The use of modern technologies and the impact on prison life

Intended and unintended consequences?

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Introduction

- Omnipresence of technology in society
- Digital divide deepens exclusion
  - Prisoners as '*cavemen in an era of speed-of-light technology*' (Johnson 2005)
- Deprivation of access to ICT as a new 'pain' of imprisonment
- ICT as an important vehicle to realise normalization of prison life

Characteristics of new generation T

- Interactive
- 24/7
- In-cell
- Integrative vision on prisons

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Use of ICT in Prison

- **'In house'**
  - Access to information
  - Access to internal services
  - Virtual communication
  - Organization and agendasetting
- **External**
  - Selected access to information ➔ www
  - Selected access to external services
  - Selected virtual communication

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Benefits

PRISONERS

- Digital literacy
- Rehabilitative potential
  - Access to services
  - E-learning
  - Family contacts
- Direct and quick communication
- Boredom management, 'in- cell care deliverer' (V. Knight)

STAFF

- Less movements
- Order and security
- Diminish routine tasks
- New job content ➔ support versus control
- Smoother communication

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Challenges

- Costs for prisoners
  - Increasing the gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots'?

- Training for prisoners and staff !!

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Challenges

- Changing job content for prison officers : 'Stop doing the same things the same old way'
  - Actively look for communication and interaction with prisoners
  - Recruitment, new profile
- Impact on prisoner – staff relations and security?
  - Passive versus dynamic security

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Dynamic security

- **European Prison Rules (2006)**
  - 51.2   The security which is provided by physical barriers and other technical means shall be complemented by the dynamic security provided by an alert staff who know the prisoners who are under their control.

Dynamic security

- **Belgian Prison Act (2005)**
  - Art. 105, par 1 : Preserving order and security implies dynamic interactions between prison staff and prisoners on the one hand, and a good balance between the technical means that are used and a constructive detention regime on the other

Dynamic security

- Relationships as 'quiet power' (Liebling et al. 2011 : 100)
  - Order and safety ➔ 'oil' wich smooths the flow of a prison day
  - Knowledge of prisoners leads to increased power
  - R as the root through which prisoners perceive the delivery of fairness, respect and justice
- ! Assessment of possible risks of escape, agression, depression, etc...
- Humanization of prison life

Dynamic security

- PC prison = 'calm' prison
  - Prisoners can 'hide'

- Incentives to leave the cell?
  - ! Attractive communal activities and constructive detention regime

Challenges

- 'Digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' (Prensky, 2001)
  - Divide within the groups : digital natives – digital immigrants – digital illiterates
  - Shaking up the existing hierarchical relations?
    - 'Digital native prisoners' versus 'digital immigrant prison-staff '

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Challenges

- Tension between normalization and 'less eligibility'
  - Punitiveness in society
    - Fight against the idea of a 4 star prison

- Demand for security ➡ 100% is very expensive
  - '*The last 2% security costs a fortune*' (Steven Van de Steene, Belgian Prison Service, 7/6/2015)
  - Mediatization of small problems
  ➡ hampers the implementation of ICT?
  - ! Pro-active media and communcation strategy

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Big questions

- Humanizing potential?
  - Substitution of person-to-person contacts by virtual communication?
    - ↗ Virtualisation of help, support, training, relations?
    - 'In house' and outside contacts
    - Changing the nature of communication
  - Increasing 'decision-making at a distance' ➔ anonimity

Big questions

- Re-integrative potential?
  - Limits to access, costs, continuity
  - Creating new pains of 'self-government' and 'responsabilisation' (Crewe 2011)?
  - Right balance between responsabilisation and support
  - Substitute or adjunct for face-to-face contacts?

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Big questions

- General context of budget cuts
  - '*We do not need less staff, but other staff*' : Steven Van de Steene, Belgian Prison Service,7/6/2015.
  - Replacing dynamic security with more passive security?
- Privacy issues
  - 'Big data' ➔ increasing opportunities to monitor prisoners
- PC still in its infancy
  - Priorities?

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Conclusion

- The sky is the limit from a technological point of view

- But…. Technology is not neutral

- Technology has the potential to change prison life in a profound way

- What are the stated and real purposes?

Conclusion

- Beneficial effects for prisoners and staff will depend on how ICT will be implemented

- Investment in technology and/or in support and creative uses?
  - 'in house' learning, 'game-isation', translation of information, co-production with prisoners, etc....
  - Provider-driven, staff's needs - driven or prisoner's needs driven development?

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Thank you for your attention!

If you want to share information on the use of ICT in prison in your country please contact me

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