

On the ontological and axiological structure of social pedagogy – in search of values

Keywords

values, social activity, environment, environmental education, social participation, education, the environment, social practice, socio-cultural animation

Abstract

The presented article takes up the subject matter of values in the relation to social pedagogy. It is the fundamental plane of the numerous explorations and considerations of this academic field. It is here that we are talking about how to educate man and, therefore, also about what values to lead him to and what values to point out to him. The world of values, however, is also a highly complex reality, not always fully succumbing to rational examination, thus being fairly elusive, as it is also a world of intuition and spiritual experiences. It is often an unidentified and mysterious way of our quest. Social pedagogy is not free from these problems, which seems to be the most difficult area of research in this discipline.

The task of identifying social pedagogy from the point of view of the values present in it is quite complex and perhaps ultimately quite difficult to be identified clearly. In this regard, there are indeed different decisions and adopted solutions.

This work is an attempt at these analysis – showing simultaneously that in this discipline it is difficult to make clear and homogeneous decision, although at the sametime they refer always to the pedagogy comprehended here as the specific social activities.

The issue of values in education is an obvious, fundamental plane of the numerous explorations and considerations of this academic field. It is here that we are talking about how to educate man and, therefore, also about what values

to lead him to and what values to point out to him¹. This important perspective will not be changed by any fashion or extremely relativized views since it is the “salt” of pedagogical thinking. The world of values, however, is also a highly complex reality, not always fully succumbing to rational examination, thus being fairly elusive, as it is also a world of intuition and spiritual experiences. It is often an unidentified and mysterious way of our quest. Social pedagogy is not free from these problems, which seems to be the most difficult area of research in this discipline, but again, you can find here trails that lead to the goal and bring closer the perspective of hope.

On values in social education / social pedagogy / – the background of the research

Axiological issues undertaken in social pedagogy are clearly those associated with the issue of the relationship that exists between the *individual / human being* and the *environment / society*². It is this relationship that is also described axiologically, and requires it, as a relationship that is teleological in its nature and, therefore, with its essential transfer into practice. The “functioning” conception of man adopted here and the concept of the very structure of social life as the key elements of this relationship should be sought out and defined in this complex relational context. Hence, the issue of values has been somehow linked to social pedagogy, hidden in this relationship. In this sense, it is difficult to state clearly that, for example, the subjective nature of social education consists of the subjectivity of individuals, understood in this or that way, including for example their ability to engage in *creative social activities* or *cultural activity*. These activities are in fact always “entangled” in, or are a product of broader social relations or mechanisms of social life. These, in turn, can be understood differently, and not necessarily overlap or imply (in the sense of epistemological, ontological and axiological identity) the subjective role of man. An example of this can be the very social pedagogy, mostly understood functionally and deterministically (even today) when it comes to the course of social life, together

¹ There is relatively rich literature on the axiological foundations of pedagogy. A classic presentation of this issue is, for example, the study: U. Ostrowska, *Aksjologiczne podstawy wychowania* [Axiological foundations of education], [in:] B. Śliwerski (ed.), *Pedagogika* [Pedagogy], Vol. I, Gdańsk 2006, pp. 391-415; With regard to the areas of social pedagogy (social work) see, for example, M. Cichosz, *Aksjologiczne inspiracje w pracy socjalnej – kontekst współczesnych przemian cywilizacyjnych* [Axiological inspiration in social work – the context of contemporary civilizational changes], [in:] K. Marzec-Holka (ed.), *Spółczesność, demokracja, edukacja* [Society, democracy, education], Bydgoszcz 2000, pp. 177-184.

² See: A. Przećławska (ed.) *Relacje między ludźmi jako przedmiot badań pedagogicznych* [Relations between people as a subject matter of educational research], Warszawa 1993, pp. 14-17.

with the simultaneous dominant personalist and humanistic understanding of a human being³.

Therefore, the principles of pedagogical interactions themselves, the rules governing social life adopted in social pedagogy, clearly interpreted axiologically and indeed of such axiological "nature", as for example the principle of the *common good*, *social justice*, *subsidiarity*, *support* but also *social capital*, are also the resultant of understanding social life and man, an active participant in social life, as a person⁴.

