# City and Insecurity Feeling Creation

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## Abstract

The feeling of insecurity characterizes and unites the Western societies of the twenty-first century. Despite official statistics emphasize a constant reduction of crime rates, fear crime is constantly growing. The need of security, thus, becomes an important request which should be met by local administrators firstly. The paper starts analyzing the different meanings of urban security for citizens. The several opinions influence both the demand of security, which is different in every contexts, and the feeling of insecurity experienced by citizens. The media play an important role in creating the feeling of insecurity of the citizens, as evidenced in the paper. Finally, the focus is on how the fear of crime changes with reference to the evolution of the social context.

## 1. Introduction

Talking about urban security is not simple. The difficulty comes from the fact that today more than ever the term "urban security" refers to a set of measures that should improve the quality of life, make the rates of violence decrease and cities security increase. Some author defines security as an ordered and civil cohabitation in the towns and in the surrounding territory. The request for security is increasing more and more. Today it represents a real social problem, according to some authors this issue is heavier than the crime itself (Clemente and Kleiman, 1976) is. The matter of urban security has played an important role in the public opinion, the political debate in the towns, sociology and criminology reflection.

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## 2. The Different Meanings of Urban Security

The expression "urban security" has several meanings because such a concept is connected not only to law and order, but also to penal field. Security is a complex matter, by out-of-focus borders and elusive contents. For some reasons it is difficult to define security in an univocal or standardized way. Today the term security doesn't indicate only the integrity of women and men or their goods, nor it is exclusively correlated to criminal events occurring in a determinate urban context, since they are only one of the several parts of which the security request (Cardia, 2000) is made.

Some authors (Lagrange and Zaubermann, 1991) identify two meanings of security. The first one has a social characterization since women and men protection from negative events such as diseases, labor lost is its main focus. As regard the second one, security is understood as the stability of a pre-established order, social and racial identities. Nowadays the western democracies include a positive activity in the security concept. Such an activity is directed to remove, eliminate potential threats firstly and to guarantee the reinforcement of security perception in the citizens (Zedner, 2000) secondly. From many interviews made both to local politicians, managers, technicians of three big Italian cities such as Turin, Bologna and Naples, the variety of meanings characterizing the security concept and the consequent difficulties to define it univocally (Selmini, 2003) have emerged. For some people security has been defined as livability - that is the preservation of the life quality -, opportunity to access to public areas quietly, to live and guarantee the quality of urban areas. According to other women and men security consists in the possibility to access to many areas, choice of the time in which go out or not and take a route. Furthermore there are many definitions of security considering the respect of rules and laws that discipline and regulate the civil cohabitation. In few cities security means respect for the public thing, respect for rules and sense of legality. The request for civic security deriving from urban cohabitation and the respect for shared rules are very frequent, therefore. Such a meaning of security is shared by few experts in this field. Managers, local politicians and technicians emphasize that security is made by people. Security originates from the school education through the respect of elementary rules of civil cohabitation.

## 3. The Insecurity Feeling and Security Request

The security request can be seen as larger set in which several needs are stored, from the attention need to the request of sociability, the claim of equalization (the claim of making things equal in size, quantity, value, etc. in the whole of a group).

According to a view that is widely shared, many people connect the pressing request for security to the improvement of life conditions in the cities in the last decades. In the past the crimes that would not raise a particular social clamour because they had taken place in a dangerous contest, today people have been requiring a greater and greater repression for them. Therefore the improvement of social conditions have increased the demand of security and livability in safer areas.

Since the Nineties years security request has gained a greater importance even in the European countries. The sociologist Giandomenico Amendola (2003) affirmed that the security request is a request of livability in the cities. For this reason the local authorities have become the main actors in the assuring urban security, being the citizens the principal interlocutors. From mid-nineties investigations, it emerged that the security request occupied the twelfth place among all the public needs. Today security demand is always present on the political worktable of local authorities. In some Italian cities the security request is among the first three citizens' requests.

