

Community education – the context of contemporary changes and challenges

Key words

Environment, educational environment, community education, social diagnosis, social space.

Abstract

Social education in the broad sense of the term is one of the planes on which the description and interpretation of what we call education in general is carried out, and it happens both on the basis of developed theory and implemented practice. Social pedagogy evolving today is a pedagogical sub-field that most fully engages in these issues. The concept of community education is the one most discussed today on its basis, addressing issues of social education. To generalise, this concept is understood today as the informal education of children, adolescents and adults, an education related to satisfying the needs of specific local communities. This perspective of educational and environment impacts on humans, in the context of their local presence, allows simultaneously different possible levels of interpretation in social pedagogy. One can identify here such categories as social space, a small homeland, social capital, or the category of place. All of these concepts emerge together from certain ways of understanding the environment and educational environment.

In connection with social education many issues occur today involving both children, adolescents and adults, as well as school, the family and other communities. These are the areas of challenges and many 'new' problems for contemporary educational practice.

Introduction

Ever since the beginning of scientific reflection on the process of education, social conditions have been pointed to as an important factor. These conditions have been considered in different cognitive contexts, when it comes to both educational theory and practice. On the one hand, these have always been strongly evolving trends, concepts of so-called social education, most often

inspired by a specific philosophy, axiology or sociological thought and ideas¹. On the other hand, they have always been a richly evolving practice of institutional education delivered in diverse forms through agencies, institutions and organisations of various kinds which were indicated and then realised in very specific social conditions. Ultimately, the social perspective of understanding education, accentuated here (both when it comes to its theory and practice), gained its fullest (although not only) manifestation on the basis of so-called social pedagogy.

1. Social/community pedagogy

Apart from the numerous and varied interpretations previously and still accepted within social pedagogy, one can safely say that (at least with regard to the Polish and European tradition), a fairly uniform way of understanding its object, tasks and goals has been formed. This kind of source- and base-like way of understanding the discipline retains its identity and relevance in the context of concepts accepted within it today, such as for instance the concept of community education.

Basically then, a person remaining in a relationship with the environment, which affects him or her, but which is also shaped and transformed by him or her, is the subject of social pedagogy. Also, from the beginning (despite the different and rich ways of interpreting this fact, and concepts accepted in this regard), social educators have indicated that it is all about a suitable impact on this environment, educationally determined and defined as such. Social pedagogy was thus, at its inception, clearly identified as a practical science. The considerations and decisions adopted by successive generations of social educators, beginning with Radlińska, Wroczyński, and then Kamiński, Lepalczyk, Kowalski and many others, confirmed and continue to confirm it. It is also true today, where the practical dimension of this discipline is emphasised. Kawula (1996) writes:

social pedagogy focuses on issues of community determinants of educational processes as well as on the analysis of conditions and factors allowing a human's (human groups') needs of development to be satisfied in different phases of life and a variety of situations ...; for these reasons, social pedagogy focuses on the environment of life of individuals or groups and on institutions in a society intentionally appointed to carry out educational tasks (p. 29).

¹ Philosophical inspirations as well as those coming from sociology were and are the most distinctive inspirations for social philosophical thought. Still, they also come from other sciences such as, e.g., economics, politics and theology, which shows the complexity of this thought and the wide scope of potential justifications accepted within it.

Pointing out the need for specific actions to be implemented in the environment, Przeclawska and Theiss (1996) define social pedagogy in a similar way:

This discipline deals with the theory of environmental determinants of education and human development and the theory and practice of shaping the environment. Social work and cultural work occurring frequently in this context are treated as a form of transforming the environment (p. 9).

In contemporary German social pedagogy, the practical and environment-related dimension of this discipline is emphasised in a similar way. Following Böhnisch, Hamburger (2006) writes:

social pedagogy refers to the relationship between the individual and society; this relationship is treated as a conflict, or perceived from the perspective of the conflicts it contains; social pedagogy examines the determinants of conflicts; social pedagogy creates concepts of solving conflicts (p. 3).

