LIVING IN SECURE CITIES: THE PROJECTS ABOUT CITY SECURITY

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"For it is wrong to believe that the scale of fears corresponds
to that of the dangers that inspire them. One can be afraid
of insomnia and not of a serious duel, of a mouse and not of a lion."
(Marcel Proust, *A' la recherche du temps perdu*)

"The cities like dreams are made of desires and fears"
(Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*)

The analysis of fear and the theory of social "disorder".

Recently the media have begun to be interested, with almost daily interventions, in the problem of security in Italian cities, both emphasising the increase of road criminality (or diffused criminality) and evidencing the deep sense of insecurity in which the citizens live which appear more and more deeply correlated as well as with an illegality increase - above all predatory - also with "the more and more visible scissors between number of denunciations and the frequency of sentences" (Bouchard, 1997).

The fear of criminality and the fear of becoming victims is part of a phenomenon that is more and more deeply characterising contemporary society and involves most serious social and psychological consequences (Santinello, Gonzi, Scacchi, 1998), determining a limitation of people's behaviours and movements (Taylor, 1995) and substantially modifying social relations of individuals (Liska, Baccaglini, 1990).

Moreover, the coming out of the insecurity problem is deeply correlated with the political choices of the local authorities and has influences on the relations and the conflicts among the various social groups (Taylor, 1987) as well as the urban order of cities (Amendola, 1993).

The data of a recent survey about victimization held by Istat (Dazzles, 1998) point out in an incontrovertible way that also in Italy the sense of insecurity for criminality not only does exist among people, but it has become a social phenomenon that cannot be ignored any longer.

The issue of the sense of insecurity, unlike Italy, for the last thirty years has been object of numerous studies and researches above all in the United States and in Great Britain which have pointed out that the sense of personal insecurity, although with a parallel trend to the increase of microcriminality, "seems to be socially more widespread, assuming a particular

emphasis that makes it a social and scientific, autonomous and independent reality" (Santinello, Gonzi, Scacchi, 1998).

In particular the researchers have pointed out two main dimensions of the sense of insecurity: the *fear of crime*, that is the personal fear of criminality, and the *concern about crime*, that is the social worry for criminality or the worry for the order (Furstenberg, 1971).

The data concerning the Italian situation - though insufficient - show that the personal fear of crime is as widespread as in the other western countries (Savona 1993).

It is interesting to notice how the fear of crime is not distributed in a uniform way among people, but it varies depending on sex, age, type of town of residence or geographic area where people live. The data show that the most important variable is the first, since fear is much more widespread among female rather than male population.

Moreover the data - confirmed by other researches carried out in the United States and in other European countries - show that fear of criminality is much more widespread than the victimization (real crime) and the most insecure demographic groups are, in reality, the less victimized (Perkins, Taylor, 1996).

Examining the data so far emerged from the research it is evident that nowadays the sense of insecurity for crime - in the centres of metropolitan areas of Italy - is widely spread in various layers of the population and it has become a social phenomenon that cannot be undervalued any longer.

Some people think that fear of crime is an irrational feeling (Oatley, 1992) in two different meanings: that fear is disproportioned and excessive in comparison to the effective risk to suffer a crime (irrationality regarding the causes) or that it tends to hinder and to negatively influence people's behaviour (irrationality regarding the effects). As far as the latter aspect is concerned it must not be forgotten that the sense of fear carries out also protective effects on human beings since, making them more cautious and prudent, it strongly reduces the risk of victimization.

As far as irrationality referred to the causes is concerned, several researches held in Great Britain and in the United States during the 80's have underlined the irrationality of fear, pointing out how the groups among which it was mainly widespread - women and old people - were also those who run less risks, showing a lower rate of victimization. The researchers explained this result apparently paradoxical asserting that their fear was fed by wrong information, spread by mass media, about the real risks of suffering a crime (Stafford, Galle, 1984; Maxfield, 1984; Roché, 1993).

A similar result - and apparently paradoxical - comes out also from the survey by Istat, in which the variations of the personal fear for sex and age do not seem to correspond to those of the objective risks of victimization.

