# DRUG POLICY MOBILITIES:

## FOLLOWING HARM REDUCTION THROUGH URBAN BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

## Eugene McCann, Geography, SFU

# Outline

- Introduction to key concepts
  - Harm Reduction
  - Policy mobilities
  - Built environment

- Drug policy mobilities

- Example 1: Public space & the local politics of policy mobility
  - Mobilities and politics in and through Oppenheimer Park

- Example 2: Global networking among Drug Consumption Rooms
  - Site of persuasion in the politics of policy mobility

- Conclusions

# What is Harm Reduction?

We can also understand Harm Reduction as a social, political, & policy movement.
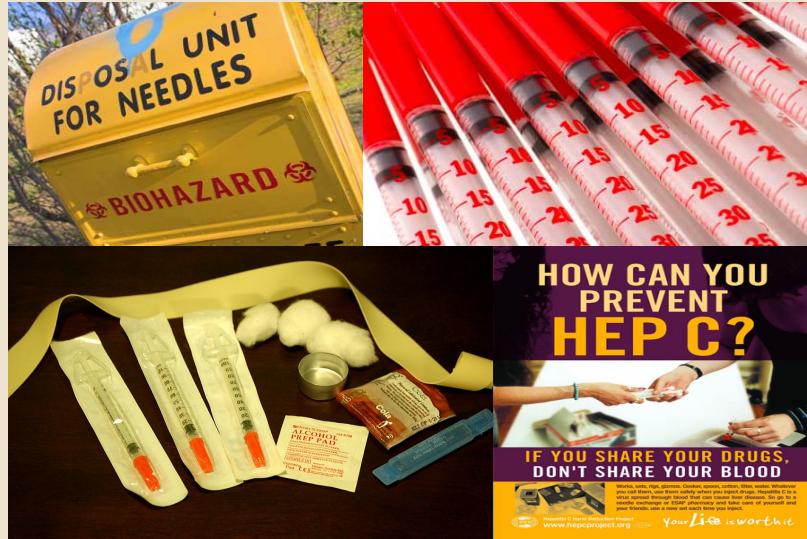
"'Harm Reduction' refers to policies, programmes and practices that aim primarily to reduce the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of legal and illegal psychoactive drugs without necessarily reducing drug consumption. (International Harm Reduction Association, 2010)

# The concept of policy mobilities

The mobilities perspective sees mobility as a "meaningful and power-laden geographical phenomenon" involving "the displacement of an object from A to B" in which "**the type, strategies and social implications of that movement are considered**" (Cresswell, 2001 & 2006, my emphasis)

"[T]he 'role of the analyst,'" is . . . 'to **follow networks as they stretch through space and time**, localizing and globalizing along the way'" (Olds, 2001, 9, citing Murdoch 1997, 334-335, my emphasis).

"[We must] develop adequate conceptualizations and robust empirical assessments of policies 'in motion', including descriptions of the circulatory systems that connect and interpenetrate 'local' policy regimes" (Peck, 2003).

"[There is a need to delineate] the strong diffusion channels and distribution networks that exist to facilitate the transfer of policies of a particular type from one place to another" (Ward, 2006).

# The concept of policy mobilities

- **<u>Policy mobilities</u>**:  The social and spatial process of circulating, mediating, (re)molding, and operationalizing policies, policy models, and policy-related expertise among policy actors (broadly defined).
  - e.g., McCann (2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c); Cook (2008); Mountz & Curren (2009); González (2010); Larner & Laurie (2010); McCann & Ward (2010, 2011), McFarlane (2010); Peck and Theodore (2010a, 2010b), Prince (2010); Ward (2011).

- **<u>Four commitments of the policy mobilities approach</u>**:

  - To detailed empirical analyses of the contexts and practices of policy mobilization

