Scripting OC in the eSociety:
identifying a new structure of online criminal opportunities for offline transit crimes

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Abstract
An increasing number of news media and investigative reports underline that the Internet facilitates traditional transnational organised crimes and especially transit crimes, ranging from sex trafficking to trade in counterfeit products. However, these sources do not to pay enough attention to the modalities and the extent to which this is true: it is not easy to distinguish between new stereotypes and what is actually going on. In order to understand the role the Internet plays in these criminal activities—and consequently to develop preventive measure to inform the public policy agenda—situational approaches and in particular script analysis can provide a proper framework. After a brief presentation of the principles of script analysis and of the scripting model used in this work, this paper shows how script analysis can effectively serve as a tool to investigate what kind of criminal opportunities the Internet offers for certain organised criminal activities to happen and how these opportunities affect their organisation.

Introduction
Every economic, socio-political, or technological change, by modifying the environment in which crime operates, modifies also the dynamic of criminal activities by creating the possibility for offences that are completely new or intervening only in some phases of the activities. The Internet, in particular, not only has positively affected the lives of millions of people in areas ranging from commerce to entertainment, but also has provided new opportunities for illegal activities, enabling potential criminals to commit large-scale offences with fewer personal risks and costs (Bequai, 2001; Wang and Huang, 2011).

Criminological literature has already focused on the new opportunities for criminal activities offered by the Internet. In doing so, however, the notion of opportunity has been considered only in general terms: the criminogenic potential of eSociety has been recognized, but the ways in which
criminals behave in the new Internet environment are still opaque. Furthermore, despite the broad consensus on the role of the Internet as crime facilitator, the relationship between the use of the Internet and organised crime is still under-investigated. What kinds of criminal opportunities the Internet offers for organised crimes to occur? How has the Internet revolution transformed the way in which organised criminal activities are carried out?

In order to answer these questions, script analysis—by studying event decisions and the details of crime commission—can provide a proper framework. After a brief presentation of the state of the art of the literature dealing with the relationship between organised crimes and the Internet and of the principles of script analysis, this paper will show how a scripting model can effectively serve as a tool to investigate what kind of criminal opportunities the Internet offers for certain organised criminal activities to occur, and how these opportunities affect their organisation. Data and examples used are drawn from the author's PhD dissertation, where the the structures of criminal opportunities that the Internet provides for a series of organised criminal activities—i.e., wildlife trafficking, trafficking in counterfeit pharmaceuticals, trafficking in drugs (traditional and synthetic), and sex trafficking—are identified and compared.

**The impact of the Internet on organised criminal groups and activities**

Since the mid-1990s Internet crimes have received significant coverage by both scholars and media. Most of the literature dealing with crimes in the Internet era has concentrated on new types of offences targeting computer networks themselves, such as spamming and data stealing malware. However, the Internet has also facilitated the commission of existing types of criminal activity by creating “a completely new environment in which traditional crimes […] can take new forms and prosper” (Clarke, 2004: 55). In this second case, most researchers have focused on narrow and heterogeneous issues such as hate speech, child pornography, terrorism, and sex trafficking.

As concerns more specifically the impact of the Internet on organised crime, Williams claims that there is “growing evidence” that “the dark side of the Internet” involves not only “disorganized crime” as in the case of individuals or pedophile rings, but also criminal organisations focused on the exploitation of the new opportunities offered by computer networks for illegal enterprises and activities (Williams, 2001: 22). According to Williams, even if organised crime and Internet crime are not synonymous and never will be—since the former continue to exist in the real world and the latter is often perpetrated by individuals—these two phenomena are increasingly overlapping (Williams, 2001). However, as concerns the relationship between organised crimes and
the Internet, apart from the vague statement that new Information and Communication technologies (ICTs) included the Internet facilitate organised criminal activities that can be found in a number of investigative reports (just to name a few, CEOP, 2010; EUROPOL, 2011a, 2011b; Troiano, 2011; AIFA, 2012; FDA, 2012), so far only few traditional transit crimes—such as drug and sex trafficking—have been subject to systematic analysis. For instance, it has been underlined that drug trafficking groups use new technologies to deliver their products more effectively, to communicate through encrypted messages, or to counter the work of law enforcement agencies through digital attacks (INCB, 2001; Walsh, 2011). Human traffickers use ICTs both to recruit victims and to exploit them (UN.GIFT, 2008). Recently, also the trading of counterfeit items via the Internet has received scholarly attention: in an exploratory study, Treadwell (2011) shows how the Internet is providing new opportunities to distribute counterfeit goods and suggests that this is leading to a transformation of the criminal marketplace, transforming it into a more flexible and disembodied “cyber-bazaar” (187). Four basic and general ways in which ICTs may facilitate traditional forms of organized crime have been identified (Grabosky and Smith, 1998: 188): by enhancing its capacity to plan and coordinate criminal activity; by sustaining the organizational structure; by facilitating the marketing and distribution of illegal services; by obstructing criminal investigations.

