

Policy Matters: how drug and social policies impact locally and how communities have responded

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Key messages

- Clondalkin is not alone
- Global policies of the last thirty years have been harmful
- Poor communities have suffered most
- Communities have responded and resisted
- Now people have had enough
- Communities need to form alliances
- Drug policies need to link with wider social and economic policies
- Public health approach integrates policies



Capitalism – inequality, poverty and austerity policies

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICIES

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The Divide

What happens when the rich get richer?

- Toxic effects of divided communities on everyone who lives in them
- Income inequality explains most modern social ills – violence, obesity, drug abuse, depression, teenage pregnancies, ill health
- Breakdown of society, fear of crime, rising mental health issues
- Rise of super-rich
- Debt

Wilkinson and Pickett *The Spirit Level* 2009

Era of neo liberalism

‘changes in social rights, growth in inequality, restructuring of the welfare state, liberalisation of labour markets, deregulation of financial markets, outsourcing of public services, dismantling of corporatism’

Steffan Mau *Inequality, marketization and the majority class: why did the European middle classes accept neo-liberalism?*
Palgrave Provocations 2015: vii



COMMUNITY SEGREGATION AND DEPRIVATION

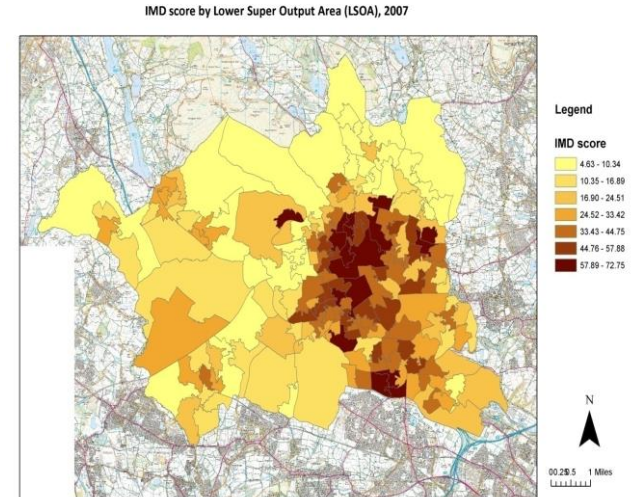
Space matters

Inequality is visible

Rich take up more space

Poor live with hazards, pollution
and harm

Concentration of problems





War on drugs versus harm reduction

DRUG POLICIES

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War on Drugs

President Nixon



The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: **the anti-war left** and **black people**.

*"You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or blacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin - and then criminalizing both heavily, **we could disrupt those communities**. . . We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."*

[former Nixon domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman, April 2016 *Harpers Magazine*]



Making drug control 'fit for purpose'

Antonio Maria Costa

UNODC Executive Director 7 March 2008

Unintended consequences of current drug policies

- criminal black market
- policy displacement
- geographical displacement
- substance displacement
- distorted perceptions of users of illicit drugs

Also important to note that the Conventions were *drafted before the new health challenges became manifest*







Impact of heroin epidemic on poor estates

You have to take heroin to feel normal
Rattling - gouching

All the young men who've died
All funerals

This is happening in my family

My dad was a drug dealer
– his home was called
THE SHOP

You're in a dream world – your own big
plastic bubble

Living in a War
Zone

Constant thieving

This policeman came to give a talk
to the Residents Association on
security

While he was giving his talk,
someone set his car on fire and
stole his helmet

He gave me heaven
on a piece of foil



Lorraine in Bradford

Then - before the heroin epidemic – there was a sense of community but it was really rough – then everyone was in for alcohol – so it was horrible before but there was a sense of community

Now – the estate's been fractured – the drugs wrecked it really –

Everyday I feel hurt, pain, anger, hate - that's why I went on heroin – to block out those feelings

Some people are getting their lives together with a lot of courage and determination - but others going down a big steep hill, into a big black hole



Community based approaches

Themes in framing drugs problem locally

- community safety
- neighbourhood decline
- crime
- drug dealing
- parenting
- child protection
- policing strategies
- influence of outsiders

Why they work

- Make problems visible
- Demand solutions
- Demand reallocation of resources
- Different way of seeing the problem
- Challenge moral frameworks
- Give voice to those previously excluded



*the smallest event can rip through
poor lives, sending them spinning
out of control*

Matthew Desmond *Evicted* 2016 [Ethnographic study of Milwaukee]

Never let a good crisis go to waste

IMPACT LOCALLY

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The Paradox of Partnership: conflicting outcomes

Liberal governance

- civil society and NGOs involved
- local champions crucial
- sharing best practice a benefit
- issues raised on local and national agendas

Economics of neoliberalism

- Communities fragmented and destabilised
- Managerialism
- Constant restructuring
- Constant change in goals and targets
- Lack of resources, both financial and human
- Short term contracts – difficult to build or retain staff
- Unrealistic objectives
- Performance management pushes agencies to focus on short-term targets



