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# Say NOPE to social disorganization criminology: the importance of creators in neighborhood social control

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## Abstract

Despite decades of research into social disorganization theory, criminologists have made little progress developing community programs that reduce crime. The lack of progress is due in part to faulty assumptions in the theory: that neighborhoods are important; that residents are the primary source of control; and that informal social controls are emergent. In this paper we propose an alternative: the neighborhoods out of places explanation (NOPE). NOPE starts with property parcels (i.e., proprietary places), rather than neighborhoods. It focuses on the power and legal authority of people and institutions that own property, rather than on residents. It posits that control is intentional and goal driven, rather than emergent. We refer to those who own and control as creators. This small group of elites shape city areas and residents must adapt to the environments that suppress or facilitate crime. We discuss how shifting our focus to creators provides important new implications for theory, research, and policy in criminology.

**Keywords:** Community criminology, Social disorganization, Informal social control, Neighborhood, Crime at places, Place management, Crime opportunities, Environmental criminology

## Introduction

After 100 years of attention to neighborhoods, one would expect criminologists to have developed robust and reliable community interventions that reduce crime. In his review of community interventions, Rosenbaum (1988, p. 323) argued:

*there is a paucity of strong demonstrations and evaluations showing that such interventions can alter the behavior and local environments of persons who are not already predisposed to crime prevention.*

Little has changed since. Many point to weaknesses in the theoretical foundations of community interventions for the lack of support. For example, Welsh and Hoshi

(2002; p. 165) state, "there is little agreement in the academic literature on the definition of community prevention and the types of programs that fall within it."

These theoretical weaknesses go deeper. In her systematic review of the community-based interventions, Charlotte Gill (2016) tries to address this problem by making an important distinction between *in* and *on* community programs. *In* interventions focus on people living *in* communities (rather than institutions): for example, efforts to keep at-risk teens out of trouble or help people released from prisons re-enter society. These interventions do not attempt to improve community functioning. In contrast, *on* interventions, treat the community as a whole. They seek to improve collective functioning of residents. Three prominent examples of *on* interventions include neighborhood watch (Ben-nett et al., 2009), focused deterrence (Kennedy et al., 2001), and broken windows (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). All three are initiated, maintained, and often led by

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police. The evidence for neighborhood watch effectiveness is modest but based on old and weak studies (Gill, 2016). There is very strong evidence that focused deterrence works to reduce violence and some other crimes but the role of residents in the outcome is unclear; it might just be police (Braga, et al, 2019). After deadlocking due to contradictory and weak evidence, the jury on broken-windows policing is returning a verdict of not useful (O'Brien et al., 2019).

Both *in* and *on* interventions aim to improve informal social control. But does the evidence show that informal social control reduces crime? Our answer is no: the evidence is weak and ambiguous. As Cullen and Kulig (2018, p. 170) point out, "...nobody clearly defines what informal social control is or how precisely it works to limit crime events...thus, it is unclear whether the construct of informal social control has much utility". Moreover, the studies are overwhelmingly cross-sectional (Wickes & Hipp, 2018). Therefore, they cannot distinguish between lack of informal social control causing crime and crime undercutting informal social control. Indeed, when Wickes and Hipp (2018) analyzed longitudinal data, they found little support of an association between informal social control and crime (see also Hipp & Wickes, 2017).

After 100 years of attention, how is it that our interventions in communities and our evidence for informal social control is so uncertain? As Rosenbaum (1988) noted three decades ago, there are three reasons. First, maybe our researchers have used inappropriate methods to test a sound theory (Hipp, 2010). Second, maybe practitioners have misapplied a sound theory (Bullock et al. 2002). Third, maybe the theory is not sound.

The purpose of this paper is to address the third reason: the theoretical problems. Unless we have sound theory, no improvements to research methods or implementation will lead us to effective crime policies. We leave methods and implementation discussions for future research. So, let's look inside the theory.

At the heart of community criminology is social disorganization theory (Wilcox et al., 2018). Social disorganization and its control-focused variants are based on four ideas we call the neighborhood resident emergent control (NREC) framework. Neighborhood because they all involve a bounded subsection, or area, of a city. Resident because they always describe those who live in the neighborhood as the primary actors, if not the sole actors. Control because, at least since Kornhauser (1978), all variants describe how residents impose limits on each other's behaviors. And emergent because these controls always arise unplanned and undirected from the day-to-day interactions of residents going about their normal business, a product of human ecology originating in the Chicago School (Park et al., 1925).

These four characteristics hint at why NREC-based theories have not produced strong empirical support. First, neighborhoods cannot be coherently and consistently defined. Second, residents are not the sole important actors. Finally, control is not emergent. We will come back to these points later. We suggest criminologists should cling less tightly to the idea of neighborhoods, expand their ideas of who creates controls, and consider control as deliberate.

