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A. Chmielewska, A. Janus-Dębska, G. Rybicka
Zawód kuratora sądowego w Polsce: praca, misja, pasja, przygoda? Rozważania o stanie obecnym i przyszłości kurateli sądowej w Polsce na podstawie wyników badań własnych ("The profession of the probation officer in Poland: job, mission, passion, adventure? Considerations on the current state and future of the court guardianship in Poland based on the results of our own research")
Wydawnictwo Ekonomia i Środowisko, Białystok

Probation officers are a special professional group. On the one hand, these are people who carry out the supervision of minors or the exercise of parental authority, as specified in court decisions. On the other hand, according to normative acts, it is a service. This term includes not only (according to the dictionary definition) employees of a particular institution, but also performing certain activities with dedication. The authors of the book "Zawód kuratora sądowego w Polsce: praca, misja, pasja, przygoda? Rozważania o stanie obecnym i przyszłości kurateli sądowej w Polsce na podstawie wyników badań własnych" fit perfectly into this dual meaning of the term. This can be seen in the title, according to which the probation service is not only a job, but also a mission, a passion and even an adventure.

The reviewed book is an innovative look at the profession of a probation officer with all its shadows and highlights, but also (which is particularly important) with a sense of mission that accompanies the people performing it. The authors are people who, due to their professional activity, know the aforementioned pros and cons of the work of probation officers perfectly well, enabling them to combine the knowledge and experience of practitioners with academic criteria for planning and carrying out a research project and analyzing the collected empirical material.

The reviewed work is an extremely interesting study, which is evidenced by its interdisciplinary and multidimensional character and the topicality of the issues raised. It is a broad approach that reflects on helping people who have been placed on court probation. The authors skillfully oscillate between the formal requirements of their profession and a humane, understanding look at the daily performance of duties, which was undoubtedly helped by their own perspective, free from subjectivity, shaped by many years of professional experience. Significantly, they have given it the ever-present notion in the discussion of perceptions of punishment of the search for new depenalized approaches. In line with this perspective, they state that “What is common to many countries in the field of penal policy reform is a change in the model of operation of probation authorities in order to increase their effectiveness, improve their image in the public perception, and make penalties and non-isolation measures more credible” (p. 21) and yet the last item mentioned is the essence of the work of probation services.

The timeliness of the subject matter is also contained in the question posed on the pages of the reviewed text: “Quo vadis, custody?”, because we can nowadays talk about dilemmas related to its ontological, axiological, empirical and methodological dimensions, giving it, respectively, the sense of: the essence and the object, the objectives and values taken into account, the cognition and understanding of the reality of probational work and what constitutes the workshop of the work of a probation officer and boils down to specific methods of working with wards.

The first chapter of the book under review is an essential collection of content on probation. The authors described the goals and tasks of probation officers and characterized the regulations governing their work. In addition, they presented the history and statistical data on contemporary court probation services in Poland, thanks to which one can learn more about the scale and scope of their activities. The chapter ends with an analysis of the functioning of probation services in selected European countries (Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium Czech Republic, Scandinavian countries). In this context, legal acts directly related to the profession, but also related documents, including recommendations of the Council of Europe, were additionally characterized. This is a definite asset to the work as it allows for a broader perspective on the probation service. In addition, it allows you to learn about its European inclinations and local, national specifications, and, as a result, the specificity of the formal and legal tasks associated with the exercise of the profession. The authors also shed some light on the understanding of basic terms in English, related to probation (probation agency, probation) including the methodology of work (supervision or assistance).

Chapter II of the paper was devoted by the authors to the research methodology. After operationalizing basic terms and issues, they defined the objectives of the study, and its organization. The assumptions made place the research project in

an understanding context, as they pay attention to learning about the reasons for choosing the profession, desirable qualities, and want to know how probation officers separate their professional and private lives. The basis for the collection of research material for the authors were questionnaires filled in by probation officers in a remote mode and interviews with those representatives of the profession who during questionnaire studies were indicated by the respondents as icons of court probation in Poland. This is an interesting procedure which perfectly fits the idea of the reviewed work. Additionally, the ethical criteria of the research were described and the respondents were characterized by gender, age, marital status, offspring, education, length of service, rank, and type of judgment performed. The chapter ends with a brief characterization of the administrative division of the territory into judicial districts, which primarily illustrates the organization of the research.

In the subsequent chapter, the authors present and discuss the results of the conducted research. It contains a successful compilation of quantitative and qualitative analyses. Respondents' understanding of key concepts in the probation service was analyzed. A dichotomous perspective on the perception of the probation profession was consistently implemented. In addition, both the retrospective dimension (experience, previous employment, choice of profession) and the current perception of professional activity (goals, independence and autonomy, environmental nature of the work performed) were analyzed. Particularly interesting are the chapters devoted to problems and difficulties that probation officers face while performing their duties, reasons for dissatisfaction with their profession and types of support they receive while performing their tasks. This is a solidly grounded analysis of the problems and ambivalences experienced by these individuals, done with particular expertise and sensitivity. What is important, this issue is analyzed in many ways, because (as the authors note) "The prosocial skills of probation officers are revealed not only in their work with wards, but also during the performance of tasks in the office of the probation officer team with their colleagues" (p. 116).

Particularly noteworthy is the subsequent fourth chapter, entitled "Great Probation Officers Worth Remembering" ("Wspaniali kuratorzy o których warto pamiętać"). Although the ethical aspect of the research (anonymity, confidentiality) may be questionable, the operationalization of the research assumptions, the method of selecting people for the study and the analyses carried out do not raise serious objections. Through this procedure, the authors were able to perform a successful fusion of quantitative (questionnaire data) and qualitative (interviews) data analysis.

The fifth chapter is a summary of the work prepared in the form of a commentary based on the literature and an interview with prof. Marek Konopczyński, a pedagogue, creator of "Creative Resocialization" ("Twórcza resocjalizacja"), for many years a member of the Main Council for the Rights

of Social Readaptation and Assistance to Prisoners, supporting the activities of probation officers.

The reviewed work skillfully combines several elements: oscillations between formal requirements and an understanding view of the wards and their problems, quantitative data and qualitative content from the interviews, a sort of discussion of the authors' own research, the literature, and the voice of a scientific authority, a practitioner and a long-time mentor of probation officers. This publication is valuable, interesting and (what is particularly important) based on practical knowledge and experience of the authors, who conducted research in their familiar environment, skillfully reading its specificity and problems, answering the questions and verifying their own view of the situation with the view of colleagues from the probation service. It is no exaggeration to say that this publication combines such important areas as theory and practice in the best sense of the word, which makes it recommended reading not only to young and experienced adepts of the probation service, people aspiring to it, but also to representatives of institutions who work with probation officers on a daily basis as part of their daily duties: court employees, police, social workers, pedagogues and psychologists. Thanks to their joint activities, it will be possible not only to popularize but also to root the model of work based on effective mediation or non-isolation forms of impact on people falling into conflict with the law. It is undoubtedly a work bringing closer to a wide audience: court employees, police, social workers, pedagogues, psychologists or people undertaking rehabilitation activities, the meanders of contemporary probation service.