Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Faculty Law and Criminology
CRiS – Crime & Society Research Group

Research report
2009-2012
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Introducing CriS – Crime & Society Research Group

In 2012 CRiS: ‘Crime and Society’ Research Group was formally founded by the members of the criminology department of the VUB. Until then the department of criminology was the administrative context where this group developed its criminological expertise. The Department of Criminology of the VUB is historically originated in the Faculty of Law, because originally the criminology education was merely a continuation of law studies and mainly specialized in penal law and penitentiary matters. The helmsmen of the criminology research unit were jurist–criminologists. Under their leadership criminological research developed since the eighties more and more into the direction of social research. Research policy within the Department has always focused on a combination of fundamental and applied research.

Over the past 25 years our research focussed on a critical analysis of the social phenomena of crime and deviance and of the formal and informal reactions to these phenomena. Research expertise developed in three main research areas: penology, juvenile criminology and policing and security. This resulted in a strong interdisciplinary tradition of theoretical and empirical research into crime phenomena (e.g. persistent juvenile delinquency, sex offences, desistance from crime), societal reactions (e.g. risk or exclusive society, neighbourhood watch initiatives, public attitudes towards crime and punishment) and criminal justice policies and practices (e.g. public and private policing, juvenile justice systems, sentencing and implementation of custodial and non-custodial sanctions for adult offenders). Our research expertise and scientific quality were highly appreciated by an external, international “Research Evaluation for the Political & Social Sciences”, performed in 2005 at the request of the VUB Research Council: “The problems addressed are important ones (…). The team is making a significant contribution to vital issues. Innovative work in all three areas (…). Well balanced theoretical and empirical research (…). There is a coherent approach across the three identified research areas (…) The research projects are systematic and well planned”. The conclusion was: “A successful team with a clear strategy. The team has produced an impressive body of work that has had impact on the Belgian Criminal Justice System. The research has been consistently of a high standard and has been very influential.” This report presents an overview of our recent and ongoing research since 2009.

Recently we obtained important funding for our strategic research programme “Crossing Borders: Crime, Culture and Control” (2013-2017). This strategic plan aims at bridging and integrating more our three main research domains, focusing on our common constructivist and critical stand combined with a comparative and interdisciplinary approach to crime and crime control.

With the launching of CRiS Crime & Society Research Group, we wish to make a double statement. On one hand our goal is to consolidate and reinforce our criminological and scientific expertise. On the other hand we want to make a significant step in developing and diversifying our research on an international level. As a research group we are at an important and strategic moment of choices that will create our future.

Prof. Jenneke Christiaens
Chair of CRiS Research Group

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1 For earlier research we refer to our previous report (2005-2009) that can be found on our website: http://www.vub.ac.be/SCRI/
1. STRAT Crossing Borders
Crossing Borders: Crime, Culture and Control

**Period:** 2013 – 2017

**Financing:** VUB (Research Council Funding)

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**Project:**
This strategic research program aims at pursuing, reinforcing and further developing and diversifying the research that is carried out by the research group Crime & Society and the Department of Criminology.

Research has focused over the last 25 years on a critical analysis of the social phenomena of crime and deviance and of the formal and informal reactions to these phenomena. It developed through three main research areas: penology, juvenile criminology and policing and security. This has resulted in a strong interdisciplinary tradition of theoretical and empirical research into crime phenomena (e.g. persistent juvenile delinquency, sex offences, desistance from crime), societal reactions (e.g. risk or exclusive society, neighbourhood watch initiatives, public attitudes towards crime and punishment) and criminal justice policies and practices (e.g. public and private policing, juvenile justice systems, sentencing and implementation of custodial and non-custodial sanctions for adult offenders).

The current Strategic Research Program “Crossing Borders: Crime, Culture and Control” aims at integrating the expertise of the three research domains into one single research team and research plan, focusing on our common constructionist, critical, comparative and interdisciplinary approach to crime and crime control as social phenomena.

“Crossing borders” therefore refers to different scientific aims and levels of research:
- crossing borders epistemologically by the critical study of links between crime/crime control and social structures, social inequality, cultural and human rights issues (social deprivation, ethnicity, migration, gender,..),
- crossing borders methodologically by further integrating our present expertise in both qualitative and quantitative research methods,
- crossing borders in space through further fostering our international and comparative research,
- crossing borders in time through continued historical research,
- crossing borders by an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together criminology, sociology, law, history, pedagogical sciences, psychology and psychiatry,
- crossing borders through synergy and integration between our three main research domains in order to strengthen and deepen the expertise of our research team.
Overall research perspectives and questions:

Developments in crime control in western societies over the last 30 years have been described as “the new governance of crime” or “a new configuration of crime control”, characterized by a simultaneous emergence of both a “preventive” and a “punitive” turn. Within the “preventive turn”, the state increasingly decentralises crime control and delegates its powers of control and punishment to local authorities and private actors. The “punitive turn” refers i.a. to the increased reliance by the state on deprivation of liberty for adult and juvenile offenders, immigrants and other categories, new forms of control such as sex offender registration or enhanced technological surveillance in community sanctions and measures (electronic monitoring). However, emerging comparative research also illustrates important differences in these developments between western societies and forms of resistance by crime control actors or by populations in conflict with the law.

Two major perspectives will therefore structure this research program: 1° a cultural perspective on crime and crime control; 2° an international comparative approach to these questions.

1. Cultural perspective on crime and crime control

Part of our current research expertise focuses on a cultural understanding of crime and crime control as social practices. It emphasizes the centrality of meaning, representation and power in the construction of crime and crime control. This perspective has been and still is applied at the local or national level to the culture of specific groups in conflict with the law (such as juveniles, migrants, female offenders, prisoners) and to the organizational and professional culture of crime control actors and organizations (police culture, penal culture of juvenile and sentencing judges, prison or probation staff culture).

Research question: Within the STRAT, this type of research will focus on the transversal question of “new” or “similar” forms of preventive or punitive control in the areas of penology, youth crime and policing and security, the meaning they carry for and forms of resistance they produce with the populations and professional actors involved, their interactions with local, professional and organizational cultures, and their understanding within broader societal changes.

2. Understanding crime and crime control through international comparative research

Crime and crime control as social phenomena are highly influenced by the globalizing tendencies of our late modern societies. Criminality changes through higher mobility of people, while crime control is increasingly influenced by international and European organisations or by policy transfer between countries. These phenomena are studied internationally either from a macro sociological or from a comparative perspective. While the former emphasizes global developments and similarities, the latter aims at understanding local differences and particularities. The research team has expertise in both approaches. Several members have participated in comparative research projects, analysing Belgian developments in a broader international perspective. European developments are also studied, i.a. with regard to human rights issues. The STRAT aims at integrating both approaches.

Research questions are:

How does comparative research help to develop a better theoretical understanding of Belgian practices and phenomena in the new governance of crime?

How can similarities and differences between practices be understood and explained internationally?

Is there a specific European dimension in theoretical developments in criminology or penology? What is the importance of human rights or children’s rights in these?

3. Methodological perspectives

Most comparative research on crime and crime control is based on a quantitative approach. Our research team has developed specific expertise in qualitative and mixed methods research. To apply such methods in comparative research raises specific challenges. Within the STRAT research will focus on the methodological questions, exploring the possibilities and limitations of such qualitative comparative research.
II. IAP Interuniversity Attraction Pole
“Justice & Populations: The Belgian Experience in International Perspective, 1795-2015” Network project IAP - Interuniversity Attraction Pole (IAP) P7/22

**Period:** April 2012 – March 2017

**Financing:** Belgian Science Policy Interuniversity Attraction Poles Programme, Phase VII

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**Project:**
Research on ‘Justice in Relation to Society’ is an expanding domain but is generally lacking a multidimensional approach in the social sciences. Building on the experience and results of a previous IAP project on “The Socio-political History of Justice Administration in Belgium (1795-2005)” (P6/01 – www.just-his.be), which has covered major gaps in the knowledge about Belgium’s national justice history from a top-down and institutional perspective, the current IAP project P7/22 “Justice & Populations: The Belgian Experience in International Perspective, 1795-2015” (Beljust 2.0) extends the scope to tackle the theme of the relationships between Justice and populations from an interdisciplinary, long-term perspective, covering the period from 1795 (end of the Ancien Régime in Belgium) up to the present.

a) The Belgian experience is systematically examined in its international context, that of an increasingly globalised world. For the domain of justice, especially for the 20th-21st centuries, this necessitates an innovative approach to demonstrate how ‘justice’ is historically and geographically located in terms of the global/local context, and how the ‘local’ can be widened out to look at inter-, trans- and supranational aspects of justice. To Belgium, this is of particular relevance, since for several aspects and at different times in its history it has functioned as a “laboratory of Western Culture” (e.g. penal policies; experiences of wartime occupation; the Belgian colonies).

b) A bottom-up perspective implies a focus on “populations”: both judicial actors and social groups and communities and individuals in their dealings with justice. From a social science perspective, this means that class, age, gender and ethnic or national differences are taken into account in all research projects.
The following scientific objectives are put forward:
Shift from ‘justice-centred’ approaches to the study of interactions between judicial institutions, social groups and individuals.
Deepen diachronic knowledge, comparing past and present societies: identifying both long-term continuities and evolutions and moments of crisis and transformation.
International perspective: discuss issues of justice in a comparative and critical way, comparing national experiences, but also examining transnational transfers and the circulation of concepts, knowledge and practices within the framework of global processes.
Interdisciplinarity: the above objectives imply the involvement of various disciplines: history, legal studies, sociology, criminology, political science, management studies, archival science.

The project is structured around 5 integrated work packages: 4 thematic work packages, in which different national and international partners intervene to examine transnational key aspects of the relationships between Justice and Populations from various disciplinary angles and scales of analysis (macro, meso, micro, long term):
- WP 1a: Justice and international dynamics (BeJustInt)
- WP 1b: The State justice system: functioning, reform, actors (BeJustState)
- WP 2: Justice and the citizen (BeJustCitiz)
- WP 3: Justice, Crisis and (At-)Risk Populations (BeJustCrisis)
- WP 4: Long-term (self-)representations of justice (LongTermJust)

The fifth WP (Knowledge Management for a Social Science History of Justice: Sources, Tools, Training and Valorisation: DigitJustHis) is dedicated to the development of joint knowledge management strategies (sources, tools, methods, training, valorisation), aimed to support and promote the research of the entire network. Following a multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach, a variety of social science and historical methods are brought together, ranging from contextual legal history to social policy analysis, critical source analysis, discourse analysis, prosopography, case-studies and criminological field work, involving both quantitative and qualitative expertise of the partners. The IAP P7/22 network brings together 11 Belgian and 3 European universities and research teams.

As a partner in this network project we will realize 3 more specific research projects:

(1) The preventive turn in the policing of urban space, as experienced by citizens (IAP Project, Work Package 2)


Financing: IAP Project P7/22 Belgian Science Policy Office

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Project:
In the past several decades, prevention has clearly become the new core principle, ‘the defining logic of governing crime’ and is referred to as the preventive turn. Like in other countries announcing a more
repressive anti-social behaviour policy, in Belgium a similar move can be observed. With legislation on municipal administrative sanctions, the enforcement authority of local governments expanded to include incivilities. We can see the emergence of incivilities as a new field of intervention at the local level, whereby new initiatives are merged with the already existing crime prevention initiatives. The result is the establishment of numerous projects to specifically tackle anti-social incivil truant youth who hang around in public spaces and constitute a ‘risk’. To date, there is no scientific research available on this topics, which is why this research project focuses on the following questions: 1) Which prevention initiatives aimed at the disturbance of order in the public space by young people exist in Belgium? 2) How do these initiatives function in the day-to-day practice? 3) How do the youngsters involved experience these practices?

First of all, we want to map the preventive field regarding disturbance of public space by youngsters in Belgium through a profound literature study. To do this, we will contact several municipal prevention services to find out about the initiatives they offer and how the teenagers are engaged. Secondly, to find out what types of behaviour are actually addressed in practice, we focus on some of these initiatives and study them in depth. The selection is based on the insights from the first phase. After having selected these cases, we will study the types of behaviour that are being addressed through an analysis of the reported files and take a deeper look at the actual practice by conducting a participative observation at the service responsible for the initiation and elaboration of the intervention. And finally, through semi-structured interviews we will try to create a clear image of the experiences and opinions of youngsters who have been subject of this type of prevention initiatives.

(2) Voices from inside the juvenile justice system and beyond: Pathways and life experiences of juveniles after youth justice intervention (1912-2012) (IAP Project, Work Package 2)

**Period:** 2013 – 2016

**Financing:** IAP Project P7/22 Belgian Science Policy Office

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**Project:**

Throughout the 20th century the Belgian juvenile justice system has been the subject of much criticism and debate. On the one hand, the ‘welfare system’ has been criticised because it lacks respect for children’s (due process) rights. On the other hand, the welfare model (which aims at ‘protecting’ children and youth) has also been criticised for its far-reaching interventions, often labelled as arbitrary, too severe, stigmatising, etc. National and international research increasingly stresses the iatrogenic effect of youth justice interventions. This effect appears to be twofold: the interventions not only impact on youngsters’ youth justice (and criminal justice) pathways as such, but as well on their further life experiences in a more broader sense. Youth justice interventions might engender negative effects even years after they have been imposed. In other words, these interventions might have side effects on the youngsters’ lives long after they attained majority.
The problem formulation of this project consists of two main research questions:

- (a) What is the ‘impact’ of juvenile justice interventions on the lives of youngsters once they leave the justice system?
- (b) Has this effect been changing through time, and if yes, how?

