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TÍTULO: Criminología ambiental aplicada al entorno universitario: diagnóstico situacional mediante marchas exploratorias y mapa del temor.

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RESUMEN: Esta investigación presenta un diagnóstico situacional del riesgo universitario fundamentado en la Criminología Ambiental. Mediante una metodología mixta que integra Marchas Exploratorias, Mapeo del Temor y Densidad de Kernel, se analizó la correlación entre incivilidades físicas y la percepción de inseguridad. Los resultados evidenciaron un predominio de deficiencias estructurales (50.46%) y deterioro ambiental, identificando el horario nocturno como el de mayor vulnerabilidad (63.09%). El análisis geoespacial confirmó un "efecto de borde", localizando los *hotspots* de temor en intersecciones perimetrales donde convergen el flujo peatonal y el deterioro de infraestructura. Se concluye validando la relación vinculante entre el desorden físico y el miedo al delito, recomendando la implementación de estrategias CPTED para recuperar el control social del espacio.

PALABRAS CLAVES: criminología, criminología ambiental, prevención situacional, CPTED, percepción de seguridad.

TITLE: Environmental Criminology applied to the university environment: situational diagnosis through exploratory marches and fear mapping.

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ABSTRACT: This research presents a situational diagnosis of university risk based on Environmental Criminology. Using a mixed methodology that integrates Exploratory Walks, Fear Mapping, and Kernel Density, the correlation between physical incivilities and the perception of insecurity was analyzed. The results showed a predominance of structural deficiencies (50.46%) and environmental deterioration, identifying nighttime as the period of greatest vulnerability (63.09%). The geospatial analysis confirmed a "edge effect," locating fear hotspots at perimeter intersections where pedestrian traffic and infrastructure deterioration converge. The study concludes by validating the link between physical disorder and fear of crime, recommending the implementation of CPTED strategies to regain social control of the space.

KEY WORDS: criminology, environmental criminology, situational prevention, CPTED, security perception.

INTRODUCTION.

Contemporary criminology faces an unavoidable epistemological divide, a necessary fracture that displaces the hegemony of the traditional etiological approach. For decades, the discipline has maintained an almost clinical obsession with the figure of the offender, searching his psyche or biology for the reason behind the transgression, while relegating the setting where the criminal drama comes to life to the background; however, this anthropocentric view is insufficient to explain the complexity of the phenomenon of crime in modernity. In this context, Environmental Criminology emerges not as a simple auxiliary branch, but as a pragmatic and scientific response that reorients the fundamental question: we stop asking exclusively *why* someone commits a crime, to question where, when, and under what environmental conditions the opportunity for crime materializes.

From this perspective, crime ceases to be an isolated behavioral abstraction and is understood as a tangible physical event, anchored to spatial and temporal coordinates that are not mere passive containers of human action, but rather determining actors in it. Urban space, with its design, flows, and shadows, "speaks" and conditions behavior. As Brantingham and Brantingham (1991) establish with surgical precision in their seminal work, the architecture of crime follows logical patterns: Environmental criminology posits that criminal incidents should be interpreted as the result of the convergence of offenders, victims or targets of crime, and legal regulations, in specific contexts, manifesting themselves at particular times and places; therefore, a comprehensive analysis of crime involves four dimensions: the legal dimension, the offender dimension, the victim/target dimension, and a spatiotemporal dimension.

This "spatiotemporal dimension" is what allows us to move from reaction to prevention. If we accept the premise of Routine Activities Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), the university campus is not an isolated sanctuary, but a convergence node where massive flows of suitable targets (students, electronic equipment, vehicles) inevitably intersect with potential motivated offenders, often in the absence of capable guardians.

The analysis should not be limited to the cold statistics of crimes committed. There is a more subtle and corrosive phenomenology: fear. In the Mexican context, the perception of insecurity has mutated into a "geography of fear" that alters the morphology of everyday life. According to the September 2025 National Urban Public Safety Survey (ENSU), 64.9% of the population identifies public transportation, a vital artery for the university community, as a high-risk space, surpassed only by ATMs (INEGI, 2025a). This data is not insignificant; it reveals that fear is unevenly distributed and that there are specific "landscapes of fear." In Nuevo León, although the macro perception of insecurity has fallen to 61.5%, the reality at street level tells a different story: the progressive abandonment of official transport, evidenced by a drop of up to 33% in Metrorrey users (INEGI, 2025b) suggests a pattern of spatial avoidance.

Citizens, and by extension students, are changing their routes and schedules not because of actual events, but because of their *semiotic reading* of urban deterioration.