The increase of security request is strictly connected to the perception of insecurity. The insecurity feeling represents the logical opposite of the security concept. It is very difficult to give a definition of this concept too. Identifying the causes that have originate the spread of insecurity feeling is not easy because it is a complex issue.

From few statistical investigations it is clear that the insecurity feeling is a social issue since the most part of Italian interviewees declared to feel little or at all secure when they walk alone in the area where they live in, especially in the dark. The data concerning the domestic space are more interesting because a consisting part of the sample declared to feel little or at all secure (Barbagli, 2002) when they are alone at home in the evening. Currently it is wrong to think that if the security request is increasing or it has become one the citizens' priorities is because of the increase of crime rate.

On the contrary, although there are some crimes generally ever-increasing, Italy turns out to be a country with a low crime rates if it is compared to several European countries.

First of all it is important to emphasize that there is a difference between the request for security in the metropolitan areas and the request for security in small towns. In fact the perception of security changes and it is different in small towns although registering high crime rates. In the metropolitan areas different issues might arise. However, a greater livability in the towns, the necessity of restoring the sense of legality, the request for security are issues in common with small or big cities, independently from the statistics offering optimistic data in relation to the reduction of crime rates.

From a criminological point of view, for a long period some authors have argued that the insecurity perception was directly correlated to the increase of the crimes, the fear of being crime victim. This interpretation was deserted luckily. In fact associating the increase of the insecurity to the fear is restrictive of victimization. Recently it has been pointed out that the insecurity may have several causes not always correlated to the crime. Many years ago Pavarini had attributed the increase of insecurity to the rarefaction of social relationships, the weakening of the social ties in the cities, the crisis of the political participation and the forms of representation causing a "moral indignation" (Pavarini, 1994), instead of the crime fear. According to Walklate (1998), the importance of the confidence in the institutions and the attention dedicated to the citizens would cause a greater need of security. Recently, some authors have focused on the conditions of general uncertainty which we live in and that have characterized all the complex global societies. According Bauman the postmodern deregulation leaves indefinite, fluctuating and "destructuring" men identity. "The fear of certainty lack has forced individuals to a frenetic effort of self-achievement and self-training" (Bauman, 1999, p. 109). For Giddens (2000) the globalization is not only an economic complex phenomenon. It is a set of economic, socio-political, cultural factors that have been developing and creating a net of relationships and relations of interdependence among individuals, but at same time globalization has been generating a separation between real society and old institutional models of reference, depriving family, traditions and State of their original meaning. Man lives in an anomy condition and has to face "built risks", that is new problems that don't have historical precedents which he may operate some comparisons to. Man might adopt only precautionary strategies.

In addition the figures concerning the security market testify how much fear and insecurity have increased. This phenomenon is not typically Italian, in fact, there has been an increase of sales in all European companies that have been operating in this sector. The fear of victimization, that is the fear to become victim of a crime produces an insecurity feeling principally (Hale, 1996). Other causes of insecurity are the inability to assess or value the consequences of the victimization (Bennet, 1990), the geographical and social characteristics of the urban spaces.

According to Ellin (1997) the policy of fear keeps on protecting from insecurity. Insecurity feeling is not a new or recent phenomenon but it has always existed in the man's history. In fact fear and sense of insecurity have characterized the evolution of the building in the towns. In the past to defeat the fear, the main device of defense consisted in building high and large walls. Surrounding towns with long ditches gave a security feeling. Both systems were useful not only in creating a division between the outside and inside parts of the towns, reassuring women and men from sudden attacks but also in widening internal control and creating a climate of compactness (Mantini, 1991).

Today fear and insecurity remain. The danger does not come any more from outside, but it has been generated by threats in the city itself. Such a danger is incidental to in a part of collectivity, generally the poorer and the more emarginated one. In front of such a danger there are walls or ditches that may hold. It is necessary not to defend from external factors but from internal ones. Maybe the insecurity perception increases. The fear issue has some effects on the social integration because it gives life to episodes of escape, abandonment of determinate districts, the inhibition of social activities and the increase of security costs.