From the same research another apparent paradox came out, not pointed out by other foreign studies: although it is the upper-middle class individuals who suffer more frequently predatory crimes, in Italy the fear is more widespread among the lower-social-class citizens.

After all the greater sense of insecurity shown by women, the elderly and the lower-social-class individuals is linked to a greater vulnerability and to the perception of the consequences that can derive from victimization, elements that come into a subjective appraisal of the risk.

These individuals, thus, perceive the criminal act as a much more threatening event than the others do, because more devastating in its impact and for the consequences on their lives.

Other surveys held in some western countries have pointed out how crime fear is born, spreads and grows also because of the repeating - in the residential area - of actions and events, apparently of little importance, sometimes just at the border of crime, called "acts of incivility" and perceived as a whole by the citizens as signs of community moral order collapse (Lewis, Maxfield, 1980).

In 1978 Albert Hunter asserted that "the fear in city environment is above all fear of social disorder, that can be considered a threat for the individual". Moreover, he pointed out that social disorganization was at the origin both of little violations of the norms (incivilities) and of the more serious ones (crimes) and emphasised that in the areas where the former are more frequent also the latter are more often committed.

It has been noticed, however, that the citizens' sense of insecurity depends more on the incivilities than on crimes, because of their greater frequency (Lagrange, 1995).
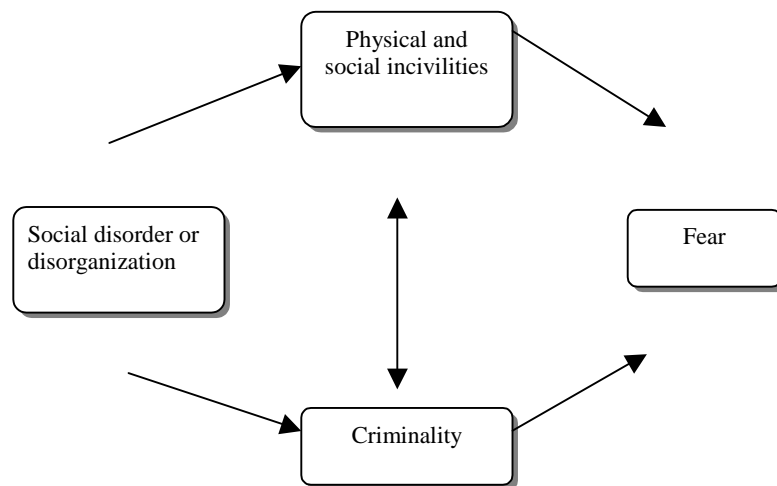

Fig. 1. Model of Hunter (1979).

Source: Taylor (1987).

By the end of the 60's a similar hypothesis had already been advanced in the United States; a survey report in 1967 showed that the people's sense of insecurity and their fear of staying alone at home or of walking around the quarter streets at night depended on the repeating of "acts of incivilities", of little disorders or violations of norms commonly shared, rather than on the frequency of bag-snatchings, robberies or burglaries (Skogan, 1990).

All the studies demonstrated that a large source of insecurity is represented by what many researchers call "disorder", that is the whole of signs of incivilities present in the area in where a person lives, that can be social or physical. The former ones are connected to events or specific activities such as the behaviours of different categories of people: pushers and customers, prostitutes, beggars, etc. The latter ones, instead, show long-lasting aspects of the living environment: abandoned or neglected buildings, graffiti, damaged telephone boxes, broken street lamps, dirty roads, etc. Incivilities, finally, can be active or deliberated - vandalism, graffiti, etc. - or passive and involuntary like the neglected buildings or the street rubbish not collected.
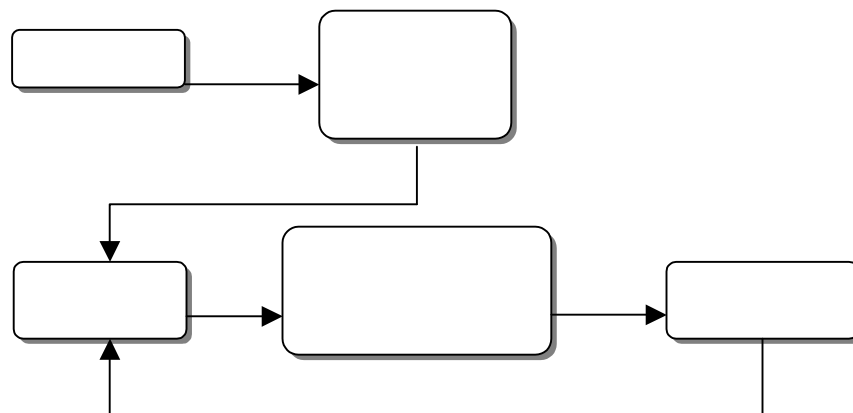

Fig. 2. Model of Wilson and Kelling (1982)

Source: Taylor (1987).