Summing up the definitions of social pedagogy quoted above, and being aware of the fact that modern methods of defining it do not differ substantially from the above, one can say that any attempts at interpretation and justification made in this field will always be associated, from the perspective of a source, with the search for the concepts of a **human** as a social being, caught up in certain environment conditions; of the **environment** as a place of human existence and, above all, of certain social actions; and, finally, of **social action**, as conscious activities designed to transform the already existing environment conditions. The three categories mentioned above are therefore crucial for the concepts and theories emerging (self-constructed or borrowed) in social pedagogy. At the same time, taking into account the current development of social pedagogy, it may be noticed that this discipline primarily aims at building and formulating specific directives of practical conduct or at a certain social practice, at the expense of exercising rational reflection, which leads to the creation and development of a theory.

Due to the nature of this practice, we can point here to several areas of its realisation and implementation. These include care, social welfare, cultural animation, and education (Cichosz, 2004). Diagnosing social life and proposing specific ways of measuring it, it is not so much committed to explaining it, as to transforming it through proposed strategies of social action. Thus, the visible and dominant practical nature of social pedagogy makes its functions seem to be more instrumental than cognitive and its character more methodological than epistemological (unless we call here for a completely different perspective, another way of understanding social phenomena and practices, a more

comprehensive and complementary one). The model of social pedagogy established in this way somehow created its structure, when it comes to its areas of interest (and in connection with it, also the branches that have developed), and the methodology of community work. This model is shown in the following pattern of social pedagogy understood primarily as a specific kind of practice. This diagram illustrates a way of understanding this discipline which is quite often seen nowadays.

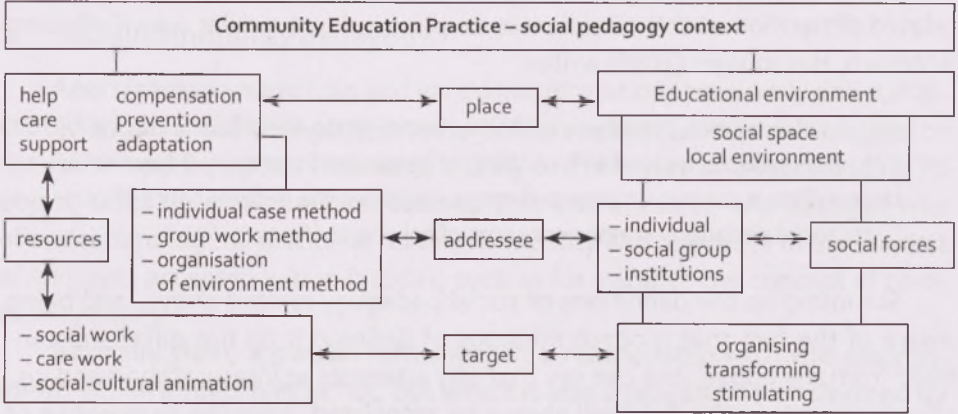


Figure 1. Social pedagogy as community education practice
 Designed and developed by *Mariusz Cichosz*

Understanding social pedagogy as a specific type of social practice is today widely accepted by the representatives of pedagogy in general, as well as by social educators themselves. In one of her papers, Danuta Urbaniak-Zajac (2003) wrote:

there is (relative) agreement in pedagogical literature that a twofold reality lies behind the name 'social pedagogy', i.e. a type of social practice, a system of organised activities constituting an important part of the so-called social sector, namely the system of benefits and offers addressed to people in need of support, assistance, advice, care, etc., a theoretical reflection concerning these actions and conditions conducive to their making (p. 8).

2. The concept of community education

When it comes to practices that are undertaken and implemented as well as concepts that are elaborated, contemporary social pedagogy, after many changes that took place within it especially after the late 1980s and early 1990s,

is now an area which accepts relatively different concepts in this field. While retaining its well-established characteristics of a practical discipline, namely focusing mainly on social environment forms of educational activities (see Diagram 1), there are still different interpretations possible within itself. One of the concepts especially present and discussed in social pedagogy today is the concept of community education. It is a concept of widely understood educational actions (educational, cultural, as well as those relating to caring, supporting) undertaken in the area of the local presence of a person and larger human communities. It is about supportive actions related to education and the social environment undertaken especially in this broad, extra-curricular area of human activity. Mikołaj Winiarski (as cited in Lalak, Pilch, 1999) accepts the understanding of community education as a process, a method of socio-educational work and a pro-community attitude. The author speaks of it as follows:

community education can now be understood in two ways, i.e. as a specific process or a method of socio-educational work. The community method is a way of organising the local community to undertake tasks in the areas of education, care and social welfare, which consists in activating social forces and focusing them on the implementation of these tasks. In this, as well as in every other method, the stress is placed on the technical and organisational aspect of implemented activities. In general, community education as a process is a sequence of changes taking place in the local environment, concerning education, upbringing, care, social welfare, and cultural education, which happen owing to the social forces of this environment (p. 80).

