Of late there has been a growth of interest in why people stop offending, and the processes by which they are rehabilitated or resettled back into the community. This work, which has always been a key aspect of criminological research and focus, was given a substantial boost in the US with the publication of Laub and Sampson (1993), and subsequently in the UK at the turn of the century with the publication of Maruna (2001) and Farrall (2002). Since then, a number of books have charted the processes of desistance (e.g. Barry, 2007; Ezell, Cohen, 2005; Maruna, Immarigeon 2004, to name but a few). There has also been a number of special editions of journals which have been devoted to the same broad subject matter: Howard Journal (43/4, 2004), Criminology & Criminal Justice (6/1, 2006) and
the *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* (23/1, 2007). More recently Wikström, Sampson (2006), amongst other collections, includes papers which touch on desistance from crime.

Seminar 5 of CRIMPREV WP2 took place between 21st-23rd July 2008, at Keele University. There were 10 papers (one speaker pulled out late due to illness) presented during the seminar, with, in all, 19 attendees. Papers were mainly presented in English. Simultaneous translation was provided for the one paper presented in French.

The papers were presented by the following:

Jukka Savolainen [jukka@umn.edu] on Life-Course Criminology in Finland; Torbjørn Skardhamar [ska@ssb.no] on efforts to Exploit Norwegian register data on crime and social conditions; Per-Olaf Wikström [pow20@cam.ac.uk] on Criminal Careers and the Role of the Social Environment; Aušra Gavėnaite and Svetlana Justickaja on Criminal Careers in Lithuania; Cândido De Agra [c.agra@direito.up.pt] on drug use careers in Portugal; Krysztof Krajewski [kkrajewski@autocom.pl] on criminal careers in Poland; Tony Bottoms, Stephen Farrall & Joanna Shapland on the importance of building structural explanations of desistance from crime; Deirdre Healey on desistance amongst probationers in Ireland; Marwan Mohammed [marwan@cesdip.com] on gangs in Parisian suburbs, and Kristof Clonen [kristof.clonen@law.kuleuven.be] on criminal careers research in Belgium. Closing statements were made by Per-Olaf Wikström and Jukka Savolainen. (Paul Nieuwbeerta was due to talk about Developmental and Life Course Studies in Delinquency and Crime in the Netherlands, but was taken ill shortly before the seminar).

A number of themes emerged during our discussions. These are summarised below:

**Models of Research Design for Criminal Careers Research**

No inventory of criminal careers research could ever be complete, of course. That said a number of distinct models for researching criminal careers did emerge.

Some have relied upon one-off interviews (either in-depth or as part of a cross-sectional quantitative study) in which respondents are asked to reflect on why they ceased offending. Such research designs are entirely retrospective (e.g. Maruna, 2001 or Farrall, Bowling, 1999), and subject to all of the flaws with such approaches, such as selective and/or faulty recall. Other studies have conducted a single interview, plus a follow-up of official criminal histories (Barry’s 2007 study of Scottish probationers). Other studies have undertaken what is being referred to as qualitative longitudinal research, an approach which entails repeated interviewing members of the same cohort of offenders using traditional in-depth interviewing techniques (e.g. Clonen’s work in Belgium or Mohammed’s work in Paris). In many cases, such an approach involves ethnographic research work too.
In some countries (those with limited or very under-developed criminal careers research communities) research designs were limited to the analysis of government statistical records (Skardhamar; Gavénaitė, Justickaja; and Krajewski). Often such studies were a) quantitative and b) limited to cross-sectional designs, which in nature tended to limit what could be said about the processes associated with key aspects of the criminal career (such as onset, escalation, duration, specialisation or termination) or the ways in which such processes were subjectively experienced by offenders. Both Norway and Finland have longitudinal studies which relied on official data sets.

