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Junninen, Mika

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Finnish professional criminals and their organisations in the 1990SA

Mika Junninen

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Abstract This article concentrates on Finnish professional criminals and their organisations in Finland and in cross-border crime operations. It is based on qualitative empirical material. It focus on 14 different Finnish groups active in the 1990s in smuggling (alcohol, tobacco and drugs), and/or procuring prostitutes, and/or handling stolen goods. The objective of the study was twofold: 1) to gather collective information about the world of the Finnish professional criminals by studying the personal characteristics of the group members, the crimes they commit, and the structures of the criminal groups, 2) to compare differences and similarities of professional criminals and organised crime groups in Finland and abroad. The study clearly shows, that Finnish professional criminal groups are loosely structured networks that based on trade relations between the participants. The operational time of the groups is short and laundering of profits is not planned beforehand. The comparison of studied groups and internationally well known organised crime groups shows, that the Finns are a long way behind in all matters related on organised crime and its criminality. Finnish groups are loosely structured networks working on ad hoc basis, at the moment and a certain time. International groups are monopolistic business enterprises that corrupt and threats state authorities and surrounding society to leave them in peace, promote its own business matters and reputation of top men.

Introduction

According to Finnish police sources in the 1990s, Finnish professional criminals¹ had widened their scope of activity, become more violent and started to work more

¹A professional criminal is an individual who earns his living by committing crimes. Committing crimes requires professional skill(s) and competence that distinguish the person from the beginners. A professional criminal earns his living by committing crimes, has a professional attitude, and behaves accordingly (Vold 1958). In his study of the prison population, Kääriäinen used the term “professional criminal” to refer to persons who seemed to be oriented towards committing crimes as a way of life. Professional criminals are that part of the prison population who seem to be orientated towards committing crimes as a way of life. Crime is an essential part of their way of life and a means of livelihood. The crimes are planned, carried out reasonably well, and the profits are relatively large (Kääriäinen 1994, 60).

M. Junninen (✉)
HEUN, PL444, 00531 Helsinki, Finland
e-mail: mika.junninen@om.fi

closely together. In the overviews made by the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation, when EU standards for defining organised crime groups² are applied, there were 27 organised crime groups active in Finland in 1999. The number of such groups has increased rapidly: in 1995, police identified only 10 active groups in Finland. (NBI 2000)³. The purpose of my research was to study are the Finnish professional criminals really so organised and has the crime situation changed so dramatically, as the Finnish police claim⁴. The main research questions of my study were: how, why and on which crime areas have Finnish professional criminals been organised in the 1990s⁵, and what are the participants like. This article concentrates on Finnish professional criminals and their organisations in Finland and in cross-border crime⁶ operations. It is based on qualitative empirical material where I studied 14 different Finnish groups active in the 1990s in smuggling (alcohol, tobacco and drugs), and/or procuring prostitutes, and/or handling stolen goods. The objective was to gather collective information

² Organised criminal groups are groups that commit various types of offences, exhibit a hierarchical structure, have an internal sanction system, and continue to operate even without one or more of their key members. The aim of these groups is not only monetary gain but economic power as well. Ultimately they seek to occupy a monopoly position in a certain market in order to compete with rivaling groups or make tacit agreements with them. The instruments they use include intimidation and violence, inside as well as outside the group, and corruption. In addition, efforts are made to infiltrate into legitimate sectors of the economy with the purpose of covering up illegal activities, acquiring influence over politicians and exerting control over their decision-making. Lastly, a criminal group engaged in organised crime is always active on a long-term basis (Fijnaut et al. 1998, 11).

³ The figure for 2004 was 34 (NBI 2005).

⁴ Aim of the study was to challenge Finnish police compulsion to define all kind of group criminality and criminal groups as organised crime that took place in Finland. The whole issue of defining and reporting national levels of organised crime in European Union countries was developed in the beginning 1990s. As new member of EU, Finland joined in the EU on 1995, the Finnish police found that many organised crime groups from Finland. In the media police claimed, that those Finnish and foreign organised crime groups will take over the whole country. No academic studies have found that risk before or after that massive media campaign (gf. Aromaa 1983, Kinnunen 1996, Junninen 2006). In the academic research police willingness to claim all serious criminality as organised crime has seen as clever trick to get more funding and research rights to police force. Before that Finland had been seen as peaceful country with low level of serious criminality. Similar kind of overestimation from the police side can be found from the Holland in the early 1990's (gf. e.g. Fijnaut 1991).

⁵ The 1990's was chosen on two main reasons: 1) the rapid change of neighbouring countries created new opportunities to commit cross-border crimes between Finland and Estonia or Russia, 2) Finnish media was reporting very often Finnish police statements of fastly crowing risks of foreign organised crime in Finland.

⁶ Cross-border crime is not a new phenomenon; it has existed as long as borders have defined nations and criminals have used neighbouring countries to buy and sell illegal goods or hide crime profits. Border area and the countries different legislation, culture and economical system have given a great possibility to gain and hide criminal profits. On the same time neighbouring countries living conditions (criminals, laws, authorities) are better know than the countries further, there is only one border to cross and more countrymen living in the country. In the Finnish scheme Estonia became attractive on the 1990's when country gain its independence from Soviet Union, and the whole society was under massive changes and political, societal and criminal chaos. The dilemma of police difficulties to investigate cross-border crime and co-operate with the neighbouring country authorities is well know also in Finland (cf. e.g. Joutsen 1997a, b; Ulrich & Kivimäki 1998; Junninen and Aromaa 1999).

about the world of the Finnish professional criminals by studying the personal characteristics of the group members, the crimes they commit, and the structures of the criminal groups. A bit similar kind of studies has been made in Sweden in the 1970s and in the Netherlands in the 1990s, in addition to which there is an ongoing study in Estonia⁷.

Dilemma of professional criminals

The definition of a professional criminal is ambivalent. At least three different dimensions of interest are relevant:

- 1) how do the occupational characteristics of professional criminals diverge from those who work in “legitimate” professions,
- 2) how do professional criminals diverge from habitual offenders, and
- 3) how does legal and criminological literature define the concept of a professional criminal.

The comparison of legal and illegal professional identities is an interesting one. The distinction of taste is a classic sociological dilemma: how do the different social classes behave and use different kinds of indirect aspects to justify their social status⁸. Bourdieu used the concept of distinction to describe the differences of French social classes (Bourdieu 1979). Bourdieu’s ideas have been applied extensively, like the study of Riitta Kumpulainen, when she studied Finnish judges and their methods to distinguish themselves from each other and other professions (Kumpulainen 1995).

