



Homes integrated as an institution (total) in the support system for adults with deep intellectual disability – introduction to consideration

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The article discusses the subject of housing for people with more severe intellectual disability – as one of the forms of support. The integrated-community flat constitutes an alternative institutional form of support for persons with more severe intellectual disability. The symbolic interactionism theory was extremely helpful in preliminary deliberations and the discussed integrated-community flats were based on the conception of total institutions. Therefore, the following questions were asked: What characteristics of a total institution does the integrated-community flat have? Can the integrated-community flat be described as having characteristics of a total institution? A qualitative case study with participant observation was used for this purpose.

KEY WORDS: housing, adults with more severe intellectual disability, total institutions

Introduction

Development of housing for persons with intellectual disability constitutes one of the forms of support for this group of persons. Currently, placing persons with moderate and severe intellectual disability in social aid homes is being replaced with places requiring more engagement from the persons concerned. Large clusters of social rehabilitation are replaced with intimate places the structure of which is similar to flats. However, those places remain institutional forms of aid and support for persons with moderate and severe intellectual disability. Of course, there are no doubts that those places are more intimate and such spaces feel more “domesticated”. Nevertheless, the people in question remain wards and we are still faced with a warden – ward relationship. Therefore, while accompanying the residents in their everyday life, the following reflection arose: Does thus constructed form of housing for persons with more severe intellectual disability support them in their adulthood, independence or autonomy? It also invites reflection, if, perhaps, it is a form of involving the person in the social control system even more? Thus, it became an encouragement to preliminary deliberations on the grounds of the analysis of the total institution theory of Erving Goffman in the following areas: the space and daily schedule, wardens – residents, the level of satisfying needs, contacts of the institution with external environment. Two first areas: the daily schedule and relations between residents will be presented herein.

The issue presented in the text concerns integrated flats on the basis of total institutions theory including contents of the symbolic interactionism theory. As a result, the discussed institutions of integrated housing for persons with more severe intellectual disability shall be subject to initial deliberations on the grounds of a continuous exchange of meanings and symbols occurring between the “actors” of the social life in the flat. Flats constitute a social structure, where interactions between residents are continuous. Communication, which takes on the form of a verbal and non-verbal symbol,

gestures or signs, constitutes one of the components of interactionism. As a matter of fact, communication generates people's behaviour towards one another. An individual interprets and defines their actions and behaviours towards other individuals in the social structure, which constitutes a way of exchanging meanings. According to Elżbieta Hałas "the second important element in the non-actionist conception of human behaviour comprises the assumption that an individual does not reproduce behaviours or actions according to the certain patterns, but constructs activity, interprets partner's behaviour, takes on the role of the latter and on the grounds of the role-taking undertakes a relevant action continuously formulating the so-called definition of the situation, in which the person operates, as the person is aware of oneself and has self, makes choices"¹. To sum up, people and, in this case wards of integrated flats can operate on the grounds of meanings provided by objects. These meanings will originate in interactions and will be modified by interpretations thereof made by people in current situations.

It should be very clearly underlined that the proposed text is an introduction to deliberations included in the article. It is, in fact, the subject which should be elaborated on due to the numerous threads resulting from the selected methodological direction.

Flats in Sosnowiec, which constitute the subject of the analysis herein, operate on the foundation's initiative. The foundation submits a project to the competition organised by the city for the organisation and functioning of flats. The city provides premises and pays for wardens of these flats. Whereas, residents participate in the costs of the flat's maintenance (rent and food). The first integrated-community flat in Sosnowiec was developed in 2014, second - in 2017, and third - in 2019. In the meantime, a training flat was developed within the project. However, this form of housing does not

¹ As cited in E. Hałas, *Symbolic Interactionism - Plurality of Directions vs. Basis of the Unity of Perspective* (*Symboliczny interakcjonizm - wielość orientacji a podstawy jedności perspektywy*), „*Studia socjologiczne*” 1961, no. 4, p. 111, [in:] J. Turowski, *Sociology... (Socjologia...)*, pp. 63-64.

constitute the subject of the presented article and will not be analysed herein. My attention will be concentrated on the residents of integrated-community flats as a (total) institution.