However, the mainstay of criminal careers research has been the prospective longitudinal approach. In this research design, a group (‘cohort’) of either offenders or a random sample of school children is identified, and these are interviewed at several points during the remainder of their lives. In some cases, teachers, parents or partners are also interviewed or asked to give summary information about cohort members. Some have focused on the whole of the criminal career, such as the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, led by David Farrington with a cohort of around 400 school boys sampled from the East End of London in the early 1960s. Others have concentrated upon adolescence, such as the more recent Peterborough Adolescent Development Study led by Per-Olaf Wikström, with a sample of around 700 children. In Scotland the Edinburgh Youth Transition Study similarly sampled around 4,500 school children. Similar studies exist in the Netherlands and Germany and have recently started in Belgium. The analyses from these designs tend towards the quantitative.

There are, as many have documented, numerous costs with prospective, general population studies such as those identified above. Not least of these are that such studies require huge and ongoing commitments of resources (for which read time and money). Accordingly, a related design involves following a group of offenders who have been subject to particular court sentences. Such designs have been used in Finland, the UK, the Republic of Ireland and Belgium. In the UK in the early 1990s, Ros Burnett identified a sample of 130 property offenders who were still serving prison sentences, but who were about to be released from custody, and followed up members of this sample post-release. In part based on this project (both had been initiated by Oxford University) Stephen Farrall followed up almost 200 men and women commencing probation supervision. More recently, the ongoing Sheffield Desistance Study led by Tony Bottoms and Joanna Shapland has concentrated on those people aged 20-24, most of whom were in prison when initially sampled. A similar study has been conducted by Healey in the Republic of Ireland of 73 probationers. Savolainen reported that in Finland there are follow-ups of cases with specific characteristics at a particular point in time (such
The Uneven Development of Criminal Careers Research Across the EU/Europe

Even before the seminar, it was clear that not all of the EU Member States or European nations had invested research into criminal careers. For example, it proved impossible to locate anyone researching criminal careers in Spain or Greece. Jukka Savolainen suggested a threefold classification of countries along these lines:

1: Countries where criminal careers research was well-established (for example, the Netherlands, Germany, the UK, Sweden). Often these countries had several longitudinal studies of criminal careers in place, and had a well-developed community of scholars who frequently engaged in research and debate on pertinent topics. Research was not confined to either quantitative or merely the analysis of government collected statistical materials. Funding opportunities (both governmental and through other routes) were available. Research into criminal careers was a recognised area of these countries criminological traditions.

2: Countries where criminal careers research was still a developing area of research (Finland, Norway, Belgium and France for example). In these countries we find small groups of (and, often, isolated individual) scholars. Such scholars are often very eager to develop this field of study, but in some cases find that there are few (if any) opportunities for themselves. The competency of such scholars is not under question at all – since they are engaged in excellent work using a range of widely-accepted methodological techniques. Rather they are hampered by either a lack of political and/or academic interest in the topic at hand, or by a general lack of funding opportunities. Scholars in such countries often turn to those outside of criminology (e.g. those researching public health or life courses in general) when looking for research collaborators – and often this is beneficial.

3: Countries with little (or no) recent history of sustained criminal careers research. Such countries included Spain, Lithuania, Portugal and Poland. In some cases, such countries had once had a research base in criminal careers (such as Poland), but this had declined, or been brought to an abrupt halt, by the political changes around 1989/1990. Often, any data sets which did exist where entirely based on government statistics, and their reliability prior to 1990 was questionable. Such countries have – if they have any community at all – fledgling scholars who are extremely isolated. There appeared to be a great need for both capacity building and political support for criminal careers research in such countries.

Accordingly it was felt by the attendees at the seminar that there was a real need for the development of criminal careers research in these countries and across the EU in general. As well as developing
criminal careers research in these countries, any EU-led activities would have benefits from the development of a truly pan-European research agenda in a number of ways. Some of these are outlined in the discussion below.