Among the components of community education understood in this sense the author mentioned the following:

a) the objectives and tasks in education, upbringing, interpersonal care, social welfare and cultural education, b) the organisational structure (the actors involved – individuals, social groups, organisations and institutions and the relationships between them), c) strategies of acting and social conduct (forms, methods, techniques, technical resources), d) effects, educational and social outcomes, e) determinants (determining factors) of the community activity carried out (Winiarski, 2000, p. 63).

Similarly, although emphasising and pointing out a more humanistic and personalistic dimension of this concept, Theiss (1996) characterises it by defining it as “the informal education of children, adolescents, and adults related to satisfying the needs of the environment or local community. These can be both individual, group or collective needs, and among them, economic, cultural, and political ones” (p. 2). This approach clearly emphasises the subjective role and

place of the human being in social structures as the author identifies three fundamental ideas underlying the concept accepted by him, i.e.:

1) the concept of a human as a subject who is actively involved in building the world, 2) the concept of open, civil society, i.e. such communities in which the ideas of pluralism and tolerance are implemented, and 3) the idea of (representative) democracy as well as participatory (Theiss, 1996, p. 2).

According to Theiss (2006), the purpose of community education understood in this way is to:

find, evaluate, and develop local cultural and social resources, and in this way to shape the local, nationwide and European identity and develop the activity and creative attitudes of individuals, social groups and local communities in building the microcosm of humans (p. 12).

Community education is the most fully integrated in the concept of so-called social education. As such, nowadays it also finds broad interpretations beyond the pedagogical ones. It is in ontology, epistemology and axiology that we can seek justifications for it, both in social policy, economics, theology, law, etc. However, regardless of the possible and broad context shown here, the key and, in a sense, universal issue for the concept of community education, is the one of environment itself and of educational environment.

3. Community education – accepted findings

Within the concepts elaborated in social pedagogy, as well as more narrowly, within a narrowly understood concept of community education, educational environment is the key problem. This is a particularly important issue for planned and implemented educational practices. The issue of distinguishing different types of environment is particularly important here. Educational practice is always implemented in a specific location, addressed to specific individuals and conditioned by a specific situational system, i.e. it takes place in a very particular environment. When it comes to educational environments, their understanding and their 'location' is always, to a greater or lesser extent, related to the way of understanding of the environment in general. Anyway, many authors, referring to certain decisions and justifications or making non-assumptive reductions, regard educational environment and environment as such as being identical². It seems that most typologies of educational environments refer to

² A typical example of such an approach are R. Wroczyński's views, or in a broader sense social pedagogy practised in Poland, within the mainstream of systematic sociology of education, especially in the Marxist interpretation; cf. St. Kowalski's views.

the division retained in the social sciences since the beginning of their existence, namely that in fact there are three types of environment: social, natural and cultural. Szczurkiewicz (1938), a prominent Polish sociologist, co-founder and representative of the Polish school of sociology of education once wrote:

we can define the environment as a chronologically serialised set of all stimuli acting directly or indirectly from the outside on an individual, from the moment of his or her birth, through all the phases of his or her life until death. The stimuli acting on a human being can be (1) physical, (2) social, (3) cultural; depending on the kind of stimuli in operation we can obtain the following environment(s): (1) geophysical, (2) social, (3) cultural. The type of stimulus, however, is not only identified by an objective viewer, but also by the very individual experiencing it, who enters a dynamic relationship with it by experiencing it as a physical, social or cultural one (pp. 207-208).

This way of understanding the environment is fairly widely adopted in the social sciences developing in Poland, also in pedagogy, including social pedagogy. This somewhat base division has become a basis for many decisions and although in modern pedagogy its limitations and lesser and lesser relevance in relation to educational reality are highlighted, it has directed the way(s) of thinking about education for many years.

