

## Introduction to Volume 10, Issue 1 (Special Issue)

### Rural Criminology, Place, and Governance: Scientific Dialogues from the Atlantic Rural Criminology Meeting

**Véronique Chadillon-Farinacci** (ORCID: 0000-0003-0129-8163)

Associate Professor

Department of Sociology and Criminology

Université de Moncton

Moncton, New Brunswick

CANADA

**Hesam Seyyed Esfahani** (ORCID: 0000-0001-8809-4109)

Associate Professor

Department of Sociology and Criminology

Université de Moncton

Moncton, New Brunswick

CANADA

**Correspondence:** Véronique Chadillon-Farinacci; [veronique.chadillon-farinacci@umoncton.ca](mailto:veronique.chadillon-farinacci@umoncton.ca)

This special issue builds on the scientific dialogues initiated at the *Atlantic Rural Criminology Meeting*, an international hybrid symposium held on November 8, 2024, at the *Université de Moncton*, in Moncton (New Brunswick, Canada). New Brunswick, much like the other Atlantic provinces of Canada, is marked by a large share of its population living in rural areas. In 2021, 36.8% of New Brunswick's population lived outside of urban centres, compared with 16.1% for Canada as a whole<sup>1</sup>. In addition to contributions from four continents, this symposium stands out for its presentations addressing local issues affecting Canada's rural communities. Designed as a forum for sustained scholarly exchange, this event brought together researchers and practitioners from multiple countries and disciplinary traditions to explore the ways in which rurality influences crime, harm, regulation, and justice. The articles assembled in this issue extend those discussions.

A central premise uniting all contributions is that rurality constitutes an active and structuring condition of crime and justice. This position aligns with established critiques of criminology's longstanding urban bias, which has tended to universalize theories, data, and policy models derived from urbanity. Across these seven articles, rural space is conceptualized as relational and unevenly governed, shaping criminal opportunities, enforcement practices, and experiences of victimization in distinct ways from those observed

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0016-01 Population and dwelling counts by the Statistical Area Classification.



in urban contexts. In fact, all these articles highlight the diversity of rural experiences by emphasizing specific forms of crime and victimization.

A first cross-cutting theme concerns the uneven presence and capacity of the state in rural areas. Several contributions document how policing, courts, and regulatory agencies operate under conditions of spatial dispersion, limited resources, and institutional withdrawal. These conditions are well established in the rural criminology literature. As rural justice systems operate at the periphery of state authority, governance in these contexts is often characterized by delays, selective intervention, and weak symbolic ties to affected communities.

A second unifying idea relates to governance and regulation beyond formal criminal law. Multiple articles highlight the centrality of administrative, regulatory, and hybrid enforcement mechanisms in rural settings, particularly in fisheries. Prior research has shown that such systems frequently rely on monetary sanctions, licensing regimes, and discretionary enforcement. This may generate unintended consequences such as strategic non-compliance. Taken together, the articles in this issue highlight the central role of legitimacy, economic conditions, and regulatory capacity in shaping rural governance.

A third recurring theme concerns the interaction between rural social relations, spatial configurations, and harm. On one hand, low population density, limited guardianship, and close-knit social networks simultaneously structure criminal opportunities. On the other hand, they constrain reporting, intervention, and victim support. Consistent with prior work, the articles demonstrate how intimacy and visibility in rural contexts can obscure harm, particularly in cases involving coercive control, youth criminalisation, and gender-based violence. These dynamics challenge conventional assumptions about community cohesion and informal social control, showing that their role in rural safety is inherently ambivalent.

Taken together, the seven articles in this special issue reflect the intellectual orientation fostered by the *Atlantic Rural Criminology Meeting*: a form of rural criminology that is empirically grounded, theoretically engaged, and attentive to place-based inequalities in justice. By foregrounding rurality as a constitutive dimension of governance and harm, this special issue contributes to the consolidation of rural criminology as a field capable of enriching broader criminological theory while addressing pressing social and regulatory challenges in rural regions.

Each contribution engages rurality as a structuring dimension, while addressing distinct empirical sets and methodological approaches. The following list introduces each article individually, situating its core argument and within the broader conversations advanced by this special issue:

1. *The Central Role of Place in Rural Criminological Studies*, from Joseph F. Donnermeyer, argues for placing community (understood as place) at the center of rural criminological theory and research. Drawing on classical and contemporary scholarship. This article critiques crime-first approaches to place and demonstrates

how a community-based framework better captures rural diversity, challenges stereotypes, guides theory development, and links global transformations to lived experiences of crime and justice in rural settings.

2. *Rural Criminology and Criminological Knowledge: From Space and Place to the Global Scale* by Matt Bowden offers a conceptual synthesis situating rural criminology within transformations linked to late modernity, globalization, and informational capitalism. Drawing on comparative analysis, it conceptualizes rural space as physical, representational, and relational. It argues that rural crime and justice must be examined across interconnected scales.
3. *Sanctioned but unpunished: impunity and recidivism in shellfish poaching in Galicia*, from Hugo Ballesteros and Gonzalo Rodríguez-Rodríguez, analyzes administrative sanction records from Galicia (Spain) between 2012 and 2020 to examine recidivism among shellfish poachers. The findings identify a small group of repeat offenders who strategically use economic insolvency to neutralize fines, resulting in durable legal impunity.
4. *Safety Risks, Institutional Responses, and Narratives in Fishery Management* by Véronique Chadillon-Farinacci and Ellie Côté examines the 2023 crisis in Canada's commercial glass eel fishery using government communications, public infraction reports, and patrol data obtained through access-to-information requests. It introduces the concept of value density to explain why high-value, low-volume resources generate intense criminogenic pressures in rural and coastal contexts.
5. *Rural Girls in Conflict With the Law* by Walter S. DeKeseredy reviews the North American literature on rural girls in conflict with the law, revealing a persistent blind spot in both rural and feminist criminology. Synthesizing qualitative studies, victimization data, and theory, it demonstrates how rural girls' justice involvement is shaped by patriarchy, service scarcity, trauma, and social isolation.
6. *Gaps in Access to Justice in Rural Area of New Brunswick* by Hesam Seyyed Esfahani examines the closure of a rural courthouse in New Brunswick's Acadian Peninsula, situating the decision within debates on access to justice, language rights, and administrative justiciability. Drawing on constitutional law and rural socio-legal scholarship, it shows how judicial withdrawal generates both material and symbolic harms.
7. *Rural realities: Unmasking the hidden dynamics of crime in South Africa's Countryside* by Willie Clack presents a mixed-methods analysis of livestock theft in rural South Africa, combining spatial analysis, routine activity theory, and socio-economic context. By mapping theft hotspots, it shows how rural crime emerges at the intersection of opportunity, vulnerability, and historical dispossession.

The seven articles in this special issue reflect both conceptual progression and empirical diversity. Together, they move from issues of institutional presence and access to justice to questions of regulatory governance, resource-based harms, and, finally, social relations, vulnerability, and global forces shaping rural crime and justice.