

Paweł Czarnecki

ISM Slovakia

## ***Social pedagogy. Basic definitions***

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Social pedagogy constitutes a part of general pedagogy, so, in order to understand what this particular branch of pedagogy is, one ought first of all to clarify the meaning of the notion “pedagogy”. The concept has two basic meanings: “theoretical” one and “practical” one. In the “theoretical” sense, it means the theory of upbringing and thus the science of education, whose purpose is understanding the process of upbringing as well as the factors which influence that process. In the “practical” sense, what we understand by “pedagogy” is to sum total of all the educative activities employed for the purpose of steering the process of education in the desired direction. Speaking about pedagogical activities, we do not, of course, deal with activities from the field of education theory, as that would be contradiction in terms, but with the body of practical skills employed in everyday work by practical pedagogues. This distinction implies that also among professionals in the field of social pedagogy one can make a division into theoreticians, that is scientists specializing in research in the area of education science, and practitioners. Into the second group, apart from the pedagogues employed in various educational institutions one can count also teachers, as it is the teachers who via schools have important influ-

ence on the functioning of children and youths in social environment. Basic information about the subject, goals, function and methods of social pedagogy can be found in the following works [Radlińska, 1961]; [Kamiński, 1982]; [Pilch, Lepalczyk, 1995]; [Śliwerski 2006].

It is worth noticing that sometimes one can encounter a definition of pedagogy describing this discipline as a practical science (This how pedagogy was defined among others by H. Radlińska). According to this approach, this field differs from other sciences as well as from other pedagogical disciplines exactly in its praxeological factor, oriented not only onto knowing the particular aspects of social reality but also onto their conscious and purposeful shaping. This formulation does not mean that pedagogy as science does not pose as its main goal the understanding of the process of upbringing, it points, however, to the fact that education is a practical activity, and the knowledge of upbringing constitutes the basis of exactly this activity. Pedagogy is not exceptional in this respect, as this "practical" dimension of this kind is present in all the sciences which deal with human actions (e.g. economy).

Social pedagogy as scientific discipline is by no means a homogeneous field. Just like in every science, so in this area, there is a meeting point of different ideas concerning particular issues, as well as the essence of social pedagogy itself, its subject, its methods and goals. This pluralism without doubt makes it harder to employ the concepts worked out by theoreticians on practical ground, and the practitioner, willing to put to practice new pedagogical theories, must choose from many ideas and approaches, of which each one has both its supporters and opponents [Frąckowia, 1996].

One should also remember that in social pedagogy as a science, there is continuous progress, springing on one side from the development of this very science and affiliated sciences (that is, from the emergence of new theories and research results), and on the other from changes occurring in society itself, which also have to be taken into account by pedagogy [Cichosz, 2006]; [Pilch, Lepalczyk, 1995].

There is also another, higher understanding of social pedagogy, according to which this field is identical with the theory of social work. This definition seems inasmuch justified, as social work can be treated as the sum total of activities aiming at the change of the way of functioning of individuals or groups in a specific social environment, and thus *de facto* as a kind of educational activities. Also in this meaning, we preserve the distinction between social pedagogy as theory and as practice. On the other hand, social pedagogy in a broader sense also aims at the change of social functioning of individuals and groups, although it takes into consideration all kinds of problems connected with the functioning in society, not just social problems. Social work theory can thus be treated as one of elements of social pedagogy in general sense. Into thus understood social pedagogy one should also count these fields of pedagogy which deal with specific kinds of problems in social functioning, so, e.g. resocialisation pedagogy, or family pedagogy [Murynowicz-Hętko, 1998].

