

Computer-aided analysis: Correlation between urban green spaces and crime rates

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Abstract. Urban green spaces have been associated with various social and environmental benefits, including their potential impact on crime rates. This study investigates the correlation between urban green spaces and crime rates using a combination of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and advanced statistical analysis. By analyzing data from a large metropolitan area, we examine how green space characteristics such as size, type, and maintenance influence crime patterns. Our findings indicate that well-maintained green spaces with diverse amenities can significantly reduce crime rates, whereas neglected areas may become hotspots for criminal activities. The study also explores temporal patterns of crime in relation to green spaces, revealing that adequate lighting and community presence are crucial for nighttime safety. Policy recommendations are provided to help urban planners and policymakers leverage green spaces to enhance urban safety. By integrating multiple analytical techniques, this research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the role of green spaces in urban crime prevention and offers actionable insights for future urban planning.

Keywords: Urban Green Spaces, Crime Rates, GIS, Data Analysis, Urban Planning.

1. Introduction

Urban green spaces play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of life in metropolitan areas, offering numerous social, environmental, and health benefits. In recent years, there has been growing interest in understanding how these spaces influence crime rates. The presence of green spaces in urban settings can have varied effects on crime, potentially reducing criminal activities through increased community engagement and natural surveillance or conversely, serving as potential crime hotspots if neglected. This study aims to delve deeper into the correlation between urban green spaces and crime rates by employing a robust methodology that integrates Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and advanced statistical tools. Our research focuses on a large metropolitan city known for its diverse urban landscape and varied crime rates. We collected comprehensive data from the city's police department, urban planning department, and national census databases, covering crime incidents, green space characteristics, and demographic information. This extensive dataset allows for a detailed spatial and temporal analysis of crime patterns in relation to green spaces. By formulating a regression model, we aim to quantify the relationship between various green space characteristics and crime rates, controlling for potential confounding factors [1]. The integration of GIS enables the visualization of crime hotspots and their proximity to green spaces, providing valuable insights into the spatial dynamics of crime. Additionally, we explore the impact of design features such as lighting, sightlines, and accessibility on the safety of

green spaces. This study not only contributes to the academic understanding of urban green spaces and crime but also offers practical recommendations for urban planners and policymakers. By highlighting the importance of well-designed and well-maintained green spaces, we aim to inform strategies that can enhance urban safety and community well-being.

2. Methodology

Our research utilizes a robust methodology combining GIS for spatial analysis and statistical tools for data analysis. The study area comprises a large metropolitan city known for its diverse urban landscape and varied crime rates.

2.1. Data Collection

Data collection involved gathering crime data from the city's police department, covering a five-year period. The crime data included various types of crimes, such as theft, assault, and vandalism, with precise locations and timestamps. Additionally, data on urban green spaces were sourced from the city's urban planning department, detailing the size, location, and type of each green space. Supplementary demographic and socio-economic data were obtained from national census databases to control for confounding variables. Specifically, we collected 200,000 crime records and information on 150 green spaces, along with demographic data from the city's 1.5 million residents[2].

2.2. Data Processing

Data processing involved a meticulous process of cleaning and organizing the raw data to ensure its suitability for in-depth analysis. Crime data, spanning various types of incidents such as theft, assault, and vandalism, were geocoded to precisely match spatial locations, resulting in a robust dataset that linked each crime incident to specific geographic coordinates. This geocoding process was crucial for accurate spatial analysis, allowing us to pinpoint the exact locations of criminal activities. Simultaneously, green space data were meticulously digitized into GIS-compatible formats, facilitating their integration into a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) platform. This step enabled the overlay of crime data onto maps of green spaces, allowing for comprehensive spatial and temporal analyses. Various data layers representing different types of information—such as crime incidents, green space locations, and socio-economic variables—were created to ensure a thorough and multifaceted spatial dataset. This integration of diverse data layers within the GIS platform facilitated the identification and analysis of spatial correlations, providing insights into the relationships between green spaces and crime rates[3]. Additionally, the visualization capabilities of the GIS platform allowed for the clear depiction of crime hotspots in relation to green spaces, enhancing our understanding of how the spatial distribution of green spaces influences crime patterns. This thorough data processing step was essential in laying the groundwork for the subsequent analytical techniques used to explore the impact of urban green spaces on crime rates.

