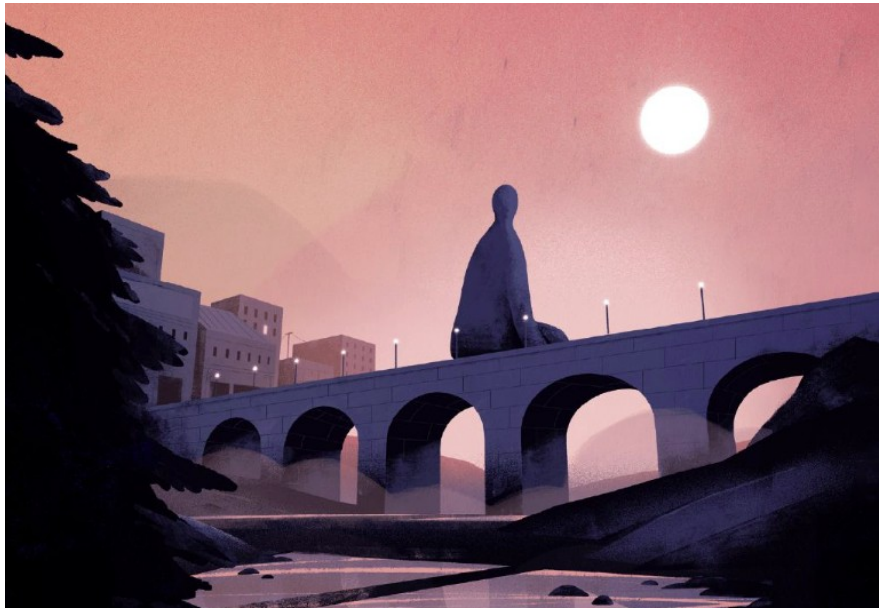
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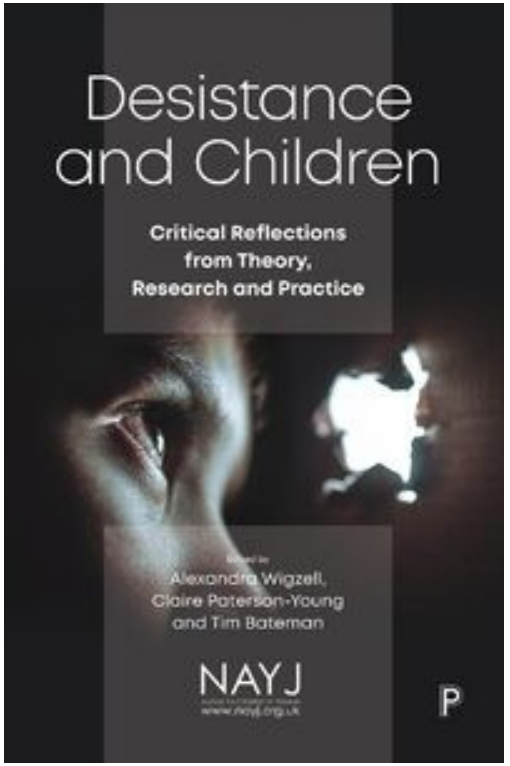
Developmental Trajectories:
From Offending to Desistance



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Desistance & Young People

- When young people get into trouble, what should be our focus?
  - Punishment: Teaching them a lesson?
  - Their behaviour and the risks they represent?
  - Their welfare?
  - Their rights?
  - Their development and how we can best support it?
- The politics of youth offending and youth justice
  - Desistance or Child First?



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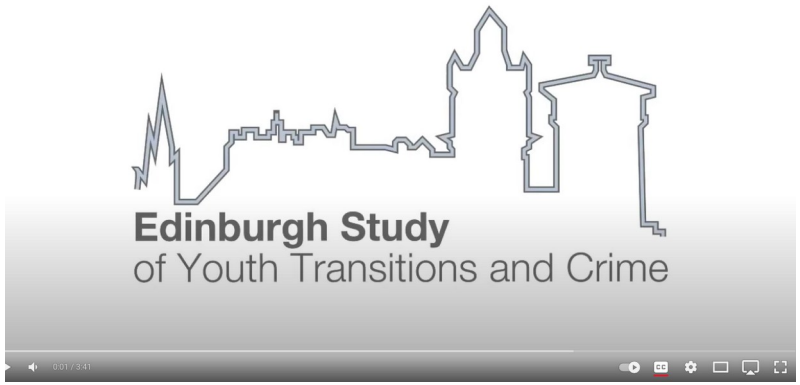
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Getting it right for every child



Arrested (or disrupted) development

- The Edinburgh study of youth transitions
  - https://[YouTube] [the edinburgh study of youth transitions] ac.uk



  - https://youtu.be/nlBH7ibK8ZA?si=kmqzuwhk7Y9tnbPy

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Punishment Disintegrates

- Criminalization
  - Simplification
  - Flattening
  - Distortion
- Penalization
  - Judgement
  - Marginalization
  - Estrangement
- Effects on…
  - Belonging
  - Identity
  - Behaviour

