

Offender Supervision in Europe

COST Action IS1106



June 2015

WELCOME to the third (and hence penultimate) newsletter of the COST Action IS1106 on Offender Supervision in Europe.

Doubtless, this has been our busiest year and this newsletter reflects that. Our working groups met in Belfast (in October 2014) and in Athens (in April 2015) and all have made excellent progress in pilot-testing innovative methodologies for researching supervision. Their annual briefings are already available on our website (here: www.offendersupervision.eu/documents-and-resources).

We also ran our highly successful Training School for early-stage researchers AND our second international conference. Four members of the Action have benefited from support for 'short-term scientific missions' to other countries and have produced evidence of the significant benefits of their travels (see: www.offendersupervision.eu/documents-and-resources).

As if that was not enough, we completed

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Delegates at the COST Athens Conference in April

our second book, *'Community Punishment: European Perspectives'* (edited by Gwen Robinson and Fergus McNeill), which is due for publication by Routledge in August 2015 (further details can be found here:

www.sponpress.com/books/details/9781138818644/).

But we didn't stop there ... Christine Morgenstern and Gwen Robinson also guest edited a special issue of the *European Journal of Probation* on 'Consent and Cooperation of the Unfree' (see: ejp.sagepub.com/content/6/3.toc).

Of course, many individual members of the Action will also have produced important work informed and enhanced by their engagement with the Action which I have failed to report here. In many respects therefore, this newsletter only offers a very brief summary of *some* of the enormous volume of work done by an exceptionally committed group of colleagues, with whom it is always a pleasure to work.

*Fergus McNeill
University of Glasgow
Chair of COST Action IS1106*

Working Groups Work!

Working Group 1, which is focusing on the lived experience of supervision, this year continued to develop tools and approaches for capturing and comparing the experience of supervision. It has two sub-projects: the *Eurobarometer*, which is a survey of experiencing supervision, and the *Supervisible* project, which uses photovoice methodologies to illustrate and examine the experience of being supervised.

The *Eurobarometer* questionnaire has been piloted in Serbia, Italy and Romania. The next steps are to refine and improve the tool and pilot it in more jurisdictions.

Supervisible has been piloted in England, Germany and Scotland. The projects in all three countries indicated that the method was one which engaged and empowered participants, who became co-researchers and producers of the meanings and the true 'experts' of interpretation of photographs.

The three active researchers are presenting a paper at the European Criminology Conference in Porto in September 2015. They are also due to contribute a chapter to a book on Visual Criminologies in September 2015.

Working Group 2, which is exploring the processes involved in the imposition and administration of offender supervision at different stages of the criminal justice process, has continued to explore and develop vignette methodology that can be used to research and compare decision-making processes in and across countries.

Interviews with decision-makers involved in breach processes have been carried out, based on one of two vignettes. For most members of the group, the vignettes proved to be great conversation starters: they made decision-makers talk and allowed researchers a good understanding of the decision-making process, of the roles of the actors involved and of the criteria used.

The group has agreed on the need to develop a way to translate its qualitative data into more quantitative data or put it together differently to better structure the findings so as to allow

for comparison across and within jurisdictions on a more abstract level.

The group has discussed the first draft of a book proposal on breach-processes, and a panel proposal has been accepted for this year's European Society of Criminology conference, called *Understanding breach processes in a European context*.

Working Group 3 is focusing on the practice dimension, developing innovative research methods that can be applied to the domain of practice and can also be used to compare practice across jurisdictions.

In 2014 the group presented the preliminary results of its pilot research in a panel at the European Criminology Conference on *Practising Offender Supervision: Exploring Innovative Methods for Comparative Research*.

Sub-groups are working on *Visualising practice*, the aim of which is to test the utility of visual methods (photography) for representing and comparing probation practice in different jurisdictions; *Observing practice*, which aims to answer the question "What kind of knowledge can be obtained about probation practice by using observations as a research method?"; and *Practice Diaries*, which aims to learn more about the use of diaries/narratives to describe the professional life of practitioners.

Each sub-group is currently preparing a written paper for a forthcoming special issue of the *European Journal of Probation* that will focus on what has been learned so far.

These papers will describe the genesis of each project; the issues encountered in the development of pilot work; the experience of piloting each method; and discuss the utility of each of these 'innovative' methods for future research on offender supervision practice. It is hoped that, by these means, we will make a contribution to one of the aims of the Action, which is to find new ways of making the normally hidden domain of offender supervision more 'visible', and ultimately aid public understanding of what it involves.



The Next Generation: Our Training School in Barcelona

BACK in January 2015, six trainers and 20 trainees attended our Training School at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, which was wonderfully organised and hosted by Ester Blay and Trevor Calafato. Speaking for the trainers, I know that we all felt that we learned a lot, not just about each others' work and our own, but about each other! But, more importantly, here are some reflections from our trainees:

"For me, the training school was a very interesting, inspiring and enjoyable event in every sense. I mostly appreciated the intimate setting (small groups), the personal approach and the constructive way of giving and receiving 'friendly feedback' during the panel sessions. This approach made me feel comfortable to share thoughts and step out of my comfort zone. I also very much appreciated the career advice session on the last day; it was very helpful, comforting and motivating to hear about the experiences of 'senior researchers'. I left Barcelona with a buzzing head, full of new insights, inspiration and warm feelings. Thank you very much for this great opportunity." **(Anonymous Trainee)**

"My experience of the COST Training School surpassed my expectations ... Firstly, although I am an early-career researcher, I enjoyed the opportunity to deliver a presentation of my PhD thesis to date and receive friendly yet constructive feedback similar to that of a viva. This experience has afforded me the ability to address any potential issues that were highlighted by both the trainers and trainees prior to my actual viva in the near future, and to obtain a greater sense of what to anticipate upon that day when I have to defend my thesis. Secondly, at stages over the three days I was afforded the opportunity to listen to the trainers describe the research they are currently conducting for COST upon offender supervision in the EU. This enabled me to gain an understanding of the methodological and ethical issues they encountered, and how they were able to overcome these problems to conduct their research. Therefore, not only was I able to be illuminated by new research methodologies, notably visual research methods, I also gained insight in how best to avoid potential political and ethical issues that I myself may encounter. Finally, the COST Training School allowed me to meet and speak with my fellow trainees, especially from other jurisdictions. I was able to share knowledge and personal experiences with them which will have a positive influence upon my PhD thesis and future work." **(Wayne Campbell, Liverpool John Moores University)**

"The training school was a good event and I am pleased that I was able to attend. I thought that it was well run – in an atmosphere that was a blend of real work and good fun. I came away with a number of specific learning points, including:

- 1) The feedback that I received on my presentation was encouraging. I used the time to talk about the way I am trying to analyse and interpret interview data – and the comments from trainers and students were positive and helpful. I am also following up some ideas from other people's presentations – for example,*

ideas about probation and punishment.

2) It was good to hear about the various strands of the COST project – in more detail than is possible in the short presentations at ESC conferences. I would like a greater involvement in COST over the coming 18 months.

3) I thought that the trainers were generous with their time and ideas – both in formal sessions and during breaks and mealtimes. I was reminded again of the importance of colleagues and teamwork in academia.

