



## **Interview with Arno Pilgram and Christa Pelikan: On a Criminology that Sought to Change the World**

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## Introduction

Critical criminology seeks not only to examine the world, but also to change it for the better. Such a goal inevitably raises the strategic question of the relationship with state authorities. Is it more effective to pursue the desired change under the auspices of the state or in close cooperation with it, or, on the contrary, from a safe distance? To a certain extent, the interview presented here can be read as an anticipated admission that there is no definitive answer to this question. It deals with the history of critical criminology in Austria from the perspective of two of its key figures, Arno Pilgram and Christa Pelikan, who have firmly tied their professional lives to the Institute for Sociology of Law and Criminology. It was at this Vienna-based institute that a critical approach to the study of crime as a construct of the criminal justice system developed and became an important actor in the field of European critical criminology.

The Institute was founded in 1973, primarily thanks to the initiative of the then Social Democratic Minister of Justice Christian Broda, to provide intellectual support for the planned extensive reform of criminal law and as a counterbalance to the criminology cultivated at the time in criminal law departments. Heinz Steinert, the founding director of the Institute and probably Austria's best-known criminologist, saw its creation as part of the 'permanent conflicts' that occur between the legislative, executive, and judicial powers of a constitutional state. For Steinert, the rule-of-law state (Rechtsstaat) is not outside domination, but a contradictory mode that contains its own internal limits and oppositions. The Institute, accordingly, was founded to intervene in that field of tension. It was expected to support the implementation of criminal law reform against resistance from part of the judiciary, while it was also established as a 'counter-institution' producing 'counter-knowledge' against traditional criminology and the prevailing penal orders (Steinert, 2010).

Arno Pilgram and Christa Pelikan are the last two living members of the Institute's early team, which was founded under the name 'Ludwig-Boltzmann-Institut für Kriminalsoziologie' (its name has been changed several times). Arno Pilgram was part of the original group along with Heinz Steinert, Wolfgang Stangl, who has since passed away, and Herbert Leirer, who soon left the Institute to become secretary general of the probation service. Christa Pelikan joined the Institute a little later and, like Arno Pilgram, remained there throughout its existence. In 1993, Arno Pilgram became the Institute's deputy director and succeeded Heinz Steinert as its scientific director in 2000. Both Christa Pelikan and Arno Pilgram were thus involved in significant historical moments, such as the introduction of victim-offender mediation in Austria.

The interview emerged through several conversations that took place between November 2025 and March 2026, tracing Arno and Christina's intellectual and professional journeys. These exchanges were recorded, transcribed, and returned in a condensed form to both authors in rounds of review, giving them the chance to refine, expand, or reflect on what had been said. The result offers a closer look at these personal and institutional trajectories, covering topics such as the Institute's research contributions, its international relations and cooperation with other institutions, Steinert's academic profile and intellectual legacy, the emergence and spread of victim-offender mediation, the impact of critical criminology on practice, and an assessment of the current state of the field in Austria, including a message to young criminologists who want to continue in criminology with the aim of changing the world.

## Interview

**Václav Walach & Veronika Reidinger:** We would like to focus this interview on the history of critical criminology in Austria as you have experienced it. Could you first introduce yourselves? How did you become critical criminologists and what have been your research interests?

**Arno Pilgram:** My career in criminology resulted from my interest in reforming residential institutions for young people. These were facilities that housed both juvenile offenders and neglected youth. I came to Vienna to study psychology, intending to work in this field. I had grown up in an official apartment at such a facility, where my mother taught. She suffered a lot from the living conditions of the children there but could do little to change them. She wished to see a new generation of staff and reforms taking place in such institutions.

As a first-generation university student, I had no conception of scientific careers. I started my studies in 1965 and became engaged in student politics in the late sixties, though within the Catholic student community, which had also developed a left wing at the time. As middle-class students, we solidarised with juveniles in

youth institutions. 'Öffnet die Heime' ('Open the Institutions') was a movement that brought students fighting for freedom into at least imagined contact with lower-class juveniles confined in institutions.

While seeking a speaker for a series of lectures on deficits in youth treatment in public institutions, I met Heinz Steinert, who would prove crucial for my subsequent trajectory. Looking for a topic for my dissertation, Steinert offered me the opportunity to participate in his research program when he was still employed at the Verein für Bewährungshilfe und Soziale Jugendarbeit (the Austrian Probation Service, now known as NEUSTART). I defended my thesis on self-fulfilling prophecy in probation (Pilgram, 1972) shortly before the Institute for Sociology of Law and Criminology (IRKS) was established in 1973. Steinert was its first director and invited me to join. For me, this was a good chance to continue pursuing my reform and research interests.

