The social construction of “gambling addiction” as a means of solving other social problems. The Case of Germany

Abstract
Since the mid-1980s, the gambling discourse in Germany has been characterized by talk of “gambling addiction”. However, this debate had a forerunner. The rapid expansion of arcades (and slot machines) in many cities was contrary to the prevailing model of a lively and attractive city center and triggered a discourse in which social and economic unease was expressed by residents, storekeepers and politicians. Due to the fundamental rights of freedom of occupation and trade, however, gambling halls could not simply be banned. The problem of the so-called “arcade flood” and the clinical picture of “gambling addiction” were therefore specifically related. Only the reference to the fight against “gambling addiction” legitimized restrictive measures against amusement arcades.
A similar modus operandi is evident in the current German debate on the regulation of commercial gambling. In order to protect the existing state gambling monopoly (and the tax revenue generated by it) against private providers, the state is forced to prove that only the maintenance of the monopoly offers the guarantee to effectively combat "gambling addiction".

So what?
The history of “gambling addiction” in Germany can be read as a history of instrumentalization of this problem pattern. With the clinical picture of “gambling addiction” not only a (new) social problem was designated, but this social construction contributed suitably to the solution of urban planning and economic problems.

Keywords: gambling addiction, Germany, arcades, regulation.

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