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Chapter 4

Involvement mechanisms for organized crime

Abstract⁴⁶

This study aims to illuminate the processes that make individuals engage in organized crime activities. Within the diversity of individual involvement processes, several distinctive mechanisms are discussed. Theoretical ideas are illustrated by empirical data on 15 crime groups, including over 300 offenders. The crime groups differ in size, composition, and the nature of criminal activities. Social capital theory is used to understand the dynamical process of becoming involved in organized crime; on the one hand an individual contributes to a crime group, on the other hand the crime group helps an individual reach certain goals. Case studies reveal several resources, such as knowledge, skills, and equipment, that make offenders suit and contribute to a particular organized crime group. Criminal and conventional histories of organized crime offenders turn out to be diverse. Several joint characteristics that opened doors to organized crime opportunities, like running one's own business, are discussed. It is confirmed that involvement through family and long-time friends is common; most criminal groups contain at least one or two relatives.

4.1 Introduction

The question why individuals engage in crime is at the heart of the criminological enterprise. As stated by Wikström (2004: 5): 'To explain crime is to answer the question why people commit crime by specifying the process that makes them, or prevents them from, engaging in acts of crime'. In this paper, I will elaborate on these processes for organized crime by analyzing three dimensions of individual involvement mechanisms; (1) contact between co-offenders, (2) knowledge and experiences beneficial to involvement, and (3) motivation to engage in these illegal activities. These three assets of individual involvement processes will be identified based on systematic analyses of investigations on 15 organized crime groups – including 314 offenders – that operated in the Netherlands. Dutch organized crime groups are primar-

⁴⁶This chapter was earlier published as: Van Koppen, M.V. (2013). Involvement mechanisms for organized crime. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 59: 1-20.

ily engaged in transit crime; international smuggling activities such as drug trafficking, smuggling illegal immigrants and large-scale cross-border fraud (Fijnaut et al., 1998; Kleemans, 2007). In addition to individual involvement processes, the composition of criminal collaborations will be discussed. I start though by presenting three cases, which illustrate the diversity of individual involvement in organized crime.

Like father, like son

The entire gipsy family A is involved in cocaine smuggling; Father, mother, and their four children – 20 to 24 years of age. They have been living in the South of the Netherlands for 20 years. Father and mother moved to Italy some time ago and their youngest son, 22 years of age, becomes the Dutch leader of the crime group, though acting upon his father's orders. Father A is still in charge and instructs his youngest son from Italy. The youngest son is a father of three, had his first child at the age of 18, and lives together with his new girlfriend. His sister, the youngest of four children, as well as the oldest and second son evidently have less authority over the crime group. They do all kinds of odd jobs under the authority of their younger brother. All four children have multiple earlier convictions, mostly for thefts and robberies.

Birds of a feather flock together

B and C, respectively 32 and 31 years old, are both touring car drivers working at the same travel organization. They have known each other for about 3 years. B is divorced, monthly pays maintenance allowance, and lives with his parents. He has no previous convictions. B is planning to set up a store together with his girlfriend and needs some money to do so. C is married, has two young children, and was once caught for drunk driving. He has high debts and states not to see the wood for the trees. In the presence of some touring car drivers, among which was C, B expresses the wish to earn some additional money, either legally or illegally. C has had some offers to transport drugs in the past and uses these contacts to mediate between B and the criminal group.

Climbing the criminal ladder

D is a former robber and was convicted 14 times for aggravated thefts between the age of 15 and the age of 22. From age 22 on, he was imprisoned. After his release at the age of 27, he again commits a property crime as well as a weapon-related crime. At the age of 33, he is convicted for organized crime. For 12 years, D has been on friendly terms with E, who is the key figure in a group of

criminal friends living in the same village. D manages one of the bars owned by E. As a consequence of the cooperation with E, D shifts his criminal focus from property crimes to drug trafficking. During the house search at D's residence, professional literature on organized groups was found as well as books on firearms, a textbook for police officers, and a police file of an organized crime group.

These three examples tell completely different stories. Firstly, the story of a life raised in crime, where crime is part of a life style. Secondly, the decent touring car drivers that are exposed to temptations and opportunities. Thirdly, the self-made offender who starts at a small level, but wants more and more, and shifts his focus. These three cases indicate, either explicitly or implicitly, individual involvement mechanisms for organized crime. The stories contain clues that show how these involvement processes work in general, though they also show how different these processes are for different individuals.

4.2 Organized crime and crime causation theories

The first difference between the three cases relates to the ancient debate on what explains crime best: personal or situational factors. Most criminological theories assume some kind of interaction, to a smaller or larger degree, between the individual and opportunities. Situational action theory, for example, states that the choice to participate in a crime is dependent on who is in what setting (Wikström, 2004).

For most common crimes, opportunity is not a barrier. Most crimes are relatively easy to commit, and can be committed anywhere at anytime. When and why individuals seize their opportunities, is therefore mainly explained by personal characteristics and circumstances. Offenders are generally assumed to have low self-control, to be highly impulsive, and to often go for a quick win rather than to invest time and money and wait for a big haul (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). This offender-description, however, does not seem to fit the prevailing view of organized crime offenders. Whereas opportunities for most common crimes are countless, the complexity of activities makes organized crime opportunities less evident. Organized crime is less easily accessible than most general crimes, and activities require close cooperation between offenders. Crime groups involved in drugs or human trafficking, for example, use sophisticated logistic procedures (Schloenhardt, 1999). Organized fraud groups use complex techniques to evade taxes. Therefore, opportunities are more important in explaining involvement in this type of crime (Kleemans and De Poot, 2008).