www.distantvoices.org.uk



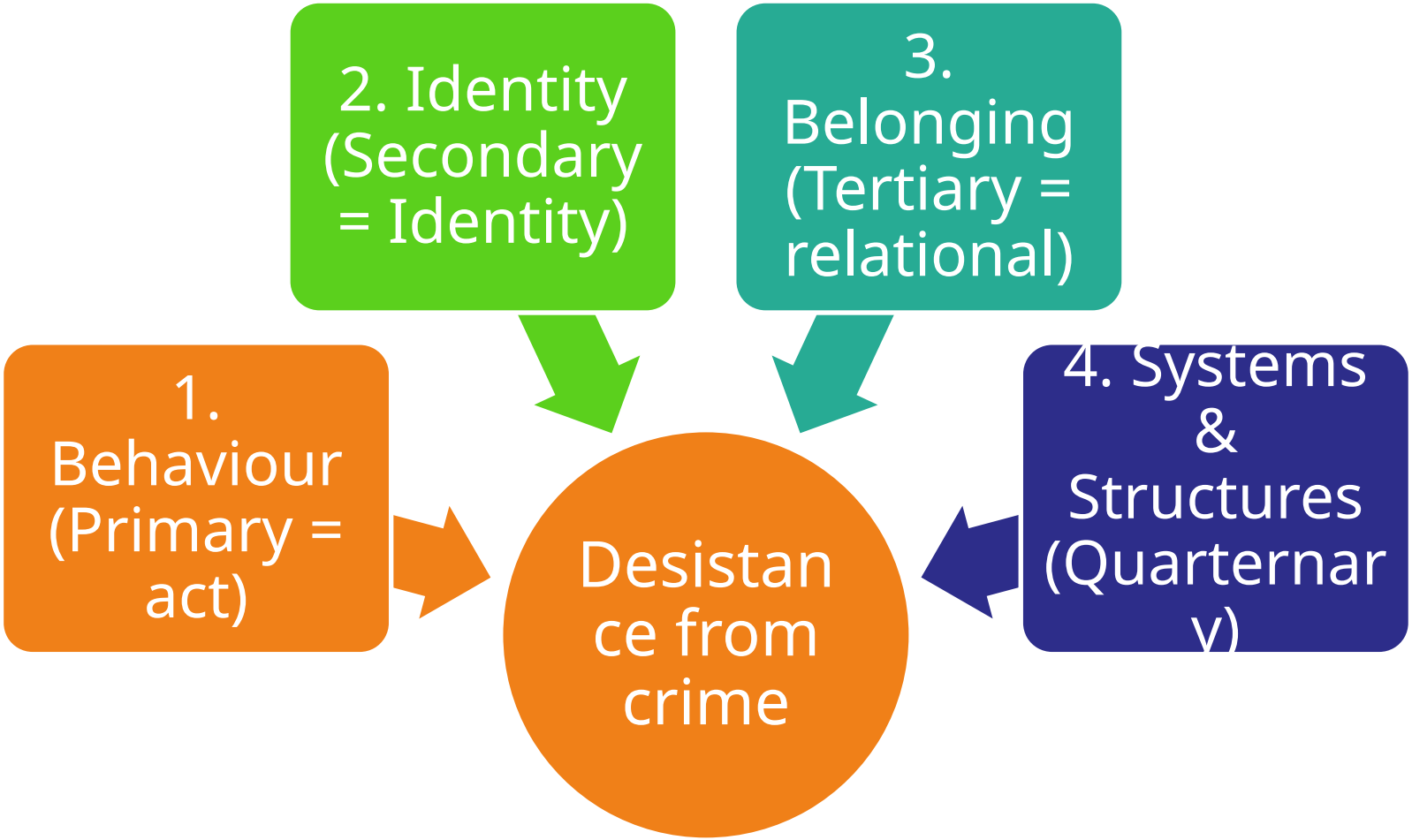
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Frustrating desistance

- Schinkel and Nugent (2016): The pains of desistance
  - Two very different samples… similar experiences
  - The pains of isolation
  - The pains of goal failure
  - The pains of hopelessness
- There are **structural and cultural barriers** to desistance and re/integration which must be addressed; otherwise supporting **promoting hope and personal transformation** may be cruel.

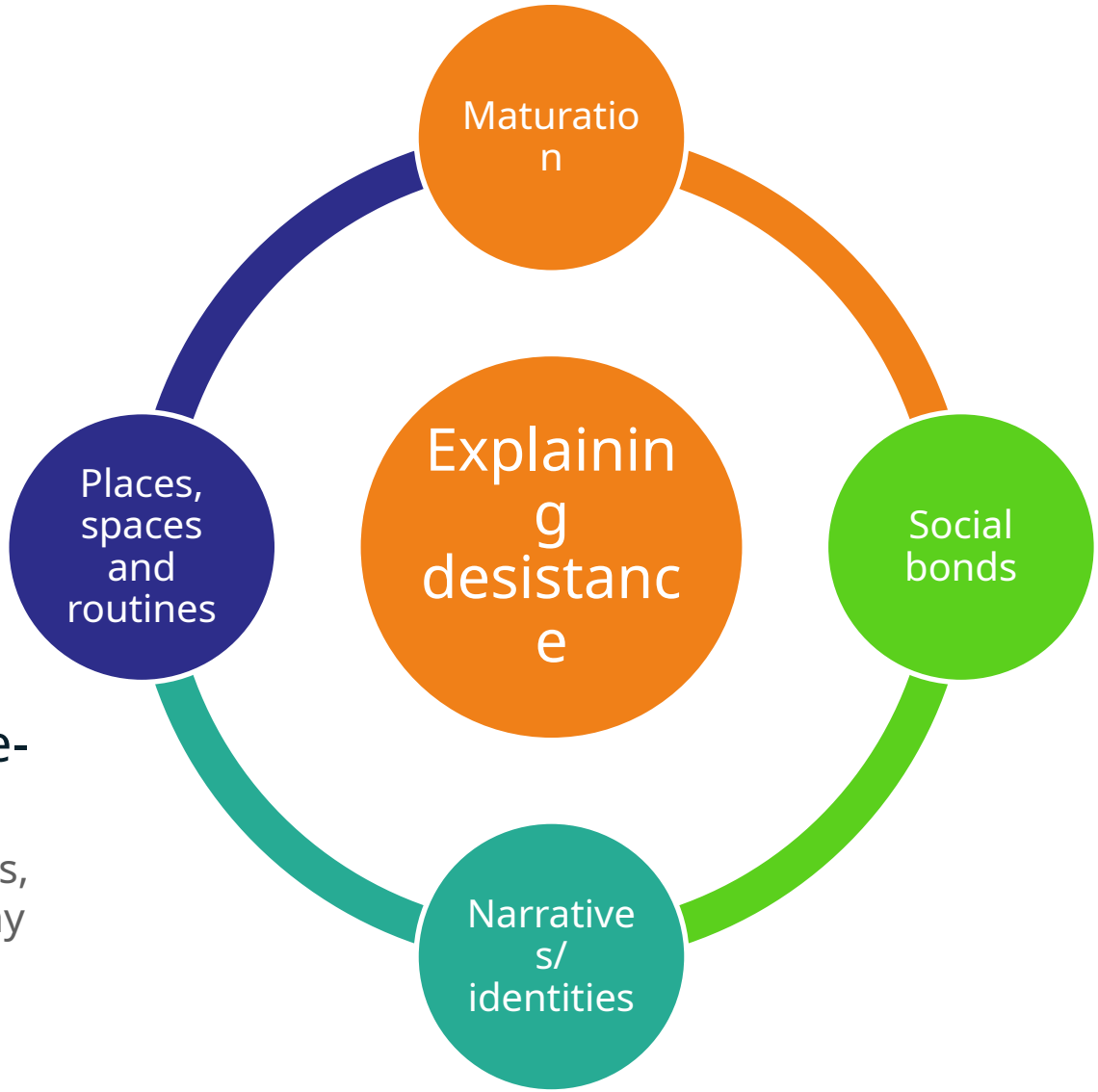
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3 (or 4) dimensions of desistance



