



Bundeskriminalamt



7th Research Conference on Organised Crime

The different Faces of Organised Crime

in Wiesbaden on 8 – 9 October 2014

The criminal arboristic approach – A method to combat organised crime

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Curriculum vitae

Mr. Kim Nilvall is Detective Inspector at the Swedish National Bureau of Investigation in Stockholm. He started as an interrogator at the unit for serious crimes in Gothenburg, 1995 and worked as an investigator between 1995 to 2002. In 2002 he became a project manager within NCIS Sweden and lead the projects XTC – Trafficking of XTC towards Sweden and Nicks –Internet related drug trafficking.

Mr. Nilvall cooperated from 2005 till 2010 with Interpol in the “Project drugs.net” and worked in several countries in overseas and Eastern Europe.

Since 2010 he has conducted analytical trainings on “the Criminal Arboristic Approach” in Nicaragua, Norway, at the OSCE and Serbia. He developed a methodology regarding the strategic recruitment of informants and in 2012 he was responsible for the National Drug Threat Assessment.

In 2013 he worked as cooperative party with the Ministry of Security of the Republic of Chine within New Psychoactive Substances.

Since 2014 he is responsible for the Swedish part within the Dutch project ITOM – Illegal trade online market places.

Mr. Nilvall has published a number of reports, for example in 2010 on the Criminal Arboristic Approach and in 2012 an analysis of consequences for police work in relation to the new praxis stated by the supreme court in Sweden regarding penalty degree in drug related crimes.

Abstract

The purpose of this presentation is to present a model for understanding and explaining the structure of organised crime. The criminal arboristic perspective (CAP) is an analytical method that can be used to identify strategically important individuals within organised crime, to assess their capacity and prioritise the individuals towards which law enforcement measures should be aimed. The procedure increases the chances of predicting the direct or indirect effects any measures may have against strategically important persons.

Traditionally, organised crime is often described in terms of criminal networks or groupings. Our point of view differs from the traditional view in that we believe we should start from an individual perspective in order to understand and explain the structure of organised crime. The starting point for our reasoning is that the criminal world is no bigger than that all criminal individuals are linked to each other through the contact networks of the various individuals. Together they create a single large criminal network – organised crime.

In order to combat organised crime in a resource-efficient manner, we must identify individuals who are strategically important for the large criminal network. A simile with the work of an arborist can be made:

An arborist must know which branches can be pruned in order not to endanger the tree's supply of nutrients and water. The same applies conversely from a law enforcement perspective. Those individuals who have a strategically important role within organised crime are the branches that are particularly important to prune. If we only prune those branches that are the most easy to reach, we can cause the opposite effect – in fact, we are only strengthening organised crime by removing those parts that are weak so that they can be replaced by something stronger.

The analysis is based on an individual perspective and aims to assess the significance and duration of the relationships between individual criminals in the contact network. The contact network is divided up into two parts, an inner and an outer circle. The individual's inner circle consists of contacts that are more permanent, characterised by trust and frequent contacts over time. The outer circle is more changeable, and may be characterised by limited trust and more sporadic contacts.

The objective of the work is in the first instance to bring the strategically important person to justice, or to disturb him, and in the second instance to bring persons in his inner circle to justice or to disturb them. It is also important to damage organised crime as a whole as much as possible. In order to use the resources as efficiently as possible, it is necessary to assess the capacity of strategically important criminals and prioritise between different targets. By using this model of assessing capacity and prioritising, the capacity of each criminal can be assessed – and therefore also the threat they pose to society.

The arboristic perspective and the method presented have several areas of application. For example, law enforcement authorities can use the method to identify "hidden" strategic individuals, to target informer recruitment onto the correct object, to lead and direct the operation on concrete and objective grounds, and for the purpose of follow up and evaluation.