

Word Count
European Responses to Gangs
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Prior to embarking on this discussion of European responses to gangs, it is imperative to set out the parameters and scope of this chapter. It is unconceivable within the confines of this chapter to provide an in-depth analysis of each of the 28 European Member States and their responses to gangs. Indeed in some instances such analysis would be unproductive, given that the 'gang' does not feature highly on the political and policy agendas. Rather, we will endeavour to provide a broad overview of European gang discourse, knowledge, interventions and current policy direction via a miscellany of countries, including Western Europe countries involved in the ITACA Projectⁱ (Interaction of different subjects Towards A strategic Common Answer concerning juvenile gangs), the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. In order to set European gang policies and interventions in context, we briefly reflect on the dialogue around definitions, with a particular focus on the problem of translation. Our task of generically discussing gang responses across Europe is hindered by the fact that, at the time of writing, there exists no commonly accepted definition of 'youth gangs' or 'juvenile gangs' (or even of what constitutes 'juvenile delinquency') within the EU. During the course of this chapter, we endeavour to illustrate how, the gang phenomenon may be described in various ways between European countries, while indeed other European countries may not directly address 'gangs' at all. To this end societal and criminal justice system differences within Europe are significant when it comes to understanding responses to gangs. Finally, we attempt to provide an indication of the emerging evidence regarding the nature and extent of the European gang problem.

Lost in Translation? European gang discourse and continuing definitional issues

As Klein *et al.* (2001: 3) note, until recently, there had been a "tendency to deny the existence of gangs in Europe because they do not fit the stereotype derived from the earlier studies". Hence, whilst many European countries have had youth groupings, which might be referred to as 'street gangs', 'youth gangs' or 'juvenile gangs' both academics and policy makers were often hesitant to call them 'gangs' because they compared their own groups to American stereotypes (see Covey 2003; Decker and

Weerman 2005). Nevertheless, the resistance to the acceptance of a gang culture in Europe has shifted markedly over the last decade. Indeed, some might argue that the pendulum has swung the other way and there is now over-identification of the gang (e.g. among police and policy makers). The eminent US gang researcher Ronald Huff (1990) has presented a compelling analysis of US reaction to gangs. He refers to a three-stage model of (1) Denial, followed by (2) Over-reaction and (3) Misidentification. As we document later in this chapter, in certain European countries we can see clear historical similarities in the fields of academia and policy. Yet, whilst there has been a marked shift around the acceptance of gangs and accumulative discourse on gangs in Europe, certain issues still prevail, such as the reluctance in some quarters to use the term ‘gang’ and the perennial problem of definition. Research in the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Sweden highlight these difficulties. For instance, Van Gemert (2012) identifies the reluctance of the use of the term ‘jeugdbendes’ in the Netherlands to describe problematic youth groups (jeugdbendes being the common equivalent of gangs). In a French context, it is argued that it would be more appropriate to describe the phenomenon of juvenile gangs as ‘bandes’ (not ‘gangs’), vocabulary with less of an emphasis on the serious and violent nature of youth gangs (see Cervantes and Marchand, 2013). Terminology also blurs the understanding amongst the Scandinavian countries where there are differences between the meaning of the words gang (gjeng), which is used in Norway (and Sweden), and bande, which is used in Denmark. Carlsson and Decker (2005: 267) note that the “Norwegian word gang has associations that might lead to a belittling or denial of the problem, whilst the Danish word bande can push people in the moral panic direction.”

	Different gang terms and meanings employed¹ across Europe
Denmark	<i>Bande Gang</i>

¹ [Terms employed in policy, by police, or via media/public discourse.](#)

France	<p><i>Bande juveniles</i> Juvenile band (groups of young people)</p> <p><i>Bandes de jeunes</i> Bands of youths</p>
Italy	<p><i>Baby-gang</i></p> <p><i>Bande minorili</i> Juvenile band</p> <p><i>Gang di bulli</i> Gang of bullies</p> <p><i>Bande di periferia</i> Band of periphery</p> <p><i>Bande giovanili</i> Youth band</p> <p><i>Street gang</i></p> <p><i>Juvenile gangs</i></p>
Germany	<p><i>Bande Gang</i></p> <p><i>Kinderbande</i> Gang of children</p> <p><i>Jugendbande</i> Young gang</p>
Norway	<i>Gjeng</i> Gang/Thread/Bunch
Spain	<p><i>Juvenile gang</i></p> <p><i>Juvenile violent group</i></p> <p><i>Bands</i> (in relation to Latin groups, such as the “Latin King” operating in Madrid)</p>
Sweden	<i>Gjeng</i>
UK	<p><i>Delinquent Youth Group</i></p> <p><i>Troublesome Youth Group</i></p> <p><i>Youth Gang</i></p> <p><i>Urban Street Gang</i></p>