This is where the Broken *Windows* Theory comes into full play: a deficient, poorly lit, or dirty urban structure not only facilitates crime but also sends a message of impunity and abandonment that fractures social cohesion. Recent research has begun to decode this language of the environment in the local educational setting. (Soto-Muñoz et al., 2025) have demonstrated how minors' subjectivity reacts to risks in the school environment, validating the need for Environmental Design (CPTED) interventions. Likewise, the use of geospatial technologies for criminological analysis has made the invisible visible, transforming intuition into operable risk maps for decision-making (Quintero-Ávila & Caballero-Delgadillo, 2025a; Quintero-Ávila, 2025).

The empirical validation of this approach has gained momentum in recent scientific literature, demonstrating the effectiveness of technological tools in deconstructing the perception of safety. Various current research projects have adopted geospatial analysis and perception studies as key methodologies for criminological diagnosis. In this regard, recent studies have shown how the configuration of space influences victimization and fear of crime (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2025; Quintero-Ávila & Caballero-Delgadillo, 2025b); likewise, the application of these models in local environments has made it possible to identify situational risk patterns with greater precision, overcoming the limitations of traditional official reports (Quintero-Ávila, Hernández-Valdez, et al., 2025; Quintero-Ávila, Caballero-Delgadillo, et al.2025). This line of research confirms that the integration of spatial data is essential for understanding the complexity of contemporary urban security.

DEVELOPMENT.

Therefore, this research aims to transcend the administrative diagnosis to carry out a critical deconstruction of security in the UANL University City. Through the methodological triangulation of Exploratory Security Marches (MES) and Fear Mapping, we seek to correlate the physical reality of

deterioration (the "hardware" of the campus) with the subjective experience of insecurity (the social "software"), demonstrating that university security is, above all, a socio-environmental construct.

Methodology.

Research Design.

This study adopted a mixed descriptive and correlational approach with a non-experimental cross-sectional design. The research focused on the spatial and phenomenological analysis of university security, combining on-site environmental audit techniques with the collection of data on subjective risk perception. The data collection period covered the school year corresponding to August 2025.

Setting and Spatial Delimitation.

The spatial unit of analysis was limited to the University City Campus of the Autonomous University of Nuevo León (UANL), located in the municipality of San Nicolás de los Garza. For data processing, a georeferenced polygon of the campus was generated using ArcGIS software, establishing vector layers that allowed for the precise segmentation of the internal and perimeter areas of the faculties.

Participants and Selection Criteria.

The study population consisted exclusively of the active student community. Non-probability convenience sampling was applied, selecting participants under strict eligibility criteria to ensure data validity:

Inclusion Criteria:

- Be a student formally enrolled in one of the faculties located within the Ciudad Universitaria campus during the period of application of the instrument.
- Be 18 years of age or older at the time of the study.
- Have expressly given informed consent for voluntary participation in the research.

Exclusion Criteria:

- People outside the institution or under 18 years of age.
- Incomplete records or those who did not complete the consent validation process.
- Duplicate or redundant responses, which were detected and filtered out by matching institutional email addresses.

Instruments and Procedure.

Data collection was carried out using Exploratory Security Patrol (ESP). A physical audit of the environment was conducted through systematic patrols to identify environmental crime-inducing factors. The findings were georeferenced in thematic layers within ArcGIS, categorizing the observations into variables of physical deterioration:

Deficiencies in urban structures.

- Areas of environmental deterioration due to accumulation of garbage.
- Areas with excessive vegetation (visual obstruction).
- Areas with poor lighting.
- Areas with graffiti or vandalism.

Fear Mapping. Participants were asked to spatially identify the points where they experience the greatest perception of insecurity. To add depth to the analysis, this variable was stratified into three distinct temporal layers, allowing for the analysis of fear variance according to the time of activity:

- Morning shift.
- Afternoon shift.
- Night shift.

Data Processing. The information collected was systematized using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). A layer overlay was performed to compare the location of physical risk factors (obtained during the exploratory march) with the hotspots of fear reported by students, thus allowing the spatial correlation between urban deterioration and subjective insecurity to be visualized.

Data Processing and Analysis.

The information was processed in two phases using specialized software:

Geospatial Analysis (ArcGIS Pro). Georeferenced points were processed using the Kernel Density Estimation (KDE) algorithm. This technique made it possible to calculate the magnitude per unit area of the reported events, generating continuous surfaces or "heat maps" that visualize the *hotspots* of insecurity and their spatial correlation with the areas of physical deterioration identified in the exploratory march.

