



Mission nearly impossible: To study causality within the evaluation of the German regulation for gaming machines

EASG Conference Rome, 10-13 September 2024

Gerhard Bühringer, Robert Czernecka, Anja Kräplin



Competing interests

Background

1. Aims
2. Methods
3. Results
4. Proposals



- We received grants for gambling research from public and commercial gambling providers and public regulatory agencies /ministries in Germany
No restrictions in terms of design, data analysis, interpretation and publications
- We evaluated gambling protection drafts / measures of public and private gambling providers and regulatory agencies
- GB participated in about 15 parliament and ministry hearings on draft versions of the State Treaty on Gambling
- GB is a member of the 'Düsseldorfer Kreis': key stakeholders from public and private gambling providers, research, and support system, focusing on evidence-based player and youth protection

1 Background: Gambling in Germany

Products	Provider	Regulator
<p>Online gambling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Sports betting (2) Casinos (3) Slot machines (4) Poker <p>Terrestrial gambling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (5) „Traditional“ Casinos (6) Lotteries (7) Sports betting (8) Gaming machines 	<div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px;"> <p>Private Comp./Federal States ¹⁾</p> <hr/> <p>Federal States ¹⁾</p> <hr/> <p>Private Comp./Federal States ¹⁾</p> <div style="background-color: yellow; padding: 2px;">Private Companies</div> </div>	<div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px;"> <p>State Treaty on Gambling (2021)</p> <hr/> <div style="background-color: yellow; padding: 2px;">Fed. Gaming Reg / State Treaty</div> </div>

1) Or State-controlled/ licensed companies (e.g. Lotto, Casinos)

(1) Terminology

- „Gaming machines“ and „gaming hall“: term to differentiate from standard slot machines

(2) Regulation of technical features

- Stake: 0,20 € / game of 5 seconds (144 € / h)
- Gain: max. 400 € / h; loss: max. 60 € / h
- Gaming only at 1 machine at the same time / no automatic start
- Forced breaks after 1 and 3 hours

(3) Access regulations

- Gaming hall: 12 machines, restaurant/pubs with food services: 2 machines
- Minimum distance between sites / to schools / youth centers
- National online registration and blocking file

(4) Availability in Germany

- Gaming halls: about 140.000, restaurants: 70.000
- forced reduction since years → change to other options?

(5) Utilisation and risks ⁽¹⁾

- 12 month prevalence of gambling participation: about 30 - 35 % adult population
- 12 month prevalence of gaming machine participation: 2 – 3 %
- Only gaming machine activities: 16 %, multiple gambling: 84 %
- Screenings: 12 % (SOGS) - 33 % (DSM 5; 7 % severe level) [controversial figures!]

(1) Based on several surveys 2019/2023

How to evaluate change without baseline?

(1) Study assignment: Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action

- Future update of the current 6th Amendment to the Regulation (2014)
- Last changes, e.g.: losses/wins per hour, mandatory breakes, access controls
- Altogether 15 (!) complex regulatory changes between 2014 and 2018

(2) Challenges

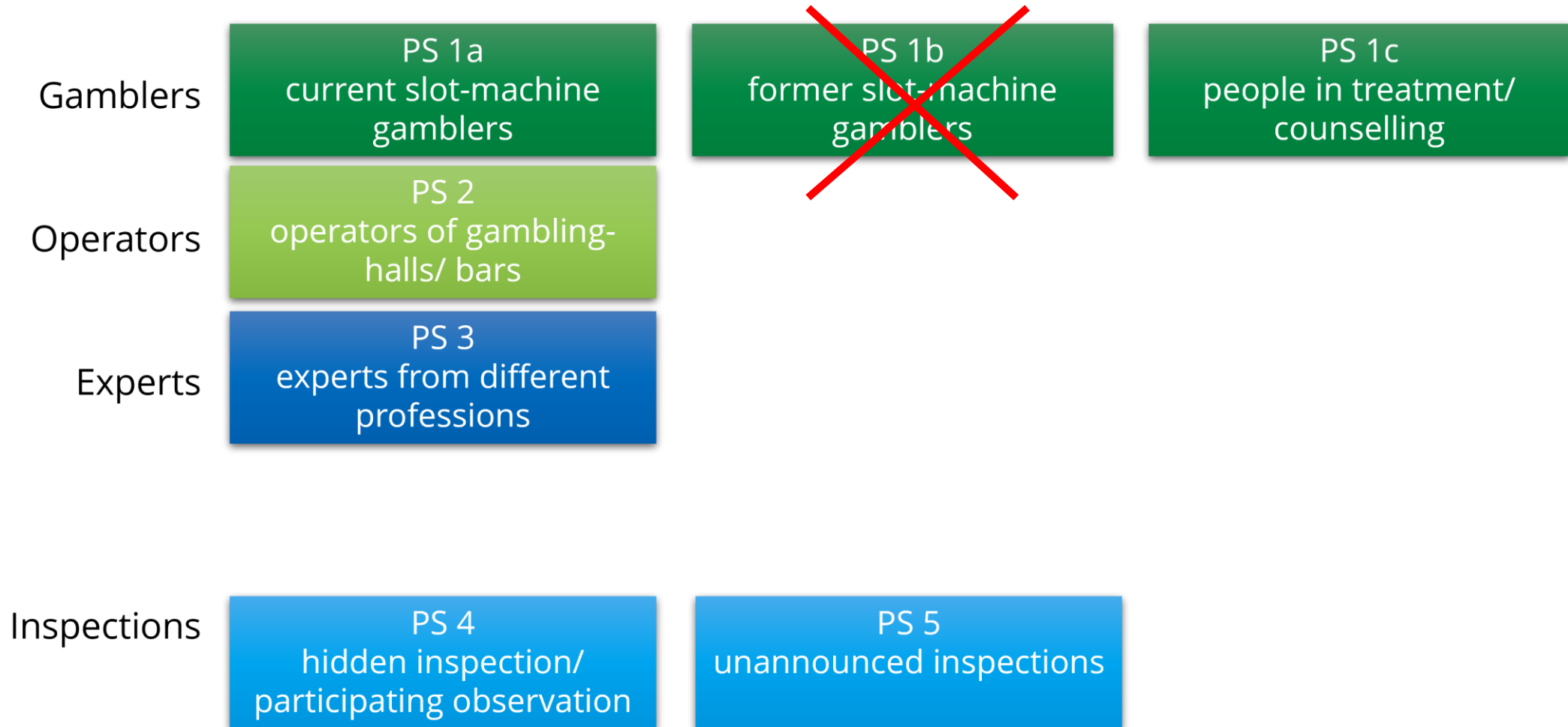
- No specific baseline data: last survey 2009 with different focus
- No national, nearly no regional and mostly no community register of gaming halls and none for pubs
- Brief study period: 04.2021-05.2023

