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News from the world of the Hungarian and international criminal geography

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LECTORI SALUTEM!

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that we present the latest issue of the *Criminal Geographical Journal*. Criminal geography is a vibrant, interdisciplinary field that offers unique spatial perspectives on the complex drivers of crime. At its core, it seeks to decipher why certain unlawful behaviors cluster in specific environments and how spatial structures – ranging from urban streetscapes to global digital networks – influence both criminal opportunities and security responses. By analyzing environmental factors, mobility patterns, and spatial risk distribution, criminal geography goes far beyond static mapping: it unveils the underlying social, economic, and physical mechanisms behind deviance. Ultimately, by examining the intricate relationship among crime, punishment, and space, this discipline serves as a vital bridge connecting abstract academic theory with actionable, data-driven law enforcement practice.

The dynamic relevance of this scientific discipline is brilliantly demonstrated by the eclectic array of studies featured in this current issue. The papers included here tackle a remarkably broad spectrum of contemporary challenges: from the geographical concentration of cybercrime and transnational networked offenses to localized institutional safety and digital deviances.

We trust that the breadth of research presented herein will serve as an engaging and essential resource for both academic scholars and applied professionals. We invite you to dive into these pages and join us in exploring the evolving landscape of criminal geography.

Wishing you an enjoyable and informative read!

If you have any comments or suggestions regarding the journal, please write them to the editorial board!

Velibor Lalić Ph.D.
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THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE VIRTUAL: CYBERSPACE, ANONYMITY, AND THE SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF CYBERCRIME

Abstract

Geography has always been an integral part of criminology, yet the rise of cyberspace poses a distinct challenge to territorially grounded ways of thinking about crime. Criminals, victims, and the technical infrastructure that is utilized to commit an offence routinely sit in three different jurisdictions, while tools such as VPNs, the Tor network, and compromised proxy servers allow perpetrators to mask or fabricate their location almost at will. This article examines how the geography of cybercrime can still be studied, and meaningfully benefited from, despite this virtual disconnection between the location and the act. It reviews recent empirical attempts to map the global distribution of cybercrime, including expert-survey indices and large-scale technical attack data, and considers the socio-economic and political conditions that concentrate offending in states. It turns to a striking counter-example: the emergence of physically fixed, geographically concentrated “scam compound” operations in Southeast Asia, where virtual crime is delivered from real fortified locations by a coerced workforce. The article argues that virtuality does not eliminate geography from cybercrime; it relocates and multiplies it, creating overlapping spatial layers - offenders, infrastructure, and victims - that existing, territorially bounded law enforcement and legal frameworks are poorly equipped to address.

Keywords: cybercrime, cyberspace, geography of crime, anonymity, jurisdiction, scam compounds, law enforcement cooperation

1. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to investigate in a deeper approach than a short article would allow, i.e. what happens to the geographic reasoning of crime once a significant part of the criminal act takes place in a virtual environment. It draws on the same body of recent academic, legal, and threat-intelligence literature reviewed in the shorter companion article. It utilities more space to work through the conceptual history of geographic criminology, the technical

mechanisms of anonymization and their spatial implications. The article focuses on the available empirical evidence on where cybercrime originates, the socio-economic and political conditions that explain persistent geographic concentration, and - as an extended case study - the emergence of physically fixed “scam compound” operations in Southeast Asia, which represent perhaps the clearest illustration available of how virtual crime can produce very real, and very fixed geography.

This article raises the question: what happens to geographic thinking about crime once the “scene of the crime” becomes, in large part, virtual. It draws on recent academic, legal, and threat-intelligence literature published between 2023 and 2026 to examine five interlocking themes;

- (1.) how researchers have attempted to empirically map the geography of cybercrime despite the obstacles posed by anonymity;
- (2.) what socio-economic and political conditions explain why offending still clusters in particular countries;
- (3.) how, paradoxically, some of the most sophisticated cybercriminal ecosystems have re-anchored themselves in fixed physical locations;
- (4.) what it means for the jurisdictional architecture of law enforcement;
- (5.) and what the resulting research and policy agenda should look like.

2. Cyberspace as a Geographic Problem

Cybercrime has become one of the defining security problems of the twenty-first century, with global cost estimates ranging from hundreds of billions to several trillion US dollars a year. However, the most fundamental question remains: where does cybercrime actually happen? Classical criminology has long treated geography as a core explanatory variable — crime clusters in particular neighbourhoods, cities, and regions, and the offender, victim, and crime scene typically occupy the same physical space. Cyberspace unsettles this arrangement. An offender in one country can rent server infrastructure in a few seconds, route traffic within a third to disguise their origin, and target a victim in a fourth, all within the same criminal act. Anonymisation technologies - VPNs, Tor, botnets, and compromised proxy chains - are designed precisely to raise the question “where is this coming from”, but it is difficult or impossible to answer with confidence.

From a geographical perspective, cyberspace presents three interconnected challenges: its virtual in nature and character, the anonymity affords users, and the inadequacy of conventional territorial frameworks for understanding its boundaries and governance.

The central methodological difficulty in studying the geography of cybercrime is that the virtual layer of the internet was engineered, partially, to be indifferent to physical location. Criminal actors exploit these IT architecture solutions by design rather than by accident, using methods to anonymise themselves by: identity and location spoofing, layered proxy infrastructure, and disposable server rentals in permissive jurisdictions are now standard operational practice for serious cybercriminal groups. The result is a systematic gap between the apparent, technical origin of an attack - an IP address, a server location, a registered domain - and the physical location of the individual responsible for it.

This gap has direct consequences for law enforcement practice in a view of crime detection and investigations. Research on policing in the United Kingdom shows that even within a single national jurisdiction, uncertainty about the geographic location of victims, suspects, and the technical infrastructure involved routinely, creates confusion over which agency holds investigative responsibility for a given cybercrime case. When the same problem is projected onto an international stage, involving dozens of legal systems with different evidentiary standards, the difficulty compounds sharply. Some legal scholarship identify a recurring set of “bottlenecks” at the heart of this problem: tension between data sovereignty and the extraterritorial reach that digital investigations often require; the absence of standardised, mutually recognised protocols for the collection and admissibility of digital evidence; and treaty ratification processes too slow to keep pace with the operational tempo of digital crime. Virtuality, in other words, does not remove geography from the picture — it multiplies the number of jurisdictions a single criminal act can touch, and it is precisely this multiplication, not the absence of location, that creates the enforcement problem.

3. Measuring the Unmeasurable: Empirical Approaches to Cybercrime Geography

Despite these obstacles, a growing body of empirical work has attempted to produce structured, evidence-based pictures of where cybercrime originates. The most influential recent contribution is the World Cybercrime Index (WCI), developed through a large expert survey in which leading cybercrime investigators and intelligence analysts worldwide were asked to nominate and rank the countries they judged to be the most significant sources of major categories of cybercrime (Bruce et al., 2024). The resulting index is the first systematic, expert-informed ranking of national cybercrime output, and it places countries such as Russia, Ukraine, China, the United States, and Nigeria among the leading source nations — a finding that is itself an implicit acknowledgment that, however virtual the act is, the human infrastructure behind it remains geographically situated.

A complementary, more quantitative approach uses large-scale technical attack data rather than expert opinion to model the same phenomenon (Chen et al., 2023). This research confirms that cybercrime is not evenly distributed across the globe but concentrates in a limited number of countries and regions, and it links this concentration to a complex interplay of political, economic, social, and technological conditions. Taken together, expert-survey and technical-data approaches converge on the same broad conclusion even though they measure different elements: the WCI captures where investigators believe human offenders are based, while attack-data studies capture where technical traffic appears to originate, a distinction that matters precisely because anonymisation can separate the two.

Sub-national data, support the recognition of the same pattern at a finer resolution. The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) 2024 Annual Report documents pronounced geographic concentration of victim losses within the United States, with California, Texas, and Florida recording the highest complaint volumes and financial losses, largely reflecting population size and levels of digital commerce (FBI/IC3, 2025). Total recorded US losses reached USD 16.6 billion in 2024, a 33 percent increase on the previous year, with cryptocurrency-related fraud alone accounting for USD 9.3 billion, up 66 percent year-on-year. Here, geography reappears not on the offender side but on the victim side: financial technology adoption and digital exposure map unevenly across a country, producing regional victimisation patterns that mirror, in reverse, the concentration seen among offenders.