Furthermore, the Internet can have an impact on organised crime in terms not only of how these criminal activities are carried out, but also of how criminal groups are organised. The risk of the creation of flexible and non-ethnic “virtual gangs”, whose member never physically meet, has already been foreseen in academia (Galeotti, 2005:4). Several future trends have been hypothesized, such as the possibility for growing network connections between hackers, small-time criminals, and organized criminal groups (Williams, 2001), or between organised crime and terrorists (Shelley, 2003). Despite the importance of the topic, however, there is still few research-based evidence addressing the impact of the Internet on the organisational dynamics of criminal groups.

Before moving on, it is necessary to specify what it is meant by “organised crime” in this paper. Indeed, to identify organised crime is a thorny issue and no generally accepted definition has emerged yet (Abadinsky, 1981/2010). This expression is not neutral but rather evocative, and beside narrow legal definitions this term is often used in broader and all-embracing ways. Even if organised crime should not be reduced to illicit and illegal trades—where illegal refers to the trade of a product forbidden by law (such as heroin) and illicit to the trade of a product that could be legally traded under different circumstances (such as in the case of caviar smuggling)—these

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1 This distinction, which is often overlooked, is important: indeed, the fact that criminals operate in a “grey” or in a “dark” market entails different challenges that have to be met, and thus different patterns follow. For instance, are criminal actors selling pets via the Internet following different steps than their legal counterparts? How does the system
opportunistic and market-driven criminal activities appear to be the core problem of organised crime, especially in its transnational manifestations\(^2\). To underline that the primary businesses of organised crime are international smuggling activities, while ignoring all the activities involving controlling economic sectors or regions that characterise only certain experiences of organised crime, the notion of *transit crime* has been developed (Kleemans, 2007: 169ff). Transit crimes can be defined as international illegal trades where criminal groups are involved using the same opportunity structure that facilitates legal economic activities (Kleemans, 2007: 176). In this way, the focus is on the criminal activity rather than on the criminal group, thus allowing researchers to focus on the *how* rather than on the *who*. Similarly, this permits to suspend judgment on the minimum degree of organisation and sophistication that is necessary and sufficient in order to label a criminal group as “organised”: indeed, groups involved in transit crimes are conceived as “criminal networks”, avoiding conceptions of organized crime as hierarchical, pyramidal structures that are not in line with empirical facts (or, at least, that could depict only a sub-species of organised crime in certain specific geographical manifestations) (Kleemans, 2007: 170). In this paper, organised criminal activities considered are all, indeed, transit crimes.

**Opportunity as cause of crime: origins and evolution of script analysis**

Being interested in the structure of opportunities that the Internet provides for transit crimes to occur, the criminological approach that has been summarized under the label of “environmental criminology” and that considers the impact of external variables on people's behaviours can provide a very good theoretical framework\(^3\). As summarized by Clarke (2009: 262ff), unlike criminological theories that try to explain why some people become criminals by looking at biological or social dispositions, environmental criminology focuses on the opportunities that allow a specific type of

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\(^2\) Indeed, (transnational) organised crime may concern a wider set of crimes, from extortion and murder to infiltration of legitimate business and money laundering. However, the provision of illicit goods and services not only is considered one of the major threats that have to be addressed as an international priority, but also as the core problem of organised crime (Glenny, 2008; UNODC, 2010; McCarthy, 2011).

\(^3\) Under the broad umbrella of environmental criminology we can find three main complementary theories developed on predatory crimes that, while operating at different levels of explanation, share the idea that opportunity is a root cause of crime and aim to reduce crimes by looking for crime patterns in a specific environment (Felson and Clarke, 1998; Clarke, 2009: 262): *rational choice theory* (Cornish and Clarke, 1986), *crime pattern theory* (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1993), and *routine activity theory* (Cohen and Felson, 1979).
crime to happen: the propensity to commit crime depends upon immediate circumstances, which have an active role in “readying” the (potential) criminal to act (Wortley, 1997: 74). Opportunity is seen both as providing the occasion—the objective condition—for the action and the temptation—the conditions perceived as favourable—for it (Mayhew et al., 1976: 7, emphasis in the original).

