



An exploration of organized crime in Italian ports from an institutional perspective. Presence and activities

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Abstract

The article will present the results of a qualitative research into organized crime in the Italian port system. It is a pioneering attempt to assess an extensive and diachronic perspective on the presence and activities of organized crime groups into the Italian seaports in order to provide a systematic analytical map through the analysis of institutional law enforcement reports. The article attempts to shed light on an overlooked topic, analytically relevant insofar as it examines OCGs's activities in a specific and particular space representing an opportunity to obtain profits and social connections. Moreover, it analyses OCGs tendency to be involved in legal and illegal businesses, their ability to persist in space and time, and their skills in moving abroad. The results show that organized crime activities are permanent and largely widespread in the main harbours all over the country, particularly in Ancona, Cagliari, Genova and Gioia Tauro; organized crime groups operate mostly in illegal business and in particular in illicit trafficking of drugs, cigarettes and counterfeit goods; the Italian mafia 'ndrangheta seems to be able to persist in space and time within several seaports. The study shows that simultaneous processes of specialization in illegal markets and diversification in seaports are ongoing.

Keywords Organised crime · Maritime security · Ports · Mafias

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Introduction

Seaports are a fundamental hub of global commercial networks and supply chains (Huybrechts 2002). During 2018, volumes amounting to 11 billion tons were moved by vessel and an estimated 793.26 million TEUs¹ were handled in container ports worldwide (UNCTAD 2019), while every year the shipping industry moves almost 90% of global goods (George 2013). This indicates that everyday maritime transport networks connect different parts of the world, creating never ending supply chains, in which ports represent the principal hub of exchange. Hence, the harbour is a border place with an ambivalent essence, where organized crime can find opportunities to expand illegal and illegal business (UNODC 2013). In fact, ports are described in literature as «centres of moral corruption and decadence» (van Hooydonk 2007, p. 28) characterized by the use of informal agreements among actors, that exchange resources and information with peculiar praxis (Sergi and Storti 2020). This is possible because, as Bottalico sustains, «port labour is a traditional form of waterfront work, related with militancy, casualism, close-knit communities» (Bottalico 2019, p. 198), a «workforce with its written and unwritten rules, circumscribed within a perimeter that precisely defines social relationships and contractual constraints» (Bottalico 2019, p. 204).

A port is a network of infrastructures where multilevel enterprises (local and global) and both public and private actors operate. It is an ambivalent space characterized by overlapping public and private jurisdictions and almost-military security control which is functional to the openness to transit of goods and commodities. It is essentially a dichotomous space, that represents a crucial asset for commercial business, particularly in the Italian local and national economy (Spirito 2019), where the blue economy represent almost 3% of the total economy (Unioncamere 2019).

It can be considered as a border space and an edge, as a line defining the end and the beginning of a new country, but also as a meeting point. It is true for global economic actors and for organized crime groups (OCGs), that can find a welcoming environment (Antonelli 2020) marked by corruption (Hardy 2017) even involving public agents (Jancsics 2019). It is a complex system characterized by intersecting interests of agencies, private companies, and regulatory entities, in which the claims for security measures coming from the market and the governance system can create rivalry (Sergi 2020a) and can be exploited by criminal networks in order to operate inside the port.

In this type of systems, criminal organizations can participate with different roles, as consumer of corruption or as regulator of the markets (Della Porta and Vannucci 1999; Vannucci 2012, 2018), using their particular resource and ability in networking with other actors of the legal and illegal economy to expand their interest in space and time (Sciarrone 2009). As a matter of fact, as claimed by many law enforcement report (DNA 2017), several criminal organization operate in European and Italian seaports in trafficking different illegal goods such as drugs, counterfeit products, smuggled cigarettes, weapons, illicit waste and humans (DNA 2016), but also infiltrating legal markets (Sciarrone 2009). Therefore, the port can be considered as a space where organized crime can expand social ties, legal and illegal business.

¹ TEU (“Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit”) is a unit of measure use to describe the capacity of container in shipping industry.

Despite its analytical and empirical relevance, it appears there is still a shortcoming in literature about the studies of central logistical space such as ports and their connection with organized crime. As Kleemans sustains, «street segments and “pockets of crime” have been investigated in great detail, but important logistical nodes such as airports and harbours have largely been neglected» (Kleemans 2018, p. 9). This claim may be applicable to the Italian case where, notwithstanding the relevance of Italian mafias (Allum et al. 2019), only few research have been completed (Sergi 2020a).

The aim of the article is to address this gap in understanding giving a contextualised and in-depth picture of the ongoing Italian port situation and providing a systematic analytical map of the presence of OCGs from an institutional perspective. This study aims at describing which OCGs groups have been involved in legal and illegal business in Italian ports for the last twelve years, with a focus on the most persistent OCGs and most affected ports. The interest in the issue relates to the nature of ports, which represents a unique opportunity for OCGs to obtain profits and social connections. Given the limitation of the data, the study should be considered as a pioneering attempt to adopt an extensive and diachronic perspective on the interests of OCGs in the Italian port system through the analysis of institutional reports.