Integrated flats as total institutions

In contemporary society, institutions are discussed, among others, in the conception of total institutions of Erving Goffman, American sociologist and writer. According to him, total institutions are any social institutions with closed structures, such as: social aid houses, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, monasteries or care institutions, "they take up some time and attract interest of their members and create a separate world for them"², which means that the aim of those institutions is to "enslave" their wards.

The author of this conception differentiates five groups of total institutions. The first group consists of institutions aimed at providing care for persons requiring support, aid and care. This group includes, among others: social aid houses, social support centres and orphanages.

The second group of total institutions consists of centres, facilities for persons that cannot or are not capable to live independently. According to the author, an additional feature of those persons is that they, not by their own fault, pose a threat to themselves and to the society. These institutions include, among others: psychiatric hospitals. The hitherto described groups can be included in total institutions, the basic aim of which is to take care of the patients', boarders' or wards' wellbeing.

The third type of institutions consists of prisons, penal institutions and detention centres. This type of institution is predominant-

² E. Goffman, *Characteristics of Total Institutions (Charakterystyka instytucji totalnych)*, in: *Contemporary Sociological Theories (Współczesne teorie socjologiczne)*, ed. A. Jasińska-Kania, L.M. Nijakowski, J. Szacki, M. Ziółkowski, Scholar, Warsaw 2006, p. 316.

ly aimed at protecting society from wards of such institutions. Protection of the society results from the fact that persons staying at those institutions, consciously hurt themselves and others.

Military barracks and life on ships constitute the fourth group of total institutions, which are “appointed to perform specific technical tasks and have a purely instrumental character”³.

Whereas, the fifth group consists of total institutions, which have a voluntary character, which means that persons entering those institutions do so completely voluntarily, withdrawing from social, professional and family life. This group includes: monasteries, nunneries and abbeys.

The following features can be distinguished among the constant characteristics of both, the total institution and persons working there:

- strict hierarchy of statuses,
- division into personnel and wards (we – them),
- formalism,
- dehumanization,
- a lack of subjectivity in interpersonal relations,
- orientation not on a human, but on the performance of set tasks⁴.

Integrated-community flats fit within the conception of total institutions of Erving Goffman. The author placed them in his theory in the first category as the place for people who need help. The fact is that flats for persons with intellectual disability do not have bars in windows, closed doors or other obstacles, which would separate them from the society in an obvious manner. However, it is characterised by a certain specific structure, a type of closure, alienation, stigmatisation.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ E. Goffman, *Characteristics of Total Institutions (Charakterystyka instytucji totalnych)*, in: *Contemporary Sociological Theories (Współczesne teorie socjologiczne)*, ed. A. Jasińska-Kania, L.M. Nijakowski, J. Szacki, M. Ziółkowski, Scholar, Warsaw 2006, p. 317.

The most important feature of a total institution is mixing three important zones of human functioning from the perspective of fulfilling their needs, that is: sleep, entertainment and work. Wards perform everyday activities, such as: relaxing, eating, playing or studying in the same place, that is, the flat. A departure from the above rule can happen when wards go to a school or work outside the facility. Another important element of this structure is that no person is ever alone, each person is treated the same, which causes a lack of intimacy and individualisation. Thirdly, according to Erving Goffman: "everyday activities are at all times strictly specified so that each of them inevitably leads to the already established, directly following activity"⁵. Of course, developing flats is a socially useful and very much needed initiative. The aim of this article is not to criticise such initiatives. It is more aimed at a certain reflection on the meaning and place of creating such forms of support and not creating simulated activities or simulated support for persons with more severe intellectual disability. The analogy of integrated flats and above all, the attempt of placing them in the presented theory related to total institutions are bound by the fact that E. Goffman includes in total institutions, among others, social aid houses. The discussed flats constitute an alternative to social aid houses for persons with intellectual disability. The flats have a specific structure and a certain type of action scheme and are not based on the complete voluntariness.

The "institution", which is the supported-community flat for persons with moderate and severe intellectual disability, is a social "product". It is socially constructed, which means that this is a place, where wards are shaped in a certain manner. Residents in the flats should be "imitators of knowledge, identity and culture"⁶,

⁵ E. Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Condition of the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates (Instytucje totalne. O pacjentach szpitali psychiatrycznych i mieszkańców innych instytucji totalnych)*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdansk 2011, p. 16.

