Practising Offender Supervision in Europe

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COST CONFERENCE, LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY
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Focus

- review of empirical research on the practice(s) of offender supervision
- offender supervision broadly defined to include:
  - professional and other bodies/workers
  - public, private and third sector agencies/workers
- emphasis on what is known about workers, interactions and practices, not outcomes
- ...and how we know what we know (research methods)
What do we know about...?

Five areas:

1. **Roles, characteristics, recruitment and training of practitioners**
2. Interactions and relationships between practitioners and other professionals
3. **The delivery, practice, performance of OS**
4. **The role of tools and technologies**
5. The management, supervision and regulation of practitioners/practice
Jurisdictions

Key: no. of probation workers

<500 (small) = blue

500-5,000 (medium) = green

>5,000 (large) = red
Where has research been done?

- Countries with longer histories of OS and/or research tradition/capacity
- UK dominates
- The Netherlands and Romania "up and coming"
- Fewer studies in other jurisdictions
- No obvious differences in designs or focus between jurisdictions
Who funds/does research into practice?

- **Governmental bodies**
  - e.g. Justice Ministries
  - academic or government researchers
  - tend to be larger-scale/national studies

- **Independent research bodies**
  - e.g. Economic and Social Research Council (UK)
  - tend to be more innovative

- **Probation organizations**
  - e.g. Salvation Army (NL)
  - few studies by practitioners

- **Studies without (or with little) funding**
  - postgraduate research projects (masters and PhD)
  - tend to be small scale
  - more likely to be theoretically informed

- **"Internal affairs"**
  - academic researchers tend to have experience of working in probation
More common themes

- Single role(s) in single jurisdictions
  - e.g. Community Service workers in Ireland
- Values, attitudes and motivations of workers
  - e.g. Probation Officers in England & Wales
- Discrete processes
  - e.g. assessment; report writing; enforcement; electronic monitoring
- 'Snapshot' studies of the 'here and now'
  - e.g. when introducing new measures or tools
- Impact(s) of change(s) (policy; new technologies, etc.)
  - e.g. balance of care vs control; rehabilitation vs risk management; discretion or 'professional space'
Neglected themes

- Recruitment and training of workers
  - more known in younger organisations, e.g. Romania; Croatia
- Para-professional and non-professional staff
  - e.g. PSOs in E&W; volunteers in Sweden
- Interactions (both inter- and intra-agency)
  - e.g. probation and sentencers/social services/prison staff/police etc.; how/by whom workers are supervised (by managers; by sentencers)
- Histories of practice
  - but recent interest in ‘oral history’ research in UK
- ‘Everyday’ practice and culture
  - another emerging interest, e.g. England & Wales and Romania
- Diversity
  - ...among workers doing OS; within and between countries; among offenders; between workers and offenders (etc.)
Methods and data

What is common?

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Artefacts

What is rare?

- Ethnographic/observational research (but this is on the increase)
- Use of novel/innovative methods
- Use of multiple methods/data sources
- Comparative studies
- Replication of research (designs) within/between jurisdictions
So we know....

- quite a lot about what workers *say they do*...
- much less about what they *actually do*...

“Researchers (and the lay public) must learn to look behind not just the official but the [probation] officer’s versions [of practice]” (Fielding, 1984: 168).
## Some examples

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<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Country/Region</th>
<th>Authors/Year</th>
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<td><strong>National Survey</strong></td>
<td>Denmark, Germany</td>
<td>Kyvsgaard (1998), Kurze (1999)</td>
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<td><strong>Diaries</strong></td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Gustavsson (2004)</td>
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<td><strong>Appreciative Interviewing</strong></td>
<td>England &amp; Wales</td>
<td>Robinson et al. (2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mixed methods, incl. observations</strong></td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Larminat (2012)</td>
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<td><strong>Working Alliance</strong></td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>Menger &amp; Donker (ongoing)</td>
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<td><strong>Comparison</strong></td>
<td>Belgium (UK)</td>
<td>Bauwens (2011)</td>
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Why so few studies?

- Limited and unknown practice, few involved
- Short history in some jurisdictions
- Difficulties in finding funding
- Problems in getting access
- Lack of interest from researchers. Probation practice is mainly studied in the disciplines of criminology and social work, but is a "remote area" in both disciplines
- Preference for prisons research?
Dissemination

- Low interest
- Language
- Conducted in practice = reach practice
What do we need to know?

- **What are they actually doing?**
  Need for ethnographic research, observations

- **Why they are doing it in that way**
  Need to go beyond ”stories”

- **Why probation officers resist or comply**
  Need to understand motives

- **What is specific for probation practice**
  Need for comparisons, international and interorganisational
Ideas for the future

- Funding for studies beyond mapping and stories on practice
- Attracting more researchers that will broaden the field
- International comparisons for developing understanding of the core practices of OS
- Comparisons with other organisations in the field for developing understanding of specific methods and technologies for OS
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
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<td>Aline Bauwens</td>
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