Background

Defining organized crime has been a recurrent task in literature (Varese 2010, 2017) and has generated a broad debate on its structure (Reuter 1985) and activities (Sergi 2017). For the purpose of this study OCGs can be defined as groups that attempt «to regulate and control the production and distribution of a given commodity or service unlawfully» (Varese 2017, p. 45). According to this perspective, it is possible to recognize three sets of illegal activities in which OCGs can be involved at the same time, that are related to production, trade and governance (Campana and Varese 2018). As Sergi (2017) claims, in the Italian case there is often an «overlapping of the conceptualizations of organized crime and mafia» (Sergi 2017, p. 71), that is highly problematic and needs to be faced. Aware of the «multifaceted criminal panorama in Italy» (Sergi 2017, p. 71), in this study mafia groups are identified as a particular form of OCGs specialized in the supply of protection and governance (Gambetta 1993; Varese 2017). Among them, ‘ndrangheta, the Calabrian mafia, seems to be the most powerful (Sergi and Lavorgna 2016). The peculiar organizational structure of mafia groups allows them to act at the same time as an organization tending to govern territory and as an organization which is involved in illegal trafficking. The combination of these two dimensions can change in space and in time (Sciarrone 2009). In fact, according to some authors, mafia groups can diversify activities and methods when they move abroad (Campana 2013; Dalla Chiesa 2016; Sciarrone 2019; Varese 2011), thanks to peculiar contexts and agency factors easily explaining how mafia-type groups expand across territories (Sciarrone and Storti 2014).

In literature, several scholars have investigated specific illicit markets that, to a certain extent, are related to ports, such as illegal trafficking (Eski and Buijt 2017; Kostakos and Antonopoulos 2010; McNicholas 2008; Sergi 2020b; Zaitch 2002) or irregular immigration (Monzini 2007). Other authors have analysed how OCGs relate with port workers (Monzini 1999), with trade and labour unions (Jacobs 2006; Lupo

2008), and with private companies (Block 1982). On the contrary, very few scholars have investigated how organized crime is able to operate both in legal and illegal business in ports (Sciarrone 2009; Sergi and Storti 2020) or how it affected port life during history (Leloup 2019). These studies show that OCGs tend to exploit port to improve different businesses with different strategies.

In fact, the combination of multiple vulnerabilities – such as economic, administrative, environmental and spatial aspects – can generate different opportunities for criminal actors. Hence, the port is both an entrance door for illegal trafficking (Sergi 2020b) and a social setting for business (Kleemans 2018). As Van de Bunt et al. (2014) illustrate, OCGs are structurally embedded with the port environment in terms of use of legal trade, infrastructures and facilities. According to the authors, OCGs exploit pre-existing legal networks for their activities. Research findings indicate that ports can be considered as crime generators and crime attractors (Patricia Brantingham and Brantingham 1999; Paul Brantingham and Brantingham 2013), i.e. a «social opportunity structure and offender convergence settings» (Kleemans 2018, p. 2). Hence, in this particular space, OCGs can improve social and economic capitals (Sciarrone 2009), that are important resources to reproduce activities and presence in space and time.

In this scenario, the Italian case is particularly relevant. Italy is a country surrounded in large part by the sea and recognized as a natural port in the middle of Mediterranean Sea, where it represents a strategic hub for trans-Mediterranean trading routes that come from both the Eastern and the Western side, and for European areas, thanks to the four TEN-T lines that pass through the Italian territory. Even if Italian infrastructures are not high quality and efficient (World Economic Forum 2017), Italian maritime economy is very important for national and local business, considering that the additional benefit produced by blue economy is almost 46,7 billion of euros (Unioncamere 2019). The Italian port system is a strategic economic asset, characterized by a landlord port governance, in which the local and public Port Authority owns the port area and makes it available to companies on the basis of concessions. There are 16 Port Authorities all over the country, which are uniformly located along the coasts and which coordinate 58 ports of national relevance. The use of informal agreement among the actors is one of the main feature of Italian ports, that create a welcoming environment for OCGs (Antonelli 2020).

Several law enforcement authorities and public institutions consider Italy as a country where organized crime groups – and particularly mafias – are historically settled (C.P.A 2018; DIA 2019; DNA 2018). Also, they point out the relevance of the Italian ports for Italian and foreign OCGs. This claim is usually supported by the data regarding the seizures of illegal goods, especially drugs, on the maritime borders provided by Direzione Centrale dei Servizi Antidroga (the Italian Antidrug Central Office) (D.C.S.A 2019). Despite methodological issues,² seizures are still a solid indicator of borders permeability. In 2018, 53,04% of drugs were seized in border areas. During the same year, on the edge of the country, police confiscated 1.492,61 kg of cocaine of which 77,80% on the maritime borders, mostly on the western ports. Between 2017 and 2018 law enforcement's action increased the amount of heroin seized by 286,31% thanks to the operations on the maritime borders. In 2018, 99,82%

² The amount of illegal good seizure can provide information about law enforcement's performance or strategies.

of hashish and 97,36% of marijuana seized on the borders were found on the sea frontier.

According to D.C.S.A., OCGs select a port according to the connections they have there and the possibility to control part of logistics and transport features and network (D.C.S.A. 2019). This is supported by Direzione Nazionale Antimafia's reports (D.N.A., National Antimafia District Offices), which point out that OCGs are interested in concluding «a safe trade, regardless the economic costs» (DNA 2017, p. 298). The safety of the trade depends on the ability in succeeding to avoid Customs and Police controls, thanks to corruption, expertise and lack of intelligence protocols.