Sośnicki referred to the division presented here in his findings. Distinguishing the types of educational environments, he showed that firstly, given their origin, we can talk about physical and spritual environment; secondly, (following Pieter), taking into account the territorial basis, we can talk about the surrounding environment, local and personal; and thirdly, taking into account the impact of particular social groups, he singled out the following as educational environments:

a) groups for whom education is not a profession and which do not perform educational functions specially. Education, however, can be a side effect of their actions; b) groups that perform educational functions, but as additional or spin-off ones, attached to their main functions, sometimes as a means to their proper purposes. Two varieties can be distinguished here: 1) groups in which education does not occur constantly, but occasionally, as it happens for example, in a family, care groups, educational institutions, associations of adults and youth, etc. 2) groups in which education plays a major role, is their constant function and essential objective, such as e.g. schools; and finally c) groups in which education is not an important activity, but which organise it arranging for it to be performed by other, smaller groups, included in the main one. The state, the nation, etc. belong to this group (Sośnicki, 1967, pp. 75-76)³.

³ The typology of the educational environment presented here, adopted because of the effect and influence of respective groups, was being developed within social pedagogy. To a certain

Out of the three aforementioned criteria adopted by Sośnicki for the purpose of distinguishing educational environments, the second criterion, which was taken from Pieter, deserves special attention. It is important for the reason that, as it seems, it still retains high relevance. The particularity of indicated 'places' for educational practice and their adequacy in relation to the problems of education undertaken really seems to be timeless and still valid. This typology, actually, was and still is quite a common reference point for research on environment, research inspired and conducted on the basis of pedagogy and social pedagogy (although it often means unconsciously becoming an inherent part of just such a tradition and heritage of the discipline). Taking into consideration the influence of environment factors, Pieter (1972) identified three criteria regarding educational environments: 1) according to the degree of 'distance' of given factors from education, 2) according to the degree of conscious organisation of the given factors by the educating society, 3) according to the specific suitability of certain environment conditions for specific mental activities or directions of education (pp. 86-122). Following the first criterion (according to the author the most important one) which all the others can be assigned to, he singled out three environment circles as circles of educational influence. These are the surrounding environment, local environment and individual environment⁴, and they include the following:

The surrounding environment – neighbourhood, the region – the environment conditions characterisitic of the non-residential surroundings of a person: population density, transport conditions, professional diversity of people, economic rate, housing, the state of education, the state of cultural needs.

The local environment – residential – covering the entire environment conditions of a place in which a person lives (village, town): climatic conditions of the local environment, the size and character of the place, the place's cultural tradition, cultural 'assets'; transport and housing conditions of the place, the state of school facilities, libraries, reading rooms, recreation rooms and after-school educational facilities and their equipment, the residents' linguistic culture, the state and activity of educational, cultural, social and political associations, conditions of fun and entertainment.

extent it was also developed, for example, in the concept of the so-called *non-professional educators*. The typologies adopted on the basis of this concept clearly referred to the above distinction. Cf. E. Trempała's works, e.g. *Pedagogiczna działalność wychowawców nieprofesjonalnych w środowisku lokalnym* (1998), Bydgoszcz, Poland.

⁴ The category of environment circles was and still is (although to a lesser degree today) an important one from the perspective of understanding the concept of educational environment. Understood in this way, as a structural or, precisely, ontological one, it was the key category within social pedagogy. It served the purposes of both description and diagnosis of the state of affairs, as well as being useful from the point of view of planned educational practice.

The individual environment (personal) – conditions with which only one person has to do, which reach him or her directly and at any time: housing, the parents' or guardians' income, the wealth of the family, parents' free time, the child's share in housework activities, cultural property, level of parents' education, parents' intellectual life, language culture, state of parents' home life together, aesthetic needs of the family, ideological belief-based needs of the family, the nature of the family's social life, parents' intellectual and moral authority, technical culture in family environment (Pieter, 1972).