⁶ G. Dahlberg, P. Moss, A. Pence, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Languages of Evaluation (Poza dyskursem jakości w instytucjach wczesnej edukacji)*

but also values and norms. The institution that is the flat provides persons with intellectual disability with care and implements socialization aspects. It is to satisfy their emotional, developmental, health, existence, social and religious needs. The task of such institution consists in providing persons with intellectual disability with education and therapeutic activities, if needed. The aim of such flats is to, predominantly, prepare a ward to independent life as a result of acquiring by them proper social skills. Doubtlessly, an important aspect of these tasks' implementation consists in the social education broadly understood as the responsibility of all society members for persons with more severe intellectual disability staying in these forms of support facilities. A thesis may be proposed that this form of support for persons with intellectual disability is "(...) a tool of social intervention aimed at protecting the society against consequences of poverty, inequality, a lack of sense of safety and marginalisation"⁷. Irrespectively of how they are perceived, their aim is to achieve social aims and above all, serve wards. They are supposed to be places where (...) influence is wielded to achieve predefined, desired results; places of development, education, socialisation, where shortages are compensated"⁸.

The concept of an institution herein is understood in broad context, as socialisation of wards in integrated-community flats. Flats will be an institution, a certain type of symbol of care and support for persons with moderate and severe intellectual disability. Whereas, an organisation will be understood as rules, statuses, legal regulations of functioning and developing flats, their structure, wards and wardens and infrastructure for achieving aims.

i opieki), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław 2007, p. 123.

⁷ G. Dahlberg, P. Moss, A. Pence, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Languages of Evaluation (Poza dyskursem jakości w instytucjach wczesnej edukacji i opieki)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław 2007, p. 122.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

An outline of methodology and an attempt at research

An attempt at researching the described phenomenon was based on the symbolic interactionism theory. The qualitative research strategy was adopted. The theme of research in the qualitative research strategy is to above all, understand and describe the meaning of certain behaviours of a human or social groups. The sense of the word "meaning" is, in fact, the essence of the qualitative strategy. As a matter of fact, each interaction, feelings or experiences of the individual have specific meanings, which is unquestionable when human behaviour is concerned. In fact, individual feelings or experiences matter in social interaction. Interpersonal interactions create a given situation of a person, therefore, the nature of the social reality is to a great extent based on the exchange of experiences, symbols or meanings of a given situation.

Human existence in the qualitative strategy consists in continuously giving meaning and sense to the social "being", it is, in fact, the social existence that creates meanings in a given social situation. Using the theory in the qualitative strategy constitutes non-deductive system of correlated definitions or laws, it consists in above all, "describing ways of establishing and maintaining systems of group meanings"⁹. Values for the qualitative research strategy constitute an inherent element of social life, they are always different for a given social group, but never perceived as bad.

In symbolic interactionism, people influence each other with symbols. Social reality means human behaviour towards one another in the course of interactions. "A symbolic interaction is a fundamental social fact and only with this concept category other forms or types of social phenomena could be explained"¹⁰. In interaction-

⁹ G. Dahlberg, P. Moss, A. Pence, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Languages of Evaluation (Poza dyskursem jakości w instytucjach wczesnej edukacji i opieki)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław 2007, p. 78.

¹⁰ J. Turowski, *Sociology. Small Social Structures (Socjologia. Małe struktury społeczne)*, Lublin 1993, p. 63.

ism, a person with disability, including intellectual disability, has a possibility of coping in various social situations, since social conditions are a dynamic system; thus, the person with disability does, in fact, adapt to the conditions in which the person lives and creates them. As a matter of fact, irrespectively of their limitations or deficits, a human is a free and autonomous creator of their social activity. Interpreting the situation of persons with disabilities from the point of view of interactionism can result in improving the approach towards them and, therefore, "developing a humanistic-subjective approach to those persons"¹¹.

