

Effects of Imprisonment on Romanian Offenders' Lives

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Activity Report

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ACTIVITY REPORT

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Chapter I. Project' activities

According to the objectives outlined in the working plan, in the period between May 2013 and November 2013, four activities were carried out, all of them subsumed to Objective 1—scientific documentation. A qualitative exploratory study was also conducted, an activity not initially included in the working plan, but very important for the empirical research and also, for the other activities that will be conducted in the later stages of the project. In the last two month of the reporting period for this year (November – December 2013), efforts to prepare the empirical research were undertaken. This activity is subsumed to Objective 2. Also, because the prison environment as location for conducting research has its own particularities, being subjected to specific regulations, for the proper running of the field research, the project' objectives and methodology were discussed with prison responsible of the two penitentiaries where I intend to conduct the research (Giurgiu and Timisoara). Not least, I conducted a pilot study at Giurgiu and Timisoara prisons to test the validity of research instruments (the questionnaire) that will be administrated to inmates.

First activity. Synthesis of international studies and research on the impact of imprisonment

The areas of interest of this documentary analysis focused on:

- 1) Inmates' criminal activity/recidivism;
- 2) Inmates' relationships with their families (i.e. marital relationships and relationships with children);
- 3) Inmates' group of friends;
- 4) Human capital and inmates' perception on future opportunities for employment.

For this activity, several books, research reports and scientific articles published in international journals of criminology, penology and social sciences were consulted. Some of these works have been accessed during the documentation stage undertaken at Central Library and Radzinowicz Library of Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, UK (*see also the fifth activity*). Other English books have been purchased either directly at the

European Society of Criminology Conference (held in Budapest) or from bookstores in Cambridge, either through a book dealer. The studies included in the analysis focused on the effects of incarceration on *adults men* (the project does not target females, juveniles and young prisoners and therefore, they were excluded from analysis). The bulk of these publications reported data from the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands, countries with a well-known tradition of research in this field.

Second activity. Literature review on the use of imprisonment in Romania

For this activity, several papers published by the Romanian criminologists and penologists ever since the end of nineteenth century, and early twentieth have been consulted at Romanian Academy Library. There were also reviewed the most important laws of prison organization (the law on prison regime (1874); the law for prison and preventive institutions organization (1929); prison laws (1969; 2006) and the Criminal Codes adopted over time).

Third activity. The evolution of prisoners' number and the rate of incarceration in Romania

(3.1.) The analysis of official data on the evolution of the number of imprisoned persons in Romania

The analysis was based on data provided by the National Administration of Prisons and also, on the information available on the institution website (<http://www.anp.gov.ro>). According to the analysis, three periods of evolution of prisoners' number, in the period between 1990 and 2012, were identified in Romania. These periods have been further analyzed in the context of the evolution of offence rates and crime rates based on data available in the Romanian Statistical Yearbook (INS, 2011) and completed for 2011 and 2012 with the Police statistics (<http://www.politiaromana.ro>) and the statistics provided by the Superior Council of Magistracy at the request of the Institute of Sociology under the letter no. 2/27381/1154/27.11.2013). Also, because the size of prison population in a certain period of time depends on the number of new entrants to prison, but also on the length of time the prisoners spent behind bars, data on the evolution of the proportions of prison penalty in the overall number of sanctions imposed by the courts were included in the analysis (as indicator of the proportion of the new-entrant prisoners), as well as data on the evolution of the ratio between entrances and releases and on the evolution of the number of inmates who were conditionally released from prison (as indicator of the time people spent in prison). Romanian Statistical Yearbook (2010 and 2011) was the main source of data for analyzing the

proportion of prison penalties in the overall number of sanctions imposed by the courts, while data for the last two variables, available only for the period between 2000 and 2012, were provided by the National Administration of Prisons at the request of Institute of Sociology under the letters no. 44508/DSDRP/31.05.2012 and no. 32891/DSDRP/18.04.2013

(3.2.) Comparisons with other European countries

The comparative analysis of several indicators associated with incarceration had as main sources of data the Annual Penal Statistics developed by the Council of Europe under the project SPACE I (available at <http://www3.unil.ch/wpmu/space/>) and the statistics of the International Center for Prison Studies (<http://www.prisonstudies.org/>). The following indicators were included in the analysis: the incarceration rates, the length of sentence, prison population density, socio-demographics of prisoners (sex, age, nationality) and type of offences for which they have been convicted and imprisoned.

