in the provision of education. The creation of libraries in prisons is based on the right of prisoners to be educate, to experience, albeit incarcerated, a dignified life and to be treated with dignity during their imprisonment. Reading therefore, not only has an entertaining role, but a deeply educational and social one.

"Equal opportunities" presuppose the provision of the same opportunities regardless of the social group, gender or class to which one belongs. The right to education is fundamental and guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) and can be enjoyed by all citizens, including those incarcerated in prisons (Krolak, 2019). All people should enjoy the right to be educated regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, their abilities and characteristics. The protection and enforcement of this right constitutes one of the most basic principles of the 2030 Education Action Plan and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). 4. This obliges Member States to "ensure open and equal quality education. and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"(Krolak, 2019).

Today there is still inequality, among other things, in the provision of education, on the one hand because not everyone has access to education and on the other hand, because neither the content nor the quality of education is common to all (eg minorities, people belonging to low socio-economic strata, people living in rural communities, children in insecure conditions, people in need of special education, people unable to attend high-level universities). Many people around the world encounter obstacles to equal access to education, which prevents them from enjoying various goods in addition to the education itself (Lazanby, 2016). According to Unesco, 758 million people, both children, adults, and the elderly remain illiterate. Of these, older people, who have difficulty escaping illiteracy, are the most problematic group. People are unequal to each other because they have different genetic characteristics, different abilities and different cultural stimuli. In particular, in the case of cultural deprivation or inadequacy initially associated with the social class to which the students belonged (eg children of the working class) while today it is more closely linked to family culture (eg ethnic / ethnic minorities), it is considered to be an impediment to school performance and students' academic success.

Education can act as a kind of equalizer, helping marginalized and sensitive social groups (people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, minorities, children with disabilities, the elderly, incarcerated, etc.) to overcome disadvantages and fully participate in society, as long as they have access to it (Bender, 2018; Krolak, 2019). People must enjoy the right to acquire knowledge and skills, to cultivate their skills, inclinations and talents, to succeed in the labor market and to progress. Most importantly, however, they should maintain a high level of health and prosper. All of the above is only possible through education. All relevant research confirms that the level of education is proportional to the level of health and well-being of individuals. In short, the higher a person's level of education is, the higher his or her health and financial level will be. Nevertheless, education does not only benefit individuals but societies as well. When a society is made up of productive and educated citizens, it is proven to be more benefited, both economically and productively as well as in the quality of its democracy (Lazanby, 2016). The education system can and should function as a remedy for those with disadvantages both inside and outside of education.

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In cases of children with different cultural backgrounds and children belonging to non-privileged groups of the population, the programs of remedial teaching in schools or integration classes that aim to deal with failure (failed adjustment) or difficulties in adapting can act effectively. As a solution to the inequalities that arise in the context of multiculturalism and with the aim of providing equal opportunities for all, the adaptation of school curricula is promoted, in order to be in accordance with the "multicultural and gender-fair" principles. In short, multiculturalism topics are introduced in curricula, so that they are representative of the different cultures of the students. (eg teaching morals and customs of foreign countries, using books by minority writers) (Rosenfelt, 1994; Levine and Cureton, 1992).

As far as the elderly are concerned, strategies have been developed in recent years to address barriers to learning related to age and the prejudices surrounding it. The programs provide the opportunity for the elderly to participate in educational processes aimed at their personal development and expression. One of these programs implemented in order to raise awareness, engage and encourage older people is MATURE. (Mature, 2013). For inmates in adult penitentiaries - estimated at 11 million worldwide - education can serve as a means of redefining and rehabilitation, which is why it is internationally referred to as Correctional educational. According to research in recent decades, educated imprisoned adult are less likely to relapse when they are released, thus making them safer for society. (Erisman and Contardo, 2015). Given that 95 out of 100 prisoners are reintegrated into society and that 7 in 10 will resort to new offenses, or even crimes, it is of paramount importance to develop means in order to reduce their chances of recurrence, which will consequently ensure a reduction in crime rates (Gorgol and Sponsler, 2011). These tools can be provided by education, and can take the form of:

- educational programs in prison (vocational training, apprenticeship or specialization programs)
- schools operating inside or outside the prison
- distance education (eg Open University in England, Open University in Greece)
- attending colleges and universities (eg Pilot Second Chance Pell in the United States)
(Gorgol and Sponsler, 2011).

