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# **Looking for professional identity with ups and downs: the Belgian experience in criminology**

**International conference on “The profession of  
criminologist today: content, challenges and  
prospects”**

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***Stephan Parmentier***

***Leuven Institute of Criminology***

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# Introduction

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- booming criminology, in research, teaching and practice
- but problems with identity of the profession, external and internal aspects

# 1. Key issues in professional identity

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## 1.1. Characteristics of liberal professions:

- territorial protection:
  - controlling the offer (size control - quality control)
  - controlling the demand
- self regulation:
  - disciplinary regulation
  - judicial proceedings
- controlling the relationship with clients
- financial autonomy

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## **1.2. Some aspects of criminological professional identity:**

- special knowledge and skills
- separate teaching/training programmes
- autonomous research and publications
- limited labour market requirements
- few professional associations

## 2. Developing criminology in four phases

### 2.1. Phase 1 (1920s-1950s):

- Pioneers from two main backgrounds: (criminal) law and medical sciences (psychiatry)
- Criminology courses as electives for lawyers and medical doctors
- Criminology only taught in French
- Little research on criminal (justice) issues
- Establishment of Schools of Criminology within Faculties of Law (Leuven 1929, Brussels 1939)

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## **2.2. Phase 2 (1950s-1960s):**

- The further institutionalisation of criminology
- First criminological courses taught in Dutch
- International orientation (e.g. Etienne De Greeff)
- Little systematic research

## 2.3. Phase 3 (1960s-1980s):

- The years of societal transformation: criminology as the sociology of crime and criminal justice
- Development of a new curriculum (first as post-graduate degree, then as full-fledged education)
- First criminology graduates and careers in criminology
- Start of academic research on a variety of criminal justice institutions (e.g. prison sentences, policing behaviour, etc)



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## 2.4. Phase 4 (since 1980s):

- Criminological sciences as a forum of various disciplines (e.g. criminal law, sociology, psychology, anthropology, organisational studies) and various topics (e.g. juvenile justice, organised crime, restorative justice, human rights)
- Innovations in the curriculum: methodology courses, student internships
- Separate curricula in the North (4 years in Dutch, 1 Master year in English) and the South (2 years)
- Booming student numbers (e.g. Leuven currently has 800 crim students)
- Start of international exchanges (Erasmus within Europe, EU-Canada, New Zealand, South Africa)
- Expanding academic research, also with international orientation

### 3. Some essential features of Belgian criminology

- Criminology as a forum of various disciplines
- Strong (internal) connection with criminal law, also institutionally
- Strong (external) connection with traditional actors in criminal justice (e.g. corrections, police), but also newer labour markets (e.g. victim services, private security)
- Curricula include practical placements
- No reserved jobs for criminologists
- No professional organisation

# 4. Challenges for the future

- What are the core competences of a criminologist ?
- What is the disciplinary orientation of criminology, caught between criminal law and social sciences?
- How to build in international exposure and contacts with the world of practice and policy making?
- How to reinforce the relation between teaching and research (e.g. two-year master programme)?
- What about size and quality control of criminologists?
- Is professional secrecy part of the criminologist's relationship with clients?
- Is there any future for non-state employment for criminologists?
- What is the role of professional organisations for criminologists?

# CONTACTS

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**Thank you for your attention !**

**Further information:**

**[stephan.parmontier@law.kuleuven.be](mailto:stephan.parmontier@law.kuleuven.be)**

**[www.law.kuleuven.be/linc](http://www.law.kuleuven.be/linc)**