

# Criminology essays - ecological crime criminal



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## **Ecological Crime Criminal**

Are ecological approaches to criminality appropriate to help preventing crime?

For some years, a small group of criminologists have been attempting to understand crime using the ecology of crime (Brantingham, 1993; Stark, 1987; Taylor and Covington, 1988). This is about how criminal opportunities are created in neighbourhoods. Crime prevention seeks to reduce the frequency of criminal behaviour by means that operate outside the Criminal Justice System.

Crime pattern theory is particularly important in developing and understanding of crime and place, because it combines rational choice and routine activity theory to explain the distribution of crime across places or locations. In this essay, I aim to evaluate the different ecological approaches and to see how useful they are as a deterrent or actual crime preventer. This will be achieved by looking at the models and theories that make up the ecological or environmental approach.

Jock Young identifies a series of linked processes that transformed the way crime was viewed or perceived. Although it was assumed that improved conditions and economic restructure would lead to a drop in crime, it was found that the opposite happened. Despite increasing the size of the police and the capacity of the prison system, crime had been increasing year after year. (Newman, 1972). According to Young, the volume of criminal activity grows in all parts of the world, especially countries where economic development was more vigorous.

But following a steady and seemingly harsh rise in recorded crime in England and Wales between 1955 and 1992, the last thirteen years has witnessed an almost unprecedented decline in both police recorded crime and estimates of crime from the British Crime Survey. Jock Young referred to the growth in recorded crime during the years of the Keynesian Welfare state in the UK as an aetiological crisis for criminology. The expectation had been that with rising living standards and increased welfare provision crime would fall. Criminologists have become so used to explaining rising crime that they might now face a second aetiological crisis - explaining falling crime rates

Essentially the ecological, or holistic, view is that a neighbourhood is like an ecosystem. An ecosystem has many parts to it, which fit more or less together to give that system some form of balance. The same with safe neighbourhoods. Everything has its own place, just as everyone should feel to some extent that they belong, or are part of, some place. When that ecosystem experiences changes that are too rapid or too extensive, then the system often becomes dysfunctional and out of balance.

This might happen when a few extra bars open up that start to create disorder and noise problems in the neighbourhood. It might also occur when large proportions of traditional residents move rapidly out of a neighbourhood and the tenure of local tenancy drops too quickly. Perhaps the number of abandoned buildings in a neighbourhood increased beyond a certain point, a tipping point, and crime begins to climb dramatically. These are all examples of a neighbourhood out of balance. In such neighbourhoods, a niche is created for crime opportunities. (Brantingham, 1993; Stark, 1987; Taylor and Covington, 1988).

According to Jacob (1961), the neighbourhood diversity and social mix influences the opportunities for crime, this began the work of CPTED. CPTED is an approach that looks at those who engage in criminal, or nuisance behaviour in public. By watching them carefully you will see they prefer some areas over others, they choose certain times of the day and week, and they focus on specific targets while ignoring others. It can reduce the social and psychological impact of crime in neighbourhoods. Most importantly, it improves the liveability and safety of urban places. (Newman 1972).

A policy-oriented explanation of crime that states that minor signs of disorder in a neighbourhood, left unchecked, can result in more severe disorder and ultimately serious crime. This idea was known as the broken windows theory. The term comes from an influential 1982 article in *The Atlantic Monthly* by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling. The theory implies that if the first broken window in a building is not repaired, then people who like breaking windows will assume that no one cares about the building and more windows will be broken.

Soon the building will have no windows. The theory endorsed the belief that crime was the result of lax police efforts and that stricter law enforcement policy is the primary ingredient to promoting safer communities. Wilson and Kelling theorized that if rude remarks by loitering youth were left unchallenged, they would be under the impression that no one cares and their behaviour will likely escalate to crimes that are more serious.

Ever since Durkheim, many social scientists have subscribed to the premise that deviance and crime are "normal" properties of naturally functioning

social systems. When trying to explain the causes of these behaviours, however, many social scientists typically resort to the idea of "pathological" origins.

Overall, social scientists have yet to explain how and why "normal" individuals operating in unexceptional social environments deviate and commit crimes; recent developments in behavioural ecology and evolutionary biology provide new insights that promise to explain how deviance and crime arise naturally in populations of interacting individuals without necessarily implying genetic influences.

We interpret criminal behaviours by which offenders expropriate goods or services from others as expressions of diverse behavioural strategies that derive from normal patterns of population-level social organization and interaction. This view accommodates both explanations that focus on individual causes of crime and those directed toward social factors. Our approach permits the generation of novel hypotheses and fully accommodates, simplifies, and helps unify important and diverse insights and findings amassed by a wide range of disciplines and theories that have tried to account for the nature and distribution of crime.