Aim 1: Evaluation of the effectiveness of the “tightened” regulatory instruments

- Assessment of awareness, implementation and effectiveness by affected groups/experts
- Assessment of current gambling behavior by participants
- ...of current gambling problems/disorders by expert interviews of participants
- ...of switching to other products with less regulation
- ...of availability and participation in illegal gambling: gambling halls and pubs
- Suggestions for improvements and literature review

Aim 2: Evaluation of protection of minors: regulations and education (warnings)

- Assessment of youth related regulations by hidden visits
- ...by hidden entrance tests and ID checks/national register checks by young persons
- Suggestions for improvements and literature review



(1) Interviews: mostly random selection with some obstacles

- Current gamblers: 456 from gambling halls, 144 from pubs
- Former gamblers in treatment: 11
- Providers: 55 from gambling halls, 2 from pubs
- Experts, others (e.g. police): 23

(2) Unannounced control visits and hidden visits

- Experts with members of local Regulatory Authorities: 25 gambling halls, 14 pubs
- Hidden visits: 85 in gambling halls, 44 in pubs - including 86 by young persons

Altogether about 850 interviews and visits

(1) Result 1: Assessment of Effectiveness

- Effective: age verification, player card, only one machine at the same time, national register and block file, staff training, advertising ban, closing times
- Ineffective: win/ loss limits, forced brakes, information material

(2) Result 2: Literature review

- Limited / no effectiveness: win/ loss limit, warnings

(3) Result 3: Implementation

- Partly deficits in both sites: ID control, check of national block files
- Strong overall deficits in restaurants

(4) Result 4: Illegal gaming

- Partly/ locally clear indicators for illegal machines and halls

(5) Result 5: Knowledge of regulations

- Limited staff knowledge
- Limited coordination of Federal/ State Regulations gambling segments in Germany

(6) Result 6: Gaming behaviour

- Predominant regular users, however: mostly active in multiple gambling segments
- Similar number of screened GD than 2009: 41 % (cave: sample bias!)

(7) Result 7: Impact of changed regulations on player protection/ GD prevalence

- No clear trend
- High probability for past changes to other gambling segments with less regulations

(8) Result 8: Young protection

- Mostly effective in gaming halls, but severe deficits in restaurants/pubs mit food service

(9) Result 9: Further suggested improvements

- Inconsistent proposals

- (1) Central gaming machine registration**, local online access for community regulatory authorities
- (2) Unannounced controls** by independent test companies
- (3) Improvement of legal regulations** and police controls against illicit gaming machines
- (4) Final deadlines** for compliance with existing regulations – and sanctions
- (5) Coordinated regulation** of all gaming and gambling segments

- (6) Better training of staff**
- (7) Better implementation of ID control and player card**
- (8) Separation of responsibilities:** supervisory staff and external support staff

(9) Regular surveys for trend analyses and early problem detection

(10) Regular expert hearings on new problems and trends

(11) Research on effectiveness of controversial regulations

Prof. Dr. Gerhard Bühringer (1) (2)

Dipl. Psych. Robert Czernecka (2)

Dr. rer. nat. habil. Anja Kräplin (1) (3)

(1) Technische Universität Dresden, Institute for Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, Work Group Addictive Behaviors, Risk Analysis and Risk Management, Germany

(2) IFT Prävention und betriebliche Gesundheitsförderung – Mental Health Solutions, Munich, Germany

(3) Technische Universität Dresden, Faculty of Medicine Carl Gustav Carus, Section of Systems Neuroscience, Germany

Thank you for your attention!