

Measuring Organised Crime: Complexities of the Quantitative and Factorial Analysis

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1 Relevance and Impact of Discourses on Organised Crime for Measurement

Since the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, organised crime has been the object of a progressive inclusion into the list of threats and risks to security (Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2008) and even to defence (Ruiz-Funes García 1960), by virtue of the increasing links between it and international conflicts (Ibáñez Muñoz and Sánchez Avilés 2015), as well as because of the repercussions that the development of its multiple criminal activities has on the integrity and independence of States in economic, political and social terms (Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2011).

On the one hand, the recognition of the danger it poses has permeated a good deal of political, institutional and academic discourses (García Segura 2015: 207) for different purposes. On the other hand, it is also possible to identify discourses that are quite openly against labelling as a threat the very nature of organised crime (Edwards and Gill 2002: 246), and even detractors who question the very existence of organised crime, at least in the terms institutionalised through the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its protocols, signed in Palermo in 2000 (Fernández Steinko 2008).

Each of these discourses is not harmless, putting forward different approaches and perspectives based on specific interests. One can deduce that those that reject

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the interpretation of organised crime in the terms that are mainly accepted nowadays do so due to the imposition of certain countries and institutions. A political construct has colonised the collective imagination of the public, alongside the national and international laws and policies of governments and international organisations (Fernández Steinko 2008: 61–87).

It is a cultural inertia strongly inspired by the institutional interests of some nations, like the USA, eager to channel the efforts in the field of security and defence to new threats, that justifies the investment made and its future sustainability, promoting the idea of organised crime as a potential danger that hangs over the whole of society. This chapter also argues that behind the strengthening of the global fight against organised crime lies a political discourse that pretends to hide the pursuit of hegemony, the control of the international security and defence agendas and the defence of explicit economic interests, linked to the sectors that are enriched with the fight against crime (Neuman 1997). The background is the control and imposition of economic and financial rules but also those related to security. Susan Strange has called this form of exercise of power, “structural power”, an indirect form of exercising hegemony over what strategists call “soft power” (Nyer 2004). In short, this is what Díez Ripollés (2003) calls “legal colonisation”, a process whereby a country has the capacity to impose to another country’s legal system—or to the international community as a whole—its particular way of defining and diagnosing a phenomenon, in order for it to become laws and legally binding documents. It is a process that can be extended to the unilateral diagnosis of threats to national security of countries around the world. A sort of “legal acculturation” is to borrow a term from cultural anthropology (Ronderos 2005: 208).

From a political perspective, an attempt is made to justify the harmful genesis of organised crime—with or even without empirical verification (Reuter 2001)—to articulate response protocols and resource mobilisation in order to justify extraordinary measures which may involve, if necessary, the collapse of the balance between security and civil liberties and fundamental rights. This dubious empirical approach (evidence-based approach) of the analysis and crime control policies is a matter of much academic discussion. The criticism is that public policies against organised crime are not based on the result of empirical research but are the product of the system of normative beliefs and coalitions of interests that determine them: the interested politicisation of the discourse against organised crime (discourses like “war against organised crime”, “zero tolerance” or “iron fist policies”), for the sake of achieving political gains.

There is ample evidence of the use of questionable data, it being the object of speculation and intentional distortion (Andreas 2011: 23–25), to justify certain policies (Walsh 2004: 9), or to gain the attention of the international community about certain aspects of organised crime, like illicit flows.

Organised crime has become a matter of high political sensitivity (high politics), leading to the alteration and misrepresentation of data in support of political and ideological positions (Thoumi 2005: 187), linking the success or failure of States (in reality, governments), directly with their capacity to provide security.

The existing discursive problem, therefore, affects research on organised crime. Data collection and measurement are seriously affected by the interests of the actors who use them because before one can approach the merely technical matter of how to measure something, one has to previously know what to measure, depending on the nature of the problem and the objectives at stake (political, institutional, economic, moral or ideological interests), thereby helping or hindering, depending on the case, academic and empirical research.

It is therefore important to place the discourse of organised crime and how to deal with it in the context of criminological research (academic discourse), oriented towards the implementation of public policies; prioritise the investigation and scientific knowledge on the subject above any type of interest that directly influences the approaches, strategies and methodological analysis applied to the study of the matter and that could ultimately distort the measurement of organised crime.

In conclusion, the academic discourse should prevail—even though it is not exempt from deficiencies—in order to use contrasted empirical knowledge on the reality of organised crime, in an attempt not only to gain knowledge about the present reality on the subject of organised crime but also to establish future trends and to be able to explain the success or failures of these organisations and criminal activities, including aspects such as mobility, structures, composition, capabilities, types of relationships or possible links with other phenomenologies such as terrorism or insurgencies (Pulido Gragera and Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2014).