(Jane Dominey, Institute of Criminology, Cambridge)



“Attending the COST training school provided a fantastic opportunity for me to receive feedback on my research from leading experts in my field. There isn’t much of a focus on offender supervision at my current university so being able to meet with colleagues who share similar research interests to me was hugely beneficial. The plenary session with the trainers on career development strategies was, for me, one of the most useful (and stress-relieving) sessions as not only did it give me the opportunity to ask questions about how to survive in the world of academia, it also made me realise that the pressures that I am currently experiencing as a final year PhD student had been experienced by everyone and are not as insurmountable as they seem. I returned home from the school with renewed confidence and enthusiasm for my field.” **(Chris Kay, University of Manchester)**

“The Training School was a unique experience to learn from the fascinating studies, methodologies and research findings presented, as well as a significant opportunity to interact with and gain insights from established researchers and respected academics with diverse perspectives and approaches on the field. Additionally, for those of us working on European research programmes, gaining inside to the reality of other countries is always interesting and extremely valuable in order to achieve a better understanding of our own work. What distinguishes, however, the COST Training School from other similar event was its very positive, friendly and cooperative nature, in an otherwise rather competitive and antagonistic field. Meeting and most importantly connecting with other young as well as established researchers reminds us and helps realise that we all share the same problems, difficulties and challenges in our work. Finally, I think that the most rewarding and

important aspect was the opportunity to receive valuable feedback and focus on our own research, as opposed to all the diverse and different obligations and projects that consume the better part of our working time. I felt inspired from all the diverse speeches and perspectives presented during those three days and got many fresh ideas for my research. Most importantly, I left Barcelona with renewed passion in my own PhD research.” **(Alexandra Koufouli, Athens)**

“I have spent three days at the COST on Offender Supervision training school, presenting my research and receiving priceless feedback. I have learned new methodological developments and received great pieces of advice on academic life, while having a great time. Here I will share some anecdotes and reflections:

- *Friendly critics: If this would have been twitter #friendlycritics would have been trending. People didn’t just say it, they meant it. I was quite nervous because it was my first presentation in English, but everyone was so supportive – both about the English issue, and also about the research ... I am so glad that my “debut” was in such a friendly environment.*
- *Humility: On day three, trainees had to “peer review” the trainers’ presentations from the day before. We took that duty very seriously and prepared in groups our friendly critiques, even though it was unclear to us how this could help. Firstly, we learned a lot looking more deeply at methodology, and how originality, rigour and significance are measured. Secondly, it was amazing to watch trainers diligently taking notes while group delegates were giving their reviews! That made me think that the only way to achieve excellence is always being open to critics and new approaches to your research.*
- *Renewal: It can sound quite obvious that I learnt a lot ... It is true, but it is also true that my own research and motivation were renewed. During all three days, my mind was on fire ... I think our researchers’ minds are quite self-centred: every time I was enjoying a presentation or listening to someone’s research and learning from them, my mind went immediately to my own research issues with new approaches to cope with them.*
- *Collegiality: This isn’t something new: “scholars get each other” and after few minutes, different cultural backgrounds meant nothing considering our shared passions and pains! Lunches, coffee breaks and a fancy dinner were moments of cheerful comradeship hard to explain between people who had met just few hours before. Collegiality was also quite evident in the career development panels, where experienced researchers gave us an insight into their careers and lives, sharing things they struggled with at our stage and things that still worried them were raised in an almost therapeutic session.*
(Consuelo Murillo, PhD student at Pompeu Fabra University)

“My experience at Cost Action on Offender Supervision Training School far exceeded my best expectations: it was really inspiring in several ways. First, because it allowed me to get to know and talk on several occasions with people whose work I admire and that were very open to get to know about my interests and field of

research ... I also want to highlight that trainers' feedback and the friendly criticism on my presentation was great, and it will be of great value to incorporate those reflections on my research. This training school was also a great opportunity to get to know other early-stage researchers that share interests and experiences with me. We ended up creating a really good network to engage in further collaboration. Secondly, being able to gain insight into the current research that is being conducted within the COST Action on Offender Supervision fostered my creative thinking and promoted the input of a variety of ideas that I might now apply in subsequent research projects focused on offender supervision. It was very interesting to observe, for example, how the use of visual methods in research can be so fruitful. Furthermore, the presentations of both trainees and trainers were also really useful for understand how different methodologies might be used in this area, comprising what are the main advantages and disadvantages of each one of them. Thirdly, in the last day, being offered the possibility to reflect and give some feedback on what is being done in this COST Action was an incredible experience in terms of critical thinking. While thinking together on the work that is being done, trainees were able to reflect more clearly about our own work. The presentation of the "friendly criticism" and debate that followed also created a sharing environment that is very good because it really showed how senior researchers are open to our suggestions and reflections, which creates a lot of confidence to early-stage researchers. Connected to this, finally, I also want to highlight that it was really inspiring to be able to hear from senior academics about their past and present challenges in their professional paths. The discussion opened to trainees' questions was really a good way to get involved in themes that are usually not discussed in this type of events but that, in fact, very prominently affect our academic careers." **(Rafaela Granja Goncalves, Minho University, Portugal)**

"I found it was a great event and am really glad I went. It boosted my confidence in my abilities and in what I had learned in the past few weeks. I wasn't 100% sure my research (nor myself) would be in any way "on par" with others because I only started my studies in October 2014, and doing a PhD can be so isolating and so often (physically) lonesome ... I'm finding that my thought process has already been informed by this event through either reinforcing what approach or research or thoughts I had before the event, or contributing towards structure or design of any new or future approach I may take to this project. This training was a real 'turning point' and landed me smack into the epicentre of my own research! It's like finally realising my own identity as a criminology researcher! I know who I am!! I was also invigorated by meeting the trainers and other early stage researchers. There is a lot to be said for supporting the "younger generation" (younger in studies or in career or in age) of researchers and indeed, in giving them a chance not only to present but to critically review current European research and contribute towards shaping it. It was a real community and I hope to attend more COST events or indeed, consider hosting a PhD training school myself in later years. I look forward to being part of the (potential) post-grad movement of COST and look forward also to hearing more about it." **(Jean Anne Kennedy, Ireland)**

Learning As We Go: Short-term Scientific Missions

UNDER COST funding, short-term scientific missions (STSM) allow members of the Action to make application for funds to travel to work alongside colleagues in other jurisdictions for between 1 week and 3 months. Given that so much of our Action's work is undertaken within working groups and their sub-groups, uptake of STSMs for individuals to travel has been a little bit slow. That said, this year we achieved our target of supporting 4 STSMs.

Maria Anagnostaki, PhD candidate at National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, spent a month (June-July 2014) working closely with Professor Anthea Hucklesby at the University of Leeds in the UK. The trip was invaluable in allowing Maria to draw on the considerable resources of the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies at Leeds in order to inform her doctoral work on the implementation of community service in Greece. As well as enjoying access to expert supervision and support from Prof Hucklesby and to the extensive literature available in the Centre, Maria was able to observe Community Payback in England and to complete an exhaustive review of the implementation of community service across most of the countries participating in the Action's working group on decision-making. She was able to complete her paper on "Consent and cooperation in the Greek context: Rhetoric and praxis", which was published in the special issue of the European Journal of Probation referred to in the introduction (see: <http://ejp.sagepub.com/content/6/3.toc>). The results of the STSM will also be discussed in her doctoral thesis. For more details see: <http://www.offendersupervision.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/STSM-Report-Anagnostaki.pdf?a8c403>

Martí Rovira of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona (Spain) spent 5 weeks in

July-August 2014 at Willem Pompe Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology, Utrecht University in the Netherlands, working with Prof Miranda Boone. Martí's STSM focused in criminal record background checks in the labour market as a supervision measure 'by' the community. He aimed to develop a comparative analytical framework from a European perspective. The diagram below illustrates this, but for more details see: <http://www.offendersupervision.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/STSM-Report-Rovira.pdf?a8c403>