The comparison between habitual offenders⁹ and professional criminals is also interesting. According to Kivivuori (1992), habitual offenders commit crimes:

- 1) as a revenge to society, they want to make someone suffer because they are unemployed or in tax debts etc., and blame society for the misery,
- 2) because relatives or ex-partners have abandoned them,

⁷ In Sweden, the committee members represented criminal police, local police, tax authorities and criminologists. Their task was to consider and analyse the degree of organisation of Swedish criminals, and to assess the congruence between them and the criteria presented in social science and legal literature on organised crime (Rikspolisstyrelsen 1977). In the Netherlands, criminologists used police data sources to study how well Dutch professional criminal groups correspond to organised crime definitions (Bruinsma et al. 1999). Markina’s study tries to define the formation of the Estonian organised crime after the country’s independence in 1991 (Markina 1998).

⁸ Status means that professional criminals, as other professionals, seek to attain a certain standing and reputation among their peers. Status is based on technical skills, financial situation, social contacts, influence and habits that crystallise as professional pride. (Aromaa 1983, 54.).

⁹ A habitual offender is an offender who does not succeed in the criminal’s profession, nor is able to otherwise meet the living standards of the professionals. He gets caught time after time, but still wants to work and live like a criminal even if other criminals cannot trust him with any demanding tasks. Between prison sentences he is thus compelled to work in a legal occupation. Because the only merit of the habitual offender is that he has been caught several times, he has no actual status among the professional criminals (Vold 1958; Vold et al. 1998.).

- 3) on the spur of the moment or when intoxicated (most of the crimes of habitual offenders fall into this category),
- 4) for no rational reason, rebellion, impulsive reaction against authorities, etc

The persons I interviewed frowned upon such unprofessional behaviour. In criminal groups it is not only strongly disfavoured, but also harshly punished. One of the worst mistakes a professional criminal can make is to work under the influence of intoxicating substances. Kivivuori describes alcohol as being of central importance in the criminality of habitual offenders. They are said to spend all or most of the proceeds of their crimes to luxurious life and alcohol as soon as possible. This kind of “push the boat out” lifestyle was also present in my interviews, but because the incoming sums of money were so much bigger, my informants were able to spend part of the money on luxurious life and save the rest or use it to finance new crimes.

The tradition of studying professional criminals in criminology can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century when Edwin Sutherland made his classic study “The Professional Thief”. In this study, he analysed and described ethnographically the life and daily routines of professional thieves in the United States. About the same time in Europe, Jean Genet wrote his autobiographical “Journal du Voleur”, dealing with his life as a professional thief (Sutherland 1972; Genet 1998). Traditionally, professional criminals are considered as thieves and burglars who are proud of their way of life and have chosen to commit crimes as their profession. They are working on their own or in small disorganised, opportunity-based groups of changing membership. The evaluation of thieves and supporting professions, such as receivers of stolen goods, showed that they defined their world as well-structured, and that their self-identity was strong and closely related to fellow criminals (Aromaa 1983).

Definitions of professional criminal

There is a conflict between the legal, criminological and empirical research definitions of a professional criminal. Authorities and the criminal law find that a person who commits just a single crime may be classified as a professional criminal, provided that he has planned to continue with criminal actions. According to empirical research, the persons I interviewed, and criminological literature, a person who commits one crime is just a beginner and by no means a professional criminal. They claim that the requirement of continuous criminality should be taken into account. In their view, a professional criminal is a person who makes his living mainly by committing series of lucrative crimes against property, thus securing his family’s livelihood. Criminal activity is fairly rational, persistent and financially profitable, and a single criminal act is by no means enough.

The persons I interviewed thought that both the authoritative and criminologist definitions of professional criminals are inadequate as they can be applied to habitual

offenders, too. The criminals' own definition¹⁰ comprises three main dimensions: 1) demanding, profitable crimes, 2) committing crimes is exercising a profession, and 3) right and smart attitude, i.e. planning and inventing new forms of crimes, and good manners. The authoritative and criminologist perspectives may be biased because they are used in legal work and reflect the formal control system. In legal work, the criminal act is traditionally in the centre, and the reasons that influenced or instigated the person's act(s) are only a secondary aspect.

The essential difference between criminological literature, empirical study and the interviewees' own assessment is that the two last-mentioned sources represent significantly more optimistic views on the diversity of the criminal activity. The exaggeration of the glamorous lifestyle of professional criminals in empirical studies could be due to the fact that the informants and participants have been selected according to their criminal records. Empirical studies suggest that criminals are satisfied with their life and their choice of profession, and have no need to change their behaviour or stop committing crimes. The criminal justice system, on the other hand, attempts to minimise the attractions of the life of professional criminals by creating good control networks and severe sanctions.

The criminals' own definition of professionalism resembles the stereotype of a "super-criminal" who is able to do anything. But when compared with the literature on the crimes and lives of habitual offenders, the difference in attitudes and

¹⁰ The persons interviewed for this study had a relatively clear opinion concerning the central characteristics of a professional criminal. A summary of their own definition of a professional criminal is the following:

- 1) Several crime areas. Professional criminals operate in many crime areas. A single professional criminal may be specialised in a single crime sector and knows everything about it;
- 2) Money orientation. The person's only motive is money and his main source of income is crime; he is not committing crimes for excitement or fun;
- 3) Goal orientation. When an offender commits crimes, his only concern is committing them as well as possible, regardless of the consequences to others. Crimes can cause fear, terror or distress but this is of no relevance;
- 4) Committing crimes is serious work. The profession of a professional criminal is comparable to the profession of a company manager in that it involves a lot of pressure (to make money and not get caught), work is always priority number one, at any cost (family, friends, leisure time etc.);
- 5) Professionalism. The person plans his actions and co-operates with others to achieve goals. He does not want to act unprofessionally;
- 6) Only profitable crimes are committed. A single crime series can be worth millions;
- 7) Dignity, good behaviour, credible appearance and self-confidence. Professional criminal behaves in away that makes fellow criminals respect his skills and income, and normal people his luxurious lifestyle;
- 8) A free man. In general, professional criminal spends more time outside than inside prison. In the best case, police are not even after him because he is unknown;
- 9) Legalising the profits. Professional criminal knows how to launder the proceeds of crime so that a) authorities do not even become interested in him—they do not realise that he has earned his money by committing crime(s); b) if the authorities become interested in his source of income, money is invested in a way that they cannot confiscate or even find it;
- 10) Normal family. Family life of a professional criminal is "normal", at the very least serving as a façade of happiness and normality. Wife's income serves to explain the standard of living;
- 11) Established. Professional criminal has to be known in the criminal fraternity as a person who has all (or at least most of) the attributes mentioned above.

behaviour between habitual offenders and my informants becomes more understandable. Habitual offenders commit crimes occasionally and with a varying volume, and their occupational objective is to get money for food, alcohol and drugs. Their reasons are thus totally different compared to those of professional criminals. The main differences between the two types of offenders are the goals of the crimes, the occupational attitude and the criminal mind. These differences became evident when I compared Kivivuori's study on habitual offenders and the three studies on professional criminals (mine, Hobbs' and Sutherland's) discussed above.