  - To analyses of inter-local mobilizations while seeing wider contexts

  - To analyses of mutation, hybridity, & emergence

  - To rich accounts of the politics of policy mobilities

# Mobile Urbanism: Cities & Policymaking in the Global Age
## Eugene McCann & Kevin Ward, eds. (Spring 2011, Minnesota)
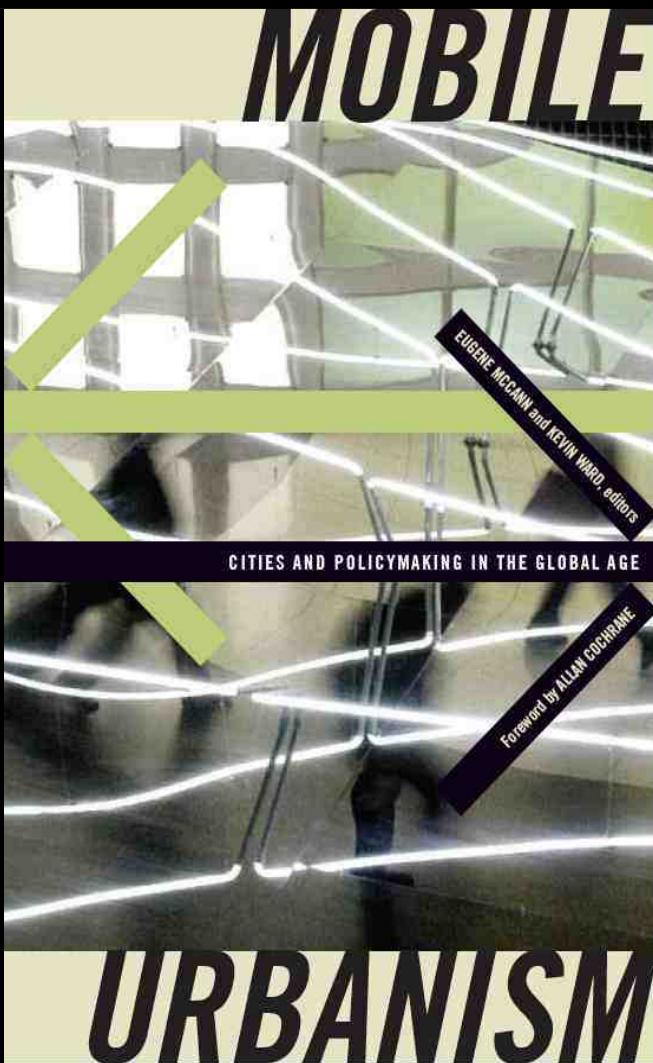
**Preface**  *Allan Cochrane*

**1: Urban assemblages: Territories, relations, practices, and power**  *Eugene McCann & Kevin Ward*

**2: A counterhegemonic relationality of place**  *Doreen Massey*

**3: The spaces of circulating knowledge: City strategies and global urban governmentality**  *Jennifer Robinson*

**4: Creative moments: working culture through municipal socialism and neoliberal urbanism**  *Jamie Peck*

**5: Policies in motion and in place: the case of Business Improvement Districts**  *Kevin Ward*

**6: Points of reference: knowledge of elsewhere in the politics of urban drug policy**  *Eugene McCann*

**7: The urban political pathology of emerging infectious disease in the age of the global city**  *Roger Keil & S. Harris Ali*

**8: Airports, territoriality and urban governance**  *Donald McNeill*

**9: Cities assembled: Space, neoliberalization, (re)territorial-ization, & comparison**  *Kevin Ward & Eugene McCann*

# What's the urban built environment got to do with it?

Vancouver

Zürich

Geneva



☐ Geographers on the urban built environment:

- A social product & also productive of society

- Relational and scaled

- Concreteness & process; Fixity & flow

- Circuits of capital and people

- Circuits of knowledge

- Ideas & actions; Politics & policy-making

# What's the urban built environment got to do with it?

Supervised Drug Consumption Rooms

Vancouver



Zürich



Geneva



☐ Following Harm Reduction through urban built environments:

☐ **Who mobilizes** HR knowledge & policy?

☐ What **informational & institutional 'infrastructures'** facilitate this mobilization?

☐ What are the **key sites of persuasion and political struggle** around this mobilization?

# Drug policy mobilities

- **Who mobilizes** Harm Reduction knowledge & policy?
  - Politicians; policy professionals (e.g., planners, social workers, medical professionals) and public health departments; police departments; AIDS activists, & drug policy activists, including users; think tanks; …

- What **informational & institutional 'infrastructures'** facilitate this mobilization?
  - International Harm Reduction Association (IHRA); *International Journal of Drug Policy*; *Harm Reduction Journal*; Drug Policy Alliance; Keeping the Door Open; Hungarian Civil Liberties Union; International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD); popular media; documentary film makers; …

- What are the **key sites of persuasion and political struggle** around this mobilization?
  - Offices of activist organizations; government chambers; public spaces (public meeting rooms, streets, parks; health care facilities, including consumption sites); …

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# Urban public spaces and the local politics of policy mobility

"And at that time, on the hundred block of Hastings, there was just thousands of people openly shooting and smoking crack and it was quite a scene. And so then . . . we did an event in the summer of '97 called "A Thousand Crosses" . . .

… we put a thousand crosses up in Oppenheimer Park and it was sort of a memorial for those people that had died of overdose, drug overdose …

… I wanted to raise this cry with the demonstrations that we had done and with the thousand crosses, the conditions down here were beginning to register with people beyond the Downtown Eastside" (Vancouver activist).



