Chasing Moving Targets in Rural Spaces: Local Policing and Drug-Related Interventions

Susanne Stenbacka

Published online: 10 Dec 2021.

Submit your article to this journal ⬀

Article views: 601

View related articles ⬀

View Crossmark data ⬀

FOCUS: THE GEOGRAPHIES OF CRIME AND POLICING IN THE GLOBAL COUNTRYSIDE

Chasing Moving Targets in Rural Spaces: Local Policing and Drug-Related Interventions

Susanne Stenbacka
Uppsala University, Sweden

Globalization in rural areas is commonly described in terms of both challenges and opportunities. Opportunities include increased communication and reduced distance. These factors, however, are also favorable for illicit activities such as increased opportunities for marketing drugs on the Internet and reduced barriers for transporting drugs. The drug industry is global and involves cross-site processes, but the drug problem is very local. This article discusses how drug activities infiltrate the work of professionals in rural places and the way this affects rural people and their living environment. In local communities, the police have the authority to counteract the spread and use of drugs, an authority that is described as geographically thinned. That is, police as well as other professionals combating the effects of drug abuse are affected as local cooperation, which is often encouraged by short distances, dense networks, and local knowledge, is weakened. Using a qualitative interview approach, this study argues that local practices related to prevention of drug-related crime are poorly equipped to deal with the speed and range of the contemporary drug trade. **Key Words: drugs, police, rural, Sweden, time–space compression.**

The impact of globalization on rural areas is commonly described in terms of both challenges and opportunities. The challenges include increased market competition destabilizing the local economic base, disassembled trade barriers, increased international mobility, and improved communication technologies (Woods and McDonagh 2011). Some of these opportunities and challenges apply to illicit activities such as reduced barriers for transporting drugs and increased opportunities for marketing drugs on the Internet.

This article investigates how globalization of crime affects rural policing (Barton, Storey, and Palmer 2016) of drug activity and how drug-related policing is experienced by police officers and other service professionals such as medical authorities, rescue services, and social welfare and educational institutions. In addition, this study aims to explain the position of the rural place, including the spatial distribution of power in relation to globalization processes and globalized crime. Therefore, the empirical point of departure is drug use and drug-related crimes in a small, remote municipality in northern Sweden.

Because Sweden is a large, sparsely populated country, people often are required to drive long distances to access work or the services they need, challenges that are magnified when driving in harsh winter conditions. To capture these challenges, this study was conducted in a relatively sparsely populated municipality in Norrbotten County (less than 5,000 inhabitants or 0.3 inhabitants/km^2). Nonetheless, basic services related to health care, policing, natural resource management, firefighting, and education are provided. The case study highlights the interdependence and consequences of weak links among central functions, processes that characterize many rural areas or peripheries in Europe.

Digital Drug Markets in a Rural Context

Nearly thirty years ago, Weisheit (1993) concluded that the lack of knowledge about drug use in rural areas has meant that rural areas are ill prepared to deal with drug-related problems. During the years that have followed, some studies included rural areas, primarily focusing on drugs in relation to drug abuse, health, well-being, and access to drug abuse services (Borders and Booth 2007; Rigg, Monnat, and Chavez 2018; Fadanelli et al. 2020) as well as the global drug war against methamphetamine labs (Linneman and Kurtz 2014; Revier 2018). Studies on the geography of drug markets mainly focus on international drug flows (Matthews et al. 2021) rather than national or translocal contexts. One reason for this might be that a peripheral location has traditionally been seen as a "vaccine" against drug access and abuse. Before the digital revolution, rural areas were often described as less exposed to drug trafficking as the result of their

remoteness (Matthews et al. 2021). Because rural areas are perceived as less prone to criminal activity, they often are not provided enough resources to be proactive. That is, urban areas (areas with spatially concentrated crimes) are prioritized, whereas rural areas (areas with spatially dispersed crimes) are trivialized (Gilling 2016).

Some ruralities, however, suffer from the same problems associated with urban settings such as illegal drug use by young people. In these ruralities, close-knit networks among societal institutions might be advantageous, but people in rural areas who need support for their attempts to overcome drug abuse are hindered by poor public transport, complicating the use of supportive agencies, which are limited and widely dispersed (Barton 2005; Barton, Storey, and Palmer 2016).

