SPACE, CRIME AND SECURITY: TOWARDS THE PRODUCTION OF A TERRITORIAL ANALYSIS MODEL

Pedro Fraile and Quim Bonastra

Departamento de Geografía y Sociología. Universidad de Lleida

The investigation outlined here is part of another more general one dealing with the perception of security in intermediate cities in Catalonia and how this relates to various social and territorial factors. In this article, we study the locational logic of certain crimes, looking for regular patterns in their locations and using as a point of departure data from the registered reports and interventions of the regional police force of Catalonia (*Mossos d'Esquadra*) in the city of Lleida for the period 2005-2007.

I. GEOGRAPHY, CRIME AND SECURITY

It seems beyond all doubt that the theme of urban security is of considerable importance and, furthermore, is being used widely from different political positions to legitimise a variety of strategies for social or territorial intervention.

The profound changes that have affected us since the end of the last century seem to be shaping a new development model that has been described in miscellaneous ways, according to which facets are being emphasised. Some speak of post-modernity, others of globalisation or risk society. A range of authors agree in stating that these processes are significantly altering capital-labour relations. This does not necessarily entail a rise in unemployment, as would be expected from the introduction of labour-saving technologies, but rather it is provoking employment precarity as well as a consolidation of the informal economy. Several complex migratory movements are also related to these dynamics.

Castells argues that the concentration of these changes in urban environments may lead towards what he defines as the dual city, a space in which wealth, excessive consumerism, poverty and marginalisation are relatively contiguous and often compete for space, thus sharpening tendencies towards confrontation and conflict.

In this environment, feelings of insecurity may spread, though these are not necessarily related exclusively to levels of crime, but rather have much to do with particular conflicts or discrepancies in the use of public space.

This is the framework in which our reflections on the location of certain contraventions are inscribed. However, they start from the assumption that there are important regional

differences and that intermediate Spanish and European cities display specific features that must be taken into account.

For this reason, it is important to apply a geographical approximation to the problem of urban security which, moreover, is an offshoot of a long tradition within our discipline. With the growth of radical geography, themes such as imperialism, ghettoes and marginality established themselves at the centre of studies on territory and the social relevance of the questions under scrutiny came to the foreground.

During the later decades of the last century, Geography absorbed various influences; for example, the phenomenological approach which drew attention towards problems linked to perception. Other disciplines, such as History and Urban History underwent similar processes. Each of these circumstances favoured the study of the perception of security or fears and their relation to space.

When the geography of crime began to cohere during the 1970s, there was already a body of scientific production on the subject, which originated with those whom Peet defined as liberal geographers. According to Peet, these researchers confined themselves to studying crime amongst the lower classes, sidestepping that which came from other social sectors and refraining from an investigation into its causes. Such criticisms led to proposals for new, more qualitative research methodologies intended to emphasise the underlying causes of the facts and in turn incorporating the 'behavioural' approach into geographical studies.

II. SECURITY, SPACE AND ACTUARIAL LOGIC

As stated above, the changes affecting society at the start of the twenty-first century have been described in many ways and analysed from differing perspectives. Perhaps one of the most fruitful approaches for explaining these matters is that of risk society, a term disseminated at the end of the twentieth century by Ulrich Beck.

From this perspective, one of the defining features of the new model is the view that the social production of wealth is indissolubly united to the production of risks. The perennial example is that of Chernobyl.

If this idea is a point of departure for the analysis of crime, it should be stated that the latter is closely linked to the prevailing mode of development in such a way that it cannot be conceived as a simple imbalance in the system and, therefore, as something easily eradicable.

Linked to this conception of crime, there has developed a strand of thought termed 'actuarial logic', which states that, given the unavoidable nature of the phenomenon under consideration, measures to confront it should be limited to risk management leading to its reduction, repression or redistribution, thus ignoring all analysis of its underlying causes.

In our opinion, such an approach gives rise to serious problems. Above all, in its eagerness to identify risk groups, it fosters the stigmatisation of certain social sectors above others. Furthermore, it transposes a significant part of responsibility onto potential victims, requiring them to adopt a vigilant attitude, resolute forms of behaviour or specific uses of public space, while at the same time transferring to them a part of security costs, whether that be high-security door locks or creating an enclosed environment ('gated communities'). From a wider perspective, it should neither be forgotten that all this is made possible due

to the accumulation of an enormous quantity of data about individuals, with the potential consequences for citizens' privacy rights.

In short, we agree with the analysis that presents crime as indissolubly linked to the prevailing mode of development, but we disagree with the type of strategies or policies of intervention characteristic of actuarial logic because it does not deal with the cause of the problems and because, in the medium term, it tends to deepen the discrepancies between different sectors and thus makes mediation and social cohesion more difficult.

This general reflection on discourses developing around conflictivity and the contravention of legal norms serves to frame the analysis carried out on the localisation of certain crimes, which is the specific aspect of the investigation presented in these pages.

