

Empirical criminological research on drug trafficking through the Port of Rotterdam encourages new policies and has improved law enforcement efforts.

The municipality of Rotterdam, police, public prosecutor and Customs ('Driehoek+') were facing a rise in drug-related crimes in the Port of Rotterdam. They sought to establish an independent, science-based analysis of the criminological background of these undesirable developments. Their main objectives were to obtain empirically based knowledge on drugs trafficking through the Port of Rotterdam and its facilitating criminal and legal structures in order to counter the subversive character of drugs trafficking and improve law enforcement in this field. This has become the focus of a major project by researchers from Erasmus School of Law.

The demand by the municipality of Rotterdam, police, public prosecutor and Customs ('Driehoek+') for scientific insights into criminal drugs trafficking networks as well as into the policies and practices of the public and private parties involved with controlling drugs trafficking resulted in a private tender, which was ultimately won by the ESL criminologists who have extensive experience with empirical research into organised crime in its social, economic and legal contexts.

The research conducted in this project helped improve academic and practical knowledge among professionals and policymakers on the logistics of drug trafficking through one of the global mainports. The results and recommendations were translated by the Rotterdam authorities into a confidential implementation agenda (*Offensive against Drugs crime. Heading on a safe and resilient Port of Rotterdam*, 2021) translating all six major recommendations from the report into 22 action points which are currently being implemented. The results of the research consequently significantly improved law enforcement efforts dealing with organised and subversive crimes. By including public-private partnerships in its central focus, the research additionally contributed to the ambitions of Erasmus School of Law to deal with questions about the role of law in safeguarding public and private interests in trade and commerce.

The results of the research in the shape of a report have been published in a book entitled 'Drugscriminaliteit in de Rotterdamse haven. Aard en aanpak van het fenomeen' ('Drug crime and the Port of Rotterdam: About the phenomenon and its approach') which provides insight into the social organisation and governance of drugs trafficking in the Port of Rotterdam. To increase the validity of the research, a mixed method approach was chosen. This consisted of interviews with professionals from public and private parties as well as businesses, police case file analyses, network analysis, and observations from within the port. To identify vulnerabilities, together with a selected group of master students, the researchers focused on the logistics processes and the various roles that people work in. Attention was also devoted to activities by government agencies (Customs, police, municipality, public prosecutor, inspectorates) and private companies.

In addition, the research resulted in multiple academic articles, including open access publications. Next to that, conferences were organised by the Municipality of Rotterdam, Rotterdam City Council and the Erasmus School of Law Centre for Information and Research on Organized Crime (CIROC) to discuss the research findings for professionals in the field as well as an academic audience. This all led to extensive media coverage which ensured that drug trafficking in the Port of Rotterdam is still a topic of discussion for policy makers. Moreover, several businesses in the Port of Rotterdam invited researchers to elaborate on their research findings.

The research improved knowledge of the state of affairs in the port and how criminal behaviour may be tackled. For instance, the report identified developments in the misuse of port facilities and

infrastructure, as well as risks and vulnerabilities in the existing port activities. Pivotal in the research process was the regular reflection from and establishment of mutual trust with the support committee consisting of (local) governmental and societal stakeholders (municipality, police, prosecutors and Customs, private sector companies in the port and inspectorates). Through these stakeholder relationships, the researchers not only gained access to interview partners and otherwise inaccessible documents, but it also enabled them to frequently communicate and share knowledge with and among the different stakeholders long after completing the research and publishing the final report. Both public and private stakeholders indicated that the research had stimulated awareness, urgency even, of the requirement for cooperation. That requirement has since been achieved. Furthermore, the Minister of Justice and Security recognised the importance of this report in providing a comprehensive picture of the drug trafficking situation in the Port of Rotterdam (a.o. [TK 29 911-249](#)).

The project also impacted academic practice. The project became one of three case studies in the master course 'Organised Crime', contributing to the science and practice-oriented learning environment for criminology students. It also led to follow-up research by the department and in the wider field of criminology. International criminologists rely on this research for setting up future research agendas, especially when approaching similar research questions in other ports.

Overall, the project not only fuelled improved collective law enforcement practices, but also initiated broader awareness—in society, with national and international authorities, in the academic field of criminology—of the problems with drugs criminality in this port and similar ports.