This suggests the possible relevance of a first diachronic analysis which takes into account the evolution of the phenomenon in Italy during time, which could also be useful for further comparisons.

Methodology

This article presents some findings of a broader and ongoing qualitative research project about the interests of mafia group into the Italian seaports, during which broader background data have been collected. They consist in sources openly available such as trial documents, press articles and institutional reports. All this material has driven the author's analysis and it will be taken into consideration in the section "Conclusion" to critically discuss the findings of the paper.

This study attempts to provide a systematic analytical map of the presence and activities of OCGs in the Italian port system through the references to organized crime groups' activities provided by law enforcement reports released by Direzione Nazionale Antimafia. In fact, for the purpose of the paper, all the data analysed in the section "Results" come from the D.N.A. reports and represent the D.N.A.'s narrative on the topic. Certainly, more extensive and systematic data sources would be useful to improve the validity of the results.

D.N.A. is a national office composed by the Procuratore nazionale antimafia (National Antimafia Prosecutor, chief of the bureau) and other 20 Prosecutors. It has the mission to coordinate all the local Direzioni Distrettuali Antimafia (D.D.A., District Antimafia Prosecutor office) in the investigations, sharing information and creating a network among Offices. Every year, D.N.A. produces an annual report about the ongoing situation of organized crime in Italy and of Italian OCGs abroad (in particular mafia type such as 'ndrangheta, Cosa Nostra, Camorra and Apulian mafias), assessing the main police operations, seizures of illicit goods and current investigations. The study examined 12 annual reports (considering the period between July 2005 to June 2017, the last report entirely available) corresponding to more than 9.500 pages.

The data present some limits, that needed to be considered. First, they offer the institutional point of view of a law enforcement office. The reports are indirect sources and the collected data have purposes that diverge from academic analysis. Usually, D.N.A. tends to enhance the description of the activities and the achievements reached by law enforcement agencies during the year, so the reports need to be considered as the D.N.A.'s narrative on the ongoing situation. Second, it is not clear how D.N.A. collected the data because the reports lack a methodological section, and this could represent a potential bias. Third, a specific section about the interest of OCGs in

seaports is missing, consequently the data the author collected come from the all documents and not only from a chapter focusing on this topic.

Despite all these limits, D.N.A. reports are actually one of the best source available to map the interest of organized crime groups operating in Italian seaports across the last 12 years, because they provide updated and detailed information about criminal activities all over the country that no other agencies can produce. In fact, these documents could be considered trustworthy as data set because they are originated from reports provided by *D.D.As* – which could offer a local narrative of the ongoing situation of the district, describing the activities of the specialized law enforcement agencies of the main national police forces - that merge with the national analysis of D. N.A., that consider a widespread viewpoint on OCGs activities in Italy and abroad. Also, other scholars have used the very same source to assess the mobility of Italian mafias in the world (Calderoni et al. 2016), or they have used indirect sources from official law enforcement records to analyse Italian organized crime mobility across Europe (Campana 2013). Even if the analysis is non-exhaustive, it is a necessary first attempt to describe how broadly OCGs moved across Italian ports.

Since the interest of the author was to analyse how D.N.A.'s narrative presents some sort of manifestation of OCGs in the Italian port system, the unit of analysis in the reports was the port and the research identified all references to keywords such as “port(s)”, “port system(s)”, “maritime”.³ Each reference indicated a sort of manifestation such as a police operation, an event, a report or a warning which referred to a projection or an interest in in legal and illegal business of organized crime in the port. Subsequently, the author removed irrelevant references:

- The ones associated with an illegal business occurred on the coasts or in the sea in front of a harbour;
- The ones generically referred to “Italian ports” or a geographic area or a Region, such as “Adriatic ports”, even if there was a detailed description of activities;
- The ones related to ports that have been chosen by public authorities to dock vessels used for human trafficking.
- At the end of the data collection the author eliminated the duplicates from each report.

Each reference was coded by 15 different variables: Region, Province, Direction of the route, Export country, Export port, Import country, Import port, Group Name, Consortium name, Province of origin of the group, City of origin of the group, Individuals name, Legal business, Illegal business, Response type. Given the nature of the source, not all the references present data about all variables: some of them are very detailed, while other lack of information. It surely depends on the quality of the D.N.A.'s data gathering and on the type of manifestation of OCGs.

For this reason, the author decided to adopt a qualitative descriptive analysis of the references of the dataset, investigating in which ports OCGs operate, which OCGs groups are involved and how they cooperate, and what kind of legal and illegal business are pursued. The choice was driven by the nature of the reports, described

³ All references have been searched in Italian: “porto”, “porti”, “sistema portuale”, “sistemi portuali”, “marittimo”, “marittimi”.

above: a high number of references could be an indicator of the performance of state repression and not imply that the port is “more affected”. To limit the impact of potential biases, the author followed a diachronic analysis and focused on the manifestation across time.

In the section “Results”, all references to OCGs have been collected according to D.N.A.’s narrative. As shown, in literature there is a challenging debate about what is organized crime (Varese 2017), but, for the purpose of the analysis, and mindful of the opposing positions, the author decided to respect the classification and the narrative made by the D.N.A., and accepted as OCGs the groups considered as organized crime by the authors of the reports.