4. Socio-Economic and Political Drivers of Geographic Concentration

The reviewed literature converges on a cluster of enabling conditions rather than a single cause: high youth unemployment, weak legislation, constrained legitimate economic opportunity, and the presence of a technically skilled but under-employed workforce. Countries combining these features - a capable technical talent pool with few legal outlets for that talent - have repeatedly emerged as significant sources of financially motivated cybercrime, including fraud, phishing and business email compromise.

Political conditions compound these socio-economic drivers. Several studies describe cybercriminal ecosystems that have developed under conditions of explicit or implicit state tolerance, producing what the legal literature terms refer to as “safe havens”. Where the jurisdiction of international enforcement is blocked, or where local authorities lack either the capacity or the political will to act against cybercriminal activity operating on their territory. For a victim-country's law enforcement a safe haven in a different country is a geographic dead end. Regardless of how precisely an investigation can trace an attack back to a physical location,

the case cannot proceed if the state where such haven is located is unwilling to cooperate. This is a reminder that the geography of cybercrime is not purely technical or economic challenge; it is also a question of sovereignty and political will.

5. When the Virtual Becomes Physical - The case of Scam Compounds in Southeast Asia

The most striking illustration of how cybercrime's geography can reassert itself in starkly physical form is the network of “scam compound” operations that have grown across Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025; Lazarus et al., 2025). These operations specialize in large-scale online investment and romance fraud – widely known as “pig butchering” or *sha zhu pan* – and represent a distinctive organizational model. A cybercrime conducted from real, often fortified compounds, staffed in significant part by trafficking victims held under coercive conditions.

The scale involved is considerable. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimated in 2023 that approximately 220,000 people from dozens of countries were being held as forced labourers in scam centers in Cambodia alone, and related analysis has put global revenue from pig-butcherings scams at roughly USD 63.9 billion in 2023, with Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos identified as principal operational centers (USIP, 2024). US losses to these schemes in 2024 have been conservatively estimated at USD 5 billion, a 42 percent year-on-year increase, with much of the underlying compound infrastructure in the Mekong region reportedly controlled by organised Chinese criminal networks. Specific hotspots - including KK Park in Myanmar's Kayin State and the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Laos - have been identified in threat-intelligence and academic reporting as major operational hubs, exhibiting a hierarchical, quasi-military organisational structure with measurable performance targets and accountable supervisors (CYFIRMA, 2025).

What makes this model theoretically significant is the clean spatial separation it creates between three elements that classical crime geography usually locates in the same place:

- a) the perpetrators and coerced workers operating from isolated compounds in one region;
- b) the technical infrastructure that may be routed through servers or any other IT architectures (e.g. storages) anywhere in the world;
- c) the victims, who are concentrated in high-income, digitally connected countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Singapore, and India.

In this model, cyberspace does not dissolve geography, it stretches across three distinct and simultaneous locations, each governed by different legal systems, each posing distinct challenges for a single investigation.

6. Jurisdiction in a Borderless Space: Law Enforcement Responses

The compounding effect of virtual anonymity and multi-jurisdictional dispersion is the most visible in law enforcement practice. National responses, however well-resourced, run into a structural limit: sovereignty stops at the border, while crime does not. International bodies such as the Interpol and Europol play a critical role in bridging capability gaps between states (Tropina, 2023). Coordinated actions such as the Africa Cyber Surge operation illustrate both what multilateral cooperation can achieve and the degree to which such interventions typically fail to address the scale of the problem, given how fragmented data and intelligence-sharing remains across national agencies, private-sector actors, and international bodies.

At the legal-instrument level, the inconsistency between national legal frameworks and the limited reach of existing multilateral agreements, such as the Budapest Convention, has long been recognised as a structural weakness (Singh et al., 2024). A significant recent development is the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime (the Hanoi Convention), adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2024 and opened for signature in Hanoi in October 2025. With 74 signatory states as of May 2026, it is the first global legal instrument specifically designed to facilitate international cooperation on cybercrime enforcement and electronic evidence sharing. Its practical effect, however, will depend on ratification rates and on the willingness of signatory states to implement its provisions in good faith - the same lack of political will underlies the “safe haven” phenomenon discussed above. A parallel bibliometric analysis of the research field itself shows a marked shift over the past decade from traditional forensic methods toward machine learning, blockchain analysis, IoT forensics, and AI-driven policing tools, suggesting that technical capability is evolving faster than the legal and institutional frameworks meant to govern its use (IJRSI, 2025).

7. Conclusion: Toward a Geography of Cyberspace

The evidence reviewed here suggests a conclusion that might initially seem counter-intuitive: virtuality does not remove geography from cybercrime, it reorganises it. Anonymisation technologies decouple the apparent technical origin of an attack from the physical location of the people responsible, but they do not eliminate that physical location; they simply make it

harder to find and more likely to sit behind a border that investigators cannot cross. Empirical mapping efforts, whether based on expert surveys or technical attack data, consistently find offending clusters in specific countries and regions, shaped by socio-economic conditions, political tolerance, and the presence or absence of effective rule of law. At the extreme end of this spectrum, the Southeast Asian scam-compound model shows virtual crime becoming, in a sense, more geographically concentrated and physically fixed than many traditional forms of offending, precisely because a coerced physical workforce needs a physical location to operate from.

For criminology and for law enforcement training alike, these findings argue for treating cyberspace not as a placeless domain that has escaped geography, but as a new kind of geographic terrain, one with its own topology of safe havens, choke points, and concentration zones, layered on top of, rather than substituting for, physical territory. Three directions for further work follow this review. First, measurement itself needs further methodological development, since expert surveys and technical attack data each have significant limitations and a triangulated approach is needed to capture the offender side, the infrastructure side, and the victim side of geography simultaneously. Second, the conditions that allow geographically isolated, physically concentrated cybercrime operations to persist - weak governance, state tolerance, and regional isolation - deserve closer criminological attention as both a theoretical puzzle and a policy challenge. Third, the intersection between cybercrime and forced labour or human trafficking, most visible in the Southeast Asian case, remains under-studied and carries direct implications for victim protection and international law enforcement cooperation. No single country can address a form of crime whose geography is, by design, distributed across several of them at once.

Having understood this way, the technical tools of anonymisation discussed in this article do not remove geography from this terrain; they function as a kind of camouflage layered over it, requiring specific technical and investigative effort to see through, in a manner not unlike other forms of concealment long familiar to criminology - disguise, false identity documents, or the use of intermediaries - except operating at internet scale and speed.

The material reviewed here suggests that for a significant and growing share of contemporary crime, “place” needs to be understood as a plural and dynamic concept, a set of simultaneously relevant locations (offender, infrastructure, victim, and in some cases specific technical choke points) that may shift independently of one another over the course of a single criminal operation.

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CRIME IN NETWORKED SPACE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION

Abstract

The study examines how globalization and digitalization are transforming the spatial dynamics of crime and international criminal cooperation. Traditional geographically bound interpretations of crime are increasingly challenged by networked criminal activities in which offenders, victims, digital infrastructures, and financial transactions may be located in different countries simultaneously. The paper describes this phenomenon through the concept of the “spatial fluidity” of crime.

The study argues that this transformation fundamentally reshapes law enforcement operations, placing growing emphasis on information flow, rapid coordination, and the effective use of international cooperation channels such as Europol, Interpol, and the SIRENE network. It also highlights that modern law enforcement effectiveness increasingly depends on competencies such as adaptability, communication, digital awareness, and decision-making in a networked environment. The paper concludes that the “new map” of crime is defined less by geographical borders and more by connectivity and information exchange, requiring new approaches in both policing practice and law enforcement training.

Keywords: spatial fluidity of crime, transnational crime, international criminal cooperation, cybercrime, criminal geography, law enforcement cooperation, information flow, digitalization, competencies in law enforcement, networked policing

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, globalization and digitalization have fundamentally altered the way crime operates across space. Earlier approaches to the geography of crime were primarily based on crimes tied to a physical location, where the scene of the crime and the area of impact could usually be clearly defined. Today, however, crime increasingly manifests itself in a complex,

networked environment where the perpetrator, the digital infrastructure, and the harmful effects are often linked to different countries or geographical spaces.