Statistical Analysis (Jamovi). The Jamovi statistical platform was used for the quantitative treatment of frequencies and the description of the sample. Descriptive analyses were performed to determine the prevalence of the perception of insecurity by shift and the incidence of environmental risk factors, ensuring the numerical robustness of the findings presented.

Ethical Considerations.

In strict compliance with research ethics protocols, an informed consent process was implemented. Prior to data collection, each participant was informed about the objectives of the study, the anonymous nature of their participation, and the exclusively academic use of the information, ensuring the protection of personal data in accordance with current regulations.

Results.

The findings from the exploratory walk allow us to identify relevant spatial patterns in the configuration of environmental-criminogenic risk in the university setting. Table 1 lists 673 incidents classified into five categories of vulnerability, confirming that physical space acts as a substantive mediator in the perception and potential occurrence of criminal events.

The density of problems detected suggests an urban ecosystem where factors of deterioration, poor maintenance, and insufficient services converge, which together create conditions conducive to criminal opportunity.

Table 1. Areas of social vulnerability.

	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Deficiencies in urban structures.	326	50.46
Areas of environmental deterioration due to waste.	160	24.77
Areas of excessive vegetation.	106	16.41
Areas with poor lighting.	54	8.36
Total.	646	100

The category with the highest concentration corresponds to deficiencies in urban structures (n = 326)**,** representing almost half of all observations. This finding is consistent with the literature, which warns that infrastructure failures—broken sidewalks, missing signage, damaged street furniture, or residual spaces—increase physical disorganization, reduce natural surveillance, and promote situations of pedestrian vulnerability. Its high prevalence suggests the presence of "gray areas" where insufficient maintenance fosters perceptions of abandonment, one of the main environmental predictors of fear.

In second place are areas of environmental deterioration due to litter (n = 160)**.** Their concentration confirms that the accumulation of waste operates not only as a sign of physical disorder but also as a catalyst for minor incivilities that escalate into a perception of institutional chaos, as proposed by disorder theories (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). Litter is directly associated with less attachment to the place, reduced pedestrian traffic, and a diminished sense of community vigilance, all of which increase the risk of victimization.

Areas of excessive vegetation (n = 106) also represent a critical component of environmental risk. Tall weeds and uncontrolled vegetation create blind spots, reduce visibility, and provide hiding places, creating opportunities for crime, particularly opportunistic crimes, harassment, or stalking. These types of

conditions are often underestimated, although evidence shows that visual obstruction is one of the strongest predictors of urban fear.

Areas with poor lighting (n = 54)**,** although numerically smaller, have a qualitatively high weight in the situational analysis. The literature on environmental criminology agrees that inadequate lighting increases the perception of insecurity and reduces natural nighttime surveillance, impacts that affect women and vulnerable groups differently. Its presence, although limited in frequency, represents a strategic risk that should be prioritized because of its direct effect on fear of crime.

Finally, areas of urban deterioration due to graffiti (n = 27) constitute the least frequent category but are not irrelevant. Their presence is associated with symbolic signs of territorial lack of control and informal appropriation of space, generating narratives of insecurity that directly influence the way individuals move around and remain in the environment.

In the university context, graffiti outside formal artistic contexts tends to be interpreted as an indicator of low institutional supervision. Figure 1 shows the spatial distribution of the risk areas detected during the exploratory walk, allowing us to visualize how the different manifestations of physical deterioration and environmental vulnerability are concentrated and dispersed within the evaluated environment. The map shows a clear pattern of territorial segmentation, where certain sectors present a significant accumulation of problems, while others maintain more stable and functional conditions.

The concentration of deficiencies in urban structures appears to be one of the most dominant elements of the landscape, distributed continuously along pedestrian corridors and transition points. This suggests a direct relationship between the physical deterioration of the environment and the intensity of daily use of the space, making these areas critical targets for institutional intervention.

Areas of environmental deterioration due to litter are more fragmented in location, but coincide with residual spaces, perimeter boundaries, and areas with less natural supervision. Their presence reflects the

existence of neglected microenvironments that, in addition to affecting the perception of safety, generate vulnerable scenarios where other incivilities are more likely to accumulate.

In the case of excessive vegetation**,** the map shows its appearance in sectors that function as blind spots or visual barriers. These elements tend to be located on edges, corners, and less-traveled areas, creating areas where lack of visibility increases the perception of risk and limits natural surveillance.

Areas with poor lighting, although less frequent, stand out strategically within the spatial composition of risk. Their location coincides with mobility routes and secondary access points, which increases the impact of this condition on everyday safety, especially at night. Insufficient lighting appears as a factor that, even with a lower numerical presence, has a significant effect on the experience of insecurity.