2 The Use of Criminology as an Academic Discipline Suitable for the Study and Measurement of Organised Crime: A Brief Critical Reflection

The last two decades have been characterised by an intense doctrinal debate on the definition of organised crime, finally settled unsatisfactorily by international law in favour of the recognition of an own entity and phenomenology (Abadinsky 2004; Albanese 2001; Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2008).

The international scene forms a ragtag group of organisations whose structure, discipline, internal rules, division of roles, illegal activities and thus their dangerousness represent a plurality of combinations (De la Corte and Giménez-Salinas Framis 2010). This diversity is precisely the main impediment to outline a universal definition that manages to capture the essence and common variables of the totality of these criminal manifestations.

Despite the inherent difficulty that a multifaceted threat poses because of its diffuse and elusive nature, we pretend to outline a scheme of the progress made in the measuring of transnational organised crime, emphasising its most significant elements. The objective is to help create a comprehensive analytical framework within which both the conceptual dimension and aetiology are discussed. Not forgetting that organised crime, like any other social phenomenon, is closely related

to the realities that surround it. Crime does not take place in the “abstract” but takes place in particular circumstances of time and space. Social conditions, technological, political and human development, have a decisive influence in the way that crime takes place, in the forms it manifests itself, in its quantity, intensity and in all its connotations and peculiarities (Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2008). Knowledge of these aetiological factors also provides significant inputs to criminological studies. Therefore, the need to understand what is organised crime, the possible paths through which it evolves and its main manifestations and effects raises a number of questions that, logically, require answers. Answers that can fill the shortcomings of current scientific knowledge, especially those organised criminal manifestations with a capacity to wrestle territorial and social control from States, but also the monopoly of violence (Sansó-Rubert Pascual and Giménez-Salinas Framis 2014); for this purpose, criminology is an indispensable tool. It has a great, untapped, explanatory potential that requires higher levels of investment in criminological investigation projects. This scientific discipline should be the recipient of a higher confidence on the part of the actors that could benefit from it: an idea that Bernard et al. (2010: 337–38) have reflected very well with these words:

In the past, criminal policies have frequently been the product of political ideology: the conservatives favoured certain policies and the progressives favoured others. Neither were particularly interested in investigating whether the policies adopted worked. Instead, quite frequently, they seemed to take the following position: “I have taken a decision, don’t bother me with the facts” (...). In the future, criminological theory and investigation, more than political ideology, should be the main source of criminal policy.

It seems logical that the policies adopted in the fight against organised crime should take into account “what works”. If we disregard this, we run a high risk of leaving society unprotected, unnecessarily sacrificing individual liberties and absurdly squandering public resources (Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2016).

But to reach that point in the path, we still have a long way to go when it comes to training and research. To the effect of its practical application, it also requires the development of a set of analytical methodologies, reinforced with the relevant educational support adapted to the peculiarities of the criminological discipline.

However, despite the aforementioned difficulties within the curriculum of criminology, organised crime is gaining weight as a specific field of study and teaching, reflecting the concerns raised by the criminal phenomenology. That is the reason why the list of issues to consider—and to try to provide a scientific explanation—has only multiplied, demanding, in turn, the development of the appropriate instruments and methodologies for its analysis and explanation.

These circumstances should act as a spur to gain momentum and promote a commitment to the criminological scientific field. The methodological and didactic challenges are present, and as criminologists ascribed to academia, we must accept them and provide answers (Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2016).

3 The Need for a Quantitative Approach to Organised Crime

Is it possible to establish measures for complex criminal demonstrations as it is done with conventional crimes? Is it reasonable to use the same measuring instruments? What obstacles can we find when we measure their size and get to know their dimensions? These are rotating questions in the criminological doctrine that is recently fostering studies on organised crime beyond entirely qualitative considerations (Van Dijk and Buscaglia 2003; Giménez-Salinas Framis et al. 2009; Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2012). There is an increasing academic interest to boost the actual deficient scientific method on the study of organised crime development through the use of quantitative analytical methodologies.

Although certainly the amount of studies, books, articles in scientific magazines and reports on organised crime have experienced a constant increase during recent years, the balance of knowledge reveals a highlighted disproportion in favour of qualitative researches (descriptive), to the detriment of the ones entirely quantitative. This is why the interest and efforts of some criminologists have been focused on the development of new ways of measurement and assessment (Von Lampe 2004; Vander Beker 2004; Albanese 2000; Giménez-Salinas Framis et al. 2009; Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2012).