The methodology consists of two parts.

First, in order to provide an answer to the first research question, it is essential to include the ‘voices’ of children with a youth justice history. For this purpose in-depth interviews with former ‘children of the juvenile justice system’ will be conducted. Focus will be on how they experienced their contact(s) with the youth justice system. More specifically, we will explore if and how the intervention(s) impacted on their further life history. We are interested in the views and experiences of the former youth justice ‘clients’ themselves. In order to explore changes through time, we aim at finding respondents between 20 and 70 years old.

Second, we will conduct a case file analysis (Youth Court, archives) followed by a reconstruction of individual life trajectories. The historical perspective requires a selection of cases throughout the past 100 years. Because the Belgian Youth Protection Act was created in 1912, and modified profoundly in 1965 (and in 2006), it is important to select cases from these distinctive eras. The further life trajectories of these former youth justice clients will be reconstructed by means of several databases (population register, criminal record, ...).

(3) Policing youth in urban public space in historical and comparative perspective, early 20th-century – present (IAP Project, Work Package 2)

**Period:** 2013 – 2016

**Financing:** IAP Programme Belgian Science Policy Office

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**Project:**
This post-doctoral research project builds on earlier historical-criminological work of the researcher on everyday urban policing, police-youth relationships and transgressive uses of urban public space in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Taking the city of Antwerp as a case-study, drawing on various judicial and police archival records, and comparing the results with literature on other major European cities, this earlier research showed that juvenile disorderly behaviour and leisure activities in urban public space were a major focus of official concern already in the early 20th century and that youths were thereby increasingly subjected to ‘early intervention’ preventive policies. The practice of the policing of youth on the streets, however, appeared to be highly informal, involving also parents, families, local communities on the one hand, and highly selective on the other, with very specific target groups and zones subject to police attention and intervention.
The current project aims to further extend the scope by expanding the research to the post WW II-period, by integrating new source material for Brussels, and by linking up its results with those of other ongoing projects in CRiS on policing, youth, and the regulation of urban space today, engaging in a reflection on major parallels and shifts between past and present. Central questions are, for example: How did the post WW II-creation of specialized police units for juveniles transform (or not) the everyday police control of juveniles in the city? How did/does the police define ‘juvenile misbehaviour’? How did/does the handling of ‘disorderly juveniles’ fit (or not) with other police priorities and strategies of regulating urban space? Which was/is the police focus in terms of target groups and specific zones? How were/are citizens involved in this police control? How did/do juveniles react to it?

**Relevant publications:**


III. Security, prevention and policing
‘Everybody stay calm and get on the floor, this is a robbery’. Armed robberies on independent entrepreneurs: a perspective of perpetrators.

**Period:** 2011 – 2012

**Financing:** Ministry of Internal Affairs

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**Project:**
The increasing violence against independent entrepreneurs and commercial entities is a priority in prevention and security policies. Armed robberies are both property crimes and violence offenses. Although many measures have been taken, there is a pressing need for an integrated approach which aims at cooperation strategies between public authorities and private security organisations. Furthermore, an important objective of prevention and safety policies is to focus on the security of independent entrepreneurs. ‘Armed robberies’ can cause a great deal of psychological and/or financial damage to entrepreneurs, clients, employees and the image of the enterprise. But what do we know about this type of crime and how can we understand its underlying structures? This study highlights the perspective of perpetrators which have been convicted for armed robberies. Based on semi – structured questionnaires (thirty interviews in three prisons), we try to present their stories, views and perceptions regarding three objectives. First, we focus on their motives. Why do people commit an armed robbery? Second, the study explores the modus operandi of choices in planning an armed robbery. How do these perpetrators operate? Why have they committed a robbery on a jewellery shop, a gas station, a supermarket…? How do they flee? Why do they use a weapon? … Third, we want to discuss the applied prevention and security measures. Do these measures have an impact on the choices they make? And, if so, why?
The main aim of this research is to present the discourse of perpetrators in committing armed robberies on independent entrepreneurs.

**Relevant publications:**
Book publication VUB-press in preparation
Spatio-temporal offender profiling (STOP). Theoretical and empirical building blocks for the prediction of criminal mobility patterns in time and space.

Period: 2009 – 2014

Financing: phd-project on own funds

Promoter:
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Researcher:
Rachid Kerkab

Project:
Research has shown it is possible to predict the probable residence location of serial criminals. These empirical patterns built upon consistency in the spatial behaviour of criminals, such as directional and/or distance biases in target selection.

A large part of this journey to crime research has focused on the distance travelled by criminals from anchor points (mainly the residence location) to crime locations. Moreover, the distance decay principle asserts that offenders do not travel far from their home to offend and that the frequency of offending decreases with increased distance from an offender's home location.

This body of knowledge, grounded within environmental criminology, can be considered as a stepping stone in the development and advancement of investigative strategies such as case linkage and geographical offender profiling.

However, there is little attention to the role of temporality in the study of criminal mobility patterns. This PhD project seeks to empirically assess the principles underlying criminal spatial behaviour and extends this knowledge with a temporal dimension.

For this reason, we propose a spatio-temporal model derived from environmental criminology, time geography and previous empirical evidence. This spatio-temporal lens will form the foundation of our empirical analysis and our contribution to the understanding of criminal behaviour in time and space.
Ideas and the self in online social networks.

**Period:** 2012 – 2016

**Financing:** Criminology Department (VUB)

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**Project:**
The rise of the computer sciences had an important impact on the organization of social life. Faster and cheaper computers, affordable networks and user friendly social apps and browsers caused a large part of social life to move to cyberspace. The web itself underwent some important changes as well. New apps invite users to provide content, to interact, to share and connect with others. This, in turn, results in a massive amount of data that can be converted to information (intelligence). An important part of our society is defined by the social networks that are created through social media. Today however, we see that we have several gaps in our knowledge to properly address these changes. Little is known about the organization of these networks and the propagation of ideas within these same networks. This project addresses these topics. Through opinion mining we try to grasp how people form opinions on ‘deviant behavior’. We use graph theory to see how networks are formed within this debate, and how these networks mutate through time. We use covert methods to mine the data on the web and use state of the art techniques to automatically analyze our data.

**Relevant publications:**

Searching for gangs: A study of the discourse of professionals.

**Period:** April 2011 – November 2011

**Financing:** SPP Social integration – Federal City politics

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**Project:**
The Belgian federal urban policy service finances projects to prevent youth gangs in the cities. In order to stimulate a more creative and effective social reaction on youth gangs a research was ordered to gather promising practices developed in the different Belgian central cities. The research questions were:
1) Which social representations and knowledge have local actors on youth gangs? 2) Which direct or indirect practices were developed? 3) Which of the developed practices can be evaluated as promising?
The results gathered by means of interviews and focus groups with social workers (from different sectors like housing, neighbourhood work, social services, street workers) and police (most often members of the specialized police services on ‘youth and social service’) from different Belgian cities (Brussels, Antwerp, Mechelen, Ghent, Ostend, St-Niklaas, Liège, Namur, Charleroi, La Louvière, Mons, Seraing and Verviers) were surprising. All of the implied actors denied the existence of traditional ‘youth gangs’ and described the groups of youths in the cities as volatile, perceived as disturbing by the public but with objectively little ‘dangerous’ behavior. The focus groups ended often in discussions on the proper role of the professionals in ‘creating’ or ‘sustaining’ the idea of the existence of dangerous youth gangs. Although not the object of the study, often was referred to social representations of these groups by the media and their role in the creation of the problem. Some of the professionals also pointed to the role of the youngsters themselves; they were pleased with these representations, used symbols (ways to dress but also ways to move and behave) to stress their bounds and membership. But according to the professionals, their behavior was most often more disturbing (hanging around, spitting on the ground, making noise, shouting remarks) than ‘real’ crime. There was a consensus on the fact that their behavior should be interpreted as a search for identity creation and a normal reaction of youngsters.
The promising practices are those, in the eyes of the professionals, which cease to create distinctions between youth and other members of the society. Giving youth a place in the social system were they are able to develop identity while being included in neighbourhoods was seen as the most important promising practice.

**Relevant publications:**

Evaluation of youth crime in Brussels.

**Period:** 1-11-2012 – 31-10-2013

**Financing:**
Observatoire bruxellois pour la Prévention et la Sécurité - Brussels Observatorium voor Preventie en Veiligheid

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**Project:**
The project is a collaboration between the Criminology department of the NICC (National institute for Criminalistics and Criminology) and the research group Crime and Society of the VUB.

The goal of the research is to enable the « l’Observatoire bruxellois pour la prévention et la sécurité » to create an image of the evolution and specificity of registered youth crime in the Brussels region and its different entities (communes, police zones, statistical sectors, neighbourhoods..)

The research consist in the development of indicators that can be gathered from existing institutional or survey quantitative data. By making an inventory of possible sources, evaluating their data construction and developing reliable indicators, the phenomenon of youth crime can be sketched in its different dimensions. The evaluation of the existing quantitative data permits to “make sense” of the now produced statistics and the selection of the most pertinent and reliable indicators will be a support for the determination and support of the prevention policy of the “Observatoire”.
Project:
This research focuses on the role of local administrative authorities in preventing and repressing crime. Local authorities can use in practice a large area of measures (like refusing or withdrawing certain permits) but the access to adequate information where these decisions can be based on is restricted. This restriction can be the result of practical and judicial obstacles (privacy regulations, confidentiality of judicial investigations, unclear regulations...) Police and (some) local authorities plea for a more easy accessibility of judicial information to be able to organise a more efficient and effective administrative approach to crime. This information is stocked in databases of police, public prosecutor, inspection services and other federal services and administrations. The purpose of the research is to:

- Make an inventory of concrete sharing of information between different actors at the local level.
- To map the practical and regulatory obstacles for information flows.
- Give recommendations to ameliorate the information transfer.

Relevant publications:
Aggression towards ticket inspectors (Belgian Railways).

**Period:** 2011 – 2011

**Financing:** Criminology Department (VUB)

**Promoter:**
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**Researcher:**
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**Project:**
This project covers a research where the researcher worked incognito as a ticket inspector to study the daily routine interactions between travelers and train personnel. The aim of the study was to gain further insight into the escalation, reduction or avoidance of aggressive behavior, as well as to study the advantages and pitfalls of the method that was used (covert participant observation). Covert participant observation is highly controversial and rarely used in criminological research, due to ethical reasons. Moreover, today we see a shift towards a formalization and legalization of ethical rules, which delegitimizes covert research methods even more. However, informed consent and total openness about research goals can also hamper the possibilities to study socially undesirable or unaccepted behavior and might give biased results. We argue that it is not always appropriate to strive for total openness.

The results of the observation indicate that aggression statistics come with an important dark number. We found several causes for ticket inspectors to not signal the aggression. Furthermore, we saw that the ticket inspectors use a broad spectrum of methods to deal with these daily aggressions in the field.

**Relevant publications:**

Project:
This study describes the communication trajectory of the Belgian NGO “Child Focus”. In addition, five other European Child Alert systems (France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) are studied and compared. The analysis is based on document and website analysis, focus groups, short questionnaires and contacts/interviews with local correspondents. The main results of the analysis can be summarized as follows:
European alert models are much inspired by the US Amber Alert instrument. While the US Amber Alert system was aimed at developing a broadcasting system, the European Alert project is aimed to design a reviewed dissemination process, since many European countries already locally developed a broadcasting system.
The development of Child Alert systems is built on the assumption that involving citizens in what is essentially a policing process, contributes to locating the disappeared minor. However, no results of evaluation studies at this stage support this assumption. Neither is evaluation research available on the efficiency of the development of Child Alert systems.
The comparative analysis learns that core concepts such as ‘minority’, ‘child disappearances’, ‘extremely worrying’ and ‘collaboration strategies’ are used differently in the daily practice of the respective systems. The development and use of Child Alert systems are an issue of collaboration between partners with different backgrounds. The mix of partners involved and the local context explains many differences in social construction of the Child Alert system.
The international focus in developing and disseminating information remains underexposed.
The technological tools and dissemination strategies differ between countries. Every country is seeking ways to speed up the distribution of information of the networks by means of technological applications.

Relevant publications:
Local integral safety policy: research on an integrated approach.

Period: 2009 – 2010

Financing: Ministry of Internal Affairs, Department of safety and prevention

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Project:
For the last ten years, ‘integral safety’ is the leading federal safety policy in Belgium. Out of the fundamental insight that a safety issue is not just a stand-alone fact, the understanding grows that an integral safety approach cannot limit itself to one-sided solutions, but should cover the whole ‘safety chain’ instead: from the proactive elimination of structural causes of unsafety over the prevention and preparation of actual violations towards the actual solving of the problem and handling the so-called after-care, including a thorough evaluation and avoiding secondary victimizations. This implies that safety has interfaces with various government policy fields, active on the different intersections of this safety chain (health care, education, city wardens, the police, justice system, etc). These fields are not only divided in an horizontal fashion on the local echelon though. Solving local safety issues implies the involvement of all the governments with authority on the subject. But because of the complex division of power in Belgium, it is a complex job for the local governments to do so.