Overall, Figure 1 shows a scenario where vulnerability factors are not distributed randomly, but rather respond to spatial patterns defined by use, maintenance, visibility, and institutional capacity to manage the environment. This spatial analysis strengthens the situational diagnosis by showing that environmental insecurity is constructed from the interaction of multiple physical elements that converge in critical areas. The map allows for the precise identification of the points where situational prevention and urban space improvement efforts should be concentrated in order to reduce the perception of risk and improve the habitability of the environment.

Figure 1. Risk Areas Identified in the Exploratory March.

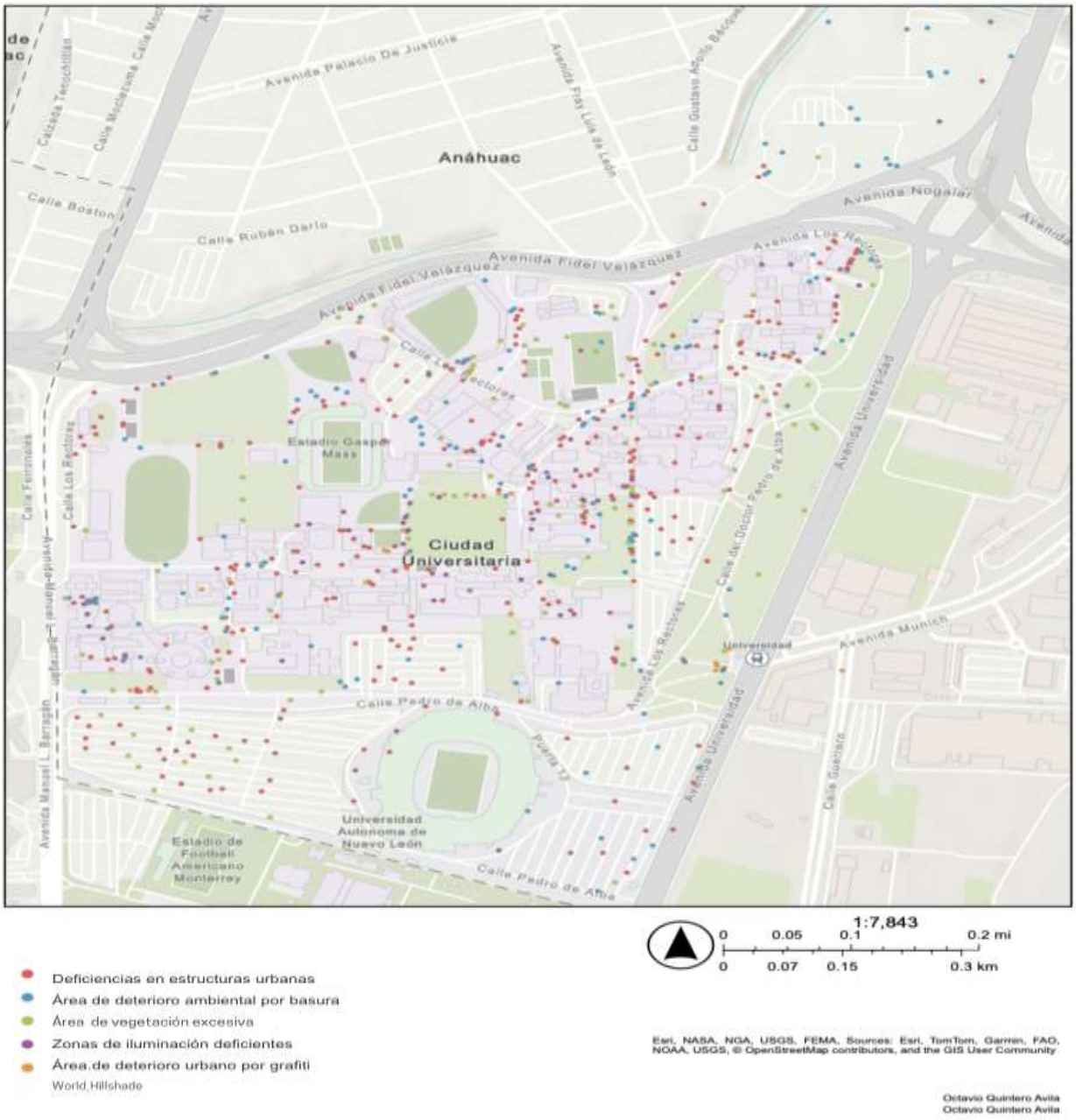


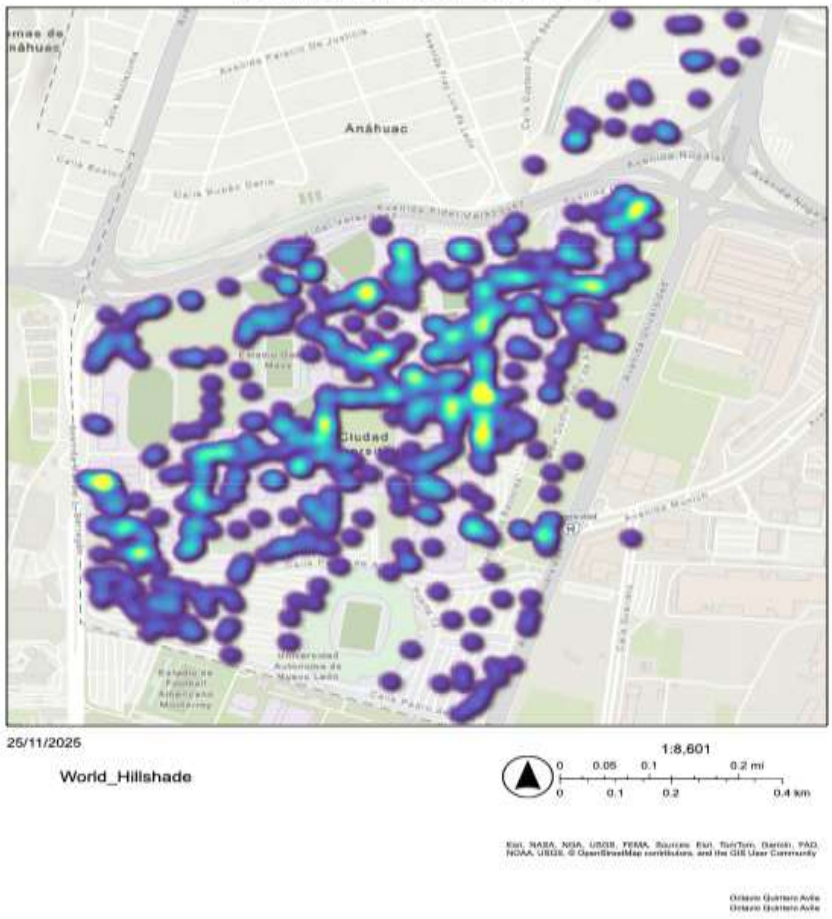
Figure 2 presents the spatial analysis using Kernel density estimation, applied to identify the concentration of incidents recorded during the exploratory march. The pattern observed highlights areas where environmental-criminogenic problems are intensifying, allowing for the identification of hot spots that

require priority attention within the evaluated environment. The distribution is not homogeneous: high-density clusters can be seen that coincide with internal mobility corridors, secondary access points, and pedestrian crossings where multiple previously identified vulnerability factors converge.

