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Understanding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the Context of Safety and Security for Rural Communities[1]

Abstract: This article examines challenges to the study of rural crime and criminal justice through the lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It emphasizes that the rural population of the world and within many countries is a significant share of the total, even though urbanization will inevitably continue through the remainder of the 21st century. Contrary to longstanding stereotypes, especially those found in criminology, rural places are quite diverse. In addition, rural localities everywhere are changing, and with these changes emerge important issues related to the safety and security of rural populations. All 17 SDGs are discussed within the context of crimes that affect rural people and their perceptions of safety; we examine what rural criminology can do to help criminal justice policymakers and practitioners focus strategies and tactics suitable for a rural context.

Keywords: community, criminological theory, fear of crime, rural crime, rural criminology, safety and security, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

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Introduction

Something historic occurred in 2007, an event that had never happened before in the history of humanity. For the first time, the majority of the world's population became urban, an unceasing trend that continues to this day. According to World Bank estimates, the rural population has now declined to 43%, and there is no end in sight to this downward trend (World Bank, 2018; United Nations, 2018). England was the first country to reach urban-majority status, in 1855, during the early years of the Industrial Revolution, which makes sense because this was where the Industrial Revolution mostly started (Wrigley, 1985). The United States was likely second, with 1917 estimated as the year for its shift to an urban-majority population status; today, its rural population has declined to only 17% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Poland joined the urban-majority club in the mid-1960s, with a rural population today of about 40% (Statistics Poland, 2024), which closely matches the trend for all countries located in Central and Eastern Europe.

It may seem odd to begin an article on criminological concerns about safety and security in rural localities within the context of the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development with a description of the way the world has urbanized, but urbanization is a reality that must be recognized because it is the background within which this discussion must occur. There are three immediate and highly important points to be made. First, rural populations have not stopped growing; they are simply not growing as fast as the number of people who live in urban places. At 17%, rural America's population is approximately 56.66 million, and if it were counted as a separate country, it would rank in the top 25 in the world by size. Rural America alone is approximately the same number of all the people who live in Italy. Poland's rural population is 15.3 million, a number that surpasses the total populations of such countries as Belgium, Greece and Sweden. Altogether, the rural population for all countries of the world is 3.42 billion out of a total population of 8.1 billion. What we mean by rural is certainly not insignificant, and across every continent except Antarctica, there are millions of rural communities, impossible to count precisely, that are the diverse locales where crime and fear of crime affect the safety and security of these non-urban citizens (Meško, 2020, pp. 3–13; World Bank, 2022).

Second, the unrelenting pace of urbanization has real implications for the safety and security of rural communities, because transportation systems and communication infrastructure tie together the rural and urban populations of every country. The welfare of the rural sector depends on the welfare of the urban sector, and vice versa. Hence a focus on the safety and security of rural communities and rural people in relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is essential to fully explicating the link to the field of criminology and criminal justice.

Third, it can be argued that rural populations are unique, and therefore so are the issues of their safety and security. This would not be a correct assumption, however,

despite the vast diversity of rural places. Rural communities have at least one thing in common, regardless of what region of the world is referred to: smaller, less dense populations (Donnermeyer, 2015, pp. 161–162). It is this characteristic which in turn affects their various economic, cultural and sociological dimensions (Wilkin, 2022, pp. 11–27). From these simple features of places with smaller populations and lower population densities follow some other distinctive characteristics. Rural communities tend to have a higher density of acquaintanceship (Freudenburg, 1986, pp. 29–30), display more cohesive networks and possess values that are more traditional when compared to urban places. These distinctions may be true for a great number of rural places, but not all, hence the criminological community must be cognizant of the diversity found within such populations and not adhere to a falsity that they all look alike (Ceccato & Abraham, 2022, p. 10). One of the myths about rural areas is that they are safe places to live, but it would be wrong to assume that rural people are not faced with real concerns about safety and security, concerns that speak directly to various UN SDGs.

1. Rural criminology

Rural criminology is the study of crime and criminal justice as they are expressed within the context of places with smaller populations and population densities, that are not contiguous with more populous places. As a sub-field within criminology, its development accelerated in the mid-1990s with a first synthesis of literature and in the first two decades of the 21st century with the founding of the *International Journal of Rural Criminology*, the establishment of the Division of Rural Criminology in the American Society of Criminology, the European Society of Criminology Rural Crime Working Group and the International Society for the Study of Rural Crime (Donnermeyer, 2019). More recently, an *Encyclopedia of rural crime* has been published (Harkness et al., 2023). In Poland, rural crime and criminal justice studies are sparse, except for the recent work of Jurgielewicz-Delegacz (2023; n.d.), Terelak & Kołodziejczak (2023) and Kołodziejczak et al. (2019).

