

# Guest Editor's Introduction

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## Introduction

The increasing role of geographical analysis in solving social problems is not just a practical response by government agencies. Illustrated in this issue of *Cityscape* is the incorporation of geographic methods and techniques toward understanding issues of crime and disorder, two major negative influences on the quality of life in urban America. The primary emphasis in the use of this new approach is on the delivery of programs and services to people through place as a means to increase the impact of federal, state, and local investments on the quality of life in urban neighborhoods.

## Urban Geography, Place, and Crime

Crime changes with urban development patterns. Opportunities for criminal activity emerge, disappear, or move as geography changes across the urban landscape. Patterns emerge, dissipate, or persist based on changes in economic, ecological, and demographic conditions. Future crimes are far more predictable by place of occurrence than by a particular offender (Sherman and Weisburd, 1995; Weisburd et al., 2004). The greater predictability arises because places are relatively rigid; land use, infrastructure, and even demography change slowly. Places are resistant to change in the absence of major investments of time and money to make change occur. Public policy, especially local public policy, usually drives such investments.

The environmental criminology subdiscipline began with the 1975 paper, "Residential Burglary and Urban Form," (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1975, 1981). As one of the first empirical studies to establish the interaction between criminals and geography, the Brantinghams examined the geographic patterns of criminal offending within and between places. Environmental criminology fused geographical principles with criminological theory, providing opportunities to test empirically interactions between crime and place. The resulting research applied and tested new theories of crime rooted in urban development, including crime pattern theory (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1975), routine activities (Cohen and Felson, 1979), journey to crime (Phillips, 1980; Rengert, 1992), and geographic profiling (Rossmo, 2000). Other longstanding theories, such as social disorganization (Shaw and McKay, 1942), rational choice (Cornish and Clarke, 1986), territoriality (Taylor, 1988), and deviant places (Stark, 1987) were modified from this research to include a geographic aspect. Geographic theories strengthen criminological theories by providing a place-based foundation for where offenders live, why incidences occur where they do, and how

offenders move within a particular geography. Geographic theories also offer insight into the development and change of urban form (spatial organization) and into the interactions between places that form from those changes (spatial interaction).

The development of Geographic Information System (GIS) software and spatial statistics has significantly affected the ability of law enforcement to combat crime and criminal justice to deliver services (Wilson, 2007). Because crimes have a spatial structure and form cohesive patterns, place-based approaches can make public policy more efficient. Actions from public policy simultaneously affect multiple people within the same target area. Crime types have a spatial structure based on urban geography. Residential burglaries happen only in residential areas. Commercial robberies, likewise, transpire only in commercial districts. Auto thefts more frequently happen in places with large amounts of parking that are difficult to monitor. Homicide tends to occur across larger areas where poverty, inequality, physical deterioration, and economic decline have long been established. Because places are interconnected, the benefits from targeted places can diffuse outward to adjacent places and upward to larger geographic areas to strengthen the whole. This diffusion compounds the positive effects of such programs while adding little additional cost.

Places are not isolated or detached from the surrounding geography. Social, economic, or political interactions occur within and between places in which places that are closer together are more related and share similar conditions. This phenomenon is known as the first law of geography (Miller, 2004; Tobler, 1970). Distance decay, a core idea by which spatial interactions and relationships between places are analyzed, measures the first law of geography. What occurs in one place diffuses to adjacent places, and from adjacent places, upward to larger geographies. The outward spillover of crime into adjacent neighborhoods leads to several places becoming unattractive; this, in turn, can lead to an entire set of neighborhoods becoming afflicted with a host of new social ills (Barr and Pease, 1990; Galster, 2005; Hakim and Rengert, 1981; Hesselting, 1994; Hipp, Tita, and Greenbaum, 2009). These places sometimes become failed neighborhoods. A failed neighborhood upwardly supplies an area with lower educational attainment, higher unemployment, unhealthy conditions, dilapidated buildings, and a wrecked infrastructure. Disproportionate amounts of human services, public safety, maintenance projects, and like resources are spent on these places, with little positive contribution in return from these places.<sup>1</sup> Tax revenue shrinks, assets are sold, capital improvement is suspended, businesses move out, jobs are shed, and residents who can leave do so. The legacy of place (Eberts, Erickcek, and Kleinhenz, 2006) may undermine the potential to solve social, economic, or political problems because these problems become entrenched.

## Articles in This Symposium

Urban crime policy crosscuts a broad area of governmental actions toward solving problems. Change can be instilled through creating programs, enhancing laws, establishing regulations,

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<sup>1</sup> Researchers at the Spatial Information Design Lab at Columbia University and the Justice Mapping Center appropriately described these places as Million Dollar Blocks (MDBs). The primary aspect of the MDB project was to research the costs of incarceration whereby offenders were continuously cycling in and out of prison back to and from the same neighborhoods that offered little opportunity for them to succeed. More information is available at <http://www.spatialinformationdesignlab.org/projects.php?id=16>.

improving the environment, or redirecting resources that alter place or behavior in place. The symposium in this issue of *Cityscape* features a range of articles that demonstrate the interplay of crime patterns and urban geography.