A professional criminal can work on his own or participate in group actions. My informants thought it was really important that they are proud of being professional criminals who plan their crimes, and emphasized the fact that they are totally different from habitual offenders who commit stupid unplanned crimes on the spur of the moment. This distinction between higher and lower level of professionalism is similar to any other profession and occupational identity.

Empirical studies on professional criminals in Finland, Great Britain and USA

There are only a few empirical studies made on professional criminals. It is amazing how similar the findings of these are, even though the three studies—British, American and the present—reflect different social conditions and different decades. On occasion it feels that the place and time of study are irrelevant, as if you are reading and analysing just one study. From the research point of view it is interesting how such similar findings are possible. In the following table, the studies on professional crime, conducted in three different countries at different times are analysed in more detail.

As shown below, main points of the research findings are congruent: ages when criminals start and end their careers, low level of education, lack of participation on relatives' part even though they are aware of the origin of the money and goods.

Getting caught and the consequent prison sentences are few and occasional. Prison both benefits the professionals (can create contacts, learn new crimes and new ways of committing them) and harms them (losing freedom and the opportunity to commit crimes). When not in prison, they spend their time enjoying the benefits of their crimes, and committing and planning old and new crimes. As criminal's career evolves, his group of friends changes; eventually, there are usually no other friends left except for those who commit crimes themselves. Most of the men are or have been married, and some of them have children. The criminal career has started mostly because of the money and partly because of the excitement of committing crimes. Career has been varyingly successful depending on intelligence and luck, and there is no intention to bring it to an end although the criminal lifestyle increases the risk of getting old prematurely or of dying violently.

The crimes committed have been tailored for maximum financial gain. They are planned and committed with care, and there is no violence involved except for tactical intimidation purposes or to secure the successful completion of the crime. The profits are used to finance new crimes, support family, or invested in legal businesses and conspicuous consumption. The structure of professional criminal

groups varies from tight, hierarchical, long-term marketing chains and networks to flexible and short-lived groups that commit single crimes. Even though the time the group spends on single crimes can be short, the same persons might commit several crimes one after another, making the group's crime career last for years or decades. Usually a group is formed by a few regular members of the same age and ethnic background. In some crimes, it is possible to use temporary "aids", basically anyone who can do the required work. The groups do not really have any regional or product monopolies; the crimes are committed when the opportunity presents itself. The most important rules regulating the group's activities are trustworthiness and zero tolerance for informing. The relationships within the groups and with other groups are based on business. Trust and co-operation exist as long as things work out in a way that satisfies both or all parties.

One common element present in these three studies is that criminals live a hard and fast life, drinking, getting by with little sleep, and doing other things harmful to one's health. It seems that they want to use the opportunities to commit crimes and enjoy life while it is still possible. You never know when you are going to get caught, lose your freedom and the possibility to commit crimes. Also, the competition between criminals is hard, and there are new and eager young men waiting in line to take your place in the limited market. The biggest difference between the studies is that while Sutherland concentrates only on thefts, Hobbs' and my studies cover professional crime more widely. Another big difference is that the professional crime that Hobbs studied is evidently smaller-scale and more regionally limited, focusing more on the local market, than the crimes committed by the criminals studied by Sutherland and myself. In the latter studies, the criminals aim to work on a national level and in big cities, are harder to trace and have more opportunities to commit crimes. Compared to the study by Hobbs, Sutherland's and my findings can be better generalised to a national level. The biggest similarity between the informants from different countries is that they are driven by economic rationality and personal pleasure, and thus behave in a very selfish fashion (Table 1).

Definitions of organised crime

Defining the concept of organised crime and its methods of committing crimes has been a source of controversy in legal and criminological debate throughout the 20th century. The need for definitions remains perpetual; authorities regard them as essential tools of control in their fight against organised crime.

The concept of organised crime is ambivalent, and several different kinds of definitions exist. All the different organised crime groups are unique, and both their forms and the crimes they commit vary significantly around the globe. Therefore, a single, conclusive definition of organised crime has to be very general in nature. Those familiar with the subject and operating in the field have acquiesced to draw very general guidelines, because for them and their work, the definitions are nonetheless important tools. The essential characteristic of the term "organised crime" is that it denotes a process or method of committing crimes, not a distinct type of crime, nor a distinct type of criminal (Beare 1996).

Table 1 Comparison of the personal features of professional criminals in different countries. The studies referred to are mine 2001, Hobbs 1995 and Sutherland 1972

Variable	Country		
	Finland 2001	Great Britain 1995	USA 1937
Personal characteristics			
Age (20–40 years)	X	X	X
Education (low)	X	X	X
Social status (low)	X	X	X
Start of criminal career			
Juvenile delinquent	P	P	O
As an adult	P	P	X
Parents/siblings			
No serious criminal career	P	P	P
Some crimes	P	P	P
Prison (few times/sentences)	X	X	X
Respected criminals	X	X	X
Own family			
Wife	P	P	P
Children	P	P	P
Friends are other criminals	X	X	X
Use of money			
Living	P	P	P
Saving	P	P	P
Future			
Why quit	P	P	P
Start legal business	P	P	P
Crimes			
Goal orientation	X	X	X
Professionalism	X	X	X
Profitable crimes	X	X	X
Several crime areas	X	X	X
Violence (if needed)	X	X	X
Own crimes ^a	P	P	P
Groups			
Structure (network)	X	X	X
Few participants	X	X	X
Gender (male)	X	X	X
Ethnicity (same)	X	X	X
Short-lived	X	X	X
Monopoly (no)	X	X	X
Rules (common)	X	X	X
Relations between other groups (good)	X	X	X
Relations between members (good)	X	X	X
Help to imprisoned members	X	–	X
Contacts with foreigners	P	P	O

X=fulfil the criteria completely, P=fulfil the criteria partly, o=do not fulfil the criteria, and – = no information.

^a Own crime(s) means that person who participate one group crime actions can also commit crimes on their own or participate other group's crime activities without any restrictions of the group that they are active in the first hand

The most global definition of organised crime is the United Nations definition that is broad enough to cover the different forms of organised crime around the world. This breadth creates both opportunities and problems for national authorities. The main advantage of the UN work is that with this definition, some kind of global

and common understanding of the concept¹¹ of organised crime has been achieved. A unified definition helps the authorities of different countries to deal with present crime and to prepare for future ones. Especially the poorer countries benefit from this global definition since they do not have the resources to deliberate the issue.

Yet the same globality is the principal problem with the UN definition: national differences are not taken into account. Resources the poor countries have to control crime are already limited, and the new international obligations to intervene in cultivation of drugs, human trafficking etc. can thus seem like an unreasonable strain. It is problematic for this definition that western industrial societies needs are that well presented, to minimise their costs in preventing felonies such as drug crimes and illegal immigration.