Over the years, many rural criminologists have warned against dichotomous thinking, such as urban versus rural, because it masks the diversity found in both the countryside and cities (Ceccato, 2016, pp. 31–33; Donnermeyer, 2015, pp. 162–163; Wells & Weisheit, 2004, pp. 19–20). As Ceccato and Abraham rightly observe: 'Rural areas are heterogeneous entities, and thus the search for a singular definition of the rural is illusory […] the idea of the "rural" as a homogeneous environment is commonly fueled by mediated, streamlined images of what the "rural" is expected to be' (2022, p. 2). Donnermeyer (2019) advocates for a definition of rural that is based solely on population size and/or population density (and not next to an urban centre). There are no other essential characteristics, hence all other cultural, economic and

sociological features are left as variables, depending on the location (Stanny, 2014). It should also be added that past dichotomies not only stereotype rural communities, but marginalize rural studies within the field of criminology.

In their monograph, Ceccato and Abraham (2022, p. 10) discuss several key points about rural communities and the diversity of non-urban environments that are important to any consideration of the UN SDGs. First, all rural areas are continuously changing (Bukraba-Rylska, 2008). They are not static, and they are influenced by many different kinds of external forces – demographic, economic, cultural and social. For example, agriculture, an occupation synonymous with the rural, is a smaller and smaller occupation of the rural population of most countries (Jurgielewicz-Delegacz, 2023, pp. 484–485) and of their economies as measured by such indicators as gross domestic product. Compared to only two generations ago, farms are much larger, more mechanized and increasingly reliant on computer technology, yet are more central to a country's food security because it is more dependent on fewer people to grow crops, vegetables and fruit or raise animals for meat than in years past (Gray, 2018, pp. 12–16). Yet farms are also increasingly crime targets because of these expensive production inputs.

Ceccato and Abraham (2022, pp. 12–13) make two other key points of particular importance for this article. One is that crime is influenced or contextualized by the very nature of rural areas. Kołodziejczak et al. (2019, pp. 94–95), for example, found high rates of domestic violence (about 40%) against seniors in rural West Pomerania. Further, senior victims of violence were likely to experience multiple victimizations across a variety of types, such as psychological violence (being blamed for everything by younger family members), neglect (negligence in providing care when they are ill and/or family members who are uninterested in their welfare), economic violence (such as being forced to give money to younger family members) and physical (non-sexual) violence (pushing/shoving, slapping and kicking). The victims are more often women than men; this is apparent from research carried out in rural areas of West Pomerania on domestic violence against older women. The survey results show that more than 40% of older women report experiencing domestic violence. The scale of this phenomenon justifies asking questions about both the quality of life of older people and the patterns of everyday family life. It is important to note that if violence on the part of the closest relatives is present in the everyday experience of such a large category of senior women, it can be assumed that the phenomenon is in some way included in the existing social order and cultural patterns associated with it. Traditional patriarchal values and patterns of intra-family relations are still present in rural communities in Poland. In the mentality of rural women, the permanence of the family is perceived as crucial, and the well-being of the family is more important than their own well-being (Terelak & Kołodziejczak, 2023, p. 259).

Another key observation made by Ceccato and Abraham (2022, pp. 13–14) is that perceptions of safety and security among rural populations are quite uneven, an observation also made by Meško (2020). It is commonly believed that rural people feel safer than city dwellers, an overgeneralized statement that reflects stereotypical images of rural areas as 'idyllic' places that are apparently peaceful and quiet (Donnermeyer, 2023, pp. 117–118). Yet rural criminological research says otherwise. For example, DeKeseredy's (2021, pp. 7–22) synthesis of the literature on violence against rural women noted the link to strong norms of patriarchy, which is associated with localities that exhibit cohesive relationships among its residents but that are certainly not crime-free. Although these rural communities may appear peaceful to a visitor from the outside, they are not to many of the women (especially wives and girlfriends) who live there. The point is that the same set of cohesive social relationships in rural community environments might deter some crimes but encourage others. Likewise, in a recently published volume edited by Ceccato and Harkness, with chapters that explore the safety and security of rural populations in 18 countries from Kenya to Sweden, they remind readers that 'the study of fear of crime has traditionally been explored through an urban-centric lens in criminological literature, predominately emphasizing theoretical frameworks and specific forms of victimisation. The approach has often neglected to address the unique issues and challenges related to victimisation in rural contexts' (2024, p. 6).

