

BOOK REVIEW

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Public Safety: Reviewing Szabolcs Mátyás's *Crime Geography*

Book: *Crime Geography*. By Dr. habil. Szabolcs Mátyás, Ludovika University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary. Publisher: University of Oradea; 2024. ISBN: 9786061023462

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Abstract: Szabolcs Mátyás's *Crime Geography* is a groundbreaking book that explores the intersection of geography and criminology, offering theoretical insights and practical applications for understanding the spatial dimensions of crime. Published in English, the book is the first to present crime geography as an independent scientific discipline, bridging criminology, geography, and social sciences. The author emphasizes its interdisciplinary nature, outlining three main approaches: criminological, geographical, and interdisciplinary. The book traces the historical development of crime geography, from 19th-century French “moral statistics” by André-Michel Guerry and Adolphe Quetelet to the 20th-century Chicago School’s “concentric zone model”. Modern technological tools like GIS and crime mapping are discussed extensively, particularly their use in analysing crime hotspots and informing policing strategies. The author also introduces the innovative *Crime Classification System*, inspired by Köppen’s meteorological classification, which integrates qualitative and quantitative data to enhance crime visualization and reveal regional crime trends. The book’s standout feature is its practical focus, which includes examples from Hungary and international contexts. The author connects geographic

methods to crime prevention, exploring frontier areas like urban crime, demography, ethnography, and transport geography. His engaging writing style makes complex concepts accessible, although the technical terminology may challenge readers without a background in geography or criminology. Overall, *Crime Geography* is a significant contribution to the field, blending academic rigor with real-world applicability. It is a valuable resource for professionals and lay readers interested in crime's spatial and social dimensions.

Keywords: crime geography; crime; crime prevention; crime analysis; crime prediction; public safety

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I. Introduction

The crime analysis and crime prediction have paramount importance for public safety (Tihanyi et al., 2024), and crime geography has emerged as a promising avenue for expanding this field of research. The examination of crime prevalence maps and other advanced techniques borrowed from geography, and their consolidation in a single resource, can be beneficial for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and researchers alike.

In this vein, the literature presents several contemporary studies grounded in the national practices of BRICS states Brazil (Lima et al., 2024), China (Wei and Pan, 2024), India (Bajaj and Lama, 2024), South Africa (Esan et al., 2025), Russian Federation (Krasnova et al., 2022), and Jordan (Alshbol, 2011), Nigeria (Adeyemi et al., 2021), EU countries (Doğan and Kurnaz, 2025) alike.

Published in 2024, "Crime Geography" by Szabolcs Mátyás¹ illuminates how geography's methods and approaches can contribute to understanding crime's spatial and social contexts. It is the first specialist book in English that not only presents the geography of crime as a scientific discipline but also discusses its practical application in detail. The author emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of crime geography several times. According to Szabolcs Mátyás, investigating the spatial distribution of crimes is not only a part of criminology or geography, but an independent scientific field located at the intersection of geography and social sciences. Crime geography lies at the intersection of criminology, human geography, and sociology. It explores the spatial distribution of crimes and their underlying social, economic, and environmental causes.

II. Discussion

The book begins by clarifying the conceptual foundations of the geography of crime and then presents the place of the discipline within the social sciences. The book distinguishes three main approaches:

1. Criminological approach, which considers crime geography as a part of criminal sciences.
2. Geographical approach, which utilizes tools and methodologies from human geography.
3. Interdisciplinary approach, which combines elements of both, establishing crime geography as a unique field closely related to criminology and social geography.

The *First Chapter* establishes the discipline's conceptual and scientific foundations, situating it within the broader framework of social sciences. Szabolcs Mátyás emphasizes that crime geography is not merely a subset of criminology or geography but a distinct, interdisciplinary field that bridges these domains.

Importantly, Szabolcs Mátyás is credited as the first to divide crime geography into two branches: general crime geography and applied

¹ Szabolcs Mátyás, Doctor of Earth Science, a habilitated associate professor at the Faculty of Law Enforcement at Ludovika University of Public Service (Hungary). He also teaches at the University of Debrecen (Hungary).

crime geography. General crime geography focuses on theoretical questions, such as its place in science, methodologies, and connections with other disciplines. Applied crime geography, on the other hand, is oriented toward practical uses like crime mapping, predictive policing, geographic profiling, and, as a result, public safety.

The chapter also highlights how crime geography's unique spatial approach allows researchers to uncover relationships between crime patterns and geographic factors. Szabolcs Mátyás provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and applying crime geography by addressing both theoretical and practical aspects. This foundational chapter sets the stage for the innovative perspectives explored throughout the book.

The *Second Chapter* of the volume provides a historical overview of the development of crime geography. The author describes 19th-century French “moral statistics” pioneers, such as André-Michel Guerry and Adolphe Quetelet, who studied the territorial distribution of crimes. He then presents the results of the 20th-century Chicago school. Within this, he highlights the “concentric zone model” of Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, according to which the distribution of crime varies depending on the distance from the city centre.