During my career, I have studied crime statistics as indicators of criminalization, as manifested in the reporting or non-reporting of incidents by the public and the varying responses of institutions to these complaints. This approach allows us to address questions such as what 'crime waves' reveal about intergenerational conflicts or tensions across other social divides, or how they reflect social movements advocating for or against shifting values and structures of influence, as well as the degree of political and state support these movements receive<sup>1</sup>. In addition, I have been interested in the instrumental and symbolic dimensions of criminal law reforms, particularly the invention, implementation and everyday use of new interventions designed to supplement or replace traditional penal sanctions.

**Christa Pelikan:** My position was somewhat different. I was neither a sociologist nor a lawyer at that time. Today I describe myself as a sociologist of law, but I studied social history at the University of Vienna. For years I worked on my dissertation thesis concerning the history of Austrian family law, which I traced from the Neolithic revolution through Roman and Greek law to contemporary times. A substantial part of my doctoral research involved working with files, both archival and more recent.

I began at the Institute in 1973 in an assistant position, bringing books and such. I am exaggerating, of course, but I was working half-days initially while simultaneously pursuing my doctoral research. In connection with my work on family law, I engaged deeply with Max Weber's concepts in the sociology of law, particularly his ideas on legality and legitimacy. His wife, Marianne, was also working on family law, which further informed my approach. Afterwards, my research focused on the application of victim support legislation, examining files in courts in Vienna and Innsbruck to understand how the law functioned in practice. From there, it was not far to restorative justice, a field I devoted myself to for the rest of my professional career, including its application in cases of intimate partner violence (Pelikan & Hofinger, 2016; Pelikan, 2010).

My path to the Institute came through personal networks characteristic of that era. I had known Steinert since I was thirteen years old. However, the reason I came to the Institute was not this personal acquaintance but rather a recommendation from Irmtraut Goessler who was a leftist politician and was connected to Herbert Leirer, another founding member of the Institute, through an alternative kindergarten – the first Vienna Kinderkollektiv, an antiauthoritarian institution we had founded in 1969.

It was in the late sixties and early seventies, the era of Aufbruch – upheaval in the spirit of 1968. Most of us knew each other through various connections and movements. The recruitment procedures of that time are not comparable with those of today. We were all very young, but this was in a sense an advantage. Many people still working in the criminal justice institutions had been there during the Nazi period. The reform effort required new people.

**VW & VR:** The development of Austrian critical criminology is closely linked to the IRKS, which is now part of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Innsbruck. Could you tell more about its history and significance for Austrian criminology in general?

**AP:** The Institute remains located in Vienna to this day. It was founded there as the Ludwig-Boltzmann-Institut für Kriminalsoziologie, initially operating under the auspices of the Ludwig-Boltzmann-Gesellschaft, which continues to exist as an academic society outside universities. The Ludwig-Boltzmann-Gesellschaft at that time functioned as a scientific start-up body where new disciplines could develop – disciplines not initially welcomed at conservative universities, particularly at law faculties. The Ludwig-Boltzmann-Gesellschaft was more

1 For an early and programmatic paper on proper and meaningful use of crime statistics see Pilgram (1982).

under the influence of social democratic institutions such as labour unions and the Vienna City Government.

From 1984 to 2021, the Institute was operated by a relatively independent private association and renamed Institut für Rechts- und Kriminalsoziologie. The scope of interest was explicitly extended from sociology of crime to sociology of criminal law and law in general – here Christa played an important role with her background. However, this broader scope had characterised our work from the beginning but could now be expressed more explicitly. The focus on the sociology of law set the Institute apart from most other criminological institutes in Europe, which tended to remain within the narrow boundaries of studying crime and offenders.

In 2021, the new management decided to affiliate with the University of Innsbruck to secure a more stable perspective than a private research enterprise could offer. The Institute is now called Institut für Angewandte Rechts- und Kriminalsoziologie – for applied sociology of law and crime. In the addition ‘applied’ one can discern the attempt to preserve the special relationship with the Ministry of Justice. We always resided in the immediate neighbourhood of the Ministry – first in the same building as the Palace of Justice, then we moved to the building opposite the Ministry of Justice.

