Other ‘Roads to Nowhere’
Insights in the Journey to Crime

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Thought experiment

Other ‘Roads to Nowhere’

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Journey to crime

Source: Rossmo (2000, p. 120)
Knowledge gap (1)

JTC studies rely on local, intra-city police data

• Notable exceptions: Smith, Bond & Townsley (2009); Wiles & Costello (2000)

Consequences of using local, intra-city police data

• Full spectrum of crime trips not studied (cf. Hesseling, 1992)
  • Local and inbound crime trips included
  • Non-local (outbound) crime trips excluded
• Local geographic range (cf. Hesseling, 1992)
• Danger of circular arguments
Knowledge gap (2)

Long crime trips as outliers (Stangeland, 1998)

• “distance uncharacteristic of the distances being travelled by others in the sample” (Barker, 2000: 62-3)

• E.g. *inter alia* Clare, Fernandez, & Morgan, 2009; Fritzon, 2001; Hesseling, 1992b; Laukkanen, Santtila, Jern, & Sandnabba, 2008; Lundrigan & Czarnomski, 2006; Townsley & Sidebottom, 2010; Turner, 1969; Wikström, 1991)

Starting point of crime trip

• Registered legal address. Convenient, but …

• … transient and homeless people (cf. Rossmo, 2000)?

• … other reference points, e.g. pub or friend’s place (Stangeland, 1998; Van Daele, 2009; Wiles & Costello, 2000)

Ecological fallacy

• Individual distance decay v. aggregated distance decay (Rengert, Piquero & Jones, 1999; Van Koppen & De Keijser, 1997)
‘Other roads’ (1)

Wiles & Costello (2000)
- Non-criminal mobility increased – what about criminal mobility?
- Most crime trips are short, but long crime trips present
  - Directed towards known areas

Polisenska (2008)
- Long crime trips present
  - Directed towards unknown areas
  - Weekend cottages

Morselli & Royer (2008)
- Criminal mobility is profitable (the further they travel, the more they earn)

Smith, Bond & Townsley (2009)
- Ecological fallacy in JTC research (JTC data is nested)
- Aggregated DD, no individual DD
  - Most crime trips are short ≠ most offenders prefer targets close to home
What we learn from these studies?

• Burgeoning alternative research tradition
• Results are insightful and challenging
• But ... questions remain
  • Departure and target areas of mobile criminals?
  • Profitability of mobility?
  • Mobility as measurement error?
  • New technological advances and mobility?

Opportunities for new and exciting research into JTC!
Our ‘roads’

Mobility of foreign ‘itinerant crime groups’

Outbound offending

Directional consistency

Rational choice and long crime trips
• Vandeviver, C. – PhD project, 4 years

Technological developments and awareness space
• Van Daele, S. & Vandeviver, C. (in review).
Case study of particular type of offenders

• Eastern European gangs of criminals committing all sorts of property crimes

• Quite an impact on crime figures
  • 25%?

• ... and on police organisation
  • ≠ districts
  • international component

Asks for more profound analysis of their mobility patterns

Start of our research line
Distance (police stats)

- Travel twice as far on average (34km vs 17km)
- Only moderate decay
Anchor points (case files)

- Are flexible at individual level
- But more or less fixed at group level
  - Same neighbourhoods
  - Does not account for larger distances -> large distances ARE large distances

Target areas (case files and interviews)

- Affluent
- Rural (less opportunities)
- Mostly unfamiliar (or merely abstract)

Findings mostly not corresponding with those of other JTC research

Case study (e.g. foreigners: routines? awareness space?) -> validity?
Focus on outbound offending

- Start in city but end outside it
- Typically overlooked in JTC research
- Rare offending pattern (?)
  - Away from criminal opportunity structures, daily routines, crime generators...
Outbound offending (2)

Outbound offenders (min. 5 crimes, 90% outbound)

Profit maximization?! 
- Rich pickings? Yes (compared with local) ... and no (only outbound)
- Committed near motorways
- Crime sprees

Outbound offending is linked to co-offending 
- But NOT because of distant anchor points of accomplices
Directional consistency

Behavioural consistency
• Human geographic behaviour is stable and predictable
• Reason: time constraints & daily routines

Research question
• JTC characterised by directional consistency?

Strong evidence for directional consistenceny
• 90% of serial offenders is directionally consistent

Source: Van Daele & Bernasco (2012)
Rational choice and long crime trips (1)

Need to know

• Highlighted knowledge gap
• Questions surrounding initial understanding of long JTC

Ultimate goal: theory development

• Large-scale quantitative test of established insights in JTC
• Assessment of findings in light of underlying RC framework and previous JTC research results

Scope

• Non-local recorded crime data (police & public prosecutor)
• Analysis of full spectrum of crime trips (deliberate inclusion of long crime trips)
Rational choice and long crime trips (2)

Intermediate results: all crime trips in greater Ghent area

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>N</th>
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<td>All offences, all trips</td>
<td>39,41</td>
<td>6,25</td>
<td>4,68</td>
<td>4704,87</td>
<td>206,29</td>
<td>10478</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Crime trip length

All offences, all trip lengths, plot truncated at 250 km
Intermediate results: long crime trips in greater Ghent area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of crime trip</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 10 km</td>
<td>64,53</td>
<td>6762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 99,99 km</td>
<td>30,81</td>
<td>3228</td>
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<tr>
<td>100 – 999,99 km</td>
<td>3,83</td>
<td>401</td>
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<tr>
<td>≥ 1000 km</td>
<td>0,83</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100,00</td>
<td>10478</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influence of technological applications on awareness space and burglary target selection

Technological applications

- Google Maps & Google Street View
- Linked to increased burglary risk

Experiment

- Students as ‘burglars’
- 63 participants
- 3 groups: street, online and online w/photo
- 1 week
- Target, official & actual address, 3 nodes
% of participants for which a particular node is closest to target

- Official address: 49%
- Acquaintances: 16%
- Actual address: 14%
- Leisure: 11%
- Work: 10%

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Technological evolutions and awareness space (3)

Average distance to nearest node (incl. residences) per group

Mean distance in km
F=4.868; df=2; p=0.011

- Street
- Online, w/ photo
- Online

Street: 1.78
Online, w/ photo: 0.54
Online: 8.42
Concluding remarks

- Recurrent findings in JTC studies

- ... made JTC researchers overlook their research weaknesses and assume general ‘mobility rules’

- Thinking outside the box leads to different conclusions

- Smith et al. 2009: “It is not enough to be correct, we must be correct for the right reasons”
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