A "routine activity approach" for analyzing crime rate trends and cycles. Rather than emphasizing the characteristics of offenders, with this approach one can concentrate upon the circumstances in which they carry out predatory criminal acts. Most criminal acts require convergence in space and time of likely offenders, suitable targets and the absence of capable guardians against crime. (Cohen and Felson 1979).

Human ecological theory facilitates an investigation into the way in which social structure produces this convergence, hence allowing illegal activities to feed upon the legal activities of everyday life. In particular, the dispersion of activities away from households and families may increase the opportunity for crime and thus generates higher crime rates. (Hope, 1995).

A variety of data is presented in support of the hypothesis, which helps explain crime rate trends in the United States 1947-1974 as a by-product of changes in such variables as labour force participation and single-adult households. Also the notion of absence of a capable guardian such as, police or security guards, locks or barriers, alarm systems and CCTV were thought to have also increase the likelihood of crime in that region or environment.

The capacity of communities to prevent violence can be examined from three perspectives: youth violence, child maltreatment, and intimate partner violence. The analysis suggests that community social control and collective efficacy are significant protective factors for all three types of violence, but these need to be further distinguished for their relationships to private, parochial, and state controls.

It is argued that strong interpersonal ties are not the only contributor to collective efficacy and violence prevention. Weak ties, including those outside the community, and organizational ties are also seen as necessary.

Violence prevention programs should be structured in ways that contribute to the communities' own capacity to prevent violence.

Shaw and McKay argued that any city (in this instance they cited Chicago) could be divided into various concentric zones emanating from the centre of

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the city. You can visualise these zones by thinking about an archery target, for example, with the centre of the target (the Bulls-eye) being Zone 1 and each successive ring being named successively.

The middle zone (Zone 1) is the central business district in any city. The next is the inner city (Zone 2), sometimes called the Interstitial Zone or Zone of Transition. This Zone is surrounded, respectively, by: Respectable working class housing (Zone 3), then by the (middle class) suburbs (Zone 4), the city fringe (rural / semi-rural areas) inhabited by the rich (Zone 5).

### **Concentric Zones**

( *Diagrammatic view* )

(Park and Burgess 1925)

In examining crime rates in relation to each zone, Shaw and McKay found that one zone in particular (Zone 2) exhibited higher rates of crime than any other zone. This zone (which Shaw and McKay termed a " zone of transition" because it was to this area of cheap housing that successive waves of immigrants - Irish, Italian, Polish and so forth - came), had a consistently higher rate of crime than any other zone, regardless of which immigrant group dominated the cultural life of the area.

This led Shaw and McKay (1969) to argue that the high crime rates were not a consequence of the behaviour of any one particular ethnic group (since it did not really seem to make much difference which ethnic group was dominant at particular times).

Rather, they argued that something about the fact of living in such a zone was the root cause of the high levels of crime. This "something" was, according to Shaw and McKay, the fact that no settled community could establish itself in this zone because of the repeated waves of immigration into - and emigration out of - the zone.

In effect, the high turnover of people in the "zone of transition" resulted in the idea of "social disorganisation" - the idea that a lack of clear, moral, guide-lines deriving from a settled, stable, community structure resulted in a lack of informal social controls and hence a high rate of crime.

However, as Felson and Clark (1998) suggest, there are 10 principles of crime opportunity theory. The first being that opportunity plays a major role in all crimes, not just property related crime, for example, studies of bars, and clubs show how their design and management play an important role in generating violence or preventing it. Their concept also notes that crime opportunities are specific (i. e. the theft of cars for joyriding has a different pattern for opportunity than theft for car parts).

In addition, crime opportunities depend on everyday movements of activity and that one crime produces the opportunity for another. (Home Office, 2004). But they do suggest that reducing opportunities does not usually displace crime - Wholesale displacement is very rare and many studies have found little if no crime displacement, also focused opportunity reduction can produce wider declines in crime as prevention measures in one area can lead to a reduction in another nearby, a 'diffusion of benefits'. This is because offenders might overestimate the reach of those measures.



To conclude, it is clear that ecological approaches to crime draw on the many different approaches such as, urban planning, decision making models, design, fear of crime and many more. As with many other approaches, they look at how and why is committed, and give the general understanding and in-sight to crime but cannot it is not fully known whether such approaches can help to reduce crime.

Although we know that crime is committed for many reasons, (e. g. money or gain, revenge, reputation etc.), even with the full understanding and application of ecological approaches, crime may be one of those things that can never be completely eradicated.

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