The alternative framework we propose is the neighborhoods out of places explanation (NOPE). NOPE starts with property parcels, rather than neighborhoods, that can be readily defined and identified. It focuses on the power and legal authority of people and institutions that own property, rather than on residents' interactions and associations. It posits that control is intentional and goal driven, rather than emergent.

Like the NREC framework, NOPE is an explanation of control. But NOPE proposes that those who create controls or crime opportunities do so at the proprietary places they manage (Cook & MacDonald, 2011; Madensen & Eck, 2012). We call these people *creators*. They make up a relatively small number of people and institutions, many of whom live outside of the areas surrounding their places (Linning & Eck, 2021). The creators of places shape neighborhoods; residents largely adapt to the works of creators. NOPE does not call attention to residents' inability to tend to broken windows, but to the owners of the windows. And in doing so, it helps explain something NREC variants have trouble accounting for: why a few places within any area have a great deal of crime but most places do not, even in high crime neighborhoods.

Our paper is organized as follows. Section two reviews the key assumptions in NREC theories and their weaknesses. Section three addresses these weaknesses by highlighting the role of creators. We discuss the history of deliberate government and private industry decision-making that shaped urban areas. We show how creators shape neighborhoods and exert control over them. This gives context to our NOPE framework outlined in our fourth section. In our final section, we discuss the theoretical, methodological, and policy implications of NOPE.

### **The fundamental assumptions of NREC theories**

Control is fundamental to community theories in the NREC framework (Wilcox et al., 2018). Neighborhoods with strong informal social control have less crime than those with weak informal social control. Routine interactions among residents create informal social control within neighborhoods by stimulating trust, fostering shared ideas of what behaviors are good and which are

not, and by creating expectations that neighbors will enforce these norms. When trust, shared norms, and expectations of enforcement are low, informal social control is weak. In turn, neighborhood characteristics—so-called structural factors—promote or suppress trust, norms, and enforcement (Wilcox et al., 2018).

Negative structural factors include poverty, population mobility, and ethnic heterogeneity. There are many ways to measure these factors. Concentrated disadvantage, for example, typically combines various indicators of poverty, single parent households, and proportion of young people. Prominent theories that apply the NREC framework are social disorganization (Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969), broken windows (Wilson & Kelling, 1982), the systemic model (Sampson & Groves, 1989), and collective efficacy (Sampson et al., 1997).

Studies based on the NREC framework go back over 100 years, to the beginnings of empirically based crime studies (Burgess, 1916). Nevertheless, there are no coherent, reliable, and evidence-based crime reduction strategies based on this research. Why? The answer lies in three assumptions criminologists make when they use this framework (see Fig. 1).

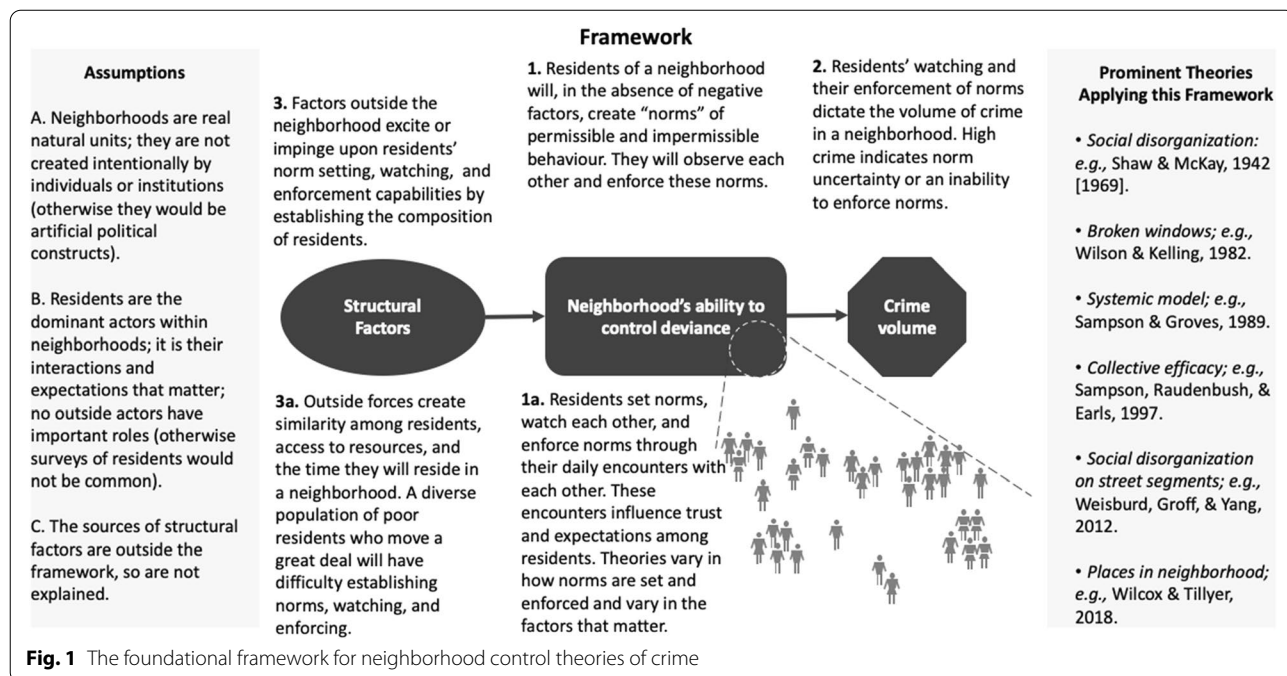
**Assumption A: neighborhoods are natural**