Despite the fact that the Belgian federal government is promoting the implementation of a local strategic plan to develop this policy for more then 10 years, only very few of them actually created such a plan. This strategic plan should not only include the major local safety issues and priorities, but also focus on the participation and cooperation of all parties involved in preventing and solving unsafety. The different governmental departments have their own strategic planning and are dependent of a variety of projects, often written to receive extra money in the form of subsidy provided by a range of regional, federal or European governmental agencies. All these funds have their own specificities (timing, goals, formal qualifications, etc.) which makes it very difficult to put them together and link them in a coherent and strategic integral approach concerning safety.

Our first aim is to gain insight how these policies are integrated in practice. The qualitative method of the case study gives us with the possibility to perform profound analyses of policy documents and in-depth interviews with local stakeholders. We select three local governments - one in Brussels, one in Flanders and one in the Walloon region - and investigate: (1) What topics a local integral safety policy should cover? (2) What plans and projects, providing funds and subsidy, are available regarding these topics? (3) Whether these plans and projects be aligned and linked in one local integral safety policy? On the basis of these insights, we want to investigate if it is at all possible to demand from the local governments a strategic integrated safety plan, covering all the local safety topics and and proposing an coherent approach towards solving them.

Relevant publications:

The mayor as director of a local safety policy.  
Research on the ‘safety discourse’ of the Flemish mayor.

**Period:** 2010 – 2014

**Financing:** Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO-Vlaanderen)

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**Researcher:**  
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**Project:**  
The aim of this research is to establish the place and importance of this safety discourse in the role as a local mayor. Allegedly, he is confronted with issues of safety and security as a leading beacon in our society and over the years, he has been pointed at as the director of the so-called ‘local safety policy’. However, the question remains how these topics are perceived by the local mayor himself. This leads us to our main research question: **how do the mayors interpret the concept of safety and how do they perceive their role in establishing it?**

Indeed, little is known about his point of view, his interpretation of the situation and definition of safety and security. Moreover, this proves a challenge for me as a criminologist. Indeed, the focus on integral security questions the traditional boundaries of criminology. Should I limit the endeavour to crime and its construction? Or lower the drawbridge and welcome the popular policy rhetoric of a broad perspective on (un)safety and (in)security? By studying discourse of the Flemish major regarding safety and security, the former seems unavoidable. In line with my interpretive stance, I decided to tackle this question on the crossroads of policy, practice and academic interest. As they effectively meet on the mayors’ plate, this allows me to confront different expectations and compare meanings.

On the basis of both theoretical (institutional context) and practical (language barrier, distance) considerations, I decided to delimit the research setting to the Flemish Region. I selected a range of mayors, taking into account their experience, political background, composition of the college of mayor and aldermen and the socio-economic and demographic classification of the municipality. Because of the focus on the lived experience, data is collected using face-to-face interviews using an adductive interview strategy with elicitation techniques. Despite the fact that the average interview is only about one hour, this strategy allows me to gather in-depth information on different levels (expectations, desires, frustrations, opportunities, ...) and should allow me to gain insight in the ‘safety discourse’ of the Flemish mayor.

**Relevant publications:**


EUCPN: European Crime prevention Network.

Els Enhus and Jenneke Christiaens are the scientific advisors of the European Crime Prevention Network (EU-CPN). The EUCPN was set up in May 2001 by an EU Council Decision to promote crime prevention activity in Member States across the EU, and to provide a means through which valuable good practice in preventing crime, mainly “traditional” crime, could be shared. Facing new challenges in the development of European crime prevention initiatives, this founding legislation was repealed and replaced by a new Council Decision on 30 November 2009.

The main aims of the EUCPN are:

- identifying good practices in crime prevention and sharing knowledge and experience gained between member countries;
- accumulating and evaluating information on crime prevention activities;
- improving the exchange of ideas and information within the Network;
- developing contacts and facilitating cooperation between Member States;
- contributing to develop local and national strategies on crime prevention;
- promoting crime prevention activities by organizing meetings, seminars and conferences.
Policing the streets in Europe: Emergency Patrol, Community Beat Patrol, Information Use. An International Comparative Study.

**Period:** 2006 – 2010

**Financing:** none

**Promoters:**
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**Researcher(s):**
Master students

**Project:**
This study aimed to gain insight into what police officers do on a routine basis while supervising the community. This international research project included several observational studies: three in The Netherlands and two in each of the other participating countries. The research was carried out in at least two different places in each country to reduce the risk that the picture of patrol work in a certain country would be influenced too much by exceptional local circumstances.

The study was built up around five main questions:

1. How is police patrol work organized?
2. What does police patrol work involve on a day to day basis?
3. How are the two types of police work interconnected?
4. What are differences between police work in different countries?
5. How can these differences be explained?

The second main question (‘What does police patrol work involve?’) includes the question which role information from different sources plays in police patrol work.

**Relevant publications:**
The role of the police as viewed through the glasses of the citizen. A kaleidoscope of expectations and meanings.

**Period:** February 2007 – February 2011

**Financing:** Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO-Vlaanderen)

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**Project:**

A literature review of police theory and research on the role of the police reveals an often used narrow perspective; reducing it to the definition of the police and their function, the relationship of the police force to the state, or to the tasks carried out by the police. The role concept itself is seldom object of study. In this project, roles are analysed as bundles of expectations. These bundles are strongly interwoven with meanings. Expectations with regard to, and meanings given to the police, are the main focus of this study.

Research on police practice shows that it is the citizen who determines daily police work to a large extent. The general public obviously initiates a lot of day-to-day police tasks and the police role is strongly related to what citizens expect of the police.

The citizen, and in particular, his expectations of the police, is the central research topic. The focus is on the role-making process, whereby the citizen is asked how the police role is ‘made’, and how the process of ‘role-making’ is perceived.

Two central research questions can be differentiated:

- What do people expect from the police?
- What do the police mean to people?

To answer the questions a multi-method approach is chosen.

1. Participant observation in police organizations
2. Semi-structured interviewing of 120 citizens.

Schafer, Huebner and Bynum (Schafer, 2003) summarized some indicators influencing people’s attitudes of the police: demographic characteristics, the contact with the police and the neighbourhood context and –culture. In the construction of the sample these were taken into account. In particular citizens of several age groups are interviewed: 20 people who are aged between 16-20 year, 20 citizens who are aged between 40-50 year and 20 persons who are aged between 65-75 year. This is done in the city and in the country.

In the analysis of the 120 interviews, we distinguished expectations at three levels: behavioural expectations, expectations with regard to police tasks and the contact one wants with the police. After the description of the research results we used the framework of the symbolic interactionist, Charles Horton Cooley (1922), to interpret the results. This framework makes it possible to classify the different expectations on a continuum rating the police as caretaker with regard to safety, and to an emergency call service. Some characteristics of the respondents, e.g., age, residence in an urban or rural area, and concrete contacts, are discussed in order to look for differentiation with regard to their positions on the continuum.
Relevant publications:
Wat doet de politie? Antwerpen: Maklu (Cahiers Politiestudies, 13).
The Police Occupational Culture: Between Reactivity and Creativity.

Period: October 2009 – October 2013

Financing: VUB Research Council (OZR)

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Project:
The police occupational culture(s) (POC) is/are often emphasised as an important obstacle to police reform and cultural change. However, although the POC, as a concept of culture, may present itself easily as a workable even testable framework (e.g. quantitative ‘attitude’ measurements), it is a rather ambiguous concept with diverging ways of interpretation and complications to ‘define’ it accordingly; i.e., various scientific frameworks to study the culture and the POC. Traditional or ‘classic’ conceptions of the POC are rather troublesome, in a sense that they contributed to an image of the POC as being homogeneous, static and universal. The POC is also often described as a stress-coping mechanism, rendering police officers merely as ‘cultural dopes’ within their working environment and its alleged overwhelming socialisation effects; i.e. the POC as a ‘cognitive burn-in’ concept with its ‘unquestioned orthodoxy’ as a scientific model. More importantly, traditional conceptions generally render the POC isolated from its broader social contexts and structural conditions. With some notable exceptions, thinking about the POC is often done without taking into account the dynamic interplay of agency, culture and structure, and how it contributes to the constitution of ‘social order’. Mechanical or deterministic conceptions of the POC therefore offer a low analytical value due to their theoretical even empirical limitations. The need for a more dynamic approach and theoretical sophistication of the concept of the POC and its implications for the police and policing is being emphasised.

Current research’s main goal is to contribute to current debates about conceptual frameworks to study the culture and the POC in particular. Building on valuable insights of cultural criminology and – sociology in particular, the research’s conceptual starting point is the ‘relative autonomy of culture’. This view highlights how culture is being ‘used’ to structure action and how it contributes to the reproduction of social order, even macro structures (e.g. police powers and mandate). This is in our view a convenient approach to value the way police officers interpret their ‘confusing’ work environment and how they act accordingly to it. In doing so, we assess the reproduction and negotiation of (situational but pragmatic) schemes for actions which are being shaped by the ‘symbolic world’ of the police organisation and its mandate. In this view, clusters of strategies of action (or ‘styles’) should not be considered ‘fixed’ nor ‘mechanical’, but rather as a culture production process, meaning these repertoire(s) are part of a rather fluid cultural ‘toolkit’ emphasising the potential of diverging cultural ‘causal effects’ and outcomes. In other words, we focus on the meanings, symbols and (patterned) actions of the police officers and the way these are being ‘used’ to reproduce order with its meanings being exposed through it in particular. By examining the culture-in-action we hope to bring forward an approach in which the interplay of culture, structure, agency and inter-group dynamics is valued.

Relevant publications:
Civil personnel in police (high rank) functions?

**Period:** October 2009 – September 2010

**Financing:** Ministry of Internal Affairs

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**Project:**
The police reform of 1998, changed the presence of civil personnel in the Belgian police in many ways. A special statute was worked out and different structural levels of responsibility were foreseen in the organization. On the local as well as on the federal level a substantial increase in numbers was planned and the functions got more diverse. These developments resulted after 10 years in civil personnel of category A (the highest category), involved in a variety of functions at the management level.

These developments changed the traditional relationships in the police organization and resulted in questions on the possibilities and acceptance to deplore civil personnel in high rank functions.

The following questions were researched:
Which arguments (pro and con) are found in literature on the involvement of civil personnel in different (high rank) functions and specialized tasks?
Which arguments (pro and con) can be found in the police organization gathered by means of focus groups and interviews for on involvement of civil personnel in different (high rank) functions and specialized tasks?
What are the lessons to be learned from explorative cases were civil personnel has been involved in different (high rank) functions and specialized tasks?

These three methods resulted in the construction of a matrix synthesizing the arguments on the involvement of civil personnel. This overview should enable the police organization to make deliberate decisions on the involvement of civil personnel in (high rank) functions.

**Relevant publications:**
Consortium Education Research Of The Police (CERP).

**Period:** 2010 – 2020

**Financing:** No financial support

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**Project:**
The purpose of this study is to gain better insight in the process of education and socialization during the police education and the further police career. The central questions are: 1) What characterise persons recruited to the police education and profession? 2) How does the police education process influence the values/attitudes, motivations and expectations of the police students/recruits? 3) How does experience with the field of practice by working in the police and among police colleagues influence their values/attitudes, motivations and expectations after three years, six years or even 10 or 20 years? What make this study special is that we want to follow the students/recruits through their education/training and into their professional careers to see how their views on knowledge, police work and society are influenced by their education/training and experience from police work.

The study is part of a larger European project, the so called StudData- project, in which police students in ten European countries will participate: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Iceland, Belgium, Germany (Hessen, Thüringen, Brandenburg, Hamburg), Hungary, Slovenia and Spain (Catalonia).

The research design consists of developing a longitudinal survey study of police students, following several cohorts from the time they are starting up their police education until they finish and at several stages throughout their careers, measuring them after three years, six years and possibly even 12 and 20 years after they finish their police education. By giving the same questionnaire to police students in different countries with different police education systems, and where the status of the police in society also differs, we will get important comparative data and probably find interesting and useful patterns. Several questions with relevance for police culture, police science and police education have been built into this.

The resulting database will enable researchers to provide many of the answers to the questions above (and further elaborated below), and making comparative analysis on at least four dimensions: changes over time within a cohort of police students/officers, between different cohorts, between different countries (or police educational institutions within countries), and between police education and other professional educations (and professions).

At present in Belgium 5 universities (departments of criminology) and 9 police schools participate in the project. A large database with comparable longitudinal data is now available for researchers.
Relevant publications:

The organisation, function and inspectors of ‘neighbourhood policing’: a state-of-the-art and future evolutions.

**Period:** 2010 – 2011

**Financing:** Ministry of Internal Affairs

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**Project:**
Neighbourhood policing is generally seen as one of the most visible aspects of the Belgian police reform. Nevertheless, there are still many questions left unanswered regarding its essential developments. At this point, it is still unclear how the organisational and functional structures of neighbourhood policing should be encountered. This research aims at a better understanding of the position of neighbourhood policing within the police organization. The role of neighbourhood police inspectors will be examined as well. Lastly, the study focused on future developments. Based upon an integrated approach, the study explores the organizational, functional and professional dimensions of Belgian neighbourhood policing.

The study is both inductive and qualitative. We have observed eight Belgian police zones (urban, semi-urban and rural), interviewed several neighbourhood police authorities as well as police inspectors and organized focus groups.
Accountability of private military companies in international war theatres.

