



SCHOOL OF LIFE – PRISON AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

NEW SOCIETIES, OLD MINORITIES / NEW MINORITIES, OLD SOCIETIES?

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The Ethnography of the Prisoner's Transitions (EPTrans)

- ▶ The ethnography of the prisoner's transitions aims at developing an advanced understanding of the reentry process from the subjective perspective of prisoners themselves. The processes, interactions, meanings and conflicts involved in re-entry will be examined from Roma and non-Roma prisoner's point of view;
- ▶ The research is conducted in two places simultaneously: Romania and Norway. University of Bucharest will be responsible for the Romanian side and University of Oslo will cover the Norwegian side;
- ▶ Target: 50 subjects in Romania (25 Romanian + 25 Roma) and 25 in Norway (15 Romanian + 10 Roma); around 60 in present
- ▶ Data collection:
 - Observation;
 - In-depth semi-structured interviews (once the conditional release or the full release was approved in the prison, after one week from release, after one month from release, after three months, after one year - For each interview conducted outside the prison, the participants will receive 50 lei or 10 E);
 - Tests (hope, agency and the level of problems);
 - Pictures (Photo-voice).

Identity in transition from prison to society

▶ Extract methodology:

- 19 participants – Roma and Romanians - recruited from Bucharest-Jilava Penitentiary;
- Interviews made before release (1 day – 3 weeks before liberation);
- Observation;
- Confidentiality, anonymity, data protection, ethics.

The purpose of sentencing (Law 254/2013)

Article 3

- ▶ (1) The purpose of sentencing and of the custodial educational measures is the prevention of committing new crimes
- ▶ (2) Through the execution of sentences and custodial educational measures it is aiming to form a correct attitude towards the rule of law, to the rules of social coexistence and regarding work, for the reintegration into society of persons detained or interned.



Prison as a learning experience?

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- ▶ Yes, in the first place I try to **restrain myself**. I was more nervous... my instincts... everything was getting on my nerves, indifferent... I jumped at fighting, mostly if I had some booze in me, it didn't count if there was a funeral, a wedding, a tramway, car, subway... maybe also my disease, this penitentiary taught me to **be quiet and listen** and after that to... (DV)

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- ▶ Well... a coming to one's senses, not to make mistakes, **not to commit crimes**, to stay besides my family, to appreciate what I have next to me... a reeducation **but not in the penitentiary**... here you learn a lot **more bad stuff, How to commit crimes, how to respond with vulgarity, how to fight**. It is not for reeducation, the penitentiary teaches you more **bad things**, between inmates. No, if you want to talk with somebody, you don't have with whom, **they laugh** at things that you want to unburden that you are holding too much inside you. (MI)

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- ▶ [...] before **I was a violent man** and I didn't like to overlook anything. If somebody bothered me, or if he told me something, that was it, it was enough for me. Actually this is what I was waiting for...or... I was the first to go and do the bad thing. **But now no more**, I think that I served 5 years in jail, I want to go outside, to start a family, to use something from this life, how the saying goes [...] `I have resigned myself I did my punishment for what I have did, I have a little more and that's it. But nevertheless, **I have changed** a lot and I am glad about it. (MC)

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- ▶ LR – What have you learnt here? UI – **Nothing good**. LR – What bad have you learnt? UI – How to survive... *speaking with the thief*, I'm sick and tired of this, how to avoid troubles. (UI)
- ▶ Here you realize... Whom you lost, you lost your wife, you lose everything, **it is very tough**. You can have money, be sough-after, it is all in vain, if you are not home you can't fix anything. I have destroyed my psyche here. (SG)

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- ▶ When you are in **a room with 40 people**, where there are only **2 tables** where you can eat, and where there is **no chair...** lunch is coming... all of them get down and **no space remains**, then something is changing inside your mind... to eat on the ground, or not to eat at all because it doesn't make sense. The people with whom you laughed before, they **push you in the back** to get in front of you, that marked me somehow... the agglomeration from the penitentiary **changed me**. In some extent I have understood how people are, I guess... that I had understood [...] you have the meals assured and a shelter upon your head, as it is been told, you don't have to fight for them because they are a given **but they have to fight...** that's it is what I saw about them, and this aspect marked me. I start to appreciate people differently, I let them talk, to speak but I don't take any conclusions, only after facts, after words no... that's about it, a waste of time in some extent and on the other hand an accumulation of **experience**. After a while **you get bored**, after a time **nothing surprises you anymore**, you know what will be happening beforehand, you know exactly what he wants to say, what a person wants to do when he opens his mouth. (ZM)

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Adapt to deprivation (Time, freedoms, status, family, profession, partner, relations etc.)

Patience and time management

Trust no one

Growing up / self restrain (paying more attention to each situation)

Self orientation (Towards family, state of liberty - especially in prison)

Tougher (fight back) – hyper masculinity

Routine

How to commit new crimes (in some cases)

How to work (in some cases)

Obey rules (at least while in prison)

Be quiet

- ▶ This material represents an extract from the study *The Ethnography of the Prisoner's Transitions (EPTrans)* supported by EEA / Norway grants.
- ▶ Website: www.reentry.eu





Questions and answers
Thank you!

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