

Institute for International Research on Criminal Policy
Ghent University

Prof. Dr. T. Vander Beken – Reporting on organised crime – Stockholm, 15 June 2006

Reporting on organised crime: from description to explanation

Prof. Dr. Tom Vander Beken

The Stockholm Criminology Symposium 2006
Session 32 - Measuring Organised Crime in Europe II
Stockholm, 15 June 2006

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Overview

1. Research and organised crime
2. Criminal analysis and organised crime policy
3. Risk, threat, harm and vulnerability
4. Tools for assessing organised crime
5. Conclusions

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1. Research and organised crime


Scientific research on the assessment of (organised) crime can have many faces.

Research which uses existing data: **WHAT IS IT?**

Research focusing on methodological problems (definition, conceptualisation, data collection, policy bias,...): **HOW CAN WE KNOW IT?**

Research on the possible use (criminal policy) of the available information (criminal analysis): **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

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2. Criminal analysis and organised crime policy

A. Why analysing organised crime?

B. What do we need/want to know?

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A. Why analysing organised crime?

Organised crime is a key concern for many policy makers.


To give an appropriate response to the phenomenon, policy makers need to be **informed**:

- preventive and/or repressive action
- operations, tactics and strategy

Analyses are there to produce **knowledge** and **understanding**, not just information

Analyses are tools to set **priorities**.

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B. What do we want/need to know?

Knowledge about the phenomenon includes:

- more than reporting on **law enforcement activity**: (in)significant law enforcement action can “create” (in)significant phenomena;
- information to **think ahead** about possible future developments (more than the report on last year’s situation);
- not only numbers of criminals, groups or activities, but **a ranking** of these issues to show differences in dangerousness, seriousness, ...; and
- an understanding of the **risk/threat** posed by organised crime, the **harm** caused by it and the **vulnerability** of the environment.

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3a. Risk, threat, harm and vulnerability


Risk is the chance of something happening that will have an impact upon objectives.

Threat arises when a source of risk has an intent to occur or has the capability to do so.

Harm is the damage occurring should a threat be realised.

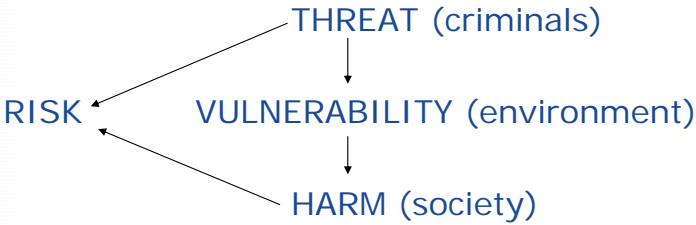
Vulnerability is an aspect of the environment offering opportunities to the threat to cause harm.

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3b. Risk, threat, harm and vulnerability



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    graph TD
      Threat["THREAT (criminals)"] --> Vulnerability["VULNERABILITY (environment)"]
      Vulnerability --> Harm["HARM (society)"]
      Threat --> Risk["RISK"]
      Vulnerability --> Risk
  
```

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4. Tools for assessing organised crime

Several methodological tools exist to make « useful » organised crime assessments, focusing on:

- Threat
- Vulnerability
- Harm
- Risk

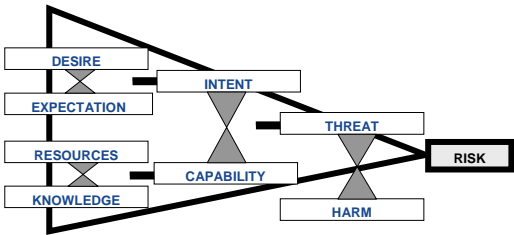
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4a. Threat analyses

Focus is on measuring the *intent* and the *capability* of *criminals (groups)* and rank them according to their « dangerousity » (e.g. Canadian « Sleipnir » analysis, European OCTA,...).



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4b. Vulnerability studies

Focus is on assessing the ***weak points in the (legal) environment*** which ***could be exploited by organised crime***. (No law enforcement bias):

- Vulnerability studies of economic sectors;
- Environmental scans linking political, economic, social, technological and environmental (PESTE) evolutions to (future) crime opportunities;
- Scenario studies about key uncertainties;
- Crime proofing studies about legislation or products;
- ...

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4c. Harm assessments

Focus is on the ***consequences*** (harm) caused by organised crime.


Ranking of crime ***phenomena/groups/vulnerabilities*** in order of the harm they (might) cause.

Difficult and subject to debate:

- what*** is harm (economic, emotional, physical, intellectual, political...)?
- how*** to measure and compare (and rank)?

Examples: UK approach (NCIS and SOCA)

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4d. Risk analyses

Focus is on the analysis of the risk, thus linking assessments on **threat, vulnerability and harm**.

The « ideal » model as it:

combines information on **criminal activities** (threat), about the crime **opportunities** of the environment (vulnerabilities) and about the **impact** (harm) of organised crime; and

offers knowledge to policy makers which is not only based on law enforcement activity to set **priorities for both prevention and repression**.

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5. Conclusions

A good organised crime policy requires strategic knowledge about the phenomenon allowing targeted and concrete action.

Organised crime assessments are useful tools if they are able to help policy makers to assess the **seriousness** of the phenomenon.

Assessments based on a **risk-based concept** (threat, harm, vulnerability) serve that purpose well.

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