These situations and behaviours so different among them, have however in common the fact that they constitute a violation of the norms shared by the population regarding the management and the use of public areas and often they do not need complex interventions of contrast: strengthening the lighting system of specific zones, improving waste collection,

better keeping and restoring eventual abandoned buildings, in one word revaluing the territory is enough.

Therefore, the signs of incivility have influence on the sense of security, compromising the integrity and the degree, for a series of reasons. First of all citizens perceive them as part of a continuum of disorder that goes from the lighter infractions (irritating noises, groups with provocative attitudes on the road) to more serious crimes (vandalism, crimes against patrimony or people). Also incivilities, moreover, although often constitute simple violations of social norms, are considered as "spies of the collapse of the norms that regulate daily life and of incapability to make them respect on part of those who have this task" (Barbagli, 1999). Moreover the people who are responsible of these little violations are considered a threat by citizens, because unpredictable and therefore capable of anything, also of much more serious offences. Finally, incivilities are much more visible than crimes, thus "if crimes generate a restricted number of victims, incivilities multiply the number of witnesses" (Barbagli, 1999).

The strong correlation existing between incivility and sense of insecurity has been demonstrated - as well as with surveys - also with experiments. The most important is the *Foot Patrol Experiment* held in Newark (New Jersey) in the middle of the 70's with foot police patrols. For a long time the territory patrolling had been considered a waste of resources, however it had been decided to send patrols of policemen to control the city on foot - rather than by car - and it had been noticed that this measure, although the number of crimes committed did not diminish at all, made meaningfully reduce the fear of citizens.

The positive effects on the citizens' sense of security were essentially produced by the fact that the patrols faced in different and more effective ways the problem of social disorder. As a matter of fact, policemen, being absorbed in common people's lives and problems, best known and estimated by citizens, negotiated with the residents, through a positive social mediation, the conduct rules regarding the use of public areas, establishing the disorder thresholds and reducing the number of incivilities (Kelling, Coles, 1996).

According to some researchers the disorder is contagious and spreads favouring, as time passes, the increase of criminality, the number of thefts and robberies. The phenomenon is explained by the fact that the sense of insecurity provoked by the signs of incivilities can reduce - as time goes by - interaction and cooperation among the residents, discouraging from protecting themselves and their own community.

In this way the mechanisms of social control weaken until "the area is vulnerable to criminal invasion" (Wilson, 1985). This is, in short, the basic thesis of the *broken window theory* (outlined in the figure n.2) according to which if in a building there are smashed glasses and nobody replaces them, after a while all the windows will undergo the same destiny. This happens not because the area has been invaded by vandals or delinquents, but because those broken windows indicate that none of the residents in the area is willing to defend other people's property against actions of vandalism.

It has been noticed how the increase of the sense of insecurity and the correspondent reduction of the sense of solidarity and cohesion among citizens make the informal social control decrease, too, in relation to a spiral process that ends up upsetting the traditional relationship according to which "more crimes = more insecurity" and making it become "more insecurity = more crimes".

Other experiments have confirmed what has been said about the *broken windows*. The most famous experiment is the one of the American psychologist Philip Zimbardo who at the end of the 60's empirically winnowed the validity of this theory not in laboratory, but on the Americans roads where he abandoned two cars without the plates and with the bonnet up, the first time in the Bronx, New York, and the second time in Palo Alto, California. In the Bronx, after only ten minutes since abandoning it, the car was taken by assault by the members of a family who took the radiator and the battery. In twenty-four hours all the pieces of some value were removed by various people, mainly white women, well dressed and respectable-looking. In Palo Alto, on the contrary, nobody had been approaching the car for a week. On the eighth day Zimbardo himself approached the car with a baton in hand and began to hit it. That was enough for the passers-by to join him and start destroying the car.