Plans for activities in organized crime are often much more thought-out and usually take a while before they pay off. These offenders must in a way be more calculating and willing to invest time, money and patience. Based on analyses of criminal careers, it has been shown that many organized crime offenders are not born criminals whose anti-social behaviour grows from bad to worse with age, but instead seem to react to appealing opportunities becoming available to them later in life. A large part have an adult onset in offending or are first offenders at the time they get involved in organized crime (chapter 2 of this thesis). Furthermore, compared to general offenders, organized crime offenders start off their criminal career in a far more serious way, and continue to commit more serious offences over the life course, as measured by imposed prison sentences (chapter 3 of this thesis).

The emphasis on opportunities in explaining organized crime is closely related to the significance of social contacts, because these provide access to co-offenders. Many activities in organized crime, in contrast to most common crimes, are transnationally oriented, which makes finding suitable co-offenders and coordinating the process even more complex. Furthermore, formalities that smooth collaboration in the legal world – contracts and the possibility to go to court in case of disagreement – are absent (Reuter, 1985). To become involved in organized crime, offenders have to either join an existing crime group, or start off criminal activities with others and set up a new crime group. Mutual reliance and trust in each other's capacities is essential for fruitful cooperation. Therefore, organized crime offenders do not take their chance with someone overnight (Von Lampe and Johansen, 2004).

The bulk of research on crime involvement employs an offender approach. Large-scale longitudinal studies view individuals in isolation, examining the influence on criminal behaviour of several life events, such as marriage (see, for example, Sampson et al., 2006), having children (see, for example, Farrington and West, 1995), or job stability (see, for example, Sampson and Laub, 1990). However, for organized crime a more dynamical approach is required to explain individual involvement in criminal groups. Involvement in organized crime is explained by the interaction between an individual and a crime group. On the one hand, motives and ways to join an organized crime group should be explained on an individual level. On the other hand, the composition and collaborations within crime groups should be explained on a group-level. In other words, to explain involvement in organized crime, one should go beyond the individual, and examine the involvement processes and mechanisms in the broader perspective of the criminal network. Social capital theory suits this two-fold approach and will be used as framework to explain how and why individuals get involved in organized crime.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Using the theory of social capital to explain crime involvement seems paradoxical at first sight, as higher levels of social capital are generally found to be related to lower crime levels (Putnam,

Social capital theory focuses on an individual within a social structure, which allows this individual to have access to specific resources (Portes, 1998). The other way around, the collective profits from its relationship with an individual because of his specific resources. It is both an individual and a collective good, i.e. individuals bring along beneficial resources for the collective, while resources of the collective may help the individual achieve his aims. This way, both the individual and the group enlarge their resources (Paxton, 1999; Sampson et al., 1999). Hence, social capital promotes cooperation and mutual relations (Putnam, 2000) and mechanisms that play a role in this theory are also important in the involvement process for organized crime. A social capital approach can therefore help us understand how crime groups develop.⁴⁸

4.3 Social capital resources for organized crime

Resources as defined by social capital theory are not limited by any constraint, as every contact and any experience, know-how or personal characteristic can potentially contribute to one's individual resources and can carry an advantage or direct opportunity for joining a crime group. I will elaborate on three assets that are particularly interesting in the light of involvement in organized crime. Firstly, contacts are crucial as they provide access to additional resources, especially in organized crime, where contacts are required to receive access to co-offenders and build a crime group. Secondly, an individual's knowledge and capacities may contribute largely to the successful execution of activities by a crime group. Know-how on procedures, either legal or illegal, is a valuable asset for a crime group. Equipment, such as money and transport tools, can potentially enlarge someone's social capital, as crime groups need money to invest and drivers and trucks to transport their goods. Thirdly, motivation of offenders is an important condition. Though strictly speaking motivation is not a resource, it has some common ground with social capital, as it emphasizes the trade-off between reaching certain goals and the risk of getting caught. Motivation is strongly connected to life stability, as life changes

2000). However, social capital also has its downside. Some social structures have illegal means, such as organized crime groups, and individuals within such groups use the contacts within the group to mount their criminal activities (Portes, 1998). This downside of social capital is labelled *perverse social capital* (Rubio, 1997) or *criminal social capital* (McCarthy and Hagan, 2001). It is the consequence of an environment that favours criminal behaviour.

⁴⁸Two main perspectives characterize social capital theory (see for an overview Portes, 2000). The first centres on individuals as units of analysis and is related to a rational choice approach (applied by, for example, Burt, 2005; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001). The second perspective takes a more sociological view, focusing on the collective rather than the individual (applied by, for example, Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). This study uses a combination of these two perspectives by reasoning from the interaction between resources of the individual offender and resources of the criminal group.

can serve as turning point by shifting the significance of risks and benefits. Therefore, personal and situational factors will be discussed and exemplified.

4.3.1 Resources found in co-offenders

Earlier studies shed light on the structure of criminal collaborations, the frequency of interpersonal contacts, and brokerage (Morselli, 2001, 2009; Natarajan, 2006). Nevertheless, the nature of connections between co-offenders is underexposed and a systematical reconstruction of the nature of contacts within a crime group is often lacking. Criminal cooperation is delicate, as individuals interact in a risky environment. Large sums of money are involved, officially registered agreements are impossible to use, and deception and detection always lay in wait. Trust and reciprocity therefore are key mechanisms in the process of creating social capital and developing criminal relationships (Coleman, 1990; Warr, 2002). Interaction is based on the expectation from both sides that cooperation will be beneficial. Cooperation between individuals will lower costs and make outcomes more productive (Uphoff, 1999). Repeated interaction favours a solid base for mutual trust. Individuals who have been working together before, ensure trust through the shadow of the past. Trust may also be grounded in the shadow of the future, as individuals know they will meet again (Flap, 2002). This explains why offenders are likely to co-offend with family, long-time friends and other confidants (Kleemans and De Poot, 2008). Co-offending with people you trust makes the risky environment somewhat more convenient or at least not even more precarious.