2. Criminological theory and place

With these considerations in mind, let us focus more directly on the UN SDGs in relation to crime, safety and security within rural places around the world. It is the very diversity of places that underlies the UN's statements of sustainability for both rural and urban locations. Consider, for example, the eleventh goal, the most obvious in relation to the concept of community. It states: 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (United Nations, 2023). Even though it singles out 'cities', it does also say 'human settlements', which includes all communities, both large and small. A 2001 UN report defines a human settlement as a 'distinct population cluster […] in which the inhabitants live in neighbouring sets of living quarters and that has a name or locally recognized status', including 'fishing hamlets, mining camps, ranches, farms, market towns, villages, towns, and cities' (United Nations, 2001, p. 13). Even that report, which is woefully inadequate because it provides information from only 67 countries and fails to count settlements in Brazil, China, Egypt, Great Britain, India and many other countries, shows that of well over two-thirds of a million human settlements, the vast majority (about 88%) are considered rural.

It is assumed that urban places contain more diverse populations than rural places. That may be the case, given their much larger populations (Ceccato

& Abraham, 2022, pp. 10–11; Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014, pp. 6–7); however, it can be argued that across the millions of rural places found around the world, there is more diversity than in the urban realm. Certainly, a small village may have little diversity within it, but comparatively with other rural places, there may be as much if not more diversity. A village in Brazil dependent on the production of cassava can display a different set of characteristics than a small town in the middle of the corn-producing state of Iowa in the US, and both are very distinct from a hamlet in Poland surrounded by dairy production. With differing rural contexts, how do expressions of crime and peoples' perception of safety, the police and the criminal justice system in general vary? How do these contexts challenge the ways that issues related to the SDGs should be understood?

When we think about what a community is, whether for research or for planning various criminal justice services, we should first start with a concept of the community and then understand the context of crime, safety, security and sustainability within it. For too long, criminologists and criminal justice scholars have first considered issues of crime, and then in an ad hoc fashion have built frameworks around community to understand the context of these issues (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014, pp. 15–18; Kaylen & Pridemore, 2012, pp. 135–137). It is like the centuries-old idiom 'putting the cart before the horse', that is, starting with the wrong end of things. We have various popular criminology theories that illustrate this idiom, such as:

1) The theory of collective efficacy, which assumes that within specific places, neighbours express shared expectations of what is acceptable (considered conforming) or not acceptable (considered deviant/criminal), which in turn reduces crime and improves safety and security. Yet we also know that localized values, norms and beliefs (i.e. culture) may tolerate and even encourage criminal behaviour, such as poaching (Holmes, 2016, pp. 309–313) and violence against women (DeKeseredy, 2021 pp. 65–66).
2) Hotspot or crime pattern theory, that is, the occurrence of crime is not random spatially or temporally but based on the interplay of identifiable characteristics of specific places. This theory (Lilly et al., 2015, pp. 373–375) is built almost solely on considerations of urban places and is rarely applied to rural contexts, for example the specific locations on farms where property crimes are most likely to occur (Donnermeyer, in press).
3) Routine activities theory, that is, crime occurs through the convergence in space and time of an offender and a target (either a person or a property) in which the offender perceives an opportunity for the successful commission of the offence (Lilly et al., 2015, p. 360). Yet this theory does not consider larger social forces that impact smaller, rural communities, such as the many smaller places which have suffered economically through deindustrialization.

4) Social capital/network theory, which postulates that both conforming and criminal behaviours are learned through networks of individuals within a community (Deller & Deller, 2011 p. 330) but ignores networks that often extend outward to various extra-community groups, such as the connectedness of organized crime across communities and across the borders of countries. This is particularly true for issues of drug production and misuse, and for many other offences as well.
5) Social disorganization theory, which assumes that social control breaks down and crime goes up with particular characteristics of places, such as high rates of poverty or a high proportion of single-parent households. Even though this theory is the most frequently applied to the situations of crime in rural communities (Donnermeyer, 2015, pp. 160–161), the rural results are often inconsistent with the assumptions of the theory (Kaylen & Pridemore, 2012, pp. 145–146), demonstrating a need for substantial revisions and perhaps replacement of the theory.
6) Subcultural theory, which explores how deviant and criminal groups emerge from specific urban neighbourhoods, often along lines of race, ethnicity, immigration status, social class and other social structural factors (Lilly et al., 2015, pp. 72–75). This theory is rarely used to examine the contexts of rural populations, such as gangs and right-wing / neo-Nazi groups, among others.