Fourth activity. Exploratory study on the collateral consequences of imprisonment on Romanian prisoners

Although this activity was not foreseen in the working plan, given that in Romania the subject of intended and unintended effects of incarceration is under-researched, an exploratory study was conducted in July 2013. The purpose of the study was, on one hand, to identify those aspects that should be addressed in the main research and, on the other hand, to identify the potential practical problems that might affect the field work. The study was based on a cross-sectional research design and employed a qualitative research methodology. A group of 20 prisoners held in Giurgiu Prison, all men, were interviewed using a semi-structured, in-depth interviewing technique. All the interviews were tape-recorded, but only after the prisoners had given their written informed consent. The interview guide covered several themes centered on identifying how the lives of the inmates were shaped by the current and, if applicable, previous experiences of incarceration. Respondents were selected according to the period of time they had already spent in detention, as follows: long-serving prisoners, who had spent in prison more than five years of their current sentence (n=5), medium-serving prisoners, who had served between two and five years of their term (n=10) and short-serving prisoners, who had served less than two years of their sentence (n=5).

Fifth activity. Documentation stages

(5.1) Documentation stage at University of Cambridge Library, UK, 11-25 September

The stage implied individual study on Central Library and Radzinowicz Library of Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, UK. At the two libraries I had free access to the shelf, but also to the electronic resources, which gave me the opportunity to consult a large number of volumes and articles published in international journals. About 20 books and 35 articles focused on the social effects of incarceration, the impact of imprisonment on inmates' families, prison adaptation, and prison life have been consulted. Also during the stage, I had a meeting with Prof. Ben Crewe, the Deputy Director of Prison Research Centre, the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and the author of the well-known book: *The Prisoner Society: Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison* (Oxford University Press, 2009). The discussion with the renowned professor focused mainly on ethical and methodological aspects of prison research.

(5.2) Visiting scholar at Department of Criminology, Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology, University of Leiden, The Netherlands, 07 October – 07 November 2013

During the visit, I completed the research methodology under the guidance of Prof. Paul Nieuwbeerta, Head of the Department and my postdoctoral advisor. Along with regular meetings with Prof. Nieuwbeerta, I had also meetings with PhD students and postdocs working in the Department and who are part of the research team of Prison Project, a longitudinal study that examines the effects of imprisonment on offenders and their families' life course in the Netherlands.

Sixth Activity. Elaboration of project methodology. Preparation of the field activity

As mentioned above, the research methodology was completed at Leiden University, under the guidance of Prof. Paul Nieuwbeerta. The list of variables, the research instruments (both the questionnaire and the interview guide), and the ways of questionnaire administration were discussed and completed by the end of my visit.

In addition, due to the complexity of research methodology, but also because of the particularities of studies conducted in prison, the research design and various practical issues associated with the process of data gathering have been discussed with the responsible of the two prisons in which I intend to carry out the field activity. One of the conclusions that emerged from these discussions was the need to extend the number of prisons included in the study. Although initially I planned to conduct the research in two prisons: one of maximum

security (Giurgiu Prison), and one of open and semi-open regime (Timisoara Prison), it came out that this is not feasible due to the large volume of data that should be collected at each prison, which would put an extra-burden on the activity of prison staff for a long period of time (1-2 months). Also, during this activity, a pilot study was conducted on a group of 10 detainees imprisoned in Giurgiu Prison and 80 – at Timisoara Prison in order to test the validity of research instruments applied inmates (the questionnaire).