Lower crime rates in sparsely populated areas of the globe are often taken as a sign that crime is not a major concern in these areas. The negligence of safety and security issues outside the urban realm is not exclusive to criminology. Such paucity of knowledge on crime, victimization, and safety conditions in rural contexts can be associated with the inadequacy of reliable official data and/or the lack of methods capable of capturing the complexities of the rural–urban continuum. Indeed, issues of data scarcity and sparsity in rural areas are a limiting factor for many of the standard methods used in criminology, such as tools to detect spatial concentration, measures of risk and modelling. We also argue that the study of crime and crime prevention in rural contexts demands an integrated and interdisciplinary set of theories and methods that can provide guidance to deal with an ever-increasing amount of data from relatively new sources such as crowdsourcing, social media, and remote sensing including drones.

The aim of this special issue is to advance the scholarship on conducting criminological research in rural contexts, from remote areas to the urban fringe. This collection of original research is devoted to the processes of preparation of data, execution of research and analysis of crime and safety. The included studies explore both traditional and new forms of data and/or methods, ranging from primary sources (e.g., interviews, online surveys) and secondary official statistical data (e.g., crime records) to media coverage (e.g., articles in newspapers), crowdsourced data, social media posts, and the like. Methods vary from qualitative (e.g., focus groups, observations) to quantitative (e.g., regression models), including statistical measures and Geographical Information Systems (GIS). In particular, we have observed that although the role of place has become increasingly important in criminology (Eck & Weisburd, 1995), much of the traditional rural criminology literature has paid little attention to the geographical features of crime even when data were available. Recent interdisciplinary perspectives from geography and other related fields are showing the advantages of embracing a spatial approach to rural and environmental crime (Ceccato, in press). We hold that knowing where crime occurs and how it is distributed is important for understanding its nature and prevention. Therefore, in this special issue we offer examples of studies that critically discuss different (spatial) approaches to capturing crime dynamics as well as the best ways of preventing it along the rural–urban continuum. The concept of the rural–urban continuum is used here to stress the notion that ‘there are no sharp breaking points to be found in the degree or quantity of rural/urban differences’ (Planning Tank, 2017), rather a flow of people and goods in space where crime takes place.

The contents of this special issue illustrate a wide range of crimes as well as issues of perceived safety, adopting international, intersectional, and/or gender-informed perspectives. Contributions have included the analysis of crime along the rural–urban continuum, victimization, determinants of crime and fear in rural contexts, spatio-temporal patterns of crime and safety perceptions among residents and visitors. Another feature of this special issue is that it includes multidisciplinary contributions beyond the fields of sociology and criminology, by academics and practitioners, from India, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Japan.
Framing the contributions

The special issue starts with a piece devoted to the use of online surveys in rural areas. Kreseda Smith provides guidance on conducting online crime and safety surveys in rural contexts, focusing on the farming community in particular. The author addresses methodological considerations that distinguish rural online crime and safety surveying from its urban counterpart, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of this methodology.

In the search for a better understanding for the underlying mechanisms behind rural crimes, the article by Ceccato, Abraham, and Lundqvist explores the use of data collected from media archives when official crime statistics are known to be problematic due to underreporting. Official records tend to miss the true magnitude of crime in more remote areas because detection often depends on citizen reporting practices and, for certain crimes, on routine inspections (e.g., Barclay et al., 2001; Ceccato & Dolmen, 2011; Donnermeyer et al., 2006; Smith, 2020). Some crimes are considered rare offenses, and records are limited to the small number of cases that reach court, such as crimes against animal farmers. Therefore, Ceccato et al. assess the use of media archives as a data source to investigate the nature of farmer victimization utilizing analytical spatial tools, such as GIS, to report the geography of these offences at the municipal level in Sweden.

Using the theoretical principles of offender foraging and distance to crime opportunities, the article by Spencer Chainey is devoted to the phenomenon of near repeat victimization in rural contexts. Townsley et al. (2003) were one of the first to report on near repeat victimization, which is the observed pattern of a person or target being a victim of crime soon after a nearby similar incident has occurred. Although this phenomenon has been widely detected in urban environments, the author recognizes the need to study this phenomenon in rural settings. Using a case study in the United Kingdom, the author finds evidence that the near repeat victimization approach can be useful to explain patterns of burglary in rural areas; a result that has clear implications for prevention of burglary in rural areas. In the same vein of thought and using an empirical measure of the urban–rural continuum, Shimada and Suzuki explore ways to assess the risk of theft of motor vehicles (cars and motorcycles) and of bicycles in populations as well as rural residents’ behavior in terms of crime prevention in the rural settings of Japan. In this article, they propose a method of crime analysis combining data from multiple secondary data sources (census, open crime, and social survey data) for resource-limited settings using factorial ecological analysis and multilevel regression models.