The spatial behavior reflected in the map shows a clear tendency toward the accumulation of incidents at specific points on campus, suggesting that the daily dynamics of the space circulation, use, permanence, and visibility influence the formation of these clusters. The areas with the highest levels of intensity are those where conditions of urban decay, insufficient infrastructure, and low natural surveillance overlap, creating environments conducive to increased fear and perception of risk.

The continuous representation of density allows us to visualize risk gradients that are not always perceptible through simple counts. This approach adds precision to the diagnosis by showing how critical areas are not isolated but rather geographically connected extensions, forming problematic corridors that can influence the movement behavior and use of space by the university community. The map also reveals areas where density is minimal or virtually non-existent, suggesting environments with better maintenance conditions, greater visibility, and safer transitions.

Figure 2. Kernel density estimation Exploratory safety march.



Taken together, Figure 1 shows a scenario where vulnerability factors are not randomly distributed, but rather respond to spatial patterns defined by use, maintenance, visibility, and institutional capacity to manage the environment. This spatial analysis strengthens the situational diagnosis by showing that environmental insecurity is constructed from the interaction of multiple physical elements that converge in critical areas. The map allows for the precise identification of the points where situational prevention and urban space improvement efforts should be concentrated in order to reduce the perception of risk and improve the habitability of the environment.