Wendy Fitzgibbon of London Metropolitan University (UK) spent a week in February working with Prof. Dr. Christine M. Graebisch of the University of Applied Social Sciences in Dortmund (Germany). The STSM provided a valuable opportunity for Wendy and an art therapist with whom she works to help Christine pilot-test the 'photovoice' methodology of the Supervisable project in the German context. As the conference reflections also included in this newsletter (below) indicate, this provided enormously beneficial in refining the method, in generating pictures (as data), and in beginning to explore comparative analysis. For more information see: <http://www.offendersupervision.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/STSM-Fitzgibbon.pdf?a8c403>

In May 2015, **Aline Bauwens** of the Free University of Brussels (Belgium) spent a week with Dr Deirdre Healy at University College Dublin (Ireland). Aline's STSM to undertake preliminary theoretical work exploring the significance of architecture and spatial design in probation agencies charged with delivering supervision. Aline and Deirdre are collaborating in producing a related journal article and are considering developing an empirical comparative study of probation spaces in their two countries. For more information see: http://www.offendersupervision.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/STSM-Report_Aline-Bauwens.pdf?a8c403

Three Reflections on our Second International Conference

I'M sure all members of the Action will want to join me in expressing our gratitude to Maria Anagnostaki for working tirelessly to make our second international conference in Athens on 'Compliance, Enforcement and Breach' such a success. In April this year, 118 delegates from 25 countries enjoyed not only the delights of visiting one of the cradles of civilisation; we also enjoyed the wonderful hospitality of our Greek colleagues as well as benefiting from an enormously stimulating academic programme, from genuine interdisciplinary dialogue and from engagement with colleagues in policy and practice (especially but not exclusively those from Greece). Here we present three extended reflections on the conference which, I hope, will serve to remind those who attended of an inspiring event, as well as allowing those who couldn't attend to share in the learning. The conference presentations are also on the Action website here: <http://www.offendersupervision.eu/events/second-international-conference-athens>

1. Dangling Conversations About Supervision

*By Fergus McNeill,
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SETTING aside my own opening contribution (with Gwen Robinson) on 'Compliance, Legitimacy and Offender Supervision', which was based on two papers that some readers will know well, our first major contribution came from an unfamiliar voice and an unfamiliar discipline (to many of us). Prof Stef Decoene (who is both an academic at the Free University of Brussels and a practicing prison psychologist) questioned conventional criminological thinking on compliance by introducing us to how social psychologists understand how one person influences another.

The first — and perhaps most fundamental challenge that he posed was that when we (as criminologists) discuss 'compliance', we indulge in a kind of collective use of euphemism; the word we should use is 'obedience'. For social psychologists the term compliance (and the term conformity) apply only to influence between people of the same status and/or in the same social group. When there is a difference in social status or a clear power differential, as in most criminal justice encounters, or when one social group is trying to influence another, obedience is the 'correct' term for the objective of the influence attempt. For Stef, this is not a moral or a normative claim but rather an empirically derived distinction. However, he (correctly) anticipated that many of us (both academics and practitioners) would find the term obedience difficult.

Reflecting on our conversations throughout the conference, I think this may be because obedience implies *submission*, and while we may typically want people subject to supervision to submit to its formal conditions, a lot of emphasis has been placed on more active forms of *cooperation* that seem to be implied in the aspirations and content of supervision — which are often cast in rehabilitative (and sometimes welfarist) terms. Indeed, in my own talk, I had suggested a possible path to legitimate supervision that moved from formal compliance (based on instrumental mechanisms of incentive and disincentive) towards a more substantive compliance based on receiving help, developing an attachment (to the supervisor), and thus coming to see the authority as psychologically (and not just legally) legitimate.

But, of course, my law scholar colleagues (and in particular Christine Morgenstern) reminded me that, in fact, the obedience of submission to the formal requirements of the order is all that we can reasonably and lawfully *demand* of the person under supervision. Since these requirements (as I'll illustrate below) have real punitive weight, submission to them is all that is necessary for retributive justice to be done; and demanding anything further (in the way of substantive compliance or cooperation) would be to cross the threshold into punishment beyond the law (even if the intent is benign). That said, we can *ask* people to engage more substantively with the constructive intent of supervision (in terms of rehabilitation, reintegration or resocialisation) — and we can and should do all that we can to *offer* assistance (not least to mitigate any unintended collateral pains of the punishment).

In my talk, I had also alluded to the work of Valerie Braithwaite on tax-payers' 'motivational postures' towards tax authorities. She distinguishes between postures of *deference* (which might represent commitment to or capitulation in the face of the tax authorities) and postures of *defiance* (which might include explicit resistance, game-playing or disengagement). Crucially, her empirical research shows that these different postures are discernible but that their relationship to tax-payers' actual compliance with (or obedience towards) tax regimes is contingent.

This idea of postures (or attitudes and dispositions) towards supervision came alive in our second session focused on the two pilot projects of our working group on experiencing supervision. Wendy Fitzgibbon presented some of the early findings from our ongoing 'Supervisable' project. In research sites in England, Germany and Scotland, we have asked people with lived experiences of supervision (past or present, and of whatever sort) to represent their experiences in and through photographs. In the images that Wendy shared (and in a different way in the pilot testing of the 'Eurobarometer' — a survey measure of experiences of supervision — that Ioan Durnescu presented), we found some evidence that postures of commitment and substantive, cooperative engagement with supervision are possible. However, by far the stronger message of the images was that supervision is experienced as pervasive and painful, particularly in the constraints that it imposes. While we make no claims that these pilot study findings are generalizable or representative, in the three sites the recurring images of *constraint* (and of *waste* and of *judgment*) seemed to endorse Stef's argument that, first and foremost, supervisees feel that they are compelled to submit obediently. And even when supervision becomes a positive and helpful experience (often represented in images of *nature and growth*), this does *not* mean that it stops being experienced as painful and pervasive.

In the third session, our working group on decision-making and supervision explored how 'breach' decisions are made (and avoided). Intriguingly, reporting the Spanish part of the multi-site pilot study, Ester Blay suggested that these judgments are much more about 'attitudes' (and hence postures or dispositions) than they are about the formal requirements of the law. The decision-makers (whether immediate supervisors, or managers, or judges) have dispositional postures towards supervisees, and they judge the dispositional postures (or attitudes) of the supervisee. If they deem the supervisee to be *trying to comply* (or obey), they are typically quick to re-interpret or to forgive formal non-compliance or disobedience. In the Spanish case, the decision-makers exercise of discretion seems to offer the promise of protecting supervisees from what might be seen as cruel or disproportionate enforcement. But, of course, supervisees in other contexts might be highly vulnerable to discretionary decision-making by powerful actors with different dispositions — for example, in those US states where the approach to probation and parole is sometimes described as "tail them, nail them and fail them".

In the penultimate session, the working group on ‘practising supervision’ presented two papers. One came from Ines Sucic and Renata Tkalic (from Croatia) and drew on their recent paper in the [European Journal of Probation](#). They offered and then evidenced an important difference between consent to the *order* itself (and its formal requirements) and agreement with the *content* of supervision (and the substantive expectations implied in that content). Their research revealed that, to use a Scottish term, Croatian supervisees are effectively compelled (not least by the threat of imprisonment) to agree to ‘a pig in a poke’. They consent to an order the lived experience of which is shaped later by a ‘treatment plan’ over which they have little or no control and which they typically had no idea would be so central to their supervision. In other words, they sort of agree to obey, but are offered little choice about the implications of required cooperation.