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Leaving translation complications aside, the current European gang policy landscape is made more challenging by the difficulties of defining gangs and identifying their members and associates - a problem that has long since plagued gang research in the United States (see Decker and Kempf-Leonard 1991; Klein *et al.* 2001). Many European countries that attest to having a gang problem and have developed policy and a range of responses to it do not have formal or even widely used definitions. Even within the UK, one of the least problematic countries in terms of translation, resistance and problems around definitional agreement are evident at both an academic and practice level. Alexander (2000; 2008) has denounced the use of the term whilst Hallsworth and Young (2008) have warned against the upsurge in 'gang talk'. Resistance and confusion is also evident when referring to the concept of the gang amongst criminal justice workers. There have been calls from some practitioners to replace the term gang with 'delinquent youth groups' (Youth Justice Board, 2007). A Joint Thematic Review in 2010 by the three HM Inspectorates of Prisons, Probation and Constabulary found that there was still no agreed working definition or common understanding of what constituted a gang amongst those working in a prison setting or in the community in the UK (HMIPP 2010). Furthermore, when we drill down to the level of the individual and what constitutes a 'gang member', 'gang associate', or somebody who is 'gang affiliated' or on the 'periphery of gangs' the picture is less clear (Smithson *et al.* 2012).

Moreover, a working definition of a gang does not exist in Sweden, Italy, France or Portugal. In describing the current situation in Italy for example, the ITACA project concluded that a clear definition of a gang does not exist in Italy, even if there are some policy actions in the field. The gang is still perceived as a journalistic term and the research reported *en masse* media amplification of the problem but it does not represent a real criminological category (Padovani *et al.* 2013). Portugal is similar in that neither the Portuguese juvenile justice system nor the Portuguese penal justice system refers to the specific association of youths to groups or gangs. The Portuguese justice system contains no official criteria for a young person to be considered a gang member and the word 'gang' is rarely used by Portuguese people

(Matos *et al.* 2013). Hence, there is a distinct absence of both academic research and official statistics on youth gangs in Portugal.

Of those countries that have developed definitions, there is considerable variation. For example, in Spain, the official definition of 'juvenile gangs' or 'juvenile violent groups' is, "Those composed of minors and young people aged from 14 to 30 years old, presenting cohesion and internal discipline structures and whose actions result in behaviours sometimes violent, generating social alarm" (Pozo *et al.* 2013: 140). In Norway, the Oslo Police Department's gang definition is:

"A group (often limited in age) staying together over a period of time, performing criminal acts and/or disturbing public order and showing aggressive behaviour in public places. The gang has some kind of symbolic expression of their group participation such as name, insignia, clothing, language etc." (Jensen and Stubberud, 2011: 268).

Definitions in the Netherlands have mainly developed in The Hague region of the country since the mid-1990s, with a 'jeugdbende', the Dutch word for 'gang' originally described as:

"A group of three or more youth, that are connected because of race, country of origin, culture or territory, that meet regularly and (among other things) have the goal to commit criminal activities" (Van Osterwijk *et al.*, 1995: 44).

Although this original definition has since been altered and added to by the police. Within Denmark, the focus has been on biker gangs and organized crime as opposed to the emphasis on youth groups and street gangs of some its European counterparts. The legal definition of organized crime in Denmark is taken from the EU definition of which there are 11 components, with four being obligatory:

"Collaboration of more than two people; for a prolonged or indefinite period of time; suspected of the commission of serious criminal offences and motivated by the pursuit of profit and/or power" (European Union, 1997).

Definitions in the UK have developed since 2002, the first 'official' definition offered by the Home Office Report 'Shooting, Gangs and Violent Incidences in Manchester' (Bullock and Tilley 2002) defined a gang as: "Enduring groups of young people who see themselves as members of those groups and who commit crime as part of that membership". By 2009, the UK Gangs Working Group attempted to apply a universal definition to be adopted by all those tackling gangs to end terminology confusion and allow comparative analysis between different studies. The group defined gangs as:

“A relatively durable, predominately street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with or lay claim over territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature and (5) are in conflict with other, similar gangs” (Centre for Social Justice, 2009: 21).

The current Coalition Government has persisted in adopting the Gangs Working Group’s five-point definition (EGYV, 2011).

To this end, the ‘Eurogang definition’ has been praised, if not necessarily as the most conceptually suitable definition of a gang, for the attempt it represents to provide researchers with a consistent starting point in identifying, measuring and characterising youth gangs across Europe (Wood and Alleyne, 2010). Moreover, given the Eurogang commitment to developing a common framework for comparative international research, the construction of a consensus definition in the context of such diverse available definitions and approaches is critical. The Eurogang Network defines a street gang as, “Any durable street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity” (Klein and Maxson, 2006: 4).

The extent of gangs in Europe

Prior to discussing gang policy direction, we reflect here on what we actually know of the extent of the gang problem within Europe as well as how such knowledge has formed. Across Europe, gang estimates are predominately derived from police intelligence sources. These measures have historically been problematized in the US gang literature. Zatz (1987) for instance, found that the Phoenix Arizona police department exaggerated the seriousness of the gang problem by raising the estimates of the gang problem from five to more than 100 distinct gangs within a two-year period, consequently leading to further police funding. More recently, Webb and Katz (2003) warned those using police gang databases to look at gang-related phenomena to think carefully about the nature and reliability of the data, in light of the fact that counting rules were so ‘flagrantly disregarded’. In an age of austerity including staffing and funding cuts, the ‘talking up’ of the gang problem by police forces is one tactic of ensuring funding and resources in times of economic hardship (see Smithson *et al.* 2013).