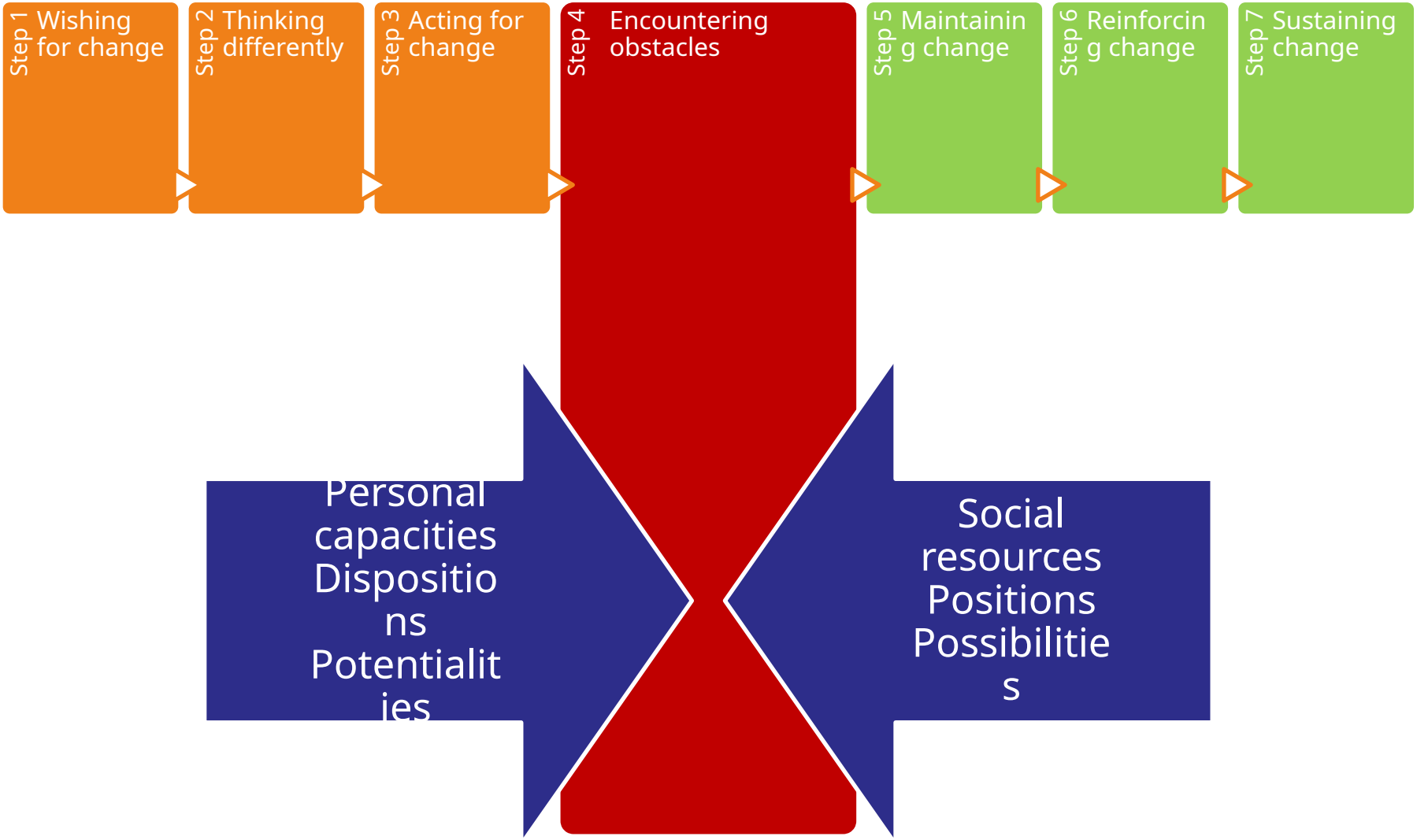
Understanding desistance

- A (natural) process of development, bigger and broader than a professional practice process
- But one that can be supported or undermined by policy and practice
- Supporting desistance requires an expanded conception of evidence-based practice
  - Yes, ‘what works’ matters, but so does how and why people change, and sustain change.