In practice, the less global European Union definition of the concept of organised crime is practically more advantageous to EU member countries. The biggest and most visible advantage of this definition has been that on a European level, it has been possible to agree on a fairly specific and detailed definition of the problem of organised crime. A precise definition helps the countries to unify legislations and government action to a joint European level. With the help of unified legislations and government action the countries can deal with organised crime on a national and Union level.

However, the practical application of the EU definition¹² has proven problematic, and appears to have given rise to national differences. On the basis of personal discussions with representatives of Italian and Finnish police authorities, it seems that for example Italian authorities use the definition in a consistent manner in their

¹¹ According to various United Nations working papers and the Palermo convention, transnational organised crime has the following characteristics:

- 1) A structured group to commit rationally planned serious crimes, three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with the Convention.
- 2) Hierarchical links or personal relations which enable leaders to control the group, earn profits and/or to control internal or foreign territories or markets, using violence, intimidation or corruption.
- 3) The laundering of illicit proceeds to further criminal activity and to infiltrate the legitimate economy.
- 4) A profit motivation, the group is structured to obtain financial or other benefits to its members
- 5) A potential for expansion into any new activity beyond national borders. (The United Nations Convention of 12 December 2000; United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention 2000; Vlassis 2001.)

¹² The European Union definition of organised crime is the following:

- 1) Collaboration of two or more people.
- 2) Each with their own appointed tasks.
- 3) For a prolonged or indefinite period of time.
- 4) Using some form of discipline and control.
- 5) Suspected of the commission of serious criminal offences.
- 6) Operating on an international level.
- 7) Using violence or other means suitable for intimidation.
- 8) Using commercial or business-like structures.
- 9) Engaged in money laundering.
- 10) Exerting influence on politics, the media, public administration, judicial authorities, or the economy.
- 11) Determined by the pursuit of profit and/or power.

In order to be classified as an organised crime group, at least six of the above-mentioned characteristics must be present, four of them being numbers 1, 3, 5 and 11 (European Union, 1997 & 1999).

work. One indication of this is, that during the time the definition has been applied by the police, there has not been dramatic increase in the number of organised crime groups (Perugini 2001). In Finland, in turn, the National Bureau of Investigation has estimated that during the 6 years following Finland's entry into the European Union, the number of Finnish organised crime groups had nearly tripled. (NBI 2001). Unofficial police data cited in legislative documents showed a similar trend; between 2000 and 2001, the number of such groups more than doubled, from 23 to approximately 60 (NBI 2001). It can also be noted that the Finnish courts appear to have often disagreed with the results of the police investigation and of the consideration of the charges. There are only a few court verdicts per year (see, Table 2 below) in which the court has increased the sentence on the basis of chapter 6, section 2 of the Criminal Code, which applies if the offender had committed the offence in a group that has been formed especially to commit crime. My informants estimated that during the 1990s, perhaps some 10–15 organised crime groups were active in Finland.

An example on how authorities may over-estimate the danger of organised crime comes from the Netherlands, where criminologists studied 189 groups classified as organised crime groups by the Dutch justice authorities. The researchers used two different kinds of definitions (group criminality and organised crime group) to assess crimes that were committed by groups. Before the groups were defined and counted as belonging to organised crime, they had to fulfil the following five criteria: 1) hierarchic structure, 2) use of sanctions, 3) investment of criminal proceeds in legitimate activities, 4) intimidation of government officials or personnel of legitimate companies, and 5) perpetration of various offences. Only three of the investigated 189 groups met all five criteria of organised crime. Four criteria were met by seventeen groups, three criteria by eighteen groups, two by fifty-four and one by sixty-one groups. Thirty-six groups did not meet any of them (Fijnaut et al. 1998, 12).

The advantage of the criminological definitions of organised crime is that they are based on empirical research material. The research has looked at, among other things, the interpersonal relationships in the groups, how the profits of crime are

Table 2 The number of cases in Finnish courts of first instance where the Finnish Penal Code article 6.2 has been applied as an aggravating circumstance in 1992–1999

Year	Number of all crimes	Number of all criminal sentences	6:2§1/2 applied as an aggravating circumstance	Number of OC groups in police statistics
1992	151.005	76.713	3	?
1993	161.472	67.231	3	?
1994	146.074	62.647	-	?
1995	140.161	62.882	2	10
1996	132.655	60.216	10	13
1997	129.568	59.231	-	15
1998	113.156	59.699	1	22
1999	118.359	60.579	7	27
Total No.	1.092 450	509.198	26	87 ^a

(Statistics Finland 2001; NBI 1999.) (? = No information available)

^a The total number may include same groups several times because they are counted separately each year

divided, the continuity of the action and other person-related issues. The researchers have illuminated the methods and internal relationships of the groups, making it possible to develop a fairly accurate definition of organised crime. The biggest problem with the criminological literature definitions is that most of the published studies have been conducted in western industrial countries and are very Anglo-Saxon. Findings based on, say, that research tradition in America cannot easily be generalised to a global level because the differences between the western industrial world and other countries are far too great. On the other hand, it is good to know that also in Eastern Europe¹³ organised crime has been studied, but unfortunately this literature is not widely known due to language problems.

The international institutions definitions of organised crime are intended to provide guidance to national authorities when developing national law-making processes. The nature of the decisions of the international institutions is advisory, indicating how the internal laws and regulations of the member states should be developed. These legal definitions of organised crime may be criticised; authority's objective is to control, not to understand, the phenomenon of organised crime. The European Council has pointed out in its strategy that "we have to know the enemy"¹⁴, thus underlining the importance of a common definition. The lack of empirically studied information and the states' economic interests have in part contributed to the situation where the common acceptance of organised crime definitions has remained imperfect for so long. (Strategy of 27 March 2000; Koskinen 2001, 15–16.) Criminological definitions can be used as a basic source of all definitions. The basic studies available have attempted to understand, define and describe the relevant forms of group structures, human relations, and committed crimes. On the basis of that knowledge, law drafting can be carried out without over-estimation and delusions of the danger of organised crime.

On the other hand, those criticising the different definitions and attempts to understand forms of organised crime always remember to point out that the whole field of study is far too orientated to serve authority interests (stiff punishments, increasing law enforcement resources). Police are mainly interested in creating practical tools which facilitate their work while investigating single crimes. The critics claim that criminologists have forgotten their basic task, that instead of researching group participation, group formation, and their influences on society, they concentrate too much on serving police interests. However, it is worth remembering that most of the money with which crime groups are studied comes from justice authorities, and this must affect research frames. The lack of academic studies in the field has resulted in a situation where authorities attempt to get support for their work, and all they find are the criminological studies from the 1930s regarding American social structures or the history of other societies (cf. e.g. Abadinsky 1990; Arlacchi 1986; Cressey 1969) outdated a long time ago. Under

¹³ cf. e.g. Gurov, Alexander and Rusakova, Maya in Russia, Plawaczewski, Emil in Poland or Stankov, Bojan in Bulgaria.

