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**THE GEOGRAPHY OF CRIME.  
A CASE STUDY OF WARSAW**

Those who have paid at least some attention to the recent developments of research directions within geography would certainly agree that the geography of crime and delinquency has, in the past fifteen years become a quite well-established subdiscipline within social geography. A number of publications in this, one could have thought narrow subdiscipline, has grown significantly and now forms a substantial part of the body of human geographical literature. Externally, what is also important for geography as an academic discipline, the geography of crime is coming to play much more visible part within a broad field of criminology. Geography of crime shares many of common goals, methods and research assumptions with this part of criminology which is labelled "environmental criminology".

Two most important changes in contemporary criminology: the shift from concern with offender motives to concern with criminal event and the shift from sociological to situational (geographical) perspective have marked the beginning of the period of greater involvement of geography with the study of crime (Brantingham and Brantingham 1981, pp. 18--19). For some reasons this is not so in Poland where some studies of crime from spatial perspective have been conducted in the past decade but not by geographers.

As in most geographical studies, geographers interested in the study of crime and delinquency can use almost all scales of spatial resolution: regional (international, state), urban (ward, tract, block), or individual (dwelling unit, space, path) (see Herbert 1982, p. 54). Despite the fact that analyses conducted in all scales could be useful in prevention policies, it seems that in recent years greater emphasis is being put on urban and individual scales of analysis while the studies concerned with regional comparisons are gradually losing geographers' interest. Doing so geographers follow the critique expressed by Barry Poyner (1983): "To put it unfairly, it may be interesting to know that Florida has a higher murder rate than Ohio, but it is not a finding that brings us very near to knowing how to reduce the risk of murder" (Poyner,

1983, p. 2). Nor do many other findings considered out of context which can be found in criminological literature. Poyner speaks from the point of view of urban planner and hopes that knowledge about crime rates for smaller units, "micro-distributions of crime" will be more helpful in designing preventive measures. It is quite obvious that the studies which focus on the assesment of the local environment's qualities in which crime events occur, are of great attractiveness for planners of prevention strategies. If, however, they take no account of many other factors recognized in criminological theories which may provide at least partial explanation of root causes of crime, they may lose much of their potential value. Crime is a very complex phenomenon and it should be remembered that there is no such a single analysis which would help us to prevent it. The findings about the distribution of homicide rates by states tell us something different than conclusions drawn from the study based on statistical data for census tracts or blocks of flats. Each study of micro-distributions of crime should be placed within wider context of analysis of "antecedents" of crime (Herbert 1977, p. 219). and this may require the detailed studies of spatial outcomes of societal allocative processes and socio-legal system at a macro level, and the analysis of these processes themselves.

It is significant that in recent years more attention is paid to one of the substantial bases of deviance: spatial conditions from which socially unacceptable behaviour arises. In the opinion of many social scientists (Jacobs 1961) these problems, especially the problem of crime cannot be solved by strengthening the institutional means of control over society. An alternative to this kind of „prevention" is seen in situational preventive measures — in changing the situation in which offences normally occur. Ideas related to the concepts of „defensible space" and alike look very attractive and have probably some value. However, they are not universal and what is thought to be a "defensible" design in one region may be vulnerable in the other. Even within one city the same design can attract crime in one place but have the qualities of defensible space in the other.

To put it clearly: to say what should be done about certain situational conditions under which crime is more likely to occur it is necessary to know why, (to recall Poyner's example) the homicide rates in southern states are ten times higher than in northern or why in certain voivodships in Poland crime rates (as indicated by number of convictions) are almost four times lower than in others (see Fig. 1).

It is known from the beginning of the nineteenth century that crime rates are unevenly distributed over space. Possible explanations of this phenomena may vary along the scales of spatial resolution. Although

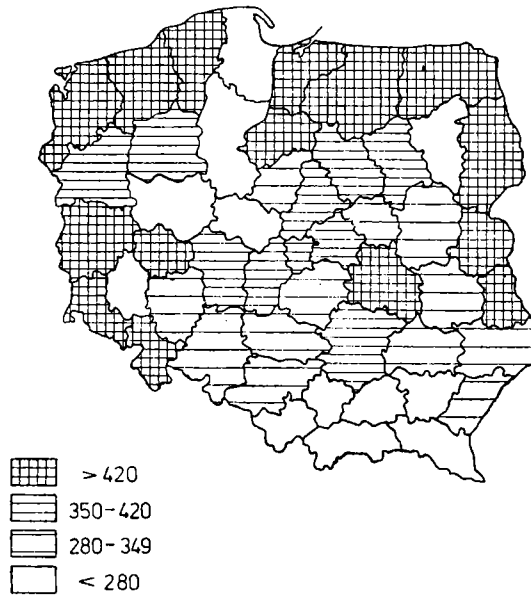


Fig. 1. Rates of conviction per 100,000 in Poland (all categories of crime, by voivodships, 1984). Data Source, *Rocznik Statystyczny 1985*. Map compiled by author.

these are not mutually exclusive the analysis of crime in microscale should be placed within the context of macroanalysis.