Looking among pedagogical achievements for typologies which, on the one hand, were inspiring and meaningful for the theory and practice of education and, on the other hand, whose topicality we can still talk about today, we should mention here the typology which was applied in pedagogy owing to the systematic sociology practised in the trend of functionalism, particularly clearly present in Polish pedagogy in the 1970s and 1980s. This is the typology identifying educational environments with specific institutions. This kind of educational influence, very much localised then (and thus justified) in the trend of Marxist ideology, and thus the ideology of the overall educational impacts, has already faced serious criticism. Today, however, the prospect of institutionalisation invoked in, among others, the trend of structural and critical thinking when it comes to the functioning of social systems (both in relation to their description and design), plays a very important role. In my opinion, treated literally and as a source, the typologies then associated with it and indicating the role of institutions in social life may have well-determined inspirations and be of specific value for the present.

The typology of educational environments understood as educational institutions, which was widely accepted in Polish pedagogy in the 1970s and the 1980s, comes from Przeclawski's works (1968)⁵. This typology was for many years well-established in the works of contemporary sociologists of education and social educators. Przeclawski distinguished the following educational environments: 1) institutions of natural education: family, peer groups, 2) institutions of indirect education: the workplace, institutions organising holidays, health care institutions, institutions disseminating art, magazines, the radio and TV (today the media), books, films, 3) institutions of direct education: a) school, b) institutions of extra-curricular education: courses, clubs, community centres, societies, the youth club.

⁵ The typology presented by Przeclawski was one commonly used in social pedagogy, especially in the 1970s. It was applied both with regard to the issues of extra-curricular education, parallel education as well as permanent education, but also in concepts adopted in the then social and educational policy. It seems, however, that its conceptual sources can be traced back to sociology of education, in concepts developed before World War II.

The typologies of educational environments accepted today clearly correspond to the above-illustrated and developed achievements in this field. Taking as a criterion a defined socio-spatial framework, and then the location of factors and their nature, Mikołaj Winiarski (2007) distinguishes six environment circles, categories of educational environment. These are: *educational microenvironment*, limited to only one social group or educational institution, *local educational environment*, as a group of socio-cultural and natural factors of educational influence and functioning in the area of residence, *area educational environment*, i.e. natural and socio-cultural factors present in area of the municipality or several smaller neighbouring communities, a larger town or a city district, a medium-sized city, *educational mezzoenvironment*, i.e. natural and socio-cultural factors localised in a given region or macroregion, *educational macroenvironment*, i.e. the nationwide social or educational environment, covering various sectors of society, the whole network of facilities, institutions and organisations, *global educational environment*, i.e. the universal environment, the impact of natural, economic and socio-cultural factors situated in other countries (pp. 433-434).

The above typologies of educational environments most often display their objective nature and accentuate this dimension. Thus, this is a prospect of experiencing the environment from the perspective of the community, as an objectively given reality and this very perspective was and is mainly accepted in pedagogy, as epistemological as well as methodological. Experiencing and recognising the environment from the point of view of an individual (hence the subjective approach), although always present in pedagogy, has not yielded any deeper conceptual developments.

However, from the perspective of implemented educational practice, in pedagogy and, especially, social pedagogy, the issue of social and community diagnosis has been extensively developed.

4. Recognising the educational environment – social diagnosis

For pedagogical practice, also understood in the context of the concept of community education, the primary issue is the initial recognition of this environment, identifying where and how it functions, and who or what creates it in a given situational arrangement. This issue is closely connected with the issue of social diagnosis, which has been broadly, and in a multi-layered way, developed on the basis of social pedagogy. All the leading representatives of this discipline have spoken on social diagnosis, providing a kind of ultimately broad base of knowledge, important today and, as it turns out, still relevant for the concept of community education. The need to diagnose social and community conditions has already been stressed by Radlińska or Wroczyński. According to them, this

environment is a set of factors co-determining the development of the individual; therefore, an educator's task is to determine and produce a diagnosis of environment conditions. But the concept of diagnosis in contemporary social pedagogy was most fully developed by Kawula and Marynowicz-Hetka.

Emphasising the environment context of the functioning of individuals or social groups, **Stanislaw Kawula** says that the purpose of diagnosis is to:

focus our recognition on these social conditions of situations and the destiny of individuals or groups that are present in their immediate environment and, above all, in the family, school, workplace, place of residence, in a peer group. Therefore, pedagogical diagnosis always has a social aspect, since it makes us see the causes of a certain condition of human behaviour or functioning of social groups or institutions in their mutual relationships and interactions (Kawula, Dąbrowski, Gataś, 1980, pp. 41-42).