In synthesis it can be asserted that there are three hypotheses subjected to verification by the various researches (Fig. 3): according to the first, the fear of crime depends on the number of the predatory crimes; according to the second, it is also due to the social or physical disorder present in the community; and according to the third, disorder generates fear both directly and indirectly, favouring the increase of predatory crime.

I°

Criminality → Fear

II°

Criminality

Social disorder

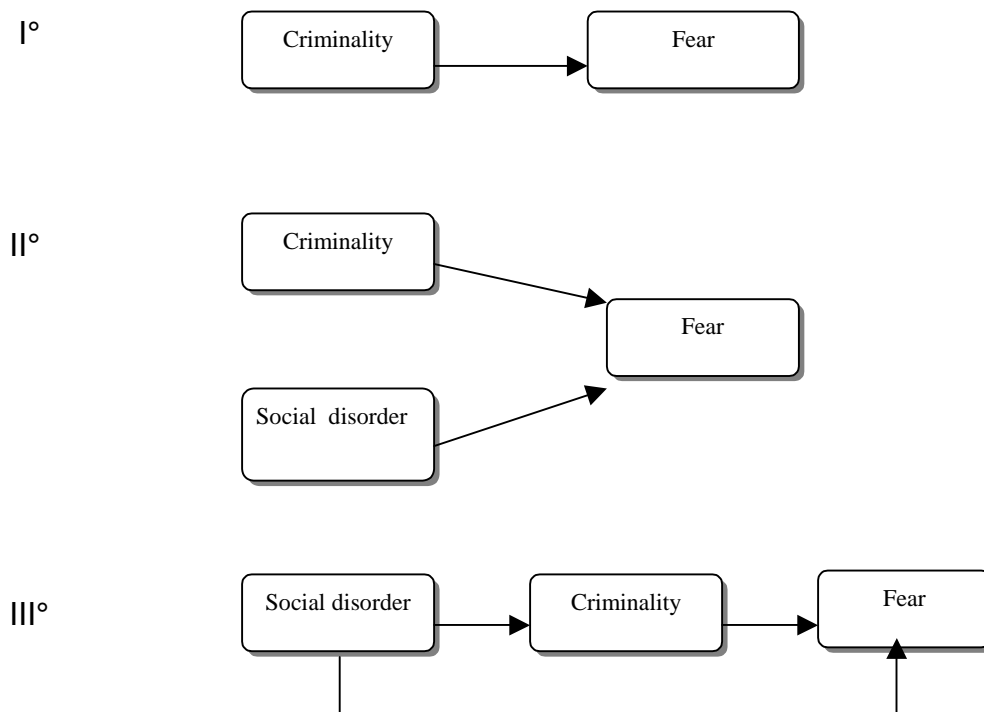→ Fear

III°

Social disorder → Criminality → Fear

Fig. 3 Three hypothesis on the relations among predatory criminality, fear and social disorder

Source: Livingston, 1992.

These contributions are characterised by the fact that they consider the fear of crime an effect of the perception of the community structural changes and not an exclusively individual process of appraisal of an external risk.

The phenomenon of the fear of crime is therefore inserted in a social context that contributes, through its own characteristics for dynamics, to the diffusion or the reduction of insecurity.

This reading of the phenomenon considers the fear of crime linked to the state of real crime rates - also these ones consequent to the increase of social disorganization and interlaced to the sense of insecurity - as well as to the concept of personal vulnerability, thus the sense of insecurity and of fear are considered attitudes consequent to the perception of real "clues of *icivility*" on part of the individual, clues that are estimated rationally from the single person.

Another series of interesting contributions comes from the studies of Environmental Psychology that established itself scientifically in the United States between the end of the 50's and the beginning of the 70's, with the production of interesting researches that distinguished themselves by the attention - not only to the social or psychological environment - but also to the physical environment, for the observation of the daily reality and its interdisciplinarity with other contexts of environmental sciences (Proshansky, 1976).