Co-offending with familiar others relates to differential association theory, stating that criminal behaviour is learned through role models, usually family or friends (Sutherland and Cressey, 1978). This not only include techniques and skills, but also motives, attitudes and drives to commit crimes (Matsueda, 1988). Differential association theory assumes individuals to interact with or at least influence each other and interaction particularly takes place within intimate social networks (Sutherland, 1947). The differential association process is not offence-specific, but turns out to be remarkably similar across crime types (Jackson et al., 1986). As organized crime requires co-operation by definition, and interacting individuals are always influenced by each other, this theory should at least to a certain degree hold for organized crime.

From a social capital perspective, however, crime groups benefit from a certain degree of heterogeneity. Pooled resources of groups of individuals with similar backgrounds – such as family or friends – are limited since they often have a lot in common, such as age, education, contacts and lifestyle (see, for example, Black et al., 2005; Mortimer, 1974). Familiar contacts are more likely to provide redundant resources and are less likely to offer additional resources, beyond one's own knowledge, skills, or equipment. Social capital is

higher in heterogeneous groups because of the varied knowledge and capacities different individuals bring along (Lin, 2001). An individual offering additional resources to a group provides non-redundant information and serves as a bridge to others, filling the gap of a structural hole (Burt, 2005). Individuals in such a position exchange information between otherwise disconnected others. They take care of contacts with various backgrounds, such as offenders living abroad or offenders from different ethnical groups (Kleemans and Van de Bunt, 2008). Groups that span structural holes through brokerage have better connections to all manifestations of social capital. This assumption is underlined by earlier studies showing that family ties are important in organized crime indeed, though individuals benefit from co-offending with outsiders as well (Van de Bunt and Kleemans, 2007: 174).

In sum, to overcome too much embeddedness and enlarge social capital, offenders have to look outside their familiar neighbourhood and take the risk of working together with others they have less of a basis for trust with. In this, they have to strike a balance between capability and trust. To the extreme, they have to make a trade-off between a less capable confident and a capable stranger. Referring back to the examples, the family group in which the son took over his father's lifework typically is a group built upon confidants. The children obviously are loyal to their father and probably are used to live a life in crime, including the additional uncertainties and wealth. The second example – the touring car drivers – shows how outsiders can bring resources that are necessary for successful execution of criminal activities.

4.3.2 Resources found in criminal and conventional experience

Earlier studies stress the importance of individual capacities and knowledge for successful contribution to a crime group (Kleemans and De Poot, 2008), facets that are both referred to as resources in social capital theory. On the one hand, an individual's resources are enlarged when entering a group because he gains access to the pooled resources of the group, helping him achieve his desired outcomes. On the other hand, crime groups exist and are effective due to the expertise of individual offenders.

Sometimes, individuals are more or less forced to co-offend with individuals from outside their familiar environment. Certain knowledge, skills or tools may not be present within someone's inner circle. In such cases, individuals have to look for others to complement the crime group. In this process, social capital is best observed because individuals actively have to search for and approach suitable co-offenders. Yet when are individuals suitable for organized crime? It is a foregoing conclusion that there is no such thing as a prototype organized crime offender. An offender may be an eligible candidate for one crime group because of his expertise, though may be worthless for

another crime group. Or even, an offender who is useless for a crime group at one point in time, may be invaluable at a later date. Collaboration in organized crime is considered to be dynamical, i.e. groups operate in accordance with the individuals involved and individuals get involved in groups that suit their resources. Organized crime groups are agile rather than static, and move depending on the individual strengths and share of offenders. Although no fixed resources exist to fit an organized crime group, some characteristics or processes make offenders more likely to get in contact with and fit *any* crime group.

Criminally experienced individuals have an advantage over first offenders with regard to criminal know-how. Individuals with multiple earlier offences, and who have preferably not been caught for these crimes, already know how things work and are used to the risky environment. From a social capital perspective, criminally experienced offenders are valuable because they bring general knowledge on illegal activities and will enlarge the social network of the crime group. Possibly most important; they are more likely to have criminal contacts, i.e. they know other individuals willing to carry out criminal activities. Seasoned offenders are found to play a decisive role in the source of information and guidance for others (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). Skilled offenders convey their expertise and experience to individuals less experienced in the world of crime. Less experienced individuals in their turn enlarge their social capital through this tutelage and also get in touch with the contacts of their mentor. Mentored individuals have higher criminal earnings and lower incapacitation rates than those without tutelage, particularly when this individual has low self-control (Morselli et al., 2006). Earlier studies show that criminal careers of those involved in organized crime are diverse. Some offenders have extensive crime records, others have committed some minor crimes. However, relatively many organized crime offenders are found to be first offenders, i.e. offenders with a clean record up to their involvement in organized crime. Also, no large differences were found between criminal careers of leaders and lower-level offenders in a crime group, i.e. experienced and first time offenders were equally distributed among both leaders and lower-level offenders in a crime group (chapter 2 of this thesis; Kleemans and De Poot, 2008).

First time offenders often have a more conventional life path, are educated, and knowledgeable in certain disciplines – such as judicial or financial knowledge – and contribute to a crime group in their own way. Conventionally experienced offenders use knowledge, experience or equipment obtained through conventional professions to attend the crime group (Kleemans and De Poot, 2008). Individuals with a specific educational background, for example in the judicial, technical and financial sector, are indispensable for the execution of complex activities. Organized fraud groups, for example, often use a criss-

cross of companies and money flows. Not only highly educated individuals are beneficial for crime groups, individuals with executive professions may contribute to the criminal activities as well, because of their skills or equipment. Truck drivers can transport drugs, technically skilled individuals are able to construct machines for producing XTC tablets.

