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Work as a drama. The experience of the former inmates
on the labour market

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SPECTO

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- Irwin (1970:2):

‘A common dimension in the nature of these obstacles and the ignorance which surrounds them is the **disparity of perspectives of the officials and the felons**. The programs and policies obstructing the felon’s progress instead of facilitating it are planned and implemented from an official or conventional viewpoint’

- GZ:

‘The real prison experience starts when released’

Aim and structure

- To present the inmates positioning on the labour market from the dramaturgic performance perspective (Goffman, 1956; Saldana, 2005; Berg, 2011)
- Structure:
 - Literature review
 - Methodology
 - Findings
 - Discussions

Work in the literature

- Work associated with desistance (Duwe, 2015; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Lipsey, 1995; Sampson and Laub, 2001)
- Via cognitive transformation (Giordano et al, 2002) or through identity change (Maruna, 2001)
- Which comes first still contested area (Skardhamar and Savolainen, 2002; Bushway and Apel, 2012)
- Other factors might shape its impact – age, social structure etc. (Uggen, 1996)
- Work is important but only if meaningful and satisfactory (Uggen and Staff, 2001)
- Positive prospects of future legal earnings appear also to reduce involvement in criminal activities (Pezzin, 1995; Shapland and Bottoms, 2011).

Difficulties in finding work

- Most parolees find their jobs through personal contacts such as **family, friends or ex-employers** (Berg and Huebner, 2011; Solomon, Roman and Waul, 2001; Souza et al, 2013; Visher et al, 2004; Visher et al, 2011)
- Former prisoners may 'have expectations of extremely rapid occupational advancement during the years immediately following their release, expectations which are **unrealistic in light of their limited work experience and lack of vocational skills**' (Glaser, 1969: 238).
- **Stigma** as 'negative credential' (Pager et al, 2009)
- **Discrimination** (Graffam et al, 2008; Hlavka et al, 2015)
- Precarious position - '**keenly anticipate rejection**' by employers (Winnick and Bodkin, 2008: 321) or '**tense or defensive interactions**' with employers (Pager, 2007: 148)
- Some stop looking for work (Apel and Sweeten, 2010)
- Some focus on underground economy (Halushka, 2016)
- Others engage in intensive identity work (Maruna, 2001; Trimbur, 2009)

Work in the literature

- Focus too much on the conventional meaning of 'work'
- Look into the general orientation but neglects micro-behaviors
- Does not take into account the context – economy, social, ethnic background etc.

Methodology

- Based on an ethnographic study conducted in Bucharest and the surrounding area
 - 58 released inmates from Jilava Prison – theoretical sampling – 28 Roma
 - One year follow up
 - Conditional released but no supervision (except 3 full released)
 - Ethnographic methodology
 - Thematic analysis

Methodology

- dramaturgical approach developed first by Goffman (1959) and later by Berg (2001) and Saldana (2005).
- provides an analytic context in which the details of the everyday efforts and interactions in relation to employment can be integrated and understood in their context.
- life as 'performance' with humans interacting as actors in conflict with each other (Saldana, 2009).

Codes:

- OBJ: objectives or wants or needs
- TAC: tactics employed by the participants to deal with conflicts and obstacles
- CON: conflicts or obstacles confronted by the participants/actors which prevented them from achieving their objectives
- PROPS: skills or artefacts used or mentioned by participants related to employment (e.g. education, qualifications, professional skills etc.).

Findings: Objectives

- Provide drive for action
- All participants attempted to become economically active
- Work as:
 - Start a new life - ‘First of all, work! Work to earn a living’ (MH)
 - Earn autonomy - ‘This is what I planned from the beginning: to be independent. Not to depend on anyone’ (MM)
 - Compensate the family
 - Earn a living outside crime - ‘I do not want to steal anymore. I don’t want to hear about this anymore...’ (IA)
- Work – multiple function

Findings: Conflicts & Obstacles

- PTSD - flashbacks, lack of sleep, dizziness etc.
- Major health issues
- Deep feelings of shame:
'How could I go there? I am ashamed. If they call me, I might go but ...' (MH)
- Stigma:
'For the moment nobody gave me any work around here. They are afraid that I did time in prison... They are afraid I will steal from them' (MM)
- Internalized stigma:
'If they fear you, you start to feel dangerous' (NM)
- Temptation
- Huge family issues
- Terrible living conditions – toxic neighbourhoods
- Identity papers
- Complex and dysfunctional bureaucracy
- Criminal record - the number of criminal certificates issued by the Romanian police for work reasons has increased from 163,616 in 2013 to 779,677 in 2016.



Strategies

- Heavy reliance on family networks, friends, former employers
- No IT skills – to search Internet
- State – almost absent – no trust
- Precarious position – accept low paid jobs in the underground economy - no labour contracts – no security, ‘ripped off’ - **Work ‘does not allow me to die but I cannot live either’** (DV).
- Roma – more entrepreneurial – why?
- Some wait for better opportunities – better paid, source of hope
- Some emigrate – ‘going abroad’ dream, successful (including on the identity level), but ...
- Most of them vacillate between different forms of participation – informal, cvasi, hustle, conventional economy
- Economy around Bucharest – 2% unemployment, increased number of jobs in construction, metal and transportation
- No decent prospects – no hope, prison as a romantic place etc.
- Not too many resources – within three months they know what is the occupational route

Findings: PROPS

- Elements that support the actor's roles
- Goffman's terms (1956: 14) they are: 'items of expressive equipment, the items that we most intimately identify with the performer himself...'
- Enhance their representation: skills, gestures, artefacts etc.
- Focus on work qualifications
- No focus on soft skills – e.g. teamwork, punctual, reliable etc.
- No skills in self-disclosure:

'As I was already nervous from the other interviews I told them: listen, I have a criminal record. They said they will check with their bosses and call me back ... yes, no phone call back, it is funny' (NM)

- No artefacts – letters, diplomas, recommendations etc.

Discussion



Discussion

- Employment – complex process in a difficult context
- At the intersection of personal, structural and relational factors
- Many anticipate rejection – ‘learned helplessness’ – give up hope and confidence
- Solutions:
 - Enhance self-efficacy in and post-prison
 - Up-skilling towards new economies
 - Mutual help – ‘friendly employers’, social economy etc.
 - The role of State – use of unemployment funds to create solidarity employers, fiscal benefits with no strings attached, awareness
 - Encourage entrepreneurial initiatives – especially for Roma

More details – Filmul 2 lei 60

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuRJxCN4P8I>

Thank you!

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