The study describes this phenomenon using the concept of “spatial fluidity,” which refers to the fact that crime is increasingly less tied to stable geographic locations. Digital technologies enable perpetrators to exert influence in other countries without a physical presence, while their activities may simultaneously affect multiple jurisdictions. This process also creates new challenges for law enforcement agencies, as traditional, territory-based policing alone is increasingly insufficient to address rapidly evolving forms of crime that operate along networked lines.

Domestic literature also points out that law enforcement operations increasingly depend on the effectiveness of international cooperation and the flow of information (Finszter, 2018; Vári, 2019). In line with this, international research emphasizes the primacy of networked operations, in which the role of physical space is partially pushed into the background (Castells, 2010; Sheptycki, 2007). Taken together, these approaches provide useful framework for interpreting contemporary forms of crime and international cooperation.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate how the spatial transformation of crime is reshaping the functioning of international criminal cooperation and what new competencies it demands of law enforcement actors. The study focuses on the speed of information flow, responsiveness, and coordination among different jurisdictions. The study argues that the effectiveness of modern law enforcement increasingly depends on the extent to which professionals are able to adapt the specific characteristics of the networked environment and effectively manage new forms of cooperation and information sharing.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach focused on analyzing the operational logic of international criminal cooperation and the specific characteristics of fake rental fraud schemes. The research does not aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of a specific case or organization, but rather to examine how the digital environment has transformed the functioning of international coordination, the role of information flow, and the expectations placed on professionals involved in cooperation.

The research is based on literature and document analysis. The primary criteria for selecting sources were scientific verifiability, practical relevance, a balance between domestic and international literature, and the topic’s direct connection to international criminal cooperation.

The crime-geographical approach to the topic provides an important theoretical framework for interpreting the functioning of networked and globalized crime (Mátyás, 2020). From the perspective of this study, this is particularly decisive in the analysis of coordination problems arising from the digital environment. László Bói's work illustrates the coordination difficulties of transnational crime through the forensic characteristics of itinerant crime (Bói, 2016). This clearly demonstrates that the problem of operations spanning multiple jurisdictions is not a new phenomenon, but the digital environment has significantly increased its speed and complexity. One of the starting points of the research is that digitization and networked operations have noticeably transformed not only the structure of criminal activity but also the operational logic of international criminal cooperation. The study therefore pays particular attention to examining the flow of information, coordination mechanisms, and the functioning of multi-jurisdictional cooperation. In the digital environment, the effectiveness of operational response is increasingly influenced by the rapid processing, structured management, and transmission of information through appropriate channels. This research interprets this operational logic through the lens of the intelligence-led policing approach (Manning, 2008), with particular attention to the fact that the role of analytical and coordination capabilities is continuously growing in modern international cooperation.

A limitation of this research is that it is primarily based on literature and document analysis; therefore, it does not include primary empirical data collection or statistical analysis. At the same time, it consciously strives to link the findings of the literature with practical operational logic.

The development of the researcher's perspective is also influenced by professional experience. The author previously served in a UN mission environment as an Interpol liaison officer in a multicultural (Ürmösné 2014) and international setting, and at the national level has worked for more than a decade and a half as a career staff member of the International Law Enforcement Cooperation Center. This background is reflected in the study's approach, particularly in the interpretation of issues related to coordination and operational logic.

3. The Transformation of the Spatial Nature of Crime in the Digital Age

For a long time, the spatial analysis of crime focused on phenomena tied to physical space (see, for example, the issue of itinerant crime /Bói 2016/). Classical approaches in criminal geography examined the spatial distribution of crimes, the formation of hotspots, and the spatial correlations of socio-economic factors, based on the assumption that crime can be linked to well-defined geographical units (Mátyás 2025).

Digitalization and globalization have gradually weakened this traditional assumption. In many cases, crime is detached from physical presence and manifests itself in a networked space where the location of the offense, the infrastructure, and the impact are spatially separated. International literature describes this change through the concept of the network society, in which social processes are increasingly organized along relational structures (Castells, 2010). According to approaches to transnational policing, law enforcement is increasingly carried out within cross-border, cooperation-based systems (Sheptycki, 2007).

Domestic law enforcement thinking also confirms that operational effectiveness increasingly depends on the quality of international cooperation and the speed of information flow (Finszter, 2018; Vári, 2019). In this context, space is no longer a static backdrop, but a factor that shapes operations. All of this justifies a reinterpretation of the concept of space in the study of crime. Alongside physical space, a network dimension emerges in which connections and the flow of information become decisive. Future directions in criminal geography therefore cannot be limited to the analysis of geographical locations but must also extend to the examination of the relational structures that determine the functioning of crime. These changes also help explain why the spatial dimensions of crime have become increasingly fluid in the digital environment.

4. The Spatial Fluidity of Crime

The transformation of the spatial understanding of crime stems not merely from the emergence of new phenomena, but from the deeper structural changes taking place in tandem with the increasing interconnectedness of social and economic processes.

In this context, crime can no longer be clearly linked to specific geographic locations but appears as a network of relationships in which the perpetrator, the victim, the infrastructure, and the impact operate in spatially separate yet interconnected ways.

In this study, this phenomenon is interpreted through the concept of “spatial fluidity”. The term refers to the fact that the spatial framework of crime is not fixed but constantly evolves in line with technological possibilities and available infrastructure. The digital environment allows the perpetrator to exert influence in another country without a physical presence, while data processing or communication is linked to other jurisdictions.

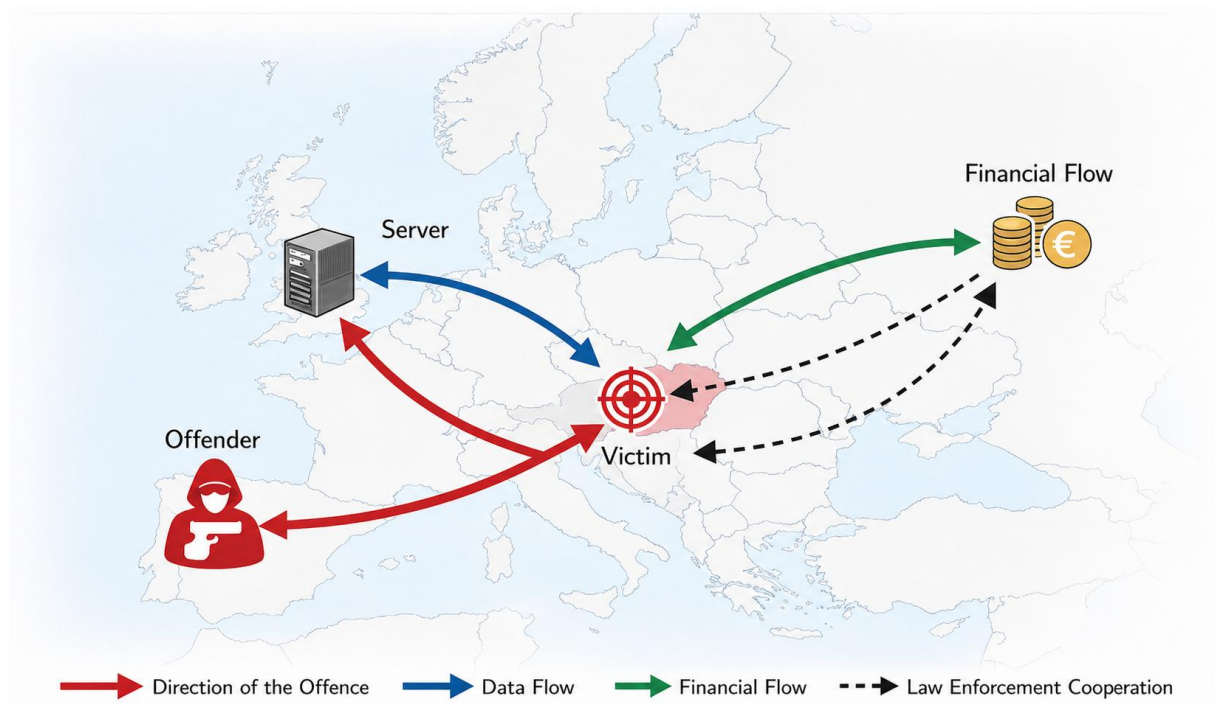


Figure 1: The spatial fluidity of crime in a transnational crime model

Author's own diagram

Figure 1. illustrates the practical interpretation of spatial fluidity, using a transnational (Ürmösne 2018) model to show the spatial separation of the perpetrator, the victim, the digital infrastructure, and the flow of funds. In such a structure, the “location” of the crime is difficult to determine.

