Social prevention of drug-related crime and nuisance in Flanders, Belgium

*Exploring components of context and program mechanisms in a realist perspective*

De Kock, Charlotte; Pauwels, Lieven; Vander Laenen, Freya

EUSPR (Vienna, Austria, 22.09.2017)
Structure

1. Conceptual framework
2. Methodology
3. Results
4. Discussion & conclusion
1. Conceptual framework (1/2)

• **Drug related crime**
  - **Overlap** between the four defined types of drug-related crime (EMCDDA, 2007)
  - **Unsound registration** of drug-related crime (De Ruyver et al., 2008)
  - **Varying causal claims** Issues of determinism / fatalism (Husak & Marneffe, 2005) versus probabilistic models
1. Conceptual framework (2/2)

Realist synthesis

\[ \text{CM} + \text{PM} + \text{A} = \text{O} \] (Porter, 2015)

CMO (Pawson & Tilley, 2006)
2. Methods

- **Semi-structured qualitative interviews**
  - How do respondents perceive the nature of drug related crime?
  - Which projects aimed at the social prevention of drug related crime exist?
  - Dual phase theoretical sampling
  - 17 Qualitative semi-structured interviews with a total of 30 respondents

- **Uncovering components of context and program mechanisms**
  - Inclusion criteria for projects (self-selection, grüne liste criteria, direct intervention goal)
  - Reconciling common programme theory and context components (Pawson, 2007) in 5 projects:
    - Van Leeuw, 2003: “it is evident that x... will work”, “in our opinion, the best way to go about this problem is to...”, “the only way to solve this problem is to...” and “our institution’s x years of experience tells us that...”.
    - Variations among the projects

- **Focus group for feedback on programme theory analysis**
  - Feedback on the identified components of context and program mechanisms
  - 5 participants working in 4 of the 5 selected projects
3. Results
3. Bias and definitions (1/6)

• **Respondent bias and mistrust**

  When you [the researcher] presented the project in city X [during a network meeting of prevention officers], we all thought “oh is this a covert way of Home Affairs to check if these drug related crime projects funded in the framework of the security and prevention contracts are actually working?”. R4

  We answer a security problem with a health answer. We are health workers, not security workers. But our health work does contribute to the reduction of nuisance, but this is not our goal, our goal is to increase the general wellbeing of individuals. RF18

• **Respondents definition of drug related crime**
  - Drug-related **nuisance** (security and prevention contracts, 2017)
  - Nuisance under the influence of substances in public spaces
3. **Five projects** and their target groups (2/6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Café Anoniem</th>
<th>Homeless persons that cause nuisance (and often deal with problem use) near the railway station</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OpStap</td>
<td>Problem users with multiple (psychiatric) problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zomerpatio</td>
<td>Homeless persons including persons with (ex) problem use that cause nuisance in the city centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winteropvang</td>
<td>Homeless persons with or without problem use and/or psychiatric disorders causing nuisance in the city centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-ACT</td>
<td>Persons with multiple problems causing nuisance near the railway station.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Analysis of components of program theory in the 5 projects based in the interviews (3/6)

1. **Prioritising the optimisation of life domains**
   
   We really choose to work on the individual level. (…) We include that nuisance goal as a nice side effect but not as the goal, because we believe that if the situation of the client gets better, you’ll see nuisance decreasing. R7

2. **Low threshold social and / or economic ‘activation’**

3. **Consciousness and participation of target group**

   We organise a syringe patrol and the fact that we fetch used syringes together with people from the target group is a type of sensitizing them. R2

4. **Consciousness and participation of partners and neighbours**

5. **Offering spatial alternatives**

   People can just come by during the day. This way they won’t be hanging around or causing trouble for others… R9
3. Analysis of components of context mechanisms in the 5 projects based in the interviews (4/6)

Content and priority of the 5 program components are dependent on constellation of context components and mechanisms

1. Collaboration

The idea of the steering committee is actually to both share expertise and learn how to go beyond your own knowledge and expertise, R7

It's both about nuisance – raised in the broader context, and the concerns we have in our welfare work. So we sought a way to serve those two goals. R11
3. Analysis of **components of context** mechanisms in the 5 projects based in the interviews (5/6)

2. **Target group characteristics**
   - Blind spots & rapid changes
     
     The priority goals themselves... those abscesses weren't a theme at all last year. We only had about three injecting users and now this number has risen a lot which results in the fact that we have new priorities in the project R2

3. **Displacement and other side effects**
   - Shifts in life domains
   - Participation

   The fact that the outreach team focusses a lot on the football story [homeless cup] results in the fact that we see less both in- and outward referral so we need to have more attention for that in the future. R2
3. Analysis of components of context mechanisms in the 5 projects based in the interviews (5/6)

4. Project Perspective
- Discretionary space
- Shared project perspective
- Funding perspective

Our current mayor has a strict opinion, he’s like “We want drugs out of the city and we only want a repressive approach” and that makes prevention and welfare work quite hard... R8A

5. Finances and Personnel
- Flexibly responding to changing needs
- Sustainable long term goals

Last time, during the government reform, I had to flush ten years of experience down the drain, only because they didn’t dare to decide to prolong the municipal contracts for another four years. R3B
3. Registration and evaluation (6/6)

- Mostly process evaluation
- No impact or outcome evaluation

- Commonly registered:
  - Presence (number, variations, diversity)
  - Activity registration

- Variably registered
  - Participant questionnaires (satisfaction, attitude, behaviour)
  - Qualitative questionnaires of the steering committee
  - Number of outreach relations
  - Number of life domains assessed
  - Project / space atmosphere
  - Personnel changes
  - Number of reported charges of nuisance
  - Referrals
  - Signals of the target group concerning life domains
  - Numbers of aggression cases
  - Police interventions and Complaints of neighbours
4.
Discussion
Conclusion
What about agency? and...

isn’t context an inherent part of a social mechanism?

(Pawson & Tilley, 2007)

(Porter, 2015)
“PM + CM + A = O” The social prevention of drug and alcohol related nuisance among hard to reach homeless populations and problem users

Programme Mechanisms (PM)
1. Promote a life domain approach (+ client agency in prioritising)
2. Low threshold social and / or economic ‘activation’
3. Promoting consciousness among participants
4. Promoting consciousness and collaboration among partners and neighbours (partner and neighbourhood agency)
5. Offering spatial alternative (expected) Outcome (O)

Outcome (O)
1. Target group’s life domains improve (health, family, education, etc.)
2. Target group’s bounding with general society improves, improving chances for recovery (from problem use) and desistance (from nuisance)
3. Target group’s consciousness improves, possibly lowering chances of creating nuisance
4. Consciousness among partners and neighbours lowers stigma about the target group, enabling comprehension and support to less repressive practices.

Context Mechanisms (CM)
- Collaboration
- Characteristics of the target group
- Displacement and other side effects
- Perspective (agency of project initiator, Funder, policymaker and practitioners)
- Finances and personnel
4. Discussion and conclusion

- Components of context are part and partial of social mechanisms
- Defining drug-related crime as drug related nuisance
- Lack of outcome research
- Need for more research about prevention among problem users
- Limitations
  - Short research study
  - No fully pledged realist evaluation
This work was supported by a grant of the Belgian Science Policy Office awarded to the Institute for International Research on Criminal Policy (IRCP) [grant number DR/00/075].