III. THE MAPPING OF POLICE STATISTICS: TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATIVE MODEL

It is worth highlighting once more that the mapping of registered reports and police interventions should not be confused with criminal reality which we consider to be unattainable in its totality, there existing, consequently, a significant gap between the two. In the best case scenario, such maps can be an acceptable gauge of what takes place in towns and cities (with all the limitations inherent in the indicators), serving to identify places and problems that must then be related to other variables before enabling the outlines for policies of intervention.

The empirical research summarised in this article has consisted in the systematisation and mapping of registered reports and police interventions (of the *Mossos d'Esquadra*) relating to fourteen types of crime in the city of Lleida from 2005-2007 and has been arranged according to the criteria and nomenclature of the Catalan regional police force. However, some cases have been drawn from outside this period or other examples have been sought to either corroborate or contradict our assertions.

We have worked to find regular patterns with regard to localisation and we have identified three different categories that we believe are applicable to other places and relatively stable in time.

1) Crimes with a Structural Logic of Location

These are crimes that occur in places that, on account of their morphology, urban functions or certain socio-economic features, tend to stabilise their occurrence. In other words, in this case we encounter a long-established correlation between the crimes and the characteristics of specific sites. Our research uses two examples where this structural link can be clearly evaluated: petty larcenies and robberies with violence or intimidation (such as muggings and snatches).

In the first case, the tendency towards stabilisation can be easily observed in an historical sequence. In the mapping of densities presented in the article, the places that appear are significant. On the one hand, we find several points that are quite territorially delimited, such as an urban shopping centre, train and bus stations or the city's hospital.

On the other hand, we also find a marked stabilisation in areas whose borders are more diffuse, such as the Commercial Hub (*Eje Comercial*), Lleida's retail and leisure area *par*

excellence, and a section of the historic core, a rather neglected area where a considerable amount of the city's marginality is concentrated. Equally, one of the areas for drinking and entertainment is included in this category.

In short, these are places where, on account of their typical characteristics and functions, there is normally an atmosphere of congregating, absentmindedness and confusion, added to the probability that people are carrying money.

Robberies with violence or intimidation also occur in some of the places described above, such as train and bus stations, the Commercial Hub, the already-mentioned retail and entertainment area and, once again, a section of the old quarter. The reasons for its stabilisation are similar to those that have just been outlined but, in addition, the chances of getaways from the places selected are in general better than in those that are not on the list.

2) Crimes with a Conjuntural Logic of Location

These are crimes that have a more conjuntural pattern of distribution; in other words, in any given moment we can find them in specific enclaves but, insofar as the circumstances of these places change, they shift readily, directed furthermore by certain recurring requirements. We have used two examples which, according to our criteria, reveal certain differences.

Robberies from inside vehicles are a very clear case of this logic of location. In the mapping of the facts from 2005, a series of points appear that are concentrated in some of the city's large car parks, such as that of the hospital, the football stadium, the sports centre, the back of the shopping centre and others. But circumstances change and in 2007 we see how some of these points diminished markedly whereas others increase over time. In that year, the car park of a discotheque on the outskirts of the city became one of the major focal points of this crime.

The other case under consideration, due to its practice as a trade, is the dealing of illicit drugs (crimes against public health). Here, using a longer sequence of data, we see how in the year 2000 it was concentrated in one part of the old quarter whereas, due to an increase in police pressure in the form of a deployment of the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, it started shifting to a part of the nineteenth-century urban expansion area (*primer ensanche*).

3) Crimes with a Diffuse Logic of Location

Finally, there is a further type of contraventions that do not seem to present a clear pattern of localisation as they are distributed in nebulous ways throughout the fabric of the city. Examples include injuries to the person, sexual assaults, thefts of vehicles, thefts using force on things (burglaries, break-ins, etc) and others.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article forms part of a wider investigation concerning the perception of security in intermediate Catalan cities; in this phase, we have undertaken the empirical research in Lleida.

In this article, we have focussed on the logic of location of crimes, identified by the verification of regular patterns in their location and, in this way, three categories have been established. Firstly, there are those that show a structural logic and thus a marked stability of location, such as petty larcenies or robberies with violence or intimidation (muggings or snatches among others). Secondly, those of a conjuntural nature, which vary location easily provided certain requirements are met according to alterations in given circumstances. The clearest example is that of theft from inside vehicles and, although relatively distinct, crimes against public health could be included in this group. Finally, there is a third category made up of those crimes that are distributed nebulously throughout the city, such as injuries to the person or thefts using force on things (burglaries, break-ins, etc).

In subsequent studies, we will discover to what extent these typologies are recurrent and, in our view, this categorisation is the first step towards enabling a reflection on other matters linked to such a distribution.

Translated by James W Thomas: translation copyright © James W Thomas 2010