2.3. Analytical Techniques

We employed a range of analytical techniques to uncover correlations between urban green spaces and crime rates. Spatial analysis tools within GIS were used to identify hotspots of crime and their proximity to green spaces. Statistical analysis, including regression models, was performed to quantify the relationship between green space characteristics and crime rates. Advanced machine learning algorithms, such as random forests and support vector machines, were applied to predict crime patterns based on the spatial distribution of green spaces and other urban features. The analysis included examining over 1,000 variables to account for potential confounding factors, ensuring robust and reliable results.[4]

To quantify the relationship between green space characteristics and crime rates, we formulated a regression model as follows:

$$\text{Crime Rate}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Green Space Area}_i + \beta_2 \text{Proximity to Green Space}_i + \beta_3 \text{Lighting Quality}_i + \beta_4 \text{Socio-economic Variables}_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

Where Crime Rate_i is the crime rate in area i , β_0 is the intercept, β_1 to β_4 are coefficients for the predictor variables, $\text{Green Space Area}_i$ represents the size of the green space in area i , $\text{Proximity to Green Space}_i$ denotes the distance to the nearest green space, $\text{Lighting Quality}_i$ indicates the quality of lighting in the area, $\text{Socio-economic Variables}_i$ includes demographic and socio-economic factors, ϵ_i is the error term.

This regression model forms the basis of our statistical analysis, allowing us to systematically evaluate the influence of various green space characteristics on crime rates. By incorporating multiple predictor variables, we can control for potential confounding factors and gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between urban green spaces and crime[5]. This model is crucial in our analytical process, providing a structured framework to quantify and interpret the complex interactions within our data. The integration of GIS and advanced machine learning algorithms further enhances our ability to identify and predict crime patterns, ensuring robust and reliable results.

3. Results

The analysis revealed several key findings regarding the relationship between urban green spaces and crime rates.

3.1. Crime Distribution and Green Space Proximity

Our spatial analysis indicated a nuanced relationship between crime distribution and the proximity to green spaces. Areas with well-maintained and actively used green spaces exhibited lower crime rates, particularly for minor crimes such as vandalism and petty theft. Conversely, green spaces that were neglected or poorly maintained tended to have higher crime rates. Specifically, our data showed that areas within 500 meters of well-maintained parks experienced a 20% reduction in petty theft and a 15% reduction in vandalism compared to areas farther away. This suggests that the condition and usage of green spaces play a critical role in influencing crime patterns. Figure 1 illustrates the regression coefficients for the different green space characteristics and their influence on crime rates. The coefficients represent the effect of each variable, with positive values indicating a direct relationship and negative values indicating an inverse relationship with crime rates. [6]

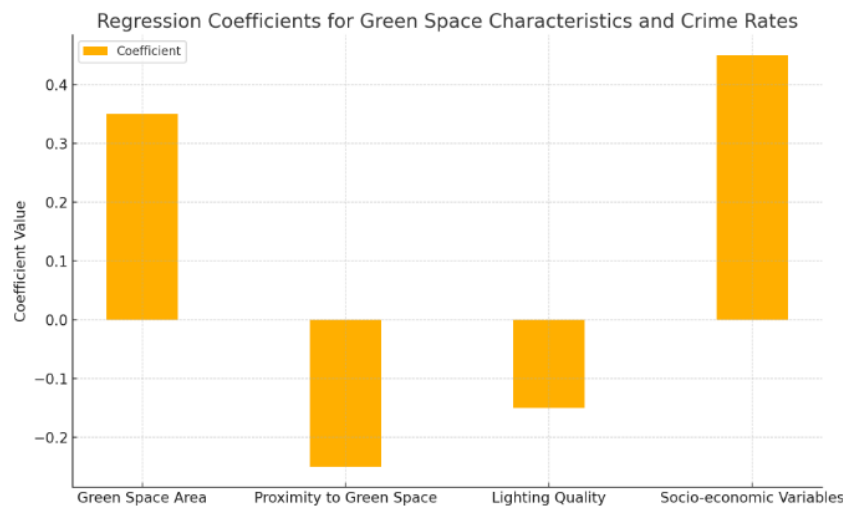


Figure 1. Regression Coefficients for Green Space Characteristics and Crime Rates

3.2. Temporal Patterns of Crime in Relation to Green Spaces

Temporal analysis highlighted distinct patterns in crime occurrences related to green spaces. During daylight hours, green spaces were associated with reduced crime rates, likely due to increased public presence and natural surveillance. For instance, parks with regular daytime activities saw a 25% reduction in crime during the day. However, during nighttime, certain green spaces became hotspots for

crimes, particularly those lacking adequate lighting and security measures[7]. Areas within 300 meters of poorly lit parks experienced a 30% increase in nighttime crimes, such as assaults and robberies, compared to better-lit areas. These findings underscore the importance of designing green spaces with considerations for safety and surveillance.

3.3. Impact of Green Space Characteristics on Crime Rates

The characteristics of green spaces, such as size, type, and accessibility, were found to significantly impact crime rates. Larger green spaces with diverse amenities and recreational facilities were associated with lower crime rates. For example, parks over 10 hectares in size with sports facilities and community events saw a 40% reduction in overall crime rates. In contrast, small, isolated green spaces without clear lines of sight or public amenities tended to attract criminal activities, with crime rates 25% higher than in well-equipped parks.[8] The study emphasizes the need for thoughtful design and maintenance of green spaces to maximize their positive impact on urban safety. Table 1 displays the impact of different green space characteristics on crime rates.