Community criminology theories assume neighborhoods arise naturally, without intentional interventions of individuals or institutions (Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969; Wilcox et al., 2018). The natural neighborhood originated from the human ecology perspective advanced by the

Chicago School (Park et al., 1925). There is also no agreement on the definition of a neighborhood (Hipp & Boessen, 2013; Taylor, 2015). At the start of their thorough examination of the community criminology literature, Wilcox et al., (2018, p. 2) note the absence of a standard definition for neighborhood (or community) and lament the “conceptual ambiguity that prevails within criminology.”

In the absence of a definition, researchers use whatever spatial grouping is available: census tracts, block groups, police administrative districts, postal codes, government planning areas. Two things unify the ways to divide areas. First, bureaucracies deliberately create them. Second, bureaucracies attach useful data to these areas, making their divisions of cities convenient for researchers. Even Chicago’s neighborhoods—the poster child for natural areas—were deliberately created for bureaucratic purposes:

*Not only did Burgess and his colleagues craft Chicago’s communities, but they also actively lobbied government bureaus, social workers, educators, and city officials to make use of this naming scheme. As a consequence, the 75 community areas became ingrained in the popular imagination. The “discovery” of a stable social ecology in Chicago amidst the tremendous flux in the city’s settlement patterns remains one of the most significant achievements on the part of University of Chicago’s social scientists (Venkatesh, 2001, p. 277).*



**Fig. 1** The foundational framework for neighborhood control theories of crime

If neighborhoods were created to serve the purposes of bureaucracies, then neighborhoods are artificial, rather than natural. This implies a different metaphor: neighborhoods are farmed fields, not natural areas (Linning & Eck, 2021). If criminologists cannot agree on how to define neighborhoods, they cannot scientifically study them.

**Assumption B: residents matter most**

From Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) to present, theories in community criminology are theories of how residents control crime. Surveys of “residents as informants” dominate the empirical literature (Sampson, 2012, p. 218). Within the NREC framework, residents are the ones who create informal social control. Using big data O’Brien (2018) has refined the study of how neighborhood problems can be solved when public services are mobilized by residents. Unexamined, however, is the possibility that for controlling crime nonresidents matter more.

Any reasonably large area of a city contains many land uses. Residents occupy much of the land, but they are not the only occupants. Businesses, governments, and others use much of the land, too. The people who own and operate these non-residential land uses often do not live in the neighborhood. Even much residential land use is operated by outsiders. We call it rental property and the people who control it are landlords.

If we are to believe that residents matter most, we must demonstrate first that nonresidents matter less. Researchers have not demonstrated this, principally because surveys of residents are blind to nonresidents. Later, we establish that people and institutions who own