In addition to police department figures that are often generated at a city or regional level, some attempts at national estimates have emerged in countries such as the

England and Wales, the Netherlands, France, Spain and Sweden. In England and Wales, the figures are confusing; in 2004, Bennett and Holloway used arrestee data to estimate that there are 20,000 gang members. However, they note that this figure may vary by 'up to 5,000 either way.' In 2009, using figures derived from the 2004/05 Offending Crime and Justice Survey (see Sharp *et al.*, 2006), the Centre for Social Justice stated, "up to 6% of 10-19 year olds self-report as belonging to a delinquent youth group" (Centre for Social Justice, 2009: 1). We can compare this to the US, where 8% of those between ages 10 and 23 have a history of gang membership (see Pyrooz, 2014). If we take the Centre for Social Justice percentages above, based on 7.5million people aged between ten and 19, it would equate to 467,000 gang members. However, the same report concludes that there are over 50,000 gang members in England and Wales (Centre for Social Justice, 2009: 19). The reasons for the discrepancy with the UK figures can be explained by terminology, the Offending Crime and Justice Survey speaks of 'delinquent youth groups', whilst the Centre for Social Justice fails to make any distinction between active and inactive gang members.

The scale, size and make-up of gang problems also vary. Figures recently compiled in Sweden, suggest that 5,000 young people under the age of 21 make up the recruitment base for gangs (see Lindström 2010). Whilst in the Netherlands, national figures published in 2010, report 1,154 'youth groups', with only six of these defined as 'jeugdbendes'. Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and the Hague report having no 'jeugdbendes' but 7, 3, 19 and 11 criminal youth groups respectively (Ferwerda and Van Ham 2010 cited in Van Gemert 2012). Van Burik *et al.*'s (2013) analysis of the Dutch situation found that whilst the term 'youth' was often used, almost a third (31%) of those identified as belonging to 'criminal youth groups' were older. More in-depth analysis of 10 criminal youth groups found that the groups differ greatly in size from large (approximately 100 members) to small (eight members). Some groups were found to primarily contain young members, while others consisted mainly of those aged 23 or older. Around half of the groups consisted largely or exclusively of members from Moroccan Dutch origin. The nature of criminal involvement was viewed as 'severe to very severe' in all groups, with at least half of the groups involved in possession of weapons, (severe) violent crime and drug trafficking.

It remains uncertain as to whether gangs are still on the ascendancy across Europe or whether recent gang policy is having an effect. Van Burik *et al.*'s analysis of Dutch

national reports identified that the number of problematic youth groups had declined in recent years. There was a decrease of 13% in 2011 and a decrease of 23% in 2012. However, as they note, this does not conclusively show that there is actually less problematic youth groups. For example, more expertise may result in better identification and hence the number of problematic youth groups may decrease, as fewer groups are misidentified. The Dutch report suggests that the decrease has been greatest amongst the least problematic youth groupings whilst the more criminal youth groups showed the least clear evidence of decline. Within Spain, there are reportedly three different types of gangs, the extreme right, extreme left and Latin “bands” (i.e. groups). Numbers of youth identified as gang members, amounts to a total of 11,465 in 2006 and 15,665 in 2007, a significant increase over two years (Pozo *et al.* 2013). French figures illustrate a rise in numbers from 2009 to 2011, with 222 gangs involving 2,500 individuals in 2009, increasing to 313 gangs in 2011 (Cervantes and Marchand 2013).

In other countries, such as Italy and Portugal, figures relating to gangs and gang membership simply do not exist. In the case of Portugal, the ITACA study suggests that although there are no criteria in the Portuguese justice system to register gangs’ activity, it is possible to establish if three or more youths were involved in the same crime (following the same criteria used in the Internal Security Annual Report). According to these statistics, 40 lawsuits were registered in 2010, with the involvement of three or more youths. This number increased to 78 in 2011 (Matos *et al.* 2013). One might interpret these figures as indication of a rise in ‘juvenile gang’ activity although practitioner opinion remains divided. In the ITACA survey of Portuguese practitioners who work with youngsters with or at risk of delinquent behaviour, less than half (46.5%) expressed ‘no doubt’ about the existence of youth gangs in Portugal (Matos *et al.* 2013).

In summary, in trying to encapsulate the current gang situation in Europe, we can see that the ‘gang’ has clearly permeated legislation and practice in some countries far more than others and hence the existing knowledge base is unbalanced. When translation complications and variations in gang forms (such as biker gangs, extremist gangs and juvenile gangs) are added to the mix, the task of making sense of the situation is hampered further. We now turn to academic research in an attempt to further piece together the European gang picture.

What are we talking about when discussing ‘gangs’ in Europe?