**Period:** 2012 –

**Promoter VUB:**
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**Project:**
Modern warfare does not solely evolve around public combatants and civilians. The last two decades, we witnessed a massive expansion of Private Military Companies (PMC’s). These companies provide services directly and/or indirectly linked to armed conflict situations. As a result, military operations are no longer the sole concern of governments. Today, we encounter a variety of private – public collaboration strategies, meaning that the responsibility of military security is distributed across a number of actors. As an outcome, it is difficult to track who can be held accountable in cases of misconduct, i.e. when military operations go wrong. State officials and public military forces have manners of control over their activities (judicial, political and ethical). However, these manners of control do not include private military companies. This observation is incomprehensible and leaves many questions (criminological as well as ethical) unanswered regarding the role of accountability of PMC’s in warfare. E.g. what is the accountability of PMC’s when starting a war? And what is the accountability and responsibility of PMC’s once the war has started? These questions will be dealt with in this research. The aim is to create a criminological and (military) ethical framework, exploring these fundamental issues. For the methodology, we will apply visual and narrative knowledge gathering, since the core of the research requires a specific approach.

This research will be executed with the intention of making a joint PhD in criminology (VUB) and in social and military sciences (Royal Military Academy – RMA).

**Relevant publications:**

IV. Crime and the city
Security and the city.

The criminology department is member of the VUB Stadsplatform (platform of urban studies). This platform is in fact a VUB (as well as ULB) network of different academics from different disciplines working on urban questions or questions related to the urban context. Thus, this network brings together social geographers, historiographers, architects, criminologists, political and social scientists, etc ... One of the leading partners in this network is COSMOPOLIS (City, culture and society). As a partner in this platform we are engaged in developing, presenting and making more accessible our criminological research from an urban perspective.

**Period:** February 2005 – December 2005

**Financing:** Stichting Verwey-Jonker (Nederland)

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**Researchers:**
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**Project:**
This project, on the demand of the ministère français de l’Equipement, des Transports, de l’Aménagement du territoire, du Tourisme et de la Mer, is a collaboration of the Verwey-Jonker institute (Netherlands), the Willem Pompe institute (University of Utrecht) and the universities of Brussels and Ghent. The study focuses on the security policy deployed in big cities in the Netherlands and Belgium. It studies the different policy approaches towards security and confronts these approaches with scientific research on the results of these politics. The insights will be used by the French ministry to question its policy towards big cities security problems and develop a future research Plan Urbanisme Construction et Architecture (PUCA).

**Relevant publications:**
Youth, transgression and the politics of place: An ethnography of hanging around.

**Period:** 2012 – 2016

**Financing:** Criminology Department (VUB)

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**Researcher:**
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**Project:**
The behaviour of youngsters hanging out in urban public space is a hot topic nowadays. In run-down and highly diverse areas, as well as in city centers, negotiation between urban youth and other users of public space appears difficult, especially in times when public space is under threat due to various forms of privatization and surveillance. Ethnographic research into the ways in which youths negotiate and appropriate space could, arguably, give insight in how places help create an identity and/or a sense of home and belonging for otherwise marginalized and ‘repressed’ youngsters (Bauman 1987).

However, rather than only trying to contextualize transgressive behaviour in public space, this research will reflect on the nature of public space itself. If urban youths do violate informal rules of conduct, which rules are those and who gets to decide upon them? And at which point does the appropriation of public space by groups of youngsters result in the production of parochial space (Lofland 1998)? How does that disrupt the ‘normal’ dialogue between users of public space? How does this fit into an urban project that is by definition based on negotiation towards a common future rather than on a shared identity or shared norms and values (Corijn et al. 2005)?

Public squares, parks and more liminal places in Brussels’ neighbourhoods Molenbeek or Anderlecht should provide excellent cases for an embedded ethnographic research of the spatial practice of young urbanites. Extensive observation should allow us to map the politics of place in those cases. Additionally, interviews with local ‘experts’ (e.g. street or youth workers) as well as the youths themselves should result in a thick description (Geertz 1973) of the politics of place. This understanding could inform a re-evaluation of what ‘public’ space is, what we mean when we exert our respective rights to the city and its ‘publicness’; youngsters as well as others.
V. Penology
Legitimate justice in times of insecurity.

**Period:** 2005 – 2009

**Financing:** GOA (VUB Research Council – Coordinated Research Action)

**Promoter:**
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**Project:**
This interdisciplinary research project aims at analysing the influence of the increasing emphasis on insecurity on the search for a new legitimacy by policymakers, on the transformation of penal sanctions such as probation, parole, community service and electronic monitoring, on public and political attitudes towards the continued importance of human rights and reductionist penal policies.
The research will lead to two PhDs: Kristof Verfaillie and Aline Bauwens (see description of the project under that heading).
The comparative European approach and the human rights aspects have been dealt with under the EU Coordinated Action Crimprev (see description under that heading).

**Relevant publications:**
See description PhDs Kristof Verfaillie and Aline Bauwens and Crimprev-project.
Legitimate criminal justice in times of insecurity. A Belgian and comparative European perspective.

**Period:** 2005 – 2011

**Financing:** GOA-project (VUB)

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**Project (1):**
“Crime control and the Multitude. Legitimate criminal policymaking as a narrative process”  
*(Phd study, Kristof Verfaillie)*.

The past thirty years, an increasing number of policy choices in the field of Western crime control have been inspired by populist representations of opinions about crime and punishment. This seems to be a consistent finding in a growing number of criminological analyses of criminal policy dynamics. Various experts have observed that today, ‘public opinion’ seems to be a privileged source, or driving force, for criminal policymakers, and this is seen as a negative trend. Whenever the concept of ‘public opinion’ is used, it often refers to a whimsical, untrustworthy, and poorly informed amalgam of opinions. In Western democracies, people’s opinions matter and are important for policy development. Democratic institutions need to be transparent, accountable, and legitimate. However, a criminal policy which is informed by ‘public opinion’ in an unmediated manner seems to expose itself to punitive choices.

In this study, we focus on the trend toward the development of more participative approaches to crime control (incl. ‘community justice’, ‘public engagement’, etc.). We focus in particular on the more direct link that seems to have grown between policymakers and ‘the public’, and the blurring that occurs between ‘expertise’ and ‘lay opinion’. We argue that these debates might benefit from a more fine-tuned understanding of the relationship between the citizen and policymaking in the field of crime control. We thus need to come to a more qualitative understanding of (i) processes of opinion formation and the construction of ‘the public’ (ii) processes of policy development, and (iii) how such processes interact or should be linked. In addition to theoretical and methodological analysis of key notions such as ‘populism’, ‘punitiveness’, ‘the public’, ‘expertise’, ‘policymaking’, and so forth, we will develop two empirical case studies. The first case study is a small scale qualitative neighbourhood study in which we focus on how people’s opinions about crime and punishment are shaped. How do people inform themselves about these issues? How do people evaluate, interpret and integrate information regarding these matters? A second case study will focus on how criminal policymaking works. How do criminal policy choices come about? We therefore analyse narratives of policymakers, i.e. key informants at the cabinet of the Minister of Justice M. Verwilghen (1999 – 2003). As such, this study hopes to contribute to the ongoing debate about penal populism and participatory justice.
Relevant publications:


Legitimate criminal justice in times of insecurity.  
A Belgian and comparative European perspective.

Project (2) The transformation of offender rehabilitation?

**Period:** 2007 – 2011

**Financing:** GOA-project (VUB)

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**Project:**
Framed by Garland’s (2001) The Culture of Control, the PhD thesis ‘The transformation of offender rehabilitation?’ aimed to examine: (1) the extent to which developments in probation policy in two jurisdictions (England and Wales and Belgium) are consistent with his account of penal transformation, and (2) asked the same question of probation practice in both jurisdictions. The analysis of practice was narrowed down to the probation officers’ interactions with offenders, who were given a probation or conditional release order. The research design combined a content analysis of policy documents and ethnographies of practice in both jurisdictions. The fieldwork made use of method triangulation (i.e. file analyses, informal talks, interviews, and, to a more limited extent, observations of probation officer/offender one-to-one supervision meetings).

**Relevant publications:**


‘Crimprev’: Assessing Deviance, Crime and Prevention in Europe”, Workpackage 3 “Criminalisation”.

**Period:** 2006 – 2009

**Financing:** European Commission EU Framework of Priority 7 “Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge based Society”; Coordinated Action ‘Crimprev’

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**Researcher:**
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**Project:**
Comparative study of criminalisation processes and their evolution in European countries, with a special focus on the influence of welfare policies, the role of public opinion, media and the “comeback of the victim”, the growing importance of human rights.

**Relevant publications:**


Training and education in Flemish prisons as instruments for reintegration.

**Period:** 2008 – 2009

**Financing:** King Baudouin Foundation

**Promotor:**
S. Snacken ssnacken@vub.ac.be

**Researcher:**
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Anne De Ron

**Project:**
Training and education have been introduced in Flemish prisons as instruments for social reintegration of prisoners. This research looks into the problems faced by prisoners, prison staff and external social actors involved in such programmes and offers suggestions for improvements.

**Relevant publications:**
Restorative justice in prison: new hope or old lie?

**Period:** 2008 – 2012

**Financing:** Research Council Flanders (FWO)

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**Project:**
The purpose of this project is to offer a scientific analysis of the introduction of ‘restorative justice’ in Belgian prisons in order to gain insight in the specific elements and mechanisms of the prison as a micro-social structure and their effects on the restorative justice theme. The following research questions have been taken up in this research:

1. In what way is the notion of restorative justice articulated between the goals of imprisonment, discipline and normalisation?
2. What place is given to restorative justice within the structure and culture of the prison and its actors in comparison with other goals and effects?

For this qualitative research, participant observations were conducted in the maximum-security prison Leuven Centraal, as well as semi-structured interviews with participating actors (intra/extramural) and case-studies.

**Relevant publications:**


Electronic monitoring: critical perspectives.

**Period:** 2007 – 2013

**Financing:** none

**Promoters:**
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Prof. Dr. Dan Kaminski (UCL)

**Project:**
Electronic monitoring (EM) is a way of supervising offenders in the community while they are on bail, serving a community sentence or after release from prison? Since its introduction, EM has been promoted as a solution for many kinds of problems in penality. Various technologies can be used, including voice verifications, GPS satellite tracking and – most commonly – the use of radio frequency to monitor house arrest. EM originated in the USA in the 1980s and has spread to over 30 countries.

A techno-utopian impulse underpins the origins of EM and has remained latent in a subsequent development elsewhere in the world, despite recognition that it is less capable of effecting penal transformations than its champions have hoped.

In this project, critical international approaches are compared, but also issues of privatization, evaluation, offender perspectives and ethics are investigated from a national and international perspective.

**Relevant publications:**


Communications at congress(es):


The sentence implementation courts at work. An ethnographic research into their interactions, decision making processes and practices.

**Period:** 2009 – 2013

**Financing:** Research Council Flanders (FWO)

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**Project:**
Decisions to release prisoners are a highly sensitive and often debated issue in Belgium. Since 1 February 2007 multidisciplinary sentence implementation courts (SIC) decide over four aspects of the detention trajectory of prisoners sentenced to three years imprisonment or more: (1) semi-detention, (2) electronic monitoring, (3) conditional release and (4) provisional release in view of expulsion or extradition. The SIC is a multidisciplinary court, presided by a judge, assisted by two assessors specialized in social reintegration or in prison matters. This creates a unique penal context, which has not yet been studied.

This project investigates the context of the establishment of the sentence implementation courts, their characteristics and peculiarities in order to describe and understand their decision-making processes and practices.

Aiming to describe and understand the decision-making practices of the sentence implementation court, a qualitative research design was prepared. We opted for an ethnographic research, triangulating open observations in the field and feedback interviews with the members of the SIC. In addition, the actors and services involved in the preparation of the files and reports, such as the prison governor, the psycho-social service in the prisons and the prosecutor, were being investigated, aiming to understand and explain why and how decisions of the sentence implementation courts are being made.

We started with in-depth observations in a first court (SICa). The fieldwork started in October 2009. Between October 2009 and February 2010 more than 40 court sessions were observed including observations of the formal and informal interactions of professional and non-professional participants (‘front-stage’ and ‘back-stage’) before, during and after court sessions. Ending the fieldwork, we conducted 6 feedback interviews with the members of the court. Our field notes were carefully and detailed registered and the interviews were transcribed literally.

In March and April 2010 we did fieldwork at the Prosecution Service of the sentence implementation court we observed, studying the role of the prosecutor in the decision-making process. In May and June 2010 we performed observations in a first prison aiming to study the role of the prison governor(s) and of the members of the psycho-social service in the preparation of the files, the reports and the advices for the sentence implementation court. In addition we conducted 5 feedback interviews with the different prison governors, 1 focus group and 3 individual interviews with the psycho-social service. In January and February 2011, we repeated this research strategy in a second prison. We did fieldwork and conducted 5 feedback interviews with the different prison governors, 2 focus groups and 1 individual interview with the psycho-social service.
In order to verify some of our preliminary research results in SICa, we conducted fieldwork from January to March 2012 in a second Sentence Implementation Court (SICb). We observed 5 court hearings and conducted 3 feedback interviews with the members of the court. After the different stages of our fieldwork, we did a descriptive analysis and reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of our methodology. At the moment we are finishing the more in-depth and theoretical analysis of our data and are writing the PhD thesis.