Perhaps it is better to reverse the order of how issues of crime, safety and security are framed, hence improving our criminological eyesight, especially as we see the challenges of sustainability. As humans, we think in terms of frameworks. For example, the universe looks different to us today because of Copernicus and his influence on astronomy from the Renaissance up to the present time. The same is true for criminology and criminal justice scholars. Frameworks are important because they are our reality; they serve as the parameters within which we make decisions about how to conduct research, how to interpret the data and how to recommend criminal justice policy and practice.

The criminological community should now recognize that social disorganization, the most popular theory applied to rural contexts, does not exist, but there are indeed forms of social organization that are associated with variations in crimes. The logic of social disorganization theory (and the theory of collective efficacy) is likely wrong, that is, there is no such thing as disorganization, only forms of organization as expressed by various economic, cultural and social factors, no matter how slowly or rapidly they may change (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014, pp. 8–10). It is time to build a new view of our criminological universe, which begins with the idea of what a community is, without reference to crime issues, and then apply it to crime.

The UN report on settlements provided the beginnings of a good definition of a community when it recognized that people who live close by each other are more

likely to interact than with people who live farther away (density of acquaintanceship), and they identify the locality with a name that is presumably shared by everyone. This is a classic social science statement of a community (United Nations, 2001, p. 13). In other words, humans turn a 'space' into a 'place' through their beliefs, values and interactions with each other, creating consequences, including if it is a safe or a not-so-safe place (Liepins, 2000, pp. 23–24).

How does all of this variation come about, and why is it important to criminologists and criminal justice practitioners? All definitions of a community devised by social scientists over the past 100+ years have engaged with the idea that places have some essential, that is, universal elements. The three universal elements are practices, meanings, and spaces and structures (Liepins, 2000, pp. 28–31); they create the contexts within which individuals behave. Because they mutually influence each other, there are six possible ways that community-level expressions of crime and perceptions of it can change, whether slowly or rapidly. Further, they provide six possible ways that criminologists can visualize frameworks for how we think about crime, safety and security in various rural contexts (Liepins, 2000, p. 30).

First, meanings (values and beliefs) legitimate practices, defining what is deviant and what is not. In many rural places, poaching is not considered illegal by the people who live there and may even be seen as a type of heroic opposition to the state. Second, practices enable the circulation and challenging of meanings. For example, especially through social media outlets nowadays, stories about crime which often occurred at distant places, many miles from where rural populations live, greatly influence how they define their own safety and security. This phenomenon is often referred to as vicarious victimization. Third, practices (that is, human behaviour) occur in spaces and through structures, and in turn shape those spaces and structures. We see this in the variety of architecture in various countries, and even graffiti on buildings is an example of this. Fourth, spaces and structures affect how practices can occur, that is, both natural and built environments influence how humans use space. We may perceive some places as dangerous and other places as safe; the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and Broken Windows theories recognize this relationship (Lilly et al., 2015, p. 359). Fifth, spaces and structures enable the materialization of meanings, which is why we put up Neighbourhood Watch signs and signs identifying where the police station is located. Finally, meanings are embodied in spaces and structures. For example, those same signs are intended to give people a sense of safety, not merely to ward off possible thieves and burglars. It is within the multitudinous, nearly infinite, contexts created by the interplay of these six community-level dynamics that the issues of sustainability in relation to crime and its impact on rural people and rural communities can be considered.

3. The UN Sustainable Development Goals and challenges for rural criminology

Blaustein et al. (2018, pp. 768–769) make important claims about the UN SDGs: first, that they are not entirely suitable for solving the problems of development found in countries of the Global South, most of whom have populations that are more rural than most countries north of the equator. Second, they chide UN policy initiatives for focusing largely on the security of various countries and regions, especially in areas where there were recent conflicts, ignoring broader criminological issues of safety and security from crime. Their observation is germane to both rural and urban populations. Here is how each of the goals pertains to an understanding of crime in a rural context.