References to the research

- Staring, R., Bisschop, L., Roks, R., Brein, E., & van de Bunt, H. (2019). *Drugscriminaliteit in de Rotterdamse haven. Aard en aanpak van het fenomeen*. Den Haag: Boom Juridische Uitgevers. (Also: public summary).
- Roks, R., Bisschop, L., & Staring, R. (2020). Getting a Foot in the Door. Spaces of Cocaine Trafficking in the Port of Rotterdam, *Trends in Organized Crime*, thematic issue on Spaces of Organised Crime (guest editors A. Sergi & L. Storti). Online first <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-020-09394-8>.
- Bisschop, L., Roks, R., Staring, R. & Brein, E. (2019). Publiek-private samenwerking in de aanpak van drugscriminaliteit in de Rotterdamse haven, *Justitiële Verkenningen*, themanummer Mainports & Veiligheid, 46(5), 69-90.
- Staring, R., Bisschop, L., Colman, C., Janssen, J., Roks, R. (2021) Scheldestad of Manhattan aan de Maas? Een vergelijkende analyse van de Antwerpse en Rotterdamse havens bij de in- en doorvoer van cocaïne. *Tijdschrift voor Criminologie*, themanummer Drugscriminaliteit 2021, nr.2
- Staring, R., L. Bisschop & R. Roks (2021). Ondernijnde criminaliteit laat zich niet onderscheppen noch aanhouden. Over de aanpak van georganiseerde misdaad en het belang van kennis. *Boom Strafblad* (in druk), nr. 1. Staring, R., L. Bisschop, R. Roks, E. Brein en H. van de Bunt (2022). Drug crime and the Port of Rotterdam: About the phenomenon and its approach. In: H. Nelen & D. Siegel (eds.) *Organized Crime in the 21st Century. Motivations, Opportunities, and Constraints*. Springer.
- Bisschop, L., Staring, R., Roks, R., Goudsblom, G. (in press). Public-private cooperation in the approach to drug crime in the Port of Rotterdam. The case of the Information Sharing Center Port Safety and Security. In Eski, Y. & Wright, M. (Eds). *Handbook on Maritime Crime & Policing*. Routledge.

Further sources to corroborate the impact

Organised seminars and meetings

- 12 September 2019 – CIROC seminar on Drugs crime and Ports – Richard Staring, Robby Roks, Elisabeth Brein, Lieselot Bisschop.

Participation in conferences, lectures, and poster presentations

- Cordes, B. (2018). *'Als je naar links kijkt, zie je rechts niks.'* Een case study naar integer handelen in de haven van Rotterdam. Rotterdam, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, masterscriptie criminologie, 16-10-2018. (Eindcijfer 8).
- 12 September 2019 – De aanpak van drugscriminaliteit in de Rotterdamse haven: aard en aanpak van fenomeen. CIROC conference, Erasmus University Rotterdam.
- 15 July 2019 – Presentation at seminar on ports and drugs, organised by *City of Rotterdam* – Robby Roks.
- 10 December 2019 – Report “Werkconferentie Drugsaanpak in het havengebied Rotterdam-Antwerpen en Rotterdam Antwerpen”.
- 16 June 2021– Robby Roks & Lieselot Bisschop— Drugscriminaliteit in de Rotterdamse haven: aard en aanpak van het fenomeen: Plenaire sessie met paneldiscussie, Nederlandse Vereniging voor Criminologie

Education

- November 2020: dialogue with Bob van den Berghe UNODC-CCP on possible internships.
- AY 2019-2020 & 2020-2021: Teaching case for master in organised crime about drugs in the Port of Rotterdam – Robby Roks & Lieselot Bisschop.
- AY 2020-2021: guest lecture within minor criminology Lieselot Bisschop.

Engagement with public sector/impact on policy

- June-November 2020 – Executive Agenda discussed with Driehoek+.
- January 2020 – Studio Erasmus mini-lecture on Drugs crime in Port of Rotterdam used in infographic of City of Rotterdam about approach to undermining/subversive crime https://rotterdam.raadsinformatie.nl/document/8574916/1/s20bb003893_1_46675_tds.
- 21 November 2019 – City of Rotterdam Commission on Safety and Public Order, answering questions from members of City Council – Robby Roks & Lieselot Bisschop.
- June 2019 – Feedback given to scenario writer Glen Rider about TV series ‘Ponies’ (airs in 2020) about drugs smuggling in Dutch and Belgian ports (Submarine TV, via AVROTROS) – Lieselot Bisschop.
- 10 February 2021 – Meer smokkel of meer onderscheppingen? Contribution to website ‘Rotterdamse haven Veilige Haven’ <https://www.rotterdamsehavenveiligehaven.nl/post/meer-smokkel-of-meer-onderscheppingen> – Robby Roks
- 26 March 2021 – Lecture about report Aard en aanpak drugscriminaliteit in Rotterdamse haven voor Kick-off Information Sharing Center ZeBra (Zeeland – West-Brabant) – Lieselot Bisschop.
- 2 June 2021 – Lecture Publiek-Private Samenwerkingen in de haven van Rotterdam voor ‘Havenbazen’ stocktakes, Gemeente Rotterdam - Lieselot Bisschop.
- 14 & 15 October 2021 – Mini-lecture *Kwetsbaarheden voor drugscriminaliteit in Nederlandse Havens*, Havens van Moerdijk, Vlissingen-Borsele & Terneuzen, in opdracht van Taskforce-RIEC Brabant-Zeeland – Lieselot Bisschop.