**Relevant publications:**


Legal pluralism and conflict-resolution in penal matters: case-study with the Wê and at the correctional tribunal of Man (Republic of the Ivory Coast).

**Period:** 1998 – 2010


**Promoter:**
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**Researcher:**
Veerle Van Gijsegem

**Project:**
The purpose of this ethno-criminological research is to describe and explain legal pluralism and conflict-resolution in penal matters in practice, in the West of the Ivory Coast, more specifically with the Wê and at the correctional tribunal of Man.

In the books, legal pluralism in penal affairs has been prohibited since 1946, when the Ivory Coast was a French colony. Field-work during a seven-month-residence with the Wê of the groups Nidrou and Gbéan (sous-préfecture of Kouibly) and a three-month-residence in Man, shows that in practice legal pluralism is still very important in all aspects of life. This field-work includes participant observations and interviews with several categories of chiefs of the groups Nidrou and Gbéan, as well as observations, a file-study and interviews with public prosecutors and judges at the correctional tribunal of Man. The types of deviant behaviour studied in detail are: adultery, witchcraft, homicide, assault and battery and theft.

**Relevant publications:**


Doing prison work in a changing context.

**Period:** 2009 – 2013

**Financing:** Research Council of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel

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**Project:**
Prisons are unique social and moral environments whose characteristics and practices reflect broader social patterns and have significant consequences for those detained in them, those who work there and the wider society that sanctions. It is therefore not surprising that prisons are the subject of much scientific (sociological) research (Crewe, 2007). Starting in the 1950s, the majority of these studies focussed on the prison as an institution and on prisoners as research subjects (See e.g.: (Crewe, 2009, Sykes, 1958, Cohen and Taylor, 1972, Toch, 1977, Liebling, 1992)). This stood in sharp contrast with the academic neglect, except for a few einzelgängers (Frank, 1966, Thomas, 1972), of the professional group operating on the frontline of a prison. The eighties, however, meant a reversal in this area and numerous American and European studies on prison officers were emerged (See e.g (Kommer, 2008, Rostaing, 1997, Duffee, 1980, Lombardo, 1981, De Waele and Depreeuw, 1985, Zimmer, 1987, Kauffman, 1988, Chauvenet et al., 1994, Verhaeghe, 1994, Rostaing, 1996, Farkas, 2000, De Coninck, 2001, Liebling and Price, 2001, Crawley, 2004a, Crewe, 2006, Liebling et al., 2011). Nonetheless, the current share of studies on the social world of prison officers remains rather small. Most Belgian prison research is of a qualitative nature, focusing on various aspects of daily prison life, but often from the prisoners’ perspective. In order to deal with the lack of knowledge on prison officers in Belgium, these considerations have led to an ethnographic research on the role of the profession of prison officers in Belgium.

**Relevant publications:**


It’s a man’s world. A narrative research on male prisoners’ experience of prison life and prison culture.

**Period:** 2009 – 2013

**Financing:** Research Council Flanders (FWO)

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**Researcher:**
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**Project:**
This research project aims to explore “masculinity” as a coping strategy for male prisoners, by combining two important academic gaps: (1) the serious lack of gender perspectives in Belgian criminological research (Verschaeve, 1999; Lippens, 2005; 2008a-b; 2009a-b) and (2) the relative absence of qualitative penal research on various aspects of Belgian prison life (Robert, 2008). Since prisons are traditionally described as a hypermasculine environment (Toch, 1998), masculinity oriented research is relevant and necessary to determine to what extent this hypothesis can be validated in a Belgian penal context.

The central research question is: What is the importance of gender in Belgian male prisoner’s discourse concerning their (criminal) life course and their prison experience? This project has both fundamental and empirical ambitions. Firstly, it aspires a conceptual evaluation of both the notion “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 1987; 1995) and Messerschmidt’s theory of “crime as structured action” (1993; 1997). Secondly it aims to explore, test and elaborate international empirical findings on prison experience, prison culture and hierarchical positioning from an explicit masculinity perspective. Generally, men are the scope of penal research, without recognizing them as gendered subjects. However, masculinity studies have been demonstrating that a masculinity perspective could clearly lead to a better understanding of men’s construction of social reality (Lippens, 2009a).

We will combine both (1) participative observations of long-term prisoners and (2) a narrative analysis of their discourse concerning their (criminal) life history and various aspects of their prison experience. This should allow us to further elaborate the rather limited number of international gendered insights in prison culture, prison hierarchy and prison experience, while resulting simultaneously in an original and fundamental contribution to the academic discussion based on original Belgian empirical data. This project contains also a specific policy-related relevance: knowledge on prison experience allows dealing with dynamics of prison culture and hierarchy and as a result encourages both social wellbeing (of both prisoners and prison officers) and reintegration (Evans & Wallace, 2008).

All together, masculinity oriented penal research is relevant on many levels and fundamental scientific scrutiny was urgently needed in Belgium. Since 2004 the masculinity thesis has been continuously explored, starting with a master thesis on the subject. Further research has been valorised in various gender oriented publications (Lippens, 2009a; Lippens, Nuuttiens & Scheirs, 2009a) and lectures (Lippens, 2008a-b; Lippens, 2009b; Lippens Nuuttiens & Scheirs, 2009b). The need for expertise on the intersection of masculinity and crime has continuously been stressed. The recently obtained funding of the Research Foundation – Flanders should enable the researcher to further elaborate, update and publish findings from the international review of the existing literature during the next year, followed by a 2-year period of fieldwork and analysis in 3 Belgian prisons, resulting in a PhD dissertation in 2013.
Relevant publications:


Arisen from the darkness. The Belgian prison governor. A criminological account of local prison governance.

**Period:** 2012 – 2016

**Financing:** Criminology Department (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

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**Researcher:**
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**Project:**
The prison governor plays a pivotal role in shaping prison life. However, little is known about this criminal justice actor. Not only is there a paucity of international studies, in Belgium this topic remains largely unexplored. This project aims to fill this gap in knowledge and understanding of prisons. Prisons, as dynamic institutions, are subjected to societal and penal changes. They are undergoing several transformations, such as rising and changing prison populations, a shift to post-authoritarian prisons, an increasing regulation of prison praxis, a changing influence of prison unions, a more managerial approach to prison governance, etc. Consequently, this project focuses on the question of the interaction between these changes and the (changed?) art of governing prisons by the prison governors, their (changed?) discourse and socio-demographic profile. To that end, several research methods will be applied. More precisely, two case studies will lead to insights into the current work context of the prison governor. In order to fully understand the changes of prison governance, oral histories of former prison governors and semi-structured interviews with current prison governors and members of the central prison administration will be conducted.

**Relevant publications:**

A highway to prison? An analysis of the social and penal pathways of non-national prisoners without a legal permit of residence.

**Period:** 2009 – 2015

**Financing:** Criminology Department (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

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**Researcher:**
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**Project:**
According to the Belgian Penitentiary Law, imprisonment due to violations of the Criminal Law aims at the restoration, rehabilitation and reintegration of all prisoners in society. However, the same legal framework foresees specific (early) release procedures for non-national prisoners without a legal permit of residence that aims at the expulsion to their home country (m)any concern for the abovementioned principles of penal policy (De Ridder, Beyens & Snacken, 2012). Additionally, under the Belgian Foreigners Act of 1980, due to the violation of the Criminal Law, non-national prisoners without a legal permit of residence can be considered as ‘a threat to the public order or national security’ and be subjected to an expulsion measure that activates a re-entry ban. These intertwining legal frameworks follow the perceived trend of Crimmigration, known as the exclusionary convergence of Immigration and Criminal Law (Miller, 2005; Stumpf, 2006; Van der Leun, 2010). Consequently, the boundaries between these different legal frameworks becomes blurred and the non-national prisoners without a legal permit of residence are confronted with a constant threat of expulsion once they are incarcerated due to violations of the Criminal Law.

This research considers the extent that convicted non-national prisoners without a legal permit of residence experience the constant threat of expulsion during their imprisonment. In particular, the way they cope with this threat, the impact on their migration trajectory and the preparation of the release from prison are scrutinized.

**Relevant publications:**


Qualitative dimensions of regimes in open collective reception centers for asylum seekers and the level of punitivism.

Period: 2010 – 2014

Financing: none

Promoter:
Prof. Dr. Sonja Snacken

Researcher:
Veerle Berx

Project:
In Belgium asylum seekers and certain categories of illegal aliens can benefit from material, non-financial support and live permanently in collective open institutions. The Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers is the protagonist in the management of receptions centers. The co-habitation of tens of asylum seekers with different backgrounds and cultures in open institutions demands internal rules, and consequently disciplinary actions when the rules are broken, when duties bound to the right of public material support are not fulfilled and in case of incidents and conflicts.

Open reception centers can be considered as social institutions or structures of order that regulate all actions of individuals. The (total) character of an institution can be analyzed on the basis of several criminological theories about order and control. The institutional culture of a reception center is influenced by the importation of multicultural values and the deprivations resulting from the collective regime.
Reception centers can also be considered as special moral places: due to the continuous contact between staff and residents and the dependency of the latter from the former, formal and informal interactions and relations do play a prominent role between both groups, together with the way residents are treated and approached. Concepts as values, norms, security, order, control and well-being are undoubtedly connected.

The doctoral research is focused on the values and norms that stand out in open reception centers, their impact on the quality of life and their mutual interaction with rules, regime, relationships between staff and residents and the process of sanctioning. These values are constantly under pressure due to the multitude of origins of residents, their precarious status of residence and the tension between group regime and individual needs.

Relevant publication:
The myth of community reintegration?

**Period:** 2010 – 2013

**Financing:** Research Council Flanders (FWO)

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**Project:**
The main objective of the study is to explore the (narrative) identity work of released prisoners (and their partners). The study focuses on three research questions: 1) How do released prisoners define and make sense of their identities? 2) How do the different identities relate to their quality of life (including stigma and coping)? 3) How do released prisoners proceed to rebuild (produce) social capital and networks? To address these questions several in-prison interviews and five case studies of released convicts are conducted. My research is underpinned by the philosophical position that knowledge is socially co-constructed through relationships with others and adopts a case-centred, qualitative narrative methodology within a longitudinal design.
Research into honour related violence in Belgium.

**Period:** 2010 – 2011

**Financing:** Ministry of Interior Affaires and Centre for Equal opportunities and Opposition to Racism

**Promoters:**
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- Prof. Dr. Gily Coene (VUB, Rhea)
- Dr. Els Leye (Ugent)
- Prof. Jan Snacken (VUB, CRiS) jan.snacken@vub.ac.be

**Researchers:**
- Elli Gilbert (VUB)
- Anke Van Vossole (UGent)

**Project:**
This research focuses on the factors and psychosocial and cultural processes that form the basis of honour related violence. It aims to research the policy to improve the approach towards honour related violence, focusing on four sectors: police and criminal policy, education, psycho-social and medical aid.

Research methodology: case studies, qualitative interviews with a selection of privileged witnesses and research of good practices in Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

**Relevant publication:**
Working and living in prison: the voice of the users.
Report of focus groups about the architectural needs of the new prisons.

Period: December 2010 – May 2011

Financing: King Baudouin Foundation (KBF)

Promoters:
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Prof. Dr. Marie-Sophie Devresse (UCL)

Researcher:
Elli Gilbert (VUB)

Project:
The starting point for this project was the Belgian government’s ‘Master plan 2008-2012-2016 for a prison infrastructure with humane conditions’. Building new prisons is an interesting opportunity to study the spatial needs of prison users and residents. The aim of this project was to give voice to the users and residents of prisons on their needs and requirements in terms of space. In six focus groups, more than 60 professional and non-professional users (such as ex-residents, visitors, family members, prison staff, external personnel, etc.) reflected on this subject. This project showed i.e. the demand for small-scale prisons and a maximum differentiation in prison regimes. The study also called for a prison that is open to the services in the society and that facilitates the space and opportunities for respectful interactions between staff and prisoners, as well as contact with prisoners.

Relevant publications:

Lived experiences with the Belgian detention regime in the Penitentiary Institution of Tilburg.

**Period:** 1 December 2011 – 30 June 2012

**Financing:** Dutch Service for Institutions of Justice (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen)

**Promoters:**
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**Researchers:**
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**Project:**
Since February 2010, Belgian prisoners have been detained at the Penitentiary Institution (PI) of Tilburg. They are subjected to a predominantly Belgian regime that is executed by Dutch staff under a Belgian-Dutch board of governors. This unique construction, called Nova Belgica in internal policy documents was originally set to run until December 2012, but has now been extended to December 2013. At the time of this empirical research, March – May 2012, there were approximately 650 Belgian prisoners in the PI Tilburg.

The following central research question was formulated: what are the (positive, negative or other) experiences with the execution of the Belgian detention regime in a Dutch institution, what are the consequences of those experiences and what are the possible causes of these experiences?

The research is theoretically based on Alison Liebling’s work in which she has developed an instrument for measuring the moral climate in prisons, the so-called Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL), which is based on extensive and lengthy preliminary qualitative research with prisoners (and later also prison staff). This MQPL inspired the construction of the topic list that was used for semi-open qualitative interviews with prisoners and staff at the PI Tilburg.

Several research methods are combined: reviews of the literature and case law, analysis of existing quantitative data, observations and 71 interviews with prisoners and staff at the PI Tilburg and 20 interviews in a comparable Dutch Pentitentiary Institution Norgerhaven. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed with the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA.