With regard to the individual, pedagogical diagnosis is to serve the purpose of expressing the assessment of whether the tested level of developmental properties of a pupil and his or her personality is consistent with the objectives of education, care, cultural life, etc. and determining at what level and through what causative activities these properties have been developed. Therefore, the tasks of pedagogical diagnosis should always be analysed against the background of, and with respect to, the correctness of the biopsychological development of each human being. Indeed, it is a very clear reference to the concept of a human that was adopted at the very beginning of the existence of social pedagogy by Helena Radlińska, the concept of a human as a bio-socio-cultural unity, a human whose development takes place at these three levels and planes. According to Kawula, the key diagnosed factors/areas are as follows:

1. Material factors, such as a network of specified institutions and facilities in the environment, the conditions of settlement and transportation of the nearest area, geographical and natural conditions, the state of social and individual social security, network of services.

2. Psychopedagogical factors, such as the type of emotional ties in an educational institution, forms of work in cultural institutions, a possibility of fulfilling the caring function of school, the activity of the local day-room, parents' pedagogical culture, teachers' qualifications, the efficiency of work of a youth organisation.

3. Socio-cultural factors such as the culture of interpersonal relations in a particular institution, parents' attitude towards the school, customs and rituals that exist in the environment, the type of neighbourhood ties, functions of social control in the place of residence, forms of artistic work, attitudes towards people with disabilities, the type of participation in cultural life.

4. The organisation of life in the environment, such as the issue of co-ordination of cultural life, the existence and functioning of different forms of self-government, social actions in favour of the residential area, various manifestations of the activity of social forces, the functioning of health and social care (Kawula, Dąbrowski, Gałaś, 1980).

The issue of educational, caring and cultural needs plays a very important role in determining the level of human development in Kawula's concept. It is the extent of their satisfaction that is largely a determinant of individual development. Therefore:

an important problem of pedagogical diagnosis is not only the determination (recognition) of the very needs and the extent of their satisfaction in a particular environment, but also the analysis of situations which cause certain deficiencies in the occurrence, regulation, and satisfaction of given needs. The identification of situations resulting in specific deficiencies or threats as regards regulating and satisfying the needs of the individual or society is of foremost importance for the purpose of the pedagogical diagnosis of the environment (Kawula, Dąbrowski, Gałaś, 1980, p. 67).

The concept of pedagogical diagnosis as viewed by Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka, which is understood as activities related to socio-educational work, is related to the views of the fathers of social pedagogy, especially Helena Radlińska and Aleksander Kamiński, and is a response to contemporary social determinants. At the same time, she sees social and educational work as activities assisting in development, meant for individuals, groups and communities. At the same time, the author accepts an understanding of development as "a directed process of changes heading through specific phases to the achievement of higher structural and functional forms" (Marynowicz-Hetka, 1987, p. 47). Socio-educational activity, which is the base activity in Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka's concept of social pedagogy, is to be conducted mainly on the ground of and using three methods of socio-educational work in the environment, which is also a reference to the tradition developed earlier, in this respect, by social pedagogy. This is the individual case method, a method of working with a group and of organising the environment. Socio-educational activity implemented using these three methods is to encourage the development of individuals in three areas of their activity: biological, social, as well as cultural, thus also in the area of growth, growing, and introducing, which is also in connection to Helena Radlińska's concept. The social and educational activity in the environment presented here should be preceded by a diagnosis, a recognition of resources (social forces of the environment). The category of social and educational institutions plays a very important role in the concepts presented here, also with

regard to diagnosis, because it is through their activity that the three functions of social pedagogy, i.e. help in biosociocultural development, compensation for individual and environment shortcomings and educational prevention, can be fulfilled (Lepalczyk, Marynowicz-Hetka, 1988, p. 19).

5. Community education – directions of the search

Accepting today all the knowledge elaborated in pedagogy on social-environment diagnosis, it should be noted at the same time that the understanding of the environment and the educational environment in modern social sciences is clearly developing and diversifying. This issue is found in the context of various concepts and theoretical orientations, not only specific to sociology, but also cultural anthropology, theology and finally, broadly understood, social philosophy. Consequently, a conceptual expansion of this issue has occurred. Educational environment is spoken about today, among other things, in the context of small homelands, living space, everyday life, place, community, ecosystem, ecology, etc. On the basis of social pedagogy, the most frequently cited concepts are those of living space and small homelands. These issues are also recalled in the context of the so-called pedagogy of place (all these concepts may be considered in the context of the concept of community education), such a social educational practice that is pursued in the field of the extra-curricular presence and activity of man.