In addition, each pedagogy, including social pedagogy, immanently carries with itself a structurally contained imperative of action, a need to implement a given practice of education. This is a kind of the third interpretative plane for the issue of values and, at the same time, another area of concepts adopted in this regard, remaining, of course, in close connection with the concept of man as well as the concept of social relationships (social life)⁵.

Thus, the task of identifying social pedagogy from the point of view of the values present in it is quite complex and perhaps ultimately quite difficult to be identified clearly. In this regard, there are indeed different decisions and adopted solutions. The most consistent and yet ideologically homogeneous ones, when it comes to understanding the man-society (individual-environment) relationship also with regard to axiological issues, include the views of Ryszard Wroczyński, one of the founders of the Polish social pedagogy. The author adopted a focused and coherent way of interpretation and justification for the relationships indicated above, adopting in this regard clear evolutionism

³ Although it should be remembered at the same time that personalism and humanism can have their different interpretations, also opposing ones, which can be found both in extremely individualistic concepts – not deterministic ones, behavioural-instrumental justifications can also be adopted here.

⁴ See: B. Smolińska-Theiss, *Od chrześcijańskiego miłosierdzia do liberalnej demokracji* [From Christian charity to liberal democracy], „Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze” [“Caring-Educational Problems”] 1994, No. 5. A wide range of interpretation in this axiological scope of reading social life, also from the point of view of understanding subjectivity, can be found for example in the work published on the basis of social pedagogy and devoted to the issue of “social capital”, see: K. Marzec-Holka (ed.), *Kapitał społeczny a nierówności. Kumulacja i redystrybucja* [Social capital and inequality. Accumulation and redistribution], Bydgoszcz 2005. Also: M. Theiss, *Krewni, znajomi, obywatele. Kapitał społeczny a lokalna polityka społeczna* [Relatives, friends, citizens. Social capital and local social policy], Toruń 2007.

⁵ Comprehensive distinct concepts of social pedagogy were also developed, in which the category of “action” (at the ontological, epistemological and axiological levels) remains the interpretative “base”, see: E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *Pedagogika społeczna. Podręcznik akademicki* [Social pedagogy. Academic handbook], Vol. I-II, Warszawa 2007.

and functionalism, as well as methodological empiricism, which can be summarized in the categories shown below. The characteristics of these ideas can be put together and presented as follows:

Table 1. The characteristics of social pedagogy as presented by Ryszard Wroczyński; the ontological and axiological context – adopted solutions⁶

Functionalism	At the level of the fundamental relationship which exists between man and the environment, accepting the necessity of this relationship and its mutual conditioning – it is a functionally interdependent relationship. The implemented practice of the pursuit of the common good is considered the supreme value.
Determinism	Man remains in a necessary relationship with the environment, which is constantly changing and as such continually affects human beings, affects them consistently with a defined set of stimuli, leading to the fulfilment of their specific needs.
Humanism	Man is part of the social system, a particular social structure. His development is designated by the way of functioning of this structure. He is a target of spontaneous and “natural” impact of this system and a target of intended action, from the point of view of the activities organized on the basis of pedagogy. The position of man is important but always on account of the good of all and participation in organized culture.

Source: own study

The views of contemporary social pedagogues regarding the issues discussed here seem to be more ideologically diverse and heterogeneous, and even consistency-wise relativized in this approach. Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka, already mentioned in these deliberations, stressing *action* as the supreme category of social pedagogy, which is also a clear epistemological and methodological tendency of contemporary social pedagogy, namely the fact that we are dealing with a specific type of *social practice* (and bringing the discipline to this level), writes about the “structural” variety of social pedagogy in the following way: “As a result, the paradigm of social pedagogy, understood as views (shared by the community) on the socio-pedagogical point of view, has an attribute of heterogeneity, as constructed from a variety of views that meet at an intersection under this title and are exploited from the socio-pedagogical point of view. The multi-

⁶ See: R. Wroczyński, *O niektórych właściwościach badań pedagogicznych*, [in:] R. Wroczyński, T. Pilch (eds.), *Metodologia pedagogiki społecznej [On some properties of educational research (a) The methodology of social pedagogy]*, Wrocław–Warszawa 1974, pp. 11-29.