The complementary value of offenders with criminal experience and offenders experienced conventionally is illustrated by the former case studies. The self-made criminal from the third example gradually shifted his focus to more complex offences. This offender is valuable for a crime group because he is seasoned in the criminal world, has multiple contacts, and is used to the stress of continuously avoiding the police. From the individual's perspective, he may be attracted to the large sums of money or the excitement involved with organized crime. The touring car drivers, to the contrary, do not have prior judicial contacts. They know each other through their legal occupation, and use their vehicles (equipment) to transport drugs.

4.3.3 Motives and opportunities

Some individuals are receptive for (organized) crime, others will probably never in their lives even consider a minor crime, regardless of the situation. Although involvement will not always result from considerate decision-making, a rational choice perspective on the involvement process helps in polarizing costs and benefits of being engaged in organized crime. From an offender perspective, the perceived chance of being caught by the authorities and subsequent prison sentence is considered the major cost of engagement in organized crime. Additionally, individuals may lose their job or intimates may morally condemn their activities and break up with them. Financial profits are benefits of involvement and a motivation to engage in organized crime. Monetary gains of successful activities in organized fraud or drugs are high. Other drives may persuade offenders to get involved as well. Being involved in organized crime activities brings along excitement and adventure (Katz, 1988). Additionally, joining an organized crime group has a social value for offenders, as co-offenders frequently meet, socialize and stay in contact. Social bonds can even serve as major involvement mechanisms when individuals are around others involved in organized crime and can hardly refuse to join the group. This is the case when someone grows up in a criminal environment or when someone's friends all get involved. In such situations, resisting to get involved in organized crime may be hard. It is not hard only because of financial temptations, but also because of social pressure and the fear of losing family or friends. Family A is a shining example of a family totally devoted to crime. As a member of such a family, one should stand firm to go one's own way and not to become involved as well. A refusal to go along will likely have adverse

consequences, as other family members may not understand or accept one's choice.

When balancing costs and benefits, the step to involvement will be more likely when benefits are high or involvement will bring highly favourable changes and costs are limited. This argumentation fits general strain theory, as individuals may have aspirations that exceed their possibilities (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). Individuals engage in crime when a match between aims and socially accepted means to reach these aims is missing (Agnew, 1992; Broidy, 2001). As predicted by social capital theory, an individual will consider engagement in crime when his current (conventional) resources are not sufficient to reach his goals. Both rational choice and social capital approaches predict engagement in organized crime to be easier for criminally experienced individuals. Evidently, they are willing to take the risks inherent in committing criminal activities, and presumably they suppose there is more to gain than to lose. Offender D from the preceding examples is such a career criminal whose criminal activities went from bad to worse. The same holds true for individuals with badly paid jobs or individuals without a stable social network. They are more likely to perceive (organized) crime as an option, as they have more to gain when entering organized crime.

Other theories state that individuals are more likely to move into crime when their bond to society is weakened (Sampson and Laub, 1993). While life events, such as becoming a parent or obtaining a stable job, are most often used to explain desistance from crime (Sampson and Laub, 1990), turning points negatively perceived by the offender can influence the balance of costs and benefits towards crime. Individuals disappointed by or in trouble because of some specific event, for example dismissal, bankruptcy, or some kind of rejection, tend to move over to crime earlier. Truck driver B is exemplary for individuals who engage because their current means do not reach their goals. His conventional means fall short and cannot satisfy his aspirations. Driver C apparently goes along because he experienced repeated setbacks in the recent past.

Involvement of individuals with seemingly successful conventional lives – a good job, stable family and friends – is harder to explain, at least by external, situational factors. If money is the main motive, why should individuals with ample financial means through legal sources take the risk of getting in such a risky activity? Control balance theory offers an explanation of why individuals with stable, controlled lives and without clear financial motives also commit deviant acts. The core of the theory is that both individuals with low and individuals with high levels of control may engage in deviance acts (Titte, 1995). As long as the amount of control an individual can exercise and the amount of control this individual is subject to is balanced, the individual will most likely play by the rules. A control deficit – when an individual is

controlled without being able to practice much control himself – as well as a control surplus – when an individual exercises control over others, and is not limited by the control of others – may both lead to deviance. Those who are used to exercise control over others, most often in a powerful job, are seeking for more control and are therefore motivated to engage in criminal behaviour to extend their control, especially when their perceived control is not being recognized. Their control surplus makes them think they are inviolable, resulting in a lower estimation of perceived risks (this is where control balance theory touches rational choice theory). As the amount of control exercised is most likely to rise as individuals age and careers evolve, individuals become more likely to experience a control surplus as they grow older. Control balance theory covers perspectives from both rational choice and routine activity theory, as it touches parts of motivation, constraint and opportunity (Piquero and Hickman, 2002). Moreover, control balance theory to a certain extent fills the gap of what rational choice theory fails to explain; a starting point at the balance before adding and subtracting predicted benefits and costs of a deviant act (Tittle, 1995: 50).

4.4 Individual involvement processes

In this paper, I will look into the involvement processes of individual offenders, yet analyze these processes within the broader context of the crime group. The main research question reads: Why and how do individuals become involved in organized crime? Firstly, I elaborate on the nature of the relationship between offenders. How do offenders get to know each other and what is the nature of their relationship? Specifically, the balance between confidentiality and capability will be scrutinized. Secondly, it will be determined what specific resources offenders can contribute to a crime group to enlarge the pooled resources of the group. Do offenders have special capacities, knowledge or equipment? What type of experiences or materials of individuals are beneficial for crime groups? Do offenders obtain specific knowledge or skills that provide opportunities or helps them in their criminal activities? And how do they obtain such specific knowledge or capacities? To gain answers, I examine offenders' criminal history, education and job history. Thirdly, the motives and opportunities that stimulate offenders to engage in organized crime activities are examined. Did certain life events, such as changes in occupational status, financial situation or family problems play a role in the involvement process?