## 4. The Experienced Insecurity Perception

However when one talks about security, fear, insecurity, it is necessary to make a distinction, widely shared by the doctrine. It distinguishes between objective (not influenced by personal feelings or opinions) risk and subjective perception. In fact, the sensation of insecurity and the relative security request might come from a situation of objective risk which individuals live daily in. Sometimes such a sensation might derive from a subjective perception that doesn't correspond to a current situation.

The sensation of perceived insecurity is different from the real situation and its representation plays a fundamental role for the operators. The different perception of insecurity depends on the strategies that criminologists and politicians adopt in order to conform the security request to reality. If the security request is appropriate, the perception of insecurity is correct regarding the real situation. For this reason, the insecurity sensation is justified and it has to be fought or attenuated by preparing comm.on devices in order to reduce the crime.

When the insecurity sensation doesn't derive from reality and isn't justified by crime rates but by a distorted image, it might produce alarmism. It necessary to intervene by specific tools, the so called assurance policies (Amendola, 2000) that take the place of traditional strategies in order to orient the perception of the collectivity in the right direction (Warr, 1982). Almost unanimously the criminology literature has affirmed that not only the knowledge but also the citizen's crime perception is inadequate because it gives an overvaluation of crime rates. Ferrajoli (1999) has argued that "objective dimension and subjective perception of security risks have an opposite trend in our country like in many other advanced countries".

From some researches carried out not only in Italy it has emerged that the feeling of personal insecurity has started to increase strongly at the beginning of the Seventies years as a consequence of an increase of few crimes, such as robberies and homicides (Savona, 1993) and remained stable for all the Nineties, increasing again in the new millennium.

## 5.  The Role of Media in the Spreading of Insecurity Feeling

The decrease of the objective insecurity, the subjective perception of the insecurity seems to be increased in the last years thanks to the continuous alarms launched by the media. However media are not the only responsible for this phenomenon whose causes have to be investigated elsewhere, in the complex social conditions of the urban micro-crime (Bauman, 1998). In fact several researches have showed that real victimization and insecurity are two phenomena that are not strictly connected each other. For this reason some authors think that the fear is a physic building deriving from the social context which people live in and it doesn't depend on the real crime directly. It is produced by the "shifting" on the crime of the anxiety produced by other factors in other contexts (Lagrange, 1993, p.395).

Fear isn't strictly closed to the real victimization, neither it is proportionally connected to the risk to become crime victim because the categories at risk of victimization are those ones that show their insecurity more or less. According to Thomas, in his famous theorem, "situations that are perceived as real ones are real in their consequences" (Thomas William and Znaniecki, 1918). Fear and real danger are two distinct phenomena, but at the present moment "there are not statistics on the crime trend. The security request is expressed by growing strength and imperiousness by a scared urban population" (Amendola, 2000).

Moreover from different interviews (Selmini, 2003) it has emerged that the high perception of insecurity stems not only from changes whose people have difficulties to adapt to but also from the several effects of intelligible mechanisms. Many interviewees have declared that the insecurity comes from a more less quiet perception and there are different insecurity typologies depending on the contest which they live in. For many citizens insecurity originates from social and economic phenomena, such as the unemployment, urban degradation. The insecurity perception is greater in the cities there is a greater consciousness of rights and a wider demand in the comparisons of the institutions. Many people think that the media are used to play and keep on playing an important role in influencing public opinion, emphasizing certain episodes or exploiting some issues, aiming at a real construction of the fear climate. In fact for the criminology literature the media are the responsible of increasing the social clamour with reference to crime rate without giving a correct image of crime to the citizens both quantitatively and qualitatively (Van Dijk, 1984).

