

The “Death” of RJAs in Belgian Prisons

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Background

Drawing on the conclusion of an action-research

The Ministerial Circular of 4 Oct 2000

Delegated a mission

To new actors (RJAs)

But in June 2008, the RJA function was cancelled

1. Policy Making Process
2. Policy Implementation Process
3. Organizational Characteristics of Prison Settings

1. A Top-Down Policy Making Process

A (double) research (and penal policy) programme

- The research programme:
 - 1993-1998: Penology & Victimology Team (KUL) / NGOs (*Suggnomé* and *Médianté*) → 2005 Law (June 22)
 - 1996-2000: the RJ approach behind the prison walls / pilot project (6 PS; KUL & ULG; researchers experimenting various initiatives)
 - Dec. 1999: research report
 - Oct. 2000: Ministerial Circular (end of research programme; further step in the policy programme)
- Critical statements:
 - The Ministerial circular didn't result from any request emanating from the prison environment (professionals would be affected by its implementation)
 - How could prison professionals be interested in RJ if not informed nor trained? (they were not conceived as the main intermediaries)

2. An Unprepared Policy Implementation Process

The Ministerial Circular = 9 pages without any clear instruction for the RJAs

“Structural” role (> < case by case)

“Advisors” position (> < hierarchical part of pyramidal org.)

1. **Appointment**

Nov. 2000 (23/31 Female; 22-33 y.o.; no experience)

Indifference (sometimes hostility) of the environment

2. **Double phase of integration**

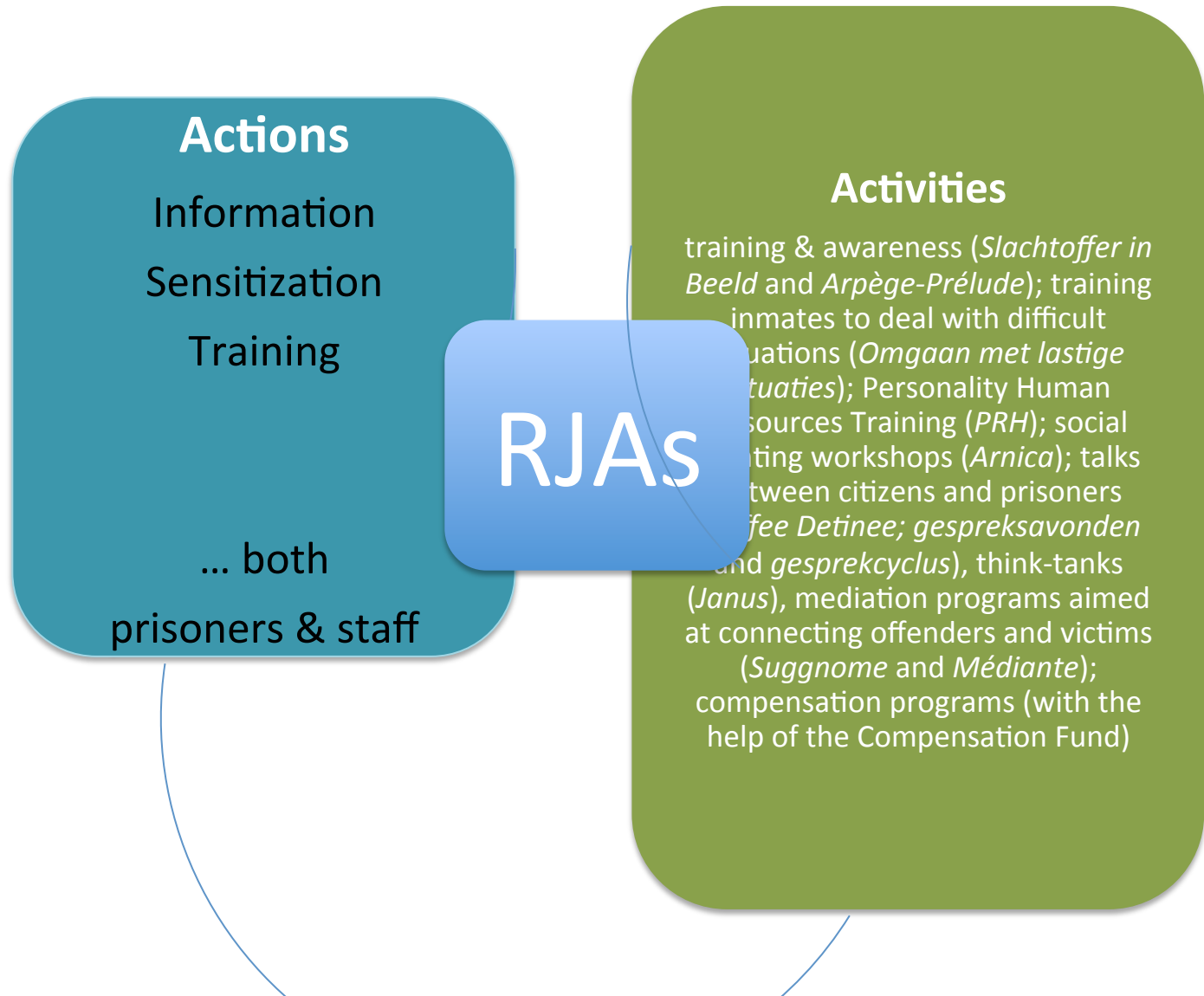
COLLEGIAL SPACE (Intervisions): sharing of emotional difficulties; precision of their mission (a concept paper & a triangular diagram)

LOCAL SPACE: variable integration process (size, type, architecture, location, culture of the PS)

3. **Time of fulfilment**

Activities (NGOs) and Actions (information, awareness, training)

3. Time of fulfilment



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4. Permanent employment & extinction of the function

2005 (preparatory work for their statutarisation); 2007 (recruitment process initiated); 2008 (examination in Jan; Results in Feb; the era of the permanently employed in June; letter in Aug – “RJ is no longer a project stage but a stage in a project” – Jr Governors)

3. A Contrasted Embeddedness of RJ Policy in Prison Organizations

Belgium is a Federal State

- **In the North:**

Flemish Community Strategic Plan (Dec 2000): providing a systematic policy of social assistance (Min of Welfare, Health & Family); 17 policy coordinators, 17 organisational coordinators, 10 pedagogical coordinators; cooperation with RJAs until 2008; the idea of RJ is **inscribed** in the Strat. Plan (structural roots)

- **In the South**

French-speaking side, more complex institutional landscape; various coordination agreements; RJ isn't **inscribed**; the last RJ activities are carried out by Médiante (based on the law of 22 June 2005 & without any RJA intermediation)

« In practice, the majority of the requests come from the side of the offender. For example, they contact the mediation service after having received information from a judicial body or from the social services in the prison or the probation service, or because they heard about the mediation service from a fellow prisoner » (Lauwaert & Aertsen, 2016 : 347).

3. A Contrasted Embeddedness of RJ Policy in Prison Organizations

Belgium has 4 open prisons

And various regimes (high security vs high
community)

Prison conditions as prerequisites

References

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THANK YOU!