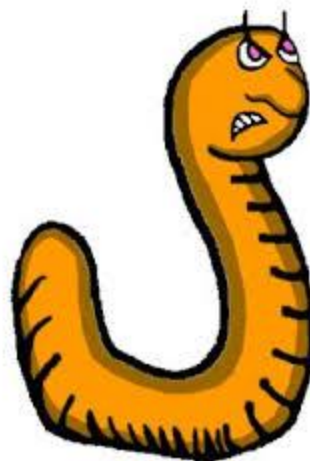
Substance use ever changing and endemic



The collage displays a wide variety of illicit drug packaging and products, including:

- JAX**: A black package with red circular patterns.
- Spice**: A yellow and green package featuring a large eye graphic.
- Kronic**: A blue and black package with a stylized 'K'.
- Benzo Fury**: A silver and orange package labeled 'RESEARCH CHEMICAL PELLETS'.
- ZONK**: A blue and yellow package with a stylized 'Z'.
- Pink Champagne**: A pink package with a champagne glass graphic.
- Other products**: Various other packages and products, including 'Annihilation 1g', 'Exotic', 'Hypnotic', 'Star Dust', 'CHARGE+', 'BLOW', 'TSEBZ', and 'Pink Champagne'.



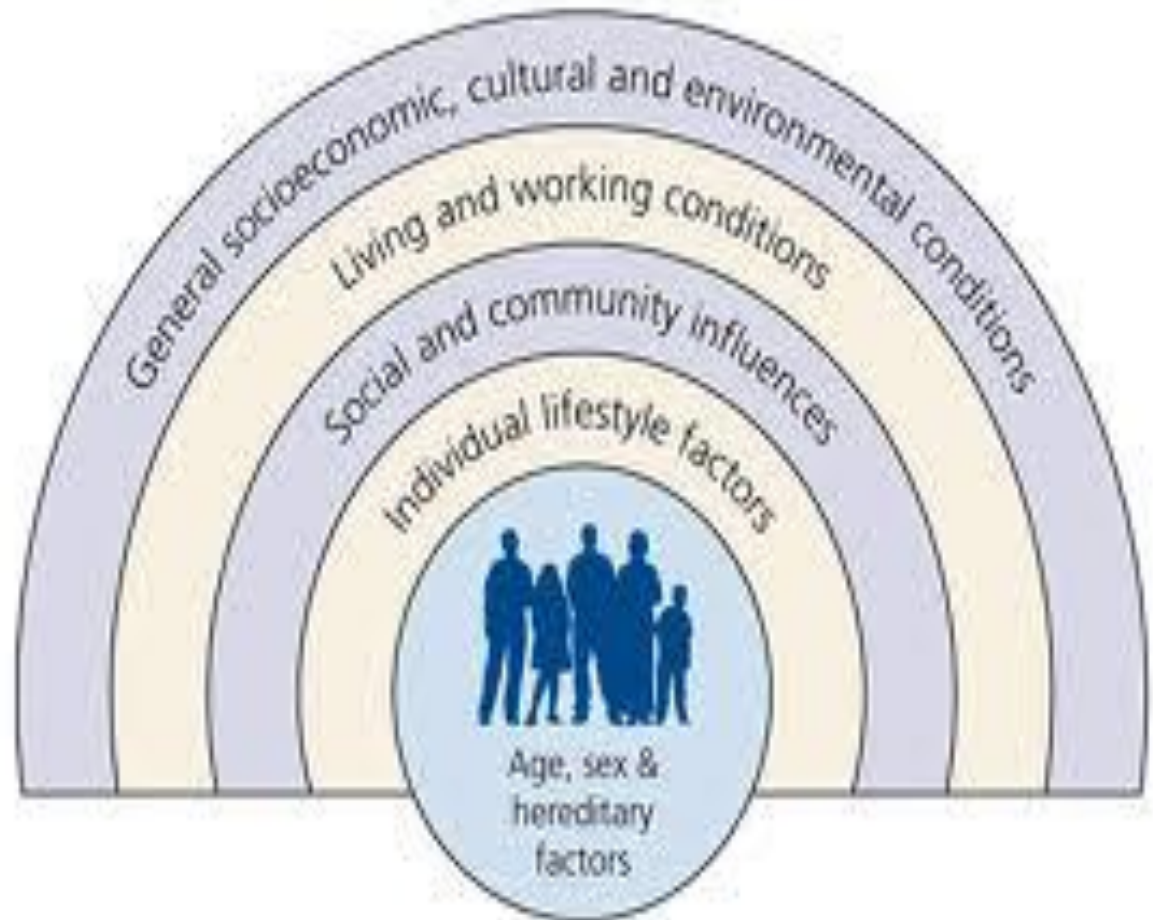


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The value of a public health approach

- social determinants
- healthy life styles
- at risk groups, behaviours and settings



Conclusions for policy

- Keep **local people** in the picture - otherwise policies lose their radicalism and momentum
- Communities need support among politicians - only governments can change the law and allocate resources
- Give local areas flexibility to respond to the shape of the problem in their area
- Abstinence and prohibition-based policies do not work – they are too constraining and out of date
- Base policy and practice on **harm reduction** principles - including for the police
- More generally, link drug policies to policies to build a more equal and caring welfare (**health and wellbeing**) state

