

Researching the Organisation of Serious Crimes: The Realist Social Relations Approach



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Overview

Organised crime policy trends and their analytical focus

From the actor-orientation to the organisation of serious crimes

Researching the organisation of serious crimes

The realist social relations approach: from indication to explanation

Organised crime policy trends and their analytical focus

Trend	Analytical Focus	Policy Exemplars
The Actor-Orientation (1): Conspirators	Organised Crime Groups (OCGs)	Kefauver Committee (1950); US Presidential Commissions on OC (1967, 1986); RICO statute (1970)
The Actor-Orientation (2): Illegal Entrepreneurs	Illicit networks	German BKA\LKA definition of OC (1986)
The Actor-Orientation (3): Poly-Criminals	Potpourri of 'threat indicators': OCGs SOCs (Serious Organised Crime areas) CRFs (Crime Relevant Factors) Effects of OCGs + SOCs on EU society	UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime (2000); Annual EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment (2006-2011); EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (2013 – 2017)
Organisation of Serious Crimes: Commissioning	Scripts, Scenes and Scenarios	Approach still marginal to the actor-orientation and primarily based in the academy and its advice to policy-makers, e.g. RUSI (Royal United Services Institute) Organised Crime Programme, 2014+

Researching the organisation of serious crimes

*The way organised crime is addressed in the UK has undergone a major overhaul in the last few years with the creation of the National Crime Agency. The first strategic assessment provides a good snapshot of the current state of organised crime. However, it points to a lack of knowledge about organised crime and its **drivers** – some of which could be addressed through research and deeper analysis. If the NCA is going to have a better record than its predecessors, it must work on getting the basics right. Knowing your enemy would be a good start.*

*- (RUSI 2014, cited in Edwards, 2016: 987, **emphasis added**)*

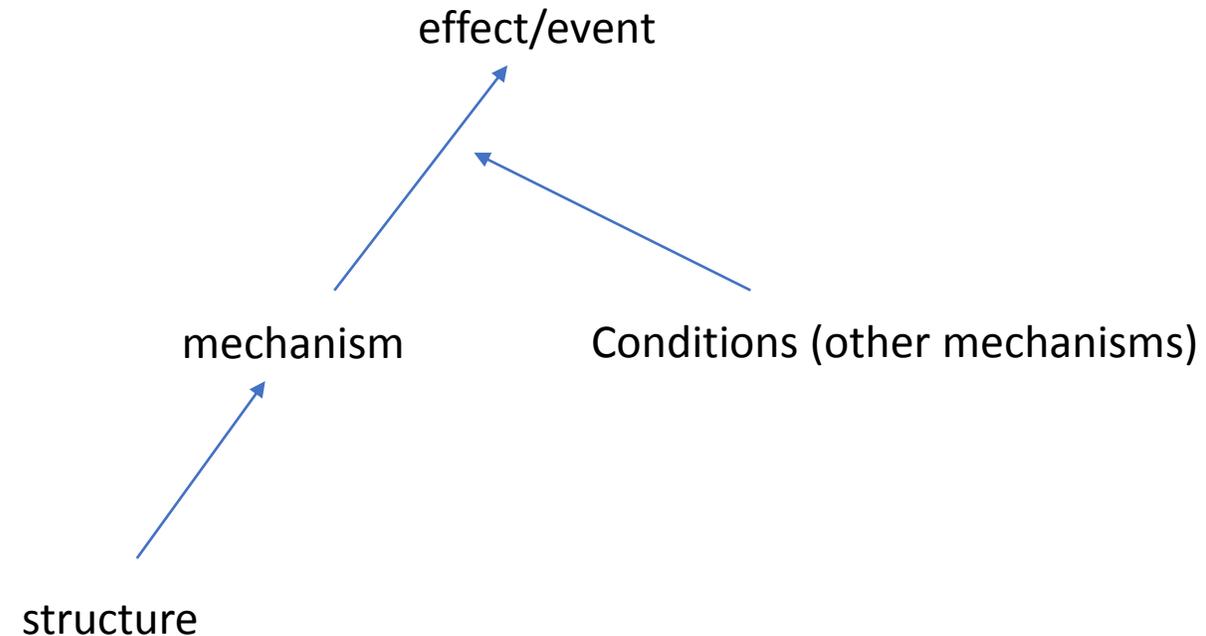
The realist social relations approach

From threat *indication* ...