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The desistance process
(Bottoms and Shapland, 2011)



Contexts of and resources for desistance

- Different socio-structural contexts
  - e.g. social class, poverty/inequality, social im/mobility, labour market conditions, racism and raclialisation, minoritisation, social policies
- Different cultural dynamics
  - e.g. ethnic diversity, religion, communities
- Different personal/individual influences
  - e.g. sex, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, neuro-diversity, prior trauma

Desistance in Chile

- Structural factors matters
  - Social inequalities create ambivalence about about and contradictions in seeking change
  - ‘Identity’ and ‘turning points’ in context… (cf. Di Marco et al (2025) on parenthood)
- Social relations matter
  - Support, assistance, opportunity, recognition
- Gendered pathways
  - Masculinities, feminities and social roles/expectations/opportunities
  - Increasing imprisonment of women
- Quality of opportunities, stage of development, and context/type of offending matter





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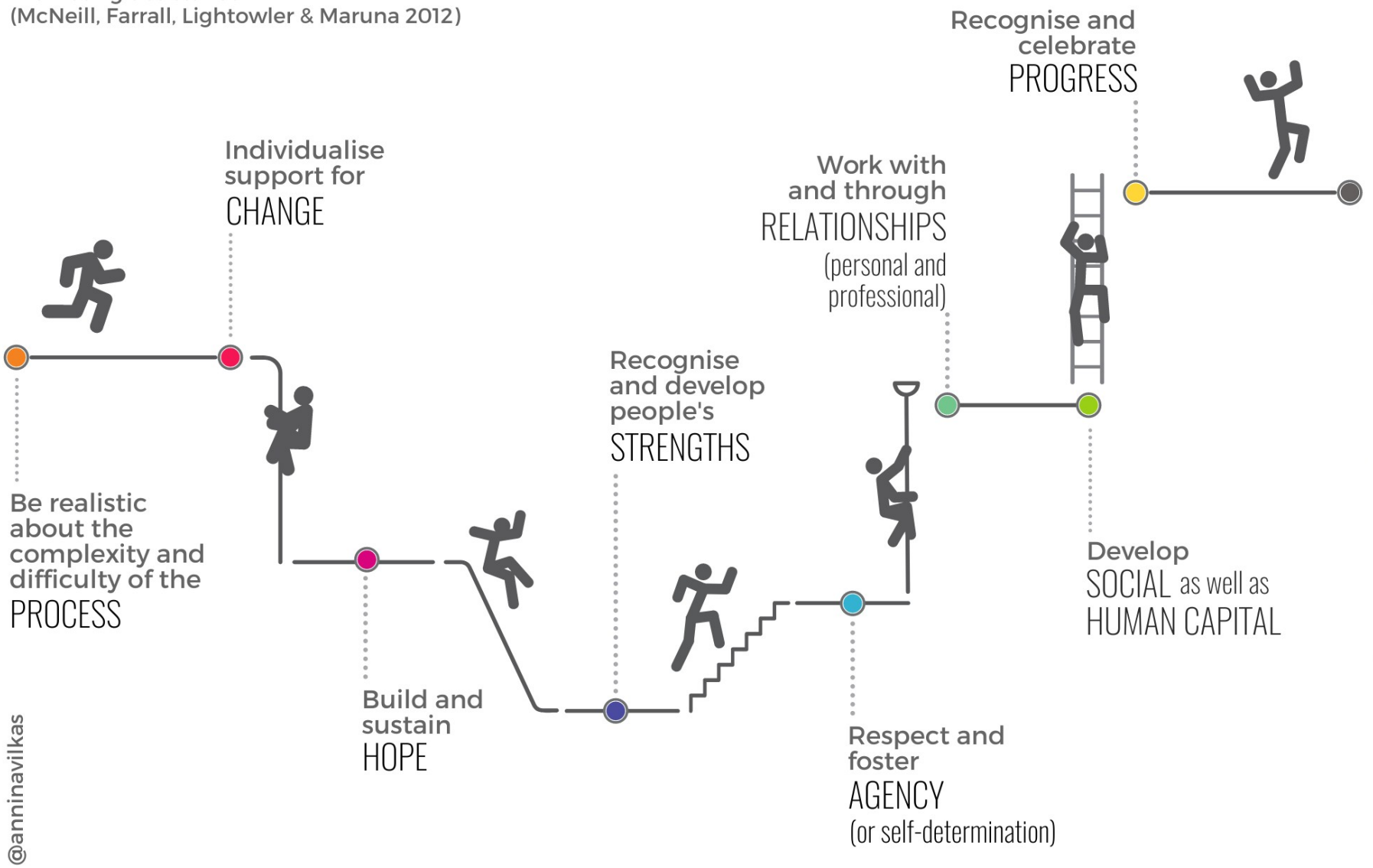
Illustrating context dependence (Wigzell and Bateman, 2024)

Group	Offending history	Nature of offending	Narrative of offending	Starting self-identity	Self-identity development and behaviour trajectory	Perceived role of YJS in pathways
Conformists	0 -1 prior out of court disposals	Criminal damage, assault	Due to immaturity – a 'silly mistake'	Positive self-identity	See themselves as having 'grown up' and put offending behind them	No support with desistance felt to be needed
Uncertains	1-2 prior out of court disposals	Violence	Uncontrollable anger, Internalised shame	Faltering self-identity	Continuing uncertainty about who they are and might become – can see both possible positive future self and negative offending future self (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009)	Despondent about the YJS's capacity to help
Shifters	1 or more prior convictions	Robbery, domestic burglary, assault, PWITS	Adversity and involvement in the YJS seen as a 'wake-up call'	Faltering self-identity	Focused on 'becoming' the best version of themselves. Express optimism and aspiration for future. Want to 'give back' to society (Maruna, 2001)	YJS worker helps them to feel 'believed in' and hopeful for their future
Survivors (custodial sentence)	Multiple prior convictions	Violence, robbery, domestic burglary	Offending provides status, belonging and sense of control	Identity embedded in offending	Emphasis on self-reliance. Focused on day-to-day survival rather than future. Self-identity change perceived as a risk to safety and survival	Emotional detachment and resistance to support due to fear of disappointment

