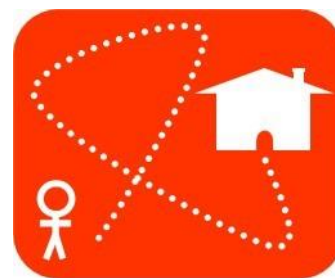


Blog Post
14 December 2016
**Tracking People: Scoping the landscape and debates
across domains**



Today I took a much-needed break from thesis writing to participate in the first seminar organised by the coordinators of a new cross-disciplinary network called 'Tracking People' (see www.trackingpeople.leeds.ac.uk). In line with the aims of the network itself, a diverse range of professionals who have an interest in wearable tracking devices also attended, with academics, policy-makers, practitioners, engineers, and providers from across Europe all descending on the University of Leeds. During the event a series of highly engaging presentations were delivered that mapped contemporary tracking activity within the domains of health and criminal justice. In turn, a series of stimulating questions were posed - for instance, can informed consent to be tracked be obtained from those with dementia? Is it necessary for offenders to be tagged with devices that can only be removed using bolt cutters? And, who should be held responsible if electronic monitoring fails?

The highlight of the day for me personally, however, was being given the opportunity to hold and inspect a SCRAM CAM tag (see image below). In a nutshell, SCRAM CAM technology provides round-the-clock non-invasive measurement of both the frequency and the quantity of alcohol intake. The 'sobriety tag' is locked to a person's ankle and contains three sensors: an electrochemical alcohol sensor that samples the insensible perspiration that is close to the surface of the skin once every 30 minutes, and two anti-circumvention detection sensors that confirm proximity to the skin and skin temperature. Data is uploaded from the tag to a Base Station installed at the wearer's address via a wireless radiofrequency signal; the Base Station then transmits the information to a secure remote server at two pre-determined times per day for subsequent inspection via a web-based platform. Blips caused by household chemicals that contain alcohol are readily identifiable by those trained to scrutinise Transdermal Alcohol Concentration data and are therefore not flagged as drinking episodes.



My interest in SCRAM CAM stems from my doctoral research which entails empirically reconstructing the complex political process in which Kit Malthouse (London's Deputy Mayor for Policing (2008-2012)) and his allies strived to replicate the South Dakota 24/7 Sobriety Project (see www.apps.sd.gov/atg/dui247/) in England's capital to combat alcohol-fuelled crime. The plot of this 'international-subnational' crime and criminal justice policy transfer story is certainly enthralling, with twists and turns, victories and defeats, and conflicts and compromises littered throughout. I won't reveal too much here as I am writing a series of academic papers and don't want to give away any major *spoilers*. Nevertheless, with the 2015 Conservative Party manifesto pledging to rollout alcohol abstinence orders and sobriety tags across England and Wales (see www.conservatives.com/manifesto), transdermal alcohol monitoring does look set to become a more prominent feature of the criminal justice landscape. Whether employment of such technology as part of a demand-side policy intervention will 'work' to reduce alcohol-related violence, decrease the cost of irresponsible alcohol consumption to statutory agencies, and support a long-term shift in public attitudes towards 'binge drinking' remains to be seen. I for one, will be eagerly awaiting the publication of independent evaluation reports.

I greatly enjoyed the first Tracking People seminar, and look forward to attending the next event which will explore the legal and ethical issues arising from tracking devices.

Laura Bainbridge
Doctoral Researcher
Department of Social Policy and Social Work
University of York
Email: lb506@york.ac.uk