**Relevant publication:**
Human rights in situations of (extreme) dependency.

**Period:** 2011 – 2014

**Financing:** Research Council VUB (HOA – Interdisciplinary Research Action)

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**Project:**
The aim of this research programme is to analyse the dynamics of relations of (extreme) institutional dependency and the influence of human rights standards and legislation on these relations. It will focus on different case studies, such as health care institutions, homes for elderly people and prisons, through an integration of different scientific disciplines: human rights, legal theory, sociology of law, criminology, forensic psychology, end of life care and decisions, oncology. In doing so, it brings together the expertise of different VUB-research teams in a true attempt at integrated interdisciplinary research about a subject matter of high social, legal, ethical and medical pertinence. Several subthemes are currently being developed through separate research projects (see below):

- The influence of legislation on situations of (extreme) institutional dependency: Forms of autonomy and participation in prisons and health care institutions (researcher: Ineke Casier)
- Unbearable suffering and euthanasia requests by prisoners (researcher: Caroline Devynck)
- Elderly prisoners: doubly punished? (researcher: N.)

**Relevant publications:**


The influence of legislation on relations of (extreme) institutional dependency. Forms of autonomy and participation in prisons and health care institutions.

**Period:** 2012 – 2016

**Financing:** Research Council Flanders (FWO)

**Promoter:**
Prof. Dr. Sonja Snacken  
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**Co-promoters:**
Prof. Dr. Wim Distelmans  
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Prof. Dr. Paul De Hert  
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**Researcher:**
Ineke Casier  
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**Project:**
This research project will investigate the dynamics of relations of (extreme) dependency, with special emphasis on forms of autonomy and participation in decision making, that occur in two types of ‘total institutions’: prisons and health care institutions. Prisoners and patients are subjected to the rules of the institution of which they are inhabitants, without (directly) choosing to be in that position (contrary to other total institutions, e.g. monasteries). Moreover, certain groups of inhabitants of total institutions, such as prisoners and patients, may become extremely dependent on the institution and its staff. Over the past few years, legislation was developed in Belgium to strengthen the rights and means for participation in decision making for both prisoners and patients (e.g. the Belgian Prison Act of 2005, the Rights of Patients Act of 2002). Through a combination of extensive legal analysis and ethnographic research we want to understand the complex mechanisms of losing and regaining autonomy and the place of legislation in these mechanisms. Participant observation, semi-structured interviewing and extensive document analysis will be used to gather data in these two settings. The data will also be reviewed in the light of the current human rights discourses and notions of ‘human dignity’.

**Relevant publications:**


Unbearable suffering and euthanasia requests by prisoners.

**Period:** 2013 – 2017

**Financing:** Stichting voor Morele Bijstand aan Gevangenen (SMBG)

**Promoter:**
- Prof. Dr. Sonja Snacken  
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- Prof. Dr. Wim Distelmans  
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**Researcher:**
- Caroline Devynck  
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**Project:**
Since the Act of 28 May 2002, Belgium is one of only three countries in the world (with the Netherlands and Luxemburg) where euthanasia or end-of-life on request can legally be performed by medical doctors under certain circumstances:

- a voluntary, repeated and lasting request;
- from an adult, competent patient;
- who suffers unbearably, physically or psychically;
- as the result of an incurable affection caused by illness or accident;
- who is or is not terminally ill.

Several procedural guarantees must be enforced in order for euthanasia to be legal and legitimate and no medical doctor can be forced to perform euthanasia. Each case must be registered and submitted to the Federal Commission on Euthanasia who checks its legality. In case of infringement on the legal conditions, the case is referred to the public prosecutor. Despite large public support for a self-chosen end-of-life (Belgian Senate 2011), the topic remains controversial, politically and in practice. Recently, requests for euthanasia by prisoners and detained mentally ill offenders have been received by the Life End Information Forum (LEIF) and the recently established Consultation ULteam (2011, VUB-UGent). Such requests seem to be the result of incurable somatic diseases or of psychic suffering resulting from a mental illness, but also of unbearable suffering caused by feelings of guilt or by a legal status where release seems unlikely (lengthy indeterminate detentions of mentally ill prisoners or life sentence prisoners who experienced repeated denial of release). While according to the Belgian Prison Act (2005) and to European human rights standards prisoners are entitled to equivalence of medical care, the prison context and the particular suffering resulting from the ‘pains of imprisonment’ and from indeterminate sentences raise several dilemmas and incisive questions of a legal, criminological and medical nature. Several ethnographic studies have been conducted in prisons and on euthanasia but, to our knowledge, none have focused on euthanasia requests within prisons.

The main objectives of this project are:
- To analyse the mechanisms behind requests for euthanasia by prisoners
- To understand the possible interactions with the prison context
- To understand how prison staff and caregivers deal with such requests
- To reflect on the possible penological, legal and medical implications on concepts of ‘punishment’, ‘dignity’ and ‘unbearable suffering’.
Elderly prisoners: doubly punished?

**Period:** 2013 – 2017

**Financing:** Research Council Flanders (FWO)

**Promoter:**
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**Co-promoter(s):**
Prof. Dr. Paul De Hert paul.de.hert@vub.ac.be
Prof. Dr. Wim Distelmans willem.distelmans@uzbrussel.be

**Researcher:** N

**Project:**
The prison population as a whole is growing, and so is the number of elderly prisoners. Whilst they still remain a small group in Belgian prisons (3.6 % was over 60+ on 3 March 2011), there are good reasons to believe that the number of elderly prisoners in Belgium will continue to increase in the future. Until now, the group of elderly prisoners has received little attention in Belgian research. However, this new trend, also witnessed in other Western countries, raises specific challenges for the prison life of elderly prisoners.

Specific pains and suffering may result from prison architecture, which seems primarily designed for offenders who are young, energetic and fit (e.g. cells and stairways are unfit for wheelchair patients or otherwise disabled prisoners). Moreover, the services and programmes provided by the prison are poorly adapted to the needs of elderly prisoners (e.g. sports and fitness infrastructure, outdoor exercise, prison labour, education, reintegration programmes, etc.). In addition, whilst prisoners are already a marginalised group whose health problems and care needs exceed those of the general population, recent international research highlights that elderly prisoners face specific physical and mental health needs. Only two Belgian prisons have a specialist elderly unit.

We therefore wish to study the specific health needs and pains experienced by elderly prisoners in Belgium in interaction with different prison regimes.
Food in prison.

**Period:** 2013 – 2017

**Financing:** Research Council Flanders (FWO)

**Promoter:**
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**Co-promoter(s):**
Prof. Dr. Peter Scholliers

**Researcher:**
An-Sophie Vanhouche An-Sofie.Vanhouche@vub.ac.be

**Project:**
In his influential publication, Sykes (1958) describes the deprivation of food as one of the five ‘pains of imprisonment’. Just as food plays an important role in society, eating inside the prison is imbued with power and significance. Even more, because of restrictive detention conditions, food may take a much more pressing significance in prison than it has outside.

If studying food has gained tremendous attention lately, the academic interest for food in prison research is rather marginal. This research aims to study food practices in prison, by meeting the following two objectives.

A first part will map all nutritional, institutional (formal and informal practices) and budgetary aspects of prison food. Both officially supplied and informally (or secretly) prepared and consumed food will be investigated in order to understand the relationship between the provision and quality of official food and possible counter strategies of prisoners to resist to this official food.

A second part will focus on the significance of food within the prison and analyze food as a vehicle of resistance, identity construction, communication, power, prestige, rewarding, comfort, sociability or any other usage of food that has been detected in general society.

Apart from a study of the international literature on food and prisons, food practices will be empirically investigated in a selection of prisons in Belgium and the Netherlands through the analysis of policy and prison documents and regulations, semi-structured and in-depth interviews with prison governors, prison staff and prisoners as well as participant observation (cf. ethnographic research)
Offender supervision in Europe.

**Period:** 2012 – 2016

**Financing:** European Union

**Chair:**
Prof. Dr. Fergus Mc Neill (University of Glasgow)

**Vice-chair:**
Prof. Dr. Kristel Beyens (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)  kristel.beyens@vub.ac.be

**Members for Belgium;**
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Prof. Dr. Aline Bauwens (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)  aline.bauwens@vub.ac.be

**Project:** COST Action, IS 1106
Offender supervision in Europe has developed rapidly in scale, distribution and intensity in recent years. However, the emergence of ‘mass supervision’ has largely escaped the attention of social scientists more concerned with ‘mass incarceration’, despite the fact that it represents at least as important a manifestation of the advent of a ‘security society’, or of a ‘surveillance society’, or of the political changes associated with the multi-level governance of crime and justice. As well as representing an analytical lacuna, the neglect of supervision means that research has not delivered the knowledge that is urgently required to engage with political, policy and practice communities grappling with delivering justice efficiently and effectively in fiscally straitened times, and with the challenges of communicating the meaning, legitimacy and utility of supervision to an insecure public. These are the academic and practical challenges that the proposed Action aims to address.

Integrating reoffending risk and desistance using a psychology of criminal conduct.
A critical theoretical analysis and empirical development of a risk-and-desistance checklist.

**Period:** 2012 – 2018

**Financing:** pending

**Promoter:**
Prof. Dr. Stef Decoene (VUB) stef.decoene@vub.ac.be

**Researcher:**
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**Project:**
Research on risk assessment and What Works is often contrasted with desistance research, suggesting that these are incompatible perspectives on the re-offending process. This PhD project critically examines this opposition, arguing that both can and should be integrated by using a state-of-the-art psychology of criminal conduct and criminal careers. The project examines this both theoretically (by analysing reoffending and desisting within a social cognitive-affective processing model of norm-violating behaviour) and empirically (by developing and testing a risk and desistance assessment checklist).

**Relevant publications:**

Effective therapist variables in the offense-oriented evaluation and treatment of juvenile delinquents. Literature study and empirical evaluation.

**Period:** 2013 –

**Financing:** none

**Promoter:**
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**Researcher:**
Ans Vandeperre

**Project:**
The scientific literature offers theoretical suggestions concerning which therapist characteristics are more or less effective when offense-oriented treatment (within the most recent formulations of the RNR-framework) is offered to (juvenile) delinquents. However, there is very little empirical research on if, when, and how these therapist responsivity factors contribute to effective treatment, and how these contrast with more conventionally propagated therapist characteristics described in clinical psychological research.
This PhD study will offer a critical review of suggested therapist characteristics, and present empirical research evaluating the putative effectiveness of these characteristics in offense-oriented treatment.
VI. Youth Justice Studies
Small numbers, big problems?
A qualitative study of the youth justice pathways of female persistent offenders.

**Period:** 2007 – 2010

**Financing:** FWO (Research Foundation – Flanders)

**Promoter:**
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jenneke.christiaens@vub.ac.be
Prof. dr. Ch. Eliaerts

**Researcher:**
An Nuytiens  
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**Project:**
The main aim of the PhD study was to gain insight in the life histories and the criminal pathways of women in prison, and in the way these two aspects are connected. In the first research phase we conducted autobiographical interviews with female prisoners in Flanders. We interviewed 41 Dutch-speaking convicted women in the Flemish prisons that are accommodated with a women section (Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent and Hasselt). In the second research phase, criminal pathways throughout childhood and adulthood of all interviewed women were reconstructed. For this purpose we made use of several data: Youth Court case files, criminal records, detention records, self-reported delinquency.

The lives of the women are characterised by vulnerabilities on three levels (‘individual vulnerability’, ‘societal vulnerability’, ‘relational vulnerability’). ‘Relational vulnerability’ appears to be the central item within the majority of life histories. Within our research population we identified 34 adult-onset offenders. The emergence of crime in adulthood is strongly related to vulnerabilities on several life domains. Three salient factors were revealed: (1) financial need, (2) addictions and (3) abusive romantic relationships. For the majority of women, abusive romantic relationships are crucial in the emergence of crime in adulthood. This does not mean that women can be reduced to passive victims of their life circumstances who are ‘forced’ into crime. Most women in our research perceive themselves as active agents. They recognise their share in the criminal activities, despite perceived manipulation or threats. Yet the life histories reveal that their freedom of choice might be affected by the gendered life context. The accumulation of vulnerabilities throughout adulthood – often ‘catalysed’ by relational vulnerability – results in the limitation of (real and perceived) options. The presence or absence of a solid social network, or at least how the woman perceives this, is essential within the process of choice. A life in isolation, and more specifically (the feeling of) being deprived from social contacts might explain why women in a precarious life context take the actual step towards crime.

**Key publications:**


Delinquent girls become adults: A qualitative analysis of their trajectory towards desisting or persisting delinquent women.

**Period:** January 2012 – December 2014

**Financing:** FWO (Research Foundation – Flanders)

**Promoter:**
- Prof. Dr. Jenneke Christiaens  jenneke.christiaens@vub.ac.be
- Prof. Dr. Els Dumortier  els.dumortier@vub.ac.be

**Researcher:**
- An Nuytiens  an.nuytiens@vub.ac.be

**Project:**
Because of their low participation in crime, delinquent girls and women were often ignored in criminological research (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). Over the last few decades the body of research on this domain has grown impressively. This newly found interest added to our understanding of female offenders’ judicial and delinquent pathways from childhood to adulthood (see e.g. Block et al., 2010; Gilfus, 1992). Within this research domain two important lacunas can be identified. First, knowledge on female persistent offenders’ profile and criminal career remains rather limited. Second, Belgian research on female offenders in general and female persistent offenders in particular remains scant.