Alongside this somewhat patchy, variable and unreliable official data, there has been a significant growth in academic gang research in Europe. However, whilst European gang research is a growth area, with amongst others, the United Kingdom, experiencing heightened academic, policy and practitioner interest in gangs, there is still a lack of academic research in many countries, and Europe is still playing catch-up in comparison to the US. The dearth of knowledge is partly attributable to the fact that some academics continue to be critical of the concept of the gang and a sense of resistance or denial of 'real gangs' or 'American street gangs' still lingers in many European countries (see for example, Alexander, 2000; 2008). UK academics such as Pitts (2012) and Densley (2013), have engaged with the existence of gangs and as Densley notes in his recent monograph of an ethnographic study of gangs in London – *How Gangs Work*, "I found the gangs Britain denied existed" (2013: 176). He goes on to provide a framework for prevention and intervention.

Here we ponder the question, 'are US style street gangs emerging in Europe or are gangs distinctive to the European countries they are located in?' Academic research suggests that within Europe, the composition and purpose of gangs differs. In Denmark and Sweden, the traditional concern in discussion of gangs has centered on biker gangs. This is culturally distinct from Western Europe, where within the UK and the Netherlands for example, the biker gangs found in the Scandinavian countries, cause little or no concern, instead there is a significant emphasis on the activity of young people and their role in gangs. However, there are clear signs that gang concerns are changing in Scandinavian countries. In Denmark, since the late 1990s, larger groups of youths and young adults, primarily from immigrant backgrounds, have been linked to a range of crimes such as violent crime, extortion of protection monies, bank robbery, and sex, drugs and weapons offences (Cornils and Grave, 2004). These street gangs and their relationship to the biker gangs have received increased police attention (Rigspolitehøfen, 2000). More recently, Rostami and Leinfelt (2012) described how by the late 2000s organized and criminal 'street gangs' had begun to emerge and replace biker gangs as the catalyst for much of Sweden's law enforcement response to gangs. Continuing the move away from a primary focus on biker gangs, Jensen and Stubberud (2012) categorise gang structures in Oslo, as divided into three types: ad-hoc gangs, ethnic minority gangs and motorcycle gangs. In other parts of Europe, there is a distinct political dimension to the gang, such as the right wing youth groups in Germany (Kersten, 2001), and

the racist and neo-nazi groups found in Scandinavia (Carlsson and Decker 2005). As Hagedorn (2001: 48) observes, "Gangs in the United States have always been more alienated and survival focused rather than political". If we take the above findings and transmit it to Maxson and Klein's (1995) instructive gang typology, it suggests that some of the Scandinavian countries may have Traditional or Neotraditional Gangs (biker gangs), whilst the focus on delinquent youth groups in the UK and the Netherlands could reflect Collective Gangs. We now turn to a consideration of European developments in gang policy.

European gang policy

Prior to embarking on a description of Europe's response to gangs, it is useful to provide an overview of differing European juvenile justice systems. An outline of these contexts will assist in an understanding of the development of gang policy across Europe. Of significant importance is the observation that the age of criminal responsibility (the age at which a child can enter the criminal justice system) differs across Europe. For example:

- Portugal – 16 years old
- Belgium - 18 years old
- Finland - 15 years old
- France - 13 years old
- Netherlands - 12 years old
- Italy – 14 years old

In each of the Scandinavian countries, it is 15, and adolescents under 18 years of age are subject to a system of justice that is geared mostly towards social services, with incarceration as the last resort (The Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics). In the US, the age of criminal responsibility is established by state law. Only 13 states have set minimum ages, which range from six to 12. Most states rely on common law, which holds that from age seven to age 14 children cannot be presumed to bear responsibility but nevertheless can be held responsible.

International juvenile justice systems have generally been characterised by welfare and justice approaches. According to Junger-Tas (2006), there are three systems at play across Europe:

- (i) the Anglo-Saxon approach (England and Wales, USA, Canada and Netherlands) – characterised by a focus on accountability, punishment and deterrence.

- (ii) the Continental approach (France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Greece and Poland) – characterised by a focus on welfare, diversion and reparation.
- (iii) the Nordic, Scottish and Scandinavian approaches (Scotland, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway) – characterised by a focus on welfare, diversion, offender focused, social intervention.

Irrespective of Europe's differing juvenile justice systems, it is interesting to see that with respect to gang policy and interventions, the US is often turned to for direction. As we go on to outline below, in the last decade, as gang discourse and European gang research has grown exponentially, so too have the responses from practitioners and policy makers. As we highlight, these responses are invariably influenced by existing US practices. It is noteworthy that US practices are so influential given that the majority of European countries detailed in this chapter, are characterised by welfare oriented youth justice systems. With this in mind, we begin this section with a caveat. If Europe is looking to America for answers, caution should prevail; although the US has implemented various guises of gang policy for the last thirty years, academics still challenge its usefulness and credibility. For instance, Bjerregarrd (2003) examined anti-gang legislation across the US and argued for improved definitions, legislation governing gangs, and gang members (see her updated review in Chapter 20). The lack of and robustness of evaluations of these gang interventions is an issue that has plagued American gang responses. For example, a recent article by Gravel *et. al* (2013) found Spergel's (1995) Comprehensive Gang Model, to be ineffective due to problems with implementation fidelity (see Gebo and colleagues review of the CGM in Chapter 22). In their assessment of six major US gang control programmes, Klein and Maxson (2006) bemoan their failure as a direct result of weak or non-existent research designs and a lack of sustainable evaluations. These were all multimillion-dollar, large, national programmes. We should point out that although we advise caution, examples of success can be found in chapters 18 and 21 of this text (the Focused Deterrence Strategy and the GREAT Programme), that said we remain cautious of 'quick fixes' and endorse the need for robust evaluations.