Jake Phillips then went on to use photographs from the working group’s ‘Picturing Probation’ project (which has collected photos from practitioners in several countries) to explore the relationships between probation architecture and compliance. Drawing on Goffman’s familiar concepts, Jake’s presentation suggested (to me at least) that the front-stage of supervision (the buildings, the waiting areas and the interview rooms) often sets the stage for obedience rather than cooperation. Security measures in particular construct the supervisee as a risk or a threat, and control and constrain access to help in ways which might serve to set people up for *disengagement* and passivity rather than cooperation. On the other hand, where the architecture sets the stage for help, nurture and support, it might nonetheless also be an architecture of infantilisation — and indeed, this was one of the themes that emerged in the ‘supervisable’ project’s photographs (linked to the themes of both constraint and judgment).

While Jake’s presentation left me pondering how we might imagine a utopian architecture for supervision (if that is not an oxymoron), Anthea Hucklesby’s final presentation quickly sobered me up! Her fascinating account of the expansion and increased intrusions of electronically monitored forms of supervision (EM) posed some unsettling conundrums. One effect of EM, at least in some jurisdictions, is a focus on ‘mere compliance’ with (or mere obedience to) the formal requirements of the order, with little concern for substantive engagement and the potential for rehabilitation to support longer-term change. Some EM providers are now providing ‘assisted compliance’ (to borrow Mike Nellis’s term) — sending text messages and making phone calls to remind people of their obligations. This kind of assistance may be helpful in preventing breach, but it doesn’t address needs or support change. Indeed, all it seeks is ‘mere obedience’ and all it offers is the avoidance of greater pains; and so it doesn’t require probation officers or social workers to deliver it.

Moreover, Anthea talked about the possibilities created by GPS tracking. Whereas RF (radio frequency) location monitoring checks that a person is in the place at the right time, GPS tracking allows them to move, but it follows their every move. One technology (RF) monitors a restriction of liberty; the other (GPS) restricts privacy. In considering these two possibilities, there is a trade off between these two types of constraint. But how are we to weigh these pains and losses against one another — and against the pains and losses of imprisonment that they are sometimes intended to replace.

Finally, why have I called this post ‘Dangling Conversations’? The image above (from the supervisable project’s Scottish strand) is a powerful one. It conveys the way in which the supervisee is left ‘dangling’ or hanging by the suspension implicit in supervision. This is a suspension of full access to social life, a suspension of the full rights of citizenship, a

judgment (that the person must ‘prove’ him or herself) and a suspension of judgment (about whether or not he or she can really be ‘one of us’ again). And this suspension always occurs in the looming, immanent presence of a seemingly worse fate.

For me, it is the pervasive and penetrating quality of this suspension — what we might call the haunting effects of a supervisory sanction — that we now need to examine more closely. We need to continue to strive to understand how it is experienced. But we also need to examine how the decisions around it are made: When and why is the hangman’s hand stayed? When and why does he open the trap door? When and why does he leads the once condemned back down from the scaffold?). We must also study how practitioners seek to manage the paradox that cooperation is what they desire and really require (at least if they want to support change), yet obedience is all that is necessary — and sometimes seems to be all that is valued in penal policy.

Too often and for much too long, probation research (at least in its Anglophone forms) has focused naively on the ‘effectiveness’ of what probation officers do. But these ‘brief encounters’ between supervisor and supervisee — whatever they achieve or fail to achieve — are only the more or less human interludes in the continuous lived experience of (sometimes interminable) supervision. The continuous part of supervision is the suspension and even if the haunting is by a friendly ghost, it still seems a frightening thing to endure.

On the other hand, perhaps I exaggerate. If people subject to supervision are commonly members of what Guy Standing and Loic Wacquant have referred to as the ‘precariat’, perhaps this sense of being haunted by marginality and insecurity, and by the threat of the penal state, is such a common feature of their lives that supervision adds less to their sufferings than we might imagine.



2. Reality Testing: A psychologist's reflection on researching supervision

By Stef Decoene, who was one of the guest speakers at our Athens conference. It reminds us of the value of critical inter-disciplinary friends who can challenge our assumptions and provoke new thoughts about how our work can proceed.

WHEN Kristel Beyens asked me if I would be interested in speaking at the Athens conference, my first reaction was to find a good enough reason not to. I don't like the airport tedium, I had planned to do some gardening at home ... and her specific question was not just to speak about a social-psychological perspective on offender supervision, but to challenge the audience. I think she knew I would try to duck her challenge—knowing that Flemish criminology is legally and sociologically oriented (this being a polite way to say that psychology is not considered to be the ideal interdisciplinary co-traveller)—but also that I would not come up with good reasons not to.

But I should not have worried. Attending the Athens conference was a quite positive experience. Of course, the hotel was wonderful—coming home I could tell about my first experience with a porter (and how I thought for one moment that he was trying to steal my bag!) Also, my worry of being booed, or worse, given the cold shoulder, was misguided. There was a refreshing open-mindedness towards every presentation. Clearly, using the word 'obedience' had a certain 'valence' which needs analysis. But the presentations of the many working groups all offered glimpses of what motivates the COST members and their intensive and constructive collaboration. The atmosphere showed that many of the researchers present enjoy working together—when Kristel says a Cost meeting is a bit like going home, I now understand a little what she is trying to say! And I very much enjoyed the conference dinner and the table talk—even when it implied being instructed on why psychology is a boring science!

So, on to my psychologist's thoughts concerning the conference:

1. The distinction between compliance and obedience quickly took on; but this risks sidelining more important themes. I think the in/outgroup distinction is even more fundamental, and prior to the differentiation between complying and obeying. In taking obedience as the challenging concept, it may be forgotten that the primary social-psychological question is whether an (ex-)offender is considered by society as in-group, and/or whether the ex-offender considers himself as being in-group. If defined (or defining himself) as out-group, the word obedience is no longer a valid description, and using the concept may camouflage that we really are talking about submission instead. I think submission and obedience should be clearly kept apart—obedience implies being in a hierarchical in-group relationship, submission implies being in a raw power (force) out-group relationship.

And even more crucial is the objective/subjective distinction. From a psychological point of view, whether an offender sees himself in a compliance, obedience, or submission position is not something objective but idiosyncratic/individual/subjective. Knowing how to 'do' supervision needs to start with assessing how the ex-offender positions himself vis-à-vis the probation officer/justice. Of course, there may well be 'objective' indicators of how an ex-offender positions himself: having a house, a family, friends who came to visit during detention ..., may determine a higher probability of seeing oneself as in-group (and thus of being asked to obey). Having interpreted justice as being unfair, having the idea that one does not belong ... may raise the chances of seeing oneself as out-group (and

being asked to submit). This is an important empirical issue. But anyway, doing offender supervision from a social-psychological perspective implies assessing this positioning (as an aspect of where the working relationship has to start).

2. Thinking about the conversations I had with other participants, and listening to the impressive congress summary by Prof. McNeill, I wonder what it is that the concept of obedience really triggered. If it is challenging, this seems not to be because it refers to something alien, but more because it makes explicit what is implicitly known but unacknowledged. It seems challenging in the way a therapist may question ways of framing an experience in order to allow the client to make something annoying consciously available and usable for working-through. In fact, some participants came to tell me that they were quite happy that the ‘word’ was out.

It is strange that concepts such as power, obedience, control generate this tension, while the experiences reported during the conference (and in published papers)—experiences of both (ex-)offenders and probations—so clearly reflect the emotive signs of being in either a power or submission relationship (be it at the commanding vs forcing or obeying vs submitting position).