Some authors deny the influence of media considering the fear as a "more general awareness" of the crime (Smith, 1984). Others find out a relationship between exposure  to information and increased fear of crime (Van Dijk, 1984).

## 6. Fear of Crime and Evolution of Society

Fear of crime has always been part of anxieties and worries of a society, but from mid Sixties researchers and scholars have started studying the fear as a real and social problem, as heavy as the crime is. Some authors define the crime fear as an "indirect victimization" (Conklin, 1971), that is as fear experienced by a  woman or a man, although she or he has never been a crime victim, but she / he thinks might become a victim.

It is necessary to say that many studies aren't correct under both methodological and conceptual profile. The fear of crime is not easy to analyze because it is a deeply subjective feeling firstly, it should have to be measured through a series of questions and answers that might be generic indicators secondly. The crime fear cannot be evaluated directly. As a result some authors make a distinction between concern (a feeling of worry, especially one that is shared by many people) caused directly by delinquency, the crime fear or the social worry for the crime represented by the anxiety for the spread of crime in the place where one lives in and personal crime fear, experienced by a physical and physic reaction to an actual and individual or merely potential danger (Roché, 1998). Personal fear and social concern are not always correlated but recently they have been defined as dimensions of the insecurity feeling.

In the wake of some English authors in order to explain the insecurity spread, Italian scholars reused the theory of the moral panic that explains the immoderate reactions of media or public opinion and other strategies of social control as regard slight or minor deviances carried out by young people (Barbagli, 1999). Today, the locution is used to indicate a sudden anxiety, an unjustified or excessive fear, due to the threats from groups that act in unacceptable way and immorally in order to damage the society.

The moral panic is based on five conditions: the increase of some concerns for some groups' actions and the negative consequences on the social context; the growth of the hostility towards such groups; the sharing the worry of many people; the existence of an imaginary danger and then unjustified fear, "flying" nature of the moral panic (Thompson, 1998).

According to a theory, the moral panic is produced by the dominant class and is spread through the mass media in order to divert, turn away citizens from the current problems. For other authors, the moral panic is developed principally among the middle class in order to defend its business and trades. Finally there are authors and scholars that think the moral panic represents a spontaneous phenomenon.

The necessity of five conditions induces some authors to affirm that it is impossible to talk about moral panic in Italy because of the absence of the fourth condition represented by the existence of an imaginary danger and the relative unjustified fear.

The insecurity feeling is a complex phenomenon for the variety of the factors that make it. It might change according to the subjective perception rather than the real situation of the life quality, psychological or social factors. This means that in addition to the widespread crime the livability in the cities, the quality of life, the absence of social ties, the lesser and lesser importance of human relationships, incidents of vandalism, incivilities and degradation contribute to increase the insecurity feeling.

A large number of researchers have focused their attention on the leading role performed by the urban degradation, that is urban disorder and incivilities produce an insecurity feeling. It clear that the security need is correlated to the absence of both central and local State.

At the present time, the terms urban disorder and incivilities are difficult to define too. According to Skogan (1990) urban disorders don't include just only delinquent phenomena but also anomy, disorganization. He distinguishes between a "physical disorder", characterized by forms of vandalism, abandonment of buildings that generate deviant act of any kind, waste disposal. This sort of disorder generates concern about the looming danger experienced by the people and creates an insecurity feeling. As a result the informal control mechanisms are reduced through the neighborhood relations which are the only solution to escape from the place. For the author the social disorder is different from the physical disorder. The social disorder is characterized by drunkenness, delinquent gangs, street violence, drug traffic and border line players. For Assier Andrieu (2002), the presence of collective rules assures the regular development of daily life and connotes the security expectations. Bauman (2001) affirms that once started, the community decline doesn't arrest.

As regard incivilities, there is an univocal definition. Generically incivilities are represented by all those acts not forbidden by the penal codes and not pursued by the Police that however produce negative feelings, disturbing the normal development of social life by the break of social ties. From a technical point of view, incivilities come from the violation of standard cohabitation in a public space (social incivilities) or the violation of standards and the protection of the territory (environmental incivilities). Incivility acts are distinguished by the signs that derive from them. Sometimes they represent little violations or simple cases of bad education or discourtesy.