... to (realist) causal *explanation*:

... and its related problems of:

- Self-referential analysis given the absence of rival accounts;
- Privileging enforcement over prevention; and
- Limited transposition of strategy into operational recommendations,

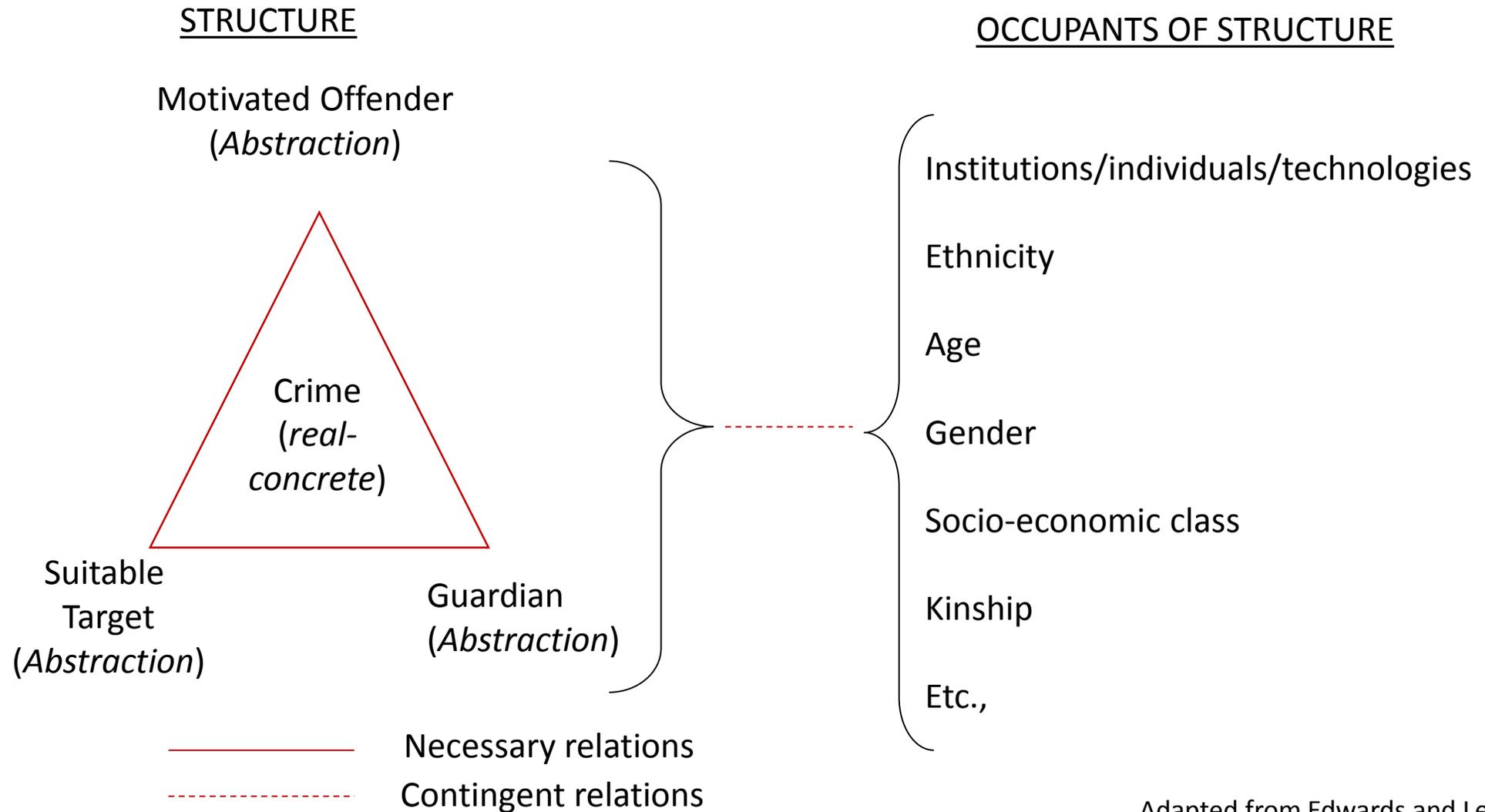


The realist distinction between intensive and extensive research

	INTENSIVE	EXTENSIVE
Research question	How does a process work in a particular case or small number of cases? What produces a certain change? What did the agents actually do? (e.g. how were certain serious crimes organised)	What are the regularities common patterns, distinguishing features of a population? How widely are certain characteristics or processes distributed or represented? (e.g. the number and characteristics of OCG's, so defined)
Relations	Substantial (necessary and contingent) relations of connection	Formal relations of similarity
Types of groups studied	Causal groups (e.g. the various actors involved in organising serious crimes including perpetrators, facilitators and controllers)	Taxonomic groups (e.g. Organised Crime Groups or 'OCG's')
Types of account produced	Causal explanation of the production of certain objects or events, though not necessarily representative ones (e.g. crime 'scripts')	Descriptive representative generalizations, lacking in explanatory penetration (e.g. 'threat assessments' of organised crime groups, serious organised crime areas etc)