4.5 Data and methods

To explore involvement mechanisms for organized crime, a selection from the Dutch Organized Crime Monitor (OCM) is used. For this monitor, 120 large-scale police investigations have been analyzed systematically between 1994 and 2006, producing a wide cross-section of various forms of organized crime.⁴⁹ The selection of cases for the OCM is based on surveys of closed police investigations of regional police forces, the National Crime Squad and special investigating policing units. We have access to the original police files, which provide us with all kinds of police findings, as well as information provided by the suspects themselves during their interrogations. The OCM is unique in that it provides a lot of raw information, obtained through the use of special investigation techniques, such as wiretapping and observation. Without exception, criminal investigations in the OCM result from long-term police investigations, resulting in a rich source of information.

For the purpose of this paper, I selected 15 cases out of 120 cases from the OCM based on availability of police files, the amount of information on the individual involvement processes. Moreover, this selection was made in such a way as to best incorporate the heterogeneity of organized crime and its offenders. The number of offenders involved in the selected 15 crime groups sums up to 314 (279 men and 35 women). The smallest crime group consists of eight offenders, while the largest group involves 49 offenders. Furthermore, we were able to trace *rap sheets* in the Dutch Judicial Documentation System of 162 of the 314 suspects.⁵⁰ These provide us with additional individual characteristics and information on the judicial records of these offenders.

The analysis of a crime group always started with making an inventory of all involved offenders in a crime group. Subsequently, police files were analyzed and scrutinized systematically. Based on the research questions, three points of special interest are formulated: (1) genesis of the crime group and interrelations between offenders; (2) social capital resources; and (3) motivation and life events. For each offender, all information regarding these three themes is gathered and coupled to personal information on his or her criminal records, such as native country and town. The most valuable information for this study was found in the records of the interrogations. Most offenders were interrogated many times, up to about 30 times.

⁴⁹The Organized Crime Monitor considers groups to be involved in organized crime *when they are primarily focused on obtaining illegal profits, systematically commit crimes with serious damage for society, and are reasonably capable of shielding their criminal activities from the authorities* (Fijnaut et al., 1998: 26-27). For more information on this monitor, see Kleemans (2007).

⁵⁰This number is relatively low because many offenders are not born in the Netherlands or do not even live here, whereas we only have data available on Dutch judicial contacts. So, this does not mean the remaining offenders are first offenders; they may have extensive judicial careers outside the Netherlands.

The 15 selected cases mirror a broad range of manifestations of organized crime. Eight out of fifteen crime groups are involved in drugs (214 offenders).⁵¹ They are prosecuted for producing, importing and forwarding drugs, often transnationally. Drugs smuggling is logistically rather complex and requires a lot of different activities, and as a consequence a lot of different offenders with different capacities and knowledge. Some offenders, for instance, are concerned with the production or purchase of drugs, some are concerned with the actual transport by ship, truck or plane and others arrange storage locations. Two crime groups are involved in human smuggling (37 offenders). Human smuggling obviously is transnationally oriented and also requires a complex logistic organization. Offenders had to arrange false travel documents for individuals travelling by airplane. For individuals that are smuggled overland by car or truck, the crime group had to arrange transport in all transit-countries. One of the studied crime groups was involved in counterfeiting and illegal trafficking of cigarettes (10 offenders). Cigarettes were shipped from two Baltic States and transported into the European Union by trucks. Two crime groups were involved in organized fraud (17 offenders). Fraud is not as logistically complex as other manifestations of organized crime, but requires even more knowledge on financial aspects and evading taxes. Two crime groups were involved in more than one type of activities; one group was involved in both human trafficking and money laundering (25 offenders), another group was involved in drugs as well as money laundering (11 offenders).

I do not claim to have a representative sample of organized crime offenders or crime groups in any way. The selection of cases for the OCM is not a random sample, and was never intended to be a random selection of organized crime in the Netherlands. It is impossible to receive such a sample, as the selection process already starts with police priorities. As a consequence, some types of organized crime are oversampled and other types stay underexposed. As a matter of fact, some types of organized crime are oversampled on purpose, because they add more knowledge to what we already know.

4.6 Results

4.6.1 Resources found in co-offenders

As was clear from earlier studies, family ties are omnipresent in criminal groups (Kleemans and De Poot, 2008), as well as in crime in general (Thornberry et al., 2003). In 12 out of 15 crime groups studied, two or more offenders

⁵¹This is more or less the same proportion as in the Organized Crime Monitor, in which 55 out of 120 crime groups are involved in drugs.

within the group are father, son, daughter, brother, sister, cousin, or brother-in-law. Furthermore, multiple co-offenders are married, are partners, or were in a relationship before. For each of the 15 crime groups on average, one third of the offenders have at least one family tie within the group. One of the studied drug groups beats the lot. In this thirty-headed drug crime group, a father and his three sons are involved, another father with his son and son-in-law, two brothers, two other brothers and their cousin, two cousins and two brothers-in-law. And in again another crime group, relatively small in number, parts from three families are involved, linked through (ex-)partners. In addition to the many family ties in each of these groups others, who do not belong to the family, are also involved. This assures heterogeneity in resources and preserves too much embeddedness.

Contrary to offenders from most other crime groups, many offenders involved in the two organized fraud groups got to know each other in the exercise of their profession. Although their interpersonal ties are less firm, trust is guaranteed as business relationships often reach back many years. Some have even grown into close friendships.

F has been a real estate agent for many years. He has known G for 20 years, because G was the lawyer of F in civil cases. F also has a professional relationship with H for many years. All three are involved in a large fraud scheme, using a tree of empty holdings to evade taxes.

More offenders with long-time relationships are involved in various crime groups. In at least 12 of the studied cases, two or more offenders have known each other right from childhood and more or less grew up together; they lived in the same neighbourhood, used to play soccer together, went to school together, and are now involved in organized crime together. Some contacts even arose in the previous generation; parents of offenders-to-be already knew each other.