This “working definition” has some limits. In fact, sometimes D.N.A. identifies some groups by their legal definition (i.e. camorra, ‘ndrangheta), while others using ethnic connotation (such as Chinese groups, Colombian, Mexican), but it is unclear if it refers to the native country of the members or to the country or place where organized crime group is based. In addition, sometimes, the definition refers to a geographical area and not to a specific country (i.e. Asian, East Europe). This complexity and the lack of information make impossible to contextualize and to analyse in detail every single case in order to give a more accurate definition of the type of organization.

The unclear narrative of the OCGs in DNA’s report represent part of the Italian public debate, in which it is not clear how “organized crime” and “mafia” are conceptualized (Sergi 2017). Furthermore, the presence and activities of non-Italian groups recently condemned by Italian tribunal as “mafia-type” create an even more complex scenario. All the limits of the definition of OC of DNA are taken into account during the discussion and should be considered as an assumption and a content of the analysis.

Results

Who, what, where and when

In the current version, the data set contains 376 references. The study shows that 50 ports are considered affected by OCGs manifestation as opposed to 351 overall Italian ports.⁴ The complete list of the ports mentioned is summarized in Table 1. So, about 14% of Italian ports have hosted licit or illicit business activities of criminal organizations during the analysed period. Among them, there are 7 ports identified for their “national importance” (i.e. for their administrative importance) and others for their “national relevance” (i.e. for their economy relevance). This kind of port holds ships with Gross Tonnage bigger than 300 and send arrival and departure information to other European States, as part of the SafeSeaNet system. The system for selecting “national relevance” ports has been implemented in 2009, so we should consider only the reports between 2010 and 2017. The study demonstrates that 25 national relevant harbours are mentioned in the reports from 2010 to 2017, which represent 43% of the total (58).

⁴ According to the Italian Ministry of Transport’s dataset which gathers information about the main Italian ports.

Table 1 Presence of reference to each port over time, 2006–2017

Name of the port	Years												Total years	
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017		
Ancona														12
Cagliari														12
Genova														12
Gioia Tauro														12
Salerno														11
Taranto														11
Livorno														10
Napoli														10
Olbia														10
Trieste														10
Bari														9
Porto Torres														9
Brindisi														8
Civitavecchia														8
La Spezia														7
Venezia														7
Alghero														5
Catania														4
Palermo														4
Vado Ligure														4
Cornigliano Calabro														3
Ostia														3
Savona														3
Crotone														2
Marghera														2
Pescara														2
Ravenna														2
Trapani														2
Tropea														2
Ventimiglia														2
Acitrezza														1
Amantea														1
Arbatax														1
Badolato														1
Cetraro														1
Fiumicino														1
Giovinazzo														1
Giulianova														1
Granatello														1
Imperia														1
Isola di Capo Rizzuto														1
Loano														1
Ortona														1
Ospedaletti														1
Porto Empedocle														1
Porto Isola														1
Pozzallo														1
San Lorenzo al Mare														1
Termoli														1
Vasto														1

Source: D.N.A. reports.

Data visualization made by the author.

The results show a widespread interest of OCGs in seaports, which seems to be permanent every year [Fig. 1]. Indeed, the number of ports mentioned is constantly included in a range between 15 and 21, so every year at least 4% of Italian ports are

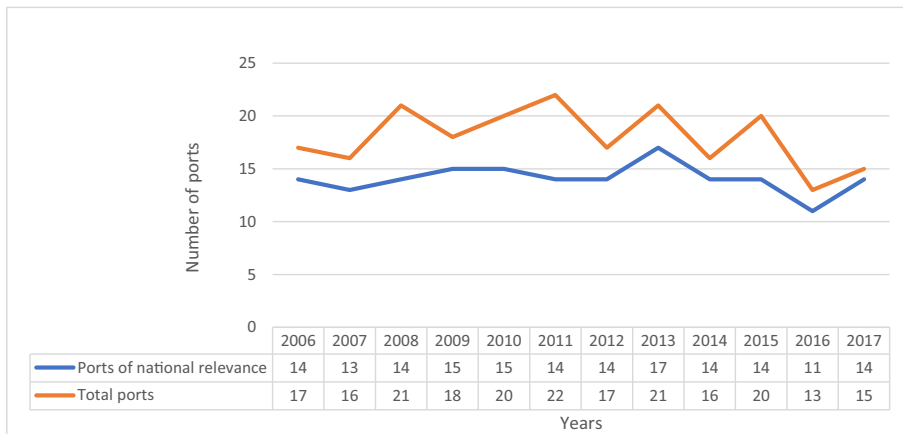


Fig. 1 Number of ports mentioned over time, 2006–2017. Source: D.N.A. reports. Data visualization made by the author

affected by OCGs activities. If we consider only national relevant harbours the range is still constant across time and the statistical average of port affected is higher, around 24%. This seems to confirm that OCGs find more opportunities in sizable ports, where considerable cargo volumes are trafficked (Zaitch 2002).

It is important to look at which ports seem to be the most affected and at the frequency of references to each port all over the time, to investigate if there are any variations. The OCGs projection has been concentrated in Ancona (in Marche, on the Adriatic coast), Cagliari (in Sardegna, on the Tyrrhenian coast), Genova (in Liguria, on the Ligurian coast) and Gioia Tauro (in Calabria, on the Tyrrhenian coast), which are mentioned in all the analysed reports. OCGs activities have also been reported in Salerno (in Campania, on the Tyrrhenian coast) and in Taranto (in Puglia, on the Adriatic coast) for 11 years, and in Livorno (in Toscana, on the Tyrrhenian coast), Napoli (in Campania, on the Tyrrhenian coast), Olbia (in Sardegna, on the Tyrrhenian coast) and Trieste (in Friuli Venezia Giulia, on the Adriatic coast) for 10 years.