Barnard and Forsyth (1998), in a study on rural Scotland, concluded there was "an apparent near universal drug availability" (433). Since then, a factor that has affected access to drugs in a decisive way is the transformation of the distribution system. The Council of the European Union characterizes the drug market as becoming increasingly digitized and frames this new reality as follows: "The use of these technologies can significantly lower the barriers to entry into the market, be disruptive to established business models and create new challenges for law enforcement and public health" (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction 2019, 25).

An international study based on an online survey of drug users concluded that users prefer "social supply" through friends, but data indicate that apps are increasingly becoming a viable option (Moylea et al. 2019). In their investigation of intercepted drug packages in Scotland, Matthews et al. (2021) found a higher delivery rate than expected to some remote and rural locations, concluding that "the opening up of licit markets through greater Internet connectivity within remote and rural parts of Scotland has probably also facilitated an increase in online drug purchases which are then delivered through the post" (3). Consequently, the level of drug-related harm has changed in the affected communities.

The sale of drugs on the Swedish market, through the Internet, seems to be increasing, according to the Council of the European Union (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction 2015). This is due to rapid changes with regard to increased use of the Internet, development of new techniques for economic transfers, innovative encryption methods, and new alternative digital marketplaces. These goods can be distributed relatively free of risk within the country in smaller quantities via letters or packages directly to users' homes or to local mail contractors. The Swedish post service has been deregulated since 1993, when the state monopoly was abandoned. In the early 2000s, traditional post offices were replaced with business centers (primarily for firms and businesses) and postal agents (*Postombud*), such as petrol stations or grocery stores, which handle letters and packages.

The use of Internet and post deliveries contributes to increased insecurity among those individuals working with deliveries of parcels and letters. Employees might be threatened and they often feel uncomfortable contributing to the use of drugs (Andersson and Soold 2020). The effects of the flows and power structure are easily identified but difficult to trace (Bridge 1997).

Barton, Storey, and Palmer (2016) summarized the opportunities facing rural areas as a comparative lack of mobility, less anonymity, and higher visibility, allowing for more detailed control and manageable stability. The contemporary process of digitization has, however, undermined the basis of such tactics, and the expanded geographical area of responsibility for the individual police officer means that either the local knowledge is thinned out or there is knowledge but not enough resources to disrupt local supplies of drugs.

Time–Space Compression, Drugs, and the Rural Context

Factors such as increased communication possibilities and reduced impact of distance barriers, often mentioned when scrutinizing the impact of globalization, also benefit illicit activities; for example, by reducing barriers for marketing and transporting drugs. The concept of time–space compression helps contextualize these processes. In Harvey's understanding, time–space compression has two components: technological advances and temporal compression (Bridge 1997). Consequences take shape in how actors, artefacts, and spatial contexts are positioned and repositioned in both absolute and relative ways as the previous remote and distant places (i.e., rural areas) become connected and accessible.

In an article on drug distribution following advertising in a large international marketplace, Dolliver, Ericson, and Love (2018), referring to Harvey (1990) and Appadurai (1996), defined time–space compression as "the growing speed of communication and movement of capital worldwide" and indicated that "most aspects of the drug distribution chain remain offline" (45), which leads to the apparent urge for studying patterns of physical spatial distribution and use and how these patterns are expressed in local contexts and situations. Matthews et al. (2021) used the concept to explain the spatial patterning of drugs in a national context by examining drug deliveries by postal service in rural Scotland. The two articles just referred to contribute to an understanding of drug deliveries in international and national contexts. Focusing on the local context, this article offers an insight into place-based societal processes in relation to drug deliveries and abuse.

Massey (1993) argued that Harvey's understanding of time–space compression, including the focus on the power of capital, ignores other power geometries involved. That is, the increased communication flows and interconnectedness do not influence all social groups or categories in the same manner. Two parallel paths of development can be identified in relation to contemporary rural communities: increased possibilities for distribution and abuse of drugs and strained public resources regarding policing. This development implies that rather than seeing everyday life as a haven (as suggested by Harvey, in Bridge 1997), in opposition to the speed and repositioning that time–space compression inflicts, this work makes visible the power geometries that infuse everyday life (Massey 1993; Bridge 1997).