**CP:** The Institute was established to accompany the Great Penal Law Reform of 1975, which encountered considerable resistance from the judiciary and the public. The then Minister of Justice Christian Broda provided essential assistance at the birth of the Institute, as did his close political friend Elisabeth Schilder, who was head of the Probation Service and Heinz Steinert’s employer at the time. Broda and Schilder had both been in the leftist underground during the fascist era – in the Widerstand, the resistance, insofar as there was one in Austria (see Hauch & Fallend, 2020).

Broda wished to see the law applied, its effects monitored, and ultimately the judiciary and the public convinced by better results – especially less crowded prisons. The Institute was meant to provide this feedback and suggest adjustments. This was not to establish critical criminology per se, but to demonstrate the variability in handling and applying the law – to reveal regional, temporal, and cultural differences in legal practice, and to control it from above.

Such empirical research could not have been expected from the established criminology departments at the institutes for penal law at that time – they functioned essentially as branches of police science, serving as support personnel for investigators. The circumstances of the Institute’s founding were reflected in its original name – Institut für Kriminalsoziologie (Institute for the Sociology of Crime). Although its actual focus was the sociology of penal law, it was politically more prudent to present it as criminal sociology. This was because a ‘sociology of law’ carried provocative connotations which the Ministry of Justice and the Ludwig-Boltzmann-Gesellschaft wanted to avoid; by analysing legal norms and judicial decision-making, it suggested that the political administration could potentially direct a judiciary that prided itself on its independence and self-regulation. In contrast, a ‘sociology of crime’, much like ‘criminology’, implied that it would only provide insights into crime and criminals, and this is generally less threatening to the judiciary.

**VW & VR:** Could you tell more about the role of the Probation Service in Austrian penal policy? Is there anything specific about its conception?

**CP:** The foundation of the Probation Service was from the beginning, in 1957, heavily imbued with psychoanalytic ideas. Its first director, Sepp Schindler, was a psychoanalyst. Schilder, too, came from this tradition and insisted on this approach in probation practice. Given that psychoanalysis was born in Vienna, you would expect it to be everywhere. Not at all! This was quite unique, even though not unprecedented.

Developing the application of psychoanalytic concepts to probation, Schilder and her colleagues followed the work of August Aichhorn. An elementary school teacher who later trained as a psychoanalyst in the Freudian tradition, Aichhorn had worked with young men interned in a residential institution in Oberhollabrunn. He decidedly avoided repression and based his work on a psychoanalytic understanding of young people and their social environment both outside and inside the institution. This was one of the rare instances in which psychoanalysis became relevant for institutional practice, for social work, and ultimately for criminal policy (Aichhorn, 2005).

The psychoanalytical background is very different from anything I have encountered elsewhere. Just think of the term 'probation officer' that is so frequently used in other countries. In Austria, we have no probation officers, no titles from military terminology. Our probation workers are social workers. This distinction is significant for the entire understanding of our approach, and it reflects the different origins from which critical criminology in Austria emerged.

**AP:** Steinert also studied psychology and trained as a psychoanalyst. These qualifications made him well-suited for an organization with a psychoanalytical tradition, such as the Probation Service. In anticipation of a later professional pay-off, the Probation Service supported his academic ambitions, giving him the time and space to complete his habilitation at the University of Graz. His habilitation thesis dealt with the formation of personality within total institutions, such as the military. Steinert spent most of his compulsory military service as a psychologist in the Heerespsychologischer Dienst (the Austrian Army Psychological Service). There, he collected the empirical material to support his assumption that institutions act as more significant agents of socialization than the family (Steinert, 1972).

Appointed as director of the Institute at only 32 years of age, Steinert was genuinely radical in his thinking from the very beginning, looking at things in a completely new and different way. Yet for him, it was not the psychoanalytical connection that proved most important intellectually. He was first and foremost a sociologist, strongly inspired by the ideas of American symbolic interactionists and later critical theory. He edited books here in Vienna introducing these perspectives (Steinert, 1973b). Like Fritz Sack in his own manner, Steinert was one who brought ideas from the US and developed them in his distinctive way. Both of them, with different focuses, also referred to Marxist perspectives.