Why? To me, the criminological research on offender supervision (and treatment, for that matter) seems quite prescriptive, value-driven. And I don’t think this is a virtue, but a problem. While it is inescapable that our society (just as most others) relegates offenders to either a less-than or a no-citizen position, and while I fully agree that societal reactions towards offenders should be scrutinized and questioned, I think that, as scientists, we are wrong to use the science-label to import these extra-scientific critiques as if their content is descriptive and empirically valid (by presenting it as science).

Science, although never value-free in its day-to-day individual and social practice, aims—as a social institution and rational practice—at an intersubjectively validated understanding of reality, using historically validated rules of evidence (Ian Hacking would say it allows to intervene; or to borrow Girard’s assessment of religion, that science reveals the hidden foundations of the world). It is descriptive in a rich but fundamental sense. It does not aim at saying that things should be such or so, but at saying how things are. I’m not being naïve about the complexities underlying this statement, nor about the dangers of science divorced from ethical consideration. But when the descriptive stance is left behind, the questions we ask (for example, what the consequences are of living under imposed conditions) become difficult or impossible to formulate operationally, and by consequence, impede selection of the best possible methodology to get at reliable data, and bias or even blind us when mining these data to uncover their ‘meaning’. Looking at offender supervision from a should-be perspective is valid and important as a too often lacking social and cultural critique, but it is not science.

What are the possible consequences of “talking to” and “intervening in” the to-be-uncovered reality of offender supervision, when these interventions are not based on well-enough validated knowledge of what is, but on prescriptions of what we would like reality to be, and chosen to be compatible with these wishes? For example, how will an offender interpret the question of a power-holder (such as a probation officer) if he would be willing to “consent” to certain conditions imposed from outside? Can we not expect that this offender will disown the power-holder and experience the consent-seeking as a dishonest manipulation, one of many examples through which justice shows bland disrespect? Is it, then, at all relevant that the probation officer had asked consent because

she wants to help?

More fundamentally still, and putting the behaviour-attitude distinction more central. If it is the case that our society probes deeper and deeper into the biological and personal functioning of its citizens; and that what we call the biopolitical shape of power enlarges step by step the zone of bare life (using Agamben's concept) in order to globalize enforced control, what does a probation officer do when she tries to change identity (thoughts and feelings), which in any democratic state should be zealously guarded as a private empire?

Should the empirical knowledge a psychology of social influence offers (however lacking the lustre of creative thinking), with its observation that it is already difficult enough to realize behaviour change, not do more than enough? That is, help to ensure re-entry without putting the bar too high for the offender, and in doing so keeping social control out of the mind? Does acting out of prescription, however well intentioned, in a world culture of control not contribute to even more control? Is this not exactly what Foucault warned against when calling for an archaeology of power? Is it not better to look reality in its face, accumulate knowledge, and then to act within the bounds of interdisciplinary reason and value?

Obedience (or submission: depending on the relational positions) is what an ex-offender has to do if he wants to leave the prison on conditional release. It is, I think, a fundamental form of respect towards the offender to make that clear. He may not like it, it may hinder or hurt, but modifying his behaviour (doing as told) is what is demanded. If he accepts and invests in bringing behaviour into 'prosociality', we are content. What he thinks or feels about me, whether he forms a prosocial identity or instead keeps his antisocial attitudes (in the privacy of his mind) is of no legitimate concern—many good citizens have a lot of very dark antisocial thoughts (as the concept of motivational posturing implies). If it is not my concern as supervisor, it may become a little more difficult to be perverted as an instrument of control. It may be an aspect of archaeology of resistance.

I think value enters with the question if, when and how we implement (or not) the knowledge we have accumulated. If it enters during the investigation process we lose grip of reality. In this sense, correct terminology reflecting validated knowledge is the founding stone for effective intervention (and for me, effective implies morally guided).

3. I have the impression that I never before heard the word 'experience' more than during the Athens congress. And I have to admit that this strong focus on 'experiences' made me uneasy: An experience is by definition a subjective state, a correlate of underlying internal mental processes, the meaning and significance of which are notoriously difficult to ascertain.

What does it mean if I say that I feel like scum? That I define myself as scum? That I am treated as scum? That I think my interlocutor will be shocked if I say this, and give me lee-way to do as I like (because I hypothesize that he wants to help)? Or maybe that because I feel he hopes to hear exactly this, and I want to be polite?

The only way to treat an experience scientifically seems to me to accept it as a verbal report (communicating an experience is an action) made for an as yet unknown purpose and expressing a complex, unobservable set of mental processes (thoughts, emotions, motivations, an interpretation of a situation). In fact, verbalizing how something is

experienced only rarely fulfils a purely informative goal. It performs within a social relationship.

Let me focus briefly on one of the pictures shown during the Supervisible presentation: a female ex-offender takes a picture of a Greek-like statue, breasts naked. At the conference, the author of the photograph was reported to have said she took this picture to show how exposed she felt. It may be tempting to take this at face-value, but maybe this temptation should be resisted. Of all possible pictures of 'being exposed', why precisely this one?

I have but little experience in art analysis. But if the picture is not taken as a pure and direct summary of a particular experience, and instead as a communicated sign with a to be explored relationship to unobservable mental states, what could (should) one make out of it? The picture shows a forbidding bird/predator-like female—a siren or a harpy. The breasts are imposingly directed outward, but do not succeed in hiding claws from view. The face seems more impassioned than angry, cold. I fail to ascribe to the statue a state of being-exposed. In fact, her nudity is part of her pride and strength—there is nothing weak, hurt, or unstable here.

And if the author did not suggest identification with the statue (as being made by a female ex-offender, this would be the obvious but possibly naïve supposition), but instead indexed being under the gaze of the statue, why being under the gaze of a naked woman? Statues of justice are never showing a naked woman. And I would suspect that a woman trying the picture being exposed would depict this as being under the gaze of a man ... I assume the statue is part of some entrance to a building, symbolically guarding it, installing in the visitor a feeling of ... respect/veneration ...? Being under the gaze of the statue only exposes oneself if one enters with disrespectful intent.

None of these thoughts are intended to suggest a well-enough approximation of what the picture signifies (and/or wants to communicate). But I would like to suggest that the verbal report of an experience is never an explanation of something, but a data point that should be analysed, and not be taken at face-value. The same methodological point can be made about the pictures of probation service buildings: What does the scientist/photographer intend? What does it reveal at closer inspection about unspoken assumptions and values, implicit meanings, inadvertent symbolisation? It could also, and should, be made about the many verbal reports of offenders, ex-offenders, prison staff and probation officers that are reported in the offender supervision and penology literature.

A reported experience is a data-point, never an explanation: It needs empirically validated theory to be analysed, explained, and understood. We can understand which significance/valence an ex-offender gives to the supervision by eliciting experiences only when these experiences are taken apart, scrutinized, and analysed to the bone.

4. I admire the research creativity shown during the many presentations: an eurobarometer, photography to tap experience of supervision, vignettes. Less clear to me is which methodologies will be used to extract knowledge from these studies. With respect to visual data, there is a lot of (semiotic and art-critical) research which seems quite applicable to mine the Supervisible studies, but which were not put to the foreground during the sessions. Using vignettes to elicit reasoning processes is a strong technique, but it presupposes good knowledge of relevant variables to distinguish cases/vignettes

‘systematically’, and I’m unsure if we already have this knowledge. Cognitive psychologists have developed methods to analyze reasoning protocols generated by experts when thinking about problems/cases, and maybe this would be a good way to further understanding why probation officers using professional discretion (as Andrews & Bonta argue that they should always do before deciding) in evaluating what breach really means, look at attitudes. I find the idea of the Eurobarometer appealing—interestingly, relatively less attention was given to this than to, e.g., Supervisable—while its application (when empirically based during construction) could offer a rich inroad into variations in supervision experiences—absolutely necessary when we want to understand what determines these experiences (and how they relate to, e.g., efficacy of kinds of work relationships, or the (un)successful termination of time under imposed conditions).