The analysis shows that 16 ports are mentioned in more than 7 D.N.A. reports. This seems to imply that more than 32% of Italian ports have been constantly exposed to criminal activities during the last twelve years, while the rest have occasionally been the place of OCGs interests.

It is relevant to focus on the variations during the last four years. While the top of the rank remains stable, few ports are no longer mentioned (La Spezia and Civitavecchia) and others seem to be less involved (Napoli, Olbia, Porto Torres), while Vado Ligure and Savona (both in Liguria, on the Ligurian coast) have been mentioned for the first time and continue to be quoted constantly. This could suggest an attempt to diversify or to expand OCGs activities in different territories during last years, as a sort of mobility.

These findings suggest that the interest of OCGs in the port system is not related with the geographical position of the harbour in relation to the country (Zaitch 2002): northern areas, southern areas and islands are all mentioned, as well as both the west coast and the east coast. Therefore, for OCGs it seems to be nonessential to operate in a port located in the area where they originated, although this also depends on other factors such as the legal economic and logistic dimensions, the political and

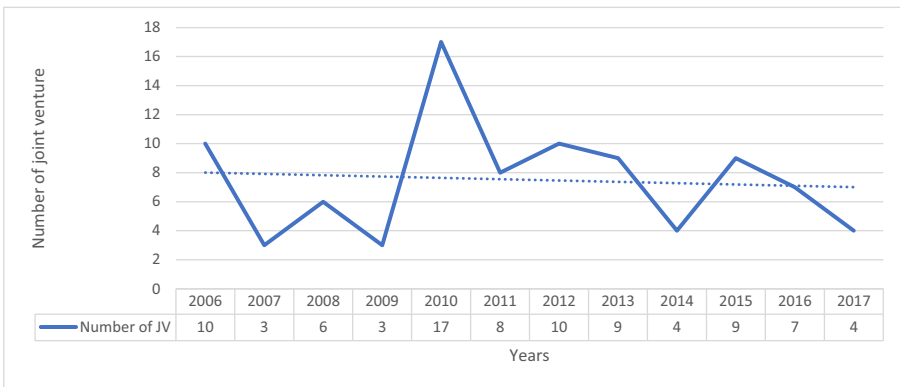


Fig. 2 Number of OCGs mentioned over time, 2006–2017. Source: D.N.A. reports. Data visualization made by the author

institutional aspects, and the criminal opportunities created by other actors of the legal and illegal sectors. This is evident in the case of drug trafficking, where OCGs can have success if they have «the ability to improvise, to adapt, to find new or alternative doors» (Sergi 2020b).

In order to better analyse the OCGs activities in the Italian ports, it is necessary to focus on the number and type of the groups that operated all over the time. In twelve years D.N.A. identified fifteen different OCGs, which operated separately, simultaneously and, sometimes, cooperating in order to constitute joint ventures. Fig. 2 reveals that the number of OCGs or joint ventures involved in some sort of activities in seaports tends to decrease during time.

The OCGs identified are Albanian, Asian (others), Banda della Magliana, Camorra, Eastern Europe, Chinese, Colombian, Cosa nostra, Italian, Bari's organized crime, Mexican, 'ndrangheta, Nigerian, North African, Sacra Corona Unita [Fig. 3]. The result shows that 'ndrangheta is the only one mentioned in all reports and that other few OCGs are constantly present, such as Chinese (for 11 years) and Camorra (for 10 years). These findings seem to confirm that there are OCGs that are able to continue legal or illegal business in seaports across time and that not all OCGs are always operative

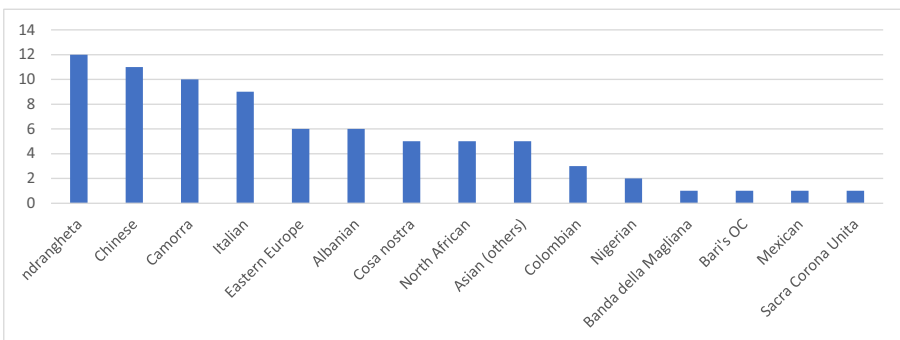


Fig. 3 Number of reports in which each OCGs are mentioned. Source: D.N.A. reports. Data visualization made by the author