**VW & VR:** The Institute was founded four years after the Arbeitskreis Junger Kriminologen (Working Group of Young Criminologists) in Germany and in the same year as the European Society for the Study of Deviance and Social Control (Walach, 2024). How important were the relationships with these organizations for Austrian criminology, and what did they bring you personally?

**AP:** Steinert had connections to the Arbeitskreis Junger Kriminologen from the very beginning. He published in their book series with Juventa Verlag even before the Institute was founded. He was the editor of *Der Prozeß der Kriminalisierung* (Steinert, 1973a), an early volume in the series, with contributions from scholars such as Gertrude Edlinger, Irmtraut Goessler, Wolfgang Hinsch, Herbert Leirer, Lukas Lehner from Austria and Wolfgang Kaupen, Karl-Heinz Reuband, Karl Schumann, Hubert Treiber, and Gerd Winter from Germany. The topic was status management by criminalization – the attribution of societal status by criminal law agents, analogous to how schools distribute positive and negative chances and sanctions. In a sense, this announced his later general interest in social exclusion (Steinert & Pilgram, 2007; Steinert, 2005b).

In 1978, only five years after founding the Institute, Steinert was appointed as a Professor in Social Structure and Social Control at Goethe University Frankfurt. This represented a quite different ambiente, scientifically also influenced by the Frankfurt School. Yet he remained director of the Institute and thus helped to institutionalise critical criminology both in Frankfurt and in Vienna. He valued greatly these different sociotopes in which he worked.

Steinert's appointment received considerable support from colleagues at the Frankfurt Law Faculty, such as Klaus Lüderssen, who co-edited textbooks with Fritz Sack. These scholars were interested in interdisciplinary exchange, and Steinert, coming from an institute close to justice administration, promised to be a valuable social science partner for debates. In Frankfurt, he also cooperated with researchers such as Sebastian Scheerer and Henner Hess.

The international connections proved essential during the Institute's early crises. When the Ludwig-Boltzmann-Gesellschaft sought to terminate the Institute and cancelled financing, Steinert mobilised colleagues from across Europe to commend the work of the Institute and to appeal to Minister Christian Broda and even Chancellor Bruno Kreisky for its continuation on a new foundation. The European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control was also instrumental here, with colleagues from the Netherlands and Norway providing crucial support.

**CP:** We participated substantially in the activities of the European Group – I would say our Institute was one of its main pillars. One of the conferences was held here in Vienna, and for years Steinert and several of us attended all the important meetings. The discussions were very exciting – debates about different strategies, about how radical one should be. The women’s issue emerged rather early and created some tensions.

Considering our cooperation with Frankfurt, perhaps the most important project that emerged from it was ‘Ärgernisse und Lebenskatastrophen’ (‘Everyday Nuisances and Life Catastrophes’). The aim was to ask people about difficult situations in their lives that might have had a criminal dimension and how they dealt with them. Based on a survey including approximately 1,000 respondents, we gathered 1,200 or 1,500 stories about their experiences with nuisances and catastrophes (Hanak et al., 1989).

One of the main findings, to which we have always referred when talking to criminal justice professionals, was that only about 3% of the stories collected concluded with a criminal law sentence. What happened to all the others? The respondents used different measures to deal with them, clearly questioning the significance that the state places on criminal law as a means of conflict resolution.

**VW & VR:** Before we continue discussing this topic, I would like to ask about your relationships with criminologists on the other side of the Iron Curtain, and specifically in Czechoslovakia. Did you maintain any?

**CP:** I cannot recall any contacts with Czechoslovakia before the opening of the borders in 1989. We established rather early connections with Hungarian colleagues and maintained very good relations with people in Slovenia at the University of Ljubljana – Alenka Šelih, for example. She was well connected internationally, spoke many languages, and possessed extensive knowledge of criminology in France, England, Italy and other countries. She was one of those great, knowledgeable, broad-minded Eastern Europeans. Perhaps there were also connections with Serbia.

**AP:** Austria was one of the first European countries to practically recognise the German Democratic Republic, but this had little consequence for scientific matters – it was primarily about economic exchange. As for our Slovenian colleagues, Marxist theory did not play a significant role in their approach. They were certainly familiar with it, but it had no substantial influence. They were not ideologically driven. We did not discuss theory much when we met colleagues from the East. We were interested in practical matters such as establishing research projects. Shortly after the opening of the border, there was a small project on its consequences in which we cooperated with colleagues from Bratislava, Budapest, and Krakow, focusing on smuggling and related issues.