By means of a prospective follow-up study of delinquent girls who appeared before the Youth Court we will explore the profile and pathway of female (persistent and desisting) offenders. Interviews with both persistent and desisting female offenders will shed light on differences between both groups, and on salient factors within the desistance process of women.

The general research question “What characterises the delinquent / juvenile justice trajectories of young delinquent girls in their transition into adulthood as persistent or desisting female offenders?” consists of four specific research questions:
- What are the characteristics of the juvenile justice trajectory of delinquent girls?
- What are the characteristics of their criminal justice trajectory?
- What characterises the life context of delinquent girls’ transition to adulthood?
- How do persistent and desisting female offenders perceive their own judicial (and delinquent) trajectory?

Comparing our findings with results of previous pathway research concerning female offenders (e.g. Nuytiens, 2011) can shed light on whether there are differences between adult-onset and childhood-onset female offenders. Comparing our findings with results of the ongoing desistance research (FWO, researcher: Tinne Geluyckens) can provide important insights in the question whether persistence and desistance are gendered processes. Despite the massive increase in desistance research, knowledge on the female desistance process remains limited (Farrall & Calverley, 2006; Giordano et al., 2002).
Juveniles desist-from-crime:  
A qualitative research on young adults with a juvenile justice trajectory.

**Period:** Feb 2010 – Dec 2013.

**Financing:** FWO (Research Foundation – Flanders)

**Promoter:**  
Prof. Dr. Jenneke Christiaens  
Prof. Dr. Els Dumortier

**Researcher-PhD:**  
Tinne Geluyckens

**Project:**  
This research has a general aim of getting insight into the dynamics that characterize the process of desistance from crime and the role of judicial intervention within this process as seen by the (former) juvenile delinquents themselves. This research will be explicitly directed towards the perspective/narrative of the (former) juvenile delinquent (as the most direct involved person), to his own criminal and desistance trajectory. We will try and answer the question: ‘What is the dynamic of the “desistance-from-crime” process and more in particular, what is the position of the judicial intervention in this process?’

To answer these questions we will analyses a diversity of information. First, we will quantitatively analyse the trajectory and recidivism/desistance patterns of a cohort of 1436 juvenile delinquents. Second, a qualitative trajectory analysis of the juvenile court files will give insight into the logic of a trajectory through out the juvenile justice system, as they do tend to seem very chaotic. And third we will to in depth interviews with 50 (former) juvenile delinquents (which we will mostly find throughout the adult justice system). This last part stand central in the project as it is the only way to get insight into the narrative of the young adult.

**Relevant Publications:**


On the dark side of the moon: 100 years juvenile detention in Belgium, paper presented at the ESSCH annual conference, 2012 Glasgow, Tinne Geluyckens, & Jenneke Christiaens


Juvenile Detention and Recidivism: A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing?, European Society of Criminology, Annual Congress 2010 Luik, Tinne Geluyckens, Jenneke Christiaens, Els Dumortier, Elisabeth Enhus

**Period:** January 2011 – December 2012

**Financing:** Daphne III program of the European Commission
(in cooperation with the Criminology Department of the VUB)

**Promoter (national partner):**
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**Researcher:**
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**Project:**
Both on the national and the international level the (youth) crime prevention field consists of a wide range of actors, institutions and organisations. They all have their own method, perspective and approach when it comes to preventing and controlling youth crime. However, initiatives aimed at collecting, refining and exchanging this knowledge remain scarce, especially between different (European) countries. Consequently, the YouPrev project aimed at filling this gap by conducting an international comparative research regarding ‘best practices’ in the field of the prevention of youth crime together with partners from Germany, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, Hungary and Belgium. One of the main focuses of this study was to take stock and improve knowledge on the prevention and control of youth crime, deviance and violence and to share this knowledge amongst relevant actors, institutions and policy makers. For this purpose we applied several research methods. Through the national institutional survey, relevant experts were questioned about existing approaches, their effects and efficiency and how they perceive best practices of tackling and preventing youth crime. Through the Delphi questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, experts from the field were asked to share their views on future developments in the domain of youth crime and the possible implication for its prevention and control. A third phase consisted of a local study whereby the prevention of youth crime was studied as a local phenomenon in three areas (an urban, semi rural /urban and rural one). In these selected areas on the one hand self-report surveys were conducted amongst 14 to 17 year olds from the secondary. On the other, interviews with both actors from the prevention field as well as students were performed. These interviews focused on the respondent’s experience with and perception of possible problems in the specific areas, how they are being addressed and what could be improved in the future. In the last phase the collected findings were presented in two workshops with police and social workers. The purpose of these workshops was to discuss and reflect upon the field of youth crime prevention and the related practices. This debate needed to serve as a resource for further recommendations on good practices of youth crime prevention but also to conceive materials for the training and continuing education of police officers and social workers.

**Relevant publications**

SRDBEL: Self reported juvenile delinquency in Belgium.

**Period:** 2008 – 2012

**Financing:** Belgian Federal Science Policy

**Promoters:**
Prof. dr D. Defraene (coordinator - ULB)
Prof. dr J. Christiaens (VUB)  
jenneke.christiaens@vub.ac.be
Prof. dr C. Nagels (ULB)

**Researcher:**
Heidi Luypaert, Tinne Geluyckens, Karolien Vandervorst

**Project:**
This research draws upon the long-standing tradition of self-report studies on juvenile delinquency studies. Most self-report research is rooted in a traditional positivist perspective. However, this research abandons this perspective. A comprehensive perspective drives our criminological approach of the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency on delinquent behaviour. The meaning of the action as expressed by the youngsters is taken into account, and the way in which these actions and their “meaning” can be understood in their social logic.

This project focuses on the issue of self report methodology. Its central goal is to develop a selfreport approach relevant for a quantitative as well as a qualitative approach. In this study we intend to go beyond the positivistic measurement of juvenile delinquency. This research aims at a “contextual” analysis of juvenile delinquency. After a thorough state of the art concerning the methodological and epistemological debate on self reports, this project focused on the analysis of existing selfreport surveys. This analysis was used to develop a selfreport survey that is relevant for both the national (local) as well as an international level of analysis. The survey was administered to a representative sample of Belgian school population (aged 13-16 years). The results of the survey formed a basis for the second qualitative research phase.

The importance of the second phase lies in elaborating/developing the qualitative methodology within this domain of self-report studies of juvenile delinquency. Over 120 interviews, both individual in depth as group discussions, were organised. This second phase is meant to enable us to “decipher” qualitatively and gain insight into the reasons for and conditions in which delinquent behaviour occurs among all young people. Through a combination of both quantitative and qualitative empirical data acquired insights are not (primarily) aiming to describe the phenomenon of juvenile delinquent behaviour (descriptive), but more importantly to look into the sense this behaviour has for youngsters (contextualised).

**Relevant Publications:**
EVODELJE: Late modern evolutions in youth delinquency (Belgium, 1980-2005): A qualitative research.

**Period:** 1/12/2007 – 31/07/2010

**Financing:** Belgian Science Policy

**Coordinator:**
Prof. Dr. J. Christiaens (University Ghent & VUB)  jenneke.christiaens@vub.ac.be

**Promoters**
Prof. Dr. D. Defraene (ULB)
Prof. Dr. C. Eliaerts (VUB)

**Project:**
This research aims at a criminological analysis of the evolution(s) during the past 25 years of juvenile problematic and “delinquent” behaviour. Obviously specific problematic juvenile behaviours, such as incivilities, antisocial behaviour or violence, became important focuses of concern in late modern (Belgian) criminal policy. Moreover, international and European research demonstrates dominant trends in European juvenile delinquency for this period (such as an increase of violent crimes). A vivid discussion is going on amongst scientists, practitioners as well as policymakers on how this complex phenomenon can be understood. Until today no research was carried out to confront the Belgian situation with these European changes in juvenile delinquency. Therefore this research focuses on an in-depth analysis of youth delinquent behaviour between 1980 and 2005.

**The main research question is:**
How did Belgian juvenile delinquent and problematic behaviour (qualitatively) change in the past 25 years, and how can these changes be criminologically and socially contextualised and understood as part of underlying social mutations?

**Methodology:**
Beyond an elementary quantitative analysis based on existing official and scientific data sources and reports, methodology consists of a qualitative approach of as “delinquent” labelled juvenile behaviour. This approach was implemented through an empirical analysis sample survey of police and prosecution records for (4 sample years and 5 Belgian judicial districts) the studied period (1980-2005).

**Key Publications:**
Juvenile delinquents appear in court: a criminological study of the interaction and the communication in juvenile justice.

**Period:** January 2008 – December 2010

**Financing:** FWO (Research Foundation – Flanders)

**Promoter:**
Prof.dr. Jenneke Christiaens  
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**Researcher:**
Clémence Françoise  
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**Project:**
Scientific interest in «law in action», communication and interaction within criminal settings are not new in the field of criminological research. Many studies have drawn attention to some significant elements of these themes (e.g., rituals, communication modes, organisation of interaction) during adult court hearings. However, few studies have looked at these questions within the setting of juvenile courts. In Belgium, there has been no scientific research into the daily practice of minors appearing before a juvenile judge. This research tries to bridge this gap.

The aim of this study is to analyse the interactions between the different actors involved in the judgment process, i.e. the minor, the juvenile judge, the parents and the lawyer of the minor during public and closed court sessions.

**Central research questions are:**
- 1. How do the interactions pass between juvenile judges and appearing youths in public and closed courts sessions?
- 2. Which specific social, cultural, pedagogic or judicial elements, dimensions and relations characterize the interactions within the Belgian juvenile justice hearings?
- 3. What is the impact of the judicial interactions on youngsters?

An ethnographic approach and method is used: in court observations of juvenile justice procedures (public and closed court sessions) in several Belgian juvenile courts in 3 judicial districts. Besides the observations, interviews are carried out juvenile judges, counsels, public prosecutors, youngsters ...

**Relevant publications:**


“Belgian youngsters appear before the juvenile justice judge: in court communication practices and the right to a hearing by the judge, Paper presented at the 12th Annual Conference of the ESC, Bilbao, Françoise, C., en Christiaens, J.,

Experts give advise to juvenile justice courts: research of medico-psychological expertise practices in Belgian Juvenile justice transfer procedures.

Period: January 2005 – December 2010

Financing: VUB

Promoter:
Prof. dr. Jenneke Christiaens
Prof. dr. Ch. Eliaerts

Researcher - PhD:
Catherine Van Dijk

Project:
This research focuses on the use of medical-psychological expertise within the transfer/waiver procedure provided in the Belgian juvenile justice system. The Belgian judicial (waiver) transfer mechanism is considered to be necessary for serious juvenile delinquents for whom the (welfare) protection measures of the juvenile justice system are considered inadequate. In transfer cases, beside the classical mandatory social inquiry, a medico-psychological inquiry is mandatory by law.

According to the judges these reports (both social inquiry as medico-psychological expertise) are crucial for their decision-making process.

Based on the analysis of all expertise reports in the files of transferred young delinquents (district of Antwerp and Mechelen in 1999-2001), this research sheds not only light on the (problematic) expertise practice, but also on the major features of the social, medical and psychological profile of these youngsters transferred to the adult penal system. Interviews were conducted with expert psychiatrists.

Relevant publications:


**Period:** 2011 – 2014

**Financing:** VUB Research Council

**Promoter:**
Prof. Dr. Els Dumortier els.dumortier@vub.ac.be

**Researcher:**
Kevin Goris kevin.goris@vub.ac.be

**Project:**
Throughout Belgium’s Youth Justice history, we see an ongoing expansion of the possibilities of the Juvenile Judge to intervene in non-delinquent, problematic situations concerning juveniles. Already with the first Child Protection Act (1912), the newly installed Children’s Judge could react not only to juvenile delinquency, but also towards “pre-delinquent” minors (e.g. vagabonds, misbehaving minors). With the 1965 Youth Protection Act, the notion of the “child in danger” was added to the field of action of the Juvenile Judge. This vague intervention ground brought about a massive expansion of “problematic” juveniles and situations within the Youth Protection System, both quantitatively and qualitatively. After the Belgian state reforms in the 1980s, this evolution persisted. In Flanders, the old notion of the “child in danger” was replaced by a new, but equally vague, intervention ground: the “problematic educative situation”. Since then, as recent figures show, the number of non-delinquent juveniles in voluntary and enforced assistance rose steeply. Inspite of this apparent increasing importance of the non-delinquent “problem child”, criminological attention towards this figure in afterwar Youth Protection remains scarce. This research tries to meet this lacuna by throwing a historical-criminological gaze on the period marking the evolution from the “child in danger” to the “problematic educative situation”.

Through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of judicial files, an answer is sought to two broad research questions:

- How and why did the figure of the “problem child” evolve from 1965 to 2009?
- How and why did the role of the Youth Protection System towards these “problem children” evolve from 1965 to 2009?