Another interesting model is the one delineated by Newman in a famous book, in 1972, where the author, analysing the great popular residential buildings, criticizes the consequences that these urban-planning choices have on people's lives, emphasising the influence that this architectonic order produces on the development of real crime rates. In contrast with these buildings he outlines the concept of *defensible space* able to contain crime, through the development of territoriality and of a high social control, making the public spaces approach a more private dimension. This is obtainable through the creation of manageable spaces (smaller buildings in order to favour sociality and control), introducing real barriers (walls, gates) and symbolic barriers (walls, hedges, sign-boards) in order to clearly define the spaces both for the residents and for eventual external aggressors, as well as adding the opportunities of common surveillance of the spaces making the control easier and getting rid of spaces "attractive" for criminals.

Fig. 4. The model of Newman and Frank (1982).

It is interesting to remember also the contribution of the psychological research on the perception of environmental dangers that demonstrates how the rare and memorable events are overvalued in their effects, while the most common ones are undervalued (Lichtenstein, Slovic, Fischoff, Laiman, Comb, 1978). As the same perceptive distortions work in the cases of victimization of criminal actions, they can explain some differences between sense of insecurity and local crime. As a matter of fact, in the areas with high crime rate there is a process of "adaptation to threat", similar to the process found in case of natural disasters, therefore people daily exposed to signs of social degradation indicative of a high personal risk get cognitively used to this presence as time goes by, mitigating its impact in their appraisal of the territory. The level of adaptation, therefore, turns out to be a linear function of the time of exposure to the danger. However episodes of direct victimization, and also some interventions of prevention eliminate this adaptation effect in the subjects, making the levels of insecurity increase (Taylor, Shumaker, Gottfredson, 1985).

The projects on security in the cities: the Commune as director of the city good living.

To the mentioned studies and researches there have been lately added new surveys carried out by specific categories of citizens for which the problem of security is concern also for reasons connected to their working activities.

On this subject a recent survey commissioned by Confcommercio (Cirm, 1999) has substantially confirmed the data of Istat survey regarding the fear for crime and the diffusion of the sense of insecurity (that hits 58% of citizens of great cities, with higher peaks in Genoa, Vicenza and Rome) and at the same time has pointed out the necessity for the majority of the sample of a more effective presence of the public forces on the territory, of the removal of the clandestine immigrants from the city centres and greater powers to the Mayor regarding the control of the city.

These suggestions - and in particular the latter - have already been taken into consideration in several cities, where the Mayors, strong also in their greater representativity and visibility deriving from direct election, have become promoters of projects and cognitive surveys in order to translate the increasing citizens' need for security into real initiatives.

However the difficulty and the delicacy of the problem impose a rational approach, able to contain the tendency to excessive emotionality that could lead to unsuitable or even ineffective remedies.

It is self-evident that order and public security are fundamental assets that every society should guarantee to its own members, and constitute the presupposition of the social contract. Without dwelling upon theories about contractual doctrines, it can be asserted that security is an asset for the very existence of society, being a necessary presupposition.

However, the sudden change of society and its increasing complexity make the "security" asset very variable, involving greater problems in comparison to simpler societies, and making the social costs for the maintenance of a good standard of security more and more evident; standard of security that should always and anyway guarantee a "balanced relationship between social protection and individual and collective freedom" (Lombardi, 1999).

On the other hand also the society state of health has influence on the level of security and, consequently, on the quality of life that can be guaranteed to a specific collectivity, since

instability and degradation phenomena bring about serious problems of public order that make the attainment and the maintenance of suitable levels of security more difficult. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that in Italy the great emergencies of terrorism and of organised crime have concentrated and focused energies and the knowledge of the formal agencies of control on these fields, diverting them from the analysis and from the fight to the phenomenon of road crime whose rates - relatively low - did not force to estimate with attention the more and more increasing climate of conflict in the city centres (Bouchard, 1997, Gualco, 1999).

Therefore, the insufficient interest to the "security asset" did not allow a timely political and cultural investment on the phenomenon of insecurity. This has involved the permanence of an insufficient level of acquaintance with the phenomenon of widespread crime among the organs deputed to fight illegality, which strays away a little from the common sense.