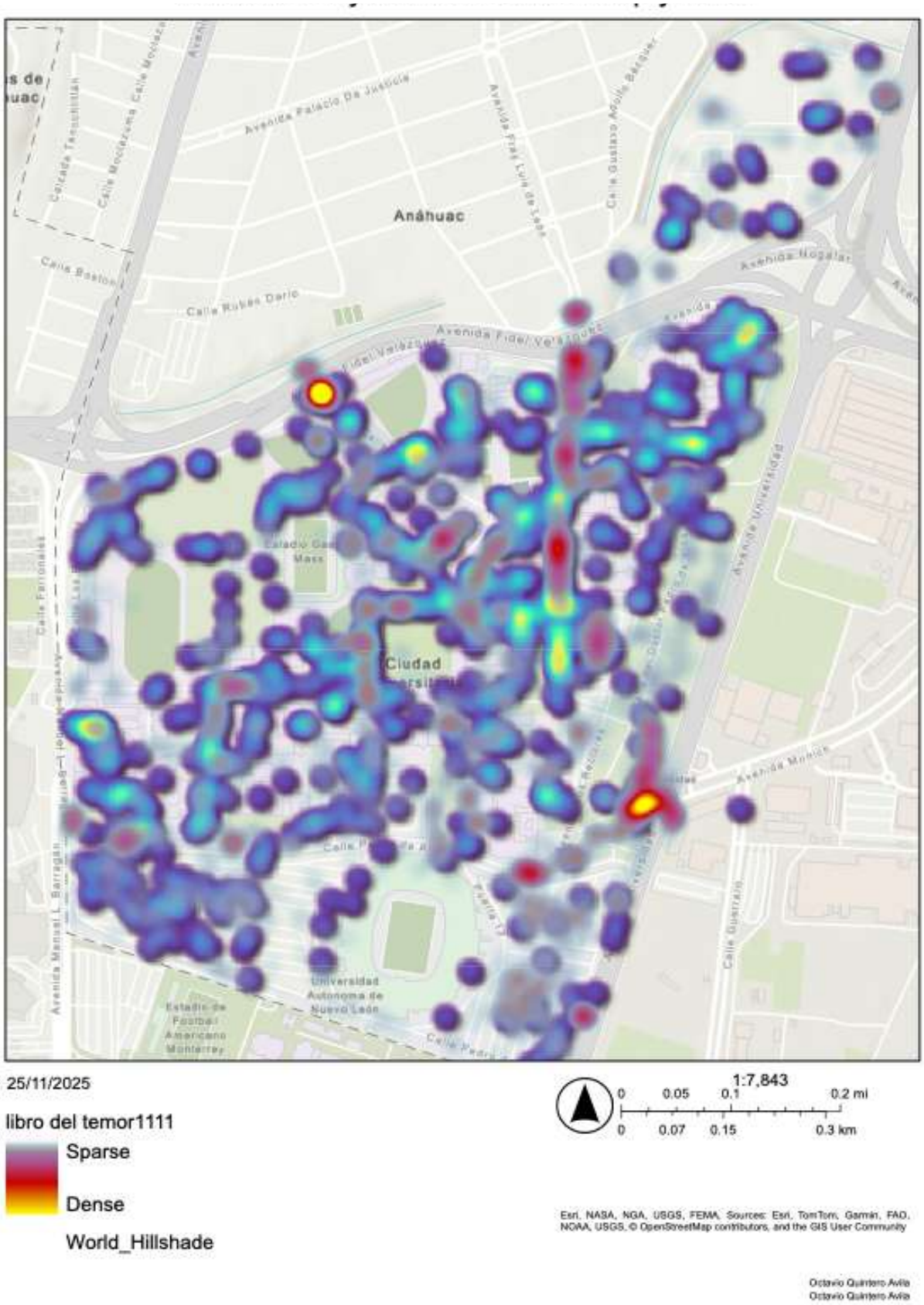
Finally, areas of urban deterioration due to graffiti are concentrated in specific segments of the environment that show signs of informal appropriation of space. Their distribution suggests that certain sections function as symbolic nodes where institutional control is perceived as limited. Complementing the physical analysis, the temporal distribution of the perception of insecurity was examined over a total universe of 1,677 records. As shown in Table 2, there is a significant disparity depending on the time of day. The nighttime hours account for the absolute majority of reports with 63.09%, followed by the morning hours with 32.56%, while the afternoon hours have a marginal incidence of 4.35%.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage according to time of day.

	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Night	1,058	63.09
Morning	546	32.56
Afternoon	73	4.35
Total	1,677	100

These results highlight that, although physical deficiencies (such as broken streetlights or damaged sidewalks) are static constants, perceived risk is dynamic and is mainly triggered by the lack of natural light. The preponderance of nighttime incidents (1,058 cases) suggests that darkness acts as a vulnerability multiplier in the areas detected. The spatial analysis presented in Figure 3 is derived from this interaction between physical space and temporality.