**VW & VR:** The critique of criminal justice is one of the key contributions of critical criminologists, including Heinz Steinert, who has been mentioned many times. He is probably still the best-known Austrian criminologist today, although he would probably not see himself this way. Why do you think he deserved this status? Which of his ideas do you consider most important?

**AP:** Aside from his role in institutionalizing critical criminology in both Austria and Germany, Steinert developed our understanding of criminal law not just as an instrument to manage crime risks but also as a symbolic instrument for politics to manage legitimacy. For Steinert, penal law served more to illustrate and propagate a political regime than to produce security. He became interested early in populist politics, which he saw as a generalised form of politics – and the prominent role of penal law in populist strategies.

In Frankfurt, his most intimate scholarly companion in this research was Helga Cremer-Schäfer. Their joint book *Straflust und Repression: Zur Kritik der populistischen Kriminologie* (Desire to Punish and Repression: Towards a Critique of Populist Criminology) (Cremer-Schäfer & Steinert, 1998) represents a manifesto of their critical criminology, or, ‘critique of criminology’ as they emphasise. The focus lies less on the workings of crime control institutions than on the production of public knowledge about crime, violence, and means to address it, not least by criminology. Steinert was influenced by the Frankfurt School, particularly Adorno’s thinking on culture industry and its ideological functions (see also Steinert, 2003). The culture of punitivity, in this view, responds not to crime problems but to problems of domination and ruling.

Steinert never suspended participation in criminological discourse, yet can be regarded as an anti-criminologist. Criminality is not a matter of course, as the discipline takes it to be. Steinert advocated analysing crime as a section of everyday nuisance and conflicts, as we discussed it above. This perspective from below, rather

than through the legal frame, reveals the limited importance of police and courts for coping with conflicts and exclusion (Hanak et al., 1989; Steinert & Pilgram, 2007).

The category of crime, Steinert argued, provides no adequate starting point for sociological analysis and should be replaced by others. To quote Nils Christie's paper that he presented in Vienna in the Christian Broda lecture series at Steinert's invitation: 'Kriminalität gibt es nicht!' ('Criminality Does Not Exist!') In this respect, Steinert was a conceptual abolitionist, in addition to being a staunch penal abolitionist. In the early 1980s, he and I wrote a paper 'Plädoyer für bessere Gründe für die Abschaffung der Gefängnisse und für Besseres als die Abschaffung der Gefängnisse' ('Plea for Better Reasons for the Abolition of Prisons and for Something Better than the Abolition of Prisons') (Pilgram & Steinert, 1981). This was one of the first contributions to considering conflict regulation as more suited to people's needs, while simultaneously reducing punitivity.

**CP:** Steinert was not only a conceptual and penal abolitionist but also a criminology abolitionist. In 2003, when our Institute celebrated its 30th anniversary, we hosted an international conference reflecting on criminology as both an actor in and a critic of societal development. It was the conference of the Gesellschaft für interdisziplinäre wissenschaftliche Kriminologie (GiwK), which was founded in Germany in 1989 as an alternative to the mainstream Kriminologische Gesellschaft. While the Arbeitskreis Junger Kriminologen remained a largely informal network, the GiwK provided an institutional platform necessary for obtaining official funding. At the conference, Steinert delivered a keynote speech whose title speaks for itself: 'Die Kriminologie hat keine Fehler, sie ist der Fehler' ('Criminology Has No Faults, Criminology Itself is the Fault') (Steinert, 2005a).

However, Steinert's practical successes were no less important. He certainly contributed to the introduction of the Außergerichtlicher Tatausgleich into the Austrian penal law. This victim-offender mediation mechanism was launched in 1988 for juvenile offenders. It was preceded by a pilot project in Vienna, Innsbruck, and Eisenstadt, implemented jointly by the Probation Service and our Institute. We provided what I called 'accompanying research,' falling somewhere between evaluation research and action research. In practice, this meant combining quantitative mapping of the field in which the new instrument was to intervene with intensive interviewing and discussion work. This involved participating in conferences and confronting mediators, judges and public prosecutors with the experiences and views of their colleagues at other project sites. This last element was what I referred to as instigating and supporting ongoing reflection.