Environmental criminology has been the basis for situational crime prevention (Bullock et al., 2010). This approach, originally developed out of Home Office research programs from the 1960s, seeks generally to alter the “near” or immediate causes of crime by modifying the decisions that precede the commission of a crime. The reduction of crime is achieved through twenty-five mechanisms that can be reduced to five main opportunity-reducing techniques: increasing the offender's perceived effort, increase the risk, reduce the rewards, reduce provocations, and remove the excuses (Clarke, 1992/1997; Cornish and Clarke, 2003). Even if until now situational crime prevention has been applied mainly to “conventional high-volumes crimes”—such as burglary and shop theft—these approaches have been constantly under refinement and their scope increasingly extended. Academia has recently recognized that there are potential benefits in combining experiences from the field of research in organised crime and situational crime prevention (Bullock et al., 2010; Felson and Clarke, 2012; Von Lampe, 2011). Situational crime prevention, in particular, can help identify preventive measures: in this way, it would be possible, for instance, to reduce opportunities such as social arrangements and facilitating conditions that are exploited by organised criminal groups (Bullock et al., 2010: 7).

In order to identify potential points of intervention, situational crime prevention teaches us to think about a crime by breaking it up into the sequential phases of its commission. As has already been underlined by Mayhew et al., criminal behaviours can in fact be seen as consisting of “a number of discrete activities which are heavily influenced by particular situational inducements and by the balance of risks and rewards involved” (Mayhew et al., 1976). Cornish (1994) elaborated the concept of “crime scripts” to describe the essential stages of a criminal activity, making the decision points explicit: crimes can be located in space and time and can be unfolded into separate but related phases—as single scenes in a theatre play script—to better identify the opportunity structures that are used during their commission. To continue with the theatrical metaphor, as scenes in a play can have different length and complexity, scripts in a criminal event can operate at different levels of empirical specificity: determining the level of abstraction at which to work will determine the identification of different possible points of intervention (Tilley, 1997). The script approach has proved successful in criminological research, having the merit of casting light on the modus operandi of offenders when committing a specific criminal activity by focusing on the
identification of specific criminal opportunities and by explaining how they are exploited.

The using of crime script as an approach to investigate organised crimes has been heartily recommended by Cornish and Clarke (2002). Indeed, organised crime can be seen as “a chain of criminogenic events” relying on an environment that provides opportunities to make profit (Kirby and Penna, 2010: 209). Recent works relied on script analysis to enhance their understanding of organised criminal activities (Savona 2010, Von Lampe 2010, Chiu et al., 2011, Zanella 2013). The state of the art of the use of script analysis to investigate organised crimes is offered by Hancock and Laycock (2010) [exemplified in Table 1]: they recently proposed “the integrated organised crime script”, which operates at a thorough level of empirical specificity by distinguishing functions, script categories, and actions in the script scenes, as well as by stressing the pinch-points for interventions. Indeed, even if this script model was almost exclusively build on drug trafficking cases, it does not focus on a specific organized crime activity but it rather aims at looking at the crime commission process on a range of transit crimes. Moreover, in their model Hancock and Laycock take into consideration not only the primary criminal act (e.g. drug importation), but also the criminal lifestyle (series of activities that are independent from any active offending process) and the participation in/the access to criminal networks, groups or individuals. All these three components, which are interrelated, need to exist because of the complexities of transit crimes, and the Internet usage might affect all of them.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
<th>SCRIPT CATEGORY</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>PREVENTIVE RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precondition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental precondition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>Series of acts carried out in order to complete the criminal activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instrumental initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Possible preventive responses (for each action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental actualization</td>
<td></td>
<td>Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Post condition</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
There are some intrinsic limits in using script analysis to understand how organized crimes are accomplished. In particular, script analysis is by definition crime-specific and this would be an impediment in investigating trafficking flows where different items are traded, with different purposes, by different types of criminal actors, and involving different countries. Moreto and Clarke (2013) have recently dealt with this issue while discussing how script analysis could be undertaken to investigate the transnational market in endangered species, and they concluded that script analysis remains “an useful tool for achieving an understanding of its constituent steps” (2). The fact is that script analysis can maintain a role in the study of complex transnational crimes if we recognize that this role is necessarily more limited than in simpler criminal activities: in particular, since no agency or organization can be responsible for taking preventive actions against the criminal activity in its whole, script analysis is certainly limited in its capacity to identify proper preventive measures. Nonetheless, if we initially broaden the level of analysis, it can still offer a valid help in identifying the more vulnerable phases in the trafficking chain (to be then addressed by the usual, more narrow, level of analysis).