The first two articles illustrate the effect of place-based policies on particular segments of the population in which geographical analysis played a key role in uncovering the effects. In "Sex Offenders, Residence Restrictions, Housing, and Urban Morphology: A Review and Synthesis," Tony H. Grubestic, Alan T. Murray, and Elizabeth A. Mack demonstrate the human and geographic consequences that arise for offenders, residents, and the government in finding suitable places for offenders to live. The authors summarize recent research findings on housing availability problems sex offenders face after residency restriction laws are implemented. Highlighted are problems that arise when place is not taken into account when making policy. "The Coaction of Neighborhood and Individual Effects on Juvenile Recidivism" is an excellent example of the interaction between individuals, neighborhoods, and rehabilitation programs. Philip W. Harris, Jeremy Mennis, Zoran Obradovic, Alan J. Izenman, and Heidi E. Grunwald uncover effects of historical characteristics of place on the variation of juvenile reoffending and the effect on the types of crimes committed. The authors make an argument for crafting place-based rehabilitation programs designed to help juveniles refrain from reoffending based on the type of neighborhood in which they live.

The third article illustrates the spatial interaction between places and their characteristics that exemplify the first law of geography. In "Mapping the Spatial Influence of Crime Correlates: A Comparison of Operationalization Schemes and Implications for Crime Analysis and Criminal Justice Practice," Joel M. Caplan examines the geographic correlates of crime that spatially influence nearby crimes. This article demonstrates two particular aspects of using place to understand crime. The first is the geographic dynamic of spillover and diffusion effects between adjacent places with shared characteristics. The second is the demonstration of local characteristics of a place that affects an offender's probability of committing crimes.

The fourth and fifth articles demonstrate the use of spatial analysis methods to evaluate the effectiveness of place-based programs. Roderick W. Jones and Derek J. Paulsen's "HOPE VI Resident Displacement: Using HOPE VI Program Goals To Evaluate Neighborhood Outcomes" and Meagan Cahill's "Using the Weighted Displacement Quotient To Explore Crime Displacement From Public Housing Redevelopment Sites" look at the effects of HUD's HOPE VI Program on residents and the places they live and to which they move. Both articles examine the displacement effect from programs that alter the built environment in three different cities. Jones and Paulsen examined changes in neighborhoods in a small city and found that residents from HOPE VI sites moved to neighborhoods that were of higher poverty and had more crime. Conversely, Cahill examined displacement of crime in two medium-sized cities and found a diffusion of benefit from HOPE VI, combined with local redevelopment, in the sites and surrounding areas. Crime was reduced and living conditions for residents improved. The mixed results suggest a better understanding is required of how people affect place when programs temporarily move participants.

Similarly, the sixth article also demonstrates the effect on place from people moving but, more specifically, through a program that allows participants to choose their neighborhood. In "Do Vouchers Help Low-Income Households Live in Safer Neighborhoods? Evidence on the Housing Choice

Voucher Program,” Michael C. Lens, Ingrid Gould Ellen, and Katherine O’Regan examine whether Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) participants move to safer neighborhoods. An overall goal of the HCV Program is to give low-income families the option of moving to neighborhoods with better employment opportunities, improved education for their children, and, most importantly, a safer environment free of crime. This article demonstrates the partial progress of participants finding safe places to live and discusses the characteristics associated with those places.

In the final article, “Modeling Criminal Distance Decay,” Mike O’Leary shows how urban geography can be mathematically modeled to understand how urban structure affects criminal decision behavior. The results show how offenders operate and adjust to the geographic structure as they move through a metropolitan area. His work is intended to highlight how research can more realistically simulate target selection based on how offenders exploit their choice of targets within a geographic context.

The international commentaries from Canada, Colombia, and South Africa bring this symposium full circle regarding crime and the structure of urban geographies. Even though various historical circumstances, policies, and cultural aspects have shaped the urban patterns in these countries, place is still a consistent framework in which to measure and understand the variation of crime. These commentaries exemplify the urban development differences between the United States and other countries, yet they show how places with low qualities of life can systemically lead to many social problems, of which crime is a major catalyst.

The articles in this symposium are only a small sample of the many works highlighting the interaction of crime and the urban environment. Readers interested in pursuing other recent literature should consult the following special issues from other journals:

- “Crime in the City.” 2008. *Built Environment* 34 (1).
- “Crime Mapping.” 2007. *Social Science Computing Review* 25 (2).
- “Geographic Aspects of Sex Offender Residency Restrictions.” 2009. *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 20 (1).
- “Bayesian Journey to Crime Modeling.” 2009. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling* 6 (3).
- “Empirical Evidence on the Relevance of Place in Criminology.” 2010. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 26 (1).

## Enhanced Policymaking and Practice

Governmental actions can alter the fate and trajectory of places, because public policy solutions to crime are often about *where*. This dynamic between people and place can no longer be ignored. It must be appreciated that when policy shapes place, the changes in those places in turn affect people, and the resulting reactions by people ultimately come back to help reshape policy. Preventing or intervening in crime by targeting place allows neighborhoods to flourish through building or sustaining a higher quality of life. As GIS and other spatial analysis tools become more prominent

and more research supports their effectiveness, governments will likely craft more comprehensive policies that give full consideration to how geography can help meet the goals of policy actions. The utility of more complex geographic analysis for policymakers confronting crime has yet to be established, and our goal in this symposium is to show what that utility might be. The Department of Housing and Urban Development, for its part, is making significant investments in all aspects of geographical analysis to support the many different community needs at the intersection with the Department's mission and programs. Crime prevention is a persistent need of many communities, and it is hoped these articles will give researchers, practitioners, and policymakers new ideas to pursue so they can better meet that need, with geography as a foundation.