So, has Europe fared any better? As we have described above, European gang research whilst steadily increasing is still some way behind the US and subsequently so is the evidence base around effective European policy responses. As we will

outline here, the paucity of empirical evaluation is omnipresent when one considers European responses to gangs. That said, some attempts have been made to assess impact. A recent case in point is the 2013 Dutch report by van Burik and colleagues. This report provides a useful overview of what is currently in place to tackle 'criminal youth groups' in the Netherlands – the Dutch Action Programme. The authors present a diverse picture and a somewhat patchy and inconsistent set of responses, dependent on the city. The study identifies 10 'developed approaches' which ranged from pragmatic and repressive policing practices through to more welfare, multi-agency approaches. They found that a majority of the approaches strongly focused on providing care interventions with only a minority primarily focused on the use of criminal actions. This is interesting for a country identified by Junger-Tas (2006) as having an Anglo-Saxon approach to youth justice – an emphasis on punishment and deterrence (see above). Sometimes the emphasis was on providing future prospects for young people, with the rare additional objective of working to address parental support needs. Intervention was often initiated via a final warning distributed to members, mostly in the form of a (mayors') letter and followed up by a personal interview. The police worked with partners (community, youth, street workers), mainly to target the supervision and monitoring of group movements and to hinder criminal leaders. However, the review found that the extent to which this was systematically carried out varied considerably. In fact, van Burik *et al.* (2013) found that a unified and joint strategy was often lacking in the Netherlands and that multi-agency working was still developing with too many different views on what was needed amongst partner agencies. However, they concluded that when invested heavily in, this bore results. The authors conclude that the Dutch Action Programme failed to meet its stated aims of tackling all criminal youth groups and notes that many Dutch cities do not have clearly defined plans (van Burik *et al.* 2013).

European gang policy is evidently developing at different rates. The countries covered in the ITACA research were found to be at varying stages of progress with regard to formulating policy, with Spain and France demonstrating some evidence of criminal justice responses to gangs. In Spain in 2005, the Ministry of Interior through the Secretary of State, established the 'Police coordination and intervention plan against organized violent juvenile groups'. It was renewed in 2008 and replaced in 2009 by the new Instruction of the State Secretary of Security, to boost and continue the aforementioned plan (Pozo *et al.* 2013). The objective of the plan is to coordinate

preventive and operational police forces activities, including: increasing intelligence on gangs through mapping and monitoring; cross-agency training on gang issues; increasing the contact with teachers, parents and young people; setting up of government advisory groups and improving collaboration within criminal justice settings including prisons (Pozo *et al.*, 2013).

Within France, the 8th March 2010 circular, set out action plans to implement local strategies to address gangs. The objectives were three-fold dependent on the type of gang: (1) Preventing crime and violence, (2) The prevention of public spaces for the instigation of riots and inter-gang clashes and (3) Prevention of organized trafficking. These objectives are to be met by the 'gang shut down' strategy, which relies on increasing the intelligence within areas exposed to the above problems by making use of real time intervention; strengthening legal responses by adapting local units; increased prevention and partnerships through youth awareness, jointly working with the Youth Judicial Protection Service; developing Local Security and Crime Prevention Committees and partnership working with the national education system (see Cervantes and Marchand, 2013).

The ITACA project reports that Italy does not have any anti-gang legislation (Padovani *et al.*, 2013). Although in 2003, the Italian government set up a Committee on 'Juvenile Group Violence', which sought to improve school activities and support health education projects in order to target the problem (Menesini and Modiano, 2003).

Anti-gang legislation in Italy was reported to still be in its early stages but nevertheless, was reported to be 'extremely promising' (Padovani *et al.*, 2013). The report found that there are no clear provisions and best practices regarding preventive measure and law enforcement strategies concerning gangs. Juvenile justice offices were found to generally be poorly organized and critiqued for not providing specific training on gangs for juvenile justice officers. The report also highlights a lack of integration between welfare and social protection systems and criminal justice in establishing a gang reduction program and raised concerns regarding a lack of specific budget allocations and an underestimation of advantages of developing a specific gang policy.