In such scenery it is obvious that the Mayors' choice of taking the responsibility of the problems of the city security on one side makes them more visible and protagonists of the quality of city life, and on the other side throws them among dynamics and mechanisms mostly unknown to the local body.

As a matter of fact if mayors want to express from their own experience the demand for security on part of their subordinates - both in the provincial committees for order and security and in other institutional centres - they will have to be able, in the first place, to know the relative components so that they can distinguish the effective threats from the simple perceptions. In the same way they will have to be able to understand if at the origin of the sense of insecurity there are conditions of degradation of the city, incivility, places of the city tissue that have been abandoned, or on the contrary if there are types of crime attracted by particular characteristic of the Commune, by productive or commercial activities, road structures or by the whole of City users that daily enter the city.

Moreover, next to the study of the structural elements of the city territory and of the components of the sense of insecurity diffused among the citizens, the Mayor will have to operate a recognition of the availability of the control resources he can rely on. As a matter of fact, very often the city administration does neither know which and how many organs has at its disposal, nor, above all, know their addresses, their purposes, their priorities, the fixed aims and the fulfilled results.

Therefore if the Mayor does not want to limit himself to point out the problems of the city during provincial order and security committee, holding a passive role once again, he will have to cope with the crime issue with competence and to try to understand if the various institutional organs of the formal control are equipped with suitable strategies for the forms of crime present in the city context. This implies taking specific responsibilities also at the moment of administrative choices that will not be able any longer to leave the analysis of the impact and of the possible relapses on the evolution of crime out of consideration.

It has been noticed that the hopes of controlling the dynamics of crime are centred on two institutional focuses: on the one hand "on the safeguard of the balances of the city, of the attention not to upset its identity and environmental values, together with the easy living on part of the citizens" on the other hand "on the quality of the offer of public security, that is the same as saying its fitting *to measure* to the configuration of the cities and the punctual criticism that the *demand for security*, the citizens point out" (Fiasco, 1999).

In this elementary dynamic, usually neglected, the local Agencies often ignore their own twofold position of collective expression of the demand for security and at the same time of distributors of a part of the offer through the service of municipal police.

And it is just with regard to this that the Commune, the Provinces and the Regions, that have provided themselves with projects on security, have decided to commit themselves in the choice of "producing quality" in a service that concerns city security - meant like a very different idea from that of public security, of which other organs have the responsibility - that is as "the whole of both institutional and social forms of control, that are developed in directed correlation with the quality of life in the city." (Fiasco, 1999).

Therefore in facing this type of problems it is useful the twofold aspect of the local Agency that demands and offers security at the same time. As a matter of fact the credibility of the offer - of the service of municipal police - will weigh on the force of demanding for security, on behalf of the citizens, to the other competent institutional organisms, and viceversa in a kind of "interaction that makes them mutually responsible" (Fiasco, 1999).

It is obvious that the municipal and other organs' management of the formal control will have to adopt lines of communication and co-operation in the choices in view of a better qualified offer that will have not to limit itself to the traditional assertion - sometimes symbolic, sometimes effective - of public order, but it will have to translate itself in the production of the asset "security of the citizen".

This process opens unknown perspectives of working for all the public administrations that are called to give answers in terms of result, through the management and the production of effective services, appreciated by the citizens (never involved in the appraisal so far) and not to limit themselves, like it has been made so far, to symbolic projections probably disguised as stricter penal norms or greater equipments of men and instruments, without checking the effectiveness of the result and the congruence between financial investments and the output of the service.

In this context, following foreign experiences, that for fifteen years had been showing how the problems of city security would have imposed themselves as one of the burning issues of the local government, some projects on city security have been started also in Italy, the first being the one of Region Emilia Romagna in 1994 - followed later by other communes and provinces - that felt the necessity to train the administrations of the various cities to face these new problems, as unknown at that time in the political-electoral competition as determinant today for the election of a mayor.

In these projects the competent political subjects for the policies of security were identified in the Mayor and in the local governments, and it was set as functional aim that of urging the government policies about the issues of city security and the attributions of new competences in matter of security to the local governments, making the effort "of holding an explicitly promotional role of new political references in the government of city security " (the Forge, 1998).