Although relationships between co-offenders often reach back many years and trust between them is grounded through the shadow of the past, less stable and less long-term bonds are also found in the studied crime groups. In two of the crime groups many offenders first met in bars; sometimes spontaneously, sometimes introduced to each other. Overall, a handful of offenders met in prison when they served time for earlier convictions. At least 18 offenders first met co-offenders during imprisonment. In some of the studied crime groups, however, the actual number of contacts acquired in detention is estimated to be much higher, according to the police officers responsible for investigating these groups. Another large contribution to the acquaintance of co-offenders is provided by conventional employment. In nearly all studied criminal collaborations two or more co-offenders are involved in the same

profession or employed in the same line of business. This diversity in the nature of contacts enlarges the collective social capital of a group.

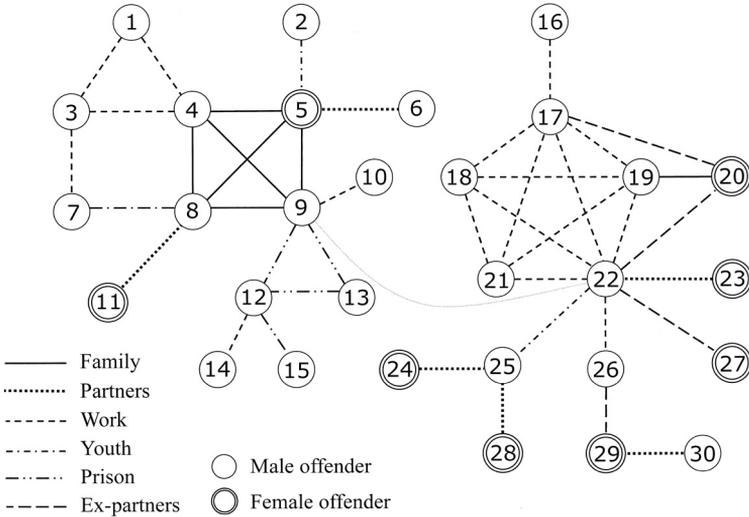
The versatility of the nature of relationships is best shown by the wide span of different ties between offenders involved in one of the studied crime groups (figure 9). This crime group produces synthetic drugs and exports these drugs by ship and truck from the Netherlands to England, Spain and Hungary. Furthermore, they transport cocaine from Colombia into the Netherlands. Offenders 4, 5, 8 and 9 are three brothers and their sister. Brother 4 and brother 9 took the initiative for the criminal activities. Brother 8 is mentally ill and probably is not fully aware of the situation. He declared: "I just did what they asked me." Sister 5 exchanged foreign currency for her brothers. Offender 19 provided raw material for the production of drugs. His twin sister offender 20, who once was in a relationship with offender 17 and offender 22, functioned as an intermediary, she delivered messages. Offenders 17, 18, 19, 21 and 22 worked at the same company. Offender 25 is a youth friend of offender 22 and advised the crime group on their money flows based upon knowledge he obtained through his education and occupation. Offender 25 is married to offender 24, and has a mistress as well: offender 28. Offender 9, 12 and 13 got to know each other in prison, just like offender 12 and 15. Noticeable for this group is the apparent divide between offenders 1 to 15 on the one hand, and offender 16 to 30 on the other hand. It is not said that offenders of the two sub groups never had contact, but no clear relationship emerged from the files. Offender 9, one of the brothers, and offender 22 are the central players and connect both separate groups, serving as bridge between both groups. They have a leading position and both gathered their own co-offenders. However, after a while they got into a fight when offender 9 stroke a bargain behind 22's back while offender 22 was imprisoned. From that moment on, both sub groups continued their activities separately.

To conclude, many if not all processes that play a role in normal life and contribute to a relationship based on mutual trust, also apply to offenders in an organized crime group. Offenders tend to co-offend with others they trust and know what to expect from. As appears from the studied crime groups, offenders prefer to unfold criminal activities with family – in-laws as well –, long-time friends, others born in the same neighbourhood, others in the same profession, others that share their hobbies, and former fellow-detainees.

4.6.2 Resources found in criminal and conventional experience

Suitability for a crime group cannot be captured in a fixed offender description. An individual may contribute his bit towards criminal activities in many conceivable ways. Specific knowledge or ideas on the production of drugs, on smuggling something or someone passed customs, or on underground money

Figure 9. Visual representation of relationships within one of the studied crime groups



flows will help a crime group in the execution of their criminal activities. Particular skills or equipment are indispensable in the execution of many activities in organized crime as well, such as the assemblage of drug production machines, the conveyance of people or forbidden goods, and owning a business that serves as a cover. These resources can be obtained through criminal experience, but also through knowledge or experience gained in a legal situation. As described earlier by Kleemans and De Poot (2008), offenders get involved in organized crime through their expertise in a specific field, often obtained through the profession they practice. The studied cases show plenty offenders dedicating their specialties to the merit of a crime group.

Offenders with a criminal lifestyle and experience know the tricks of the trade and are used to the level of excitement, and the unsteady life situation. Moreover, they usually have criminal contacts that can be exploited. About two-third of the offenders of which rap sheets are available were convicted at least once before the studied organized crime case. Only 18 % has more than ten prior offences. Offender D from the foregoing example is a typical career criminal whose offences went from bad to worse. He was caught for the first time at the age of 15 after having committed burglary. Up to the age of 20, he was caught 12 additional times, for the greater part for burglaries, though also for forgery and weapon-related offences. He has been friends with and has been living in the same small town as the leader of the crime group for over 10 years. Individuals with a lot of criminal know-how often include others

without illegal experience in their activities. These mentored individuals often led conventional lives up to that point, but often go through a personal or financial crisis that causes them to look for other ways to spend their lives and earn money.

I lost his job due to personal problems and had financial problems. He met J through a joint acquaintance in a bar. J has multiple earlier convictions from childhood on, I has only one police contact for drunk driving. J is the leader of a cocaine smuggling group and takes pity on I. In exchange for this, I initially lets the crime group cut cocaine at his home but soon starts helping them.