Method

The empirical point of departure is drug use, drug-related crimes, and local impact in a small, remote municipality in northern Sweden. A qualitative approach is chosen to give voice to individuals who experience this impact and to illuminate how they respond to, and contextualize, the situations that occur.

This study is thus based on qualitative semistructured interviews representing diverse institutions such as the police (at local and regional levels), social services, schools, the municipality administration, rescue services, ambulance services, civil society, the county administrative board, a nearby Sami village, and the Swedish Federation of Farmers. In total, twenty interviews (ten men and ten women) were conducted with individuals representing primarily the local level and three interviews (all men) were conducted with individuals representing the regional and national levels. Some interviews were conducted in groups of two or three individuals. The interviews were conducted during three visits in the case study area, in May 2018, August 2018, and May 2019. Initially, the Norrbotten region was chosen because of its specific challenges regarding a sparse population, long distances, and the attendant difficulties of providing welfare. Two interviews with regional representatives were made initially. They were chosen because of their knowledge of the region, the municipalities, the organizational structure, and interdependencies. In addition, they were appointed safety representatives, with an interest in working life issues. Safety representatives are appointed by the trade unions that have collective agreements in the workplace. One of the regional interviewees helped facilitate the initial local contacts with police officers in one municipality, and in the first interviews with these local police officers we discussed how to expand the study with informants from other sectors. Thus, further participants were recruited using the snowball sampling technique. The interviews took place mainly in offices or kitchens at workplaces, one interview was conducted in the home of the respondent, and one was done in a hotel lobby. The interviews focused on the police, working environments, cooperation with other sectors and actors, citizens' perceptions, and the rural context.

The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed. Transcriptions were analyzed using both analytical coding (i.e., literature and theory were used to determine relevant categories) and in vivo coding (i.e., the contents of the interviews were used to determine new categories; Strauss 1987). The empirical material is divided into two sections: (1) police experiences with the transforming drug market and the local impact of drug use on police work and (2) experiences from a wider range of actors involved in policing (Barton, Storey, and Palmer 2016) and how they perceive a transformed balance of power. The discussion and analysis focuses on a power imbalance; that is, drug traffickers experience little resistance due to both societal changes (enhanced communication, transportation, and networking possibilities) and changes in policing. It also focuses on cooperation and networking in the local context, emphasizing the interdependence among diverse sectors and professionals.

The literature provided initial support in the formulation of an analytical framework, and the concept of time–space compression was used as a point of departure to frame how global crime impacts and reflects power relationships in rural places.

Policing Drugs in a Rural Context: A Case Study in Northern Sweden

In the fall of 2019, a young man named Ivan died of a drug overdose. His drug problems were known by his family and social services. Within four days of his death, another young man, Robert, died of an overdose.[1] Anxiety began to increase in the community and it was ascertained that a mix of drugs occur in the municipality, a mix of drugs bought on the Internet and drugs sold by local dealers. Ivan's brother explained how Ivan bought his drugs:

> You sit at home by the computer or the phone and click the things [drugs] you want, and it will be delivered. If you have a slot in your door, you don't even have to get outside. (*Kalla Fakta* 2020)

The drug situation in this rural municipality is the focus of one episode of the TV program *Kalla Fakta* (*Hard Facts*), a Swedish television show from February 2020. This TV program aimed at critically investigating and debating contemporary societal phenomena and processes and this episode scrutinized drug-related deaths among young men in a rural municipality in northern Sweden with around 6,700 inhabitants (SCB, Sweden Statistics 2020).

The show critically examines the response of the police and social services to determine whether the outcome could have been different.

In this episode, some figures are presented to illuminate the fact that the municipality has more pronounced problems with drugs, twice the average of the region, Västerbotten. This raises the question of whether the police are effective in the municipality or if drugs are more prevalent here. Another question concerns the access to drugs through the Internet, which seems to have also increased (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction 2015).