The selected case of study and the methodology used for it suffer from an important burden: the opacity inherent to the investigations about organised crime, as well as to the multidimensionality of the concept and the identity of the group which characterises it. The tendency of a criminal subculture towards illegality is a factor that has historically restricted the access to direct sources, that is to say, to the members of organisations involved in illegal activities.

One of the main challenges when attempting to understand organised crime is the debate on measurement and assessment methods. Issues such as the search for more accurate forms of measurement and more rigorous assessment methods, the establishment of more accurate indicators and indexes and the identification of new ways to foster information transfer related to said criminality should be addressed in order to, on the one hand, be able to compare empirically the seriousness and impact of organised crime, and, on the other hand, to be able to develop strategies and policies that suit the specific features and proportions of each individual case (Giménez-Salinas Framis et al. 2009).

Paving the way for quantitative study of organised crime implies opening a sort of Pandora's box, which brings about analytical difficulties regarding the access to sources and methodological gaps. Measuring a concept is intrinsically linked to the composition and nature of the problem itself. The more complex the problem is, the more complex it will be to measure. The complications inherent to any empirical investigations on organised crime have been repeated ad nauseum.

The analysis developed in these pages is an exploratory exercise that aims to encourage further research and debate. Thus, this paper does not intend to be conclusive, but rather to give way to a research and discussion agenda aimed at

advancing scientific knowledge, which will enable the tackling of current knowledge gaps around organised crime.

In this regard, there are many study areas within the scope of organised crime that go beyond criminal groups, criminal activities and markets, which contain massive amounts of information that still have to be exploited conveniently. It would be of particular interest to develop analysis on individuals belonging to organisations and their criminal records, as well as developing a new methodology to uncover new aspects of said organisations and how relationships are built on the inside (Requena Espada 2014). Along the same research line, it would also be of great interest to study the group of figures and professions that are identified as facilitators, as well as the typology of relationships inside the organisation and ties between criminal organisations (Morselli 2009). Other aspects subject to analysis might be the knowledge of logistics that criminal organisations need to carry out their activities or the impact of the criminal subcultures on the youth socialisation process and its incidence regarding commonly accepted societal values, as well as minors self-introduction (co-optation), or any other factors seen as contributory to the emergence and expansion of organised crime.

Other relevant areas for criminological research include: determining the presence and distribution of criminal organisations in a certain territory (criminal density); detecting the ability of organised crime to infiltrate the institutional framework as well as its typology (multilevel intensity); investigating new gender approaches (the role of women in organised crime) (Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2010); analysing the replication of criminal behaviour (how and why); analysing those geographical areas and political scenarios that are prone to the emergence of crime (criminal geopolitics); developing early warning and organised crime danger assessment mechanisms (Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2012); determining typologies of identified criminal organisations and their organisational patterns and action methodologies (*modus operandi*); examining criminal patterns in the business model; and studying the cooperative relationships that are built under the scope of organised crimes (Williams 2005), just to mention a few interesting areas regarding the development of security strategies.

There is still much to investigate regarding victims of organised crime, despite the increasing academic research on the matter (Spalek 2006; Walklate 2007; Giménez-Salinas Framis 2013). Criminological research has clearly stated that organised crime has such an impact on the social, political and economic sphere that it goes beyond individual victims. Consequently, the hypothesis about the lack of victims in organised crime is completely refuted (Giménez-Salinas Framis 2013). Meanwhile, the main challenge is to determine what criteria should be used to evaluate both direct and indirect damages caused by organised crime, how victims can be identified and how their needs can be identified and guaranteed. As a result of all this, the articulation of prevention strategies that prevent and, if so, reduce damage from arising, should be considered a priority (Sparrow 2008).

One of the biggest challenges posed by organised crime is how to obtain reliable numeric data. Starting from the premise that not every crime is known and that not every known crime is reported, one frequently finds an overwhelming number of scattered estimates that are difficult to contextualise using known methodologies. These figures are reproduced in several publications, with no specific criteria. It is very hard to measure the scope and the volume of organised crime (direct and indirect costs and the amount of revenue generated by legal and illegal criminal activities, as well as the analysis of operational maintenance of criminal organisations), taking into account that the results reflect, in most cases, mere estimates. These indicative figures are useful, but can only be used as estimates.

In line with the previous paragraph, the lack of transparency within the scientific community and its public institutions should be underlined, in regard to the release of assessments in organised crime. As resources and methodology used on papers are not identified, it is not possible to verify their authenticity (Requena 2014). The reliability and value a scientific method brings to any criminological analysis lie on the methodology and empirical research used to enable their verification and comparison. We need to cope with the indispensable need to work with reliable quantitative data in organised crime research. Criminology has achieved this challenge assuming the necessity to commit to methodology complementarities, considering recognised limitations from different criminological existing methods in terms of legitimacy and reliability as the best approach to diverse aspects of organised crime phenomenon as well as a subject of analysis (Fernández Villazala 2008).

