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Zooming out: restorative justice and restorative communities tools for deliberative, democratic participation

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Convegno 'La comunità del benessere e le città riparative'

Ferrara, 25 November 2016

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RJ in Belgium – the starting point

In Belgium

- a strong bottom up development of the practice of VOM
- strong RJ legislation

A history in trying to involve the community

1. 'Community of care' (direct stakeholders)
2. 'Local community' (indirect stakeholders)
3. 'Wider community' (the public)

But limited results...



- a limited use of restorative services
- still a traditional law and conflict culture and weak societal support for and knowledge of restorative approaches
- little contact between RJ in criminal justice and similar trends in other fields
- As far as we knew: a limited spreading of restorative services over different sectors/fields in society



Shifting the lens ... building restorative communities ...

Connecting to what 'lives' in civil society

Project 'field glasses'



- Initial goal

Exploration of the potential for a broader implementation of RJ in fields which are less focused on crime.

- Field of action:
 - community building
 - socio-cultural education for adults
 - schools

Activities



- Desk research: getting to know the field
- Interviews with key actors/experts
- Reflection group
- Contacts with policymakers



Important lesson

- A diversified landscape
 - Schools
 - Community building
 - Socio-cultural work
- RJ is not (well) known; ‘no need for new frameworks’, resistance
- ‘Dealing with conflicts’ is too narrow to enter the field and a delicate theme
- Looking for common values and vision (see also Kay Pranis, 2007)



- New goal:
Explore common ground,
possibilities of mutual learning and
broader collaboration
between RJ in criminal justice and some other
fields less focused on crime



- participation
- setting up democratic processes, deliberative democracy (// Braithwaite, Dzur)
- start from the lifeworld (// Pelikan, Aertsen)
- connecting people
- ownership
- emancipatory approach, empowerment
- communication and dialogue



- Conflict is ok and can be productive
(// Christie, Pavlich, Walgrave in RJ literature)
- Cope with difference in a culture of respect
(not: work towards a common identity and common values)



Societies on the move...

- Towards relations based on negotiation
- From a welfare state towards a participatory state → activation and responsabilisation of citizens
- From a welfare state towards a regulatory state
- Increased feeling of unsafety → securitisation



Different interpretations

SOCIAL JUSTICE	NEO-LIBERAL
Citizens with potential	Deficient citizens
Shared responsibility	Individual responsibility
Open goals and diverse results	More fixed and often quantifiable results
Ownership	Directed participation
// ethics of care // fundamental social rights solidarity	

Differences leading to opportunities

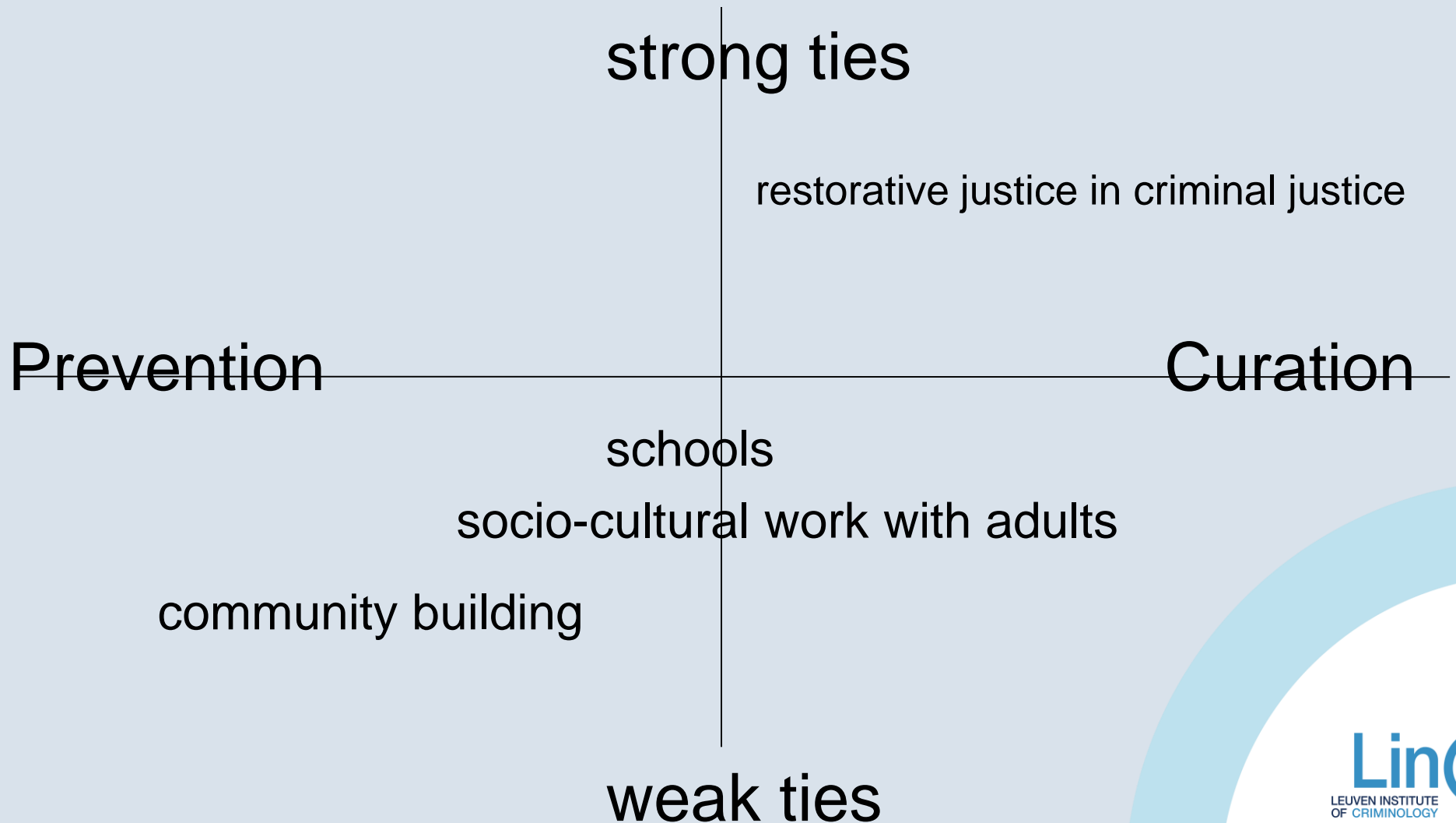
(1) Building a continuum from prevention to curation
(next slide)

(2) Methods:

- Dialogue and diapraxis
- Working with individuals versus working with groups and networks

(3) Working with cases/individuals versus structural
/policy work

Building a continuum from prevention to curation





Challenges...

- Walk the talk... restorative culture within organisations
- Compartmentalisation
- Refocus on the core business
- Actively involving policy makers



Thanks for your attention

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