The starting point was the necessity to get a deeper and scientific knowledge of the subject and to clarify the distinction between policies of security - that regard all the citizens, the quality of their social and interpersonal relationship, the quality of the city environment - and criminal policies - that constitute a part of the policies of security - and are connected only with the prevention and repression of the so called illicit and penally punishable behaviours emphasising the necessity of a unitary government of both.

The distinction has turned out to be important in order to explain the misunderstanding in Italy, where with policies of security it has always and only been meant the policies of crime prevention and repression, translated with the terms of "pubblica sicurezza" and "sicurezza pubblica" (public security), as if they were synonyms, having little help in that from Italian language that - unlike English and French - does not have two terms to indicate the city security in wide sense (safety, sécurité) and the one limited to the fighting action of the police against crime (security, sureté).

The greater part of these projects carries out a research line that is not centred in particular way on the study of the fear of crime, but wants to study the problem of crime and of insecurity as a whole (analysis of real crime, feeling of insecurity and modification of the behaviours, social tendencies to the citizens' punishing, social opinion on the causes of crime) operating with a "critical" approach that recalls the one of "new prevention" (Pavarini 1992) finalized to the construction of actions aimed to reduce specific behaviours with solutions different from penal sanction (Robert, 1991).

The surveys carried out in the context of the projects have confirmed also some assumptions of the international research concerning the activity of *Law Enforcement*, in particular the insufficiency of the repressive policies in order to attain the aim of the crime reduction. As a matter of fact, as it has already been seen in North American experience, it is necessary to operate parallelly and cross-sectionally on more levels (Sherman, 1998) and, next to the traditional policies of punishment and restriction, to consider other policies of Welfare, imprinted towards socialization and the reduction of opportunity for crime (Pavarini, 1994; Savona, 1998).

Moreover, the central elements of the new idea of prevention have to be identified in the aim of reduction of crime together with that of developing socialization, social cohesion, rationalization and improvement of living and security conditions of a specific collectivity, using the term of situational crime prevention in order to indicate all the forms of preventive control of the environmental factors of crimegenetic risk (Clarke, 1995).

The inspiring criteria of this new way to mean prevention are recognisable in some sociological theories. The first one - life style model - focuses the attention on the life style of individuals (Hindelang ET al., 1978; Garofalo, 1987) to which variations among the various layers of the population concerning the risk of suffering a violent crime should be brought back.

Therefore, the more the life style (that is the whole of the activities connected to job, to school, to the domestic management or to the free time) brings the individual into contact with potential authors of crime, the greater the victimization risk will be, and this whenever people leave their house, the places that are attended, the distances and the means of transportation used, everything gives reason of the variations of the risk.

