

Criminal Geography as a New Subject in the Hungarian Higher Education

SALLAI János¹ – MÁTYÁS Szabolcs²

Criminal geography as a discipline has a three-decade long history in Hungary. It is a welcome fact that the number of publications dealing with criminal geography has increased, it is already taught at universities and soon the university textbook of the subject will be finished. Hopefully, this favourable trend will continue and criminal geography will become a widely-respected and studied discipline which will contribute to the decrease of criminal acts.

Keywords: Criminal Geography, crime, law enforcement

In our study we introduce criminal geography, a discipline which has been around for almost three decades as a research topic among Hungarian criminologists and geographers, though it is still not widely known. Criminal geography will appear as a new subject in the national law enforcement higher education. The aim of its introduction is to familiarize future Hungarian police officers with a new discipline which may help the successful investigation and crime prevention. The representatives of criminal geography represent several disciplines thus the present study tries to summarise the national and international scientific results so far.

Higher education and criminal geography

One of the main objectives of every discipline is to have a textbook from which the students can get to know the given subject and the other one is to be taught as a separate subject in the institutes of higher education. It took almost three decades after its appearance in Hungary to be ripe enough to become an optional subject at university and to have its own textbook published. The historical moment of the discipline happened in the second term of the 2013/14 academic year at the Institute of Earth Sciences of the University of Debrecen, when about two dozen students signed up for

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the course *Criminal geography*. The course was very favourably received by both students and teachers of the institute so in the first semester of the 2014/15 academic year *Applied criminal geography* course was also introduced, for which several students signed up. The course is continuously offered at the University of Debrecen. As of the publishing of the current study no textbook has been written on the topic of criminal geography though we must mention a milestone when the discipline was given a chance to introduce itself to a wider academic public of the various law enforcement disciplines in the publication entitled *Tendencies and principles from the scope of criminal disciplines* published by NKE (National University of Public Service).³ Criminal geography will be offered as an optional course at the MSc at the University of National Public Service, Faculty of Law Enforcement from the 2017/08 academic year. The university is expected to publish an individual criminal geography textbook in the spring 2017.

Criminal geographical researches in Hungary

Thanks to Béla Földes the conditions of criminal geography were already established by the end of the 19th century. Földes was followed by many other researchers (Albert Irk, Ervin Hacker etc.), but these researches stopped after World War II.

After World War II criminology was considered as “bourgeois science”; statistics were secretive, even researchers were unable to get access to it. 1960 can be considered as a milestone in domestic criminal geography, as the National Institute of Criminology (OKRI) – within the frame of the Prosecution Service of Hungary – was established. In 1963 criminology became an obligatory subject at law faculties. The Hungarian Society of Criminology was established in 1983 with hundreds of theoretical and practical specialists.

Hungarian geographers had a chance to execute criminal geographical researches only later, starting from the 1980's. The territorial scene of such researches was mainly Budapest. They have not analysed the whole capital from a criminal geographical aspect, but they did examine some regions of Budapest as well as the main indicators of the settlement. Zoltán Kovács (1989) was the first geographer to deal with criminal geography.⁴ He executed inter-settlement criminal geographical researches – among others – in the 8th district of Budapest. Gábor Michalkó (1996) studied the criminal geography of international tourism in the Hungarian capital, and within the frames of his study he analysed the victimisation of tourists.⁵

The research executed in 1999–2000 mainly by criminologists can be considered as a very important milestone. In this research the 5th, 9th and 22th districts of Budapest were studied and victims were in the focus. Researchers located the areas with the highest chance of victimisation by means of methods of spatial informatics, and they

3 RUZSONYI Péter: *Tendenciák és alapvetések a bűnügyi tudományok köréből*, Nemzeti Közszerkesztési és Tankönyv Kiadó Zrt., Budapest, 2014, 391.