Goal #1: *End poverty in all forms everywhere.* Crime impoverishes rural people, both by taking away economic resources necessary for sustaining their quality of life according to their cultural standards and by constraining entrepreneurship necessary for future forms of economic development that they wish to achieve. Rural poverty can be of a different nature when compared to urban poverty, because the former is usually associated with limited satisfaction of cultural and educational needs and a restricted scope of leisure activities and transportation options, while the latter is associated with housing requirements and the realization of current needs such as hunger (Donnermeyer, in press). Kaylen and Pridemore (2012, pp. 136–138), in their study of rural communities in the US, noticed that poverty does not necessarily have the same link to crime. Is it possible the same is true in other countries? That is the challenge for rural criminology: to examine the causal link of poverty and rural poverty, which in turn will help define more appropriate programmes and policies for a rural context.

Goal #2: *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.* Food producers the world over are frequent victims of crime, with negative economic, emotional and physical costs for them and the well-being of their families (Smith, 2020, p. 525). Countries like Poland and the United States, for example, are concerned about food security and attempt to develop nationwide policies that address the fundamental needs of citizens.[2] As agriculture has

2 Poland and many European Union countries have seen an increase in farmer protests in 2024. One of the reasons for the protests is opposition to the European Green Deal; farmers criticize its requirements, which they see as excessive and unworkable, and fear that the introduction of these changes will lead to a significant increase in production costs (putting a big question mark over the profitability of their production) and a decrease in the competitiveness of Polish agriculture on the European market. It is also worth mentioning other demands that emerged during the protests, such as stopping the import of agricultural products from Ukraine. Polish farmers stress that the agricultural sector is struggling with the consequences of Russia's attack on Ukraine, which has led to an increase in exports of Ukrainian agricultural products to the EU (Donaj et al.,

industrialized, farms across the world and of all types have become more attractive targets for crime (Osborne & Swartz, 2021, pp. 4–5). Rural criminology must continue to research the key characteristics of the vulnerability of agricultural operations to crime and its effects on the sustainability of those in the profession of growing food and raising livestock. Goal #2 also refers to hunger, so it is worth considering whether rural criminologists should investigate the relationship between poverty, hunger and, for example, juvenile delinquency in rural areas. After all, it is known that poverty and hunger can lead children (and even adults) to seek illegal sources of income, such as petty theft, prostitution or begging (Redo, 2019, pp. 868–870).

Goal #3: *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.* Crime is costly to all rural people and reduces trust, cohesion and mutual support among those who live in rural communities (Ceccato & Harkness, 2024, p. 4). Strategies that improve access to justice for rural people, and the provision of adequate police and other criminal justice services, are essential to healthy lifestyles and secure places to live. In an age when a great share of rural residents receive their news through social media outlets, rural criminology must press forward with research on the ways that rural people perceive the criminal justice system, especially law enforcement.

Goal #4: *Insure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.* Social science research consistently finds that rural places which provide adequate educational services are also places where locally owned businesses are more likely to exist, hence strengthening identity with a place and reducing crime (Czyżewski & Polcyn, 2016, p. 199). Without high-quality education, entrepreneurship can be impaired, especially in relation to computer technology; rural populations descend to subsistence-level lifestyles, may become more vulnerable to crime and may become more likely to join in organized criminal activities to provide for their families (McElwee et al., 2011, pp. 45–46).

Goal #5: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.* In many parts of the world, both rural women and girls are disproportionately affected by crime, especially as victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, perpetuating gender inequality (DeKeseredy, 2021, p. 18). In Poland, the idea of 'rural housewives' associations' was reborn several years ago. These are voluntary, independent and self-governing social organizations that support the development of entrepreneurship in the countryside and actively work for the benefit of rural communities (Szczepańska & Szczepański, 2019). They support the advancement of rural women's entrepreneurship and develop local and regional folk culture, keeping Polish

2023). The blockade of ports on the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov has forced Ukraine to look for new export routes, resulting in an increased flow of its products to the Polish market and a fall in purchase prices for Polish products. Farmers see imports from Ukraine as a threat to the stability of the internal market and to Poland's food security; they are calling for restrictions or controls on these imports to ensure fair competition and protect domestic production.

traditions alive. Indeed, they are forms of social capital and collective efficacy that build sustainable communities, and with proper research, these kinds of empowering associations in Poland and around the world can be proven to reduce crimes against rural women and girls. Hence, one opportunity for rural criminology is to determine the extent of a positive association between empowering associations and less crime, and if there are greater benefits for women and girls.