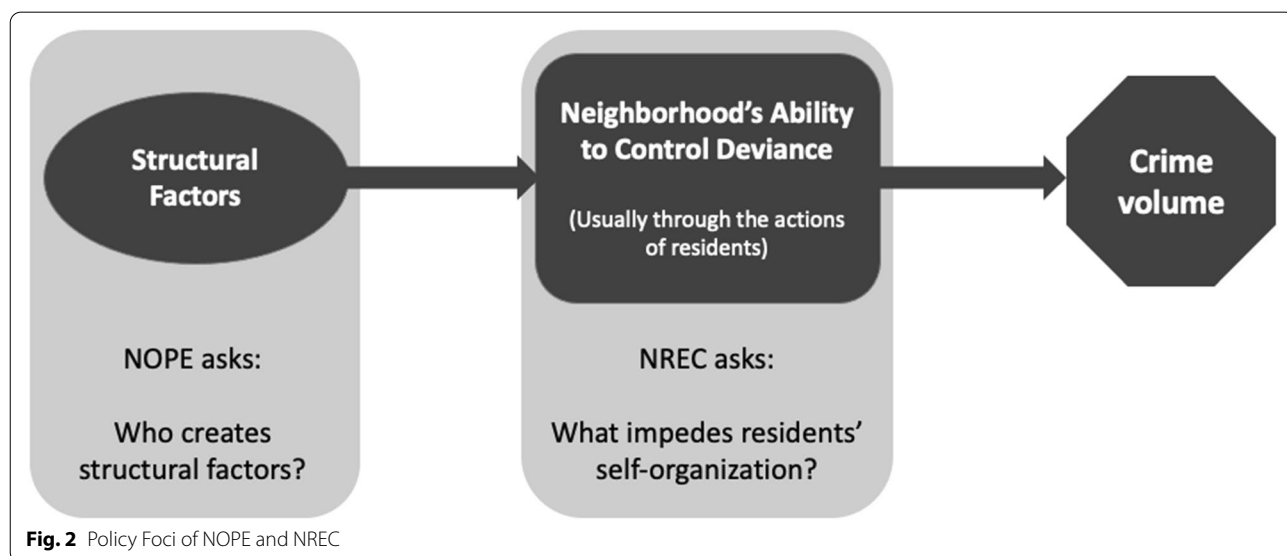
and operate property matter a great deal. In impoverished neighborhoods, they may matter most because of their influence in shaping structural factors.

**Assumption C: structural factors just happen**

NREC theories fail to include structural factors in policy implications. The typical causal process outlined in the NREC explanation is that poor structural factors impede residents’ abilities to organize themselves and exercise informal social control leading to higher neighborhood crime (Fig. 2). But little explanation is given as to the origins of structural factors (Snodgrass, 1976). Indeed, they are usually discussed in the passive voice. Consequently, when community criminologists provide possible solutions to reducing crime, they focus on ways to organize residents so they can better engage in informal social control (Gill, 2016). We take a different tack; we do not dismiss the structural factors or feel they are beyond our capabilities to influence. In the next section, we explain who shapes structural factors and why they should be included in crime theories.

**Highlighting creators in explanations of crime**

Our NOPE framework asks a new question: who creates structural factors? Our thesis is that a small number of people, usually property owners, create them. The deliberate creation of structural factors implies we can alter them. This provides new policy implications that could lead to meaningful change. Moving forward, we need to write in an active voice to identify who is doing the acting. Below we show some people who have done this acting throughout US history. Similar action has been taken by other people in other countries. Once we take this



action into account, our framework can explain another phenomenon that NREC theories cannot: the presence of hotspots in neighborhoods.

To make our case, we begin by providing the evidence that certain people create structural conditions in neighborhoods. Next, we argue that these people also create (or suppress) something far more important to explaining neighborhood crime: crime opportunities. Once we acknowledge the importance of these people, whom we call creators, we can begin designing effective policy recommendations to reduce crime more effectively.

### How creators shape structural factors

During the Shaw and McKay era, those in real estate were looking to create neighborhoods with high property values. Like criminologists, they were heavily influenced by the ecological perspective (Kuklick, 1980; Light, 2009). But they were focused on a different goal: generating profits. To them, creating socially organized neighborhoods would be the most lucrative. This meant creating neighborhoods with low poverty, ethnic homogeneity, and low population turnover. So those in the real estate, finance, and government sectors developed legal tools to create socially organized neighborhoods. Race drove many of the decisions to create these structural conditions (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011; Unnever & Owusu-Bempah, 2019). Below we provide a brief history from the United States because this is where the Chicago School was located. But also note that similar private and government decisions have happened in Western nations including the United Kingdom, Canada, China, France, Germany, and the Netherlands (Aalbers, 2006; Adams & Hastings, 2001; Couch et al., 2011; Klemek, 2011; Pickett, 1968).

First, American governments created zoning laws to control what types of buildings could go where (Glutzer, 2020; Rabin, 1989). They would allocate certain areas of cities for commercial buildings. Other areas, such as suburban ones, were designated for single-family homes (Jackson, 1985). Government zoning laws controlled city growth by dictating what types of structures could go where (Rothstein, 2017). Thus, city areas did not naturally emerge, they were created.

Next, during the New Deal era, government legislation created Federal agencies that encouraged developers to build suburban subdivisions catering to white residents (Jackson, 1985). They also created mortgage ratings systems that disincentivized banks from lending in inner-city neighborhoods. This process, often called redlining, stunted nearly all investment in low-income, minority occupied neighborhoods (Jackson, 1985; Massey & Denton, 1993; Rothstein, 2017). These same neighborhoods tend to be the ones that are considered

socially disorganized. There was nothing natural about why they came to be this way. Government policies and private investment decisions created these conditions (Jacobs, 1961). These practices created more poverty and concentrated disadvantage in inner-city areas (Eck & Linning, 2019; Linning & Eck, 2021).