The positive results then contributed to its extension to adult offenders and even internationally. In 1996, I was sent by the Austrian Ministry of Justice to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, where they had established a committee of experts on mediation in penal matters. The objective was to develop recommendations for including mediation in penal matters. As said before, Austria was already advancing along this path of restorative justice. German colleagues who knew me, such as Heike Jung, proposed that I assume the chairpersonship since Austria had something to contribute. For three years, I attended the sessions of this committee, where we designed Recommendation No. R (99) 19 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States concerning mediation in penal matters – the first decision of an international organization recognizing mediation as a legitimate component of the criminal justice process (Pelikan, 2004).

**VW & VR:** A similar question about Austrian critical criminology as a whole. How do you think it has contributed to criminological thought? And what influence has it had on criminal justice practice in Austria?

**AP:** These are two distinct questions. The influence of Austrian critical criminology on criminology in general is to a considerable degree the influence of Steinert and of our Institute by his side. I think that the Institute's relevance was secured in part by our publishing activities. In addition to contributing to the Kriminologisches Journal, we regularly published the Kriminalsoziologische Bibliografie and the Jahrbücher für Rechts- und Kriminalsoziologie. The former was published quarterly, and all issues are now available online (Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Kriminalsoziologie, 1973–1991). A key feature of the Bibliografie was its comprehensive list of international publications from the preceding quarter, which helped bridge the gap between regional and global scholarship.

The yearbooks, on the other hand, provided a platform for in-depth, thematic explorations of specific criminological issues. Published between 1993 and 2003, the inaugural volume reflected the debates following the fall of the Iron Curtain and was titled 'Grenzöffnung, Migration, Kriminalität' (Borders Opening, Migration, Crime). The 1998 edition focused on 'New York's Zero Tolerance Policy', a topic directly influenced by Steinert's

research stay in New York City during the Rudolph Giuliani administration. In 2000, we turned our attention to both theoretical and empirical analyses of social exclusion and resistance. This illustrates well our continuing efforts to study contemporary issues from critical perspectives. The yearbooks were followed by a new series of books, *Schriften zur Rechts- und Kriminalsoziologie* (Writings on Legal and Criminal Sociology), which I co-edited until 2012 and which was published until 2021<sup>2</sup>. The last volume was the publication commemorating my 75th birthday.

The question of impact on criminal justice practice is another matter. We talked about *Außergerichtlicher Tausch* and Steinert's contribution to its creation. Although he was the first to come up with specific theoretical and practical ideas, he never claimed authorship, and in fact a number of people were involved in its preparation and implementation, from Ministry of Justice employees to prosecutors and judges to people from NEUSTART. The formation of such a broad alliance largely reflected the spirit of the times, which was, if not anti-state, then certainly in favour of 'less state'. This idea was attractive to both people on the left, who saw victim-offender mediation as a progressive alternative to prison, and people on the right, who were impressed by the idea of limited state involvement and an emphasis on personal self-responsibility. The response of the public and media was overwhelmingly positive.

The present climate is far less welcoming to changes of that kind. The repeated demonstration of strong local variation in legal practice has not generated enough pressure to change habits in daily professional routine and adopt more lenient yet no less effective practices. The judiciary continues to insist strongly on its independence, and politicians remain reluctant to critically comment on jurisprudence. Although better monitoring has been promoted by our work, penal politics and policy is not driven by research.

**CP:** I would add another dimension that can be easily overlooked. Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, evaluation of innovative procedures, at least, gradually became a standard feature of new legislation, and our Institute was part of that development. When the pilot project on victim-offender mediation started, accompanying research was already built in. But more broadly, the idea that you should look at what you are doing, examine the outcome, and assess the validity of what you are doing became increasingly institutionalised. To give two examples from the turn of the millennium, when Austria introduced the *Kronzeugenregelung* (the crown witness regulation), the law itself stipulated that the experience should be evaluated after five years. Similarly, when criminal liability for legal persons such as companies, associations and political parties was introduced, evaluation of its practical functioning was part of the design from the beginning. I think systematic evaluation is now regarded as standard practice, which was by no means the case when we started.

And yet, when you ask about the influence that critical criminology has had on practice, I find myself confronted with a question that has given me sleepless nights. Did we, in the restorative justice movement, achieve anything? Has any real change taken place, or have all these efforts been incorporated and neutralised into the conventional criminal justice system? It is very difficult to change a system, but at least critical criminology and restorative justice offer a point from which we can start. And the potential to bring arguments and enthusiasm to people is still there. It has a humanistic dimension that continues to motivate people, as a counterweight to what increasingly feels like a technically brutalised, money-oriented and ever more punitive world.

