HARM REDUCTION AS A GLOBAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT

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What is Harm Reduction?

- “‘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)
Social Movements:
“The organized efforts of multiple individuals or organizations, acting outside the formal state or economic spheres, to pursue political goals” (McCarthy, 2009)
What’s geography got to do with it?

- **What are geographers interested in?**
  - Difference and connection
    - The distinctiveness of places and the commonalities / connections among them

- **What is this geographer interested in?**
  - Global networks of Harm Reduction activists & practitioners (i.e., connection)
  - Place-specific characteristics of Harm Reduction policy & politics (i.e., difference)
  - How HR seeks to improve places and peoples’ lives
HR Cities: Different but connected

Supervised Drug Consumption Rooms

- **Vancouver**
- **Zürich**
- **Geneva**

European Cities with Consumption Rooms

Cities

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 - 5
- 6 - 7
The global-urban geography of DCRs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country (8)</th>
<th># of Cities (40)</th>
<th># DCRs (67-77)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
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<td>Luxembourg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The HR Social Movement

- **Actors**
  - 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; …

- **Organizations & Institutions**
  - 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; …

- **Key cities & other ‘sites of persuasion’**
  - **Core cities:** Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Zurich; **Key ‘outposts’:** Sydney, Vancouver
  - Offices of activist organizations; government chambers; public spaces (public meeting rooms, streets, parks; health care facilities, including consumption sites); …
Key sites: Drug Consumption Rooms (DCRs)

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

‘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).

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

Common room, K&A Kaserne DCR, Zürich, 2010 (with flag signed by Swiss World Cup football team)
One global network: 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.”
Conclusion

- Harm Reduction is both a public health approach and also a political movement.

- It is both global and also local.

- It seeks to improve places & peoples lives.

- It seems to be expanding and becoming more popular in certain parts of the world and it exists in some form in every part of the world.