Furthermore, we are facing a pressing need to move forward in the development of comparative analyses, now a pending issue in the criminology research agenda. The development of Comparative Criminology will favour the use of a common terminology, as well as allow the determination of the extent to which national structures and cultures influence the scope, types, distribution and characteristics of violence (Howard et al. 2000; Albanese 2008; Requena Espada et al. 2012). This will also analyse the efforts made at tackling criminality, within and between countries (Nelken 1994), as well as sponsor the theoretical development of this discipline beyond national borders (Mueller and Adler 1996). It will give ground to the assessment of national, regional and international security and prevention policies, as well as to the comparison between different countries. It will help to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the many crime fighting systems, so as to come up with relevant strategies (Moore and Fields 1996). To sum up, as exposed decades ago by Bennet and Lynch (1990), transnational crime studies play a crucial role in the drafting of terminology and common political initiatives, a matter of particular importance in the current globalised world and in light of an increasingly transnational crime.

4 Quantitative Data on Organised Crime: Where to Browse and How to Manage Methodological Obstacles for Its Use

Organised crime research pieces usually begin with an introduction, in many cases self-justifying about the results, exposing the difficulties of finding reliable data sources (Resa 1993). A multidimensional concept such as this one creates measuring difficulties, given that the measuring formulae that are normally used for conventional crime are not applicable (Van Dijk 2009).

Another of the challenges faced by criminological research is the establishment of feasible ways of obtaining information sources about organised crime.

Under the conceptual umbrella of “organised crime”, it is possible to analyse groups and organisations, activities and/or legal or illegal markets in which they take part (primary activities) and all of the activities that are necessary for the survival of such organisations, considered as inseparable from the main activity (secondary activities).

An initial overview of the resources (data collection) reveals a big range of obstacles that must be correctly handled by the researcher as part of an aim to succeed in the construction of useful indicators for any measurement exercise.

In fourth place, one encounters methodological and information management problems, such as the “dark figure of crime”. It is important to keep in mind that the regular sources about crime (such as allegations or police reports) only refer to criminal activities that have been detected by the institutions; thus, they do not reflect criminal activity in its entirety, but only the part that is known to us—as it was previously stated, criminal organisations make great efforts to hide their activities in order for them to go unnoticed.

Another methodological difficulty lies in the classification of criminal activities within criminal law (Alvazzi 2008). Criminal activity, from a criminal law perspective, relates to a specific type of crime, referred to as complex, which are measured by means which are different from those used in conventional offences (Van Dijk 2009). A first approach shows that organised crime does not belong in conventional crime typology, but in a specific category whose measurement requires differentiated indicators. In fact, indicators such as the rate of violent homicides and many others based on conducts which are classified as crimes in Penal Codes do not show whether those manifestations are grounded on organised crime or, conversely, they are mere manifestations of the deteriorating security in some scenarios—such as the Northern Triangle of Central America (Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador). In those states, access to firearms and their daily use by petty crime perpetrators does not show which homicides are related to organised crime and which are not.

In addition, the codification of criminal activities within criminal law implies a limitation regarding regional and international comparisons. Criminal offences included in each state’s national law provide different conceptual definitions for criminal acts, as well as for the circumstances that must accompany the committing attitude for such acts. This circumstance along with the fact that enforceability and

validity of each national law is restricted to the national territory of a particular state adds another methodological limitation to take into account.

Von Hofer (2000) describes transnational comparisons of crime as risky on the basis of national crime statistics, given the fact that every country implements different “construction rules”. Specifically, the author has identified three main types of factors that have an influence on statistics: substantive factors, legal factors and statistical factors.

Substantive factors depend on the chances that citizens report crimes to the police, on how efficiently the justice system registers those crimes and on the real criminality rate in each country.

Legal factors are related to the different ways of describing a crime and to the characteristics of the subsequent legal proceedings.

Statistical factors refer to the different methods for the production of statistics, i.e. the statistical calculation rules used to gather data about crime. These rules raise great difficulties considering that they determine (a) the way in which data are registered; (b) the computation unit used in statistics; (c) the way in which a crime committed by more than one person is registered; (d) the application of the main offence rule (some countries regard simultaneous crimes considering only the main one—main offence rule—whereas others count each crime separately, which increases their rate of registered crimes); (e) the way in which multiple crimes are counted (whether it counts as one only crime or as multiple crimes if a victim reports the same crime more than once); and (f) the moment when data are gathered for crime statistics.