**VW & VR:** How would you assess the current state of critical criminology in Austria? How do you think it should develop?

**AP:** Critical criminology in Austria can no longer be identified with one single institution like the Institute for Applied Sociology of Law and Criminology in Vienna. One of the key figures of critical criminology, companion of Heinz Steinert, temporary member and short term scientific director of the institute, Reinhard Kreissl, founded VICESSE (Vienna Center for Societal Security) in 2015. There you find another support base for Critical Police and Security Studies in the country.

However, the distinctions between critical and conventional criminology have become increasingly diffuse. Labelling theory is now general knowledge, incorporated into mainstream thinking, but its critical, abolitionist edge has been somewhat lost in the process. What remains of critical thinking is still alive in certain individuals, but there is no longer any shared theoretical framework to build on or develop further. But this is exactly what needs to be preserved. Penal abolitionism and restorative justice should go hand in hand. You can abolish the

<sup>2</sup> See <https://lit-verlag.de/produkt-kategorie/reihen/irks/>.

worst measures of penal law and even try to abolish penal law in general, but you would still need to deal with people who harm others. This is where restorative justice comes in. What we need to challenge is this widespread feeling that we need to address pain with pain, otherwise the world would fall apart. Another way of thinking is needed here, and criminologists should continue working on its theorising and examining alternative measures of conflict resolution.

At the same time, we should be careful not to fall into 'taking crime seriously' – the slogan of the left realists in Britain that made Steinert furious (Steinert, 1985). The category of crime still needs to be approached reflectively, crime statistics still need to be deconstructed. Take the question of foreign nationals and crime. On one level you can look at demographic indicators such as age, sex, class, and much of the apparent difference in criminality disappears.

On another level you have to look at the quite different legal situations that various groups face; tourists are not long-term residents and vice versa, and there are many categories in between. This then influences what strategies they develop to cope. In some cases, crime is not just a survival strategy, but also a step toward integrating into society (e.g. Pilgram & Schwarzl, 2018). Immigrants get involved in services that many Austrians do not want to provide or that are simply too risky for them, such as drug trade. Another example concerns domestic violence incidents reported by immigrant women. This can be a good sign to the extent that this shows that there is no parallel society, that these women perceive the Austrian state as a system that provides an important service to them. Otherwise, they would not bother to report it.

But there is also a third level, where you can observe how foreigners are also victims of *Klassenjustiz* when they are treated more harshly than native Austrians. This selective criminalization and punishment can be demonstrated using the statistics.

**CP:** Sometimes it seems to me that criminologists today no longer want to change the world, but rather to be useful to the government or to other customers who want to sell simple solutions for crime prevention and security. Criminologists are not so much prepared for and interested in setting the agenda as they are in getting involved in the agendas set by others.

One problem is to keep insights alive. Even when you thought you had conducted thorough and persuasive research, having helped to establish a practical restorative approach to conflicts, like victim-offender mediation, you soon discover that it needs a lot more. I researched the use of victim-offender mediation in domestic violence cases in Austria, which was a highly controversial topic from the start and several times after. The summary of my empirical results was 'It didn't change men (yet at least some) but made women stronger'. While my findings showed that it can work in certain situations, the approach faced strong criticism, especially from parts of the women's movement. This was disappointing, not to say painful. True commitment to women's empowerment is not a plea for stiff penalties but to acknowledge that there are other ways of truly empowering women victims, help them regain control over their lives (making them able to use agencies of support and information) and relationships.

To be recognised and accepted, empirical work also needs to form alliances and find strong partners in policy makers, prepared to use these results and to hold them against fast and easy solutions. It was possible to establish cooperation with practitioners working with women victims. They need to be heard more within the women's movement.

**VW & VR:** As someone who have dedicated your entire professional lives to critical criminology, what advice would you give to younger scholars who wish to continue this tradition today?

**AP:** Hard to answer. One piece of advice to scholars and newcomers in criminological work would be to study the history of criminology which mirrors the changing societal paradigms of crime and responses to it. Another piece of advice would be to read your, Václav, interviews.

**CP:** My advice would be 'Look closely, think patiently, and don't let yourself be fooled' (meaning: don't fall prey to trendy and catchy ideologies), a phrase Heinz Steinert used in teaching his students (Steinert, 1984). And find allies who do the same, who are close to the complex life world.

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