Engagement with private sector

- 15 January 2020 – Workshop on vulnerabilities for crime in the Port of Rotterdam for *Nationale Nederlanden, Corporate Security & Investigations*.
 - 30 November 2021 – Lecture ‘De aanpak van ondermijnende criminaliteit in havens’ for Webinar North Sea Port *De haven en haar ‘license to operate’* - Lieselot Bisschop.
- 8 November 2021 – Panelist for Talkshow Vers Beton Live about cocaine smuggling and the impact on the city of Rotterdam <https://www.versbeton.nl/2021/11/kijk-terug-vers-beton-live-over-cocainehandel-en-impact-op-de-stad/> - Lieselot Bisschop.

Engagement in follow-up research

- November 2020/April 2021– Research reflections/action research during a confidential police investigation in the Port of Rotterdam (Seaport police, Customs); Lieselot Bisschop, Robby Roks & Richard Staring, 2021
- 2021–"The control of risks of corruption by Customs in the Port of Rotterdam (De beheersing van corruptierisico's door de Douane in de Rotterdamse haven), KPMG (2021), member of the steering committee - Richard Staring
- 1 case focused on Port of Rotterdam within Process evaluation and action research about strengthening the approach to ‘undermining criminality’ (June 2019 – June 2021), commissioned by the Research and Documentation Centre (Wetenschappelijk Onderzoeks- en Documentatiecentrum, WODC) (*Procevaluatie en actieonderzoek versterking aanpak ondermijnende criminaliteit*). Research team: Prof. Hans Nelen (uMaastricht), Prof. Karin van Wingerde, Prof. Lieselot Bisschop, Dr Moerland (uMaastricht) and Dr Flory (RSM) (175,000 euro).
- April 2022 - Preparing NWO proposal Subversive crime (Ondermijnende criminaliteit) ‘Focusing On the Right Things in the Port of Rotterdam (FORT-PORT)’ - This project uncovers the criminal business processes underlying the illicit flows of drugs and humans through the Port of Rotterdam, and simultaneously develops, implements, and evaluates strategies to help professionals working on tackling subversive crime make better informed decisions about what to focus on. Collaborative research proposal with Erasmus School of Law, and colleagues from Delft University, Utrecht University. Public partners are the Seaport police, Municipality, Customs, FIOD, Public Prosecution, Strategic Knowledge Center on Subversive Crime, Aliens Police, MIT Fieldlab, Defense Academy. Private partners are Secure Logistics, Deltalinqs, Port of Rotterdam, Deloitte, Pandora Intelligence, Information Sharing Center, Stichting Verre Bergen. Many of them are committing resources to help co-finance this (15% of the 2.5 million).

Media appearances or consultation

- 28 March 2022 – How the Netherlands became a ‘narco state’; UnHerd <https://unherd.com/2022/03/how-the-netherlands-became-a-narco-state/> – Lieselot Bisschop
- 21 September 2021 - De drugsuithalers hebben nu bijna vrij spel in de haven, NRC Handelsblad - <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/09/22/de-drugsuithalers-hebben-nu-bijna-vrij-spel-in-de-haven-a4059311> - Robby Roks
- 23 July 2021- Weer duizenden kilo’s cocaïne gepakt, maar of dat echt impact heeft, valt te bezien, Volkskrant, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/weer-duizenden-kilo-s-cocaine-gepakt-maar-of-dat-echt-impact-heeft-valt-te-bezien~b48f83ce/> – Lieselot Bisschop