As described earlier, although the phenomenon of juvenile gangs has no official definition or data in Portugal, the professionals who deal with juvenile delinquency consider it a significant issue that needs urgent attention and answers. According to

such professionals, there are many problems in the Portuguese intervention policies concerning juvenile gangs. First, they consider that there is not a systemic policy toward gangs. A specific problem pointed out by practitioners is the failure to consider mental health issues in formulating a gang response. Thus, they consider that although the laws which frame juvenile delinquency in Portugal are positive, there is much to change and to improve. The few implemented actions towards juvenile delinquency in gangs are generally considered ineffective and uncoordinated. Nevertheless, some intervention practices are named as good examples. Working with the youngsters and their families in the community, for example in socially deprived areas where youngsters are at higher risk of becoming violent and participating in gangs' delinquency, is seen as a positive practice. The "Programa Escolhas" is named by 23% of the practitioners as the most important programme carried out in Portugal with impact on the prevention and intervention in juvenile delinquency (Padovani *et al.*, 2013). Implemented in 2001, it includes several small projects undertaken in "risk" areas throughout the country, and continuously over time. It aims to prevent a wide range of social problems in specific territories, and is carried out by multidisciplinary teams involving the communities (Matos *et al.*, 2013).

Practitioners point as problematic the lack of program evaluation practices in Portugal. Negative evaluations are frequently rejected instead of being considered improvement opportunities. Recommendations include the need to create conditions for an evidence-based understanding of youth gangs in Portugal, namely through: (1) The promotion of public discussion about the phenomenon; (2) The creation of an operational definition of gang in order to gather official statistics about it; (3) The increasing cooperation with international institutions (Matos *et al.*, 2013: 123).

Amongst the Scandinavian countries, it is evident that there are two distinct types of gangs as well as two discrete approaches to gangs. The first being the police led suppression approach, dealing in the main with biker gangs and organized crime (e.g. Denmark's 'Biker Law' and 'Biker Task Force'). For example, Denmark and Norway, both now have specialist police departments: the Oslo Police District established theirs in 2009, whilst in Denmark, the National Center of Investigation (NCI) represents a national police effort against organized crime, including group-related crime. Denmark's dedicated Biker Task Force, set up in 1996, has since changed to cover a broader range of group criminality that includes street gangs and

other organized crime groups. A further key piece of legislation was the 2002 Plan of Operations, which has been interpreted as subjecting gang members to increased surveillance (Cornils and Grave, 2004).

Carlsson and Decker (2005: 281) note, “The Scandinavian intervention diet represents a mixture of both suppression and social-intervention strategies”. This approach mirrors the welfare oriented characteristics of the Scandinavian youth justice system. This mixture is clearly illustrated by the recently developed Stockholm Gang Intervention and Prevention Project (SGIP). SGIP received significant European Union funding between 2009-2012 (EUR 1,181,000) with an objective “to prevent and deter youth from beginning criminal careers in street gangs and other criminal networks” (Rostami and Leinfelt, 2012: 9). They go on to make the bold claim that unlike other Scandinavian and wider European strategies, SGIP is based on “empirical findings and “best practices” (Rostami and Leinfelt, 2012: 91). The strategy incorporates the operational PANTHER Gang Model – Preventive Analysis about Network Targets for a Holistic Enforcement Response. Both models are based on a holistic approach, incorporating suppression, intervention and prevention. In assessing the PANTHER model, Leinfelt (2012: 183-184) notes a common flaw in police led gang interventions – the disregard of underlying issues and lack of understanding of the problem. The solution, he argues, is to think more holistically, and to involve a wide range of external partners and stakeholders from an early stage. He also notes the necessity to build in robust evaluations of interventions. Indeed, the PANTHER project was independently evaluated by the University of Linnaeus (see Holgersson and Granér, 2012) who found that on the basis of the data made available, that only four of the project's 18 objectives had been met, with a further two objectives described as ‘probably been met’ (Holgersson and Granér, 2012: 4). Moreover, the objectives met related to public engagement rather than gang suppression, for example, the hosting of two international gang conferences and public engagement such as media interviews. Carlsson and Decker (2005) provide a more detailed outlining of the Scandinavian response, documenting informal social control techniques – such as civilian security patrols – and a combination of social control and social opportunity measures, including youth contracts, multisystemic therapy, exit parent groups and complimentary methods. As we indicated above, very few, if any of these approaches have been rigorously evaluated and not all are targeted specifically at

youth gangs. Nonetheless, they are important to note as they demonstrate the differing approaches to 'gang intervention' in the Scandinavian countries. Suppression and social intervention play a role, and disagreement still exists over the concept of youth gangs. These two approaches represent a commitment to tackling organized crime, in the main organized biker gangs and are police-led approaches and the second, social preventative strategies aimed at youth groups – who may or may not be defined as gangs – whereby the police do not dominate preventative strategies.