"A Thousand Crosses."  Oppenheimer Park 1997
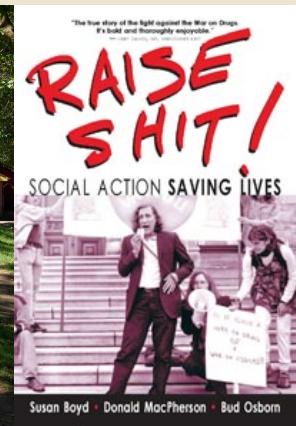
# Urban public spaces and the local politics of policy mobility

<u>The Oppenheimer 'tent event,' 1998: Policy mobilization in action</u>

"We decided that we wanted to have an event to at least bring the community together. To have that as a starting point. Because if we have a united community then maybe more can be done. So we did an event at Oppenheimer Park. . . . We didn't want it to be in any of the sort of traditional places. Like, to make it in Oppenheimer Park, to make it in a tent, made it very neutral and made it truly a community event" (Event organizer)



Crime fight called threat to tourist trade

WARNING FROM AFAR: Werner Schneider shares his experience with Frankfurt's drug-control programs on Vancouve

German expert faults city's war on dr

[T]hey brought some people from Bern, Switzerland, Frankfurt, and . . . Merseyside, Liverpool, to an event here. And that was the first time I actually got to talk to other people from the local government level. … It was a real watershed in terms of making connections . . . (Senior drug policy official).

# Urban public spaces and the local politics of policy mobility

Oppenheimer Park as a "globalizing micro-space" (Larner and Le Heron, 2002, 765).

"We would just cling to [this information from elsewhere] … [I]t's really empowering for users to understand that drug users elsewhere were being treated as citizens, citizens that are deserving, you know, [with] compassion." (VANDU organizer)

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# Global/inter-urban networking among Drug Consumption Rooms (DCRs)


Eastside DCR, Frankfurt


Insite DCR, Vancouver


Quai 9 DCR, Geneva


La Strada DCR, Frankfurt

• DCRs: Sites of 'knowledge transfer,' persuasion, and political struggle.

• DCRs: "Protected places for the hygienic consumption of previously obtained drugs, in an non-judging environment & under the supervision of qualified personnel" (Akzept, 2000.)

# The global-urban geography of DCRs


Number of Rooms by Country
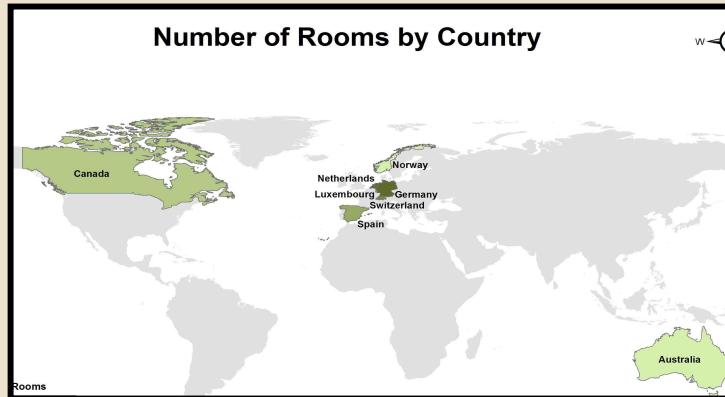


| Country (8) | # of Cities (40) | # DCRs (67) (77) |
|---|---|---|
| Germany | 14 | 23 |
| Netherlands | 12 | 22 (32) |
| Switzerland | 7 | 12 |
| Spain | 3 | 5 |
| Canada | 1 | 2 |
| Australia | 1 | 1 |
| Luxembourg | 1 | 1 |
| Norway | 1 | 1 |