By recalling the category of **living space** attention was drawn to the need of broadening the environment, which according to Przećławska "is a more closed circle, while space is something open, a material from which educational environment is created" (Przećławska, Theiss, 1999, p. 76). In this approach the environment was recognised then, in the traditional sense, as 'an area' too narrowed, limiting and reducing many potential experiences having an impact on the education and development of a human being. The perspective of living space is a perspective both ontologically and axiologically wider, existentially more adequate since as Przećławska says:

humans' destiny is developed at the intersection of different dimensions of space. It is a physical space, social, temporal (historical space has a very special place here), symbolic, and psychological. The IT space is becoming an increasingly important area; there is also a moral space as well as one that I called the space of transcendence. Changes resulting from the development of civilisation and social transformations take place within each of these spaces as well as in proportions that develop relationships between these spaces (Przećławska, Theiss, 1999, p. 76).

The paradigm of socio-spatial orientation signalled here and adopted in social sciences today takes on a different interpretative slant⁶. In social pedagogy, also in social work and therefore also in relation to social practice, its two models are usually recalled: *the absolute space* and *the relativistic space*. In the first model, space is viewed through the prism of its physicality, geographicality, and territoriality. It is described and evaluated through the development of social communication, an interest in the modernisation of public social welfare institutions, and search for improvements of co-operation (Szurzykiewicz, 2010). He writes:

structures of social space of this type are measurable by analysing its various aspects: the data on social structures, the economic and social situation, housing base and infrastructure, family structures, educational standards, frequency of use of public services and by identifying problem areas and the gratuity scheme (p. 210).

In the second model of space, the relativistic one, space is primarily understood as "associations and various fluid links in the field of relations between forces and structures of relationships. The constitution of space, however, is of an intersubjective nature connected with practical activity of a historical-biographical and symbolic dimension" (Szurzykiewicz, 2010, p. 211). In this approach the emphasis is therefore more on space as the daily and experienced world. It is a world of human experience and choices entangled in certain social structures and institutional connections.

The above paradigm of socio-spatial life orientation of a person, when it comes to his or her place and role in society, often emphasises his/her subjectivity, causative stance and commitment to transform the social world. Such a slant also affects the specific way of understanding the educational environment. Mentioning the educational environment in the context of living space, Anna Przećławska says:

I do not understand the impact of the educational environment as a behavioural mechanism for inducing a specific response to a specific stimulus. It is an individual experience formed in an individual pupil and largely dependent on him/her...; the educational environment transforming a pupil's personality on the basis of his/her own intrinsic activity changes itself under his/her influence (Przećławska, Theiss, 1999, p. 15).

⁶ The work by L. Böhnisch and Münchmeier, *Pädagogik des Jungendraumes*, München, 1990, is most frequently quoted as a source for this orientation.

Social space as an alternative and extended view of the environment and educational environment is also described today in the category of a **small homeland**. This category, taken from the sociological tradition (e.g. in Poland, the works of S. Ossowski (1967)), was also developed in an interesting way on the basis of social pedagogy. Theiss (2006) says that this category “specifies a certain area (space, ground), together with the accompanying human references, i.e. attitudes, emotions, values, and meanings. On the other hand, a small homeland is part of local history, traditions and the cultural heritage of social groups”, and further on:

a small homeland is a structure of a relational nature. It is placed in the “between” space – between man and his world in communication with the local culture and nature, history and tradition, habit and custom, between the family and the state; in the circle of people and their matters, everyday and festive ones. It is created by force of a person’s personal, direct, and deeply emotional relation to the environment (pp. 24-25).

The category of a small homeland is thus an attempt at a comprehensive view/description of a person and his or her “local” identity. From the point of understanding this category as an educational environment, the practical imperative (meaning a translation into certain educational activities) contained in it is very important. Theiss (2006) writes:

A small homeland is an axionormative and pragmatic category. On the one hand, it shows a desirable form of social structure and social relations, led by the common good, social harmony, solidarity, etc. and defines systems of values and standards and approved human behaviour. On the other hand, it reveals rich educational, social, socialising and cultural possibilities. It reveals the tasks, space and ways of social participation (p. 25).