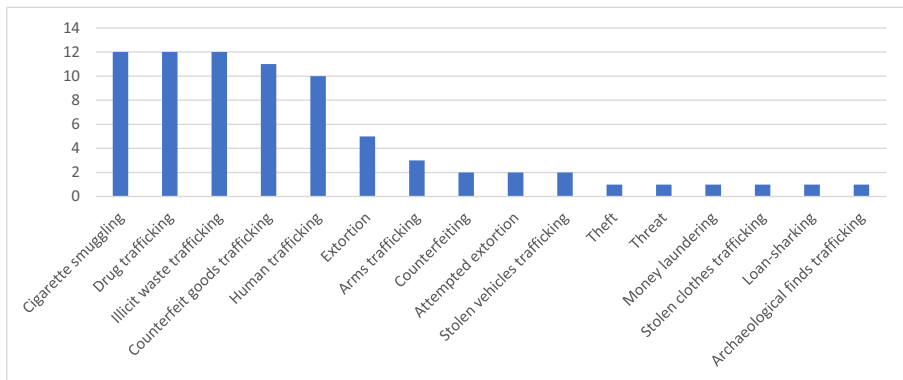


Fig. 4 Number of reports in which crimes are mentioned. Source: D.N.A. reports. Data visualization made by the author

everywhere and in every market. Hence, some of them seem to demonstrate to have skills and expertise, which allow them to endure over time.

Certainly, OCGs mentioned above were involved in different activities, both in legal and illegal markets.

The results suggest that in seaports OCGs operate mostly in illegal business. D.N.A. reports describe fifteen illegal activities: cigarette smuggling, drug trafficking, illicit waste trafficking, counterfeit goods trafficking, human trafficking, extortion, arms trafficking, counterfeiting, attempted extortion, stolen vehicles trafficking, theft, threat, money laundering, stolen clothes trafficking, loan-sharking, archaeological finds trafficking. Fig. 4 shows in how many reports these illegal activities are mentioned. It is clear that the vast majority of these are infrequent and sporadic, whereas few crimes are constant over time. In particular, illicit trade (cigarettes smuggling, drug trafficking and illicit waste trafficking) seem to be the core business of OCGs involved in ports illegal activities.

The results show few evidences of the interest of OGCs in legal economy, collecting only 32 references. They refer to legal activities managed by the criminal group in the seaport system and they are helpful to identify the types of business that occur more frequently. Table 2 indicates all the activities, which have been classified according to ATECO code 2007, which is a national version of the Nace rev. 2 – Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community.⁵ As shown in Table 2, the most affected activities are related to maritime transport services and to a more traditional sector for organized crime such as civil engineering. Given the limitation of the data, it could be hasty speculate generalizations.

Two cases of organized crime: ‘Ndrangheta and Chinese groups

Research findings indicate that ‘ndrangheta and Chinese groups have an important role in seaport crimes and are efficient in continuing business in harbours. Where do they operate and in which kind of illegal business are they engaged?

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5902521/KS-RA-07-015-EN.PDF>

Table 2 Number of references to economic activities affected by OCGs interest in the period 2006–2017

H52.22 - Service activities incidental to water transportation	5
F42 - Civil engineering	5
N.82.99 Other business support service activities n.e.c	4
H52.2 Cargo handling	3
H49 - Land transport and transport via pipelines	3
F43.12 - Site preparation	3
B08 - Other mining and quarrying	2
H50.1 - Sea and coastal passenger water transport	2
I56 - Food and beverage service activities	1
C33 - Repair and maintenance of ships and boats	1
H52.21 Service activities incidental to land transportation	1
N80.1 Private security activities	1

Source: D.N.A. reports

Data visualization made by the author.

The ‘ndrangheta groups seem to be active in small ports settled in its Region of origin, Calabria, (e.g. Amantea, Badolato, Cetraro, Cornigliano, Isola di Capo Rizzuto, Tropea, Crotona), as well as in the essential hub of Gioia Tauro. They operate also in other territories in the South like Napoli (Campania), in the Centre like Livorno (Toscana) and in the North-East like Venezia (Veneto) and Trieste (Friuli Venezia Giulia). Finally, Liguria seems to be a fundamental hub for ‘ndrangheta groups. In fact, D.N.A. points out their manifestation in the main Ligurian seaports, mostly in drug trafficking: Genova, Vado Ligure, Savona, La Spezia.

The results show that ‘ndrangheta is constantly involved in drug trafficking, which seems to be a core business over time. Sometimes it is involved in other illegal trafficking, such as counterfeit goods (4 years) and arms (1 year), or in financial activities (money laundering, 1 year). The ‘ndrangheta groups are also sporadically involved in illegal activities of governance, such as extortion (3 years) and loan sharking (1 year) (Table 3).

On the other hand, Chinese groups have interests in different areas of the country, from the North to the South, from the East coast to the Western coast, and always in ports of national relevance. According to D.N.A. reports, they operate in Genova and La Spezia (Liguria), Livorno (Toscana), Civitavecchia (Lazio), Salerno e Napoli (Campania), Gioia Tauro (Calabria), Palermo and Catania (Sicilia), Taranto (Puglia), Ancona (Marche), Ravenna (Emilia-Romagna), Venezia (Veneto) and Trieste (Friuli-Venezia-Giulia).

Research findings demonstrate that Chinese groups have constantly been involved in counterfeit goods trafficking (9 years), frequently in illicit waste trafficking (6 years) and cigarettes smuggling (5 years), and rarely in counterfeiting [Table 4].