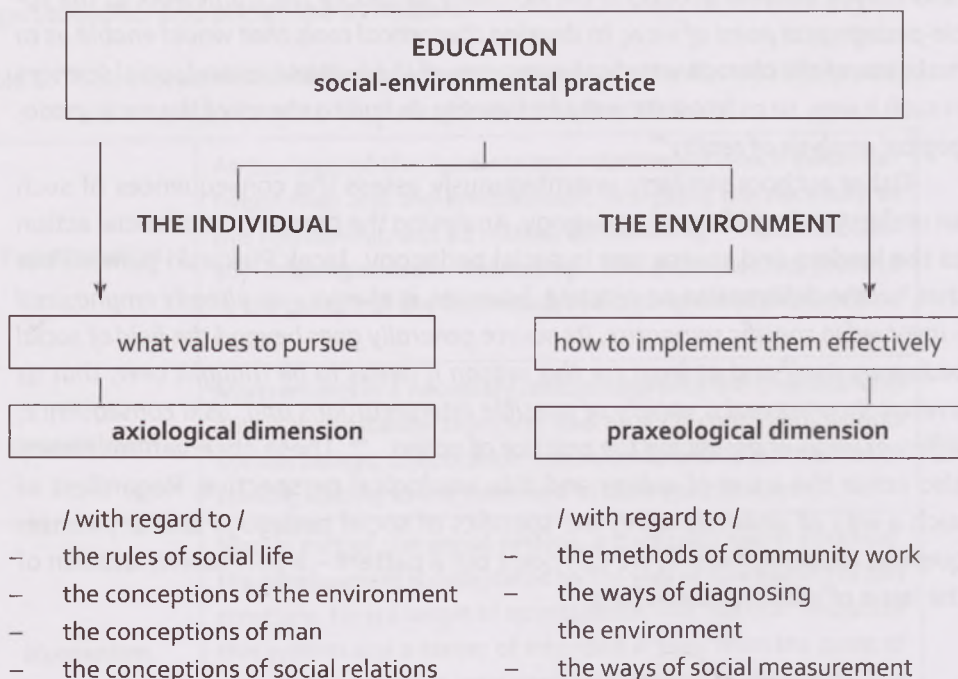
*plicity of the conceptual categories of social pedagogy is a strong argument for the formulation of such a thesis. Another issue that requires very careful consideration (and maybe another debate) is the necessity to specify the framework of the socio-pedagogical point of view, to develop theoretical tools that would enable us to make use of the abundance of achievements of the humanities and social sciences in such a way, so as to create unity in diversity, to build a theory of the socio-pedagogical analysis of reality*⁷.

Other authors similarly unambiguously assess the consequences of such an understanding of social pedagogy. Analysing the perspective of social action as the leading and source one in social pedagogy, Jacek Piekarski pointed out that "... the deliberation on practice, however, is always – as already emphasized – involved in specific semantics. Its source generally goes beyond the field of social pedagogy itself and at least for this reason it needs to be thought over, that as a result it can reveal a variety of possible interpretations and, as a consequence, different ways of describing the practice of action..."⁸. These observations clearly also cover the issue of values and this axiological perspective. Regardless of such a way of understanding the specifics of social pedagogy and any consequences resulting from it, we can point out a pattern – a permanent location of the issue of values present here.

⁷ See: E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *Kilka uwag w sprawie wieloparadygmatyczności pedagogiki społecznej* [Some remarks on the multiparadigm nature of social pedagogy], [in:] E. Kantowicz, B. Chrostowska, M. Ciczowska-Giedziun (eds.), *Szkoły Polskiej Pedagogiki Społecznej wobec nowych wyzwań. Polska Pedagogika Społeczna na początku XXI wieku* [The Schools of Polish Social Pedagogy vs. new challenges. Polish Social Pedagogy at the beginning of the twenty-first century], Toruń 2010, p. 132.

⁸ See: J. Piekarski, *U podstaw pedagogiki społecznej* [The fundamentals of social pedagogy], Łódź 2007, p. 94.

Table 2. Social pedagogy as a form of social – environmental (social action) practice – the axiological and praxeological perspective of the concept



Source: own study

The diagram above, although of a high degree of objectification when it comes to the problem of the “place” of social pedagogy, differentiates itself also because of the indicated specific areas of educational practice. In contemporary social pedagogy today, these areas include:

- social work (in this example, broadly understood social assistance/help)
- care work (including for example, working with the family)
- cultural animation (including, for example, artistic education)
- health education
- defensive education⁹.