Goal #6: *Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.* Climate change and population growth strain water resources, promoting land and water theft that threatens the well-being of rural people (Eman & Gorazd, 2021, pp. v–vi). In addition, safe drinking water is essential to the health of any population. As of 2018, the entire area of Poland has been included in the so-called 'Action Programme', aimed at reducing water pollution by nitrates from agricultural sources and preventing further pollution. This includes a set of recommendations for good agricultural practice to protect waters from pollution by nitrates, including a set of voluntary rules and practices for fertilizer storage and nitrogen fertilization, as well as the most important aspects of farm management that contribute to reducing water pollution. In Poland and across the globe, understanding farmers' motivations for compliance or opposition to environmental regulations should be near the front of the research agenda for rural criminology.

Goal #7: *Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.* There is an established empirical link between resource-extractive industries and other forms of energy development located in rural areas and increases in drug use, prostitution, violent crime and property crime (Ruddell, 2017, pp. 79–88). Energy development will be an issue that impacts rural populations, perhaps more so than urban populations, where energy supply may be more important but the source of the energy less so. Regardless, past rural criminological research has established a link between energy and crime, in part because energy development is owned and controlled by corporate enterprises headquartered in cities that may not have an interest in the health and welfare of the rural people who live in the area.

Goal #8: *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.* Many rural communities suffer from high rates of unemployment, part-time employment, low wages and poverty, all of which are associated with higher rates of substance misuse, violence and many other forms of crime (Donnermeyer, 2015, pp. 162–163). Unemployment is very often associated with transportation exclusion, with those affected finding it difficult to get a new or better-paying job (Kaczorowski, 2019, p. 12; Żukowska et al., 2023, p. 10), as this would often involve daily commuting to larger urban centres. The low or complete lack of provision of public transport makes it difficult for people to move around and prevents them from reaching their place of work, or makes it more expensive. This results in an increase in the level of unemployment in rural regions (Kuciaba et al., 2013, p. 14). Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that low occupational mobility for

many rural people, and the lack of new jobs, is related to computer technology that impacts various economic enterprises through automation, perhaps more adversely in manufacturing, agriculture and other economic sectors found more prominently in rural settings. Rural criminology needs to continue to explore these economic impacts on crime.

Goal #9: *Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.* Too often, economic and infrastructural developments in rural communities lead to increases in crime, both violent and property crime, the impacts of which are not assessed when infrastructural, industrial and other types of economic development are proposed for rural localities (Ruddell, 2017, pp. 13–15). Infrastructure is multi-dimensional, including roads/transportation, community services such as sewage treatment plants and waste recycling, digital technologies and much more. However, with improved technologies comes the greater possibility of new residents who live in rural localities but commute to work or simply work at home. Criminology has long established the link of population turnover with crime (Kaylen & Pridemore, 2012, pp. 138–141), and this link should be explored more fully by rural criminological researchers, as new economic developments change the volume and kinds of individuals who move into and out of rural towns and villages.

Goal #10: *Reduce inequality within and among countries.* Often, crime in the rural regions of many societies is an unfortunate heritage of colonialism, racism, forms of apartheid and other long-term inequities (Donnermeyer, in press). Economic development itself, if the enterprises are owned in absentia and not by residents of the area, may display similar impacts to historic forms of colonialism. Refugees and émigrés from other countries due to war, revolution and even natural disasters, such as Ukrainians moving to Poland, may impact many rural communities and the long-term residents who live there. New workers in an area may change levels of inequality, especially economically. Within rural settings, how are these developments related to changes in perceptions of safety and in the kinds of criminal activities that occur there?

Goal #11: *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.* Broader social, cultural and economic trends continuously change rural places (Błąd, 2022) and can negatively influence perceptions of safety and security among their inhabitants. A great deal of past rural criminological research is locality-based, that is, case studies from a single community or a single region. The importance of developing a new theory of rural crime and place is fundamental to providing a theoretical framework by which more comparative scholarship that synthesizes these diverse studies can be carried out, and thereby generalizations across diversity of place can be discerned (Donnermeyer, 2015, pp. 160–163).