Incivilities are always visible and interpreted as a break of the order of cohabitation by some people and as sign of the lack's control from institutions by other ones. Incivilities have an impact on the state of mind of citizens. In fact, public institutions are devices of social integration for their practical function and their symbolic charge. When their function is compromised, institutions pass from integration symbol to breakup ones (Cartocci, 1995).

The famous criminology School of the perceptual criminology (Ferraro, 1995) affirms that a large number of social problems derive from the crime and crime fear and they are not connected to the real risk of victimization, because the crime is unobserved whereas the effects or consequences of incivilities are visible by everyone. According to Barbagli (2002) "it is more evident what happens along the streets, that are public space, than what is not perceivable directly because it is private".

In the United States a widely known work of Eighties analyzed the relationship between disorder in a wider meaning, including all the physical and social incivilities and the increased perception of insecurity. In 1982 Wilson and Kelling elaborated the well-known theory of the broken window, that is the window or the glass is broken. The results of an experiment carried out by a psychologist of Stanford University were the scholars' starting point. They analyzed the time of destruction of two deserted motor vehicles on the road. The theory of broken glass argues that any broken glass that is not repaired might induce people to commit another act because vandalism is an indication of the lack of experts for monitoring and protecting but also citizens living in that area. In presence of degraded areas, the authors of incivilities might be encouraged to keep on committing deviating acts because of the absence of any contrast. The broken windows may be replaced by any currency object. Furthermore, according to Wilson and Kelling (1982), acts of incivility and general degradation would increase not only the perception of insecurity but also give life to a knock-on effect. The abandoned areas would be left by people, becoming marginal zones. People who don't have any opportunities to leave the degraded areas are forced to change their habits and behaviours by disregarding the feeling of belonging. All that happens because of the weakening of the social ties and the mechanisms of social control. As a result of continuous vandalisms' acts or incivilities the residents think the district is insecure and start sharing this concern with other residents. The concern becomes a social worry with effects on the community (internal weakening). The social effect influences the dynamics of social cohesion negatively with the decline of urban vitality.

But "[…] eyes on the street" (Jacobs, 1969, p.29) means minor / irrelevant social controls. The complete detachment of residents from their territory because of "urban unease" (Garofalo and Laub, 1978) is the latest step. Such an unease involves a total loss of the identity sense and membership in a determinate area.

If the agencies don't supply the necessary and expected protection in order to defend the territory from vandalism acts the situation is serious, the abandonment perception is relevant and the sense of institutions' inefficacy is strong. As a consequence the destabilization of the community is occurred and a mobilization of some residents might occur in the long time and the social-cultural context might change. The broken window emphasizes how important and necessary the activities of Police are in order to strengthen the social ties of neighborhood. Police should keep on watching the territory, create and develop mechanisms of informal control.

This theory has had an enormous success in the United States and has been applied in the name of "Zero tolerance" or "Get tough" by the New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani in order to reduce the crime rates and increase security feeling. The zero tolerance was a success in the new Continent but also in Europe. Certainly this theory has weakness points and has been subjected to critics as regard its validity and effectiveness. The aim of this article is not analyze this point but emphasize the impact of this theory on security policies implemented in Italy and Europe.

## 7. Conclusion

It is evident that authorities, firstly local authorities, are the main referents as regard the citizens' security request. They have a key role in the designing and implementing prevention strategies. All that implies a necessary revision of the allotment of the institutional tasks in order to make the public policies effective.

Politicians, managers, experts should compare the daily actions to the complexity of four key concepts: security, insecurity, fear and degradation. They have to face an important choice: increasing the repression of determinate behaviours that produce social alarm or stimulating prevention policies in order to avoid determinate conditions of insecurity.

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