

Zbornik Instituta za kriminološka
i sociološka istraživanja
2021 / Vol. XL / 2-3 / 137-139
Prikaz monografije
Priljeno: 5. aprila 2021. godine
Prihvaćeno: 13. aprila 2021. godine

FREEDOM IN THE CIRCLE

Author: Ana Batrićević

Ana Batrićević's monograph *Freedom in the Circle* has been published by the Institute of criminological and sociological research in 2021. The short title of this study invites readers to explore its 200 pages and to discover the symbolic message behind these two concepts. This book is not about conventionally understood freedom – quite the opposite – it is about the experiences of convicted persons in Correctional Institution in Sremska Mitrovica. More precisely, this book is about the experiences of prisoners who embraced the chance to work with abandoned dogs and learn how to take care of them and how to train them. This relationship is mutually beneficial: dogs find a safe home and care inside of prison, while convicts get an opportunity to acquire new skills, together with a formal certificate, as well as new life habits and a sense of responsibility. Last but not the least, both gain faithful company and empathy that is hard to find, both in streets for dogs and inside the penitentiary for convicts.

This new study is only a part of Ana Batrićević's long-term interest and effort to explore, record, and explain alternative methods of prisoners' re-socialization in Serbia. In that light, this monograph is a continuation of her field research published in 2019th study *The Second Chance: Prisoners Work with Dogs in Correctional Institution Sremska Mitrovica*. While this monograph deals with the innovative program in which taking care of dogs and animal training provide re-socialization of prisoners in semi-open parts of the prison, a new study goes one step further into a correctional institution. It sheds light on experiences of implementing this approach on prisoners who serve their sentences in a closed prison regime. Correctional Institution Sremska Mitrovica is pioneering in this field, making the study about this case original and one of its kind.

This monograph is also unique in one more aspect. In addition to a textual description of this particular theme, the book in front of the reader offers him or her a precious opportunity to have a glance at the life of convicts and dogs. This is made possible through a series of documentary photography, capturing deep emotions of both humans and animals in black and white technique. Positive feelings are one of the means for convicts to overcome prison deprivations, and this is one of the three main topics of this book. Second, one is prisoners' education, which can provide

them legal carrier once they serve their sentence. Thirdly, this monograph focuses on the phenomenon of abandonment of pet dogs and ways to alleviate this problem.

Book consists of six chapters that provide both theoretical and factual introduction and context to this study. The seventh chapter makes almost the half of volume of this monograph and contains original empirical data, as well as a description of the applied methodology. After the first chapter that provides introductory remarks, the second chapter, *The Freedom of the Unfree*, tries to define the very concept of freedom, from more colloquial and conventional everyday notions to more elaborate philosophical ones. To do this, the author introduces different dimensions of freedom, describing it from a physical, mental, spiritual, and legal perspective.

In the third chapter titled *Peculiarity of the “Circle” and Difficulties of its Challenges*, the author explains that “Circle” (“Krug” in Serbian) means the closed part of the Correctional Institution Sremska Mitrovica. Furthermore, this regime of serving the prison sentence is analyzed from a legal perspective and in the context of the National Law on the execution of criminal sanctions. This chapter deals with different aspects of open, semi-open, and closed parts of the prison, their security and complex conduct of prisoners admittance, and further procedures, involving different services aiming both to help with re-socialization and to alleviate prison deprivations.

The fourth chapter of the book, *Innovative Programs of Convicted Persons Re-socialization with the Aid of Animals* describes the genesis and core principles of practices aimed at achieving human’s physical and mental welfare through interaction with animals. The author also introduces an important classification of different modes of these programs, namely: Animal Assisted (AA) Intervention; AA Therapy; AA Activity; AA Education and AA Coaching. A special sub-chapter is dedicated to prison-based animal programs (PAPs), describing the different forms and results of such programs.

In the fifth chapter, *Re-socialization of Convicted Persons with the Aid of Dogs in High-Level Security Prisons - International Experiences and Examples* author described in detail two similar programs in the USA. The first one, *Violence Prevention through Compassion Education*, is released by the association *Healing Species* in two maximum-security prisons in South Carolina. From the evaluation of this case author draws many important conclusions, especially about psychological processes, which are beneficial for prisoners. The second case, the program *Prison Pup* was implemented by an association *Canine Support Team* in California Institute for Women. In this project, convicted women had an opportunity to train dogs that would later perform tasks of assisting people with different disabilities. Again, conclusions about both individual benefits and the improvement of social relationships in prison are firmly underlined.

The sixth chapter, titled *Correctional Institution in Sremska Mitrovica - The Only Penal Institution with Asylum for Abandoned Dogs* puts special emphasis on the mentioned uniqueness of many aspects of this case study, not only in Serbia but also worldwide. Concretely, CI in Sremska Mitrovica closely cooperates with the municipal communal services and runs a dogs shelter inside the prison walls (which

the municipality is lacking). The author also describes different legal and procedural aspects of this practice. Special parts of this chapter are devoted to the procedures of foster care of dogs from this asylum, and the detailed chronology of the development of this particular form of convicts' engagement in this particular case.

The seventh chapter encompasses both a thorough description of applied methodology and the presentation of collected empirical data. Concerning methods used in different phases of this study, the author skillfully employed the best principles of sociological and anthropological systematic observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews. Still, the most innovative method, scarcely seen in domestic scientific publications, is documentary photography. The author took special care to explain all advantages and possible uses of photography as both the mean of documentation of social reality, as well as a source of empirical data that can be produced outside of the research process. Nonetheless, photography is also an artistic expression that bears its layers of symbolic meaning which surpasses conventional textual/verbal mediums of communication. Series of black and white photography made by the author during her fieldwork, conducted in the closed area of the prison, which is off-limits for most of the readers, make an integral part of the collected and presented data.

The fact that participants in the interviews are at the same time in the focus of the author's camera, makes this study holistic in a real sense. Seven of them are chosen among prisoners working with the dogs. Their stories are described through categories such as their age, education, marital status, their attitudes toward work and employment, and the crimes they are convicted. The author seeks to express participants' attitudes towards animals, their experiences as participants of this program, the support they receive from their families, their inner emotional dynamics, and their plans for life after the end of the sentence.

As it should be apparent in the end, this book is an interdisciplinary study. It combines legal, sociological, anthropological, physiological, ethical, and philosophical themes. This is the main reason why this monograph will be useful not only for the scientific community and experts in this field but also for more casual readers, as well for journalists, animal welfare, and human rights activists. This book is for all those who want to understand what freedom is, and where it can be found.

Andrej Kubiček

Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research