The aim of the article is to attempt presenting the integrated-community flat in the context of a total institution. Thus, the following research problems were formulated: What features of a total institution does the integrated-community flat have and can it be said that the integrated-community flat has features of a total institution? In order to explore this analysis, the following detailed research problems were formulated:

1. How does the space and daily schedule of residents look like?
2. What are the relations between residents?

To this end, a case study was used. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that at this stage of research, the case study instruments have not been used completely. This is above all, an introduction to deliberations and a contribution to in-depth studies. The advantage of the case study "is optimisation of possibilities of understanding a given phenomenon or a specific case by answering the research question and reliability given by continuously triangulating descriptions and interpretation throughout the research"¹². The research conducted with this method is subject to in-depth analysis of

¹¹ T. Żółkowska, *Socio-pedagogical Context of Disability (Socjopedagogiczny kontekst niepełnosprawności)*, [in:] *Special Education – Current Achievements and Challenges (Pedagogika specjalna – aktualne osiągnięcia i wyzwania)*, ed. T. Żółkowska, Szczecin 2005, p. 114.

¹² R.E. Stake, *Qualitative Case Studies (Jakościowe studium przypadku)*, [in:] *Handbook of Qualitative Research (Metody badań jakościowych)*. V. 1, ed. N.K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, PWN, Warsaw 2009, p. 624.

the issue of interest to the researcher. It is important that this type of collecting data is characterised with small representativeness, which excludes any generalisations. This is "an excellent tool of problem exploration, which allows planning further research activities to be burdened with a smaller risk of accuracy and adequacy for the purposes of the research"¹³. A selection of the case (phenomenon) is simple or complex at the same time. A case can be a person, a group, a facility or an event. The case will be interpreted as a system, since "in social sciences the majority of cases consist of functional elements and act intentionally, many have a sense of the I. Functional or dysfunctional, rational or irrational, a case will always be a system"¹⁴. Krzysztof Konecki states that "a case chosen for the research should be able to be explicitly separated as a certain system and activities observed within this system should be performed in compliance with patterns that are easily reconstructable. Explicit borders or patterns of behaviour are the key elements allowing understanding a given case"¹⁵.

One of the integrated-community flats was chosen for the purposes of the deliberations. On the one hand, the flat is the case. The flat is therefore understood as a system and the phenomenon itself is the subject of interest. Since the aim is not only to understand the phenomenon, but also to broaden the knowledge thereof, we deal with the instrumental case study, where the phenomenon and its context "are thoroughly and in details studied in order to facilitate learning more about the phenomenon"¹⁶.

¹³ A. Miller, *Psychiatric Hospital as Total Institution. Sociological Case Study (Szpital psychiatryczny jako instytucja totalna. Socjologiczne studium przypadku)*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw 2013, p. 18.

¹⁴ R.E. Stake, *Qualitative Case Studies (Jakościowe studium przypadku)*, [in:] *Handbook of Qualitative Research (Metody badań jakościowych)*. V. 1, ed. N.K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, PWN, Warsaw 2009, p. 625.

¹⁵ K. Konecki, *Qualitative Research Methodology Studies. Grounded Theory (Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych. Teoria ugruntowana)*, PWN, Warsaw 2000, p. 126.

¹⁶ R.E. Stake, *Qualitative Case Studies (Jakościowe studium przypadku)*, in: *Handbook of Qualitative Research (Metody badań jakościowych)*. V. 1, ed. N.K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, PWN, Warsaw 2009, p. 628.

The manner of collecting data was participant observation. The participant observation consists in the researcher, observer "entering" the community of observed persons. The researcher is more familiar with the culture of the observed community and is closer to the events happening in the group. This method is often used in the case of "closed communities" of researched persons. As a result of the participant observation, the researcher participates in the life of the chosen social community and conducts scientific research. He or she concentrates on collecting empirical material, which will be used in further analyses. The researcher has to be aware that he or she acts as a scientist, although "you can never stand completely outside the research social reality and situation"¹⁷. While starting the observation, the researcher is obliged to find out as much as possible on the researched area. Therefore, it is important to, in the preliminary stage of research "take into account nine dimensions of each social situation that establish complex relations:

1. Space - physical place or places.
2. Actors - people connected to the given situation.
3. Action - a set of activities performed by people.
4. Object - physical items present in a given situation.
5. Activity - a single task performed by people.
6. Event - a set of correlated activities.
7. Time - time sequences, pace of events.
8. Aims - what people are striving to achieve.
9. Emotions - feeling and expressing"¹⁸.