In closing: I do not believe that psychology is the sole answer to understanding offender supervision. I do not believe that empirical research is ever able to solve the mysteries of life. And I do not believe that the best way of living is posturing. But I do believe that science is a historically validated route to understanding. And I believe that acting morally presupposes understanding. Acting morally needs to start with looking reality in the eyes, and not blinking.

Using psychology as an ally (as anyone who has really read Andrews & Bonta should know, it is) may contribute to understanding what offender supervision is.

Understanding that an offender who considers himself a citizen needs to obey; understanding that an offender who considers himself an alien in our world, needs to submit; understanding that the aim of offender supervision is making the transposition from submission/obedience to compliance; understanding that power and force are everywhere ... and I could go on here ... should help to find ways to include those who have transgressed and need to be included again, or for the first time in their life.

An offender has to obey, if he considers himself part of justice’s group. An offender has to submit, if he considers himself outside justice. And society has to be cosmopolitan (in the way Appiah defines it) if it wants to be (and feel) safe by taking ex-offenders in (again). I think this is what a psychology of social influencing implies for research on offender supervision.



3. Seasons, Senses, Spaces: Discerning the Social Choreography of the Penal Field

By Hannah Graham, who has recently taken up a post at the University of Stirling but who is relatively new to Scotland, the UK and Europe... which made her an ideal person to comment on our recent conference and on the developing work of the Action.

THIS is a reflexive response to the wonderfully *carte blanche* invitation to offer thoughts on the work of the COST Action ‘Offender Supervision in Europe’, and its recent conference in Athens, from the perspective of one who has only recently encountered this network (having only recently moved to the continent from Australia). Following on from the previous guest response is no easy feat. In that response, conference guest speaker and psychologist Prof Stef Decoene articulated numerous questions and arguments about the conference, and about the research methods developing in and through the network’s activities. Although my post was mostly written before reading Stef’s post, and is not intended as a formal response to his, it is clear that my voice and thoughts on the same conference and the same research are different. Informed by the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the notion of ‘the penal field’ shapes the thoughts that follow – a concept that was employed in a guest post for the Offender Supervision blog by Joshua Page in 2013 (available [here](#), see also Page, 2012; Durnescu and McNeill, 2014).

Considering the penal field, including its practices and cultures, creates space for simultaneous (self) reflection on ourselves as criminological actors (and our respective disciplinary allegiances, cultures and ‘habitus’ as Bourdieu would say, as ‘seers’ and ‘knowers’ of the penal field). The leitmotif of this COST network is its culture. It encompasses a remarkable and rare combination of productivity, creativity, empirical integrity, and epistemological humility. I affirm Stef’s observation that a palpable sense of joy and camaraderie exists among COST network researchers, creating a special atmosphere infrequently observed in other academic forums of the same size.

In the following sub-sections, I summarise some of the network’s compelling characteristics and contributions across three inter-related spheres, using the metaphors of ‘seasons’, ‘senses’ and ‘spaces’. Interwoven within this is a reflexive critique of what I see as some of the wider issues affecting criminology and criminal justice research, demarcating why the work of this COST network is distinctive.

Seasons: Understanding Shifts in the Social Ecology of the Penal Field

In order to argue how and why the COST research agenda constitutes a progressive development, I wish to first examine some of the current issues (and ideology wars) affecting the discipline. These are illuminated using the analogy of weather forecasting and meteorology. Trying to understand the complex social problem of crime and those who commit it (individually and collectively) predominantly based on criminogenic risk instruments and recidivism rates is like trying to understand complex weather conditions and events predominantly based on the use of a thermometer. Such instruments and metrics have their uses. However, to accurately gauge the temperature (or criminogenic risk or recidivism rates) is not the same as knowing the seasons and conditions which

influence weather patterns and events (that is, the relational, socio-political, spatial and temporal conditions and generative structures in which crime and punishment exist).

Further extension of the analogy about weather forecasting instruments captures key points of difference: while the temperature is measured based on the *volume* of mercury in a thermometer; the weight of the air is measured based on *flows* and *differences* in the *atmospheric pressure* above the reservoir of mercury in a barometer. Akin to an (over)reliance on the volumetric and numeric measurements of the thermometer, a current issue in criminology is the narrowing of empirical attention to that which is easily measurable and knowable in terms of crime and criminal justice (which is, in part, tied in to what is commissioned and what is fundable). As valuable as this type of knowledge is, we do not learn more about the penal field — and its actors, nor its potential transformation — by perpetually producing more of it. Other types of ‘evidence’ and experience, from other experts and sources of knowledge, are still required. Just as the multi-faceted phenomenon of climate change is not fully understood, nor sufficiently responded to, based on knowledge of the temperature and predicting future rises, so too the complex phenomena of mass supervision and mass incarceration are not aptly understood, nor adequately responded to based on a preoccupation with knowing and predicting recidivism rates, incarceration rates and the plethora of other symptoms of problems with deeper roots in society and culture. The problems and their magnitude are increasingly well known, and the penal emergency well documented. Arguably, what is needed are more advanced mixed methodologies to investigate and explain the *fullness* of ‘what is’ — the socio-political conditions and ‘seasons’ within penalty, and across the wider populace, which surround the numbers and rates of the problems — as well as more sophisticated ways of foreseeing and realising different futures.

Similar to the equivalent of a bureau of meteorology, the COST network is timely in its role as a kind of ‘discerning collective’ in European criminology. With members from 23 nations and diverse disciplinary backgrounds (yes, especially psychology and law, as well as sociology and social work), this network is well positioned in its capacity to analyse the social ecology and shifting seasons affecting the penal field, within and across institutional and jurisdictional borders. A social-ecological understanding of the field can complement (but not replace) and build on what is already known about social problems and professional practices, to illuminate issues of power and the generative structures which shape them.

A cutting-edge example of the network’s contributions is the bespoke ‘Eurobarometer’ survey tool, designed by members of the COST ‘Experiencing Supervision’ working group whose work was presented by Dr Ioan Durnescu at the Athens conference. While Stef Decoene and I both applaud with interest the advent of this tool, as well as the others mentioned in other sub-sections of the Offender Supervision blog, it is the emphasis on understanding experience where our views differ.

Stef felt ‘uneasy’ about the focus on experience; yet from my perspective, the emphasis on experience is valuable. People’s experiences and their interpretations of those experiences matter; especially as it gives voice to the value and import of their lives (be it personal or

professional). For too long, and with too few exceptions, not enough has been known about the perspectives and experiences of people under supervision, beyond evaluations limited to specific instruments, initiatives and institutions. Just as a weather barometer is sensitive to pressures, flows and differences, the Eurobarometer tool and associated research has the capacity to realise more advanced insights into people's experiences of offender supervision within and across jurisdictions. In part, this will help to address a crucial knowledge gap about the contours and dynamics of 'mass supervision', beyond assessing its scale and shape. If the Eurobarometer is used in combination with the other research methods and tools developed by the three COST working groups, building on their existing outputs (e.g., McNeill and Beyens, 2013), we can expect to see some of the most sophisticated critical and comparative insights into offender supervision in Europe yet. Given the recent rapid changes in influential jurisdictions (for better or for worse) like England and Wales, as well as the advent of new probation services and systems in some European nations in recent years, it feels like such contributions could hardly be more timely.