The subject of social pedagogy as science is social environment and the mechanisms by which it affects the development of an individual. Thus, not every aspect of the functioning of a social group is an object of interest for a social pedagogue, but only those aspects which influence the process of education. In view of the fact that the age group that is most sensitive to educational actions are children and youths, social pedagogy devotes a lot of attention to those very groups, being interested first of all in the functioning of children and youths in out-of-the-school environment. Social pedagogy treats this environment as one of the basic educational factors, at the same time taking the assumption that it is possible to steer the stimuli coming from this environment in a rational, planned way. Educational success or failure it finds dependent on the influence of this environment, that is why its purpose remains to be the levelling down of negative impact, preventing the emergence of educational difficulties caused by negative environmental influences and strengthening positive stimuli coming from the environment. According to the classical definition of

R. Wroczyński, „social pedagogy, basing on empirical research, that is on empiria, analyses educational influences whose source is the environment and establishes the principles of environment organisation from the point of view of the needs of upbringing” [Wroczyński, 1966: 46].

The fact that social pedagogy puts so much weight on the education of children and youth does not mean that it does not take into account the possibility of influencing adults as well. Quite the contrary, pedagogy tries to approach the process of education and the possibilities of influencing that process in the perspective of a man’s entire life. This perspective is especially important in those activities of social pedagogy (e.g. the theory of social work) whose subject of interest is the possibility of care and support to the people who are unable to function in society in a proper way. This in turn makes one of the tasks of social pedagogy to be the analysis of changes occurring in different spheres of social life, for without the knowledge about the real causes of difficulties in social functioning it is impossible to bring efficient help. About relationships of social pedagogy and the current state of society [Rodziewicz-Winnicki, 2008].

The first step in research on social environment is thus to isolate within this environment particular factors affecting the educational process and typical situations which are important from the point of view of education. What we mean here are mainly typical factors, because individual situations are not, to such an extent as repetitive ones, liable to control. One should emphasise, however, that some events of individual nature can also have large impact on the development of an individual, especially those which are negative (death of a close relative, parents’ divorce, participation in some disaster etc.). The task of social pedagogy is thus also to study the possibilities of compensation of this type of events and to employ the achieved results in practice.

Because the knowledge in the area of social pedagogy is supposed to serve practical purposes, and such goals can be realised in a systematic way only on institutional basis, it necessitates the existence of educational

institutions working on the basis of pedagogical knowledge. Apart from schools, there are all kinds of care institutions, like children's homes, foster families, care emergencies and correction houses, day care rooms, playgrounds, as well as health care institutions. One ought to emphasise that those institutions do not aim at replacing the educational functions of social environment (family, peer group), besides, they would not be able to compensate for those functions in a sufficient degree. Their task is to support the wards in their development and to assist them in the case of educational difficulties. It does not mean, however, that pedagogy can cope with every possible educational difficulty and solve every problem. About the limits of the possibilities of social pedagogy, [Pilch, 2003]; [Surzykiewicz, 2003].

As it has been mentioned here, social pedagogy is one of the disciplines belonging to the realm of general pedagogy. Whence, then, the need to bring it forth as a separate sub-discipline and how does it differ from other pedagogical subdisciplines? One of the causes is doubtlessly the praxeological character of social pedagogy. This field concentrates on problems in social functioning, and theoretical knowledge is treated as a tool, which allows to efficiently solve those problems.

Such an approach suggests, however, that the remaining branches of pedagogy do not aim at practical goals or that those goals play a secondary role. However, this is not the case, and such areas of pedagogy as foster (care) pedagogy [Dąbrowski, 2006], work pedagogy, resocialisation pedagogy [Czapów, Jedlewski, 1971]; [Pytka, 2001], special pedagogy [Dykcik, 2001] etc. also treat active modelling of education process as their superior goal. It appears therefore that within the frames of pedagogy one can separate two kinds of theoretical research: general pedagogy, whose subject is the process of upbringing as such, and detailed pedagogy, dealing with particular aspects of the process of upbringing or with specific kinds of educational difficulties.

Social pedagogy belongs to the realm of particular pedagogy, its subject is social environment and its influence on the process of upbringing. One can also classify those fields further, with more detail, depending on the degree of detailedness of a particular subject of pedagogy. One can for example differentiate military pedagogy [Szczerba, 1996], touristic pedagogy [Matuszyk, 2008]; [Turos, 1999: 95] and even museum pedagogy.