4 KOVÁCS Zoltán: *A bűnözésföldrajz lehetőségei hazánkban*, MTA Földrajztudományi Kutatóintézet, Budapest, 1989, 11.

5 MICHALKÓ Gábor: *A nemzetközi turizmus bűnözésföldrajzi aspektusai Budapesten*, Belügyi Szemle 11, 1996, 12–30.

prepared concrete crime preventing proposals.⁶ In the 9th district they prepared crime preventing proposals in connection with education and child protection at school,⁷ while in the 22th district crime preventing proposals relying on the local child protecting institutions.⁸

Andrea Balázs (2003) analysed the criminal geography of the 15th district of Budapest in relation to Rákospalota, Újpalota and Pestújhely. During her studies she concluded that Rákospalota is the least, while Újpalota is the most infected part of Budapest considering the number of criminal acts per 100.000 inhabitants.⁹

Ferenc Irk compared the problems of inhabitants of Budapest and four European cities (Amsterdam, Hamburg, Cracow and Vienna) and based on the results he determined the applicable crime preventing methods.¹⁰

One of the most comprehensive analyses of the capital was made by István Kobolka and János Sallai, who studied Budapest as a whole in the period of 1960–1985. During their analysis the researchers observed problems that had existed for decades and still exist (football hooliganism, organised crime, juvenile delinquency, etc.).¹¹ György Ritecz and János Sallai analysed the criminal geography of the frontier in many studies. They examined eg. the Hungarian-Ukrainian border line, the effects of the European Union as well as the possible effects of Hungary's joining the Schengen Area on the Hungarian frontier.¹²

After the capital Debrecen is the second most studied settlement from a criminal geographic point of view. It is Gábor Kozma who first carried out such researches in Debrecen.¹³

As of 2015 four doctoral theses have been made in the topic of criminal geography. First, Antal Tóth defended his thesis at the Doctoral School of Geosciences of the University of Debrecen (2007). The title of his thesis was *Sociogeographical examination of the spatial aspects of crime in Hajdú-Bihar County*. Mr. Tóth's doctoral thesis had a pioneering significance because such a great research had not been done in the history of the Hungarian criminal geography. The strengths of the thesis were the most important definitions of criminal geography and the introduction of research methods and trends. Antal Tóth's research area is extremely far-reaching; his publications are mainly related to Hajdú-Bihar County, Hajdúböszörmény, Debrecen, and the border areas of Hungary.

6 KEREZSI Klára, RITTER Ildikó: *Budapest V. kerületének bűnözési térképe*, Belügyi Szemle 10, 2000, 20–53.

7 KEREZSI Klára, KÓ József: *A IX. kerület bűnözési térképe*, Belügyi Szemle 7–8, 2001, 100–124.

8 KEREZSI Klára, FINSZTER Géza, KÓ József, GOSZTONYI Géza: *A területi bűnmegelőzés lehetőségei Budapest V., IX. és XII. kerületében*. OKRI, Kriminológiai tanulmányok. 2001. 112–180.

9 BALÁZS Andrea: *A XV. Kerület bűnügyi földrajza*, Budapest, 2003, 25.

10 IRK Ferenc: *Félelem, bűnözés és bűnmegelőzés Európa öt nagyvárosában*, OKRI, Budapest, 2005, 9–145.

11 KOBOLKA István, SALLAI János: *Budapest kriminálgeográfiája 1960-1985. között*, KBH Szakmai Szemle 3, 2008, 86–102.

12 RITECZ György, SALLAI János: *A Magyar Köztársaság határrendje és a határbiztonsága a schengeni elvek EU-ba való beépülése, illetve Magyarország uniós csatlakozása tükrében*, Rendőrtisztviseli Főiskola, Budapest, 1999, 30.

13 KOZMA Gábor: *A Debreceni Nagyerdői Park Rendezési Tervének várható környezeti, ökológiai és társadalmi hatásai*. Debrecen, 1997. 157–163.

Szabolcs Mátyás also defended his thesis in this discipline; its title was *Criminal geographic analysis of the Debrecen Police Headquarters*.¹⁴ Mátyás focuses on the criminal geography of Hajdú-Bihar County, Debrecen and Hajdú-Bihar-Bihar Euroregion and the criminal catchment area research as well as on the historiography of criminal geography. Zsuzsa Piskóti-Kovács, a student at the University of Miskolc, wrote her dissertation with the title: *The adaptation possibilities of the modern trends of criminal geography in different regional levels*. Zsuzsa Piskóti-Kovács examines crime by applying GIS tools and regional statistical methods.¹⁵

Finally, we need to mention Gábor Erdei – a student of the National University of Public Service Military Science Doctoral School – who received an academic degree with his treatise *The theoretical and practical correlations of criminal geography*.¹⁶

It is welcome news that many university and college students – mainly the students of the University of Debrecen, Eötvös Lóránd University, the National University of Public Service and Eszterházy Károly College – have chosen criminal geography as the subject of their thesis in the past years. Within the frames of their theses they typically did criminal geographical analyses of the settlements they live in.