In each of these areas the issue of values looks different. It requires a bit different analyses and decisions with regard to the issues such as social work [here, especially the issue of sources and selection of the rules governing social life], somewhat different with regard to cultural animation [here, especially

⁹ See: M. Cichosz, *Pedagogika społeczna w Polsce w latach 1945–2005 [Social Education in Poland in the years 1945–2005]*, Toruń 2006, p. 221.

the issue of participation in culture] or in relation to the issues of health education, i.e. different areas of practice relevant to social pedagogy. Those areas are also different contexts of thinking within the same axiology. Thus, the issue of values, being important and even crucial in social pedagogy, also remains highly complex in the perspective of epistemological analyses.

I. On the social-environmental change – the context of challenges for educational practice

Many years ago, at the beginning of the social changes of the 1980s and 1990s, Bogdan Suchodolski, an outstanding representative of Polish pedagogy, also with regard to social pedagogy, wrote: "... *The third major problem of our time is culture. It plays an important role in building a global society, but also in inspiring personal quality of life. The economic and political aspects of global society have been recalled here, but it is clear that it also has a cultural aspect. We are pondering over what importance for culture the consequences of the phenomenon of integration of the world have. This process is mainly realized in the external scope. We see the propagation of consumption, typical of rich countries. In other countries, only very few elites can make use of it, and a significant part of the population are frustrated because they cannot live a similar life. Traditional local culture depreciates increasingly, even if it has still been preserved. We can see how the conflict between culture, or rather cosmopolitan civilization defined by consumption, and the local culture based on tradition deepens. Is there a chance for reconciling the fascination with the cosmopolitanism of modern civilization and the way of life permeated with tradition? What should be changed both in modern civilization and in traditional culture? What values should be protected?...*"¹⁰.

The questions posed by Bogdan Suchodolski, even though it has been a long time since it happened, appear to be still valid. However, they are distinctive and fit into the context of the deliberations on social life, which are also undertaken within contemporary social pedagogy. This is yet another plane of analyses concerning values, and related to the changes in social life, the changes to the environment. In this regard, we can also see the development of a conception, most fully illustrated in the conception of the environment as a place of realization of values, but also a place of educational practice implemented according to it.

An interesting model of the types of the environment associated with the specificity of socio-pedagogical practice, as a response to the ongoing social changes, was introduced by Alicja Kargulowa, who distinguished, in this re-

¹⁰ See: B. Suchodolski, *Edukacja permanentna. Rozdroża i nadzieje* [Permanent education. Crossroads and hopes], Warszawa 2003, p. 90.

spect, the following types of environments: 1. the environment as a place of natural development of the individual – in this model, the teacher is expected to make sure the environment does not interfere with the natural development of a young human being, and the main task is to support this development, i.e. to give attention to optimally equipping the environment with conditions necessary for development, 2. in an ideal situation, the environment as a source of stimuli deliberately used for moulding the development of the pupil, should be kept under full control, and the development of the pupil is to be carried out in accordance with an educational ideal, 3. the environment as a system of social interactions of conscious social subjects, where the individual's own activity is important¹¹. Being part of the practical and praxeological nature of social pedagogy, the model of the environment presented here is also a place for decisions on the role of values and the tasks that should be assigned within them, regarding the social-environmental education of man.

The social world of the functioning of man is a world of changes and transformation; thus, every type of pedagogy must be a reaction to this world of social events. Social pedagogy views this world in a special way, it describes and diagnoses, but sets and indicates goals within it, still with a certain amount of uncertainty. It is still an important area of challenge for social pedagogy, both in its theory and in practice.

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¹¹ See: D. Urbaniak-Zajęc, „Środowisko” – historyczne czy teoretyczne pojęcie pedagogiki społecznej [“The environment” – a historical or theoretical understanding of social pedagogy], [in:] J. Piekarski, T. Pilch, W. Theiss, D. Urbaniak-Zajęc (eds.), *Edukacja społeczna wobec problemów współczesnego człowieka i społeczeństwa* [Public education facing the problems of contemporary man and society], Łódź 2010, pp. 119-140.

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