The analysis of crime rates for 49 voivodships into which Poland is administratively divided, clearly shows significant differences in the level of crime in different regions. Even bigger variations can be seen on the lower level of spatial resolution, within each of these voivodships and within cities (Fig. 1).

The problem of crime in Poland although not so serious as in many western countries attracts public attention. There is a reason for this. Official statistics show clearly the regional differences in crime rates and also that in recent years these rates for some categories of crime have tended to increase steadily (see Tables 1 and 2).

The average rate of the growth of crime rates in Poland is remarkably exceeded by the increase in Warsaw, where 5395 burglaries were recorded in 1980 (13.7% of total number of burglaries recorded in Poland) and almost 17 781 in 1984 (19.1% of all burglaries recorded in Poland that year). A distribution of burglary rates within Warsaw is an example of intra-city variation. All crimes of burglaries recorded by the police were mapped. Crime rates for 78 census tracts were calculated (Fig. 2).

A very specific point can be made about spatial distribution of burglary in Warsaw when we compare it with findings made by American

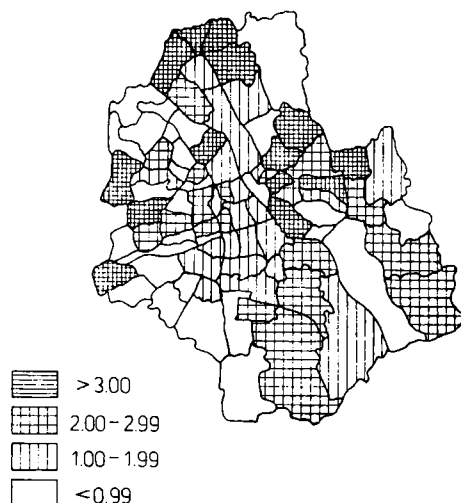


Fig. 2. Burglary rates by census tracts in Warsaw, 1980, Number of burglaries per 1000 dwelling units (see Bartnicki 1984).

geographers. Most cities exhibit distinctive areas where crime rates are well above average. Generally, aerial patterns of burglary in Warsaw do not confirm American findings which show that one of the most common features of the variation of crime within cities is its concentration in the

Table 1

Recorded offences in Poland: 1980 to 1984

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Burglary	39235	65819	74251	85097	93158
Theft	63400	81039	88001	94352	97158
Robbery	5055	6228	6143	7277	8610
Rape	1576	1395	1684	1875	2184

Source: *Rocznik Statystyczny* 1985, p. 505

centre and diminishing incidence towards periphery (Davidson 1983, p. 25). In Warsaw the areas of relatively high crime risk are those in which new housing estates were built in the 1970's. It seems that newly built housing estates are particularly vulnerable to theft from dwelling, burglaries and assaults during the first months after new tenants move in (Ungeheuer-Buican 1981). This vulnerability is associated with a spe-

Table 2

Crime rates in Poland per 100,000

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Burglary	110.3	183.3	205.0	232.7	252.4
Theft	178.2	225.7	242.9	258.0	264.9
Robbery	14.2	17.3	17.0	19.9	23.3
Rape	4.4	3.3	4.7	5.1	5.9

Source: Rocznik Statystyczny 1985.

cific demographic and family structure, the lack of technical infrastructure and the size of these estates. It is relatively easy to commit burglary in these estates not being noticed by neighbours. Attractiveness of particular residential areas is confirmed by an analysis of offenders' movements within the city. In the study of geography of crime in Warsaw (Bartnicki 1983) the distances between places of residence of more than 180 burglars and places of their offences were calculated. The average distance between the two (4.5 km.) is similar to the results obtained in other studies. Many offenders travel for distances longer than 10 km. choosing newly built peripheral estates as the places for planned offences.

It is not an intention of this essay to provide a detailed analysis of crime in Poland and Warsaw. Nor it is to give a systematic evaluation of the state of art within that rapidly growing field of environmental criminology. The aim of this paper was to present a brief example of the study on the geography of crime which is being done in Warsaw and of which full findings will be submitted in the author's Ph. D. thesis.

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