Territorial research levels

In his researches Antal Tóth denoted six territorial units of criminal geographical research.¹⁷ Later most researchers of this field have also done analyses as per the territorial structure proposed by Tóth. The territorial units to be studied are the followings:

National level

Partially because of Hungary's international memberships, partially in the interest of enabling the comparison of Hungary with other countries, it is necessary to do analysis on the highest territorial level. When comparing Hungary to other countries it is important to emphasise that legal norms differ in different countries, making international comparison more difficult.

Regional level

There are seven statistical regions in Hungary, which were mainly induced by a statistics based support system of the European Union (NUTS). The regions in Hungary – except for the Region of Middle Hungary – consist of three counties. Therefore, this level can be considered as the least homogeneous territorial unit. Analysis at this level is needed when comparing different regions, but this is done quite rarely in everyday police work.

14 MÁTYÁS Szabolcs: *A Debreceni Rendőrkapitányság kriminálgeográfiai elemzése*, Debrecen, 2011, 196.

15 PISKÓTI-KOVÁCS Zsuzsa: *A bűnözésföldrajz modern irányzatainak alkalmazási lehetőségei különböző területi szinteken*, Miskolc, 2014, 174.

16 ERDEI Gábor: *A bűnözésföldrajz elméleti és gyakorlati összefüggései*, Budapest, 2014, 246.

17 TÓTH Antal: *A bűnözés térbeli aspektusainak szociálgeográfiai vizsgálata Hajdú-Bihar megyében*, Debrecen, 2007, 250.

County level

This is the most durable territorial unit of the Hungarian public administration. Criminal statistical data are often provided at county level. However, counties show quite a heterogeneous picture, as there are significant territorial differences between them (e.g. Somogy County). Comparison of the data of different counties is extremely important and useful, but many criminal statistical tendencies can only be analysed at lower levels.

District level

Districts are parts of counties. The number of districts per counties differs between 6 & 18 depending on the size and population of the given county. There are 175 districts in Hungary all together. Compared to studying the values of a county, we can gain a more realistic picture of the criminal geographic situation of a county, if we also analyse the districts belonging to it. At district level analysis the fact that administrative territories of districts do not agree with the competencies of police precincts can cause problems. The size of districts and microregions is approximately the same, but their territories do not overlap.

Settlement level

It is a reasonable expectation of people to be informed about the crime situation of their environment. Therefore, settlements are the most studied territorial units. In case of small settlements there is usually little territorial difference between the crimes of the different parts of the settlement. However, in case of bigger settlements (e.g. cities with county authority) the different, well separable parts of the city are inhabited by people of different social levels and value systems. Also, significant crime difference can be observed among different groups of people.

Inter-settlement level

Nowadays, inter-settlement researches come to the front more and more, mainly because of public demand. As I mentioned before, in case of bigger cities – due to segregation – there are well separable parts inhabited by people of very different social levels, which results in remarkable criminal statistical differences. There is a natural public demand to get informed about the crime situation of their near environment (block of flats, district of a city etc.). As a result of this the number of inter-settlement analyses is expected to increase in the next years.

The most important sources of criminal geography research

Considering that the national criminal geographical research has only a short history the number of Hungarian specialized literature, practical guidelines and other sources is very low. Thus getting acquainted with and following the foreign specialized literature (especially in English and German) is very important. Below we list the most important sources on criminal geographical research.

Police conferences, annual evaluation meetings and work meetings

There are several police conferences, annual evaluation meetings and work meetings which not only police officers but the public (researchers, people who are interested) can attend. The annual evaluation meetings, which are held after the given year is closed, contain a lot of useful and valuable information

Libraries and professional journals

Although any library might contain technical books and journals which can be used during the criminal geography research, the library of the Law Enforcement Science Faculty of the National University of Public Service offers the most sources in the field. A huge number of literature and journals are available at the law faculties of universities of sciences, the library of the National Institute of Criminology and national libraries.