In the TV program, local key actors emphasized that the municipality has the resources needed to tackle the problems, although the results presented here show a different view, namely, that decreased police presence and limited resources affected the efficiency and results of drug-related police contacts in the region. In this study, which focuses on a municipality in Norrbotten County, which borders Västerbotten County, the police believe that criminals feel their risk of getting caught is very low. Although drug problems exist in all smaller municipalities, according to one regional-level officer, no one is "out there simply chasing them" (#1). Moreover, larger towns are reluctant to send their police officers to the smaller municipalities to investigate and deter drug crimes because they also have limited resources:

> So, no-one is going to these places. Which is devastating for the smaller municipalities … this disassembling has been going on for a long time, and with the will and acceptance of the managers. … It is ongoing with the aim to save money, and an agreement that this saving goes on, that reductions take place. (Regional-level police officer, #1)

The content of the TV program illustrates the worst outcomes of drug abuse in a family, including shock, pain, and resignation. The drug-related deaths and community anxiety illuminate how the global distribution of drugs affects social sustainability of rural places. In addition, the TV program illustrates the relatively limited power among addicts and relatives and the influence the ubiquitous character of the drug market has on this power distribution. Furthermore, the rules and laws related to addiction regulate when a person can be offered treatment for drug abuse and when treatment is compulsory. These regulations, however, were developed before the Internet made access to drug supplies easily available.

"We Are Working Uphill": Police and Society Experiences of Deficiency

One decisive point of departure is that drug-related crimes are police initiated; it only becomes "a problem" when the police are actively disrupting drug supplies. If no police are disrupting drug supplies, the depth of the problem will remain invisible and no police resources will be used, leaving the illegal activities unattended until social care or health care professionals are needed:

> [D]rugs are such, no one reports it. … It is only discovered if you [the police] work with it. So, it is possible to discern whether there are more overdose cases for example, but then it is the municipality's statistics you have to look at or the health care statistics. For us, if no one in the whole of Luleå works with drugs, there are no drugs here. Then there is no problem. But, on the other hand, if many people work with it, then we have an enormous problem. (Regional-level police officer, #2)

One police officer explained that two parallel paths of development are making it harder to combat the drug problem: increased access to drugs through the Internet and the lack of police resources. Because one police patrol car needs to cover a large area, the police officers need to prioritize where to be and when to make the effort to decrease drug-related crime and thereby increase citizen safety:

> Before, when we were here and worked for a few days, you could sort of disturb them as often as possible. But there is no time for that anymore … and if you are unlucky, nothing might happen these three or four days, maybe they are just gone and staying away these days. Then maybe it will be another year before we are back in [the municipality] again. No, it's far too easy to get hold of drugs today. Both on the Internet and such. (Local-level police officer #5)

There is a concern that drug users are getting younger. The week when school ends for summer break constitutes the most significant risk, because it is a time when many young people are prone to try drugs for the first time:

> We may not have time for the school graduation weeks as we had before. Sometimes we worked all week. Now, maybe you can choose one day when [the municipality] can have police presence to cover up. … There are a lot of those little pieces that together … if you combine everything, there is an obvious lack of resources. (Local-level police officer #5)

At a regional and local level, there are too few police, so long-term planning, follow-up, continuity, and quick interventions are lacking. This in turn affects the working context for several other professional groups. Police reports on drug use enable social services to approach users, but because of the lack of interventions and therefore data on drug use, social workers are not "nudged" by police operations. Thus, it seems that even though some aspects of drug-related rural crime

and social effects have been discussed since the writing of Weisheit (1993), rural areas still lack the tools and resources needed to combat drug-related crime. This lack of resources is due to the transformation of access and distribution of drugs, the lack of police, and the large geographical areas police in rural areas must patrol. Time–space compression (Harvey 1990; Bridge 1997) is expressed in the declining importance of distance for access to drugs, although distance is still a decisive factor in everyday police work. In addition, time–space compression needs differentiating socially (Massey 1991). Flows will affect individuals and groups in different ways, and the needs of a vulnerable group of people, abusers, are increasingly being ignored. Police work is influenced by at least two transformative processes: the transformation of the "drug landscape," including its flows and nodal points, and the transformation of the Swedish police force.