As Cornils and Greve (2004) have observed, gangs are 'useful enemies', facilitating the authorisation of broad policing powers that would otherwise have been refused. They recount how in the Danish experience, media driven public concern about first biker gangs and more recently, street gangs, have been utilised to bring in a range of legal amendments. These have included the forfeit of assets (proceeds of organized crime), possession of weapons laws carrying a maximum penalty of six years. Offences against witness/intimidating a witness and the 'Biker Law' (Act No. 907 of 15 October 1996, 'rockerloven') which, as Cornils and Greve (*ibid*) note, was passed through very quickly (after only one week of consultation) as a result of concern around the biker gang war at that time. This law permitted the police to issue an exclusion order forbidding a person to enter or to be present at particular premises deemed to be used as a meeting place for gangs or where the location is deemed to be at risk of attack. Failure to comply with the order carried a two-year prison tariff. A more contemporary example of the rapidity or 'knee jerk reaction' to gangs in Europe is the UK's Ending Gang and Youth Violence Report. This gang policy emerged in direct response to the English Riots of August 2011 and the programme of interventions was rolled out within three months of the riots occurring in November 2011 (EGYV, 2011). As we have argued previously (see Smithson *et al.* 2013), blaming the riots (in part) on gangs contradicts the figures collated on actual involvement of gangs, with figures varying dependent upon police force. Newburn *et al.* (2011) claim that original figures from the Home Office suggested that one in four of those arrested in connection with the riots were gang members. In the Home Office (2011: 5) report, it states that 10 per cent of all arrestees were reported to be gang-affiliated, it acknowledges that gang involvement in the riots was minimal. We now turn to the UK as an illustration of the European transformation.

The UK gang journey: From 'no problem' to 'national priority'

So far, we have sought to highlight differences in knowledge, policy and terminology yet what currently unites Europe, no matter the differences in opinion and responses to gangs is the ever-changing global environment within which these opinions and responses are taking place. We are currently in the midst of a global recession, Europe like the rest of the world is tackling high levels of (youth) unemployment, deprivation and poverty levels are increasing, and the traditional welfare states of many European countries are evolving as austerity measures bed in. Yet the gang and the responses to it remain high on many political agendas. The UK provides a case in point, in the aftermath of the English riots in 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron announced a 'concerted all-out war on gangs and gang culture' and that 'stamping out these gangs is a new national priority' (Cameron, 2011). Subsequently, the UK developed its first national gang response – The Ending Gangs and Youth Violence Strategy (EGYV, 2011). Weitekamp (2001: 311-312) recounts how the UK Home Office declined an invitation to participate in the 1999 Eurogang workshop: "They declared that they had no such problem and decided therefore not to participate." From 'no such problem' in 1999 to 'national priority' in 2011 is a remarkable transformation by any standards.

Youth gangs and a plethora of gang policy responses dominate contemporary discourse on British youth more noticeably than other European countries. As noted, the post-script to the August 2011 English riots led to the development of the UK's first national gang strategy – 'Ending Gangs and Youth Violence' (EGYV, 2011) based on a five-point principle of Providing support; Prevention; Pathways out; Punishment and enforcement; and Partnership Working. In the UK, political resistance to the gang label began to change in response to a series of fatal incidents across England involving young males. This latest gang policy was preceded by a call from the previous Prime Minister, Tony Blair, to hold the first 'gang summit' meeting at Downing Street in February 2007. Since this seminal event, we have witnessed a raft of new policy measures and guidance aimed at addressing violent youth gangs in the UK. By the end of 2007, the UK had witnessed the introduction of US inspired specialist gangs and firearms units in large UK cities; weapon carrying and knife and gun related offences became the next cause for concern. The Tackling Gangs Action Plan (TGAP) was introduced in 2007 within four of England's largest cities: London, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. These cities were selected to form the TGAP, a six-month initiative to target and reduce

youth violence, particularly gang-related firearm offences (Home Office, 2008), as they were found to have the highest levels of firearms offences per head of population (Dawson, 2008). Each TGAP city now includes both US styled dedicated gang/firearm units within their police forces and Boston Ceasefire influenced multi-agency responses to the 'gang problem' (e.g. 'MAGU' (Multi-Agency Gang Unit) in Birmingham and 'IGMU' (Integrated Gang Management Unit) in Manchester). Many cities now have local authority Violent Gang Boards and legislation was passed to introduce US styled gang injunctions in the 2009 Policing and Crime Act. The escalation of UK gang discourse and subsequent policy responses can be comprehended in the timeline below.

Gang policy makers in the United States can draw on a substantive evidence base stretching back to the early 1960s. This body of work includes numerous in-depth ethnographies through to large scale, nationally representative surveys. They can draw on a significant number of academics who are internationally regarded as 'gang experts', each with several decades of knowledge to draw upon. In stark contrast, UK academic research is still in its infancy, the picture is still emerging and is clearly lacking several pieces of the jigsaw. What we have begun to witness since the turn of the twenty-first century are a handful of studies that have sought to explore the notion of the 'youth street gang'. These studies have had a primary focus of elucidating the existence of US style gangs in the UK and documenting their existence, structure and size. The evidence paints a mixed picture, full of contradictions and competing narratives. Alexander's (2000) ethnographic study into a South Asian gang for example, found no evidence of gangs in East London and concluded that the term 'gang' was stigmatising and damaging to ethnic minority communities. Likewise, Kintrea *et al.* (2008), who conducted research in 10 cities across Britain, was reluctant to engage in gang terminology, preferring to discuss evidence of territoriality. In contrast, a small body of London based gang research has emerged that seemed to have little problem identifying youth street gangs and gang members. Most noticeable perhaps has been the work of Pitts (2008) and more recently, the ethnographic research of Densley (2011, 2013). The work of Pitts in particular, presents a picture of highly structured 'supergangs' whose primary focus is drug dealing.