4.1. Illustrative case study: international fake rental fraud

A practical example of spatial fluidity can be observed in international fake rental fraud schemes coordinated by Europol, in which perpetrators advertised non-existent or fraudulently offered properties on online platforms in order to obtain advance payments or security deposits from victims located in other countries. Operating from various countries, the perpetrators targeted victims abroad, while the related financial transactions crossed several jurisdictions. This case highlights that the commission of the crime, the deception, the movement of funds, and the occurrence of the loss take place in geographically separate locations yet constitute a unified criminal process requiring coordinated action by authorities in multiple countries (see Europol, 2024).

This fragmentation creates difficulties for jurisdiction, evidence collection, and operational response alike. International literature explains this phenomenon through the primacy of network logic, in which connections become more decisive than physical space (Castells,

2010). From a law enforcement perspective, this means that effectiveness increasingly depends on how quickly and effectively authorities can integrate into these networks and how they manage the flow of information. According to transnational law enforcement approaches, the management of crime is increasingly carried out within cooperative systems (Sheptycki, 2007). Domestic law enforcement thinking in Hungary also confirms the practical relevance of this perspective. The practice of international criminal cooperation shows that space is not merely a backdrop but a factor determining the possibilities for response (Finszter, 2018; Vári, 2019). Spatial fluidity is thus not merely a descriptive concept, but an interpretive framework that helps capture the functioning of modern crime. One consequence of this is that the territory-bound organizational principles of law enforcement are no longer sufficient on their own. The emphasis shifts to managing the flow of information, selecting channels of cooperation, and handling the time factor. At the same time, the significance of geographical distance is diminishing, while accessibility and points of connection are becoming decisive factors. Spatial fluidity is thus not only a challenge but also a framework for understanding modern crime. This approach provides the foundation for the analysis of the spatial dynamics of international criminal cooperation examined in the following chapter.

5. The Spatial Dimensions of International Criminal Cooperation

The spatial fluidity of crime is also transforming the way law enforcement operates. The traditional, territorially based law enforcement model—which operated within clearly defined jurisdictional boundaries—is proving increasingly inadequate in addressing transnational crime. In practice, law enforcement does not appear as an activity tied to a specific space, but rather as the operation of systems linking the institutions of multiple countries.

In practice, spatial factors increasingly influence how international cooperation is organized. The effectiveness of cooperation depends on how quickly connections are established between different jurisdictions and through which channels information flows. “Distance” in this sense is not a geographical but an operational category: it refers to how quickly information reaches the appropriate destination. International criminal cooperation is built on multiple channels operating in parallel. These operate according to different logics: they differ in terms of formalization, response time, and methods of information management. These differences stem from the type of information each system is designed to handle and the legal framework within which it was established.

Europol’s cooperation system, for example, provides structured information management suitable for comparing and analyzing data from multiple member states. In contrast, Interpol’s

global network offers broader coverage with different information-sharing mechanisms. Rapid information exchange systems operating within the European area provide further opportunities to support operational response.

Of particular importance in this context is the SIRENE (Supplementary Information Request at the National Entries) network, which is based on the second generation of the Schengen Information System (SIS II) and serves as the primary operational channel for the exchange of supplementary information between Member States.

Communication between SIRENE offices enables the rapid, targeted, and structured sharing of detailed information related to alerts in the SIS, thereby directly supporting the implementation of measures (e.g., warrants, arrests, entry bans, and handling hits related to stolen property). A distinctive feature of the system is that, despite its high degree of formalization, it is capable of ensuring short response times, thus bridging the gap between strategic data management and daily operational measures. In practice, this channel can be considered one of the fastest and most reliable tools for cooperation within the Schengen area.

In practice, these channels operate in a complementary manner. The experience of multi-country online fraud operations coordinated by Europol also shows that the key to effective action lies in the rapid selection of the appropriate cooperation channel and the timeliness of information flow.

When handling a specific case, authorities constantly assess which channel ensures the fastest and most reliable flow of information. This decision is a key element of the spatial dimension: finding the relevant connection is often more important than geographical proximity. The international literature explains this phenomenon by the growing importance of law enforcement networks, where efficiency is based on access to and management of information (Manning, 2008). According to the transnational policing approach, the relationships formed between authorities in different countries constitute a dynamic system that adapts to the specific characteristics of the case in question (Sheptycki, 2007). This is consistent with the domestic approach, which links the effectiveness of policing to the quality of cooperation (Finszter, 2018; Vári, 2019).

The spatial dimension in this context is twofold: on the one hand, there is physical space, which defines jurisdictions; on the other hand, the networked space through which information flows is becoming increasingly significant. The combination of these two dimensions requires constant adaptation and highlights that international criminal cooperation cannot be understood solely within legal or institutional frameworks.

All of this makes it clear that the transformation of spatial dimensions is placing not only the functioning of crime but also the competency expectations placed on law enforcement actors on a new footing, and highlights the need for further examination of this area.

6. The Role of Competencies in Law Enforcement Operating in a Networked Environment

The spatial fluidity of crime and the networked nature of international criminal cooperation impose fundamentally new competency requirements on law enforcement actors. A territorial mindset is increasingly being replaced by an approach based on managing relationships, information flows, and coordination across multiple jurisdictions.

In this environment, competence cannot be interpreted as narrowly defined specialized knowledge. It is becoming a set of skills that enables the rapid interpretation of information from multiple sources, the recognition of its relevance, and its transmission through the appropriate channels. The emphasis is shifting from static knowledge to adaptability, which is a fundamental prerequisite for operating in a networked environment.

The practice of international cooperation clearly demonstrates that effective communication is not merely a linguistic issue. The format, structure, and legal interpretability of information directly influence the speed and effectiveness of processing. Communication competence (Ürmösné 2012) therefore also encompasses the ability to select relevant information and transmit it in a targeted manner. The digital environment adds a further dimension to this competency framework. The emphasis is not solely on technical knowledge, but on the ability of law enforcement personnel to recognize the significance of digital elements and integrate them into operational and legal processes. This is particularly important in collaboration across different professional fields.

International literature explains this trend with the rise of information-led policing (Manning, 2008), while domestic research emphasizes the importance of coordinated and targeted operations (Kiss, 2019; Kovács, 2021). A common element is the growing importance of adaptability and the willingness to cooperate.

In a networked environment, decisions are often made under time pressure and based on incomplete information. This highlights the importance of skills that enable rapid yet well-founded decision-making. The spatial fluidity of crime thus transforms not only the operational environment but also the role of law enforcement actors. Effective operations increasingly rely on professionals who are able to navigate the networked space and connect effectively to collaborative systems. This also highlights the need for the development of these competencies to play a prominent role in law enforcement training.

7. The New Map of Crime – Concluding Remarks

The analysis shows that the spatial understanding of crime is changing substantially in the digital age. Crime can no longer be described solely as a phenomenon occurring in physical space, but rather manifests itself within a networked structure where the flow of information and systems of connections become decisive.

Based on the cases examined, it can be concluded that spatial fluidity is not merely a theoretical construct, but one of the defining characteristics of the operational functioning of modern crime. This transformation also affects the foundations of law enforcement operations. The practice of international criminal cooperation shows that effectiveness increasingly depends on finding the right points of connection and transmitting information in a timely manner. In this sense, space is not a backdrop but a factor that determines operations. The study also revealed a growing tension between legal frameworks and operational realities. While jurisdictions remain organized on a geographical basis, the logic of crime and information flow is increasingly network-based. This duality requires constant adaptation and highlights the importance of cooperative frameworks.