After several decades of deterioration in inner-city areas, the federal government responded with urban renewal programs (Jacobs, 1961; Logan & Molotch, 1987). Governments used their powers of eminent domain to seize properties and sell them to developers to rebuild dilapidated areas (Jackson, 1985; Rothstein, 2017). This process forcibly evicted thousands of residents from their homes with little assistance in finding new housing (Abrams, 1955; Klemek, 2008). The result was the structural factor known as population mobility. Once residents began looking elsewhere for homes, they encountered another mechanism, created by real estate brokers, designed to fight the structural factor ethnic heterogeneity: restrictive covenants (Weiss & Watts, 1989).

Real estate brokers did not use a neighborhood strategy to build communities, they used a place-based one. They implemented covenants property by property (Glutzer, 2020). All properties possess legal documents stating their location, boundaries, and owners. These documents may also contain restrictions on the uses of property. These deed restrictions are sometimes called covenants. Real estate brokers wrote racial covenants, into property deeds. These covenants made it illegal for nonwhite persons to own, rent, or use these properties (Freund, 2007; Rothstein, 2017; Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, 2021; Trounstein, 2018). To control the racial composition of a large area, real estate brokers saw to it that racial covenants were written into the deeds of each property. This meant exerting control through the units they had control over: individual property parcels (Glutzer, 2020; Trounstein, 2018). In essence, real estate brokers, with the help of Federal housing policy, organized neighborhoods place-by-place (Weiss, 1987).

This history has very important implications. It shows that a small group of people—property owners, real estate brokers, bankers, governments—can create neighborhoods, by controlling places. Research shows a concentration of urban land ownership (Eck, 2019). But such concentration operates at larger scales, too. Many countries are owned by a small number of people. For example, nearly half of property in England is owned by less than 1% of the population (Evans, 2019). Thus, to understand how larger area conditions arise, we need to look at what is happening at individual parcels. When we do this,

it also uncovers a very important factor that has remained unexplained by NREC theories: crime hotspots.

### Creating crime opportunities

Though understanding structural factors is important, it only provides part of the story. For instance, a flaw of NREC theories are their inability to explain why neighborhoods contain crime hotspots (Eck, 2018). There have been attempts to address it, but they still follow the dubious assumptions described above. Wilcox and Tillyer's (2018) places in neighborhoods (PIN) approach, for example, relies on ambiguously defined neighborhoods as a fundamental unit of analysis. Weisburd and colleagues (2012) overcome this issue by focusing analyses at the street segment level, but their approach still suffers from a reliance on the assumption that residents are the vital source of informal social control. Our neighborhoods out of places explanation (NOPE) provides an alternative that can account for hotspots. To understand it, we must start at the smallest measurable units of analysis, property parcels, and their owners. We can then work up to larger processes.

Although first noted by Charles Booth in London (Morgan & Sinclair, 2019) and W.E.B. DuBois in Philadelphia (1899/1973), it's only since the late 1980s that criminologists have consistently paid attention to the fact that crime is highly concentrated at addresses (Pierce et al., 1988; Sherman et al., 1989). Most properties, even in high crime neighborhoods, experience no crime. Only a small number of properties experience multiple crimes. Studies consistently find that over half of all crime in a city is attributed to about 5% or less of places (Weisburd, 2015). Both high and low crime neighborhoods have hotspots (Eck, 2018; Sherman et al., 1989). NREC theories cannot explain this (Weisburd et al., 2012). If an entire neighborhood has poor structural factors, low collective efficacy, and deficient informal social control, why does crime only happen at a tiny fraction of its places? If NREC explanations are correct, shouldn't crime be spread throughout a high-crime neighborhood?

When we look at the actions of creators, it makes sense that crime is not widespread. Not only do creators influence structural factors, but they also influence crime opportunities at places. Research in environmental criminology consistently shows that crime opportunities arise at places (Eck, 2018). We can identify who controls each place: the place manager (Eck, 1994). Eck and Madensen (2018) explain that place managers are usually the property owner. They can sometimes be employees to whom owners have delegated control. All places have place managers. For commercial properties, it would be the property or business owner. For single-family homes, it would be the homeowner. For apartment buildings,

it would be the landlord. For public spaces—such as parks, streets, and sidewalks—it would be the municipal government.