Professionals on a Transformed Balance of Power

The tendency that drug users are getting younger also worried school representatives and social workers. The principal of the local upper secondary school believed drugs are much more common than anyone has imagined:

> We have had significantly more student health cases during the school year, compared to what we have had before. We have had significantly more reports of unrest in the past year. (#20)

Similar concerns were expressed by the principal at the local high school. She believed that the structured cooperation among the school, police, and social services has decreased due to a reorganization, and her interpretation reveals that the efforts on the local level, preventive as well as operational, depend on individual engagement rather than professional structure:

> We used to have big meetings with the police and the social services and the eastern corner [of the municipality] and the school and coordinators at the high school were also involved, so we knew who was out and what could be done and things like that. … It has decreased, yes. And it was the project manager in the eastern corner who pulled it off a lot then, [but] they have changed people, so I think it had more to do with the person. (#15)

Before the reorganization, she explained, school staff could meet a police officer on the street where they "cheered them on, … talked to them, somehow, somewhere." This is no longer the situation, however, she believed, because the limited resources transferred to the local level means there are fewer police in the community. Other interviewees noted that police might lack the local knowledge and resources at the regional level as well. In addition, fewer police in the community means drug-related events at the school are not followed up in a timely manner; in one example, several months passed between the time the school notified the parents of their child's drug-related activities to the time the police contacted the parents and the child. That is, reduced local presence of police and increased workload are related to cases not being followed up. A social worker described a recent situation where several young persons were under the influence, mainly of alcohol; the social worker had hoped for assistance from the police:

> During graduation I worked with a colleague. We called the police, but the police never came. We received no feedback, no information as to why they did not come. (#17)

Whereas the police officer cited earlier refers to the importance of the distribution of resources for how crime can be perceived and presented, local professionals emphasize the lack of resources and priorities in connection with the visual imprint of drug use:

> In another municipality, you can't be standing outside ICA [a local grocery store] dealing drugs. And this is because everyone knows that there are no police here. You can drive your car drunk, you can drive your snowmobile drunk, everyone in the municipality knows who is selling drugs and where you can buy them. We have had a larger production of spice in a small village outside the town center, known by the public, and it has not met any reaction from the police. (#17)

The social worker referred to both the general experiences among the local residents and limited police activities. In addition, she mentioned that severe addicts have moved into the municipality from neighboring municipalities because of the lack of police: "[T]here are no police here, which makes it quite easy to live here for such persons" (#17). Her statement indicates that from a societal perspective the power structure has changed in favor of primarily the drug cartels and dealers. Addicts see increased possibilities of handling and using drugs without disturbance. The other side of the coin is that when abuse is not observed, it is more difficult to convince the authorities on different levels to spend more money on an "invisible" problem:

> And we experienced a huge difference on how we could proceed when we had a police patrol in [the municipality], we had a patrol that could work intensively toward [the municipality] for a limited time. And they could report to us about adult

persons [drug users]. And we could step up because we can't do anything until we are informed, and the police is a decisive actor in this process. For us, [police] resources are crucial. (Social service #16)

For the ambulance staff, the presence of drugs affects security and the ability to do a good job. The ambulance is often the first to arrive when someone is injured, often due to violence. Sometimes, they just wait for the police to arrive, and sometimes they work under risky circumstances:

And the drug problematics. I have worked on alerts where you arrive to someone's home, we are called because someone has cramps. And when we arrive it appears to be drug related, no one in the family is aware of this, and the person is getting messy, and we want the police to arrive. So, you call for the police and where are they? They are in Haparanda, 300 kilometers away. There is no alarm button to press. (Ambulance nurse #10)

Routines and cooperation involving the local police, social services, and other actors are crucial for social sustainability, security, and well-being. Such work is time-consuming because it involves several actors operating within their legislative framework and organizational context. Using routines and cooperation is also time efficient, however: If individuals are working in the same geographical area, they get to know each other and the routines of each other's organizations. Support in a specific situation might be a phone call away, assuming there is a police car within a reasonable distance.