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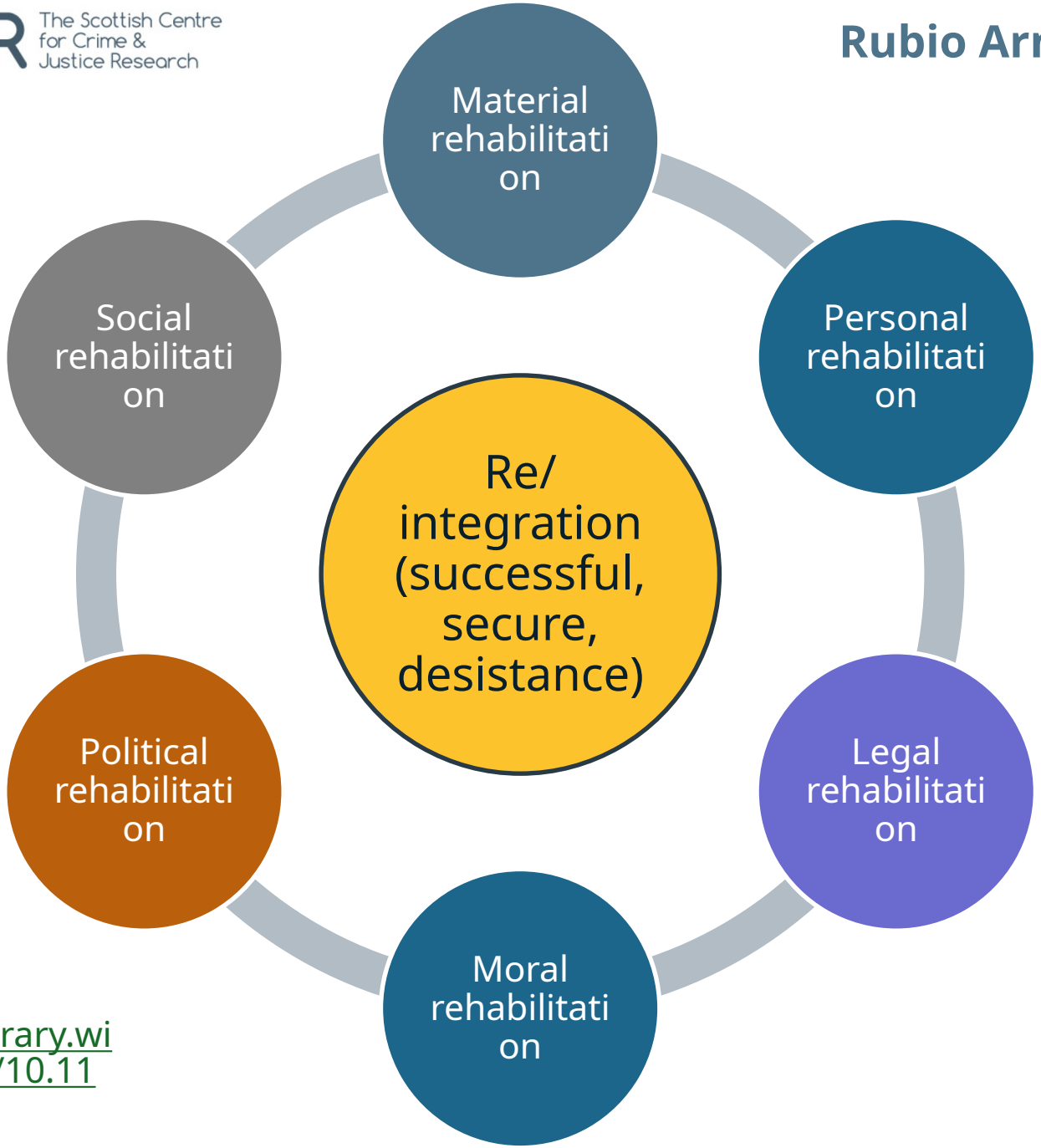
Supporting desistance

Promoting desistance
(McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler & Maruna 2012)