According to article 35 of the Greek Penitentiary Code (Law 2776/1999), the training of prisoners is provided with the aim of "obtaining or completing training at all levels, as well as in their professional training". In Greek prisons, there are, where possible, primary schools, while in secondary schools or universities, inmates receive special educational permits to attend classes. At the same time, within prisons in cooperation with competent bodies, professional education, apprenticeship or specialization programs are organized in cooperation with competent bodies. It is worth emphasizing that, as provided by Greek law, "the qualifications provided are equivalent to those of the schools of the same level of education, without their text implying that they were acquired in a detention center.", as well as that "in case of successful completion of a complete cycle of studies of at least three months, the prisoner is entitled to receive a beneficial calculation of days of punishment, under the conditions of article 46" (Law 2776/1999). Education of adult prisoners has multiple positive effects, as it leads to their personal empowerment and self-improvement. This becomes possible as it changes the way inmates "see" themselves and face their future. Education boosts their self-confidence and maturity and motivates them to set goals, which in turn boosts their self-confidence and hope for the future. It pushes them to think optimistically and to fight, to grow and succeed in all areas (Thompson, 2019) Participation in prison education programs is a creative and constructive activity in the free time of inmates that improves the process of their stay in prisons, reducing the boredom and stress caused by their incarceration. This has positive effects on their coexistence with other detainees and with prison staff (improving their sociability).

In addition to psychology, education also promotes the quality of their later life, as it increases the likelihood of finding work after their release from prison. Research in the United Kingdom and the United States shows that inmates who participate in educational programs during their incarceration are 43% less likely to return to prison and more likely to find work. In short, they are given a new opportunity in life (Thompson, 2019). Research in the United States shows that those who are involved in educational programs have a 46% lower rate of recurrence than those who do not attend such programs, which, among other things, enhances public safety. This confirms the close link between education and public safety and that recurrence is exacerbated by the low level of education (Gorgol and Sponsler, 2011; Bender, 2018). Prison education aims to give inmates new skills, such as learning to read and write, if they are illiterate, using computers, and doing basic math. In England, for example, the programs offered are individualized, in the sense that they meet the needs of each prisoner who participates in them in the form of courses and training (Gorgol and Sponsler, 2011; Bender, 2018). Education can break the cycle of poverty and lift social exclusion, both of which are situations that are blamed for increasing crime.

When inmates are trained, they can secure a job, which will help them not only not to relapse, but also ensure a better future for their children (Bender, 2018). According to Article 62 of the Resolution of the European Parliament of 5 October 2017 on penitentiary systems and conditions of detention in prisons (2015/2062 (INI), it is necessary to "provide access to detainees in education and to allow them to obtain professional qualifications". In fact, Member States are required to "provide all detainees with substantial activities, such as training or job opportunities in accordance with international standards, with the aim of socially rehabilitating detainees and providing them with a life without criminal activity after the end of their sentence. Furthermore, Member States are encouraged to ensure that detainees work, study or participate in training programs to earn professional qualifications during their detention in order to manage their time better and prepare for their reintegration into society. "According to the Council of Europe R (89) 12 suggestion, all inmates must have the same access to school and university education, vocational training, creative activities, social education, physical education and sports, and the ability to access a library (Conseil de l'Europe, 1990). The creation of libraries in prisons is based on the right of prisoners to be educate, to experience, albeit incarcerated, a dignified life and to be treated with dignity during their imprisonment, which, however, is not recognized by everybody, both on a public and a private level. The reasoning for such an organization and operation of prisons stems from the fact that incarceration is seen as an attempt to correct the delinquent behavior of prisoners as well as a kind of preparation for their reintegration into society and not a kind of punishment (Lehmann, 2003). The first reference to the supply of books to European and American prisoners was made in the seventeenth century in the case of clergymen who provided prisoners with religious books in the hope of moral improvement of the latter.

The first organized prison library became a practice in the mid-19th century in the United States, followed by other countries, such as Germany. In those libraries, prisoners did not have access to every book title, as novels and books with stories that contained crimes were excluded. During the two world wars, the operation of libraries in prisons weakened, but since the middle of the 20th century, reading in prisons was promoted (Krolak, 2019). According to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, libraries operating in prisons make a significant contribution to the personal development and education of adult inmates and help them to reintegrate into society. As it is pointed out, the majority of prisoners belong to classes with a low socio-economic surface, do not have a high level of education, and often have a low literacy ability. Offering inmates in prisons access to books on a variety of topics ,in different languages, enables them to develop their personalities and enhances their chances of successful reintegration into society (Unesco, 2019). The operation of libraries in prisons is part of the education that can be offered to prisoners and makes lifelong learning a reality. It allows the development of literacy skills and the cultivation of a love of reading. It also gives prisoners' communities a place to meet and interact by unfolding their interests (Krolak, 2019). Prisoners' contact with books and the ability to read can be a valuable ally in their endless hours of confinement. It is a constructive activity that provides inmates with a form of escapism, reducing the stress caused by confinement and its difficult conditions, while at the same time it offers them knowledge and experiences. These knowledge and experiences can help them mature, reconsider some aspects of their lives that have led them to delinquent behaviors in the past and may protect them from relapse. Reading therefore, not only has an entertaining role, but a deeply educational and social one. (Lehmann, 2003; Krolak, 2019). Books act as means of communication, since they initiate a dialogue between the author and the reader and connect prisoners with the outside world, reducing the feeling of isolation. Limiting the feeling of isolation fills prisoners with hope, expands their horizons and perspectives, and helps them focus on something creative that constitutes a kind of mental escape.