Social pedagogy, just like other domains of pedagogy, is not a self-standing discipline in the sense that to a large extent it bases on the results of other sciences, first of all of psychology and sociology, as well as other social and humanist, or even biological sciences. It means also that the research conducted within the frames of social pedagogy often requires cooperation of specialists in different disciplines. Not all the fields of psychology or sociology have the same kind of importance to social pedagogy. For example, psychoanalysis seems to bring very little into the modern pedagogical discussion, whereas social psychology yields observations and generalisations which are directly applicable in the process of education. It is so because social psychology also deals with the study of individuals' behaviour in social contacts, however it undertakes exclusively theoretical tasks, without attempting to work on methods of changing those behaviours in the desired direction [Aronson, 1997: 23]. Various discoveries and theories of social psychology do find practical application, yet in this respect this discipline does not differ from all the other fields of science, which also, as opposed to pedagogy, do not regard the methods of influencing individual behaviour as the subject of their interest. Among the problems dealt with by social psychology there are, e. g. the question of images, expectations and emotions emerging in social contacts, the question of the behaviour of the individual surrounded by other individuals (aggression, conformism, trust etc.), the question of the behaviour of bigger social groups, the influence of mass media on social behaviour, the emergence and role of stereotypes etc.

Besides, social pedagogy bases on specific assumptions as to the social nature of man, which it is not able to justify by the use of empirical methods. These assumptions belong to the sphere of philosophy, in which they are subject to endless contention, and thus it is possible to classify pedagogical ideas depending on the philosophical assumptions which lie at the bases of the given ideas and concepts. It is also worth noticing that certain issues concerning social life are regarded by pedagogy (as well as other social sciences) from different perspectives: whereas the sciences are trying first of all to study the actual state of society, to define the objectively existing, unsatisfied needs and to seek the possibilities of satisfying them, philosophy asks mainly what society should be like, what kinds of social relationship lie within human "nature", where one should delineate a border between the interests of individuals and the interests of the community etc.

The need to distinguish social pedagogy as a separate subdiscipline within general pedagogy springs from the fact that social environment affects man in different ways and conditions his development in a different way than immediate impact of the pedagogue onto his ward. Willing thus to understand the mechanisms by which social environment affects man's development, one ought to use different research methods than those applied in general pedagogy.

The purpose of social pedagogy as practice is to shape the individual in such a way that he or she is able to live in the society, and thus to establish correct social bonds and to satisfy his or her needs without getting into conflict with the values accepted by this society. In order to reach that goal, in the process of education the individual should appropriate a given set of moral values and principles, of accepted ways of conduct, should learn efficient group communication, acquire a particular *Weltanschauung*, acquire the goal-achieving skills etc. In relation to the above, there springs the question about the subject, which could decide which ethical and life standard values should become the goal of education, which kind of

a Weltanschauung is possibly accepted in the process of upbringing, and which should be considered harmful etc. Even the most open and tolerant society is not able to accept the existence of educational institutions which would inculcate children with e.g. nazist views, teach them hate, cruelty or the like. That means that social pedagogy cannot be indifferent to the goals of education and although it is not the only discipline entitled to define those goals, yet it must not remain neutral to the problems of values and principles inculcated during the education process.

Social pedagogy as science employs the very same methods (research methods and methods of diagnosis in social pedagogy shall be discussed in detail in one of the following chapters) which are employed also by other areas of pedagogy as well as social sciences, and thus: poll study, participating observation, interview and document study. One sometimes comes across charges at pedagogy, accusing it of having no uniform, universally accepted research methodology, and the same terms in different publications appear often in different senses. This objection seems right with the assumption that a lack of a strictly formulated methodology decides of the weakness of a given discipline, however such a thesis evokes many doubts. One should also notice that also other social sciences do not have a uniform methodology, which is far from proving their results worthless.

One of the methods used in social pedagogy is the monography method. According to A. Kamiński's definition, this method consists in describing the educational institution, where by an educational institution we mean an institution endowed with formal structure. Among the methods that are often used in social pedagogy there are also: psychological experiment, the method of individual cases, text analysis etc. Some authors differentiate between research methods from research techniques, and there is no consent about what is a method and what is a technique. Usually, into the techniques one counts: poll research, interview, observation, projection techniques etc. [Wroczyński, Pilch, 1974]; [Łobocki, 2006].