In this environment, the importance of competencies becomes decisive. The prerequisite for effective operation is not merely an institutional or technical issue, but the ability of law enforcement actors to interpret and manage the specific characteristics of the networked space. This involves the rapid processing of information, the selection of appropriate channels, and the coordination of various perspectives. The “new map” of crime can thus not be interpreted as a map in the geographical sense, but rather as a dynamic system of relationships. Understanding this not only enables a more accurate description of phenomena but can also contribute to the renewal of law enforcement thinking and training.

The spatial transformation of crime remains an evolving issue that will likely require further interpretation as digital technologies continue to develop.

The future of law enforcement is taking shape in a space defined not by borders, but by network connectivity and the dynamics of information flow.

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF DIGITAL DEVIANCES: MAPPING DESTRUCTIVE ONLINE INFLUENCES AS SPATIAL RISKS IN CHILD PROTECTION AND CRIMINAL LAW

Abstract

The article examines the complex nature of social conflicts of interest emerging within the modern digital environment, specifically focusing on the tension between freedom of information and the necessity of safeguarding minors. Adopting a crime-geographical perspective, the study analyzes how cyberspace functions as a virtually borderless, non-physical territory where destructive influences cluster and spread, effectively reshaping the spatial patterns of juvenile victimization and creating virtual "hot-spots" of risk. The author analyzes the evolving landscape of digital threats, including cyberbullying, incitement to suicide, and the involvement of minors in illegal activities through social networks. Central to the study is the evaluation of current criminal law mechanisms designed to implement the child's fundamental right to protection from destructive information influence. The research highlights gaps in existing legislation, focusing on the legal-geographical challenges of cross-border enforcement, and explores the challenges of imposing criminal liability for illegal activities in the information space. By examining national legal frameworks, the paper proposes enhancements to legal instruments to better address the psychological and physical risks posed to children. The study concludes that a balanced approach, combining rigorous criminal law enforcement with proactive digital literacy of children and their parents, is essential to resolve the identified conflict of interests and ensure a safe information environment for the younger generation.

Keywords: child's rights, criminal law, digital environment, destructive digital influence, destructive information, crime geography, virtual spatiality, social conflict.

1. Introduction

The Russian Federation (hereinafter referred to as the RF) continues to implement measures within the framework of the Decade of Childhood, as declared by the Decree of the President of the RF No. 240 dated 29 May 2017 for the period 2018–2027. Public authorities at both the

federal and regional levels annually plan and execute various activities aimed at health preservation, education, and upbringing of children, with a focus on the special protection of children (Ürmösné 2018) with disabilities or those without parental care. These efforts fully correlate with measures to protect fundamental children's rights undertaken in other countries (Žiobienė, 2026; Hugues, 2024; Kapsalyamov et al., 2019). A specific block of these plans is dedicated to child safety, including the "creation of a safe information space for children" (Order of the Government of the RF No. 122-r dated 23 January 2021).

From the viewpoint of crime geography, this digital environment cannot be detached from physical territory, as the spatial distribution of internet access, local socio-demographic factors, and regional policing capabilities directly influence where the real-world consequences of virtual threats manifest.

2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this article is to examine changes in criminal legislation and assess their impact on the creation of a safe information space for children, as well as to propose effective measures to protect minors from destructive information influence by contextualizing cyberspace as a distinct geographical layer of criminal exposure.

3. Research Methods

The research methodology employed includes content analysis, a review of current literature, and an evaluation of public opinion surveys regarding child safety in the information space.

4. Findings

The concept of "information space" is defined as a specific man-made environment where a particular sphere of human activity unfolds. It should be clarified that in the digital environment, this has come to be known as "cyberspace"; however, since there is still no universal international definition of this concept, Russian regulatory legal acts utilize the term "information space" (Mitin and Lebedev, 2024). In contemporary crime geography, cyberspace is increasingly treated as an extension of the traditional physical environment, requiring new models of environmental criminology to understand how illicit nodes and digital street corners attract vulnerable populations.

Experts note a duality in current trends: on one hand, the extensively increasing flows of freely circulating information, and on the other, a decline in the quality of information accumulated within the information space (Kobets, 2012). Of particular concern are the growing

"possibilities of achieving goals through negative informational influence on the individual and human lifestyle, leading to the collapse of the state and the degradation of both the individual and society as a whole" (Dugenets and Pavlova, 2023). Children constitute a group with the weakest psychological defense and possess a low capacity to resist current negative social influences in the information space (Makushkin and Chibisova, 2017).

The scientific literature suggests classifying information on various grounds, for instance: new or updated; created or reproduced; defamatory, harmful, negative, or destructive; reliable or unreliable (false, knowingly false, fakes, deepfakes, disinformation) (Ürmösné–Nyitrai 2021); distorted or synthetic; prohibited; and sensationalist (the concept of "shock content" was introduced in early 2024) (Napso, 2024).

Specifically regarding children, Russian legislation has introduced the term "information causing harm to the health and (or) development of children." Under Article 5 of the Federal Law No. 436-FZ dated 29 December 2010 "On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development," such information is divided into two categories: information prohibited for distribution among children, and information restricted for distribution among children of certain age categories.

For comparison, Article 37.1 of the Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 2570-XII dated 19 November 1993 "On the Rights of the Child" does not merely establish a list of information deemed harmful to the health and development of children; first and foremost, it proclaims the right of every child "to protection from information harmful to his or her health and development". The latter is legally defined by the Belarusian legislator as "information capable of exerting a negative influence on the health, physical, moral, and spiritual development of children of a certain age category".

The refinement of the criminal law mechanism for implementing a child's right to protection from destructive information influence is hindered by the lack of established criteria for categorizing information distributed via the Internet as "destructive" as well as the periodic expansion of the list of information prohibited for distribution among children. This legal vacuum creates significant jurisdictional challenges for crime geographers and law enforcement, as the source of destructive content often originates from external territorial jurisdictions, making localized child protection structurally vulnerable.

Analysis of criminal law norms allows for the categorization of the following information distributed via the Internet as destructive (Table 1):

Table 1: Prohibited Information in the RF Criminal Code

Types of Prohibited Information	Criminal Code of the RF
Information inciting suicide	Points "a" and "d" of Part 3 of Article 110.1
Information inciting the consumption of drugs and other hazardous products	Point "d" of Part 2 and Point "a" of Part 3 of Article 230
Information inducing engagement in prostitution, vagrancy, or begging	Point "b" of Part 2 of Article 151
Information inciting violence against animals	Point "g" of Part 2 of Article 245
Information inducing a minor to participate in the circulation of pornographic materials	Point "b" of Part 3 of Article 242, Point "g" of Part 2 of Article 242.1, Point "g" of Part 2 of Article 242.2

Author's own work

Meanwhile, the criminal law has already criminalized acts involving the dissemination of destructive information in public speeches, publicly displayed works, mass media, or information and telecommunications networks, including the Internet, which are not reflected in Part 2 of Article 5 of the Federal Law No. 436-FZ dated 29 December 2010. These include:

Point "b" of Part 2 of Article 150 of the Criminal Code of the RF – involvement of a minor in the commission of crimes;

Point "v" of Part 2 of Article 151.2 of the Criminal Code of the RF – involvement of a minor in the commission of actions that pose a danger to the minor's life (but do not constitute incitement to suicide or involvement of the minor in the commission of a crime or antisocial actions).

Furthermore, by Federal Law No. 420-FZ dated 17 November 2025, the incitement of a minor to sabotage (diversionary) activities was criminalized as an aggravating circumstance in Part 2 of Article 281.1 of the Criminal Code of the RF, although the possibility of using the Internet for this purpose is not explicitly specified. Conversely, Federal Law No. 59-FZ dated 5 April 2021 established liability for using the Internet for the rehabilitation of Nazism (Point "v" of Part 2 of Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code of the RF); despite its clear destructiveness, this has not been reflected in the list of prohibited information harmful to the health and development of children. It should also be noted that the incitement of minors to participate in gambling is not prohibited in any way, despite its obvious danger to the moral development of

children (Alishina and Chugunov, 2024).