The *Third Chapter* is a valuable resource for researchers, as it compiles a comprehensive list of potential sources for crime geography studies. These include police databases, GIS tools, demographic data, and historical crime records, providing a solid theoretical and practical research foundation. By organizing these resources, Szabolcs Mátyás significantly simplifies the work of researchers, enabling them to access relevant data more efficiently. This systematic approach enhances the quality and scope of crime geography investigations.

A valuable part of the book discusses applied crime geography. Here, Szabolcs Mátyás presents the role of modern technologies such as GIS (Geographical Information System) and mapping methods in criminal analyses. Analysing hot spots, i.e., the spatial concentration of crimes, can help develop policing strategies and crime prevention.

One of the most significant chapters is about Crime Mapping. This part of the book holds exceptional importance within the field of

crime geography as it focuses on understanding and representing the spatial distribution of crimes, leveraging the capabilities of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This chapter is unique in that it goes beyond traditional mapping techniques, incorporating modern technology and statistical modelling to analyse crime patterns accurately.

What makes this chapter particularly noteworthy is its practical relevance. Crime mapping is not merely about visualizing data on a map; it aims to uncover underlying relationships and trends. For example, it explores how socioeconomic, demographic, and urban factors influence the concentration of crimes in specific areas. This analytical approach makes it a valuable tool for law enforcement, urban planners, and policymakers.

The chapter also highlights the historical evolution of crime mapping, illustrating how advancements in GIS technology have transformed the field. The shift has enabled deeper insights and predictions about future crime hotspots, from paper-based maps to sophisticated digital systems. It underscores the integration of physical and human geography, demonstrating that geographic context is critical for understanding the “where” and “why” of criminal activities.

Moreover, the chapter emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of crime mapping, bridging geography, criminology, sociology, and urban studies. It highlights various applications, such as predictive policing, geographic profiling, and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED).

This chapter not only provides theoretical foundations but also equips readers with actionable insights, making it an indispensable resource for those involved in crime analysis and prevention. Its innovative approach to combining data visualization with analytical tools sets a new standard in the study of crime geography.

The “Mátyás Crime Classification System”, described in Chapter 8.9.1, is an innovative approach to spatially representing crime. It addresses common challenges in crime mapping by combining total crime representation with detailed insights into individual crime types. This method avoids the pitfalls of relying solely on absolute values, which can misrepresent the actual crime situation, or calculated indicators, which might not fully capture the nuances of crime patterns.

What sets this system apart is its inspiration from Köppen's meteorological classification system. By adapting Köppen's method of categorizing climates into a framework for crime classification, the system introduces a multi-dimensional perspective to crime analysis. It integrates base crime rates (e.g., total crimes per population percentage) with visual indicators of structural differences. This dual approach provides a comprehensive view of crime dynamics in a region, offering a balance between general trends and specific details.

This chapter is particularly valuable because it emphasizes the socioeconomic factors influencing crime trends and highlights their varying impacts on different types of crime, such as robbery and burglary. The Mátyás system bridges the gap between theoretical models and practical applications, offering actionable insights for policymakers, law enforcement, and urban planners.

The chapter highlights an innovative, adaptable framework that enhances the accuracy and depth of crime mapping, making it a cornerstone of modern crime geography research.

One of the greatest strengths of Szabolcs Mátyás's book is that he emphasizes practical applicability in addition to theoretical approaches. The author shows in detail how geographic methods can be used to explore the causes of crime and how they can help the police work. In the volume, he devotes a separate chapter to the frontier areas of crime geography, such as demography, ethnography, and transport geography, which all contribute to a better understanding of the spatial aspects of crime.

Another important topic is the analysis of urban crime. Szabolcs Mátyás gives examples from different countries, including the United States, where the geographic characteristics of crime were examined in light of the neighbourhood's social and economic situation.

Szabolcs Mátyás's writing style is easy to understand and conveys complex concepts. Although the book is positioned as a specialist book, it can also be an understandable and enjoyable read for interested lay people. The author's experiences and research results enrich the text, making what is read authentic and lifelike. The parts where Szabolcs

Mátyás shares his personal detective experiences and connects them with the scientific aspects of crime geography are exciting.

Although the book is highly informative, some readers may struggle with the technical terminology. For example, the details of GIS technologies and statistical methods can be a challenge for those who do not have prior knowledge of geography or criminology. Furthermore, although the volume also presents international examples, not all details are relevant for a global audience due to the dominance of the Hungarian context.

III. Conclusion

The book *Crime Geography* by Szabolcs Mátyás is a unique and pioneering work at the intersection of criminal sciences and geography. It provides a theoretical framework for the spatial investigation of crime and practical guidance for the development of policing strategies.

Looking at other crime geography books, we see that they focus exclusively on crime mapping. In his book, Szabolcs Mátyás demonstrated that crime geography is a much broader discipline and it is connected to far more scientific fields. Therefore, crime geography cannot be narrowed down to crime mapping. I also share the author's perspective. Geographical factors should be given more consideration during investigations. Numerous social and physical geographical factors, when examined, can bring investigators closer to identifying the perpetrator.

It is recommended reading for anyone interested in the social and geographical aspects of crime, whether a professional or a layperson. The book can contribute to crime geography as a scientific field gaining more recognition in Hungary and internationally.

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