**Identifying the structure of criminal opportunities provided by the Internet**

In this paper, I have relied on Hancock and Laycock's organised crime script, with slight modifications to adapt it to the scope of this study. Indeed, in their model Hancock and Laycock also identify possible preventive responses for each criminal action, while this paper relies on their model only to understand in what phases of the criminal activity the Internet has been used and what kind of opportunity it has provided (e.g. Has the Internet affected the primary criminal act, the criminal lifestyle or the relationships within a criminal network?). Furthermore, a column labelled *stages* has been added to juxtapose the specific parts of the script (the various functions in the activity and the corresponding actions where the Internet has been used) to the main stages of each trafficking flow as identified by the existing literature. In this way, it has been easier to assess whether the Internet is having an impact on the way in which each transit crime is carried out. For example, the following table [Table 2] shows the framework used to organize data as concerns wildlife trafficking.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE (Re-elaborated from Dalberg, 2012)</th>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
<th>SCRIPT CATEGORY</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - preparatory activities antecedent to the commission of wildlife trafficking</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>Actions in which the Internet has been used (including how or where)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - poaching, harvesting, or breeding of the animal/plant</td>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - intermediate passage through local intermediaries/the domestic market</td>
<td>Precondition</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - passage through regional intermediaries/international traders</td>
<td>Instrumental precondition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - intermediate passage through local intermediaries/the domestic market</td>
<td>Instrumental initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - distribution of the animal/plant/product</td>
<td>Instrumental actualization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - activities that are directly consequential or subsequent to the trafficking activity</td>
<td>Doing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post condition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data have been gathered from case studies selected through convenience sampling. Despite the limited generalizability of convenience sampling, this method is largely used in criminology and criminal justice research because it allows the inclusion of certain types of data that are otherwise difficult to access and have certain particular characteristics of interest—i.e., the usage of the Internet in certain transit crimes—and to select cases that gave the possibility to be studied with a certain depth. The case studies are law enforcement operations in which the use of the Internet had a meaningful role. Relevant cases were initially identified through a preliminary keyword search of media sources, mainly Italian newspaper online archives (La Repubblica, Il Corriere della Sera), judicial databases (Dejure for Italian cases, Westlaw for US cases, and The Law Pages for UK cases), and through the reading of investigative reports (accessible in Italian or English). Additional cases were identified during interviews with law enforcement officers and experts. Primary documentary sources were also used (judicial transcripts and records from police investigations), sometimes obtaining copies of them and sometimes only the possibility to consult them briefly and taking some notes during the interviews. A total of 120 cases have been taken into consideration for analysis. Additional information was collected through 31 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with law enforcement officers and acknowledged experts in Italy, the UK, the Netherlands, and the US.
A taste of the analysis

It would be overlong to provide here a complete overview of the analysis and the results of all transit crimes considered. For the aim of this paper, I will rather try to offer some samples of the preliminary findings by adopting a comparative perspective among different criminal activities.

First of all, for each transit crime taken into consideration, through the crime script framework it has been possible to classify different typologies of criminal opportunities made available by the Internet. The following description provides just a few examples. In all trafficking activities the use of the Internet has provided communicative opportunities—by the use of services such as emails, Skype, and instant messaging both among offenders and between them and potential customers and victims, depending on the activity considered—relational opportunities—by facilitating the relationship among offenders and between them and potential customers and victims, thus affecting the external interactions of criminal networks—and promotional opportunities—to advertise the “quality” of the “product” traded. However, depending mainly on the social perception of the seriousness of the criminal activity, on the place it fills in the law enforcement agenda, and on the characteristics of the actors involved, many more criminal opportunities have been identified for different transit crimes. For instance, in the case of criminal activities that are perceived as low-risk by offenders (and that traditionally suffer form relative carelessness in the security agenda) such as wildlife trafficking or trading in counterfeit pharmaceuticals, the Internet is often used by unexperienced offenders to get information (informational opportunities) concerning existing legal frameworks or to solve problems related to very practical aspects of the trafficking chain (e.g., how to fed parrots in a wildlife trafficking case). Furthermore, in these cases clients often are not fully aware that they are going after items that are sold illegally or illicitly. From this point of view, the Internet offers persuasive opportunities, since it allows to reassure potential buyers about the reliability and the legality of the trade, and the validity of the product sold. When the activity is more risky for criminals, the Internet can offer valid countermeasure opportunities: in human trafficking and drug trafficking cases, for instance, it was used to take extra precautions when interacting with potential clients to be sure not to interact with undercover police officers instead, or to monitor otherwise dangerous situations from afar via online cameras. When clients may become habitual (as in drug trafficking, or in the trade of pharmaceutical doping products), the Internet is used as a powerful retention tool to loyalise old and new customers, making them feeling part of the same social group. Thanks to new managerial and organizational opportunities, the Internet has opened the way to new loose criminal networks, re-designed several stages of certain trafficking activities, and modified organizational layers. These
latter aspects will be now addressed more in detail.