Reading books helps detainees feel interesting and accepted, which serves as an incentive to build healthy relationships inside and outside the prison (Philip, 2011). Organized libraries in Britain, the United States, and Canada have been operating for many years and in some cases they are similar to those outside prisons. Especially in the United States, Great Britain and the Nordic countries, libraries in most prisons are very well organized and can serve as a model for other countries (Lehmann, 2003). In Norway, prison libraries belong to the national library network and operate as branches of local public libraries. They are funded by the Norwegian government through agreements between the National Library of Norway and the local municipalities (Krolak, 2019). The same is true in the Netherlands, where the state finances the libraries within penitentiaries, while the former have contact not only with public libraries but also with the National Library. In Bremen, Germany, the prison library set a record for book lending, surpassing all of the city's public libraries, with about 1,200 inmates borrowing 25,000 books each year (Bleyl, 2016). In England alone, prison libraries provide quality services similar to those of public libraries (Lehmann, 2011). In other countries, such as Colombia, prison libraries rely on sponsorships, while in others, such as Bulgaria, there are individual initiatives for prison libraries to cooperate with their public counterparts.

For example, of the 13 Bulgarian prisons involved in the survey, only two had contact with the local public library, while libraries in Croatian prisons have no contact with public libraries (Krolak, 2019). In Greece, although there has been a provision in the legislation, libraries do not function, as they should. Whichever prison libraries operate, do not renew their titles and do not take into account the interests of the prisoners. They usually operate with donations and do not provide detainees with access to digital sources of information, both due to the lack of computers and because internal prison regulations prohibit it. The first library created and operated with the assistance of a state subsidy inside a penitentiary in Greece, was the library of the Youth Detention Center of Kassaveteia, Volos. With the help of a teacher, the library gave prisoners the opportunity to participate in training and entertainment programs. In countries where there are no libraries in prisons, such as Nicaragua, non-profit organizations have operated mobile libraries that travel. A typical example is the Bibliobus Bertolt Brecht, which began with donations raised by the German Elizabeth Zilz, who, with the support of artists, writers and audiences, bought a bus in the former German People's Republic, and turned it into a mobile traveling library with the help of engineers. A similar case is that of the mobile library of Ljubljana in Slovenia, which is an independent unit of the city library, offering books to inmates who visit it accompanied by guards (Unesco, 2012). The words of an inmate is indicative of the great importance of the operation and organization of libraries in prisons: "Thank you for being there for all of us and filling our minds with love and beauty. It's a wild journey between learning and knowledge "(Witteveen, 2017). The education system can and should function as a remedy for those with disadvantages both inside and outside of education. In many prisons around the world, prison conditions are painful: overcrowding, high recurrence rates, violence and poor conditions are some of the problems inmates are facing, with prisons turning from correctional institutions into crime schools. Therefore, the operation of libraries in prisons, although in many cases seem utopian, needs to be put at the center of everyone's efforts.

The aim, of course, is to upgrade prison conditions in order to protect the rights of detainees and ensure their smooth social reintegration after their release. Both educational programs, cultural and sports activities, as well as libraries, will contribute to this upgrade. Research data, especially abroad, confirms the crucial role of education in the successful reintegration and rehabilitation of prisoners in society. Those who participated in educational programs inside or outside prisons were 43% less likely to return to prison after their release. In most prisons in Greece, the libraries that operate do not provide educational programs to prisoners, which reveals that they do not function as means of education, while another problem is their understaffing of professional librarians. Prison libraries need to be staffed and book titles need to be regularly enriched so that they meet the needs of inmates (language, subject matter, etc.) in order to increase the number of visitors borrowing books. Prison libraries are important places of information, knowledge and entertainment in which inmates can read books, participate in organized cultural activities and communicate with each other. Prison spaces where libraries operate need to be upgraded and increase so that inmates feel they can escape prison conditions, connecting reading with positive emotions. Emphasis must also be placed on accessing the Internet for inmates in the library space. Furthermore more quality space should be provided for the libraries' operation since limited space is a problem noted in many prison libraries around the world. Instead of an epilogue, I will borrow a quote from a prisoner in Argentina who uses the library during his incarceration and which captures the magnitude of the importance of library operation in prisons: "The question here is not Who am I? The question is: Who can I become?"

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