Variations in the Processes Associated with Criminal Careers

In a number of presentations (e.g. papers by Savolainen; Bottoms, Farrall, Shapland; Skardhamar; Krajewski and Mohammed) it became apparent that the variables associated with criminal careers, and in particular the important policy-related issue of why people stopped offending, were not uniform across the EU. For example, Savolainen reported that in Finland parents are very well-supported by the Finnish state, and as such one finds in Finland stronger effects of parenthood on male desistance from crime. Similarly, in Norway cohabitation before marriage is common, and so the marriage-desistance nexus is arguably less relevant in Norway (the association is probably to a greater extent caused by selection mechanisms rather than direct effects). In this way (in Norway) the ‘true’ turning point might be several years prior to the marriage. The broader concept of family formation is still important, but one should include cohabitation, getting a child and marriage. Meanwhile Poland’s national cultural history of heavy drinking influenced the ways in which criminal careers unfolded there. In Lithuania, a general intolerance of ‘outsiders’ means that several key groups in that society are shunned. These include homosexuals, ethnic minorities, those with mental illnesses and ex-offenders.

Two papers (by Bottoms, Farrall, Shapland on England & Wales; and Mohammed on France) suggested that national and regional level structures and changes to these structures greatly affected the ways in which criminal careers unfolded (and again especially as this related to desistance from crime). For example, changes in French society since the 1960s have made it harder for many people to leave gangs. The changes referred to included changes to the availability of housing; a rise in levels of unemployment and the ending of conscription into military service.

Bottoms, Farrall & Shapland argued that since the 1970s the UK has seen a decrease in the numbers of people employed in the manufacturing sectors of its economy. Social Trends for 2006 (Social Trends, 2007, 37, 47) reports that

Over the last 25 years the UK economy has experienced structural change. The largest increase in employee jobs has been in the banking, finance and insurance industry, where the number of employee jobs has doubled between June 1981 and June 2006 from 2.7 million to 5.4 million. There were also large increases in employee jobs in public administration, education and health (up by 40 per cent) and in the distribution, hotels and restaurants industry (up by 34 per cent). In contrast, the extraction and production industries, made
up of agriculture and fishing, energy and water, manufacturing, and construction showed a combined fall of 43 per cent from 8.2 million jobs in 1981 to 4.7 million jobs in 2006. Manufacturing alone accounted for 81 per cent of this decline, with the number of employee jobs in this sector nearly halving from 5.9 million in 1981 to 3 million in 2006.

Alongside this decrease in what is essentially semi- and unskilled manual labour, there has been an increase in those people employed in what can be termed the knowledge economy (i.e. banking, finance and insurance) in the UK (and in many other EU nations too). Such jobs, generally speaking, require graduate-level (or equivalent) skills, are highly competitive and essentially ‘white collar’ occupations. Such jobs are not usually jobs which those with few (or no) formal skills are able to either gain or even aspire to. As such, the uneven growth of the various sectors of the economy may hinder employment prospects for many young men and women either leaving school with no, few or poor qualifications, or seeking employment following periods of engagement in offending. In addition to this, there has been in England & Wales (and Northern Ireland) an increasing emphasis placed upon the routine use of Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for new and potential employees, which may further damage the chances of gaining work for some with previous convictions.

Such lines of argument suggest that wider social and economic changes have firstly a ‘ripple down’ effect into the lives of those men and women who become embroiled in crime, and secondly effects that may later affect the ease with which they are able to leave crime behind. In addition to this, changes in the levels of expressed tolerance and punitiveness can greatly alter prospects for ex-offenders and those wishing to desist from crime. A third paper (Savolainen) reported changes in the age-crime curve when data from the late 19th/early 20th Centuries were compared with data for the late 20th/early 21st Centuries.

Issues of General Concern

Throughout the discussions a number of issues were repeatedly raised, which whilst not representing the sorts of things which are easy to ‘report back on’ nevertheless are of sufficient importance to merit specific mention.

The need for a clear theoretical framework from the outset

One of the key components of all good social scientific research (regardless of substantive area of concern) is the need for a clear, well thought-through theoretical framework from the outset. Although there was no suggestion that this was either a general problem for research into criminal careers across Europe or even a problem for specific projects, there was a general feeling amongst the seminar
attendees that more and better theories of crime and criminal careers needed to be developed from the outset, and that these ought not to simply assume that what had found empirical validation elsewhere (such as in the USA) would work either in Europe as a whole or in individual EU Member States. In this respect we felt that more work of this nature was needed generally.

