

## Experiencing Offender Supervision in Europe

*Ioan Durnescu, University of Bucharest, Romania*

*Christian Grafl, University of Vienna, Austria*

### Introduction

This briefing summarises the learning from the third year's activities in Working Group 1 of the COST Action about Offender Supervision in Europe (COST IS1106: [www.offendersupervision.eu](http://www.offendersupervision.eu)). This group is focusing on the lived experience of supervision. This year we have continued with the work we started in year 2: that is, developing tools and approaches that will enable us to capture and compare the experience of supervision. We have two sub-projects: the 'Eurobarometer' which is a survey of experiencing supervision and the 'Supervisible' project which uses photovoice methodologies to illustrate and examine the experience of being supervised.

In October 2014 in Belfast at the Working Groups Meetings and in April 2015 at our Athens conference, we discussed and presented the preliminary results of our pilot projects on both strands, as well as capturing our learning in the process.

### The Eurobarometer

The chairs of this project are: Ioan Durnescu (University of Bucharest) and Christian Grafl (University of Vienna). The members of the sub-group include: Anette Stogaard (Denmark), Anja Wertag (Croatia), Berit Johnsen (Switzerland), Boban Petrovici (Serbia), Helena Cristina Ferreira Machado (Portugal), Jachen Nett (Switzerland), Jelena Zeleskov (Serbia), Karin Bruckmueller (Austria), Lawrence Burke (UK), Louise Kennefick (Ireland), Luciana Caenazzo (Italy), Luisa Ravagnani (Italy), Gabriel Oancea (Romania), Rafaela Granja (Portugal) and Renata Glaval Tkalic (Croatia).

Before we started developing the Eurobarometer questionnaire, we completed a thorough literature review on what seems to be important for supervised offenders. After we consulted 58 papers, we succeeded in drafting the main dimensions that are of interest for probationers:

- general experience of supervision
- supervision as a helpful experience

- supervision as a human service experience
- compliance and co-production
- enforcement and
- rehabilitation

Each dimension was reflected in two or more items in the questionnaire. For instance, for the general experience of supervision, questions explored issues such as the meaning of supervision, how supervisees think they are seen by others, how they are affected by supervision, how they perceive their supervisors and so on. In most cases, the respondents were invited to choose from a number of possible answers but they could also add their own answer if need be.

Below you can find an illustration of how the questions are formulated.

1. Please indicate to which extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your supervision.		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
For me, supervision is							
1	a way to make me think twice about offending again	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	a way to tackle the issues or problems linked to my offending	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	a way to repair the harms I have done	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	a way to protect other people from me	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	pointless	1	2	3	4	5	6

At the end of the questionnaire there are a few demographic questions that will help us gather a better understanding differences in how different groups of supervisees or supervisees under different obligations experience supervision.

After we drafted the questionnaire (which was not easy!), we decided to translate it and pilot it in as many jurisdictions as possible. Three countries – Serbia, Italy and Romania – piloted the questionnaire and came up with suggestions for improvement. The main conclusion at this stage was that the tool is sensitive enough to capture relevant differences in experiences. For example, despite very low numbers of respondents, the answers that we have received suggest some trends in some countries towards a more punitive or administrative supervision while in others supervision is oriented more towards rehabilitation and support. Of course, it is early days to draw any strong conclusions but the early analysis is very interesting.

The next steps are to refine and improve the tool by improving the existing items and by adding more questions on the rehabilitation dimension and piloting it again in more jurisdictions. This time we will try to pilot it in such a way that will allow for a more solid comparison. Keep an eye on our blog if you want to hear more!!

We would like to thank all our colleagues and probationers who helped us design and test the tool.

## Supervisible

Supervisible, a photovoice research project, arose out of a paper presented at a meeting of our working group. We felt that a new visual method of exploration of people's experiences of supervision would be helpful and would enable participants to feel empowered and enriched by the process of being involved in a creative research project. Supervisees are often people who have had negative experiences in terms of their educational achievement and their literacy skills. This can inhibit their confidence and ability to verbally articulate their experiences and feelings. Creative processes can enable participants to increase their self-esteem and self-confidence as well as develop new skills with which to communicate to themselves and share their emotions and experiences with others.

Photovoice is an established method developed initially by researchers in the area of health. By utilizing photographs taken and selected by participants, respondents can reflect upon and explore the reasons, emotions and experiences that have guided their chosen images. This visual approach is a potentially powerful research tool to examine in an initiative and engaging manner supervision experiences from the offender's perspective.