After a period of denial, we suggest that such concentration on youth gangs as a 'national priority' represents an over-reaction to gangs. We argue that much youth activity has been (re)framed as gang-related activity and as a consequence escalates behaviour to a higher level of risk, which in turn intensifies levels of

surveillance and justifies more stringent forms of intervention and monitoring (see Ralphs *et al.* 2009). Strategies are devised and developed which aim to reduce, contain or manage the risk posed by problematic individuals and populations (Garland 2001; Feeley and Simon 1992).

In common with other European countries discussed here, despite the introduction of a raft of gang policy and interventions, the UK has limited understanding and evaluation of gang interventions and of what works (Shute *et al.*, 2012). This was made explicit in a recent review of London based initiatives to tackle gangs that found few had attempted to evaluate the effect of their work on levels of gang and violent behaviour. The review noted that further data such as offending rates would be required to ascertain success but unfortunately, this data and the resources required to carry out more elaborate research are not always available or within the scope of the charities and organisations who work with gangs and young people. The review concluded that rather than throw more 'gang money' at the problem, a good starting point would be to encourage the right conditions for an evidence-based approach to inform future decisions (Project Oracle, 2013). In a more recent article, Shute and Medina (2014: 1) launch a scathing attack on the EGYV strategy, 'we find a government wasting £10 million on untheorised, unevidenced, and unevaluated 'activity' that risks reifying the very problem it claims to fear. The national obsession and current responses to gangs in the UK are based upon ill-thought out and rushed through short-term interventions and programmes (local authorities in receipt of EGYV funding had until March 2013 to spend it – the majority of authorities not receiving the monies until summer of 2012). Iain Duncan Smith stated himself, "It is unthinkable that a full and proper study of such a devastating problem has not been undertaken prior to setting policy" (Centre for Social Justice, 2009: 9). Fast forward two years to 2011, and he endorsed a national strategy conceived over three months, not the 'full and proper' study he was referring to.

Conclusion

Discussing US programs and policies of gang intervention, Klein (2001: 9) notes:

"They range from social services for individual youth to special anti-gang legislation to crack down on and incarcerate gang members at greater levels than non-gang offenders. In between are street worker programs, organizational change, community empowerment and police suppression programs. [. . .] Perhaps the most striking

comment, however, is the almost complete lack of scientifically acceptable evidence for the success of any one of them, and the enormous complexity of attempting to implement a comprehensive approach involving a wide range of these approaches.”

Sadly, over a decade on, in a European context, the same range of interventions are evident and conclusions reached. What might we surmise about the direction of gang policy and practice across European countries over the last decade? Unfortunately, it is our belief that European countries have failed to learn the lessons offered by US academics concerning the requirement of having well-defined gang labels and evidence-based interventions. Rather, it has often taken the indolent and perilous path of clutching on to US style interventions – this despite the largely unproven (or at best merely promising) evidence of intervention success in the US. Unfortunately, this growing mass of US-inspired gang-focused policy and interventions is lacking rigorous academic analysis and evaluation and, as we have begun to outline here, where a level of evaluation has taken place such as the ITACA project, the Netherlands and Sweden (see ITACA, 2013; van Burik *et al.*, 2013; Holgersson and Granér, 2012), the evidence is at best inconclusive. In spite of the paucity of empirically based research, the alacrity of criminal justice developments in responding to and tackling the gang problem in Europe shows no signs of waning.

The broad trend has been the setting up of US inspired dedicated policing units, variants of US gang injunctions and latterly, following the realisation that one cannot simply police their way out of gangs, multi-agency approaches with greater emphasis on welfare provision and support around desistance. Nevertheless, criminal justice interventions still dominate. A consistent theme emerges amongst the countries represented by the ITACA project (Italy, Portugal, Spain and France) and the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Denmark and Norway and this is the need for an integrated approach to gang policy. The UK and the Netherlands appear further down the road of multi-agency gang policy. The concept of the gang and concerns that surround it have led to unprecedented official gang discourse and a wide range of European policy responses elevating gang interventions as high on the national policy agenda.

i The recently concluded European project ITACA 'Interaction of different subjects Towards A strategic Common Answer concerning juvenile gangs' was funded for 333,000 Euro's by the European Union's Daphne III Programme which aims to prevent and combat violence against children, young people and women. The overall goal of ITACA was to implement a European multi-level analysis of 'juvenile gangs' in order to create a picture of the phenomenon, making it possible to understand it and to identify key elements and recommendations for putting into place/creating practices and actions aimed at treatment and prevention. To this end, research was conducted with partner institutions across six European countries – Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom -between March 2011 and February 2013.

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