



**Professor Martin Killias, University of Zurich, Switzerland**  
***“Experimental Research as a Way to Inspire Criminal Law Reform”***

**Abstract**

Sentencing and criminal law reform have always been heavily influenced by ideological premises, such as the "damaging" side effects of imprisonment and the superiority, in terms of rehabilitation of alternative sanctions. However, most of the research on these topics is heavily biased since, under any feasible sentencing system, subjects with the worst outlooks (in terms of risks of re-offending) have a far higher chance to end in prison, whereas non-custodial sanctions are typically imposed on low-risk offenders. Even if adequate control variables are being used, the bias is unlikely to be eliminated through quasi-experimental designs. Two randomized trials conducted in Switzerland on (1) short custodial sentences vs. community service and (2) community service vs. electronic monitoring, shed some new light on these old issues. The observed differences do not necessarily match current assumptions, leaving the question of how penal policy makers should deal with paradoxical outcomes.

**Bio**

Martin Killias is a Professor of Criminology and Criminal Law at the University of Zurich Law School in Switzerland. Former positions include a professorship at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland) and a part-time position as a judge at the Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland. He has been a post-doctoral fellow at the University at Albany School of Criminal Justice. Later he was involved in teaching and research at the Universities of Genoa, Tucson, Montreal, at the Dutch Ministry of Justice, the Dutch Institute for the Study of Crime and Social Control and the Institutes of Criminology at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Recently, he taught at the Universities of Chongqing and Macao (China).

His research activities are centered around comparative data collection initiatives, such as the International Crime Victimization Surveys and the European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics (both of which he was a co-founder), the international self-reported delinquency survey and international perspectives on wrongful convictions. In 2001, he served as the first president of the European Society of Criminology. More recently, he has conducted experimental research on criminal justice interventions. Currently, he serves as the co-chair of the Campbell Collaboration Crime and Justice Group.

**Tuesday, November 9, 2010 3:00-4:30 p.m.**  
**Social Ecology I, Room 112**