¹⁴ "Knowing the enemy" in this context mean that authorities of the European countries have find, produce and share the facts of the organised crime groups in their country and also in the wider in the European level among the neighbouring and other countries.

these circumstances, I want in my own study to approach Finnish crime groups and participants in a “different” manner, from the inside.

Method and data collection of the study

The research material consists of 15 persons and one group of 6 persons all of whom participated in my thematic interviews¹⁵. The total number of conducted interviews was 33, and the volume of taped discussions approximately 50 h. Other, “unrecorded” time spent with the interviewees was approximately the same. The persons selected to be interviewed were still committing or had recently committed these types of crimes.

The 21 interviewed persons¹⁶ were selected for equal representation of four different criminal backgrounds. The types of crimes that Finns typically commit across borders (from abroad to Finland) include:

- 1) different kinds of smuggling (spirits, tobacco and drugs),
- 2) delivering prostitutes and organising their work (procuring) in the country.

From Finland to foreign countries, Finnish criminals primarily

- 3) handle stolen goods.

The criminally received money has to be

- 4) laundered into legal money before it can be used in normal transactions without risk. Money laundering takes place in different kinds of business transactions in Finland and abroad (cf. e.g. Junninen 1999).

The data required for identifying suitable informants were collected from both public (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, books and justice documents) and non-public sources (police, customs, border guards and tax authority data files). My aim was to profile informants so that the selected groups would represent the selected crime areas temporally and geographically. The number of required interviews was concluded from several sources estimating the number of professional criminals in Finland. The different estimates available indicated that the number of active professionals in Finland was approximately 100.

¹⁵ The number of required interviews was concluded from several sources estimating the number of professional criminals in Finland. The different estimates available indicated that the number of active professionals in Finland was approximately 100. Various arguments supported this figure: 1) in the 1990s, the number of convicted prisoners in Finland was slightly below 3,000 persons per year (Aho 2002), and if only one per cent (as motorcycle gangs claim) or under 5 per cent (as my informants estimated) of them were actual professional criminals, their total number would be 30–150 persons. The Finnish police estimated that in the 1990s, there were about 20 active organised crime groups in Finland, the number of participants varying from 3 to over ten. This would equal to 60–200 professional criminals. (NBI 2001).

¹⁶ The fieldwork was conducted in three and a half months in the summer and autumn 2001. Some of the interviewees were active in more than one of the discussed subject areas. All interviewees were male. Ten of them were serving prison sentences in Finland. Eleven were free and living mainly in Finland, staying part of the year abroad, in for example Estonia and Spain. Only two of the contacted persons refused on interview. Finding the interviewee was not difficult. Persons who were in prison had always time to speak. Some of the interviews had to rearrange several times due the business matters of the persons at liberty. The interviews were done in the public coffee places or restaurants, and in the prison cells and visiting areas. Two of the profiled persons in my reserve (on a shortlist of 50) were killed in the course of the three and a half months of fieldwork.

Finnish professional criminals and their organisations

One of the main objectives of my study was to define the structures of Finnish professional criminal groups in the selected criminal activities that included alcohol, drugs and tobacco smuggling, handling stolen goods, and procuring. None of the 14 groups that I studied were able to fulfil the 14 variables presented in below, required for a group to be classified as an organised crime group. Table 3 presents the studied groups and my estimation of how well they fulfil the study variables. In the Table, and later in the text the different group features are presented as a summary of the variables¹⁷. Detailed information cannot be disclosed in order to avoid the recognition of the studied groups.

It is worth noting that the above classification of variables of the studied groups is suggestive at best, because all activities of the groups are not known. The classification is based on the interviews of my informants. Complementary information was also gathered from public sources (TV, radio and newspapers) and trial documents. On the basis of this information, I constructed my subjective classification of the level of professionalism and the organisational level of the studied groups. It was often difficult to say whether the group was able to fulfil a certain criterion completely, or whether it fulfilled it by three-quarters, or by half or less, and several times I had to make compromises. Focusing separately on each aspect helped to understand the groups and the co-operation between them. Organised crime is not confined to a single group, and indeed, no criminal organisation operates autonomously. Each group depends on others for the supply and distribution of illegal goods, money laundering, fencing operations, and it is quite normal that they share persons and resources. An American study shows that gangs can be racially or ethnically homogenous, and still quite willing to go outside their group to form criminal partnerships (Ryan 1995, 2).

¹⁷ List of the variables is collection of different definitions of organised crime; the main sources were United Nations, European Union and criminological literature. First four variables describe the crime areas of the groups. All the groups presented in here had to be active at least one of the studied crime areas. The ten other variables is collection of the theoretical literature of organised crime studies. Bonding means that group is open only to chosen persons. Persons who are willing to participate group has to prove their quality to commit crimes, before they can recruited, if their services are needed. Basic rule is that group does not take new persons, if the work can be done without them. Continuity means that group have done more than one project together, and the future coming crime activities have been planned. Co-operation means that group have commit smuggling or some other crimes together with other Finnish or foreign group. Corruption/ violence means that group has one or another means to commit crime or hide crime profits. Division of labour, means that group members have their individual tasks in the group crime activities. Expanding nature means that group has tried to expand its activities to other crime areas or other parts of Finland or abroad. Money laundering means that group or its members have laundered money by investing it or used other means to make crime profits in legal income. Monopoly means that group has tried to reach monopoly of certain crime area in the certain part of Finland. Multiple enterprises means that group members are active in several crime areas. Non-ideological means that group and its members are only interested to make money on the crimes that they commit. No political or any other ideological ideas are not involved to the group crime activities. Profit and power means that group and its members are interested to make money on the crimes that they commit. Economical wealthy give power and independence. Rules and regulations means that group and its members have some rules to follow; no scape-coding, etc. Specialisation means that group and its members have know-how how and individual roles when they do big-scale smuggling and distribution of the goods in the country. Structure of the group means that more than three persons is involved into the group actions.