**Too much socio-demographic data**

In some ways related to the above, there was also a feeling that too many studies had collected too much information about too many socio-demographic variables, and that this had come at the expense of theoretically-informed and relevant data. This critique can be most readily applied to those studies which have had to exclusively rely on government collected data sets for their data. Such data – whilst often being of very good quality – is often the results of the pooling of official records. In some cases, because of sustained and rigorous efforts at linking such data sets (such as in Norway, where one identification number allows for the linking of census data, employment, schooling and social benefits records) this is not too much of a problem. However, in countries where the available data was limited to a few (often static – that is unchanging) variables this seriously hampered the work which could be undertaken.

**Too much quantitative research?**

In some countries (e.g. Poland, Lithuania, Norway) there was a clear sense that quantitative data sets predominated – almost to the total exclusion of any qualitative data sets. Of course, this is not to suggest for one moment that there is anything inherently wrong with quantitative data sets (since several of the seminar attendees had employed both quantitative and qualitative data sets) but rather just to remind ourselves that different data allows one to explore different issues in different ways and as such mixed methodological approaches remain the ideal which should be aimed for.

**Problems of linking agency and structure**

Several papers either touched on the problems of linking agency and structure, or were directly inspired by the issues surrounding the developments of perspectives which linked agency and structure(s). No clear consensus emerged in terms of how best to link agency and structure (indeed, it is hard to see how one ever could emerge) but there was a general sense that this was one of the next tasks for European criminal careers research. Certainly some researchers have started to explore and theorise this rich area of research (e.g. Wikström, Sampson; Bottoms, Farrall, Shapland; and Mohammed).

**Missing social environmental factors**

Not unrelated to the above was the issue of how to incorporate the social environmental dimension into criminal careers research. For some time even the best of the available theories of criminal careers
to emerge from the USA (e.g. that associated with John Laub and Robert Sampson) has been lagging behind in the development of social environmental aspects of criminal careers into both theorising about criminal careers or into research designs. However, European researchers are emerging as the front runners in such efforts (e.g. the work currently being undertaken by Wikström, Sampson). Such efforts, however, are few and far between and are resource intensive. What these do suggest, however, is that social environmental factors are important in explanations of criminal careers, but this depends heavily on ensuring appropriate measurement of such factors.

**Future Directions**

It is clear that a number of potentially useful directions for future research in criminal careers in Europe exist. One of these would be for an organised programme of longitudinal research projects based in several EU Member State countries and using standardised and identical (or as near as possible given the constraints) research designs and instruments. We see the advantages of these being the following:

- Given that Member States have different social welfare programmes, have different social, cultural and economic histories, and experience different social and economic trends at different points of time, Europe represents something akin to a natural laboratory for research into a number of different arenas – and research into criminal careers is just one of these.
- This approach, whilst costly, would allow for the development and refinement of various theories of criminal careers and would also for the differential impacts of specific welfare or taxation regimes to be studied.
- By running a European study of criminal careers which took place in many countries at the same time, we would build capacity in criminal careers research across Europe (rather than the current situation, whereby expertise is ‘warehoused’ in a handful of Member States). Such a series of studies would need to embrace mixed methodologies, of course.
- Any such study ought to move away from the ‘risk factors’ approach and to instead explore in greater detail aspects of social and economic differences between countries and changes in such provisions.

Whilst the development of such a project is a long way off, we take heart from the recent development of the European Social Survey, which has demonstrated that pan-European ventures of this sort are possible. Indeed the ESS would provide not only a useful model to move towards (albeit given the need for criminal careers research to more fully embrace qualitative data than the ESS currently is able to) but would also provide useful background data for attitudes and experiences at a more general level in each Member State.
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