

Outlaw motorcycle gangs in the Meuse Rhine Euregion

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MAIN PURPOSE AND MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this dissertation was to examine the role of national borders for the phenomenon of outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs), OMCG-related crime, and the public response thereof in the Meuse Rhine Euregion.

The dissertation cannot be viewed independently from the long-term developments towards an administrative approach in Europe. It fits into a long history of studies on cross-border crime and law enforcement in the Meuse Rhine Euregion, this time with a focus on a particular phenomenon that was perceived as one of the most urgent problems at the start of this study: outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs).

By means of using various sources, this research has attempted to compile and optimize a contemporary 'image' of OMCGs in the Meuse Rhine Euregion in an innovative way, while taking into account socio-historical developments in the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium.

The research has demonstrated that in all three countries, OMCGs have gone from a more or less condoned or tolerated phenomenon, to one that has been increasingly targeted through a zero-tolerance strategy from 2010 onwards. They have become more and more associated to public nuisance and disorder as well as (organized) crimes. Following the regional newspaper articles as well as broader media outlets, and the case files used in the dissertation, members of various clubs have been involved in intimidating behavior in public, (lethal) violent offences, economic offences, various drug-related offences and possession or trade of weapons. In addition, some cross-border criminal offences were found, of which most extended beyond the Meuse Rhine Euregion, and only few examples of displacement of non-criminal activities (either within or beyond the Meuse Rhine Euregion) were found.

In terms of the public response, it has become clear that authorities in all three countries have become stricter: the zero-tolerance strategy not only attempts to combat (organized) crime or tackle public disorder, but also seeks to prevent it by focusing on associational (group) characteristics of OMCGs assumed to facilitate the offending of its members. This dissertation has outlined the main authorities (the public prosecutor's office, the police, and public administration) and their respective departments responsible for the approach against OMCGs in the Meuse Rhine Euregion, and the cross-border cooperation structures that are involved in this topic. In doing so, it has addressed several limitations (fragmented competences, differing approaches and senses of urgency) and opportunities (improved information exchange, e.g., through the EURIEC) in cross-border cooperation which are,

again, inextricably linked to persistent assumptions regarding OMCGs. These assumptions about the associational structure as a facilitating factor for crimes of its members are easily extrapolated across national borders: chapters abroad may be useful for the transit of drugs or for rotation of women for prostitution, and for hiding from law enforcement. The dangerous reputation and status of international clubs may be used at the local level to instill fear in citizens, victims and witnesses. And when the club's activities are subsequently restricted in their own country, they can still exert their influence across the border by using the (more) accessible administrative legal pathways. And while this may be true, this research found no examples of deliberate criminal cooperation, crime displacement or structural displacement of non-criminal activities limited to the Meuse Rhine Euregion.

These findings merit the conclusion that the role of the national border as a facilitating factor for OMCGs and OMCG-related crime in the Meuse Rhine Euregion appears to be limited. The national border should primarily be viewed as a limitation for cross-border information exchange and cooperation, and hence also to some extent for cross-border research such as this (as a researcher is often dependent on secondary information from authorities).

SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIETAL RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTENDED AUDIENCE

The findings in this dissertation illustrate points about limitations and opportunities raised in previous studies on cross-border crime and cross-border cooperation in the Meuse Rhine Euregion. It subsequently confirms their recommendations regarding the increase of exchanging information, so a better (proactive) image of specific types of cross-border crime can be constructed. With the remark that in case of OMCGs, the zero-tolerance strategy does not appear to have one single goal, and therefore targets very broad aspects of (group) characteristics which may be counterproductive. Therefore, this dissertation also suggests exploring a more social, reintegrative approach to OMCGs in some cases. Both of these recommendations are primarily addressed to policymakers (and by extension, implementers and practitioners: public prosecutors, police, municipal officers, and enforcers).

The outcomes of this research can also be viewed as a stepping stone for further research into OMCG members in relation to cross-border (criminal) activities. The current dissertation has taken a broad view in examining the OMCGs present in the Meuse Rhine Euregion with the data made available by various organizations, as this region had various OMCG-related problems at the onset of this research.

OUTREACH AND DISSEMINATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Throughout the research, different parts of this dissertation have been presented during national (*Nederlandse Vereniging voor Criminologie*, 2016, 2017) as well as European (*Eurocrim* 2016, 2017, 2019) conferences. During these conferences, and at other (expert) meetings, developments and progress of the research have been discussed with fellow national and international researchers in the field of OMCGs, and specifically their views regarding OMCGs and displacement were probed in preparation of chapter 6. Moreover, parts of chapter 3 and 4 of the dissertation have previously been published as a book chapter in an edited volume on *'outlaw motorcycle clubs and street gangs'* (2018), part of chapter 4 has been published by the researcher on SSRN. In 2017 a presentation on the findings of the media analysis was provided at a *Maastrichtse Criminalisten* meeting, where various practitioners in the field were present. Lastly, in anticipation of, and following the first Dutch ban of an OMCG, two blogs (*Is a ban on outlaw motorcycle clubs effective*, March 3, 2017; *'Expect no Mercy'*, October 12, 2017) on the topic were disseminated on the Maastricht University website.