Table 3 Evaluation of the criminal activities of the studied 14 Finnish professional criminal groups in the 1990s, and the variables of organised crime used in this study

Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Criminal activities														
a) Alcohol/tobacco	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	X	-	-	X	-	-
b) Drugs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	X	-	-	-
c) Handling stolen goods	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	-	X	-	-	-	X	-
d) Procuring	-	-	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Total number	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
Variables														
1 Bonding	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2 Continuity	X	-	-	-	S	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3 Co-operation between groups	S	X	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	X	S	X	S	-
4 Corruption/violence	X	S	S	-	-	S	S	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5 Division of labour	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6 Expanding nature	X	X	-	-	-	S	-	-	-	-	S	-	-	-
7 Money laundering	S	X	-	X	X	-	-	S	S	S	S	-	X	-
8 Monopoly	-	-	S	-	-	-	S	-	-	S	-	-	-	-
9 Multiple enterprises	S	X	X	X	X	-	S	X	S	-	-	-	S	-
10 Non-ideological nature	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11 Profit and/or power	S	S	X	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
12 Rules and regulations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
13 Specialisation	X	X	X	X	S	S	S	X	X	X	S	S	S	S
14 Structure of group/ more than 3 persons	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	-	H	H	-	-
Total (max. 14) ^a	11	11	9.5	9	9	8.5	8.5	8.5	8	7.5	7.5	7	6.5	5
Percentage of the total	79	79	68	64	64	61	61	61	57	54	54	50	46	36

X=fulfils the criteria completely, S=fulfils the criteria partly, - =does not fulfil the criteria, and H=hierarchical.

^a crimes not included.

The objective of categorisation was to classify the studied 14 professional criminal groups as either organised crime groups or criminal groups, as the Dutch researchers have done in their study (Fijnaut et al. 1998, 11). It became obvious during the study that it would be unrealistic to apply only these two categories. On the basis of the interviews, I developed a third definition of a group of semi-organised crime¹⁸.

In this study, the middle category (semi-organised crime) was used to draw a line between organised crime and group criminality, because something was needed between the two. Accordingly, I started to consider the variables as a continuum, where the groups' actions and forms meet some of the variables and elements of the defined classes but not necessarily all of them. This way all groups could be placed on the continuum of organised crime and group criminality, as presented in Fig. 1.

It is important to notice that the group's location on the continuum is not stable; actually, the groups are in constant movement. The group activities demonstrated in Fig. 1 reflect the complexity of the activities of criminal groups during the 1990s. A group's location on the continuum is determined according to its success (its loses or gains in smuggling and marketing, the participants' daily efforts, actions of other

¹⁸ In this study semi-organised crime means that the group's organisation and the crimes it has committed partly fulfil and partly do not fulfil the definitions of criminology, EU and UN (presented in the footnotes before) for organised crime. It may be that the group cannot or even does not want to fulfil them completely, and thus, its crimes and group structure have qualities of both organised crime and group criminality.

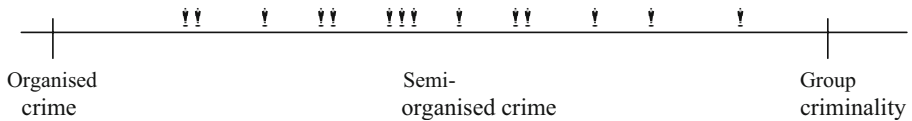


Fig. 1 The studied 14 Finnish groups on the continuum of organised crime-group criminality

groups to take over markets, authority actions to imprison persons, etc). An other important observation is that organised crime and group criminality¹⁹ are not the ends of the continuum, on the contrary. The continuum represents a space in which different groups are ranked according to the level of professionalism of committed criminal activities. At the time of this study, the status of the groups was as follows: one was moving upwards, towards organised crime, the status of seven was not changing, four of them were on their way down, and two were inactive.

I classified nine of the studied groups as semi-organised crime groups, while the actions of the last five could be classified as group criminality. Two of the semi-organised groups could nearly be defined as organised crime groups, but not quite. These groups seemed well-organised, their activities were continuous and effective, and their leaders were determined, experienced, and capable professional criminals. However, once I compared them to the aforementioned, well-known forms of international organised crime²⁰ groups, something was missing. However, there is no reason to believe that the activities of these two groups are not ongoing, even if their leaders have been in prison for years. The groups have hired new members and daily routines are re-organised. The only ascending group will certainly catch up with the two top groups, and depending on its success and the effectiveness of authorities to prevent future crimes, it may even eventually attain the 14 variables for a classified organised crime group. The next two groups on the line are stable or descending. Normally, stable groups do not aspire to develop, and the participants are satisfied with the way things are. The fifth group was plunging due to recent problems in all of its operations.

The main reason for not classifying these five groups as organised crime groups was that they did not fulfil all the criteria. Firstly, Finnish authorities were able to work undisturbed²¹ (with only a few exceptions) even when the group leaders were

¹⁹ Group criminality means that a group of criminals who are professionally engaged commit certain punishable offences in a certain period of time. The group has an internal division of labour although it is not necessarily hierarchically structured. It has no internal sanctioning system, and its continued existence depends on one or more key members. Its aim is monetary gain and it can achieve this without having to compete with other groups, let alone pursue economic dominance. In addition, the group has following features: in principle, it only commits one type of offence, the revenues are solely used to finance luxurious life style and new similar offences, and it makes every effort to commit its crimes as professionally as possible (Fijnaut et al. 1998, 11). Structured group is a group that is not randomly formed for the immediate commission of an offence and that does not need to have formally defined roles for its members, continuity of the membership or a developed structure (United Nations 2001).

²⁰ International organised crime: activities of one-country organised crime groups are involved in relations/partnership with organised crime group/s of other countries. Usually this term is used to describe partnership co-operations between different groups from different countries. (Ryan 1995.)

²¹ Undisturbed in here means, that Finnish authorities have not faced a much of irregular influence from the criminals side, even the large groups had been investigated by the police and harsh sentences given by the courts. In the interviews offenders told, that they like to keep low profile. Irregular influence against authorities is not favourable, because it causes more problems and unwanted attention. Irregular influence of Finnish authorities by the professional criminals was relative small in the last part of 1990s, when this matter first time studied in the country. cf. Aromaa, unpublished manuscript.

captured and convicted. Secondly, the groups had existed for years but their continuity was yet to be established, and at times their activity had been in a state of suspended animation and at risk to stop. Thirdly, the groups operated in only one criminal sector, smuggling illegal goods to Finland; and their international contacts were weak. They only had contacts to those foreign groups who supplied products to them, and the Finnish groups were not able to expand their activities abroad like transnational organised crime groups do. Fourthly, the groups did not have permanent monopolies in the markets of their products, as they would not have been able to maintain their monopolies in case of a failure to import goods to Finland.

I classified also the next four groups as semi-organised crime groups even though they were not interested in or capable of developing their activities. On the other hand, these groups committed crimes in a more professional manner than the criminal groups. The crimes committed were serious (i.e. harmful to society) and profitable to the groups, they were committed in a professional manner, and also the continuity of the groups was on a level that made it possible to define them as semi-organised. These four groups differed from the others in that they were less hierarchical in their structure, and did not meet the criteria for organised crime as well as the previously introduced groups.

The last five groups worked so erratically and were so loosely structured that they could easily be classified as criminal groups. They committed serious crimes and their activities continued for several years, but the aim was more to get easy money than to develop into a serious criminal group. A typical problem among these groups was the lack of professionalism, personal attitude and willingness. They did not have the ambition or capacity to develop their actions and personal relations to a higher level. The participants of these groups were satisfied with occasional work opportunities and the money that they received for their services. They were keener to protect their personal freedom, substance dependence, or other excesses, consequently needing occasional work opportunities as the earlier loot had been consumed.