It is clear that ‘ndrangheta seems to concentrate its business in its territory of origin and in few other ports of national relevance, which have the characteristic to move a high number of goods and cargos and which are settled in strategical logistic hubs. This could probably indicate that they can operate more smoothly where they are locally embedded and have direct connections to port activities, such as in Calabria. At the

Table 3 Presence of references to ‘ndrangheta for each illegal business over time, 2006–2017

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Drug trafficking	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Counterfeit goods trafficking				x					x	x		x
Extortion					x		x	x				
Money laundering											x	
Arms trafficking							x					
Loan sharking							x					

Source: D.N.A. reports.

Data visualization made by the author.

same time, they tend to exploit other important ports that handle huge volumes or numbers of cargo (Genova, Gioia Tauro, Trieste and Livorno are the main Italian seaports in terms of tonnage moved); and that are well connected to the logistic network, where they can find local supports. This evidences seem to confirm that the larger is the volume of port – in terms of traffic and capacity – the more OCGs manage to find opportunities «to use it for smuggling cocaine» (Zaitch 2002 p. 243) and, as a result, they «mold their smuggling operations and routes around the commercial cargo routes, for reasons of functionality and in an effort to “blend in”» (McNicholas 2008 p. 192). On the other hand, occasionally ‘ndrangheta seems to be involved in different kind of crimes such as extortion and loan sharking .

Chinese groups, instead, operate only in trading business and focus on very few illegal trafficking (cigarettes, waste and counterfeiting goods). Their markets are limited in terms of diversification, but their manifestation is widespread in a greater number of ports. This indicates a specialization of OCGs in some activities that requires specific resources: in order to successfully carry out different kinds of trafficking, OCGs need precise information and particular bonds in local networks.

Table 4 Presence of references to Chinese groups for each illegal business over time, 2006–2017

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Counterfeiting goods trafficking	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x
Illicit waste trafficking			x			x	x	x	x			x
Cigarette smuggling			x		x	x	x					x
Counterfeiting			x									

Source: D.N.A. reports.

Data visualization made by the author.

Two ports on the edge: Genova and Gioia Tauro

Economic reports confirm that port of Genova and port of Gioia Tauro are among the main Italian seaports in terms of cargo movements and volumes handled (Assoporti 2018). At the same time, D.N.A. reports indicate Genova and Gioia Tauro as constantly affected by the interest of OGCs.

In fact, the port of Genova is a space where OGCs have been operating for at least 12 years, from 2006 to 2017. The results seem to indicate that, according to D.N.A. reports, OGCs are not involved in legal business activities, but only in importing and exporting illicit goods. The main crimes identified are cigarettes smuggling, drugs trafficking, counterfeit goods trafficking and illicit waste trafficking.

It is possible to observe the illegal export trading happened between 2012 and 2015. All the references indicate that illegal waste trafficking is directed towards China or North Africa in which Chinese and Nigerian groups are involved with the support of Italian organizations or individuals. On the other hand, illegal import trading refers to different types of trade. Chinese groups have been involved in cigarettes smuggling up to 2013, using China and United Arab Emirates as port of departure of the contraband.

The results show that the routes of drugs trafficking are various and completely different from one another. One trade route refers to specific kinds of drugs such as hashish and marijuana, and starts from North Africa (in particular, from Morocco), where local criminal groups organize the departure. The cocaine trade route seems to have expanded over the last years and usually starts from South America (Perú, Columbia, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Santo Domingo, Panama). In this trafficking ‘ndrangheta groups have always been involved and from 2015 onwards the names of few specific families. As D.N.A. sustains, this have been possible because of the corruption of local employers.

The port Gioia Tauro, instead, is a transshipment port in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. It is a fundamental hub in the global maritime transport, for trade coming both from Eastern and Western countries. It is set in province of Reggio Calabria, a territory that is historically affected by ‘ndrangheta (Sergi and Lavorgna 2016). Nevertheless, that is not the only criminal group identified by D.N.A.. The study demonstrates that Chinese groups are involved in big national police operations concerning the import of counterfeit goods and cigarettes smuggling.

Over time, OGCs have set up joint ventures in Gioia Tauro. Between 2010 and 2012, D.N.A. reports show that Chinese groups and ‘ndrangheta have cooperated in illegal trafficking of counterfeit goods and cigarettes from China to Italy. There have been other forms of collaboration among OGCs. In 2006 and 2013 ‘ndrangheta cooperated with Colombian groups producers in order to import drugs from Columbia to Europe. Also, D.N.A. mention that the ‘ndrangheta groups cooperated with Cosa Nostra in 2013 and with other Mexican groups in 2016.

The study confirms that drug trafficking is one of the most important business for ‘ndrangheta in the port of Gioia Tauro both for importing from South America and for exporting to Europe (Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Greece) or to other Italian ports. In fact, D.N.A. claims that the port of Gioia Tauro represents one of the main entrance door of cocaine in Italy (DNA 2015). At the same time, ‘ndrangheta seems to be sporadically involved in different kinds of trade such as counterfeit goods trafficking from China (in 2009, 2014 and 2017) and Vietnam (in 2009).

Contrary to the Genova case, D.N.A. reports show that in Gioia Tauro OCGs operated also in crimes related to the control of the territory, such as extortion market (in 2010 and 2012) and loan sharking (2012).