From crime geographical perspective, destructive online content behaves like an invasive spatial risk factor. While the servers and physical creators of this content might be geographically concentrated in specific macro-regions or external jurisdictions, their digital networks operate across virtual borders, mapping out new topologies of juvenile radicalization and vulnerability that completely decouple crime from traditional physical boundaries.

Thus, it is possible to note the situational approach of the Russian legislator towards developing novel legal provisions directly concerning the protection of children from destructive information influence. In such conditions of heterogeneous legal regulation and uneven legal prohibitions, the role of the family and parents remains paramount in shielding children from content that negatively affects their health and development.

Despite the difficulties of ensuring full protection for children against hazardous content on the Internet, the majority of parents take measures to ensure their children's safety. A study conducted by VCIOM revealed that 26% of respondents use preventive conversations to discuss Internet risks with their children. "Parental Control" software ranks second in popularity (24%), allowing parents to monitor their children's online activity. Furthermore, 20% of parents restrict access to digital resources, 10% review search history, and 5% install pop-up blocking software. Thus, most parents prefer "soft" protection methods, utilizing technical tools instead of rigid prohibitions. It is worth noting that 23% of respondents take no measures to protect children from undesirable information (VCIOM, 2026). These data underscore the need for increased awareness and the development of additional educational programs for parents and children regarding safe behavior in the information space.

The problem of protecting children from destructive information influence is proposed to be addressed through legal measures, primarily by developing conceptual documents. A number of authors justify the need to adopt a "Concept for Preventing the Negative Influence of Social Networks on Minors" at the national level (Tanaeva and Agadzhanov, 2023), or a "Concept of Human Rights" at the supranational level within the regional cooperation of the Union State of Belarus and Russia (Kuzmenkova, 2024), reflecting, among other things, the foundations of individual information security.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above, we propose that the plan of main activities carried out within the framework of the Decade of Childhood for the period until 2027 should include a dedicated measure for the development of legislation protecting children from destructive information influence.

Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of the identified gaps in current national legislation and the uneven protection of children from destructive information influence should be conducted. Future initiatives must integrate geographical criminology approach, ensuring that legal frameworks account for the fluid, borderless nature of cyberspace while providing localized, territorial safeguards to effectively intercept destructive digital paths before they manifest as actual physical crimes in local communities.

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**THE SCHOOL GUARD SYSTEM IN HUNGARY IN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON: A
GEOGRAPHICAL AND CRIMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF A UNIQUE MODEL**

Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the Hungarian school guard system from the perspective of the geography of crime within an international comparative framework. The Hungarian school guard service, introduced in 2020, is a model that ensures permanent school presence through employees of the police with a special legal status, and is unique on a global scale. The research compares the school safety systems of nine countries — including the United States, Canada, Romania, Germany, Turkey, and Australia — with particular attention to geographical dimensions, the differing challenges of urban and rural environments, and spatial inequalities. As an empirical case study, the school guard system of Somogy County is examined on the basis of a questionnaire survey (n=47 school guards, n=17 institutions), revealing the specific effects of a small-village settlement structure and low population density. The results indicate that the Hungarian model represents a 'middle path' on the international spectrum: it possesses stronger competences than Western European liaison programmes, yet avoids the criminalizing effects of the American SRO model. The study highlights the decisive role of settlement and population geographical factors in shaping school safety.

Keywords: school guard service; school safety; geography of crime; international comparison; School Resource Officer; Somogy County; spatial inequalities

1. Introduction

The prevention and management of school violence is one of the most pressing public safety challenges of the 21st century, requiring examination in geographical, social, and criminological dimensions alike. Aggression manifested in public education institutions — whether physical assault, verbal harassment, or cyberbullying — is not merely a pedagogical problem but a complex phenomenon closely linked to settlement and population geographical conditions, socioeconomic background, and the law enforcement culture of the given country (Na and Gottfredson, 2013; Nance, 2016).

The international literature has devoted increasing attention to the question of police presence in schools over the past decade. In the United States, the so-called School Resource Officer (SRO) programme has been in operation since the 1990s, yet its effectiveness and side effects — particularly the 'school-to-prison pipeline' phenomenon — generate intense scholarly debate (ACLU, 2024; Fisher and Hennessy, 2016). In Europe, by contrast, technological solutions and external police patrolling are preferred, while certain countries — including Romania and Hungary — have established distinctive, state-organized school safety models.

The introduction of the Hungarian school guard system in September 2020 represents a unique experiment on the international stage: a model was created in which specially trained employees of the police with a distinctive legal status ensure school order through permanent presence. The aim of the present study is to analyse this model from the perspective of the geography of crime, within an international comparative framework, with particular attention to geographical aspects — the differing challenges of urban and rural environments, questions of spatial distribution, and regional differences.

The main research questions are: (1) What position does the Hungarian school guard model occupy among international systems? (2) How do settlement and population geographical factors influence the operation of the school guard system? (3) What lessons do the different international approaches offer for domestic practice?

2. Theoretical Background: The School Guard System in Hungary

2.1. Legal Framework and Institutional Background

The institution of the school guard service was established by the National Assembly through Act LXXIV of 2020, which, in order to eliminate and prevent school violence, amended a total of six laws and created three new legal instruments. Section 10/C of Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police (Rtv.) defines the competences of school guards, which comprise specific powers situated between those of professional police officers and those of private security personnel.

The school guard is an employee in a labour relationship with the body established for the performance of general police duties, who qualifies as a person performing a public function under the Criminal Code. Their competences include requesting information, ordering and identifying persons who endanger security, detaining persons caught in the act until the arrival of the police, averting emergencies, and sealing off the premises of the institution. As coercive instruments, they may apply physical constraint, handcuffs, chemical agents, and a police baton (Ministry of the Interior Decree 27/2020 [VII.17.]).

2.2. Training System

School guards undergo a 120-hour basic training course comprising three modules: (1) a pedagogical and child psychology module, (2) a crime prevention and conflict resolution module, and (3) a law enforcement preparation and practice module (Ministry of the Interior Decree 28/2020 [VII.17.]). The training is supplemented by additional continuing education every five years, supported by the School Guard Identity Programme. This structured training system constitutes a significant distinguishing feature of the Hungarian model compared to international practice, where the specialized preparation of school-based police officers is frequently ad hoc (Theriot, 2009; Martinez-Prather et al., 2016).

2.3. Organizational Structure and Governance

The school guard service is directed at the national level by the School Partnership Division (IPO) of the Criminal Directorate of the National Police Headquarters (ORFK), with the involvement of county coordinators and local coordinators. The hierarchical structure of the system and the SharePoint-based daily reporting obligation ensure centralized control, which also differs from the decentralized American SRO model (Canady et al., 2012).

2.4. Development of the System in Figures

The system demonstrates dynamic growth: in September 2020, 504 school guards commenced service in 491 institutions, while by January 2025 this number had risen to 830 school guards and 933 institutions, reaching an 89% staffing level. From 1st January 2025, the scope of authority was extended to children's homes, daytime child supervision, and camping activities for persons under 18 (Section 287/C, Paragraph [12] of the Act on the Service Status of Professional Members of Law Enforcement Agencies).

3. International Overview: A Comparative Analysis of School Safety Models

3.1. The North American SRO Model

In the United States, the School Resource Officer programme is the best-known model of police presence in schools, coordinated by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). SROs are sworn police officers who operate in a 'triad' role: simultaneously as educators, mentors, and law enforcement officers (Canady et al., 2012; Finn and McDevitt, 2005). An SRO is present at least once a week in more than 42% of American schools (RAND Corporation, 2024).

The effectiveness of the SRO model, however, is highly contested. Some studies suggest that it reduces violent offences in schools (Na and Gottfredson, 2013), while other research has demonstrated that it dramatically increases arrests for low-level, subjectively assessed offences — for example, 'disorderly conduct' (ACLU, 2024). Within the framework of the so-called 'school-to-prison pipeline' phenomenon, African-American, Latino, and Indigenous students, as well as students with disabilities, come into contact with the criminal justice system to a disproportionate extent on account of school-related conduct (Nance, 2016; Fisher and Hennessy, 2016). In the 2017–2018 academic year, African-American students constituted 15.1% of the student population but accounted for 31.6% of school-based arrests (IDRA, 2024). The Canadian experience is particularly noteworthy from the perspective of the geography of crime. In Toronto, Ottawa, and the Peel Region, SRO programmes were discontinued in 2017 owing to their negative impact on marginalised groups, following which reports emerged of the reappearance of weapons, knives, and gang activity (Szabó, 2023). By contrast, Edmonton and Vancouver relaunched their programmes after a temporary suspension, supplementing them with trauma-informed training (CBC News, 2026).