Place managers are best equipped to suppress crime opportunities (Eck, 2015), often using situational crime prevention (Eck & Clarke, 2019). Property ownership gives place managers legal powers over their property. They can organize space, regulate conduct, control access, and acquire resources (Eck & Madensen, 2018; Madensen, 2007). The acquisition of resources is the most important for dictating how a place will be managed. For instance, a place that generates a healthy profit in an affluent neighborhood will have more resources for maintenance and safety. If a crime problem arises, the place manager will be equipped with the money, employees, and political connections to address the problem. She may also feel pressure from nearby place managers to maintain her property to a certain standard, including crime prevention measures. In affluent neighborhoods landlords must compete for good tenants. If tenants are unsatisfied with their living arrangements, they have the means to move elsewhere (Eck, 2019).

The incentive structure for place managers changes in lower income, often high crime, areas. Let's use the example of a landlord again for comparison purposes. These neighborhoods usually contain old buildings requiring more expensive maintenance. This deters place managers from investing in crime prevention relative to basic needs, such as electricity, heating, and water. Moreover, when tenants have few resources and are subject to discrimination, they have limited ability to move elsewhere if they are dissatisfied with their living conditions. This means the place manager is under less pressure to make necessary repairs or address crime problems on the property (Eck, 2019; Mallach, 2019).

### Extending place management into neighborhoods

Though Eck (1994) originally created place management theory to explain why some properties experience a lot of crime while most experience very little, it also helps explain crime across larger areas. There are four ways in which a place manager can derive control from owning property. The first is where he purchases a single property. This allows him to control what happens within the physical boundaries of his property parcel. Though he may informally influence happenings nearby, his legal authority is limited to what happens within the boundaries of his property.

Second, if this place manager wanted to extend his control, he could purchase additional properties. This is a very common practice among property owners. Payne (2010), for example, found that a few people owned many of the apartment buildings in Cincinnati, Ohio. The

Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation owns dozens of properties in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood (Woodard, 2016). This happens in cities around the world (e.g., Warerkar, 2018). Limited liability corporations (LLCs) often own multiple properties as well. Consequently, place managers create networks of places they have control over (Linning & Eck, 2021).

The third way place managers extend their control to wider areas is by creating networks with other place managers. It is common for property developers to team up to redevelop city areas. For example, a development company may be contracted to build a stadium. Several other developers may come together to purchase adjacent properties to open bars, restaurants, and apartments that fans will use because of the stadium. It is also common for place managers to look out for each other's property. For example, owners of different businesses can have staggered business hours, such as a coffee shop and a restaurant. The owners of these two places can watch out for each other's properties. While the former opens early in the morning, the latter stays open into the evening. This increases the amount of control and guardianship they have over each other's property and any nearby/shared space between them (Linning & Eck, 2021).

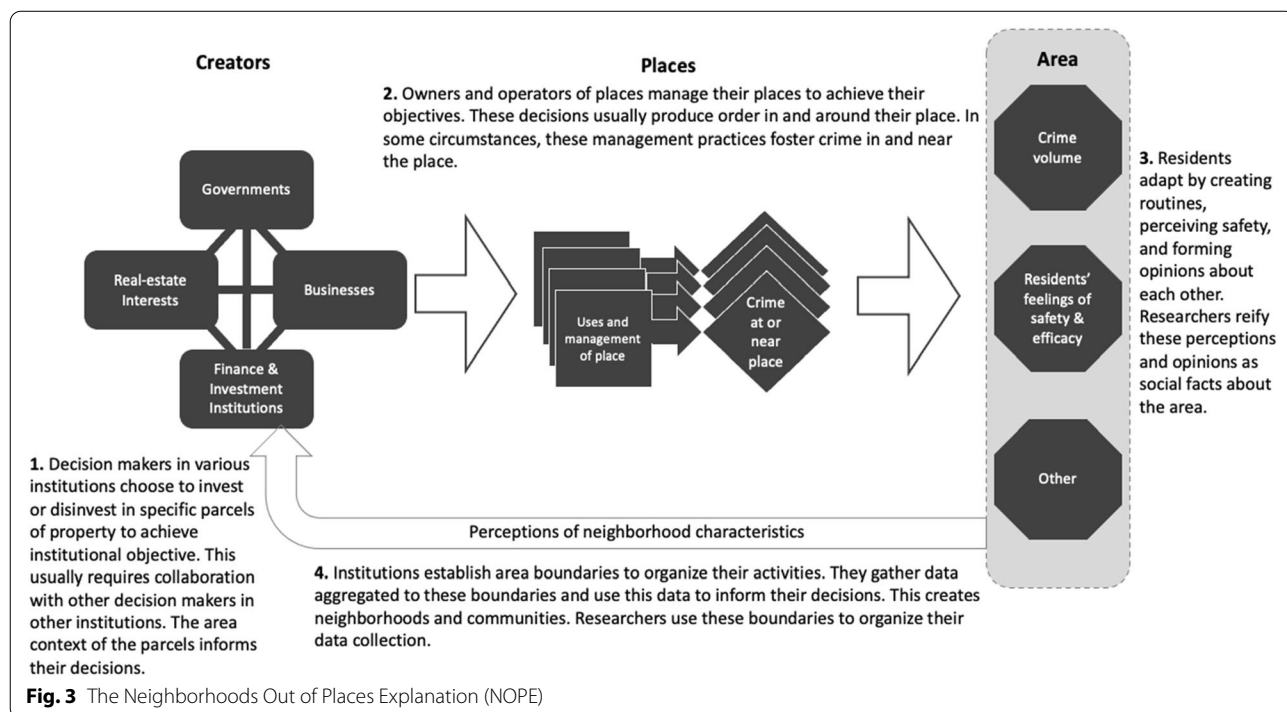
The final way place managers extend their control to wider areas is through their connections with financial and governmental agencies. For example, local governments might offer prospective property developers tax abatements to entice them to invest in declining