In view of this situation, many authors have stressed the need for establishing uniform definitions and for homologating data gathering systems (Savona and Stefanizzi 2007), in order to simplify transnational comparisons—essential for advancing in criminal investigation.

In fact, another relevant particularity to consider is the trans-nationalisation of organised crime. From a local point of view, this fact poses an enormous challenge in terms of measuring. If one group takes action in several countries at a time—as it frequently happens—the fact that one branch is identified in a specific location will only provide information about the volume corresponding to part of the criminal group, but not about the gross of it, seriously biasing measurement.

Another form of measuring consists of using the set of indicators for petty crimes as an indirect reference for presence and activity of organised crime, exploiting the potential of establishing some interrelation between both. Although theoretically it is true that it would be possible to find countries with high rates of conventional crimes and not so high rates of non-conventional crimes (organised crime), the most plausible reality is that a high rate of conventional crime corresponds to a high rate of organised crime (Van Dijk and Nevala 2002).

In fact, when high rates of conventional crimes are found paired with low rates of organised crime registered by the police, a higher real presence of organised crime is very likely. According to Van Dijk (2008), the number of cases of organised crime reported to the police is likely to be inversely proportional to the actual scale of the problem in a given country.

This statement has a relatively simple explanation: two of the factors that foster organised crime the most in a given scenario are: first the absence of specific control mechanisms to fight organised crime (lack of specialised police units, prosecutors, regulations, etc.) and second high levels of corruption (Albanese 2001). If these factors concur in a given geographical space, low rates of organised crime are likely to be found due to the low level of police detection (e.g. non-resolved homicides, a relatively low number of registered criminal organisations, etc.) (Giménez-Salinas Framis et al. 2009).

Statistics and police and penitentiary reports, along with those provided by the Administration of Justice, are not the only tools for measurement in the methodological aspect of organised crime analysis. On the one hand, there are victimisation surveys, which provide information about crimes suffered by a determined segment of the population (sample), usually regarding their high exposure to organised crime (risk of victimisation), and based on the population's faith in control instances. On the other hand, there are also self-reporting surveys (Roldán 2009); both typologies of tools have proven to be extremely useful for measuring conventional crimes (with samples of general population).

However, their use in the analysis of complex crimes poses difficulties (Medina Ariza 1999), which will be discussed hereafter. I would like to briefly mention the existence of other techniques—direct or participative observation and in-depth interviews, discarded a priori for not being ordinary and for the consequences they lead to.¹

In most cases, the in-depth interview does not provide the knowledge of the structural and functional elements of criminal organisations, due to blatant difficulties regarding the access to the groups' upper or dominant layers, where the tendency to concealing activities is, logically, more intense the higher the decision-making level. Participant observation, that is, the participation of individual researchers in the internal dynamics of criminal groups, is simply impossible if the observer does not become at least an accessory or a witness of crime, unless the researcher is acting as a legal undercover agent at the same time. On the other hand, the participant observation, if achieved, raises ethical concerns about the legitimacy of putting scientific purposes before the fact of collaborating in criminal acts. Furthermore, researchers can be exposed to physical danger, and they could incur criminal responsibility.

Succinctly, the self-report consists of a free-participation and anonymous survey about the commission of lawless behaviour, aimed at perpetrators or potential perpetrators.

¹Exceptionally, some researchers choose to employ these techniques, such as Dr. Wolfgang Herbert, who is one of the most eminent sociologists and experts in Japan of Austria, when he decided to infiltrate in the organised crime sphere of Osaka (Japan) to document his doctoral studies about Japanese organised crime. Retrieved from Glenn M. (2008). *Mc Mafia. El crimen sin fronteras*. Barcelona: Destino Imago Mundi, p. 411.

Since it is based on perpetrators, the potential usefulness of this kind of instruments to measure organised crime is truly promising. Nevertheless, its weakness lies as much in the collaboration among the participants as in the reliability of their responses. Taking part in this kind of survey may be hindered in turn by realities such as coercion and threats that an organisation could exercise upon its members to preserve its security (intra-group violence). In addition, it is highly likely that those crimes eligible for being reflected in the self-report are not time-barred due to their severity (Kleemans and De Poot 2008).

Victimisation surveys have been somewhat successfully used to measure organised crime, on the grounds that they represent highly victimised groups (extortion and corruption). A noteworthy initiative in this field at the international level is represented by the International Criminal Business Survey (ICBS). The very same methodology used for the International Criminal Victimization Survey (ICVS) was applied in 1995 to samples made up by executives of ten developed countries (Van Dijk and Terlouw 1996). Later, in 2000, a version of the ICBS questionnaire was used complemented with specific questions about organised crime and corruption.