3.2. European Models: Divergent Philosophies

The European approach differs markedly from the North American one. In the western part of the continent — in France, Germany, and the Czech Republic — permanent police presence in schools is not employed. The establishment of security relies primarily on technological tools (camera systems, artificial intelligence-supported surveillance systems, access control), external police patrolling, and cybersecurity education (Europe School and Campus Security Market, 2025; ENISA, 2024).

In Germany, the Hamburg-based Cop4U programme (2008–) employs 238 professional police officers as liaison officers alongside schools; however, Greve's (2024) research demonstrated that mere presence is insufficient — the programme exhibits weak interaction with students,

which diminishes its effectiveness. This represents an important lesson for the Hungarian model, in which active engagement is emphasized alongside permanent presence.

Romania established the Poliția Siguranța Școlară (School Safety Police) organization in September 2020, which delegates professional police officers to school districts. The Romanian model does not provide permanent school presence but rather district-based supervision, intensive patrolling, and prevention campaigns (MAI, 2025). In the 2024–2025 academic year, a 27% decrease in school-related offences was reported, with violent incidents declining by more than 30%.

Turkey employs a four-category, risk-based system in which schools are classified according to security ratings and accordingly receive a plainclothes police officer, a security guard, or both (Szabó, 2023). This differentiated approach enables rational resource allocation but lacks the Hungarian model's permanent, personal presence.

3.3. The Australian Multi-Layered System

Australia's technology-centred approach is closer to European models than to the North American one. In the state of Queensland, a multi-layered system operates: the School Based Police Officer (SBPO), the School Support Officer (SSO), and the Adopt-a-Cop volunteer programme (1985–) complement one another in ensuring safety (Fajkis, 2023). In New South Wales, School Liaison Police (SLP) liaison officers conduct educational programmes and collaborate closely with the teaching staff. AI-supported camera systems capable of real-time weapon detection and automatic emergency alerts are becoming increasingly widespread in Australian schools (Omnilert, 2025).

3.4. The Uniqueness of the Hungarian Model on the International Stage

On the basis of the comparative analysis, it can be established that the Hungarian school guard system achieves a unique synthesis: it combines the permanent presence principle of the North American SRO model with a centralized, state-employed structure, while deliberately limiting the scope of authority. The Hungarian school guard is not a professional police officer (unlike the Romanian, American, or Australian models) but is more than a private security guard — possessing a distinctive, 'middle-path' legal status. The standardized 120-hour training, incorporating pedagogical and psychological modules, also distinguishes it from most international models, where specialized preparation is frequently absent or ad hoc.

The Hungarian situation is also distinctive in terms of the geographical dimension. Whereas in the United States and Australia the urban–rural dichotomy manifests primarily in the

availability of security technology and police response times, in Hungary, settlement-structural conditions — particularly the small-village character and areas lacking urban centres — directly influence the organization of the school guard network. The absence of any system in Bulgaria and Serbia suggests that, within the Central and Eastern European region, the Hungarian initiative is pioneering in nature.

4. Somogy County Case Study: Spatial Characteristics and Empirical Results

4.1. Geographical-Demographic Context

Somogy County is situated in the southern part of the country, in the Southern Transdanubia region, bordering Baranya and Tolna counties. The spatially relevant characteristics of the county from the perspective of the geography of crime are as follows: its population in 2022 was 293,470, constituting a mere 3.06% of the national population (14th among the counties). The population density of 48 persons/km² is the lowest among the counties, which fundamentally determines the operational conditions of the school guard system.

The settlement structure is unfavourable: the average population of the 246 settlements is merely 1,193. The small-village character is particularly typical of Inner Somogy — the population of 128 settlements does not reach 500. The proportion of urban population is 51.5%, which falls well short of the national average of 70.16%; thus, Somogy is functionally a county lacking urban centres. In the county seat, Kaposvár, 59,397 people reside (20.2% of the county's population), in the further 15 towns 91,775 (31.27%), while 48.53% of the population lives in villages and large villages.

This settlement-geographical background creates specific challenges for the school guard system: the numerous small settlements result in dispersed service locations, transport distances are greater, and the student populations of individual schools are lower than in urban areas.

4.2. Educational Trends and the Context of the School Guard Service

The number of primary schools in Somogy County decreased by 4.48% from the 2020/2021 academic year to the 2023/2024 academic year (from 134 to 128), exceeding the national decline of 1.69%. The number of teachers fell by 4.81% (from 2,369 to 2,255), likewise surpassing the national decrease of 3.52%. The number of students per teacher increased by 3.37%, compared to the national rise of 1.73%. These data indicate that teacher workload in Somogy County is growing more rapidly than the national average, which renders the reinforcing role of the school guard service all the more significant.

The development of the Somogy County school guard system mirrors the national dynamic: in September 2020, 45 school guards commenced service; by 2022, this number had decreased to 37 (the low point), before rising to 57 by January 2025. The number of participating institutions grew from 36 (2021/2022) to 63 (2024/2025). A noteworthy demographic feature is that the proportion of males among the Somogy school guard personnel is approximately 75%, compared to the national 50–50% distribution, and the proportion of those under 30 is twice the national average.

4.3. Methodology and Results of the Empirical Research

The research was based on a questionnaire survey conducted among two target groups: (1) school guards of Somogy County (n=47) and (2) educational institutions participating in the programme (n=17 out of 62, a 27.4% response rate). The questionnaires were prepared using Google Forms, supplemented by statistical data from the National Police Headquarters (ORFK) and the Somogy County Police Headquarters.

Satisfaction and working conditions. The vast majority of school guards are satisfied (20 individuals) or highly satisfied (17 individuals) with their position. The training courses were rated as very useful by 27 and as useful by 11 respondents. Thirty-five respondents expressed complete satisfaction with the professional support of their immediate supervisors.

Sense of security. Of the 47 respondents, 42 perceive their school as safe or completely safe. Thirty-eight respondents consider the school guard service to contribute to school safety; 30 perceive significant improvement, and 17 perceive slight improvement since its introduction.

Incidents and interventions. The frequency of incidents is moderate: 22 respondents intervene once or twice a month, 8 several times a week, 4 daily, while 6 have experienced no situation requiring intervention at all. The most common type of incident is verbal aggression (encountered by all respondents), followed by physical aggression (26 respondents). Suspicion of drug or alcohol use arose in only a single case.

Quality of relationships. The relationship with students was rated as good by 20 respondents and as excellent by another 20 — not a single respondent rated it as poor. Thirty-six respondents perceive the support of the teaching staff as good or excellent. The relationship with parents a more mixed picture: although the majority (30 respondents) reported positive experiences, extremely low ratings also appeared.

Preparedness gaps. The research uncovered a critical area: 26 respondents do not feel prepared to deal with students struggling with mental health problems, which draws attention to one of

the most significant challenges of our time. In addition, 11 respondents signal uncertainty in the area of physical conflicts, and 9 in the recognition of drug and alcohol use.

Institutional feedback. Among the 17 responding institutions, 35.3% perceive significant improvement and 29.4% perceive improvement in safety since the appearance of the school guard. An increase in student discipline was indicated by 76.5% — not a single institution reported deterioration. As the most important preventive factor, 9 schools identified effective communication, while 2 schools named the deterrent effect of the school guard's mere presence. All responding institutions would recommend the deployment of school guards to other schools.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Positioning the Hungarian Model

On the basis of the comparative analysis conducted, the Hungarian school guard system occupies a unique position in the international field. The model unites three characteristics whose combination is found nowhere else: (1) a legal status integrated into the police organization but not that of a professional police officer; (2) standardized, specialized training incorporating pedagogical and psychological modules; (3) permanent, personal presence in educational institutions.