neighborhoods as opposed to more affluent ones. This can often put governments at the mercy of developers. However, sometimes the reverse is also true. Building codes and zoning regulations by governments can control decisions of developers (Linning & Eck, 2021; Sampson, Eck, & Dunham, 2010).

What do these four means of control mean for neighborhood crime? It implies that neighborhood conditions are controlled by a small number of people who own the properties within them. A small number of these place managers purchase multiple properties in an area and work with other place managers to shape neighborhoods. These place managers are seldom residents of these neighborhoods. In fact, many of them own properties in multiple neighborhoods, cities, and even states or countries. They design and control much within neighborhoods. Residents then must adapt to the environments created by this small number of outsiders.

**The neighborhoods out of places explanation (NOPE)**

If a few creators are critical, then we need an alternative to the NREC framework. We show this in Fig. 3. Creators can influence structural factors and crime opportunities. Their influence over neighborhoods comes from their control of places. Most creators suppress crime opportunities. However, as the law of troublesome places dictates, a small subset of them fail at this (Wilcox & Eck, 2011). Differences in crime across neighborhoods can be



attributed to the unequal distribution of crime opportunities that these few people fail to suppress. Residents must adapt to these high crime opportunity environments and have little power to informally control crime. NOPE suggests that place managers are the principal actors for suppressing crime.

Table 1 summarizes how NOPE contrasts with the NREC framework. NOPE proposes a bottom-up explanation whereby we start at property parcels and work up to larger area processes. Unlike neighborhoods, property parcels are easy to define and have readily identifiable boundaries. NOPE also argues that neighborhoods are institutionally created. They do not naturally emerge. Most control is derived from property rights bestowed to place managers through property ownership. While residents can engage in informal social control, much of their behaviors are adaptations to environments created by place managers. This means place managers can change environments to suppress crime opportunities.

**Implications**

**Implications for theory**

Neighborhoods do not emerge naturally from resident interactions. As Pfohl (1994, p. 169) asserts:

*Whatever the benefits of the disorganization metaphor, its disadvantages for the socially and economically powerless are significant. What the Chicago theorists describe as natural ecological conflict is really an unequal human struggle over the control of urban space.*

Scholars have called attention to the political economy for many decades (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Taylor et al., 2011). Our call to insert the political economy into criminology is not new (Unnever, 1987). We need to do so with

increased precision. Developers, real estate brokers, government agents, and others create neighborhoods place-by-place. Ecological metaphors hide the role of creators. Real ecologies grow and evolve without human direction. Ecologies continually remake themselves; humans maintain cities. Ecologies are self-organized; people organize cities. Ecological metaphors are sets of stories that have helped guide research, but they are not scientific facts.

NOPE implies residents’ beliefs about each other—their trusts, ties, fears, and opinions about the willingness of neighbors to do things—has little bearing on crime. In high-crime neighborhoods, these psychological states are a byproduct of living in environments created by others. This explains the findings of Wickes and Hipp (2018). The positive mental states of inhabitants of low-crime residential neighborhoods are, in part, the result of owners having more control over their environments. After all, as homeowners they are their own place managers.

The emphasis on residents’ actions obscures the deliberate actions of place managers. We do not oppose democratic mobilization. It is necessary. However, to create positive change one must have a clear-eyed view of reality. Community organizing will not reduce crime by increasing informal social control; community organizing might change the decisions of elites. Elites drive neighborhood functions.

We present reality; creators play a fundamental role in shaping neighborhoods. Creators have power and influence (Fincher et al., 2016). Our theory does not assert creator-induced changes are good, or bad. They are merely so. Creators shape crime opportunities, so we need to include them in our theories, metaphors, and research.