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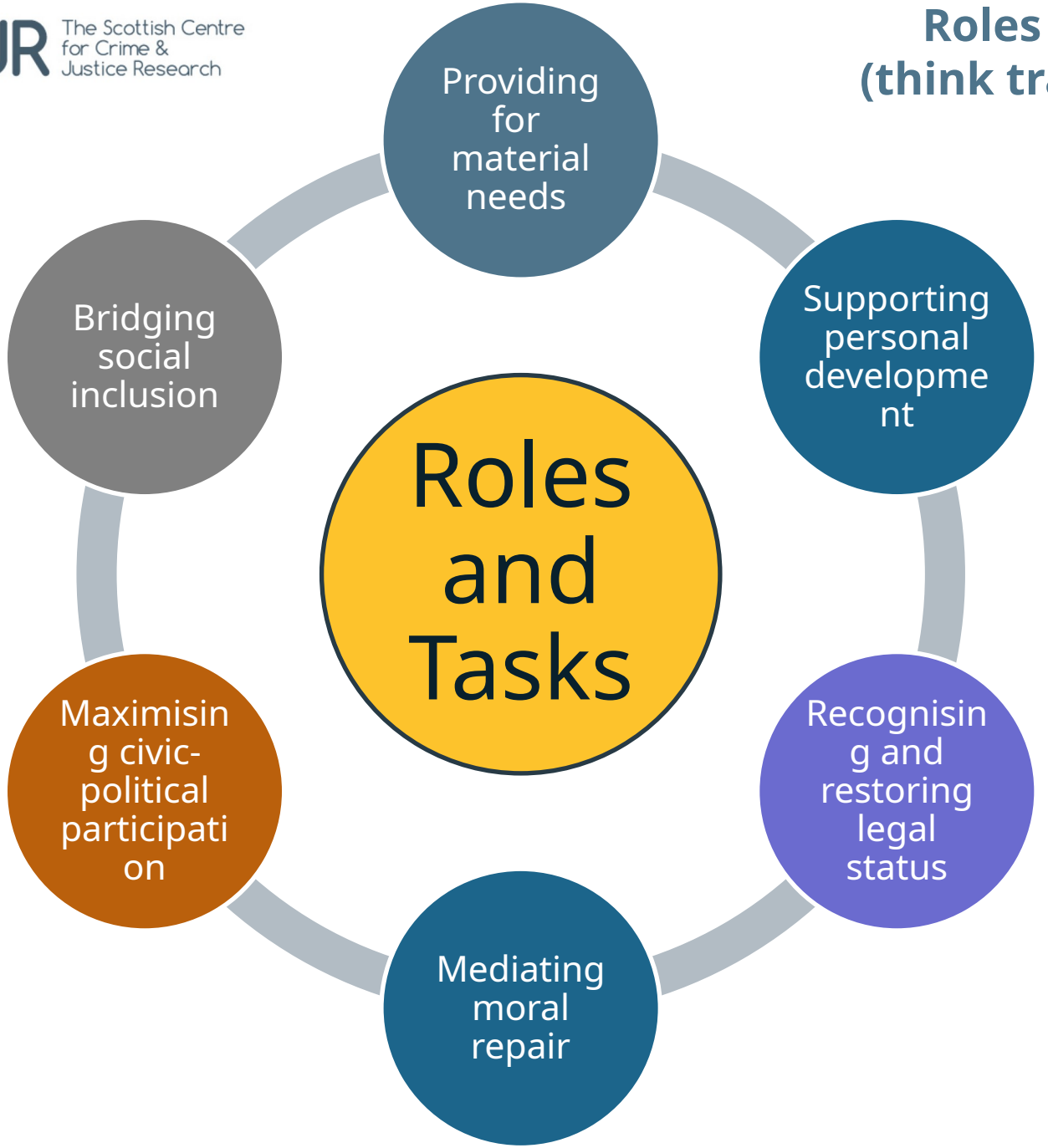
Rubio Arnal (2026)



https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/hojo.70055

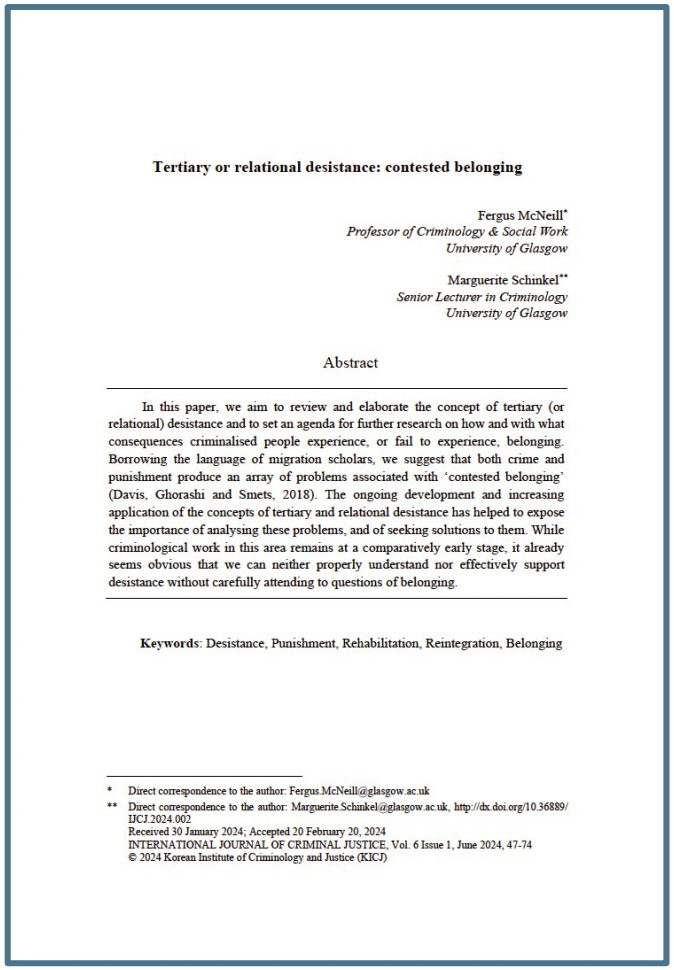
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Roles and tasks (think trajectories)



Tertiary or Relational Desistance

'...since identity is socially constructed and negotiated, securing long-term change depends on how one sees oneself, on how one is seen by others... and on how one sees one's place in society [belonging]. **Putting it more simply, desistance is a social and political process as much as a personal one**' (McNeill, 2015: 201).



Tertiary or relational desistance: contested belonging

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Abstract

In this paper, we aim to review and elaborate the concept of tertiary (or relational) desistance and to set an agenda for further research on how and with what consequences criminalised people experience, or fail to experience, belonging. Borrowing the language of migration scholars, we suggest that both crime and punishment produce an array of problems associated with 'contested belonging' (Davis, Ghorashi and Smets, 2018). The ongoing development and increasing application of the concepts of tertiary and relational desistance has helped to expose the importance of analysing these problems, and of seeking solutions to them. While criminological work in this area remains at a comparatively early stage, it already seems obvious that we can neither properly understand nor effectively support desistance without carefully attending to questions of belonging.