Goal #12: *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*. As the economies of rural communities change, so too do the consumption patterns of its inhabitants, and unfortunately, many rural communities are now dependent on illegal

production activities (such as drug production, trafficking of flora, fauna and people, and poaching, among others), especially as the lack of employment opportunities and poverty increase. Drugs and poaching, for example, were not ways of life for people in these rural places only a generation ago, but times have changed (Garriott, 2011, pp. 25–26). One key area where sustainability is important is food production. The formation of national sustainable food systems that increase production, strengthen agriculture's ability to adapt to climate change and extreme weather events, and improve soil quality is fundamental to the welfare of rural people and communities. In turn, these systems are the backdrop against which issues of crime and safety occur. The challenge for rural criminology is to show the link between the two empirically.

Goal #13: *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*. Rising sea levels, desertification, permafrost thawing and other impacts of climate change on the land and in the seas modify the ways of life of people in thousands of rural communities, re-organizing established patterns of living. Agriculture makes a large, though not always recognized, contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and thus affects climate change. It can also perform many useful functions related to the state of the natural environment and climate protection by changing production methods, protecting and restoring biodiversity, proper water management, reducing food waste, etc. Proposals contained in the European Green Deal address policies on climate, energy and transportation and the introduction of new fees for greenhouse gas emission rights in land, sea transport and housing. This package aims to modernize EU climate legislation for 2030, in favour of transformational changes in the economy, society and industry, so that climate neutrality can be achieved by 2050 and net emissions can be reduced by at least 55% (compared to 1990) by 2030. There are criminological dimensions to any kind of economic and social change; a challenge to rural criminology will be to 'scope out' (Smith & Byrne, 2017, p. 192) how these initiatives may affect levels of crime, the kinds of crime that occur and perceptions of safety among rural people.

Goal #14: *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development*. Marine life is an important source of food, livelihood, cultural heritage and fundamental security for many rural communities, all of which are threatened by poaching and other exploitative extractive practices both by rural people and those from the outside (Donnermeyer, in press). The shorelines of the world are mostly rurally located, and many rural people have relied for centuries on the harvesting of marine animals as their major food source. As mentioned in Goal #13, how will climate change, and legislation to mitigate its effects, possibly impact these rural localities in terms of crime, safety and security? How will rural criminology contribute to forecasting these changes?

Goal #15: *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.* Poaching, the theft of livestock, land and water theft, ethnic

and tribal conflicts, and a host of other illegal and harmful practices threaten the safety and security of people who live in rural regions throughout the world. Threats include the decline in the biodiversity of rural areas, including, among other things, the reduction in the natural value of areas where agricultural production has been abandoned, which played an important role for the environment. Plus there are the adverse impacts of climate change on rural development opportunities (droughts, violent weather events). It is incumbent on rural criminology to acquire a more thoroughly 'green' perspective on these threats to the sustainability and welfare of rural people (Blaustein et al., 2018, pp. 779–781).

Goal #16: *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*. The centralization and relocation of criminal justice resources to cities will likely increase crime, diminish access to justice and increase concerns about safety and security for rural people around the world. For example, in Poland, courts function only in cities; there are no courts in villages. In the past, policing styles have often differed between cities and smaller places. Will this change with centralization, and what will its effects be for the welfare of people who live in rural communities?

Goal #17: *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*. Rural criminologists, police who work in rural settings and other rural-focused criminal justice practitioners must continuously share their research and their proposed solutions for reducing crime and increasing the safety and security of rural people for there to be real, sustained development in their communities (Meško, 2020).

Conclusion

There are several points made in this article. First, the rural population of the world, and of individual countries like Poland and the United States, is large, and therefore significant to the study of crime and to the ways that change impacts crime, safety and security. Without understanding change, we cannot hope to likewise understand how the SDGs potentially apply to rural communities. Second, rural communities have always changed and will continue to; this impacts the welfare of rural populations everywhere. Third, in order to advance the study of rural criminology, especially in relation to a discussion of the SDGs, it is necessary to adopt a sound theoretical framework that begins with the concept of community to understand the context of crime and to provide for comparative work on rural populations from various localities. Although the general field of criminology offers a variety of place-based theories, they each have their shortcomings. An alternative theory of community was offered around which the SDGs can be addressed in terms

of crime, safety and security. Finally, with each of the 17 goals, there are implications for how rural criminology should focus its scholarship.

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