Conventional experience contributes to criminal activities in a totally different way. Offenders with certain professions have equipment to their disposal that can be brought into action with the purpose of employing criminal activities. Others control certain processes or procedures and use these in favour of the crime group. Again others bring knowledge through education or skills.

K is employed at his father's shipping business. He is responsible for the settlement of customs formalities of vegetables and fruit. K is approached by a friend of his father to help him with the settlement and accompanying formalities of (air) cargo's with fruit pulp and hidden cocaine. K agrees without informing of his father. After being caught, he is dismissed by his father.

Earlier analyses on the OCM reveal the variety of occupations of offenders included in 120 groups (Kleemans and Van de Bunt, 2008). Despite the wide range of conventional professions, some common components stand out. A popular occupational sector within the offender groups is the transport industry. Among the studied offenders are truck drivers, car mechanics, car dealers, forklift truck drivers, as well as owners of a car company, a car cleaning company and a breakers yard. Many of these offenders got to know each other within the exercise of their profession. For example touring car drivers B and C, who got to know each other in the execution of their job, were profitable for the crime group because they were able to transport sheaths with drugs. Other executive occupations can also be of great value for illegal activities. A former custom officer, for example, is involved in a cigarette smuggling group and a local government official is involved in a drug group. Thanks to his knowledge of custom procedures, the crime group uses an ingenious procedure to avoid trouble at the customs.

L is convicted for cigarette smuggling and is unemployed after his detention. In prison, he got to know M, who was in prison after a conviction for trading stolen goods. After their release, M introduces L to N. N is a truck driver and in service of a crime group producing and transporting drugs. Since L is unemployed and needs money, N asks him to carry out drugs transports.

Many offenders run their own business. At least 66 of the studied offenders own some kind of company. In a number of cases, offenders clearly became involved in organized crime through their own company. One of the studied offenders, for example, owns a café and gets involved in the criminal activities of his clients. Another offender owns a transport company and takes along a box of drugs every once in a while. A third offender owns a cleaning agency and orders raw material for producing drugs. These companies are not purely founded to be used for the criminal activities. They basically run on legal business, though the company is used now and then for criminal activities. This is not always the case, however. Some offenders first made plans for their criminal activities and then founded or bought a fake company purely to execute or cover their organized crime activities. This company is then placed in service of the criminal group and is only used as enrichment for the crime group. For example, a number of offenders own a transport business and carry drugs instead of legal goods. Illegal money flows can also be attributed to the company, as is demonstrated by one of the crime groups that was involved in organized fraud.

The eight offenders of this crime group together own over 180 Ltd's/Inc's, between which many transactions take place, though accounts were not consistent. A purchase was registered within one Ltd/Inc, while a sale was not registered within another Ltd/Inc. Purchases push down the profits and thus the turnover tax, while sales heighten the turnover and thus the turnover tax. Through a crisscross of Ltd's/Inc's and transactions, it is hardly possible to unravel the purchases and sales between the fake companies.

It is not always that clear which came first: the chicken or the egg, that is, the criminal plans or the business. In those cases, offenders smartly used the company in favour of the criminal activities.

4.6.3 Motives and opportunities

Motivation of offenders in general, and of organized crime offenders in particular, is often explained by monetary gain. Indeed, offenders of most organized crime types appear to go for the big money. But do they get involved

because of a financial crisis and is organized crime their best option to earn some money, or do they just always want more? For some offenders, monetary incentives are easier to understand. About 30 of the studied offenders are unable to work and receive a payment according to the Dutch Health Law. Another 30 offenders declared to have high debts, rising to a few tons in euro's. Furthermore, a handful of offenders is addicted to narcotics and needs money to supply their habit.

O works at a transport company. He has debts and a drug-dependent son living at home. A colleague and friend asks O to take people at his regular journeys to England. "The reason I agreed is because I desperately needed money.", he declares.

Next to money, other involvement incentives can be found in social relations and status. Some offenders explicitly denominate these types of motives, though these often are accompanied by financial considerations.

P is a 39 year old woman without prior convictions but with financial problems. She is a mother of three growing children and receives no maintenance from her ex-husband. P declares: "Because of the busyness and stress, I searched for relaxation in going out and got in touch with ecstasy. I started to buy pills for personal use, later on I bought some extra to resell non-profit to friends and people I went out with. I also wish to express that my attraction – how incredibly stupid I now think it is – to ecstasy and the people involved with ecstasy, is caused by the fact that I thought it was really exciting and a break out of my boring life compared to their lives. Sometimes, I posed to be larger than I was in the business, just to belong. Hence it also happened that I made up some clients or goods in the hope that I would still belong to the group."

From both a social capital and rational choice perspective, the step to engage in organized crime is more obvious for criminally experienced offenders. They often have more to gain, are used to the excitement, and are more likely to have criminal contacts.

Q has convictions from the age of 17 on (theft, robbery, weapon-related) and at the age of 33, he already served about 9 years in prison. Q had multiple jobs, all short-lived. He has five children with three different women. One of his ex-girlfriends is co-offender in the drugs group. Currently, he has three girlfriends simultaneously, all in different parts of the world.

Chapter 4

Multiple offenders studied went through some trouble right before they became involved, which directly or indirectly may have caused their actions. Negative life events that happen to an individual, can affect his decisions and can push back barriers.

R led a seemingly good life; he had a good job at the local government and had a clean record. He was married and has one daughter. He declares: "I had some trouble at home owing to certain circumstances. That was when it started to frustrate me that other people, without any positive contribution to society, nevertheless allow themselves a lot of things. Proverbially, something in me snapped. At that time, certain limits that have always been there, faded away. The temptation to earn more money, in addition to our normal revenue, was hard to resist. The opportunity was there to earn money with dealing in narcotics... That it should come this far..." R becomes part of a crime group that imports drugs from South America by ship. He knows the leader of the crime group because they went to high school together. R had both a financial as a social reason to become involved; he was attracted by the scene and wanted to belong to the in crowd.