At a national level, we must highlight the Encuesta Nacional de Victimización de Empresas (“National Survey of Companies Victimization”, ENVE in Spanish), carried out in 2012 by the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Geografía (“Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics and Geography”, INEGI in Spanish). The effort made by INEGI in the light of Mexico’s obvious difficulties over the last decade is very remarkable: a powerful and very active organised crime in some of the national territories, an open confrontation among various criminal organisations and between the latter and the government. The survey proved successful in terms of performance measures (despite having registered a black figure close to 88%, *black figure of criminality*, understood as the unknown crime rate and which, consequently, is not reflected in the statistics) which should be taken into consideration if we assume that it would be impossible to implement this kind of initiative in other criminal scenarios regarded as less dangerous owing to a lower incidence of criminal violence. This is due to the threats perpetuated by dominant criminal organisations to researchers and collaborators in order to preserve a situation of disinformation concerning their structures, activities and members.

Surveys about perception of organised crime have also been carried out within specific communities. On a similar line, the World Economic Forum included, from 2003 onwards, a survey to business people containing a question related to perception of organised crime in its annual Global Competitiveness Report.

At this point, measuring organised crime entails the recognition of the existing limitations to all methodologies involved in measuring the phenomenon of criminality by the criminological community. Consequently, it also has to be assumed that methodological complementarity is probably the most successful and accurate way (Fernández Villazala 2008) of approaching the study of organised crime.

5 Identification of Indicators and Weak Signals of Organised Crime: Particular Emphasis on Organised Group as Indicator and Last Trends

The starting premise that must be internalised as essential today is that security cut-off from intelligence is an outdated response. Therefore, identifying organised crime indicators and including them as optimal inputs for developing strategicwise criminal intelligence will allow us to delimit more accurately the main dimensions of the organised criminal phenomenon. This will enable a better evaluation of its capabilities, danger and insecurities.

The aim of developing trustworthy indicators lies in its ability to provide a contrasting empirical knowledge about the “organised crime” reality that facilitates an adjusted vision of it to the analyst when incorporated through the intelligence cycle. This vision will ultimately translate into useful intelligence (informed knowledge) to support the design of strategies against unlawful activities. A good product of strategic intelligence not only determines which is the current situation related to the phenomenon, but also provides explanations about the existence of that very phenomenon and sets likely evolutions or trends, defining possible and likely scenarios. It also enables the definition of objectives against organised crime and the establishment of policies and plans to implement and achieve the goals that have been set.

Following the main idea, the members of the Government Security structure shall abandon reactive random attacks and adopt a strategic planning perspective, in order to foster the impact of each operation against the organised crime group (Felbab-Brown 2013). This approach shall be strengthened by a quantitative criminological knowledge tool, properly processed and transformed into basic criminal intelligence. Furthermore, this approach shall constitute the basis for the design of focused dissuasion strategies and targeted action. The latter are considered as the most promising alternatives against organised crime (Garzón 2014).

Regarding organised groups as indicators, it is important to highlight something apparently obvious: organised crime is characterised by the existence of an organisation that directly conducts illegal activities. From this perspective, the main indicator to measure organised crime is the group of members that form the organisation (group). Therefore, a first approach to the evaluation of organised crime would consist of defining the number of active groups in the geographical areas analysed, as well as its characteristic features: territorial extension, type of organisational structure, major and secondary activities (i.e. whether multiple activities exist or not), if it is associated with other organisations and for how long, sophistication level, violence and corruption capacities, permeability towards state security bodies and presence in the financial and industrial sphere (partnerships with legal societies), among others.

The dimensions mentioned are especially relevant in order to have a holistic knowledge about the capacity for action, group resources, potential territories expansion, as well as its ability to influence society, economy and institutions.

All of them must be taken into account simultaneously for the evaluation of criminal organisations. Similarly, factors that contribute to the rise of economic, political and social crime are used as indicators for crime alert risk management (early alert) (Albanese 2001; Vander Beken 2004; Williams and Godson 2002). It should be pointed out that the specific statistics about criminal groups on which governments rely for organised crime risk assessments are based on very complex calculations (although not impossible) that seem impossible to verify and objectify (Carson 1984; Greenfield 1993; Blades and Roberts 2002; Van Duyne and Levi 2005).