Senses: Creative Insights into Visceral Experiences

Much of the extant international criminological literature is based on stats or stories, with research findings routinely evidenced by surveys, randomised control trials, interviews, evaluation research and other stock standard staples. The pervasive influence of psychology, with its passion for expert-led measurement, and the 'What Works?' movement is that these have given rise to a dominant emphasis on the cognitive-behavioural, both in terms of penal practices and, more indirectly, in terms of 'correctional' research methodologies. Research questions often (perhaps too often) seek to instrumentally elicit what people *think* and *do*. There is nothing necessarily wrong with this. Yet, more cognitive behaviourally-oriented methods are by no means the only valid ways of empirically engaging with practitioners and people with convictions to better understand the penal field and its impacts.

A major strength of the work of this COST network is its development of mixed methodologies that can be summarised by four C's: critical, comparative, co-productive, and creative ways of knowing. Like many others present, I thoroughly enjoyed the conference sessions explaining the design and use of visual criminology and 'photovoice' in the 'Supervisible' project, observation and ethnography, vignettes and diaries. These types of research methods elicit not only with what people think and do, but go further to engage the senses, seeking insights into what is seen, heard, spoken, written and touched/traversed in practising and experiencing offender supervision. They reach beyond the realms of the cognitive to engage with moral and emotional dimensions. They also have the capacity to creatively reveal ideological concerns, and normative concerns, as well as any one-off instrumental structured interview can. Finally, they may yield rich descriptive data that is not entirely possible in a Randomised Control Trial precisely because they do not seek control, and do not limit what is seen down to a small list of 'variables'.

These creative mixed methods are empirically defensible *and* refreshingly reveal the use

of the criminological imagination (see Young, 2011). Their design and use within one jurisdictional context is interesting. Their development and mobilisation for use in diverse institutional and jurisdictional contexts *across a continent* is ground-breaking. If hearts and minds are to be changed beyond the confines of academia – a task increasingly important in an era bearing the brunt of penal populism and neoliberalism – these types of engaging and evocative means and ends are welcome additions to the field.

Spaces: The ‘Social Choreography’ of Penal Architectures and Actors

Following on from this, one of the more exciting facets of the COST network research, as well as other studies by individual members (e.g., see Phillips, 2014), is exploration of ‘penal spaces.’ The ‘Picturing Probation’ project being undertaken by the COST ‘Practising Supervision’ working group uses visual and ethnographic observational methods to critically analyse the influence of penal architectures, designs, geographies and technologies on practices and people’s experiences.

This emergent line of inquiry fits with what Danish architecture academic Trine Brun Petersen (2013) calls ‘social choreography’, a notion which advances understanding of the dynamic interfaces between the material, spatial, relational and social in penal institutions. Based on her PhD research, Brun Petersen (2013) shows how penal architectures are inscribed with penal values, implying that their character and power (and interpretation) influences and is influenced by actors and social relations involved in their design and use. If her contributions are considered alongside those of the likes of Michel Foucault, Henri LeFebvre and Antony Duff, there are compelling reasons as to why the interfaces between the material and the social within penal spaces should be analysed as a form of penal communication.

Importantly, this facet of the COST research is an early step in the right direction to address a significant knowledge gap in criminology. Although ‘carceral geographies’ and ‘critical carceral studies’ are starting to come to the fore internationally, their proponents’ preoccupation with the prison has led to neglect of parts of the wider penal field and its architectures beyond sites of literal confinement. Conversely, the COST network research and the fascinating yet robust cross-floor discussions at the conference following these presentations, start to shed light on the symbolic signs and ‘linguistic landscapes’ (Shah, 2015) which make up the material realities of probation and parole offices and discursive practices, and other penal spaces beyond the prison. More empirical and theoretical work needs to be done in this area.

What have ‘We’ Become and Where are ‘We’ Going? Some Final Reflections on Criminologists as Actors in the Penal Field

The compelling work and culture of the COST network is refreshing for what it is, and for what it isn’t. This raises some final critiques which reflect on the discipline. It feels like criminology has encountered a paradoxical bind: many criminologists persistently critique institutions and their bounded rationalities, and call for ‘their’ reform, yet so much of what makes up *our* current criminological output reflects a bounded and blinkered focus on institutions, interventions and individuals. We count recidivism rates;

we judge institutions and individual lives predicated on a focus delimited to programmes, policies and interventions. To return to my earlier analogy, are we potentially at risk of thinking we are scientists who know and critique the complex vagaries of climate change (or crime and punishment), and yet find ourselves holding only a thermometer? Don't get me wrong, we need the tools and knowledge that we have. However, these should not unnecessarily limit our understandings of sound 'defensible practice', in criminological research, nor in criminal justice practice. Innovative criminological networks and mixed methodologies, such as those being pioneered by this COST network, remind us of the possibilities of the collective and the critically comparative. Criminology has a lot to offer, and 'we' are key actors who have the capacity to not only understand but shape the penal field.

In his 2013 blog post about the penal field in a US State, Joshua Page argued that meaningful reform of the penal field 'requires altering the field's composition, assumptions and principles – not simply demonstrating that individual policies “don't work”, and I would add: or even that they do 'work'. We cannot afford to ignore issues of culture and context. Beyond the fundamental ethical and empirical thresholds that we were taught, and now teach, at university, and which underpin academic peer review, I am happy to let rest the stand-alone arguments about 'What Works', and what counts as science (and, implicitly, who counts as a scientist). Perhaps these are unwinnable wars? Are these just unsustainable side-effects of disciplinary denominationalism and the hegemonic 'us' building that makes up attempts at the 'colonisation' of criminology (for more, see Beyens and McNeill, 2013)? It is naïve to think that our relational dynamics as criminologists and penal actors have no effect on the social choreography of the field. While I don't wish to put COST network members on a pedestal, as they are not immune to these dynamics, however, they do offer a positive exemplar as helpful cause for wider critical reflection: what have 'we' become? And where are 'we' going?

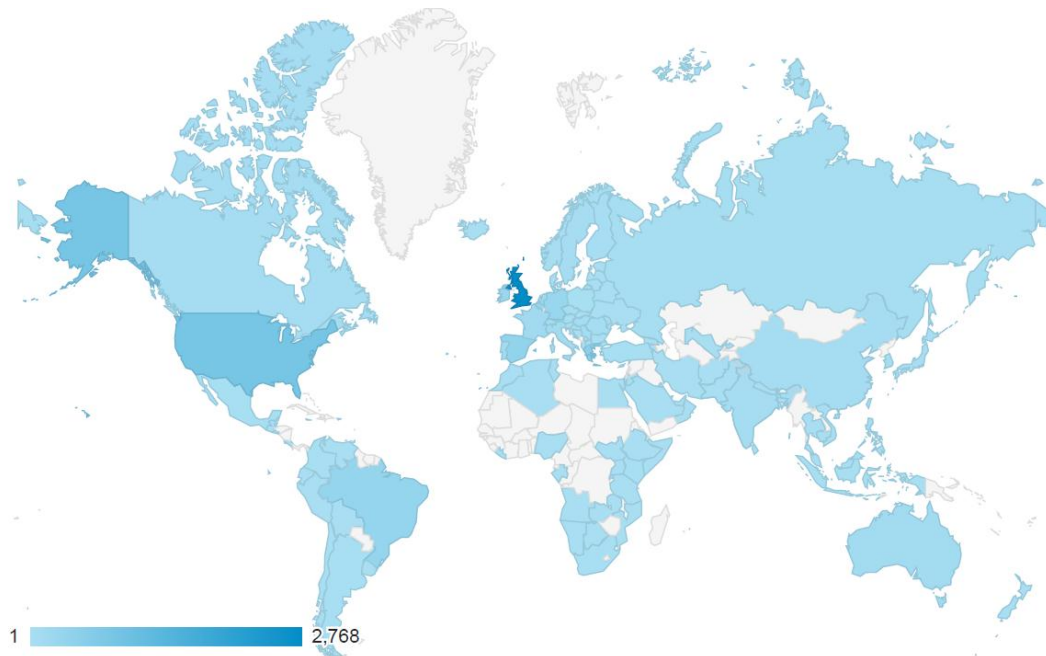
In closing, I wish to thank the COST network members for their part in what was a fantastic international conference. I will leave you with a few questions as you embark on your final year of this COST Action: What do you hope for? What will become of your findings, and what will be the sustainable legacy beyond the life of this network (at least, in its iteration as a COST Action)? How might the work of this COST network foster shifts from preoccupation with the carceral, to critical analysis and pursuit of the transformative in improving offender supervision? How might your tools and research outputs be disseminated and used to reimagine and reconfigure different futures? Rest assured, your experiences matter, your work is already having a positive impact, and the rest of us keenly follow on with interest.