European Cities with Consumption Rooms
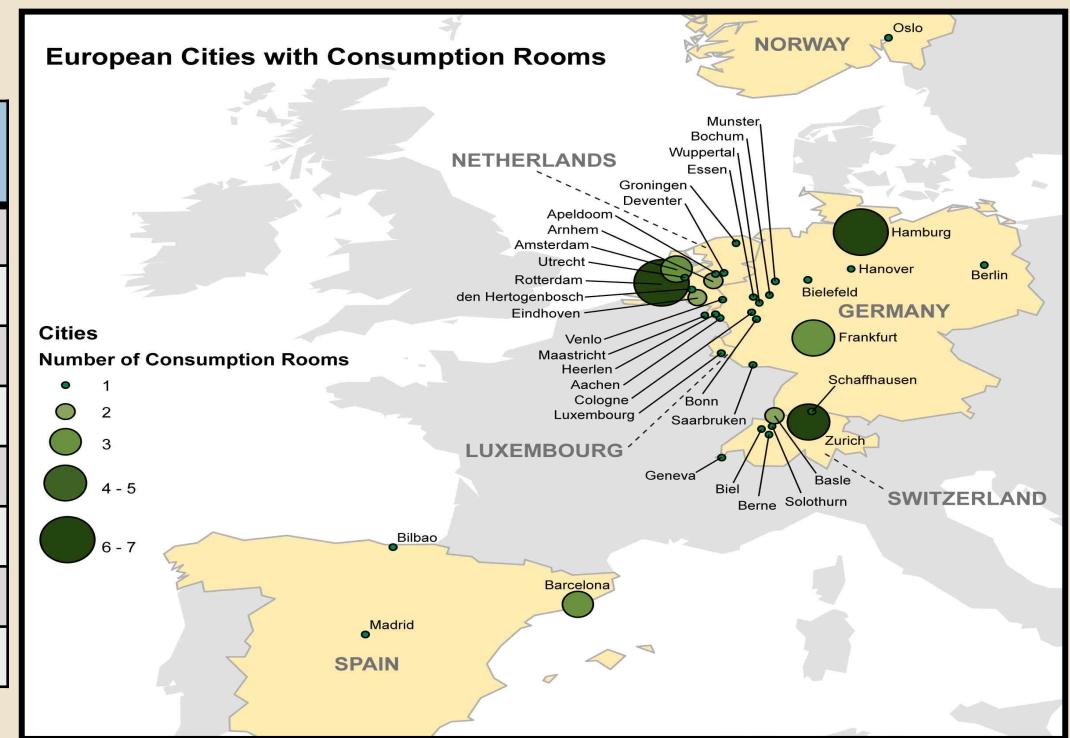
# One informational infrastructure: International Network of DCRs (INDCR)

- "[K]eep and promote the communication directed to exchange knowledge and experiences;"
- "motivate the internal development of these resources based on this exchange;"

- "support the implementation [DCRs] in new contexts of need;"
- "work towards the incorporation of other entities, centres and harm and risk reduction institutions into the Network in order to strengthen it and increase its impact and social utility."



Excerpt from INDCR's founding document (2007) showing signatures of representatives from Frankfurt, Geneva, & Vancouver.          >
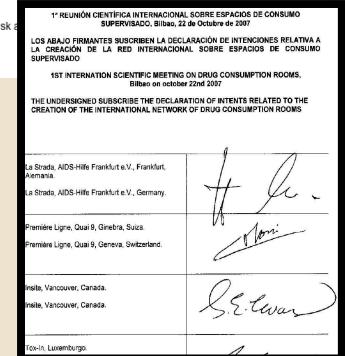
# 'See for yourself': The power of site visits & first-hand experience



<   Members of the Council of Europe's 'EXASS Network' of frontline drug workers meeting with a DCR staff member (right) at La Strada DCR, Frankfurt as part of a fact-finding trip, June 2008.

<   Geography students (from Frankfurt) talking to an Insite DCR staff member (left) after a tour, Vancouver September 2008.

(Insite holds regular tours to educate the public and 'normalize' the idea of DCRs.)





International Harm   ^
Reduction Association conference delegates visiting Barcelona's mobile DCR, May 2008.

# 'See for yourself': The power of site visits & first-hand experience

"I think that when you tell people that you've actually seen [a DCR], they lend greater credence to what you're saying … Personal experience cannot ever be underestimated, right? … You know, it normalizes it" (Social service agency representative, Vancouver).



^

Common room, K&A Kaserne DCR, Zürich, 2010 (with flag signed by Swiss World Cup football team)

Crack smoking room, La Strada DCR,    > Frankfurt, 2008

# Conclusions

"In classic migration theory, the choice of whether or not to move would be the result of so-called push and pull factors in A and B respectively. **The content of the line between them** would remain unexplored . . .   [and] taken for granted"

 (Tim Cresswell, 2006, <u>On the Move</u> (Routledge), 2, my emphasis).

"**Public health** in all its wide and shifting forms is an **important part of urban political geography** that we should consider more fully."

 (Michael Brown, 2009, Public health as urban politics, urban geography. <u>Urban Geography</u>, 30(1), 1-29, my emphases).

# Conclusions

❑ Harm Reduction is both a public health approach and also a political movement.  It is both global and also local.

❑ It operates in and through specific assemblages of expertise, practice, institutions, and built environments.

❑ These 'globalizing micro-spaces' are:
  ❑ <u>Circulatory basing points</u> – heterogeneous sites of experimentation and 'best practice,' reference points for global policy communities, locales with circulatory capacities.

  ❑ <u>Political spaces</u> – objects of governance, sites of politics, symbols of hope (or pessimism, or opposition), and reference points for global activist communities.

## Acknowledgements

## Related Papers available

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- ---.  Veritable inventions:  Cities, policies, assemblage.  Under review at Area.