Book Review

Environmental criminology: Evolution, theory and practice

Martin A. Andresen

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Environmental criminology is a theoretical framework encompassing several perspectives from contemporary criminology that explains the circumstances under which criminal events take place. Martin A. Andresen draws on his own research as well as that of other environmental criminologists to present a comprehensive view of environmental criminology that traces its roots back to the earliest work in the geography of crime in the 1800s, to the evolution of the perspective as a cutting edge strategy for crime prevention in modern day. The book is divided into three parts that provide readers with a (i) basic foundation in core concepts of environmental criminology (for example, crime patterns), (ii) a review of the theories within the framework (for example, routine activity theory) and (iii) a discussion of issues related to its practical application (for example, measurement). Andresen expertly synthesizes an immense and diverse research literature originating in several different fields of study to deliver on a rather ambitious premise as the first comprehensive sole-authored text on this important topic. This book review proceeds with a part-by-part and chapter-by-chapter review of the text, followed by a brief discussion of the applicability of the book for those interested in security or crime prevention.

In Part 1 of the text, Andresen reviews the earliest work in the ecology of crime, which spans the first two chapters of the book. Chapter 1 familiarizes readers with the notion of spatial variation in crime, as well as the importance of the spatial scale that is used to identify such variation. The chapter also provides a segue into Chapter 2, which includes a discussion of one of criminology's most prominent theories – social disorganization theory. In this chapter, Andresen comprehensively reviews the origins, empirical support for and misunderstandings related to social disorganization theory. Overall, this chapter provides readers with an introduction to environmental factors and the possible effects that they may have upon crime-related outcomes, which is the primary focus of Part 2 of the text.

Part 2 consists of five chapters and focuses on theories within environmental criminology. Andresen likens the transition between parts in the book to the shift in focus within environmental criminology from a sociological to a geographical perspective. His synthesis of the geographical approach to explaining crime begins with Cohen and Felson's routine activity theory in Chapter 3. The main point of this chapter is to demonstrate to readers how criminal events are explained by the theoretical perspective and specifically, the importance of motivated offenders, suitable targets and the absence of capable guardianship in creating

opportunities for crime. Chapter 4 shifts focus to the geometric theory of crime and the work of Brantingham and Brantingham. Particular attention is given to the concepts of the environmental backcloth, nodes, paths, edges and the journey to crime, which reminds readers that crime is not a random event, but is patterned in specific ways.

Chapter 5 continues the discussion of theories with a review of rational choice theory. This chapter is especially important given the assumption of a rational offender that is shared by all of the theories discussed in Part 2; the chapter also provides a detailed review of how rationality governs decisions related to initial involvement, continuance and desistance from crime. Chapter 6 orients the discussion around the pattern theory of crime, which Andresen describes as a ‘metatheory’ that fuses together the three previously reviewed theories into a more complete and inclusive explanation of criminal events. Part 2 of the text culminates in Chapter 7 by discussing the implications of environmental criminology, both theoretical and practical, for preventing crime. In doing so, several perspectives are reviewed, including crime prevention through urban design, crime prevention through environmental design, defensible space and situational crime prevention.

Part 3 contains eight chapters that collectively focus on the practice of environmental criminology. The first of these, Chapters 8 and 9, explain several methodological issues related to conducting and interpreting research in environmental criminology. In particular, Chapter 8 covers the topic of crime measurement with an emphasis on issues related to spatially referenced crime rates (for example, population at risk). Chapter 9 tackles spatial issues within crime analysis, such as the ecological fallacy, spatial autocorrelation and statistical techniques that are appropriate to studies involving spatial analyses. The focus of Chapter 10 is hot spots; this chapter builds on the prior theoretical discussion of the pattern theory of crime to explain the measurement and conceptual issues for identifying hot spots. Like the other chapters in Part 3, this chapter is quite technical, and reviews subjects such as mapping hot spots and kernel density estimation. Chapter 11 discusses the temporal dimension of crime, and how time fits into the genesis of criminal events. The main points included in this chapter relate to seasonal patterns in crime and how they affect spatial patterns as well as the importance of the ‘criminological day’.

Chapter 12 marks a bit of a deviation from methodological issues in spatial crime analysis and instead focuses on how environmental criminology informs researchers’ understanding of the crime drop of the 1990s. Special attention is paid to the security hypothesis and its connections to the theories of environmental criminology. Chapter 13, like the previous chapter, discusses applied aspects of environmental criminology by reviewing the topic of geographic profiling. The basics of the practice are explained, and Andresen notes how it can be used by police officers, but also in other fields, such as public health and biology. Chapter 14 introduces readers to repeat victimization, which occurs when the target (victim) experiences the same type of victimization two or more times. Patterns in repeat victimization are discussed, along with some possible reasons for and solutions to different types of repeat victimization. Chapter 15 closes out the text with a review of the crime and place literature. As Andresen discusses the classic and contemporary research in this area of study, readers are reminded of several issues from earlier in the book and how they apply to understanding crime within micro-environments.

Environmental Criminology: Evolution, Theory and Practice certainly delivers on the three descriptors comprising its title, highlighting the most essential information regarding the history, theory and practice behind one of criminology’s most vibrant perspectives. It has

many strengths and few potential shortcomings. First, the book not only provides an excellent introduction of the topic for students or others interested in environmental criminology, but it also makes a strong contribution to the environmental criminology literature in its own right by collecting topics that are often treated in isolation together under the same umbrella. Parts 1 and 2, in particular, are easily approachable even for those with no prior exposure to environmental criminology or criminological theory in general. This is because of the clear writing style Andresen uses throughout the text and his ability to explain complicated concepts in relatable terms. The collected chapters on theory are especially strong and should be required reading for all advanced criminology courses. Each chapter also closes with several discussion questions that underscore important points made throughout the chapter, which would be useful for instructors that might adopt the text for classroom use or readers looking for a quick summary of the main points of each chapter.

As a mild critique, Part 3 may be less reader friendly because of the technical nature of the material being discussed. This would especially be the case for those with no prior background or knowledge in geography or its associated methodologies. However, the chapters are clearly written and several illustrative figures are provided that are helpful in navigating the complex subject matter. Further, while not at all problematic, it is also worth mentioning that much of the research used throughout the text to illustrate key points was either conducted in Canada or the author's own work. Therefore, those intimately familiar with the larger environmental criminology literature may be left somewhat dissatisfied by the absence of research from other countries.

Despite these possible limitations, the book is successful in bringing together the essentials of environmental criminology within its pages. By the end, readers are left with little doubt of the influence that the environment has upon criminal events, and for this reason, security professionals, academics and others interested in crime prevention will find it to be a valuable resource that they will refer to often.

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