The process indicating high-speed communication and deliveries in international and intranational networks, and increased possibilities for drug use, is accompanied by local actors experiencing limitations with respect to follow-up of drug-related activities. Time–space compression does not benefit those who are engaged in these endeavors; the reorganization of the police has meant decreased ability for movement across space (Harvey 1990; Massey 1991), so distances have increased for patrolling police even as they decreased for drug dealers. Again, the uneven distribution of the benefits is made visible. The cooperation among local actors, experienced as important for society's well-being, assumes spatial grounding and continuity. Even if the ambulance staff and the police officers have close networks and know each other well, this cannot compensate for the low police presence.

Conclusion

Not so long ago, drugs were sold where most consumers were found, primarily in urban environments. Although drugs have always found their way to small towns, resulting in limited but nevertheless profoundly miserable conditions, they are now ubiquitous. Local practices related to prevention and care are less well equipped for the speed and range that characterizes the contemporary drug trade. Contemporary policing is limited by a lack of uniformed officers as well as the local population's limited access to social welfare and supportive structures.

Certain power relations are made visible when scrutinizing local consequences of international drug flows and drug-related problems and challenges in the rural community studied. Some actors, such as drug dealers, gained from the advantages of transformed modes of communication, but others were met with less desirable consequences. Thus, the local effects contain an asymmetric power geometry (Massey 1993) where a specific criminal category is more in charge compared to individual drug abusers, social workers, and police officers fighting the often invisible and nonpresent drug dealers or criminals.

Time–space compression, understood as increased speed and enlarged range, contributes to understanding of the position of rural spaces in a globalized world and the potential of these rural places regarding combating drug problems. Individuals are increasingly affected by remote intentions and acts, and the laws regulating the possibilities of investigation and confiscation are designed with a different drug context in mind. Another factor is the idea of rural areas as protected from certain illicit activities and where social networks can contribute to weaken the effects of, for example, drug trafficking. Whereas processes of social control and network configuration move slowly, illicit activities such as selling and purchasing of drugs move quickly. When the local context is emphasized, it is possible to discern a power geometry where certain exposed individuals or groups lose power. Future research needs to pay attention to rural translocalities from a perspective where disadvantages and inequalities can be identified.

In this work, time–space compression has acted as a vehicle to increase insight into local–global relationships and the dark side of the resolution of borders and the diminishing importance of distances. The time factor, how fast drugs travel, how knowledge of difficult conditions develop, and the time aspects of interventions should also be prevalent in drug abuse prevention work. Place is not only constructed and transformed "over time" but also intersects "with time" in a relationship that is difficult to predict. ∎

Acknowledgments

Funding

Note

[1] Ivan and Robert are real names. Their families participated in the Swedish TV program *Kalla Fakta* (*Hard Facts*). Citations are transcribed from the program and the facts and figures are presented in the program (*Kalla Fakta* 2020).

Literature Cited

Andersson, M., and L. Soold. 2020. Så blir postombuden ofrivilliga knarklangare [How the postmen become involuntary drug dealers]. Accessed December 29, 2020. https://handelsnytt.se/2020/06/25/sa-blir-postombuden-ofrivilliga-knarklangare/.

Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Barnard, M., and A. J. M. Forsyth. 1998. Drug use among schoolchildren in rural Scotland. *Addiction Research* 6 (5):421–34. doi: 10.3109/16066359809026060.

Barton, A. 2005. Working in the margins: Shadowland agencies, outreach workers and the crime audit process. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy* 12 (3):239–46. doi: 10.1080/09687630500083576.

Barton, A., D. Storey, and C. Palmer. 2016. A trip in the country? Policing drug use in rural settings. In *Rural policing and policing the rural: A constable countryside?*, ed. R. Mawby and R. Yarwood, 147–67. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.

Borders, T. F., and B. M. Booth. 2007. Research on rural residence and access to drug abuse services: Where are we and where do we go? *Journal of Rural Health* 23:79–83. doi: 10.1111/j.1748-0361.2007.00128.x.