Typical methods	Case studies of agents in their causal contexts (e.g. crime 'scenes' and 'scenarios'), interactive interviews, ethnography, documentary material; qualitative analysis	Large-scale survey of population or representative sample, formal questionnaires, standardized interviews; statistical analysis (e.g. organised crime notification schemes)
Limitations	Contingent relations are unlikely to be 'representative', 'average' or generalizable. Necessary relations discovered will exist wherever their relata are present, e.g. causal powers of objects are generalizable to other contexts as they are necessary features of these objects (next slide)	Although representative of a whole population, they are unlikely to be generalizable to other populations at different times and places. Problem of ecological fallacy in making inferences about individuals. Limited explanatory power (e.g. characteristics of OCG's tell us little about how they actually organised particular serious crimes and who else was (un)intentionally involved)
Appropriate tests	Corroboration	Replication

Adapted from: Sayer (1992: 243); Edwards and Levi (2008: 366-7)

Substantial (necessary and contingent) relations of connection

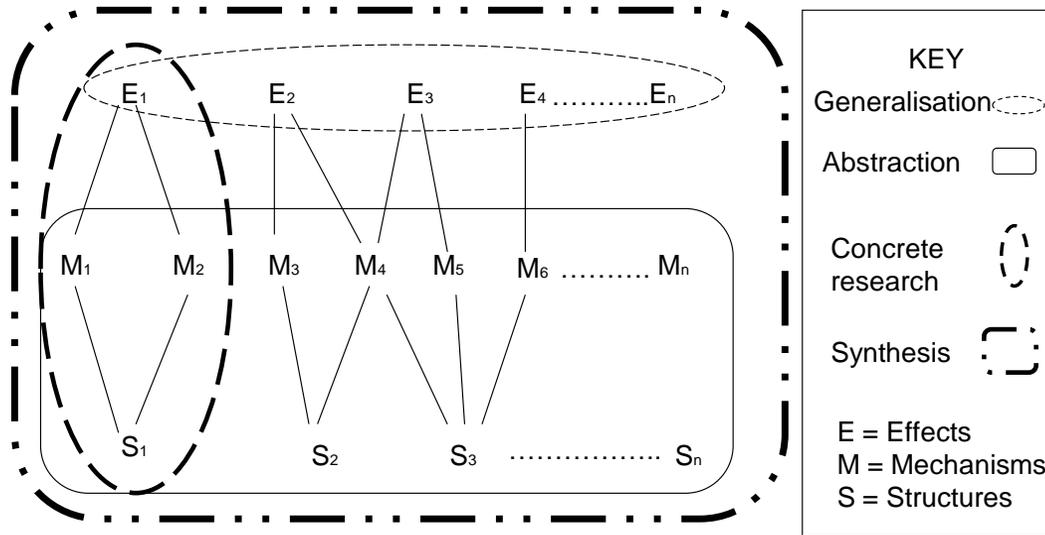


An Explanatory Research Agenda

Research Strategies

Explanans of Organising (‘Commissioning’) Crime

- Scripts
 - Breaking down particular offences into the sequence of activities (mechanisms) through which they are accomplished.
- Scenes
 - The conditions (other mechanisms) which facilitate or frustrate crime scripts.
- Scenarios
 - The contingent interaction of scripts and scenes, such that the same script is enabled in one scenario but frustrated in another.



Source: Adapted from Sayer, 1992: 237

Realist Social Relations Research Process