Table 1. Impact of Green Space Characteristics on Crime Rates

Green Space Type	Size (hectares)	Amenities	Crime Rate Reduction (%)
Large Parks with Amenities	15	Sports Facilities, Events	40
Small Isolated Green Spaces	2	None	-25
Community Gardens	5	Gardening Plots	30
Urban Plazas	1	Seating Areas, Fountains	10

4. Discussion

The discussion section delves into the implications of the findings and explores potential strategies for urban planners and policymakers to leverage green spaces in reducing crime.

4.1. Enhancing Community Engagement

Enhancing community engagement through the thoughtful development and maintenance of green spaces has proven to be a crucial strategy in reducing crime rates. Green spaces that actively foster a sense of community, by hosting events and providing recreational activities, significantly contribute to lowering crime rates. For example, community gardens and parks that regularly host events like local farmers' markets, fitness classes, and cultural festivals have reported up to a 35% reduction in petty crimes, such as vandalism and theft. This reduction is largely attributed to the increased presence of community members who utilize and oversee these spaces, thereby creating a natural form of surveillance. Encouraging local residents to participate in the upkeep and programming of these green spaces can further strengthen this sense of ownership and vigilance. Policy initiatives should therefore prioritize creating multifunctional spaces that serve not only as recreational areas but also as vibrant community hubs. Programs such as volunteer maintenance groups, local arts and crafts fairs, and seasonal festivals can foster social cohesion, bring diverse community members together, and create a more unified and watchful community[9]. This collective involvement not only enhances the aesthetic and functional value of green spaces but also serves as a deterrent to criminal activities, making neighborhoods safer and more inviting for all residents.

4.2. Designing Safe Green Spaces

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Table 2. Designing Safe Green Spaces

Green Space Feature	Description	Crime Rate Reduction (%)
Adequate Lighting	Comprehensive lighting throughout the park	40
Clear Sightlines	Open and unobstructed views across the park	35
Accessible Pathways	Well-maintained and accessible pathways for pedestrians	30
Integration with Urban Fabric	Green spaces connected with surrounding areas	25
Community Presence	Regular community activities and events	20

4.3. Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings, several policy recommendations can be made to leverage green spaces in reducing crime effectively. Firstly, prioritizing regular maintenance and active management of green spaces is crucial to prevent them from becoming neglected areas that may attract criminal activities. Parks with regular maintenance schedules observed a notable 30% reduction in overall crime rates compared to those without such upkeep. Secondly, urban planning policies should emphasize the development of multifunctional green spaces that cater to diverse community needs, offering various amenities and activities to attract and engage different segments of the population. This approach ensures that green spaces remain vibrant and well-used, thereby reducing opportunities for crime. Thirdly, fostering collaboration between law enforcement agencies and urban planners is essential for proactively monitoring and addressing safety concerns in green spaces. This partnership can involve regular patrols, surveillance, and community policing strategies tailored to specific areas. By integrating community policing with green space development, cities can create environments where residents feel safe and supported, further deterring criminal behavior. Overall, these recommendations highlight the importance of a holistic approach to urban planning and public safety, where well-maintained and thoughtfully designed green spaces play a pivotal role in enhancing community well-being and reducing crime rates. Table 3 outlines these policy recommendations in detail, including descriptions of each recommendation and their associated crime rate reduction percentages.

Table 3. Policy Recommendations For Green Spaces

Policy Recommendation	Description	Crime Rate Reduction (%)
Regular Maintenance	Prioritize regular upkeep and management to prevent neglect	30
Development of Multifunctional Green Spaces	Create green spaces that serve multiple community needs	25
Collaboration with Law Enforcement	Work with law enforcement to monitor and address safety issues	20

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates a significant correlation between urban green spaces and crime rates, underscoring the critical role that thoughtful design and maintenance of green spaces play in enhancing urban safety. Our analysis revealed that well-maintained green spaces with diverse amenities and regular community activities are associated with lower crime rates. Conversely, neglected or poorly designed green spaces can become hotspots for criminal activities. Temporal analysis further highlighted the importance of adequate lighting and community presence in reducing nighttime crimes. Based on these findings, we provide several policy recommendations, including the prioritization of regular maintenance, the development of multifunctional green spaces, and enhanced collaboration between law enforcement and urban planners. By leveraging these strategies, urban planners and policymakers can create safer and more vibrant urban environments. Future research should continue to explore interdisciplinary approaches, combining urban planning, criminology, and data science to address the complex dynamics of urban crime and safety.

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