Figure 3. Integrated Spatial Analysis: Security Walk (Points) and Fear Map (Kernel Density).



Analyzing the interaction between both layers from the perspective of Environmental Criminology reveals a direct situational correlation: the areas of greatest fear (red zones) are not randomly distributed but are spatially "anchored" in the areas where the walk documented the greatest physical vulnerabilities (purple clusters).

The visual analysis highlights three main phenomena:

Convergence on the Road Perimeter. The areas of most intense heat overlap with dense clusters of physical findings on the perimeter arteries, specifically on Avenida Fidel Velázquez and Avenida Universidad. The high frequency of "urban structural deficiencies" (Table 1) coincides with these corridors, suggesting that deteriorated infrastructure in areas of mandatory transit validates and triggers student fear, transforming the mobility space into a scenario of perceived risk.

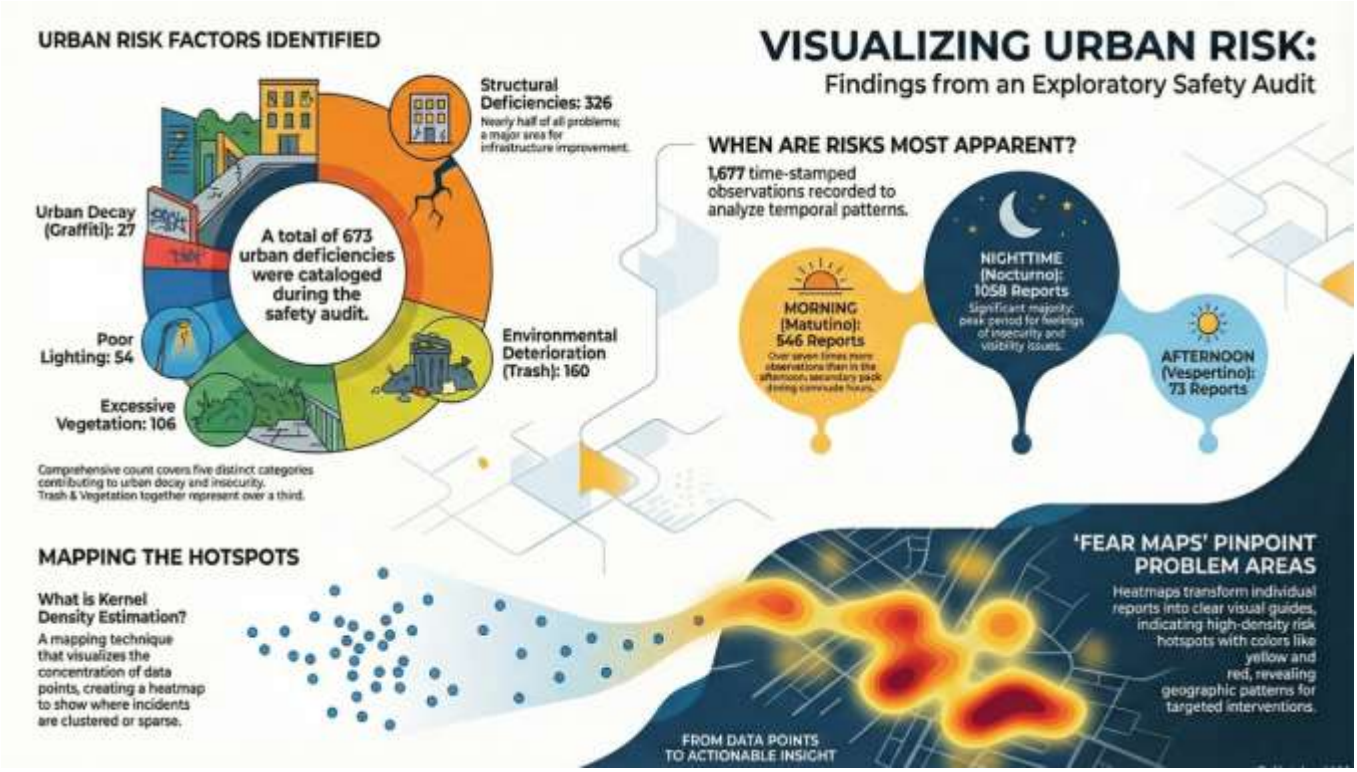
The Effect of Incivilities as Precursors of Fear. It can be observed that the clusters of purple dots corresponding to trash and weeds act as spatial predictors on the heat map. Where the environment shows visible signs of neglect (dense purple dots), the perception of insecurity rises to critical levels (red). This confirms the environmental hypothesis that physical disorder reduces the perception of control, increasing the feeling of vulnerability.