Supervisible aims to begin to bridge the gap in academic knowledge of how supervision is experienced and understood by those subject to it. Participants are invited to take a series of photographs, select specific images and then discuss their choices and what they represent with researchers and other fellow participants.

Active Members of this subgroup are: Wendy Fitzgibbon (London Metropolitan University), Christine Graebisch (University of Dortmund) and Fergus McNeill (University of Glasgow). Other interested members of the subgroup who wish to try a pilot of Supervisible in the near future include: Anette Stogaard (Denmark), Jelena Zeleskov Djoric (Serbia), Deirdre Healy (Ireland), and Christian Grafl (Austria).

Basic information about the approach to this method used by each researcher in the initial pilots are summarised in the table below.

*Table 1: Summary of Three Pilot Projects Completed.*

England	Germany	Scotland
10 women accessed via Women's Centre	10 men, 1 woman, 2 male social workers, accessed via open prison, halfway house, advice centre	7 men, 3 women, 1 male social worker, accessed via Twitter (3) and local CJSW service (7)

Diverse forms of supervision, past and/or present	Diverse forms of supervision, past and/or present	Diverse forms of supervision, past and/or present
Artist encouraged playfulness and creativity: no rules	Same artist and approach as in England	Artist provided briefing on basics of composition and showed examples
Preparatory meeting > disposable cameras > development > focus groups 2 weeks later	One day workshop: Briefing > Digital cameras > Lunch > Focus Groups	One day workshop: Briefing > Disposable cameras > Lunch while photos developed > Focus Groups

The discussion of the images and experiences shared within focus groups were transcribed and themes emerged from all three countries. These themes were then compared and contrasted during the WG time in Athens and the table below was devised to summarise and compare themes which appeared common in all three countries. (See table below)

*Table 2: Summary of Themes*

England	Germany	Scotland
Fear and anger Broken-ness	Hopelessness Depression	
Time	Waiting and lost time	Time
Surveillance and control: no escape	Limited freedom Control and permanent presence Barriers	Constraints Barriers
Rubbish	Rubbish and shit	Waste
	Trust and mistrust	
Nature/Growth/Hope	Regeneration, hope and new life Searching and aspiration	Nature/Growth Journeys
Help and support	Help and support	Help and support
Judgment and representations	Stigmatization and social decline Reduced citizenship and access to law Infantilization	Criminalization and labeling
Health and Wellbeing	Trauma	Addictions

Here are three images which relate to the themes of **Judgment and Representations, Stigmatization and Labeling** to illustrate the power of the images.



The pilot projects in all three countries indicated that the method was one which engaged and empowered participants who became co-researchers and producers of the meanings and the true 'experts' of interpretation of the photographs.

A couple of tentative conclusions were drawn from these initial findings and our discussions of them. One finding concerned the systemic legitimacy of supervision itself. This was linked to issues of criminal responsibility, the proportionality of punishment and the perceived need for supervision from the perspective of supervisees. Important issues also arose about the legitimacy of supervisory relationships. Were these relationships which were experienced as labeling and dehumanizing for the supervisee or did they bestow respect and dignity on supervisees. Was the purpose of the supervision to 'manage waste' or to foster growth? Finally the overwhelming conclusion of this limited pilot was that compliance is a hard when supervision is experienced as being painful; and that it is a painful process even when the supervisory relationship is good!

The Supervisible project has been a success particularly for the participants and has given a visible and new insight into their supervision experiences. The three active researchers (Wendy Fitzgibbon (London Metropolitan University), Christine Graebisch (University of Dortmund) and Fergus McNeill (University of Glasgow)) are presenting a paper at the European Criminology Conference in Porto in September 2015. They are also due to contribute a chapter to a book on Visual Criminologies in September 2015. It is also anticipated that a couple of journal articles will also be submitted on various aspects and findings of the research.

## Conclusion

As far as the Eurobarometer is concerned the next steps are to refine and improve the tool by improving the existing items and by adding more questions on the rehabilitation dimension and piloting it again in more jurisdictions. This time we will try to pilot it in such a way that will allow for a more solid comparison. In the end of the day, this is one of the aims of the

Action – to test new research methodologies that facilitate comparison. Keep an eye on our blog if you want to hear more!!

The next step for Supervisible is to widen the range of participating countries and to seek funding to continue to expand and develop the use of this technique to provide more insight into the experience of being supervised.

As you can perhaps tell, the working group is itching to take its work further.