Keywords: Desistance, Punishment, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Belonging

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Nugent and Schinkel (2016)

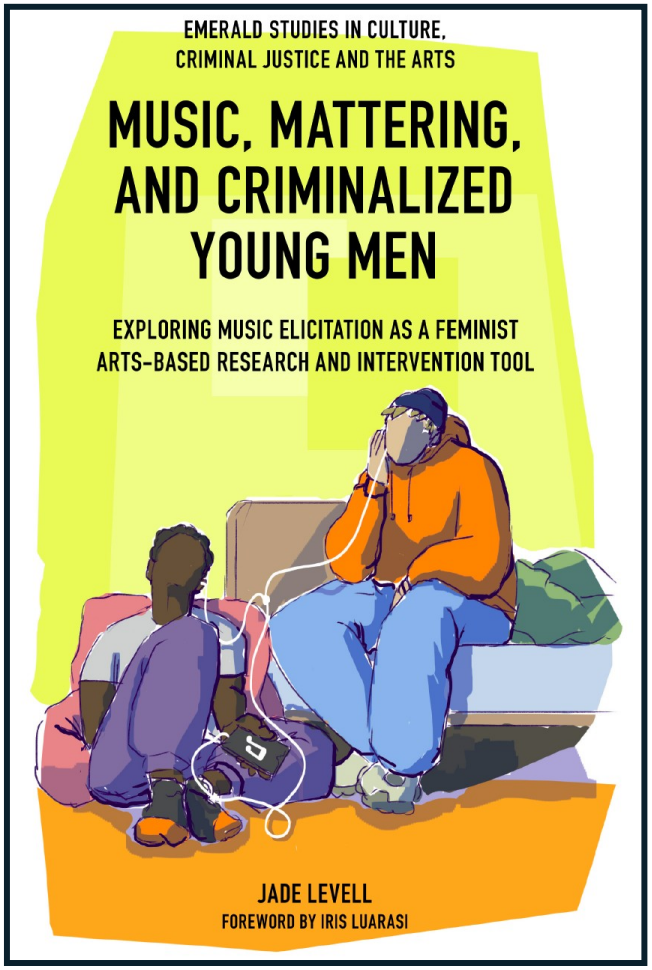
- Micro-level relations (family and friends)
- Meso-level community relations
- Macro-level social factors

https://www.kicj.re.kr/board.es?mid=a20205010400&bid=0034&act=view&list_no=14261&nPage=

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Meaning and Mattering

- Not just about identity, self-esteem or self-efficacy…
- Also about:
  - Experiencing oneself as consequential, recognized and needed
  - Being heard and valued
  - Crime and 'protest masculinity'
- Desistance may require the development of…
  - new forms of meaning
  - new ways of mattering,
  - new sites of belonging



Recognition and trust

- Good practitioners **recognize and reinforce** change efforts (Villeneuve et al, 2020, Doekhie, et al, 2018) at the micro-level
  - "She [PO] is the only person who believed in me. (..) She showed me she was not just a PO, but a person. And that's what is [important] to me, you know."
- They unleash **'the transformative power of trust'** (Ugelivik, 2022)
  - 'The experience of being trusted can lead to hope and the belief that a better future is possible, post-release.' (p635).
- But these good experiences are rare in 'risk-crazed' (Carlen) systems

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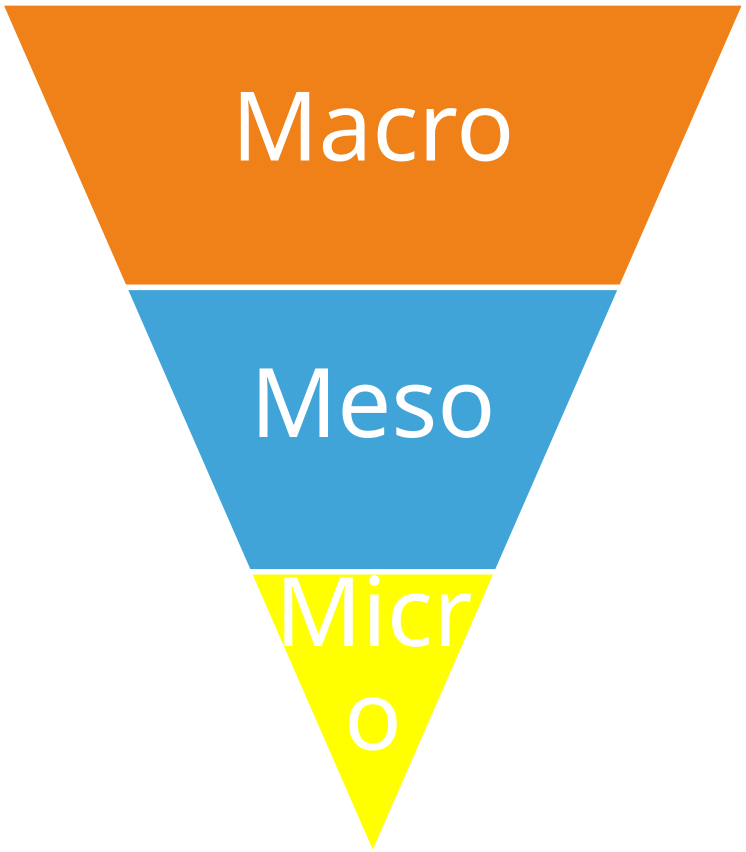
Community recognition

- Gormally (2015)
  - Young people ‘retiring’ from Glasgow gangs need access to other identities and roles in their local communities
  - Labelling them as ‘gang-involved’ frustrates this
  - Communities need resources to create opportunities, which requires redistribution…