**Relevant publications:**


**Period:** 2010 – 2016

**Financing:** Criminology Department (VUB)

**Promoter:**
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**Researcher:**
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**Project:**
From an historical perspective, (inter)national research reveals an attempt of the Juvenile Justice System to extensively control the moral and sexual behaviour of girls. These concerns hardly existed with regard to the behaviour of boys. Contemporary international research confirms the persistence of this tendency. ‘In practice’, judges continue to control the sexuality of girls. Furthermore, differences occur in judicial and social pathways of girls and boys in the Juvenile Justice System. These findings presume an alleged gendered orientation of, and a possible existence of ‘gendered practices’ in the Juvenile Justice System. As Belgian research on this subject is scarce, the presence of gendered practices in the Belgian Juvenile Court remains a relatively unexplored field. In the current research project, we will disentangle the role of gendered practices and how they can influence the functioning of the Juvenile Court by examining two Flemish Speaking Juvenile Courts. The purpose of this of research is twofold. Firstly, we want to examine how the judicial and social profiles of boys and girls are constructed and to what extent they are gender specific. On each Court an analysis of 100 Juvenile Court Files will be performed: 50 files dealing with criminal offenses and 50 files dealing with status offenses. As we want to examine possible gender specific elements, these 50 files are further classified into 25 girls and 25 boys. Secondly, we will explore the gender specific functioning of the Juvenile Court. In order to gain insight in how Judges approach boys and girls, the interactions in the courtroom between the minor and the court officers will be observed. Additionally, the observed Judges will be interviewed so that information can be generated on how they interpret and give meaning to the situations and problems of boys and girls who enter the Juvenile Justice System.

**Relevant publications:**


Monitored youth: Understanding the consequences of (electronic) surveillance practices on young people and their (deviant) behaviour.

**Period:** 1st October 2011 to 30th September 2014

**Financing:** FWO (Research Foundation – Flanders)

**Promoter:**
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**Researcher (post-doc):**
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**Project:**
This project analyses the use and consequences of electronic surveillance practices on youth delinquency in Belgium. More specifically it studies the use of surveillance technologies such as CCTV cameras, biometrics, mobile monitoring, tracking of internet data, and integrated digital data bases in both educational institutions and in public spaces. Surveillance technologies can in some way reduce delinquency locally but they can also induce new kinds of injustices and risks. They can, for example, enhance prejudice toward specific groups of young people or reinforce fear and insecurity, therefore breaching important privacy rights. In the framework of this project such practices as well as their impact on youngsters are the object of empirical research that is being made particularly in the context of university campuses and in public spaces frequented by young people. Concerning the latter, the focus is to deal with surveillance and counter-surveillance of youth led by the use of smartphones. These are very dialectical tools since they can at the same time be used by authorities to track young people’s actions, based on location logs for example, and also be used by youngsters as a surveillance tool, since they can monitor themselves or even monitor some outdoor police activities for instance. Taking in account the possibilities of recording videos, taking pictures, and accessing mobile internet provided by these tools, this project will, thus, look for the understanding of how the young population is also able to use smartphones as a counter-surveillance technology.

**Relevant publications:**


This is in your interest! Genealogy of the impact of youth protection interventions on youngsters lives.

**Period:** 2012 – 2014

**Financing:** FWO (Research Foundation – Flanders)

**Promoter:**
Prof. Dr. Jenneke Christiaens
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**Project:**
This project concerns the perspective of former « clients » of the juvenile justice system. By way of in-depth interviews and a qualitative analysis of judicial files this research aims at gaining insight in the experience of being a “juvenile justice” client. With the centenary anniversary of the Belgian juvenile justice system in mind (May 2012), it is necessary to approach the historical analysis of juvenile justice practices by including “the voices” of the children of the juvenile justice and protection system. The central research question of this proposal can be formulated as follows: What has been the “impact” of the juvenile justice intervention(s) on the lives of youngsters and how has this been changing through time? In other words, we want to analyse and question how and in what way former “clients” of the juvenile justice system attribute significance to their contact with the different actors of the juvenile justice, and how they give it a place in their life-history narrative.

As can be understood from the above, this research mobilises the oral history methodology and the perspective that narratives of subjects are an important source for the understanding, and thus the scientific analysis, of the social (criminological) world. Moreover, we associate our historical perspective on the genealogical concept of “writing history” (Veyne, 1978). Hence, this proposal is based on a twofold approach:

1. **Interviews with “former” children of the juvenile justice system:** The main goal of this first phase is to do in-depth interviews with these respondents on their trajectory, experience with the juvenile justice system, and their further life. As a benchmark we would like to obtain a minimum of 20 respondents from different age categories (as to cover at least an important part of our long-term perspective – it is obvious that it will be difficult to still find respondents with experiences of the juvenile justice system at its early beginnings).

2. **Files analysis and reconstruction of the judicial trajectory:** This second phase will consist of a qualitative analysis of juvenile justice files from the past 100 years of the Belgian Youth Protection. This analysis will focus mainly on the discourses/narratives present in these files describing – stating the youngster and “his problem”, and why a certain intervention was considered to be adequate. Not more than 100 files will be selected for this part of the research. These files will be selected in two ways: (1) The files of respondents that are consenting in the access to their files; (2) Files selected in an ad random way – but covering all “periods” in the 100 years of the Belgian child protection as well as a geographical coverage.

An International conference day It’s for your own good was organised in June 2012 to launch a series of 3 seminars (2012-2013) on juvenile justice practices: (1) Juvenile justice courts and procedures, measures; (2) re-educational practices; (3) perspective of youngsters and their families. Both contributions to conference and seminars will result a publication on Juvenile Justice Practices.

**Relevant publications:**
CHRISTIAENS J., Honderd jaar Belgische jeugdbescherming: waar is het debat gebleven?, Pantocticon, 2012/5, pp. 389-399 (Editoriaal Panopticon)
Editor themanummer 100 jaar Jeugdbescherming Panopticon, 2012 (3)

On the dark side of the moon: 100 years juvenile detention in Belgium, paper presented at the ESSCH annual conference, 2012 Glasgow, Tinne Geluyckens, & Jenneke Christiaens.
Children’s rights not allowed? Police interrogation of juvenile offenders.

**Period:** 2013 – 2016

**Financing:** Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO)

**Promoter:**
Prof. Dr. ELs Dumortier els.dumortier@vub.ac.be

**Co-promoter:**
Prof. Dr. Sofie De Kimpe Sofie.dekimpe@vub.ac.be

**Researchers:**
Camille Clays Camille.Claeys@vub.ac.be

**Project:**
Police interrogations are the starting point of criminal procedures against juvenile offenders. Research conducted in the US suggests that particularly juveniles would be vulnerable for the various manipulative and potentially coercive techniques police uses to get suspects to incriminate themselves. However, and in contrast with research on interrogations of child victims of sexual abuse, empirical research on police interrogation of juvenile offenders remains scarce. In Belgium this seems even more true, for there has never been any empirical research on how police interrogates juvenile offenders in daily practice. As a consequence we have no scientific knowledge on how these interrogations are conducted in daily (Belgian) police practice, nor do we know if and how children’s rights are practiced during this starting point of the criminal procedures.

By means of observation of police interrogations of juvenile offenders we want to analyse how these interrogations are conducted in daily practice and how children’s rights are practiced during these interrogations. Besides, to obtain a better understanding of the observed practice we will also conduct complementary interviews with police interrogations to investigate their perspectives on children’s rights. Finally, a comparison of these findings with US research can provide important insights into the legal and practical differences between a “child specific” approach of children’s rights (in Belgium) and an “adult like” approach of children’s rights (in the US).
Pathways of transferred juvenile delinquents: A qualitative study about the consequences of transfer on criminal justice pathways into (young) adulthood.

**Period:** 2013 – 2016

**Financing:** FWO (Research Foundation – Flanders)

**Promoter(s):**
- Prof. dr. Jenneke Christiaens  
  jenneke.christiaens@vub.ac.be
- Prof. dr. Els Dumortier  
  els.dumortier@vub.ac.be

**Researchers:**

**Project:**
In Belgium juvenile offenders under the age of 18 usually appear in the Youth Court. By exception, however, the juvenile can be tried according to the rules of penal law, either in Criminal Court or in the ‘Extended Youth Court’. This mechanism is called ‘transfer’, ‘waiver’ or ‘referral’. Several studies in the USA demonstrated that transferred offenders are more likely to recidivate, and at a higher rate, and more likely to be rearrested for more serious offences than juveniles retained in the juvenile justice system. Previous research showed that within a follow-up period of 4 to 6 years, at least half of the transferred youngsters (N=210) relapse into crime within a short time span. In order to gain insight in the question whether the high recidivism rates are caused by intrinsic characteristics of the population, and/or by the impact of the transfer decision, a new (follow-up) research project is proposed. This follow-up research will cover a long-term period of 10 years, and includes both transferred juvenile offenders as a ‘reference group’ of (non transferred) juvenile offenders. This research is based on a qualitative methodological approach using (1) case file analysis, (2) judicial data analysis as well as (3) interviews with transferred offenders.
Recent defended Phd’s - Current (expected) Phd’s

Recently obtained Phd’s:

Van Dijk Catherine (2010)
Experts give advise to juvenile justice courts: research of medico-psychological expertise practices in Belgian Juvenile justice transfer procedures.
   Promoter: Jenneke Christiaens and Christian Eliaerts

Van Gijsegem Veerle (2010)
   Promoter: Sonja Snacken

Bauwens Aline (2011)
The transformation of offender rehabilitation?
   Promoter: Sonja Snacken

Nuytiens An (2011)
Small numbers, big problems. The life history and (youth) delinquent pathway of female prisoners.
   Promoter: Jenneke Christiaens & Christian Eliaerts

Claes Bart (2012)
Restoration and detention. An ethnographic research in de Belgian prison Leuven Centraal.
   Promoter: Sonja Snacken and Serge Gutwirth

Verwee Isabel (2012)
The police role as seen by the citizen. A caleidoscoop of expectations and meanings.
   Els Enhus

Françoise Clémence (2012)
Juvenile delinquents appear in court: a criminological study of the interaction and the communication in juvenile justice.
   Promoter: Jenneke Christiaens

Current (expected) Phd’s:

Bauwens Tom
The mayor as director of the local safety policy: research on the ‘safety discourse’ of the Flemish mayor.
   Promoter: Els Enhus
   2014

Berx Veerle
Qualitative dimensions of regimes in open collective reception centers for asylum seekers and the level of punitivism.
   Promoter: Sonja Snacken
Casier Ineke
The influence of legislation on relations of (extreme) institutional dependency - Forms of autonomy and participation in prisons and health care institutions.
   Promoter: Sonja Snacken, Wim Distelmans & Paul De Hert
   2016

De Backer Mathias
Youth, transgression and the politics of place: An ethnography of hanging around.
   Promoter: Jenneke Christiaens & Els Enhus
   2016

De Bus Sofie
   Promoter: Jenneke Christiaens
   2016

De Ridder Steven
A highway to prison? An analysis of the social and penal pathways of non-national prisoners without a legal residence permit.
   Promoter: Kristel Beyens and Sonja Snacken
   2015

De Smaele Gaëtène
Integrating reoffending risk and desistance using a psychology of criminal conduct. A critical theoretical analysis and empirical development of a risk-and-desistance checklist.
   Promoter: Stef Decoene
   2018

Decaigny Tom
Participation of the suspect in the investigation stage of the Belgian criminal procedure.
   Promoter: Paul De Hert and Serge Gutwirth
   2013

Demarée Chaim
The police (occupational) culture: between creativity and reactivity.
   Promoter: Els Enhus & Jan Terpstra
   2013

Evenepoel Anneke
The preventive turn in the policing of urban space, as experienced by citizens.
   Promoter: Jenneke Christiaens & Els Enhus
   2016

Geluyckens Tinne
Juveniles desist-from-crime: a qualitative research on young adults with a juvenile justice trajectory.
   Promoter: Jenneke Christiaens & Els Dumortier
   2013

Goris Kevin
The juvenile judge and the ‘problem child’ in times of toughness.
   Promoter: Els Dumortier
   2014
Kennes Philippe
Arising from the darkness: The Belgian prison governor. A criminological account of local prison governance.
    Promoter: Sonja Snacken & Kristel Beyens
    2016

Kerkab Rachid
Spatio-temporal offender profiling (STOP). Theoretical and empirical building blocks for the prediction of
criminal mobility patterns in time and space.
    Promoter: Els Enhus
    2014

Lippens Valesca
It’s a man’s world. A narrative research on male prisoners’ experience of prison life and prison culture.
    Promoter: Kristel Beyens and Machteld De Metsenaere
    2015

Machiels Rudy
Returning back to Society / Homecoming – A Narrative Analysis of Prisoners’ and their Partners’ Identity Work.
    Promoter: Sonja Snacken and Maria Bouverne-De Bie (UGent)

Pashley Veerle
Accountability of private military companies in international war theatres
    Promoter: Marc Cools and Carl Ceulemans (KMS).

Scheirs Veerle
The sentence implementation courts at work. An ethnographic research into their interactions, decision making
processes and practices.
    Promoter: Kristel Beyens and Sonja Snacken
    2013

Steenhout Iris
Ideas and the self in online social networks.
    Promoter: Els Enhus
    2016

Tournel Hanne
Doing prison work in a changing context.
    Promoter: Sonja Snacken and Kristel Beyens
    2013

Verfaillie Kristof
Crime control and the Multitude. Legitimate criminal policymaking as a narrative process.
    Promoter: Sonja Snacken
    2013

Vandeperre Ans
Effective therapist variables in the offense-oriented evaluation and treatment of juvenile delinquents.
Literature study and empirical evaluation.
    Stef Decoene
    2018