



Bundeskriminalamt



5th Research Conference on Organised Crime

Organised Crime-Research in Northern European States

in Wiesbaden on 26 – 27 September 2012

Illicit drug sales and organised crime in Denmark –

Recent history and current conflicts

Kim Møller, PhD

Business and Social Sciences, Centre for Alcohol and Drug

Research,

Aarhus University Denmark

Abstract

A series of recent events surrounding the cannabis market in Copenhagen, Denmark, have highlighted how a variety of organised crime groups and gangs are involved with illicit drug distribution. After a police crackdown on the dominant street-level market, a series of shootings erupted in locations known for cannabis sales or with known cannabis sellers as victims. The five year period after the crackdown saw more homicides and attempted homicides in Denmark than any previous five-year period for the past twenty years.

In comparison with other Nordic countries Denmark has had an unusually lenient approach to cannabis control. Danish drug control policy is focused on providing investigative capabilities for police rather than deterring retail sellers and buyers. A set of prosecutorial guidelines regarding the implementation of drug control policy specify leniency and low enforcement intensity towards cannabis users, and also cannabis retail sellers. The declared purpose is to focus resources on harder drugs and professional sellers.

Over time this policy has allowed for a street-level cannabis market in Christiania, Copenhagen, to exist, stabilize and prosper. Danish police has continuously pointed to the pivotal role of the outlaw biker gang Hells Angels in controlling and supplying this market. Around 2003 there were 40 sellers on a daily basis and more than 9,900 daily buyers. From 2000 to 2007 no less than seven amendments to the drug laws and Administration of Justice act paved the way for a (second generation) crackdown on the market. Data gathered during nine months of video-surveillance and undercover buys provide information on the organization, costs and earnings associated with operating such a large drug market.

Copenhagen's police arrested the sellers and their various helpers and look-outs in April 2004. Afterwards police maintained a massive presence in the area to prevent drug from reappearing. This disruption of the primary cannabis distribution point led to a series of drug market displacement effects as buyers sought out new suppliers and prospective sellers saw the opportunity to replace the established sellers. While these displacement effects were anticipated nobody expected the increase in aggravated violence that followed. At least twenty shooting incidents have occurred in known cannabis selling locations or have targeted known cannabis sellers. In the international literature two factors are usually found to be

associated with drug market violence: concentrated social disadvantage and destabilization of the market.

These events have highlighted how outlaw biker gangs and various immigrant gangs are involved with illicit drug distribution. Recent studies based on the Danish Central National Register have mapped the socio-demographic characteristics, criminal involvement and organizational interactions between these individuals.

This presentation draws on these studies in combination with analysis of the information gathered by police prior to and during the crackdown, court cases and legal documents. The purpose is to characterize the state of organized criminal involvement in illicit drug distribution in Denmark.