S got a divorce because his wife left him for another man. Furthermore, a young family member died. S got into psychological problems and ended up on sick pay. His whole allowance payment was spent on the mortgage. He began to use cocaine daily and became addicted. S needed money to pay the cocaine and got involved in the cocaine trade.

T got convicted for cigarette smuggling and had to serve 10 months in prison. After his release, his own transport company turned out not to be viable and T became unemployed. He contacted one of the individuals he met in prison and started to perform driver's services (of drug transports) for him.

In the above examples, some possible factors that may affect someone's decision or motivation are highlighted. Financial setbacks, relational crises, and the excitement all can contribute to the rationale of an individual having the opportunity to join organized crime activities. To what extent all these elements really affect the involvement process is hard to capture.

For a couple of studied offenders, involvement is not easily explained by a financial setback. About ten offenders have more than enough legal revenues to live a luxurious life. However, some of them may suffer from a control surplus, as defined by Tittle's (1995) control balance theory. A mere handful

of offenders hold high positions at large companies and their legal incomes are so high that they should be able to live easily from these earnings. Others have much property within the Netherlands or abroad. Particularly offenders from the two fraud cases are highly educated, hold high positions at large companies, which brings along privileges that can be deployed for criminal activities. As financial profit is the major reason to engage, their motives to engage are a matter of conjecture. They have their conventional career and established reputation to lose, though nevertheless take the risk and put all this on the line. It is hard to capture the motivation of such individuals.

U is in his fifties and has no prior convictions. He holds an important post at a financial institution and earns two- to three hundred thousand euro's a year. U used his high position for the benefit of an organized fraud group. He met one or more of his co-offenders at international finance congresses.

It is possible to point at some life events that happened to offenders and most likely had at least some influence on their involvement with organized crime activities. While life events are often mentioned in relation to positive effects on crime (Sampson and Laub, 1993), mainly negative effects of life events are encountered in the present study. Some offenders had clear personal or financial problems, others lived a life of crime and got the opportunity – often through effective contacts – to become engaged in a crime group. However given the nature of the data, for the bulk of offenders motivational aspects stay underexposed.

4.7 Discussion

This study aims to illuminate the processes that make individuals engage in organized crime activities. Within the diversity of individual involvement processes, several distinctive characteristics are discussed. The theoretical framework developed is illustrated by empirical data on 15 crime groups, including over 300 offenders. These crime groups differ in size, composition and the nature of criminal activities.

It is stated that situational factors are important in explaining the development of crime groups, particularly in finding suitable co-offenders. This emphasis on the interaction between co-offenders requires a dynamical approach. The composition of crime groups and relations within crime groups should be explained on a collective level, while motives and ways to join a group require individual clarifications. Social capital theory suits this approach by focusing on individuals within a social structure, and helps to understand how crime groups develop. Social capital grows when cooperation

is beneficial for both the individual and the crime group: individuals bring some sort of resources, such as knowledge or equipment, to crime groups and in turn, crime groups help to expand resources of individuals, because they can reach certain aims that could never be reached without the groups presence.

The current study shows that ways in which individuals get involved in organized crime activities differ. The most common involvement is through family or friends who already are involved. Almost all crime groups studied contain multiple family ties between offenders, ensuring a basis of trust. Individuals brought up in a criminal family will be more likely to develop criminal aspirations themselves. This suits differential association theory, stating that individuals learn attitudes, values and skills through others. Though family ties bring trust and reciprocity, a disadvantage in terms of social capital is the danger of embeddedness. Too much uniformity in a crime group limits the pooled resources of that group, such as knowledge, skills and contacts. Organized crime involves complex activities and skills. Therefore, offenders have to strike a balance between trustworthiness and capability of co-offenders when searching for others. Next to family ties, the crime groups studied stay heterogeneous due to individuals from outside the family bringing additional knowledge and contacts. Resources are grounded both in offenders with criminal experience and in offenders experienced through conventional occupations. Criminally experienced individuals bring their criminal contacts and are used to the level of excitement. Offenders with conventional experience bring knowledge, skills and privileges gained in their occupational life.

Turning points in life are commonly used to explain desistance from crime (Sampson and Laub, 1993). A part of the studied offenders in our sample, however, experienced abrupt changes in their lives that influenced their behaviour in a negative way, as these changes directly or indirectly made them engage in organized crime. Offenders declared to have marital or family problems, others experienced a financial setback due to an addiction or becoming unemployed. The negative implications of life events on crime fit a social capital perspective, as those with personal problems or those who have much to gain are more likely to take the step to criminal behaviour. Those who are harder to explain, are offenders who led a seemingly good life without large problems. Control balance theory offers an explanation for these individuals who have more to lose, by stating that those with a control surplus – they exercise more control than they are subject to – are likely to engage in delinquent acts as well (Tittle, 1995). Although for some offenders we may guess what moved them to engage, the aspect of motivation particularly stays underexposed. Financial gain seems to be an important explaining factor, money does not account for the involvement on itself. And also, not all individuals in trouble will turn to (organized) crime.

Despite the importance of situational explanation for involvement in organized crime, this leaves us wondering why in the same situation, some will get involved, and others will not. Internal drives are the hardest element to capture, particularly when offenders seem to be motivated internally, i.e. they were not talked into it by others. Answers probably lie in the plainest situations without any external pressure. In such cases, the propensity for crime must be higher for someone to indeed engage in organized crime than in more provoking situations. To be able to shed light on motivational aspects of the involvement process, other sources should be consulted. In future research we will therefore concentrate on the perception of the offenders themselves.