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View Twitter activity from the Athens conference at https://storify.com/COST_OSE/cost-offender-supervision-in-europe-conference-201

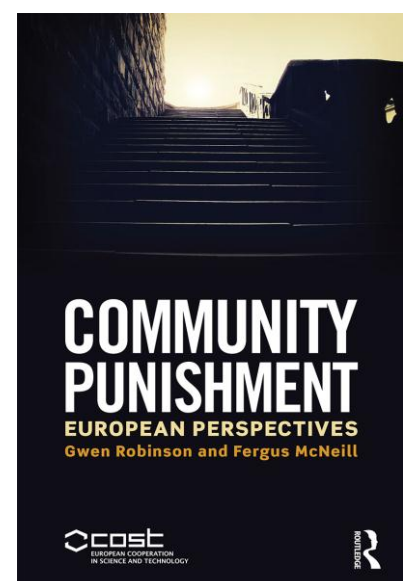
Publications and Communications

THIS year, the reach and value of our website/blog have developed considerably. The blog has been visited nearly 18,000 times by more than 10,000 users and there have been almost 33,000 page views. The map below reveals our global reach, with the darker shades showing countries from which we have received more visits:



Several of our blog posts have attracted hundreds of readers, including the reflections on the conference reproduced above. But to give another example or two, the post on [‘Release, retribution and risk’](#) which we published at the end of March has already attracted 361 views. The post on [‘Probation: Myths, realities and challenges’](#) which we published last June has attracted 380 views, and has been reprinted in the USA by the [Journal on Community Corrections](#).

Perhaps the most significant (and certainly the most extensive) single output of the Action is due to be published by Routledge in a matter of weeks. ‘Community Punishment: European Perspectives’ (edited by Gwen Robinson and Fergus McNeill) places offender supervision under the spotlight by exploring its origins, evolution and adaptations in different 11 European jurisdictions. As well as putting criminological and penological theories to the test in an examination of their ability to explain the evolution of punishment *beyond the prison*, and across diverse states, the COST Action members who have contributed to this volume also assess the appropriateness of the term ‘community punishment’ in different parts of Europe. Engaging in a serious exploration of common themes and differences in the jurisdictions included in the collection, the authors go on to examine how ‘community punishment’ came into being in their jurisdiction and how its institutional forms and practices have been legitimated and re-legitimated in response to shifting social, cultural and political contexts.



We are confident that the book will become essential reading for academics and students involved in the study of both community punishment and comparative penology, but will also be of great interest to criminal justice policymakers, managers and practitioners.

“Community punishments” are characteristic of criminal justice systems everywhere, but as this new volume vividly illustrates, the nature of these measures varies markedly from place to place and from time to time. Drawing on specially-commissioned expert accounts of community penalties in eleven European nations, Robinson and McNeill provide a fascinating, indispensable guide to the problems, trends and controversies that affect community-based punishment in Europe today. The result is a deepened theoretical understanding of the important issues at stake.’ - *David Garland, Professor, School of Law and the Department of Sociology, New York University, USA*

‘Notwithstanding new interest in comparative criminology, and descriptions of what is available in Europe, we know relatively little about how community punishments and interventions are conceived, so this is a hugely welcome book. The editors and contributors have put together a scholarly collection of European case studies which not only locate different forms of community punishments in different contexts, but reveal adaptations over time, and in particular the interplay of managerial, punitive, rehabilitative, reparative and technological pushes and pulls. This is an insightful and rich text which addresses how community punishments have evolved and survived in late modern social and penal conditions; it is a wholly interesting and original book of real importance.’ - *Loraine Gelsthorpe, Professor of Criminology & Criminal Justice, University of Cambridge and President of the British Society of Criminology, UK*

In addition, again as was noted in the welcome, Christine Morgenstern and Gwen Robinson guest co-edited a special issue of the European Journal of Probation which dealt with the important, yet surprisingly neglected, topic of ‘Consent and Cooperation of the Unfree’ (see: <http://ejp.sagepub.com/content/6/3.toc>). This edition comprised six excellent papers from members and friends of the Action in Croatia, Greece, England, Norway and Scotland, as well as the editor’s contributions.

Another special issue of the European Journal of Probation is currently in preparation, this time focused on methodological innovations in studying practising supervision. It’s guest editors will be Gwen Robinson and Kerstin Svensson. The papers will describe the genesis of each of the pilot projects in our Working Group on Practising Supervision (the diary project, the observation project and the ‘picturing probation’ project); the issues encountered in the development of pilot work; the experience of piloting each method; and will discuss the utility of each of these ‘innovative’ methods for future research on offender supervision practice. It is hoped that, by these means, the edition will make a contribution to one of the aims of the Action, which is to find new ways of making the normally hidden domain of offender supervision more ‘visible’, and ultimately aid public understanding of what it involves.

In similar vein, several members of the Action are involved in developing chapters for a new *The Routledge Handbook of Visual Criminology* which is being edited by Michelle Brown and Eamonn Carrabine.

Concluding Thoughts

EVEN although this newsletter barely scratches the surface, it perhaps give the reader a flavour of how dynamic and exciting the Action has become in the last year. For me, as Chair, it has been wonderful to watch ideas take shape as plans and to see plans turn into action: it feels as if we are actually doing research at last, rather than talking about doing research! And finally we have some findings to analyse and share, even if they are only preliminary.

Perhaps it is worth ending with two brief thoughts about what we have achieved and what remains to be done. Firstly, I think we have learned the hard way that preparation is everything. It is only because of the years spent by many of us both in the European Society of Criminology's Working Group on Community Sanctions and Measures (see: communitysanctionsblog.wordpress.com/) and, since 2012, in the Action itself that we have been able to lay foundations for what we are now beginning to build. And it's a good place to be.

Secondly -- and, perhaps this has been the most exciting aspect of this year (and the last few years for me) overall, it has been



truly wonderful to see new voices and new perspectives emerging in and through the Action. Early stage researchers have made highly significant contributions not just at our excellent Training School, but also in every event and every output that the Action has produced. Of course we must also strive to do more to build the capacity for creative and rigorous research on offender supervision.

Next year is our final year... and in fact, our work will conclude at our final conference in Brussels on 10th-11th March 2016. I now have no doubts (if I ever did) that we'll have much to report and discuss at that event. And since every ending is a new beginning, I am also sure that the Brussels conference will become merely the springboard for our next leap forward.

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