The two last articles are devoted to the use of new types of data/methods. The article written by Adams, D’Silva, and Lea exemplifies the use of digital technologies in interventions against gender-based violence in rural areas in India. In 2018, a mobile app was adapted from urban areas to crowdmap incidents of sexual assault in rural areas. Using a communicative methodological approach, residents in communities participated in a community intervention aided by this smartphone technology. Finally, the last article explores the use of Twitter by police officers in urban and rural contexts in Sweden. Ceccato, Solymosi, and Müller investigate the nature of police officers’ information sharing via Twitter by assessing the frequency, interactions, and contents of tweets from police officers, divided into official and private accounts, from 2013 to 2021.

Final considerations

One special issue cannot contain an exhaustive collection of studies devoted to conducting research in rural criminology; instead the included studies are a set of examples (some quite exploratory) of the strands of research in this area. Nevertheless, the special issue offers a rich flora of studies from the international rural research community on property crime, gender violence, crimes against farmers, and crime prevention initiatives using various types of data and methods. For a selection of other articles on complementary topics in rural criminology, see also the
coming special issue in *International Criminology*, edited by Ceccato and Meško (2021) as well as those published outside the circle of criminological journals, such as the special issue in the *Journal of Rural Studies* in 2015.

In conclusion, crimes that take place along the rural–urban continuum demand further investigation by means of applying rigorous methods to both new and traditional sets of data to produce sound empirical knowledge that can support crime prevention and advise policymakers. The good news, as exemplified by this special issue, is that there exists a growing interdisciplinary field of research that goes beyond the common boundaries of criminology, taking the best knowledge from various fields to tackle problems relevant to people living along the rural–urban continuum.

**Acknowledgments**

I am grateful to all the authors who contributed to this special issue and, in so doing, increased the extant knowledge of the process of conducting rural criminological research, which in turn may lead to advances in knowledge about rural issues. I would like to thank Scott Thomas Jacques and the *International Criminal Justice Review* for welcoming the idea of this special issue and for the support along the way. I also thank my editorial team, in particular Marianna Patelida and Jana Sochor, and the anonymous peer reviewers for offering their invaluable knowledge through their comments and suggestions. *In alphabetical order by given name:* Aiden Sidebottom, Asifa Iqbal, Cléber da Silva Lopes, David Buil Gil, Eva Göransson, Jonatan Abraham, Joseph Donnermeyer, Kim Rossmo, Martin Nokleberg, Per Lunqqvist, Ralph Weisheit, Rob Mawby, Silas Melo, and Veronica Wiman. I am grateful to the speakers and the participants of the online colloquium “Safety, resilience and community: Challenges and opportunities beyond the city” that took place 29th September 2020 organized by KTH Safeplaces Network, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden as part of the 40 days Safecities challenges, UN-Habitat Safer cities program. Articles of this special issues were presented in sessions of this colloquium that was partially funded by BRA—The Swedish National Crime Prevention Council. We would also like to thank the support of the International Society for the Study of Rural Crime (ISSRC), Uppsala University, Linköping University, and Plymouth University.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

**ORCID iD**

Vania Ceccato [https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5302-1698](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5302-1698)

**References**

Barclay, E., Donnermeyer, J. F., Doyle, B. D., & Talary, D. (2001). *Property crime victimisation and crime prevention on farms.* Institute for Rural Futures. [https://www.une.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/19059/2001-crime-prevention-report.pdf](https://www.une.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/19059/2001-crime-prevention-report.pdf)

Ceccato, V., & Dolmen, L. (2011). Crime in rural Sweden. *Applied Geography, 31*(1), 119–135. [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2010.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2010.03.002)

Ceccato, V., & Meško, G. (2021). Introduction to the special issue: Crime, fear of crime and environmental harm in rural areas. *Journal International Criminology.*

Ceccato, V. (in press). Geographical information and GIS in rural criminology. In J. P. R. Weisheit & A. Pytlarz (Eds.), *Research Methods for Rural Criminologists.*
Donnermeyer, J. F., Jobes, P., & Barclay, E. (2006). Rural crime, poverty and rural community. In W. S. DeKeseredy & B. Perry (Eds.), Advancing Critical Criminology: Theory and Application (pp. 199–213). Lexington Books.
Eck, J. E., & Weisburd, D. (1995). Crime and place, crime prevention studies (Vol. 4). Criminal Justice Press.
Planning Tank (2017). Rural-urban continuum and causes of rural-urban continuum. https://planningtank.com/settlement-geography/rural-urban-continuum
Smith, K. (2020). Desolation in the countryside: How agricultural crime impacts the mental health of British farmers. Journal of Rural Studies, 80, 522–531. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.10.037
Townsley, M., Homel, R., & Chaseling, J. (2003). Infectious burglaries: A Test of the Near Repeat Hypothesis. The British journal of criminology, 43(3), 615–633. https://doi.org/10.1093/BJC/43.3.615

Author Biography

Vania Ceccato is a Professor at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and spatial methods underlie her research that includes the geography of crime and fear in urban and rural environments. She wrote the open access book “Rural Crime and community safety” by Routledge and she is coordinator of KTH Safeplaces network, a partner of UN-Habitat SaferCities program.