The second theory Ruotine Activity Approach analyses the routine activities accomplished by the people and intends to explain not only the variations of the risks in space, but also in time (Cohen, Felson, 1979; Cohen, 1981; Felson, 1994).
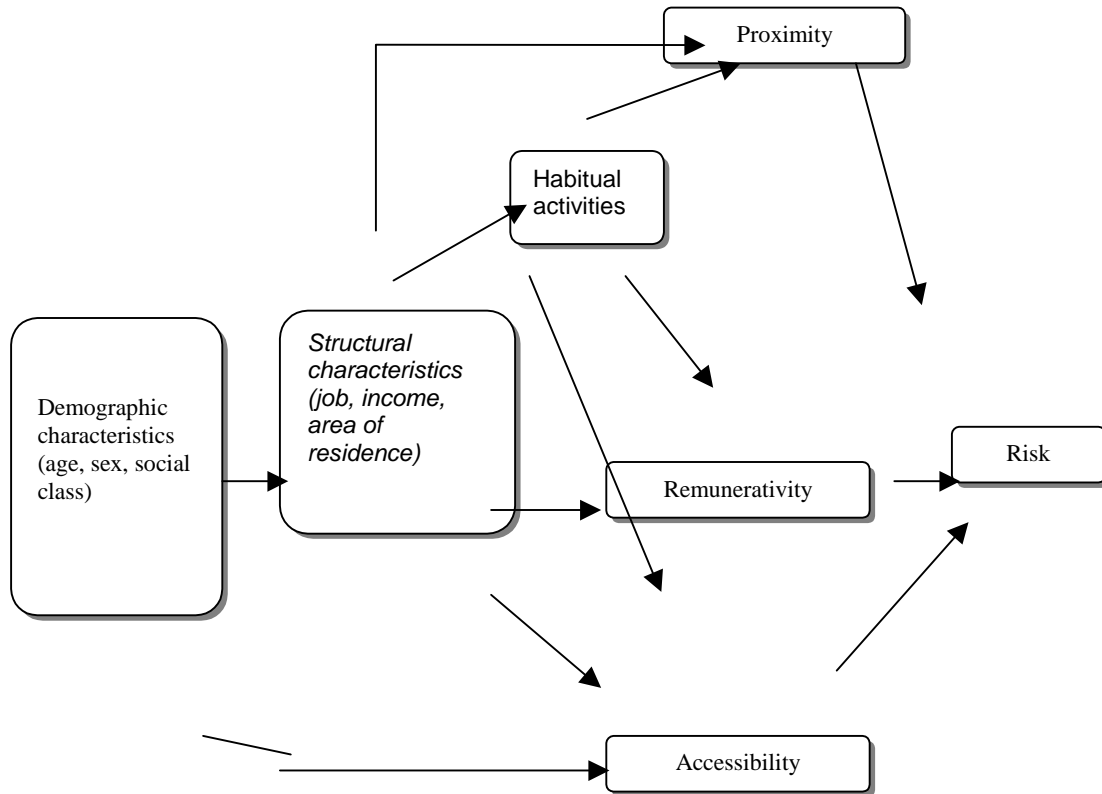
Fig. 5 Elements that have influence on the risk of suffering a crime.

Source: Hough, 1987 in Barbagli 1998

According to this analysis criminal activity is linked to ecological factors and, in order to be realised, it needs the co-existence of three elements: a subject suitable and able to commit a crime, a target (object or person) easy to reach and to attack, and the lack of effective means able to oppose the criminal action. Since the absence of one of these elements is sufficient so that the crime is not accomplished, the routine activities of the more victimized individuals have been analysed in order to emphasise the habits that can expose them to potential criminals (proximity), their structural position - job, income, place of residence - that makes them privileged targets (remunerativity) and little protected (accessibility). These last characteristics depend on people's socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, social class.

For example, the variation of rates of victimization in relation to dimensions and type of commune can be explained in a similar way: a greater crime rate pointed out in large centres has been connected with a greater number of chances and less social control in metropolis (Wilkstroem, 1991).

It is just in this perspective that the policies of crime control must be realised "according to a continuum of preventive strategies diversified but integrated among themselves" (Savona, Ciappi, Travaini, 1999). They have to involve repression (like the activity of the agencies of formal control) but also "to be supported from strategies of social policies aimed to implement the socialization and the sense of legality, together with policies of reduction of crime opportunities" (Savona, Ciappi, Travaini, 1999).

Therefore, next to surveys aimed to monitor the situation of crime in the region and to researches of victimization, some themes useful to point out real policies to protect city security should be deepened; for example surveys to analyse the relation between need for security and government of the territory, as well as to test the idea widespread in public opinion about the problems of the deviance and security.

Next to the compilation of maps in which the point of security is made, the projects carry out also an activity of analysis of the result of "researches-actions" relative to some territories of the region and/or to some themes aimed to the study of specific and limited subjects finalized to the acquaintance and to the realization of government strategies that allow to find resources and potentialities already existing in the territory, able - once co-ordinated and made to operate in synergy - to suggest alternative solutions and practicable directions useful to cope with the phenomenon strategically.

A last observation about the strategic aspects of the projects activity; it is absolutely important that all the work of statistic research and crime analysis does not limit itself to the photography of the "situation security" in a specific city or region, but realises in detailed, clear and operative indications to the administrators about the way in which they have to operate so that they can correctly face and reduce the problem of crime (and this is the weak point of some projects existing today in Italy). Only in this way the project does not limit itself to pure academy but works in synergy with the Administration and allows it to intervene with political strategies and precise administrative choices in order to face positively and pragmatically the difficult subject of security in our cities.

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