On the other side, the adoption of criminal groups as indicators is controversial. Considering the number of groups as an indicator involves the inclusion of equivalent units in this category. Nevertheless, there are not equivalent units in organised crime. Taking the number of existing groups as the only criteria does not provide information about the extension of those groups, their typology, level of danger, level of institutional influence, abilities and resources.

Secondly, a group can develop different types of crime. Logically, not all the activities have the same importance when evaluating danger and consolidation level of the group. It is essential not to attach the same importance to the main activities, which constitute the group's business and illegal market, than to the instrumental illegal ones, related to the group's development, maintenance and survival (Abandinsky 2007).

According to the obstacles that have been mentioned, the evaluation and measuring of organised crime is extremely complex, since researchers must find new measuring options. In order to do so, they use indirect or context indicators (proxy) and organised crime perception measures. The indirect indicators represent a good alternative to measure the "immeasurable": unknown crime, organised crime and its emerging forms. Depending on the data used, the indicators can be pretty reliable (such as the number of stolen luxury motor vehicles that has not been found as an indirect indicator of the active presence of organised crime; since the vehicle insurance usually covers the incident, reporting is usually very high). However, indicators based on perceptions inevitably depend on the validity of such perception and definition of the people that are analysing the given case.

The concept of "weak signals" is abstracted from definitions of primary and secondary indicators, because the perception that, in reality, there is little tangible value to be extracted from isolated indicators, as there is potential for them, to be indicative of a variety of phenomena. However, when these indicators are grouped under certain conditions, such as proximity to a certain location and type of activity, they can begin to provide insights into the presence or emergence of organised crime (CISC 2007). So, "weak signals of organised crime" may be defined as advanced indicators of change phenomena. They do not strike the potentially interested observer as such, but are compiled on the basis of raw data. They are premature, incomplete, unstructured and fragmented informational material pointing to the emergence of challenging transformations. As advanced indicators that precede significant discrete one of events and/or novel developments in the rate and direction of trends, their analysis has the potential to facilitate the real-time alignment between organisational decision-making and changing external circumstances.

These predictors of future change pose problems of interpretation and represent a challenge to established models (Andrews et al. 2016). Thus, the practical significance of weak signal information is that it can be transformed into meaningful knowledge for to get knowledge about organised crime. In summary, “weak signals” are, for the purposes of this paper, considering them as “early warnings”: advanced, incomplete and erratic symptoms of future problems derived from continuously evolving trends on organised crime.

The basic idea is that “certain indicators that were initially unsatisfactory can be joined together in order to create more reliable and valid indicators” (Aromaa and Heiskanen 2008). Nowadays, the integration of different data (from institutions, studies different context that are not directly related with the crime) represents one of the most promising options for criminology research.

Therefore, as it can be seen in the following example, low reporting rate of legal procedures related to organised crime can be explained by police corruption and political interference when processing and sentencing. Therefore, these low rates can actually mean a high rate in this type of crimes (Van Dijk 2007). Research conducted by the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control of Helsinki (HEUNI), affiliated with the United Nations, follows the same direction. This organisation analyses the development of high rate crimes and the initiatives from the General Secretary of the United Nations related to emerging forms of crime (Malby 2012).

Professor Van Dijk, a very well-known researcher in this issue, has used interesting alternative measure instruments, such as the use of a composite index (Composite Organised Crime Index), based on several individual ones: organised crime perception index, unofficial economic index (most of these data come from the World Economic Forum surveys, investment risk evaluations of the Merchant International Group, World Bank Institute research and from official statistics), money laundering index, corruption index and, lastly, unresolved homicides index (Malby 2012). It is important to explain that the last index tries to determine the level of instrumental violence of those groups. This indirect form of measuring allows having a closer approach to the presence of organised crime in an area throughout the collateral and instrumental violence projected. This indicator correlates homicide rates with the presence of organised crime in a particular place. In other words, if there is a high rate of organised crime in an area, murder and violence reporting rates will be low, since corruption and impunity of these organisations enhances lack of governmental action, and therefore, all those crimes remain unsolved.

Some other possible and important approximation indicators are the non-related criminal activity indicator of criminal organisations or the structural complexity indicator (Moreno 2013). The Latin American Network of Security and Organised Crime (RELASEDOR, in Spanish, Red Latinoamericana de Seguridad y Delincuencia Organizada) is conducting an important task in crime analysis, and, more specifically, organised crime (as another reliable measure of indirect indicators). Some of their proposals are related to the number of missing people (forced disappearance) by organised groups, the number of deceased members of security

forces in confrontation with members of criminal groups, number of murdered judges and prosecutors, number of murdered or threatened journalists, number of escaped prisoners controlled by these organisations, number of members from crime organisations that work at the security forces, number of terrestrial, aerial and maritime platforms used for drug transportation purposes, territorial controlled extension of the group (in square kilometres), number of intervened state institutions for criminal filtration (in local governments, for example) or the number of financial entities that have been also intervened, number of police interventions in those groups and money laundry indicators. All of them represent non-developed aspects for the investigation of organised crime. In general, they are all related to the use of violence, danger, impunity, logistic abilities, criminal filtration, resilience ability, impact on legal businesses, criminal activity volume and territorial control.