Also social pedagogy as practice uses methods of work which are characteristic for this very field. Its purpose is solving a specific kind of problems, so, one should rather speak about pedagogical diagnostics than about a research method. Also in this case, this differentiation has conventional character, because in practice pedagogues employ usually the same methods which are also used in theoretical research, thus: interview, poll, etc. [Lepalczyk, Badura, 1987]; [Jarosz, Wysocka, 2006.]

Social pedagogy does not actually have a conceptual apparatus which would be separate from general pedagogy, besides, some basic terms which it employs are also present in the language of other social sciences. It is so exactly because pedagogy bases on what those sciences have established as concerns matters as basic as the psycho-physical development of the individual, the emergence of social bonds, emotional reactions etc. Those issues are not the subject of pedagogical research (even less – of social pedagogy research), and, basing on the concepts of such disciplines as psychology and sociology, pedagogy appropriates also the conceptual apparatus of those sciences, perhaps adapting it to its own needs.

The basic notion in social pedagogy (just as in every other branch of pedagogy) is the notion of **education**, by which one should understand conscious and purposeful educational impact of the person who educates on the person who is being educated. „Most often – R. Wroczyński writes – in the literature on the subject, education is understood as a process aiming at achieving particular effects or as the effect of those actions and efforts” [Wroczyński, 1966: 75]. However in colloquial language one can encounter the term “education” as denoting all the possible social influences affecting the development of an individual, such a definition of education appears too broad. Only such impact on the development of an individual can be thus called education, which is accompanied by the consciousness of possible effects which using definite educational methods has on the development of the educated individual.

The notion of education entails two other basic notions: of **the educated**, that is the individual who is supposed to be shaped in a certain way, and **educator**, who himself has already reached a definite stage of development, and whose goal is in such a way to direct the development of the educated person, so that also he or she is able to achieve that stage. The educator, that is the subject who knows in what direction the development of the individual should go, and the person undergoing the process of education, who is not able to direct his or her own development, are bound together by a special kind of relationship, known as the relationship of education.

There is an important ethical issue connected with the notion of education as a purposed influencing the development of an individual, as one should answer the question of the moral right of the educator to impose his own goals, his own system of values, opinions and views. That's why education should not be treated as a kind of violence done by the family or educational institutions to the person in their care, but at the most as a certain proposition or a set of chances, from which the person may take advantage but then they may not. As it is observed among others by A. Tchorzewski: „education is the educators' continuous proposition to the educated one, who can either accept or reject the proposition, which is at the same time a token of acceptance of the subject's right to freedom, autonomy, respect” [Danilewicz, Izdebska, Krzesińska- Żach, 1995: 14].

Another important notion is the concept of „**social environment**” (problems connected with the differentiation of social environments shall be discussed closer in one of the following chapters.). In the literature on the subject one can find many definitions of social environment as well as a number of terms of similar meaning, such as local environment or local society. Such terms have no strictly established meaning, yet generally speaking they refer to the nearest social environment of the individual. One should understand by them the social group or groups to which the individual belongs, together with the relations between the group's mem-

bers. Different authors put more or less emphasis on the cohesion of so understood social environment, its relative isolation from the external environment, the cultural norms and values which are valid in this environment, the degree of inner variety (economical, cultural, religious) etc. There are different heterogeneous groups, to which man belongs during his life, such as family or peer group, from which he can, voluntarily or involuntarily, be excluded.

However, resigning from his belonging to specific social groups, one does not resign from his belonging to social environment, within which he or she exists.

In social pedagogy there are many, more or less detailed, classifications of social environments. These classifications are based on criteria such as: the age of the group members (children, youth etc.), place of the group's functioning (city, village), the degree of internal organisation (groups created on purpose, groups which came into being by themselves), the kind of occupation (physical workers, intellectuals) etc.. Some of these criteria can be applied at the same time to one and the same group (eg. education centre for children in a village).