- 15 July 2021 – The Netherlands and Organized Crime. Deutsche Welle <https://www.dw.com/de/die-niederlande-und-das-organisierte-verbrechen/a-58282075> – Lieselot Bisschop
- 16 June 2021 – De onderschatting van de cocainehandel, Follow The Money <https://www.ftm.nl/artikelen/de-onderschatting-van-de-cocainehandel> – Lieselot Bisschop
- 13 February 2021 - Corruptie bij politie of douane iets van deze tijd? ‘Zeker niet, in de jaren 60 werd er ook al omgekocht’. Algemeen Dagblad. <http://hdl.handle.net/1765/134741> - Robby Roks
- 24/26 November 2020 – Bijtende Bende livestream on waste from drug crime (synthetic drugs) organised by Trimbos institute and Studium Generale TU Eindhoven.
- 18-11-2020, verkennend gesprek met Hanneke de Jonge, Journalist Nieuwsuur.
- 29 October 2020 - Verkennend gesprek journalist Jelle Gunneweg (Havenverslaggever) & Sjoerd Bootsma RTV Rijnmond – Lieselot Bisschop.
- Video “Onderzoek bij ESL” EUR Dies Natalis 2020 – Lieselot Bisschop.
- 26 October 2020 – verkennend gesprek journalist Dominique Soenens in opdracht van weekblad Humo – Lieselot Bisschop.
- 10 December 2019 - Mini-lecture by Lieselot Bisschop, who conducted a comprehensive study with her team on drugs, crime and corruption in Europe's largest port. Studio Erasmus– Lieselot Bisschop.
- 14 November 2019 - Waarom er steeds weer recordvangsten coke in de Rotterdamse haven zijn. Erasmus Magazine: <https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/2019/11/14/waarom-er-steeds-weer-recordvangsten-coke-in-de-rotterdamse-haven-zijn>.
- 11 November 2019 - Cocainesmokkel stoppen kan Rotterdam niet in z'n eentje. Trouw <https://www.trouw.nl/binnenland/cocainesmokkel-stoppen-kan-rotterdam-niet-in-z-n-eentje~b9f5a2aa>.
- 13 September 2019- Drugsmokkelaars volgen havenwerkers tot aan de voordeur van hun huis. Algemeen Dagblad <https://www.ad.nl/rotterdam/drugsmokkelaars-volgen-havenwerkers-tot-aan-de-voordeur-van-hun-huis~a9300a34>.
- 29 May 2019 - Rotterdamse havenbedrijven melden drugsmokkel-incidenten liever niet – NRC Handelsblad <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/05/28/rotterdamse-havenbedrijven-melden-drugsmokkel-incidenten-liever-niet-a3961841>.
- 28 May 2019 - Onderzoekers naar drugsmokkel: sluit lakse bedrijven in de Rotterdamse haven – AD/RD <https://www.ad.nl/rotterdam/onderzoekers-naar-drugsmokkel-sluit-lakse-bedrijven-in-de-rotterdamse-haven~ae696ae8/>.
- 28 May 2019 – De ingewikkelde strijd tegen kalasjnikovs op het Rotterdams haventerrein - Nieuwsuur NOS (3^e item – reportage) <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/>.
- 28 May 2019 - De Rotterdamse haven blijkt uitermate geschikt voor drugsmokkel – Trouw <https://www.trouw.nl/home/de-rotterdamse-haven-blijkt-uitermate-geschikt-voor-drugsmokkel~a11198d3>.
- 28 May 2019 - Onderzoekers naar drugsmokkel: sluit lakse bedrijven in de Rotterdamse haven – AD/RD <https://www.ad.nl/rotterdam/onderzoekers-naar-drugsmokkel-sluit-lakse-bedrijven-in-de-rotterdamse-haven~ae696ae8>.

- 28 May 2019 - Rotterdamse haven nauwelijks opgewassen tegen mondiale drugshandel: bazen blijven buiten schot – Volkskrant <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/rotterdamse-haven-nauwelijks-opgewassen-tegen-mondiale-drugshandel-bazen-blijven-buiten-schot~bd8a5fa3>.
- 28 May 2019 - Drugscriminelen hebben vrij spel in haven Rotterdam – Telegraaf <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/3661501/drugscriminelen-hebben-vrij-spel-in-haven-rotterdam>.
- 28 May 2019 - Blinde vlekken bij bestrijders drugsmokkel in Rotterdamse haven – NOS <https://nos.nl/artikel/2286702-blinde-vlekken-bij-bestrijders-drugsmokkel-in-rotterdamse-haven.html>.
- 28 May 2019 – Blinde vlekken bij bestrijders drugsmokkel in Rotterdamse haven - RTV Rijnmond <https://www.rijnmond.nl/nieuws/182228/Blinde-vlekken-bij-bestrijders-drugsmokkel-in-Rotterdamse-haven>.
- 28 May 2019 – Nieuwe aanpak nodig tegen drugs in de haven – Transport Online <https://www.transport-online.nl/site/103896/nieuwe-aanpak-nodig-tegen-drugs-in-de-haven/>.