The extent to which the use of the Internet affects traditional transit crimes depends on the specific phase in the trafficking chain. From the script framework for wildlife trafficking, for instance, it emerges clearly that the Internet plays a major role in the preparation of the criminal activity and in the transit through local intermediaries in the destination countries and the distribution stage. In particular, as concerns the new criminal opportunities in the distribution stage, the criminal market in wildlife closely resembles the flexible “cyber-bazaar” in counterfeit goods described by Treadwell (2011:187). On the contrary, apart from its obvious usage as a communication tool, the Internet does not seem to have affected the opportunity structure in the initial stages of the criminal activity. This is so because most poachers aim to supplement their income by relying on traditional social and economic structures to sell their products. Only in a couple of cases has the Internet allowed for the planning of the criminal activity directly from the destination country and eliminated completely the initial stages of the criminal activity by allowing them to be planned completely from the destination country. In cases of trade in counterfeit pharmaceuticals, from the script framework it emerges instead how the Internet affects more the stages of the trade where clients are involved, while it is almost irrelevant in the initial phases of production and in the ones consequential to the delivery. This may be explained by the fact that this criminal activity is still mainly run by criminal networks with a certain degree of sophistication that already have a convenient opportunity structure to rely on; for them, the primary need to go online is to enter into contacts with potential clients and to globally increase their reach. In sex trafficking cases, on the contrary, the Internet has severely affected all stages of the trafficking chain but in particular the initial ones, acting as an important facilitator non only in recruiting victims, but also to target them according to their vulnerabilities and in deceiving them.

Even if in certain cases many people were involved, in most instances the networks running the criminal business via the Internet were composed by very few people, often couples or small family groups. One would expect a certain degree of complexity and sophistication from criminal networks running transnational transit crimes, given their intrinsic complexity. Nonetheless, the use of the Internet has allowed very loose organizations and even individuals to enter most criminal markets and to be equally (if not more) efficient. The technical skills required are low, and the essential information needed to carry out the trade, in most cases, can be easily accessed online by beginners. For instance, in the case of sex trafficking, quite unexpectedly, the use of the Internet seems to have opened the market to smaller groups, that thanks to the possibility to recruit girls online as well as to manage all phases of the trafficking activity can organize all stages of sex
trafficking on their own rather then relying on complex criminal networks. According to a Senior Officer at Europol, Human Trafficking Unit, this is true especially when looser groups operate in areas where there is not a strong presence of endogenous sophisticated criminal groups already involved in the trafficking business.

The Internet has allowed to easily anticipate interactions between offenders and customers at an earlier stage of the trafficking chain, so that specific items can be directly ordered (for instance, specific species in wildlife trafficking) and the trade is customised accordingly. Similarly, clients' feedbacks can be received instantaneously and the trafficked products can be modified underway to better meet the consumers' needs (for instance in the case of synthetic drugs). Furthermore, greater ease in communications allows for highly flexible and fluid organizational forms, which are capable of adapting to contingent needs. In several investigations, everything was managed via the Internet, so that it was possible to react promptly to specific buyers' needs. In many cases, thanks to this flexibility, it was possible to bypass local intermediaries. In cases of drug and pharmaceutical trafficking, however, some clients are assuming a new role, acting as traders themselves⁴. The Internet has thus allowed to add a new layer when the market offered the possibility for segmentation—i.e., targeting subsets of clients who have common needs and that can be reached though specific touch-points. Usually, people then re-sell them act as local retailers offline. This is especially true as concerns two categories of pharmaceuticals: some lifestyle drugs such as the ones for erectile dysfunction—then sold in sexy shops—and doping products—sold in gyms and other sport centres to both professional and amateurs.