**Table 1** A Comparison of the NREC to NOPE Frameworks

Characteristic	Neighborhood Resident Emergent Control (NREC)	Neighborhood Out of Places Explanation (NOPE)
Area unit (i.e., neighborhood)	Natural real area. Principle subject of theory. Most important unit of analysis	Institutionally created and not natural. An arbitrary artifact of interest groups
Place unit (i.e., property parcel)	Usually overlooked. When addressed, it is a component of areas	Locus of control. Principle subject of theory. Important unit of analysis. Frequent point of policy interventions
Principle actors	Residents	Place managers (owners and operators of places)
Role of residents	Active and essential	Largely passive adaptors to circumstances created by others
Sources of authority and control	Collective opinion and actions of residents	Property rights of place managers based in law
Outside influences	Largely unexplained large-scale social forces	Governments, businesses, real estate, and financial institutions that see their interests advanced by the uses of land and property
Policy	Few tangible implications that can produce reliable results and are evidence-based	A variety of implications for altering the management of places, with considerable supporting evidence of reliable results



**Table 2** Evidence creators have acted upon areas

There are many ways to detect the role of creators, few of which require substantial training, skill, or resources. The items below are some of the most obvious

Physical Evidence. Much of this can be seen walking or driving through a city

- Streets, especially if in forms unlikely to be generated by an undirected process (e.g., grid networks in North America; crescents in the United Kingdom)
- Areas of housing, or other buildings, that are architecturally similar, if not identical, constructed at the same time; planned estates; housing projects; business parks
- Large scale disruptions of street and building patterns created by infrastructure (e.g., highways, train tracks)
- Signage in gentrifying areas mentioning developers, financiers, and government agencies (e.g., XYZ Group, financed by ABC Bank, funded by MNO Agency)

Records Evidence. Available from government agencies, laws and statues, or historical records

- Zoning controls over land use and development. The physical evidence is often visible on the ground, but also in the paper record of laws
- Historical records of institutions of developed areas, real estate companies, banks, mortgage holders, government housing agencies
- Photographs of old landscapes compared to current landscapes illustrating large-scale transformations (e.g., old canal vs. today's boulevard)

Statistical Evidence. Found in databases maintained by governments and businesses

- Ownership records of land parcels showing a few entities own a considerable amount of property
- Linking ownership to crime at parcels shows a few owners have most of the parcels with crime, and much of the crime

Other Evidence. Observing the business news, engaging in conversations with property owners and developers, and observing political forums (e.g., city council discussions) provides more evidence

- The existence and success of property developers, property management firms, and city planning offices
- Discussions and debates over development and large-scale uses of land documented in regulatory agency records and in news reports
- Talking to people who operate places about their employer's expectations
- Books and articles on the history of areas focusing on architecture, property law, racial segregation, prominent buildings, and infrastructure

### Implications for research

Observations, surveys, and administrative data will remain as key data sources, but they have to be adapted to the study of creators. This will take creativity, but work has already started (Clarke & Bichler-Robertson, 1998; Cook & MacDonald, 2011; Lee et al., 2021; Olaghere & Eck, 2023). Further, evidence showing the actions of creators is plentiful. Table 2 outlines physical, statistical, and administrative measures of property ownership and creator activity that we could use to advance our research. It shows evidence of creation that criminologists could use.

We also need to ask different questions to understand crime opportunities at places. Some lines of inquiry could explore: Who creates places and why? What supports creation and how? Where does creation occur and how long does it take? Who maintains or neglects places and why? Future research should seek to understand the role of creators in the development of structural factors and crime opportunities. Does this process start with creators? Is there an indirect relationship?

### Implications for policy

Places are where social life, crime opportunities, and suppression efforts unfold. Ignoring creators may yield poor policy and science (Cook & MacDonald, 2011; DeLeon-Granados, 1999; O'Brien et al., 2019). It is essential for policymakers to pay attention to land use planning,

decision-making, and economics. Land use policies play an important role in the creation of structural factors. These policies also dictate the way creators can manage places and shape areas. If creators facilitate opportunities for crime, they can change opportunity structures at places.

Policies can incentivize productive and inclusive behavior among creators. Government regulation of creators may be useful for enhancing the public good, in some circumstances (Eck & Eck, 2012). This removes the locus of regulation from police and residents. Residents and the problem-solving framework still matter (DeLeon-Granados, 1999). However, the burden should not be entirely on them. Motivated residents can only do so much. Why do we place the burden of crime control on residents when much of the land they use is controlled by outsiders? From a NOPE perspective, resident organization may be valuable to counter adverse decisions by outsiders. But social organization does not have much direct influence on crime and we should avoid policies that depend on invoking residents' informal social control.

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