Generally speaking, the most typical social environments in Poland is city and village. One can therefore ask which of these environments is more beneficial to man's development, and which does not foster this development or even hampers it. The answer depends, of course, on what elements of human life we consider important. Both countryside environment as city environment are characterised by particular features which, depending on the assumed criteria of evaluation, we can consider beneficial or harmful to individual development. Urban environment is characterised by an abundance of institutions and groups in one can participate, richness of possibilities of career development and social promotion, greater openness and tolerance towards otherness, lack of rigorous control, yet at the same time social bonds tend to be superficial, practically oriented and anonymous, through which the sense of belonging to a given

place grows weaker, the role of authorities (in the sense of people having more experience and wisdom) decreases, the impact of family on individual life lessens, also neighbourhood ties disappear, being replaced by bonds established in the place of work. The village environment in turn is a small group, relatively closed down and isolated from external surroundings, of relatively little diversity. In spite of unquestionable influence of mass media on the consciousness of the inhabitants of countryside, in village environments there is a still greater role of traditional authorities, there is less tolerance towards otherness, social bonds still remain strong, an important role in the functioning of environments is played by various kinds of conflicts, and local educational and care institutions play a far more important role than in the city.

Those differences do not imply the necessity for social pedagogy to employ different research methods or use different methods of diagnosis in the cases of both those environments. Besides, the features of those environments favour the emergence of specific kinds of problems, which should be taken into consideration when planning educational institutions active in the city and in the village (On the problems typical for different kinds of social environments [Grzędzińska, Majdzińska, Sulowska-Bramasole, 2010]).

A particularly important notion in social pedagogy is the notion of the **family**. The family constitutes man's closest environment, and thus it plays a decisive role in the education process. It is family that introduces the child into the world of social bonds, that teaches him or her to establish close contacts, gives him the basic information about social world, last but not least, constitutes a kind of a link between the child and the adult world. No educational institution is able to replace the educational function of the family, and social pedagogy can at the most seek methods of partial compensation of educational lacks springing from faulty functioning of the family [Łapińska, 1996: 139].

Another important term is the notion of **socialization** [Łobocki, 2008: 41]. It means the process of establishing social bonds, appropriation of social patterns of communication, values and norms. This process happens partly in an unconscious way, through internalization (that is accepting particular values, norms, attitudes and beliefs as one's own), and partly consciously, through learning. The stimuli that affect the process of socialization are called social influences. One can divide them into individual influences (that is, people of special significance to the individual, e.g. parents), institutional influences (institutions and organizations called into being in order to assist the individual in his or her development) as well as cultural influences (values, norms, traditions, stereotypes, images, beliefs etc, accepted in a given social group).

This division corresponds more or less with the differentiation between social environment (the impact of individuals and institutions) and cultural environment (the impact of ideas). H. Radlińska described these influences (together with the individual's ability to succumb to them in a definite way) as creative forces.

Another important definition is **educational method**. The method to a certain extent depends on the purpose of education. Other methods should be applied when you want to raise individuals who will be able to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the collective, and other ones – when you wish your ward to become in the future an assertive individualist, interested primarily with satisfying his or her own needs. Among other factors influencing the choice of the method one should mention: the developmental age of the ward, the level of competences he or she has learnt, the social environment in which he or she is developing, the kind of positive and negative stimuli affecting his or her development etc.

Another term to be mentioned is the notion of **compensation**, that is reducing the negative environmental stimuli by suitable educational actions.

## Summary

*Social pedagogy constitutes a part of general pedagogy, so, in order to understand what this particular branch of pedagogy is, one ought first of all to clarify the meaning of the notion "pedagogy". The concept has two basic meanings: "theoretical" one and "practical" one. In the "theoretical" sense, it means the theory of upbringing and thus the science of education, whose purpose is understanding the process of upbringing as well as the factors which influence that process. In the "practical" sense, what we understand by "pedagogy" is to sum total of all the educative activities employed for the purpose of steering the process of education in the desired direction. Speaking about pedagogical activities, we do not, of course, deal with activities from the field of education theory, as that would be contradiction in terms, but with the body of practical skills employed in everyday work by practical pedagogues.*

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