The conducted observation took place in the integrated-community flat, in Sosnowiec. It was a source of preliminary data, which is a qualitative proposal, which does not give the right to answer the questions asked.

¹⁷ K. Konecki, *Qualitative Research Methodology Studies. Grounded Theory (Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych. Teoria ugruntowana)*, PWN, Warsaw 2000, p. 144.

¹⁸ M. Ciesielska, K. Wolanik Boström, M. Öhlander, *Observation (Obserwacja)*, in: *Qualitative Research. Methods and Tools (Badania jakościowe. Metody i narzędzia)*. V. 2, ed. D. Jemielniak, PWN, Warsaw 2012, p. 44.

Space and daily schedule

Space of the integrated-community flat is the area of everyday functioning of wards. The wards living in the flat have various levels of social skills. Therefore, they acquire a series of social skills within the flat. There are various interactions between them. In order to keep social order in the flat, the communication between wards and between wardens is extremely important. The everyday life of residents is quite characteristic. Basic spheres of residents' lives are interrelated. They perform everyday activities at the same time and place, together and, what is important, in accordance with strictly defined rules. Those specified rules are simply a daily schedule. Of course, unwritten schedule. Residents adjust to the binding rules. It is described with the example below.

Picture I:

It is 6.00 a.m. on Tuesday. Alarm clocks can be heard ringing in rooms. Wards start waking up, using bathroom. Someone looks at the board and shouts at the person on duty to make breakfast and tea for everybody. I am under the impression that everybody keeps order.

While staying at the flat, the wards learn how to, among others, cooperate in a group. Each resident knows what to do in the described situation. Their effectiveness of coping is conditioned by the everyday ritual, since they face the same circumstances every day. Waking up and then, morning bathroom routine. It is a kind of social training. Therefore, one may attempt the interpretation that the residents are characterised with social skills in formal situation. On the one hand, they learn the ability to follow the rules and principles binding in a given situation from one another. Analogously, the opportunity to acquire correct cooperation or communication skills is created in the total institution, so that their functioning is compliant with the binding social requirements and norms.

In formal situations, such as: waking up, morning and evening bathroom routine, eating meals or thematic classes with educators show that wards of the studied flat have relevant skills to call their

behaviour competent in the scope of these activities. They undergo a kind of social training. Everything must proceed according to the specific schedule. Everyone must go to school, work or facility at a specific time, the flat is closed at 7.30 a.m. and opened at 03.30 p.m. Characteristics of a total institution are also visible, among others, in the aspect of a lack of voluntariness and formalisation of the home functioning.

Relations between residents

Picture II:

It was Sunday. Everyone was sitting in their rooms. They were, in fact, resting after dinner. One of the wardens proposed a game. Residents agreed willingly. During the game a problem with counting appeared. However, everyone counted together, so they managed to continue. During the game, a girl named D. complained that her flatmates make fun of her. The warden told her: So tell them not to make fun of you. He also added that all of us were adults there and we were able to solve our problems. All of the wards nodded and continued to play.

The described situation shows certain elements of learning the skills conditioning competences, when the ward complained about her colleague. The warden put her in a position, when she had to exercise a skill of communicating to the colleague so as to protect her space herself. Another element of this situation consists in teaching wards such behaviours so that interpersonal relations in the group do not hurt others. Furthermore, it was important to acquire such social rules so that each person in the group could feel safe.

Summary

The presented pictures introduce the reader to the topic of total institutions. These are preliminary studies which become an impulse for deliberations over flats as total institutions. However,

a certain totality syndrome can be observed. Everything is done together and everything is under control. The cycle of the day, its rituals and schedule of activities, which could be named informal and which at first sight are not constituted activities, play a role of activities typical for total institutions. It has been proved above in the presented schedule and relations between the residents in pictures I and II. Was it what we had expected from support systems for adults with intellectual disability in the times of normalisation? I leave this question open for the reader. Each reflection in this dimension is an impulse to undertake another activities, since this is required from both, support and autonomy of persons with disability.

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