In the Action column of the script framework, also the modalities through which the Internet was used are identified. In particular, the Internet services through which the trafficking activity has been carried out as well as the types of cyber-hotspots used are specified: they are not only “convergence settings” (Felson, 2006) as identified by Soudijn and Zegers (2012)—i.e., online places where potential offenders can easily meet each other—but rather loci where interactions among all actors involved in trafficking are facilitated (i.e., victims and/or clients). Furthermore, people interacting in cyberspace often meet in the physical world to conclude their deals, so that in many instances cyber-hotspots are better described as extensions of traditional hotspots. In many

⁴ This fact has been confirmed by the AIFA Director of the Counterfeit Prevention Unit, who stressed that while the medium package intercepted by law enforcement used to contain about 20-30 tablets a few years ago, now it is usual to intercept bigger packages of about 150-200 tablets each. He also underlined how certain online pharmacies indicate that in case of big orders they will send pharmaceuticals divided in smaller shipments to escape law enforcement attention. Indeed, as reported by three different interviewees, so many cases are intercepted that if the sale concerns quantities for personal use the tendency is that to ignore.
cases people interacting in these cyber-hotspots usually share the same types of passions and tend to recognize themselves as part of the same social network. Furthermore, no matter how highly-specialized or segmented the market is, it would be in any case much easier to find potential buyers or sellers online than in the physical world. From this point of view, the Internet seems to have further boosted the importance of niche criminal markets.

The demand for contacting potential clients generally overcomes the need for discretion in the trafficking activity: indeed, in almost all cases, criminal opportunities arose from the so-called “surfing web”, open to the wider public. This is true especially in the case of both illicit and illegal products that might be confused by non-experts as legally marketable items, or that are in “gray areas” as in the case of certain smart drugs. It is safe to say that differences in the degree of concealment of trafficking activities in cyberspace are better explained by the different perceptions of the seriousness of the criminal act (in terms of what is trafficked) than by the degree of illegality of the market (illegal or illicit).

This brief overview has shown how the use of the Internet has affected the organization of transit crimes, as concerns both the carrying out of the criminal activity and the patterns of relations in and among criminal networks. Thus, the Internet does not seem to be only used as a communication tool but it has also affected this criminal market in a much more extensive. It made certain criminal markets (such as the ones in wildlife and smart drugs) hybrid markets that combine the traditional social and economic opportunity structures with the new one provided by the Internet. Some tendencies can be identified: first of all, the Internet has lowered the barriers to entry into criminal markets and opened the way for new criminal actors. Secondly, as hypothesized by Brenner (2002) and Wall (2007: 39ff), the transformative impact of the Internet has affected the organization of criminal networks and the division of criminal labor: individuals and looser groups can now carry out complex and far-reaching activities, given their greater potential control over the criminal process. Instead of by hierarchical organizational structures, Internet-mediated trafficking activities are often run by fluid networks adapting to transient criminal opportunities. In general, some organizational layers have been eliminated, but the opposite happened in segmented markets. Furthermore, the Internet has re-configured relations among suppliers, intermediaries, and buyers: not only does it facilitate communication and exchange of information, but it also affects how trust among them is earned. Finally, the use of the Internet has certainly affected the organization of the trade in niche markets, making them profitable and large-scale criminal business that certainly deserves more attention from criminological scholars.
Conclusion

Since considering organized crime for the purposes of a situational approach involves the deconstruction of its complexity to comprehend how crime operates or needs to operate, crime scripts can have an important role in identifying, step-by-step, the modus operandi of groups involved in illicit and illegal trades. This article has emphasized the possibilities offered by script analysis in providing a proper theoretical framework for a better understanding of traditional transit crimes in the eSociety. The complex but intriguing relationship between traditional criminal activities and the Internet is still under-investigated but it is likely that this issue will become increasingly critical in the coming years, as new generations are used to utilize computer networks for all their routines. By identifying the system of opportunities criminals exploit in the Internet, we have the possibility to consider the organization of both criminal activities and criminal groups, thus allowing a more complete understanding of how organized crimes behave in eSociety. In this way, it is possible not only to adequately counter organized crime in a new battlefield, but also to prevent criminal activities by targeting criminals where it is more efficient, thus finding a good balance between demands for security and the maintenance of the Internet's openness.

References