In summary, according to a fundamental syllogism that said “every crime activity leaves a trace” (Locard 2010), the next novel initiatives to be considered to know and about measuring organised crime are the EPOOLICE project (2015) that consist in a early pursuit against organised crime using environmental scanning, the Law and Intelligence systems; the analysis of the risk and the vulnerability factors of enterprises to be object racketeering by organised crime (Atanas Rusev et al. 2016); the detection, investigation and monitoring of organised crime groups using forensic intelligence: forensic data can contribute to the detection and follow-up of organised crime groups through a systematic approach (Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2015; Baechler 2016); the analysis of the links between elites and organised crime elaborated by the group of InSightCrime.org, to analyse the organised crime’s impact on governance (2016); studies about organised crime and social media: how detecting and corroborating weak signals of human trafficking online (Andrews et al. 2016); the studies of criminal network structures (Campana 2016); or the analysis of how and why, the phenomenon of trans-nationalisation of organised crime is produced (Varese 2013; Sansó-Rubert Pascual 2016). Definitely, all these research programmes represent the most original and innovative initiatives in this area to date.

6 Conclusions and Future Challenges: Indicators, Strategies and Public Policies

The organised crime phenomenon will face some new dangers, but also new opportunities. This is why it is important to think about the future challenges towards security policies.

According to this approach, as the emerging forms of crime are improving, there must be an increased specialisation in instruments against organised crime. This specialisation requires the overcoming of classic paradigms, and it aims for innovative answers, both transversal and conciliatory (holistic). The simple policy and legal reaction will not work if it is not accompanied by social, economic, educative, environmental and legal initiatives.

At first, it seems that criminology studies are at a disadvantage. It must face that those with the ability to clarify the field of study (delinquents and, to a lesser extent, members of different organisations, services and other security institution forces) are not willing to do so, at least in a scientific way (Fernández Steinko 2013). Therefore, the problem finds its ignorance-based origin in the complexity of the object of study (“organised crime”), as with other sciences, but also in the existence of multiple academics interested in avoiding the problem. The issue gets worse because of the assumption of the organised crime as a non-empirical reality that can be simply measured with positivist criteria (Fernández Steinko 2013). As a social construction, it changes and evolves depending on social interests and perceptions in a particular social and political moment (Christie 2004; Aas 2007; Bauman 2002). This complicates the possible comparisons that could be made in the long run (if there is an important current criminal behaviour, tomorrow it could be the opposite). It also complicates all possible analysis based on comparisons between geographical areas, especially towards manifestations of organised crime. As an example, environmental organised crime (animal and plants trafficking, environmental pollution, fraudulent exploitation and natural and mineral resources trafficking) is very relevant and it is also monitored in Western Europe. Nevertheless, this crime is not classified as a criminal offence in other regions of the world. These circumstances, which should not frighten the researcher in order to get answers and which should foster the access to knowledge, must act as a stimulus to promote the engagement with scientific and criminological work. The rational identification of sensitive criminal behaviours and its measuring demands to deepen in precision and perfection analysis methods. Also, it requires the use of an analysis investigation technique based on transparent, open methodologies as compared with methodological regression and with lack of transparency of different sources.

The main objective is to elaborate public policies by those who are in charge and to determine the security strategies to have a reliable framework of organised crime as a consequence of a real diagnosis of causes and effects. As indicated previously, the purpose of the ensemble of indicators is to foster evaluation and measuring methodologies of organised crime. It is also used for facilitating detection and identification of any possible criminal success opportunity. In conclusion, it is aimed to promote the implementation of security preventive (and even proactive) initiatives based on the development of intelligence abilities. This formula contributes to the promotion and the strengthening of the democratic dimension of security through collection, systematisation, spreading and exchange of information and intelligence with previous awareness about what can be and what cannot be measured and under what terms, depending on the existing limitations.

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Using Open Data to Detect Organized Crime Threats
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Larsen, H.L.; Blanco, J.M.; Pastor Pastor, R.; Yager, R.R.
(Eds.)

2017, XV, 282 p. 57 illus., 48 illus. in color., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-3-319-52702-4