Finnish professional criminal groups and transnational organised crime

The Finnish professional criminal groups that I have studied do not, in my opinion, fulfil the combination of international definitions of organised crime, as provided by the criminological literature, the European Union, the United Nations, etc. Naturally, some may argue that the bar was set too high, but on the basis of the interviews and my other studies, I think this is the reality of the Finnish groups. My informants were also of the opinion that their activities should not be defined as operations of organised criminal groups. Of the 14 Finnish criminal groups I studied, the most efficient ones were classified as semi-organised crime groups, but almost one-third of the groups were classified as group criminality. The basis and “indicator” for my classification is the existing international definitions and the globally known organised criminal groups, their activities and their basic philosophy (Sicilian mafia, the Neapolitan Camorra, Italian Organised Crime Families in New York, the Cali and Medellin cocaine cartels, Japanese Boryokudan, etc.).

In my opinion, this study is a successful test of how known international definitions can be used to define organised crime. The starting point of developing these definitions was the need for control and surveillance from the part of authorities, and the classification cannot be directly applied to define and outline the extent, the ways of operating, and the quality of organised crime. Nevertheless, the definitions have important merits, and they are helpful in conceptualizing the problem and in developing solutions. The problem of organised crime can be clarified further by continuing to work on the definitions, by academic research, and by systematic analyses of the masses of information gathered by the authorities. Improving the general level of knowledge on organised crime would help citizens grasp the problem, and give authorities in different countries in their domestic and international legal work means for crime prevention. However, even the best analysis of organised crime is always based on historical information, which is always partly or sometimes even entirely outdated regarding new forms of crime and new ways of operations of criminal groups. Nevertheless, the available historical information is not worthless, for as was wisely said by Winston Churchill “The farther back you look, the farther forward you are likely to see”.

The greatest problems of Finnish professional criminal groups are the lack of monopolies and the poor continuity of the activity, as a consequence of which the activity is unsystematic and short-sighted aiming solely at momentary profits. Therefore the groups also lack long-term objectives related to power, or plans of how to advance from the stage of making money to the stage of stabilising one’s own economic and criminal status. When comparing Finnish professional crime to Sicilian or Colombian organised crime, the differences in the scope of the activity and efficiency are clear. According to my informants, Finnish professional criminals wish to lie as low as possible, beyond the reach of the eye of Finnish authorities, whereas in Sicily or Colombia, organised criminal groups are mocking legally elected governments, carrying out the most blatant crimes and protecting their monopoly status inside the borders of the country without any concern for governments or their civil servants.

The most important feature of the Finnish professional criminal groups that I studied was that the groups are not solid and do not have a hierarchical structure even if they apply the operational model of a stepwise marketing chain. In that chain, the commodities are distributed from the top to the bottom according to kilos and sales incomes, and everybody receives his remuneration only for work done and nothing else. A specific feature of the marketing chain is that if there are no commodities to be sold, there is no marketing chain either, but each person who participates in the chain is making whatever money is available for a living. The co-operation may continue later if something that can be sold turns up. In such cases known and trusted persons will be contacted first and asked if they were still interested in doing business. The groups that I studied had another significant shortcoming: the relationships between the persons involved were very individualistic and not regulated in advance. The individuality was reflected in the indifference of my informants of anybody else’s economic security except their own. The feature of lacking advance regulation was reflected in unrealistically optimistic expectations of the ease in which the crime could be carry out and of the sophistication of the accomplices in obeying commonly accepted norms of behaviour and in avoiding interfering with or hampering other people’s lives. In real life, under the pressure of authorities or accomplices, the noblest goals will regrettably often collide with the wall of cowardice and the importance of saving one’s own skin.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that some of the Finnish groups that I studied are clearly willing to develop their criminal activity and to commit crimes that have increasingly serious consequences and an increasingly long in duration. According to my analysis, it is indeed important that the activities and the crimes of Finnish professional criminal groups are monitored actively, in order to avoid a similar situation as in Estonia, Russia, Italy, Colombia etc., where the local criminal groups are too powerful for the state to control, and there are no means or courage left to effectively interfere with their activities. It also became very clear that Finnish professional criminals take the advantage of the national borders, like any other transnational crime groups do in their country. But the Finnish groups are not willing to widen their markets or commit crimes in abroad. For the Finnish groups the cross-border crime is trade of commodities, where the participants receive monetary gain according to their work and sales input as the commodities change owners. The power aspirations in regards of interfering with criminality in another country are quite limited because it is important to maintain the trade relationships, and the seller's interest in the commodity is terminated when the deal is made.

When studying and defining Finnish groups, I noticed that the categorisation of the groups as such is unimportant, in that the authorities use it primarily as a method of control with which they attempt to understand and to structure crimes committed by groups. The interpretation by the authorities aims to control and sentence, where the commission of crimes as part of an organised criminal group may be categorised as an aggravating circumstance that makes the punishment harsher. From the perspective of control, the objective is to aid sentencing without attempting to understand and explain the activities of the groups, the interpersonal relationships, or the motives of the persons to participate in the commission of crimes, etc. After becoming aware of this control-centred perspective of the authorities, I consciously attempted to expand the perspective of my study, abandoning the black-and-white division into organised and group crime which has been applied in numerous reports that have been made by authorities themselves or to serve them directly (cf. e.g. Fijnaut 2001).

In my opinion, the crimes committed by groups cannot be subdivided into only two categories. Rather, according to the model I have presented in this study, I have placed the groups that I studied on a continuum, the other end of which represents group criminality, while the other end stands for organised crime; in between the extremes, all kinds of intermediary forms of the concepts are found. With this conceptual tool, I have been able to study the ways in which the groups have emerged and how they have evolved, and, in some cases, how they have deteriorated. None of the groups that I have studied, or of the Finnish criminal groups described in literature, had achieved the developmental path of Estonian organised crime as described by Markina. According to Markina, Estonian organised crime has progressed rather rapidly from the brutal phase that is physically dangerous to the participants to a presentable elite, committing sophisticated economic crimes, as the economic profits grew and the normative and legal system of the society developed (Markina 1998). Estonian organised crime has developed into the direction of organised crime of the greater world, similar to the American mafia that is a parasitic phenomenon operating in the margins of society. In southern Italy it plays a central role in almost every level of economic and political life. (Stille

1995, 10.) A comparison between the organised crime of Finland and of the countries mentioned before is futile since the groups that I have studied can still be classified into Markina's first stage of accumulating capital and are far away from the following steps, to say nothing of the stage of social acceptance. Whether some criminal groups of earlier times, for instance the families that grew rich in the 1920s and 1930s by smuggling spirits²², were able to move to the higher levels of committing crimes, is beyond the scope of the present study.