Bridge, G. 1997. Mapping the terrain of time–space compression: Power networks in everyday life. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 15:611–26. doi: 10.1068/d150611.

Dolliver, D. S., S. P. Ericson, and K. L. Love. 2018. A geographic analysis of drug trafficking patterns of the Tor Network. *Geographical Review* 108 (1):45–68. doi: 10.1111/gere.12241.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. 2015. Europeisk narkotikarapport: Trender och utveckling [European drugs report: Trends and development]. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. 2019. Europeisk narkotikarapport: Trender och utveckling. [European drugs report: Trends and development]. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union.

Fadanelli, M., D. H. U. Cloud, A. M. Ibragimov, N. Ballard, A. M. Prood, N. Young, and H. L. F. Cooper. 2020. People, places, and stigma: A qualitative study exploring the overdose risk environment in rural Kentucky. *International Journal of Drug Policy* 85:1–11. doi: 10.1016/j.drugpo.2019.11.001.

Gilling, D. 2016. Governing crime in rural UK: Risk and representation. In *Rural policing and policing the rural: A constable countryside?*, ed. R. Mawby and R. Yarwood, 69–80. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.

Harvey, D. 1990. *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Kalla Fakta [Hard facts]. 2020. Knarkdöden i Vilhelmina [The drug death in Vilhelmina], part 3. TV 4. Accessed December 1, 2020. https://www.tv4play.se/program/kalla-fakta/12499380.

Linneman, T., and D. L. Kurtz. 2014. Beyond the ghetto: Police power, methamphetamine and the rural war on drugs. *Critical Criminology* 22 (3):339–55. doi: 10.1007/s10612-013-9218-z.

Massey, D., ed. 1991. A global sense of place. In *Space, place and gender*, 146–56. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Massey, D. 1993. Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place. In *Mapping the futures: Local cultures global change*, ed. J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson, and L. Tickner, 59–69. London and New York: Routledge.

Matthews, B., B. Collier, S. McVie, and C. Dibben. 2021. Understanding digital drug markets through the geography of postal drug deliveries in Scotland. *European Journal of Criminology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/1477370821997323.

Moylea, L., A. Childs, R. Coomber, and M. J. Barratt. 2019. #Drugsforsale: An exploration of the use of social media and encrypted messaging apps to supply and access drugs. *International Journal of Drug Policy* 63:101–10. doi: 10.1016/j.drugpo.2018.08.005.

Revier, K. 2018. "Once again, a meth lab exploded and somebody died": Narratives of volatility and risk in the rural drug war. *Crime, Media, Culture* 14 (3):467–84. doi: 10.1177/1741659017721592.

Rigg, K. K., S. M. Monnat, and M. N. Chavez. 2018. Opioid-related mortality in rural America: Geographic heterogeneity and intervention strategies. *The International Journal on Drug Policy* 57:119–29. doi: 10.1016/j.drugpo.2018.04.011.

SCB, Sweden Statistics. 2020. Folkmängd i riket, län och kommuner 31 mars 2020 och befolkningsförändringar 1 januari–31 mars 2020 [Population in the country, counties and municipalities 31 March 2020 and population changes 1 January–31 March 2020.] Accessed December 13, 2020. https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/pong/tabell-och-diagram/kvartals–och-halvarsstatistik–kommun-lan-och-riket/kvartal-1-2020/.

Strauss, A. 1987. *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Weisheit, R. A. 1993. Studying drugs in rural areas: Notes from the field. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 30:213–32. doi: 10.1177/0022427893030002005.

Woods, M., and J. McDonagh. 2011. Rural Europe and the world: Globalization and rural development (editorial). *European Countryside* 3:153–63. doi: 10.2478/v10091-012-0001-z.

SUSANNE STENBACKA is Professor of Geography in the Department of Social and Economic Geography at Uppsala University, Sweden. E-mail: susanne.stenbacka@kultgeog.uu.se. Her research interests include gender geography, welfare provision, and spatial power relations with a focus on rural areas. Current projects are about policing in rural areas, refugee migration and integration, and experiences of disability.