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Diversity of experiences

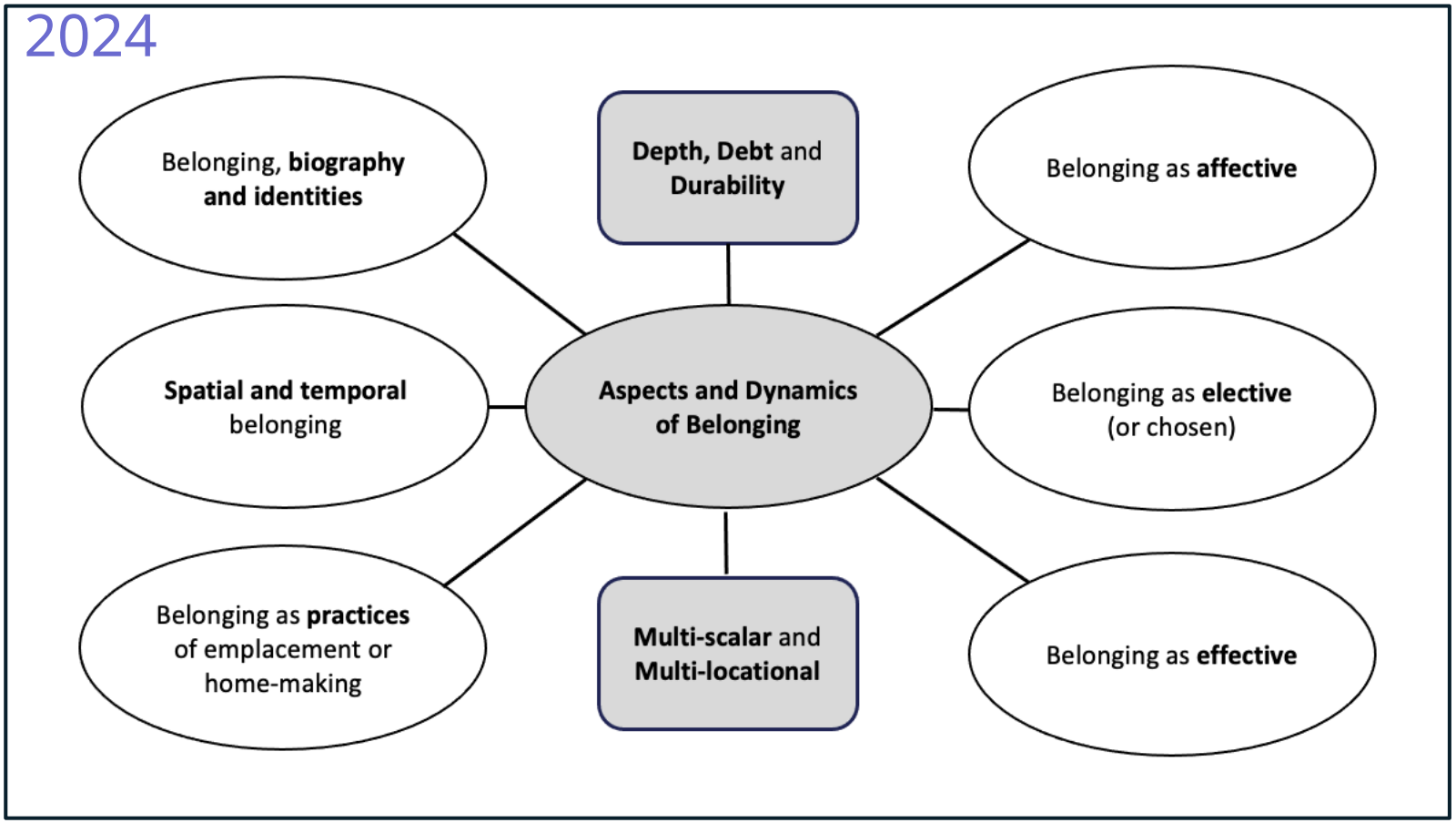
- Complex relationships between:
  - identity change and social reaction
  - micro-level acceptance and recognition helps, but meso-level engagements are unevenly available
- Macro-level structures
  - Generate and/or curtail opportunities, also unevenly.
  - For some, structural barriers and systemic violence can be internalized, disabling integration.
  - For others, a criminalized past can become a resource for integration (but only if it can be consigned to the past).



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The final frontier: Contested belonging?

McNeill and Schinkel, 2024



https://www.kicj.re.kr/board.es?mid=a20205010400&bid=0034&act=view&list_no=14261&nPage=

An Open Door (the Scottish dream)

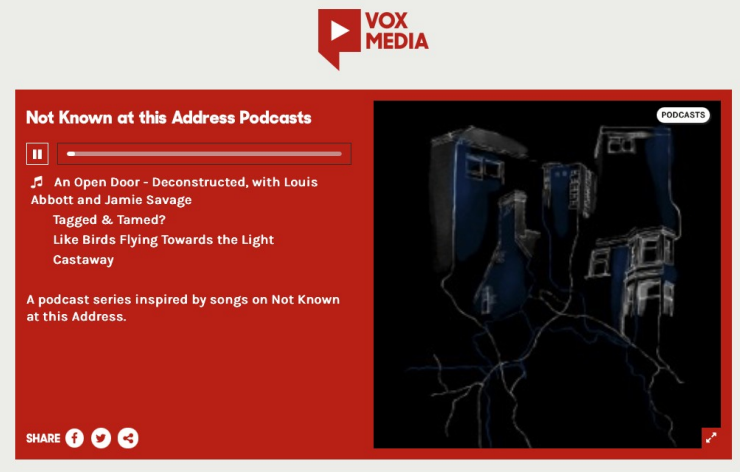
Hungry but I can't eat
Not allowed and don't sleep in my own bed
Any more -- a uniform to tell me who I am
It's boring but it's so easy, same people all of the time
And my girl on the brain, I'm in dire need of change
but I'll miss it all the same...

Give me the news and an honest pay cheque
A season-book and a set of wheels
A flash of your eye from across the party
A quiet life, an open door.

Strange place, familiar faces
Old furniture brings it all back, the new makes me curious
And I might miss the routine
But I'd replace it with that scene in front of me any day
I'm amazed at the ways it's gonna change.
Give me the news...

It's amazing how surrounded by so many people
You can still be lonely
I'm only after opening my own doors

https://www.voxliminis.co.uk/media/not-known-at-this-address-podcasts/



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Conclusion

- What not to do?
  - Criminalize and penalize young people so that their only way of mattering and only place of belonging is within criminal networks
- What to do?
  - At whatever stage, intervene in developmentally appropriate ways that avoid stigma and that instead offer ***respect, recognition and opportunity***.
  - ***Listening*** is an intervention!