Robotzsaru NEO Integrated Rules of procedure and Case processing system

Robotzsaru Neo is a national computer system which helps the daily case processing work of police officers. The system can only be accessed by police staff and it is protected by a password. People working in different fields have authorised access to different levels. Having the right command permission, valuable criminal statistic data can be extracted from the RZSNeo system.

Annual evaluation reports

The low number and poor quality national settlement – and county – level sources are balanced by the so-called annual evaluation reports which, despite not being written for a criminal geographic purpose contain several chapters which can be interpreted and successfully used from a criminal geographic aspect. These reports are annual evaluations compiled by the captains and county police chiefs who evaluate a specific year on the basis of key indicators.

Professional consultations with police chiefs

On several occasions we can notice such distortions in the criminal statistical data which cannot be explained without a knowledge which can be obtained only through a personal, professional consultation. This background information obtained through the consultations can help to evaluate certain processes objectively. The personal contact with the police chiefs is not only necessary to discuss specific questions but can also pave the way for a well-operating future cooperation.

Getting acquainted with existing settlement-level analyses

Four doctoral theses have been made in this topic which approached criminal geography from different aspects. Besides the dissertations several graduate theses have been made in this topic which can be viewed at the libraries of higher education.

Data made available through primary research

During the course of research a lot of data can be used which are produced by the researcher himself. One of the methods to collect such data is *personal observation*. Within the wide spectrum of research and data collection methods we have to mention *the population questionnaire and the case study* as an illustrative method.

Internet sources

On the World Wide Web there are several databases that can be used to make analyses (e.g. <https://bsr.bm.hu>, www.ksh.hu, www.police.hu, www.teir.hu). We should strive to choose precise, up-to-date databases, with the right size for our research. Another important expectation concerning the database is that it should have an obvious content (should be user-friendly) otherwise the user can draw the wrong conclusions.

How to use criminal geographical researches?

As in the case of any relatively new discipline, the question of how useful criminal geography is often asked. What is feasible from the theory and applicable in everyday police work? These questions can be answered based on partially Western European and partially Hungarian examples. Criminal geographical researches can provide a lot of results that can also be used in practical police work. Adaptation of these results can help to increase the ability of the police to react and improve the efficiency of crime investigation.

Within the European Union we find examples for the practical application of criminal geographical researches mainly in Germany. Amongst the German researchers special attention should be paid to the work of Herold, H., as the police offices of Nürnberg were changed radically thanks to the results of his researches.¹⁸ A few decades later (1990s) the analysis scheme elaborated by Bundeskriminalamt meant a major progress in the German criminal geographical researches. Later Bundeskriminalamt's analysis scheme was also applied in several big cities (Mühlhausen, Essen, Hamburg, Osnabrück, Rostock, and Lubeck) (Tóth, 2007). The practical criminal geographic work in Sweden (Stockholm) (Ceccato-Haining-Signoretta, 2002) and Great Britain also worth mentioning (Pödör, 2006¹⁹; Tóth, 2007).

Comprehensive criminal geographic researches, the results of which can be widely used in police work, have been executed in two Hungarian cities so far. Hajdúböszörmény was studied from a criminal geographic point of view by Antal Tóth (2007), while Debrecen was examined from a similar aspect by Mátyás Szabolcs (2011).

18 HORST Herold: *Földrajz és bűnözés*. Belügyi Szemle Tájékoztatója 17, 1973, 79–85.

19 PÖDÖR Andrea: *Térinformatikai alapú bűnmegelőzési stratégia*, 2006, Source: web.axelero.hu/konyadr/index_elemei/UntitledFrame-4_elemei/m2-iromany/bmakepnelkul.doc

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ABSZTRAKT

A bűnözésföldrajz, mint új tantárgy a hazai felsőoktatásban

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A bűnözésföldrajz Magyarországon mintegy három évtizedes múlttal rendelkező tudományterület. Öröndetes tény, hogy az elmúlt években megnövekedett a kriminálgeográfiai témájú publikációk száma, elkezdődött a tárgy egyetemi szintű oktatása, és hamarosan elkészül az egyetemi jegyzete is. Remélhetőleg a kedvező folyamat tovább folytatódik, és a bűnözésföldrajz hazánkban is egy széles körben művelt és elismert tudományterületté válik, amely kutatási eredményeivel hozzájárul a bűncselekmények számának csökkentéséhez.

Kulcsszavak: bűnözésföldrajz, bűnözés, rendvédelem