In this sense, the category of a small homeland is a very important “element of” the concept of community education, the concept developed today especially in social pedagogy.

Understanding the environment and the educational environment from the perspective of living space and a “small homeland” can also be found in the concept of the so-called “pedagogy of place”. It is now primarily a theoretical perspective of research in education rooted in philosophical thought, in the depths of poststructuralism, critical pedagogy, and urban sociology. The concept defines the space-place as a source of identification of social entities (Mendel, 2006). The subject’s identity is always seen here in a dialectical relationship “person – space/place”, which also represents the area of the forma-

tion of his or her biography, identity. Taking on a specific social ontology, the “pedagogy of place” is also an offer of educational practice, today most often implemented on the grounds of thus oriented socio-cultural animation. Mendel (2006) writes:

In connection with this, the pedagogy of place, in the context of social animation and in the face of its underlying requirement to disseminate the community forms of life of local communities, can be understood as a continuous process of severing and creatively renegotiating the meanings of places, focused on community values, in which individuals and groups are active, co-creating their own histories of themselves ... An ally- animator uses a research formula through action. He or she remains in alliance with the community in which he or she carries out research work diagnosing the environment, designing the change and co-implementing plans. In doing so he or she relies on education, which integrates these microsystems (the issues relating to education being the bond for the community, family, and school) and which constitutes the content of the animating activity (learning together, by oneself, for oneself, enlivens the community) (p. 32).

6. Community education – contemporary challenges

In the face of modern civilisational transformations, and narrowly with regard to specific socio-cultural conditions, in relation to the tasks and goals of community education one can point to its numerous tasks, especially in the field of expected and needed educational practice. Such tasks may include the following:

- shaping the local identity of individuals and social groups, as well as a wider, global identity, through discovering and nurturing the cultural heritage,
- supporting an active and productive life of individuals and groups in relationships with their surroundings, both nearer and more distant,
- assistance in discovering both individual and collective creative forces, creative possibilities,
- improving social local life by showing a vision of social development in the areas of functioning of individuals and social groups,
- assistance and care of the needy, also through the activity of institutions of support,
- inspiring educational activities (including school ones) in the direction of community cooperation.

Apart from the general indications specific to community education indicated above, we can talk from a more global point of view about today’s challenges addressed to specific individuals and groups:

With regard to children and adolescents:

- promoting access to all types of education. In this respect, it is a concern for fairer and more widely available access to the system of education. Expanding vocational counselling and guidance,
- undertaking and developing addiction prevention activities both at the level of school and extra-curricular education,
- initiating community educational activities by setting up facilities related to managing children's and young people's free time in the place of residence (e.g., community day-rooms, community centres, clubs, etc.)
- developing the media in the direction of disseminating educational content.

With regard to the family:

- assistance to poor families especially in the context of threats such as, for example, unemployment, disability of family members, etc.
- legal protection of motherhood and fatherhood and promoting fertility,
- promotion of institutional psycho-pedagogical assistance, counselling in the area of upbringing and education of children and broader communication in the family,
- initiating measures of community integration in the place of residence – the development of social ties,
- developing the media in terms of widely understood family support, in the field of education, health promotion, problem solving, etc.

Conclusion

Summing up this discussion we can say that community education is one of the most important areas of pedagogical reflection undertaken today. On the one hand, this is still an area to build and integrate new ideas, visions, concepts when it comes to education and pedagogy in general. On the other hand, a relatively wide range of issues tackled and areas highlighted provide great potential for the implemented educational practice, appropriate to the understanding of education proposed here. The constantly changing social reality of human existence, the changing conditions of existence, pose new challenges, thus giving rise to new possibilities of social educational practice. In this sense, there are also still new opportunities of a new reading and interpretation of social life.

The concept of community education also contains a certain continuity as regards Polish social pedagogical thought. This is particularly evident in relation to the tradition of social pedagogy. Striving to transform the conditions of existence has always been the driving force of education undertaken in society.

In this sense, community education has always been and will always be an important field of educational activity.

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