Conclusion

In this paper we discussed OCGs interest in the Italian seaport system analysing 12 D.N.A. reports with a diachronic perspective. The aim of the study was to provide a first assessment of the principal ports involved and of the main activities led by criminal groups. Given the limitation of data, the results should be considered as an attempt to improve knowledge on this topic and to define some first findings, that need to be discussed and reinforced with further research.

The results corroborate the hypothesis that OCGs activities in the Italian seaport system are largely widespread in the main harbours all over the country, regardless the geographical position of the port. This evidence presents different complementary implications. First, the outcomes confirm that OCGs – in particular Italian mafias, such as ‘ndrangheta – are particularly skilled in moving from a place to another in order to search for safe spots where to do business (Sergi 2020b). Second, the decision or the necessity to move are strictly related to the opportunities available in the local settings, both in legal and illegal aspects. So, there might be room to argue that the environment of the ports pushes OCGs to move from one harbour to another, according to the local opportunities and following the flow of trade market. This seems to be true for the illegal trafficking of drugs (Dinchel and Easton 2020; Easton 2020; Sergi 2020b) and it could explain why it is possible to observe distinct criminal groups operating in specific activities and with peculiar strategies in different ports.

Some findings suggest that OCGs are more involved in trading than in governing, but this claim needs to be analysed in depth. According to the D.N.A.’s reports, the infiltration of OCGs in the Italian port legal businesses seems to be almost absent, but, as Sergi sustains, «organised criminality in the port goes far beyond illegal trafficking» (Sergi 2020a, p. 12). In fact, the results seem not to be fully representative of criminal port complexity and the institutional narrative on the criminal scenario in Italian seaports seems to lack of information. For example, even a traditional form of criminal actions such as corruption is not considered as an OCGs activity and the references to the infiltration in the port economy are very limited. Hence, policing narrative seems to focus mainly on the illegal trading, but, nevertheless, it is useful to have a glance on how legal and illegal market are influenced in the port space. Indeed, the study shows that illegal trafficking is not monolith: different drugs and goods are smuggled through peculiar routes because of the country of production, and some of them may involve more than one criminal organization, as it is possible to find in the case of the port of Genova.

Therefore, these findings, and in particular the analysis of ‘ndrangheta and Chinese groups actions, show that different OCGs are constantly involved in different illegal markets and seem to operate in different ports following different strategies of exploitation. It seems to indicate that simultaneous processes of specialization in illegal markets and diversification in seaports are ongoing, which implies that OCGs tend to collect peculiar skills in specific markets and exploit different harbours. These findings

seem to suggest that there is a sort of functional diversification in illegal activities between different OCGs, and in particular between Italian mafias in ports. Due to the limitation of the data, it is not possible to postulate in detail the core business of each groups, however in the cases of ‘ndrangheta and of Chinese groups it is clear they tend to operate on different activities. This issue could be an interesting topic for further specific researches.

Even if these data come from a law enforcement agency narrative, it is clear that manifestations of OCGs in the Italian port system also depend on external factors related to the economic, social and political dimension (Sciarrone 2009), that need to be further explored. For example, an in depth analysis of the port environment, that can be permeable to corrupt exchanges (Antonelli 2020), could clarify why some groups seem to exploit one port more than another. Furthermore, a more systematic analysis of the antimafia law enforcement could identify best practices that force OCGs to adopt different strategies (Sciarrone 2019).

The results show that only few OCGs (in particular ‘ndrangheta) are able to persist in space and time within Italian seaports. Given the impermeable nature of the ports, in order to operate in all these sites OCGs need collaborators or other local supports. This seems to confirm what Sciarrone claims about ‘ndrangheta competence in bridging social capital and generating networks (Sciarrone 2009; Sciarrone and Storti 2019). The ability to create bonds inside the port has implications for future policing, because these links can be re-generated and can reinforce criminal actions. In fact, as Sciarrone sustains, OCGs are interested in «reaching and eventually engaging the network in which the person they get in touch is involved» (Sciarrone 2009, p. 51). So, we should consider port as a space for business and for socializing. It is a space of convergence for legal and illegal activities and actors. It is a geographical space and a space to create social relation, in which “boundaries between legal and illegal became dull and porous, and it creates a status of con-fusion” (Sciarrone 2019, p. 42), that shape the “grey area” (Sciarrone 2011), while the analysis of D.N.A. seems to be focused only on OCGs activities and marginally considers the relation with the urban and social context.

In addition, the results have policy implications. Given the transnational issue of illegal trafficking, the coordination between international and local police, and between Italian authorities seems to be necessary in order to prevent lack of information and to improve the diffusion of common knowledge. It is not easy because, as shown above, the D.N.A. definitions of organized crime and mafia groups are unclear and could create bias in identifying the most effective law enforcement actions.

In conclusion, further studies are necessary to achieve more solid findings, analysing more data and following a more systematic approach to data collection, hopefully after the creation of a national dataset about police or judicial cases collected by Italian authorities. Furthermore, the analysis of other specialized law enforcement agency’s reports, such as DIA semester relations, could be useful to better understand the institutional narrative about the topic. This should take into consideration both the study of illegal markets – in order to analyse how networks generate and what resources are exchanged -and the investigation of external factors. Also, in order to validate or contest the results, a case study approach could be a very welcome addition in order to analyse in depth each port environment, that has its own specific and peculiar characteristics.

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Informed consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Information is anonymized and the submission does not include images that may identify the person.

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