Risk Focus. While physical findings (purple dots) show some dispersion toward the interior of the neighborhood and campus, fear (red) crystallizes more strongly at the edges and access nodes. This indicates that, although environmental deterioration is widespread, fear is maximized where such deterioration intersects with students' nighttime mobility.

In conclusion, Figure 3 shows that the fear expressed is not an abstract variable, but a response to the degraded physical environment. There is a binding relationship: the environmental vulnerabilities detected in the exploratory march act as "danger signals", which under the cover of night, shape the hot spots of fear in the university community.

To conclude this comprehensive section on findings, Figure 4 systematizes the detected insecurity ecosystem, transforming isolated data into actionable intelligence for prevention. This visualization articulates three critical dimensions that validate the research hypothesis: the typology of deterioration, temporal concentration, and spatial targeting.

Figure 4. Comprehensive summary of urban risk factors: physical, temporal, and geospatial characterization.



The first panel breaks down the composition of the 673 cataloged urban risk factors. The distribution confirms that almost half of the problem lies in structural deficiencies (f=326), which indicates a systemic failure in the maintenance of the built environment. Added to this are indicators of social and physical disorder such as environmental deterioration due to litter (f=160), excessive vegetation (f=106), and the presence of graffiti or urban decay (f=27). These elements, together with poor lighting (f=54), make up the physical setting that, according to the Broken Windows Theory, communicates abandonment and reduces informal social control.

The second component of the figure illustrates the window of opportunity for crime. Analysis of 1,677 temporal observations reveals an unequivocal chronological pattern: the risk is not constant, but reaches its critical point at night, with 1,058 reports representing the significant majority of the perception of insecurity. This peak contrasts with the 546 morning reports and 73 afternoon reports, showing that the variable "darkness" acts as the catalyst that activates the latent danger of the identified structural deficiencies.

Finally, the lower flowchart in Figure 4 demonstrates the spatial analysis methodology used to move from data collection to the identification of intervention targets. It shows how individual reports (scattered blue dots) are processed using Kernel Density Estimation to generate "Fear Maps." This technique transforms the dispersion into risk clusters (red and yellow areas), revealing geographic patterns that allow for the targeting of preventive resources.

In short, Figure 4 encapsulates the central narrative of the study: risk on campus is not random; it is the product of the convergence between a deteriorated physical environment (structural deficiencies and litter) and a facilitating temporal factor (nighttime), which crystallize spatially in specific *hotspots* that require priority intervention under the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

CONCLUSIONS.

This research confirms that insecurity in the university environment studied does not occur randomly, but rather follows specific spatial and temporal patterns, severely conditioned by the deterioration of the built environment. The application of the mixed methodology, integrating Security Exploration Walks (SEW) and Fear Mapping, has proven effective in diagnosing how physical vulnerabilities translate into perceptions of psychological risk.

First, it is concluded that physical disorder acts as the main precursor to fear. The fact that "Deficiencies in urban structures" and "Environmental deterioration due to litter" together account for more than 75% of physical findings validates the relevance of the *Broken Windows Theory* in this context: visible neglect

of infrastructure (broken sidewalks, damaged bus stops) sends a signal of lack of social control that increases the vulnerability perceived by the student community.

Second, a critical temporal dependency has been identified. While structural failures are permanent, the perceived risk is predominantly activated at night. The fact that 63.09% of reports of insecurity are concentrated during nighttime hours indicates that darkness acts as a negative catalyst. Areas with poor lighting (f=54), although numerically smaller in the physical inventory, have a disproportionate impact on the generation of fear *hotspots*, as they eliminate the natural surveillance necessary for situational prevention.

From a spatial perspective, the study reveals an "Edge Effect." Kernel density maps showed that fear does not reside inside classrooms, but in transition zones and perimeter flow areas, specifically on Fidel Velázquez and Universidad avenues. These corridors represent the point of friction where students, becoming urban pedestrians, are exposed to a hostile environment characterized by high vehicle speeds and degraded infrastructure.

Finally, this diagnosis suggests that intervention strategies should not be generic, but rather focused on the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). To reduce fear and criminal opportunity, it is imperative to prioritize corrective maintenance of pedestrian infrastructure and reinforcement of public lighting in the identified perimeter nodes. University security, therefore, transcends police surveillance and requires comprehensive management of urban space to restore visibility, order, and, consequently, peace of mind to the academic community.

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