A particularly interesting feature of the groups that I studied was the high level of individuality and the dominant role of the leader. In the groups that I studied, the financier and the top man of the marketing chain were absolutely above all others because without him, the other persons in the marketing chain had nothing to sell. This kind of absolute one-man domination is found in many studies of organised crime. Power and its concentration into the hands of a small number of leaders is as such an interesting research topic, as well as the question of what binds the members of the groups together in a situation where one's own work, health, and economic well-being are totally in the hands of a superior person (cf. e.g. Ianni & Reuss-Ianni 1972; Stille 1995; Falcone 1995). The group dynamics and the community spirit of the groups are, in regards of Finnish professional criminals, what I have attempted to illuminate also in this study.

Discussion and Finnish debate

The conclusions my study provides about Finnish organised crime are quite different from what Finnish authorities, in particular police representatives have given about the phenomenon in public. According to the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation, the Finnish drug, alcohol and procuring markets are being controlled by Estonian and Russian organised criminal groups. According to my own interviews with Finnish professional criminals, Estonians and Russians are indeed selling merchandise to the Finns, but the relationship is one of business, not one of subordination. Secondly, the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation maintains that the number of Finnish organised criminal groups has more than doubled from ten groups in 1995 to 23 groups in the year 2000, less formal estimates being as much as three times this figure. According to my own study, there was not a single organised criminal group in Finland in the 1990s, but rather there was a mixture of different kinds of groups of professional criminals, where the participants, offences, and the time span of the activity varied greatly, depending on the success and failure of the different crimes. Based on the evidence provided by my study, I classified the Finnish groups of professional criminals that I studied as either group criminality or semi-organised crime.

²² In Finland was the prohibition of the alcohol during the years 1919–1932. It had similar kind of effects than the prohibition in the United States of America. People did not stop to drink alcohol. On the contrary, alcohol was largely smuggled into country from the neighbouring countries, in the Finnish case it mostly became from the Estonia. That large scale smuggling of alcohol showed large profits to smugglers and resellers. Part of the profits were invested in legal business, that was the beginning of the some wealthiest families in Finland, like in the United States (cf. e.g. Niska 1931, Lombardo 1994).

There are puzzling discrepancies between the information provided by researchers, crime statistics and criminal courts and the interpretations by police representatives. According to police interpretations, Finnish organised crime has become significantly more organised and more violent, and the number of groups has grown rapidly over the 1990s, whereas researchers utilising the same sources (interviews with Finnish criminals, police interrogations, informer sources, and crime statistics) as well as the courts represent an opposite opinion. Are the police employing the media as an instrument with which to create insecurity in the population and in this way creating pressures for political decision-makers to provide the power apparatus with more resources? A recent study about the growth of a general fear of violence, paralleled by the growth of violence-related headlines in the afternoon tabloids, illustrates clearly how the headlines have increased and become more fear-inducing although both crime statistics and victim surveys are unable to indicate significant changes in the volume of violence (cf. Kivivuori et al. 2002). Have the police used the media to mould the popular image of organised crime and made it appear as if the drug trade and organised prostitution were connected to it? Has the constant display of crime topics caused Parliament²³ to criminalize participation in criminal groups and prohibit the selling and buying of sexual services by lower-level statutes in a situation where solid information about the matters is missing? The question is of criminological interest, as my own interview data, crime statistics, and court data indicate that the degree of organisation of professional criminals or their crimes have not changed significantly in the course of the 1990s, whereas the popular police-influenced depiction of the situation has become increasingly unrealistic.

The central regions of activity of the criminal groups active in Finland are quite similar according to both my data and to Finnish authorities. In both cases, the main regions where the groups are active are the largest cities of the country: Helsinki, Tampere, and Turku. The report of the National Bureau of Investigation and my own study differ in estimates concerning the city of Lahti referred to by the police, while my data mentioned also the city of Oulu and the Kymenlaakso region. However, more significant than the individual cities is the question of which geographical regions in Finland these cities control. In my view, these cities control and contribute to organising the trade in the regions of Kymenlaakso, the state capital region, in the province of south-western Finland, in Häme, and in Ostrobothnia, or in all Finnish regions that are rich both by population and economy. It is quite obvious that crimes should be committed, groups established and business made in regions where the money and the markets are.

According to police information, Finnish organised criminal groups are active for an average of five years, and they are organised in three hierarchical levels, 3–5 core members and 5–12 assisting persons. My interviews do not allow a count of the average period of activity of the groups, but my previous study indicated that the criminal activity that is reported in police and customs sources relatively is mostly small-scale criminal business and one-time fraudulent projects, where the number of participating persons is small, and the duration of each project usually less than a year. Systematic long-term activity has been observed or suspected of primarily in cases that are related to the manufacture, smuggling and trafficking of drugs,

²³ The Finnish parliament consists on 200 members that are chosen in elections at every fourth year.

importing and marketing alcohol and tobacco, and value-added tax frauds. The duration of these crimes also only infrequently exceeds the limit of one year. It is, however, often observed that the same persons have been involved in one project after another, and this clearly indicates criminal activity is a permanent way of life for certain individuals (Junninen & Aromaa 1999). The probability for these persons to repeat crimes has been noted in an earlier Finnish study which investigated the birth of organised crime during the prohibition and the flourishing of the black market during the II World War in Finland and USA. (Takala 2001). The police estimates concerning the number of members and of the hierarchical levels in the groups correspond to my own estimates. However, unlike the police, I am not defining these groups as being organised criminal groups.

According to my informants, the number of people who are actively participating in professional group criminality and semi-organised crime in Finland is rather small and variable, and the number of passive random dealers is considerably larger. The largest volume of criminal projects is related to the imports of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and women for prostitution to Finland. The level of professional skills is also very variable across the marketing chains. The organisers, financiers and wholesale dealers know their trade well and have a professional attitude towards it, being aware of the risks involved. The habitual criminals who are acting as retail dealers on the lower levels of the marketing chains are satisfied by the chance of earning modest sums of money or to finance their own addiction. As a consequence of their one-time character, the studied crimes do not comprise large, permanent or hierarchic criminal organisations. Instead, they are carried out in flexible and opportunistic project groups with variable compositions. These groups are active in many different manners, connected with business enterprises that are used either as fronts or as crime instruments. The crimes, however, represent a broad scale of criminal projects, with the common feature that they exploit the specific circumstances of the border between Finland and its neighbouring countries, the differences in the standard of living, legislation, and law enforcement. In the cross-border trade of commodities, the participants receive monetary gain according to their work and sales input as the commodities change owners. The power aspirations in regards of interfering with criminality in another country are quite limited because it is important to maintain the trade relationships, and the seller's interest in the commodity is terminated when the deal is made.

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