The Hungarian model avoids the pitfalls of the American SRO model. The school guard does not possess the power of arrest or a firearm, thereby minimizing the risk of the 'school-to-prison pipeline' — the phenomenon that in the United States leads to the systematic criminalization of minority students (ACLU, 2024; Nance, 2016). At the same time, the competences of the Hungarian model exceed those of Western European liaison programmes (such as the Hamburg Cop4U), ensuring the capacity for effective intervention.

5.2. The Significance of the Geographical Dimension

The Somogy County case study clearly demonstrates that settlement and population geographical factors play a decisive role in the functioning of school safety systems. The small-village settlement structure, low population density, and the character of areas lacking urban centres create specific challenges: the dispersed service locations, greater transport distances, and smaller school units require a different type of organization than the concentrated institutional system of the urban environment.

This observation is consistent with the findings of the international literature. Rural schools, owing to geographical isolation and limited resources, face different types of security challenges than urban institutions: longer police response times, limited availability of mental

health services, and more constrained infrastructure (Ürmösné–Kovács 2022) all influence the level of safety (Agile Education Marketing, 2024; RAND Corporation, 2024).

5.3. Recommendations

On the basis of the analysis, the following recommendations are formulated:

- (1) Spatial differentiation: drawing on the risk-based categorisation of the Turkish model, it would be worthwhile to adapt the resource allocation of the Hungarian school guard system to settlement-geographical characteristics. In small-village areas, alternative solutions — for example, a 'district school guard' serving multiple institutions — could enhance efficiency.
- (2) Expansion of mental health training: the most critical finding of the empirical research is that the majority of school guards do not feel prepared to deal with students struggling with mental health problems. An expansion of the psychological module of the 120-hour basic training and the introduction of regular supervision are warranted.
- (3) Continuous monitoring of international experience: the Canadian example — where the discontinuation of the programme led to a dramatic deterioration of the situation — and the experience of the German Cop4U — where passive presence proved insufficient — both offer important lessons for the Hungarian system.
- (4) Inter-county comparative research: the present study focuses on Somogy County; it would be necessary to extend the investigation to other counties with differing settlement structures (for example, Budapest, Pest County, Hajdú-Bihar) so that spatial differences can be systematically explored.
- (5) Incorporation of the perspectives of students and parents: owing to legal constraints, the present research could not directly examine the opinions of students; in future research — with appropriate ethical approvals — this perspective must be addressed.

Overall, the Hungarian school guard system has demonstrated its viability over five years of operation. Placing the model in an international context highlights the fact that there is no universal recipe for the establishment of school safety — the solutions of individual countries are shaped by the local legal framework, law enforcement traditions, social expectations, and not least by geographical conditions. The Hungarian approach, which combines permanent presence with limited competences and targeted training, offers an instructive model for the countries of the region as well.

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Regulations

- Act LXXIV of 2020 on certain legislative amendments necessary for the elimination and prevention of school violence.
- Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police (Rtv.), Section 10/C.
- Ministry of the Interior Decree 27/2020 (VII.17.) on school guards.
- Ministry of the Interior Decree 28/2020 (VII.17.) on the training of school guards.
- National Police Headquarters (ORFK) Instruction 19/2020 (IX.10.) on the rules governing the performance of school guard duties.

News from the world of the Hungarian and international criminal geography

Call for publication proposal

The International Criminal Geographical Association is announcing an essay competition. The essay may cover any sub-topic within the topic of criminal geography, with the maximum of 20,000 keystrokes including spaces, footnotes and bibliography.

The best essays will be published in the scientific Criminal Geographical Journal by the organizers.

The essays have to be sent to the organizers to the following email address: mszabolcs1975@gmail.com.

Deadline for submission: 30 October 2026

The essays will be judged by an international jury.

Evaluation criteria:

- professional standard
- readability and appropriate grammar

The organizer committee

Dr. Szabolcs Mátyás Ph.D. (chairman of the organising committee), Dr. Máté Sivadó Ph.D., Dr. Miklós Tihanyi Ph.D., Dr. Vince Vári Ph.D., Ürmösné Dr. Gabiella Simon Ph.D., Dr. Krisztina Keller Ph.D., Dr. Dragana Čvorović Ph.D., Dr. László Bói Ph.D., Dr. Velibor Lalic Ph.D., Dr. Krasnova, A. Kristina Ph.D.

Felhívás
az International Criminal Geographical Association
VII. Nemzetközi Bűnözésföldrajzi Konferenciájára

*Biztonság térben és időben:
Hogyan köti össze a bűnözésföldrajz a tudományt a gyakorlattal?*

Tisztelt Érdeklődők!

Az International Criminal Geographical Association hatodik alkalommal rendez nemzetközi bűnözésföldrajzi konferenciát. Szeretettel várjuk egyetemi oktatók, rendészettudományi kutatók és hallgatók előadásait a bűnözésföldrajz területéről.

A konferencia célja, hogy a bűnözésföldrajzzal foglalkozó kutatók lehetőséget kapjanak a kutatásaik bemutatására, illetve a téma iránt érdeklődő oktatók, gyakorlati szakemberek és rendészeti hallgatók megismerhessék a bűnözésföldrajz legújabb hazai és nemzetközi kutatási eredményeit és módszereit.

Határidők:

Jelentkezés: 2026. november 1.

Absztrakt leadása: 2026. november 15. (1000-2000 karakter közötti magyar nyelvű absztrakt)

A konferencia időpontja: 2026. november 27. 12. 10.00 – 13.00 óra.

Helyszín: online (a Microsoft Teams rendszeren keresztül)

A konferencia nyelve: magyar

Az előadás időtartama: 15 perc + 5 perc diszkusszió

A konferencia résztvevőinek lehetőséget biztosítunk, hogy az előadásuk anyaga angol vagy magyar nyelven ISBN számmal ellátott, lektorált, elektronikus konferenciakötetben jelenhessen meg. A szervezők és a szekcióvezetők javaslata alapján kiválasztott tanulmányok a *Criminal Geographical Journal* vagy a *Bűnözésföldrajzi Közlemények* lektorált folyóiratokban kerülnek publikálásra.

Kérjük, hogy a részvételi szándékát az mszabolcs1975@gmail.com címen 2026. november 1-éig jelezze.

A konferencián való részvétel és a konferenciakötetben való megjelenés ingyenes, ám regisztrációhoz kötött!

A konferencia szervezőbizottsága:

Dr. Mátyás Szabolcs Ph.D. (a szervezőbizottság elnöke), Dr. Bói László Ph.D., Dr. Farkas Johanna Ph.D., Ürmösné dr. Simon Gabriella Ph.D., Dr. Keller Krisztina Ph.D., Dr. Németh Kornél Ph.D., Dr. Kiss Tibor Ph.D., Dr. Sivadó Máté Ph.D., Dr. Tihanyi Miklós Ph.D., Dr. Vári Vince Ph.D., Prof. dr. Bujdosó Zoltán Ph.D., Prof. dr. Sallai János Ph.D., Dr. Szabados György Ph.D., Villányi Tamás, Dr. Cielešky Péter Ph.D., Bélai Gábor, Dr. Nyitrai Endre Ph.D., Dr. Nemerkenyi Zsombor Ph.D.

Tisztelettel:

Dr. habil. Mátyás Szabolcs Ph.D.
egyetemi docens
a szervezőbizottság elnöke

Dear Readers,

The organizers are delighted to announce, that numerous entries were received for the Hungarian-language essay competition announced by the International Criminal Geographical Association.

The results of the competition are as follows:

1st place: **Alexandra Kovács-Sulyok** (University of Debrecen)

2nd place: **Alexandra Kővári** (János Kodolányi University)

3rd place: **Vivien Farkasné Sármány** (University of Debrecen)

Congratulations to all winners!

———— o ————

On July 8, 2026, Police Lieutenant Colonel Dr. László Bói successfully defended his doctoral dissertation – with *summa cum laude* honors – at the Doctoral School of Economic and Regional Sciences of MATE (Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences). The dissertation was titled:

'A Criminogeographical Analysis of the Settlement Structure and Crime Conditions in Budapest, with Special Regard to the Capital's 8th District'

With this achievement, the member of our journal's editorial board becomes the sixth person in Hungary to earn a doctoral degree in the field of crime geography.

We extend our warmest congratulations on his successful defense!

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