Thirty years of urban security policies in Italy:
Some reflections from a criminological perspective

Roberto Cornelli | Rossella Selmini | Gian Guido Nobili

Abstract

The term "urban security" appeared in Italy at the beginning of the 1990s, following new criminological approaches to community safety and crime prevention developed mostly by proponents of British Left Realism. The concept of urban security was the basis for a new public policy field, urban security policy (USP), originally characterized by a preventive approach and mostly promoted in Italy by local authorities. Around 2008, however, centralization began, and the national government started to define priorities and strategies. In parallel, interventions shifted towards a more punitive approach, based on a mix of administrative and criminal measures. This paper aims at taking stock of the development of these policies, analyzing in particular in what ways they have been influenced and shaped by criminological theories and research findings. The focus is on some particularly significant issues: the crime-fear nexus, the relation between crime and migration, the shift from street crime to disorder and incivilities, which implies the shift to situational crime prevention measures, and the tension between local and national levels of urban security policies.

Keywords: urban security, criminological theories, migration, fear of crime, public policies.

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Introduction

Urban security, crime, incivilities and feelings of insecurity have been at the forefront of the Italian public and political discourse since several decades. This paper aims at taking stock of the development of these policies, and of the related debate, analyzing in particular in what ways they have been influenced and shaped by criminological theories and research findings.

In doing that, we adopt an historical and a criminological perspective, based on trying to understand – and to problematize – how Italian criminological research on these subjects developed in the last thirty years and which was its influence on this development. At the background of security policies in Italy, there is, indeed, a replication, and adaptation, of a variety of criminological approaches, that span from British left realism to routine activity and broken windows theory. Not differently from what happened in other European countries, urban security represents a field of battle for different criminological views on the related behaviors, on the most appropriate prevention measures, on the alleged "punitive turn" affecting many Western countries (Selmini and Crawford, 2017) on the balance between rights, freedom and security. We argue that Italian USP, indeed, turn towards a more law and order approach, and that the criminological weakness at the roots of Italian USP may explain, at least in part, this evolution.

We focus in particular on some issues.

First, the relation between crime rates, incivilities, fear of crime and feelings of insecurity. Italy is no more a "high crime rate society" (Garland, 2001); nonetheless, as occurred in many other countries, USP have become increasingly repressive and more based on form of preventive coercion (Ashworth and Zedner, 2014). We argue that, particularly at some point in their development, USP were responding not to crime changes, but to other political and social concerns.

Second, the controversial relation between crime and migration affects the debate and the development of USP since their origin, becoming soon one of the main issues. Divergent results in research contribute to the politicization of the subject in a way that is probably unprecedented in other countries. Urban security and migration problems are associated and dealt with together in several national laws, and the political discourse reinforces the link of migration not only with security, but with other urban problems, from prostitution to drugs selling, to poverty and even more serious phenomena such as terrorism.

Third, a shift from street crime to disorder and incivilities occurred, with the latter becoming the main issue of both political agendas and of some criminological, and urban sociology, studies. At the political level, this implies an adherence to broken windows and the related Zero Tolerance approach.

Fourth, consistently with this shift, crime prevention measures took a divergent trajectory, with the situational crime prevention becoming soon dominant in the landscape of urban security policies, in spite of the original focus on social and community crime prevention, and thanks to some ambiguous concepts, such as "integrated security".

Fifth, and particularly significant in the Italian context, the relation between the local and the national levels of USP. To understand Italian security policies requires analyzing of the complex relations among different institutional actors, whose cooperation and conflicts shape Italian USP in a unique way.

1. The origins: a social-democratic perspective for crime and disorder?

Differently from what happened in other European countries, particularly the UK, with a long tradition of theorization and practices on crime and crime prevention, in Italy, at the beginning of the Nineties of the past century, sociological criminology was a true novelty. Still mostly oriented to a psychopathological or legalistic approach, empirical studies were rare and knowledge on crime and the criminal justice system very underdeveloped, also as a consequence of poor and unreliable data. In this intellectual and scholar context, a window of opportunity appeared, when the academic world met political interests. Massimo Pavarini, who, with few doubts, can be considered the first promoter at the academic level of studies on urban security (Pavarini,1994), was connected to the British left realists, and also engaged in a variety of projects in cooperation with activists and members of the Democratic Party of the Left, with whom, in 1992, he launched a new educational journal titled "Sicurezza e Territorio" (Safety and Territory). The goal was pedagogic: on the one hand, to promote a social democrat project to manage crime and fear of crime at the local level, raising the awareness of local left politicians on these issues and, on the other hand, to improve criminology as a discipline, thanks, mostly, to the importation of the works by the British left realists and other, mostly French and American, critical so-

ciologist and criminologists. In a few years this political project became a governmental enterprise, when the regional government of Emilia – Romagna established a project called "Città sicure". The regional project had the goal to deal with crime - mostly minor street crime – incivilities and disorder, and feelings of insecurity, with prevention measures (see, among others, Pavarini, 2006; Cornelli, 2008; Selmini, 2020).

This project had significant political and scientific implications. Politically, it promoted an idea of "urban security" based on left realism values (Comitato Scientifico di Città sicure, 1995), such as the role of local communities and local institutions, the need to take into consideration also victims' needs, the importance of community and social crime prevention (Young, 1986, 1992; Young and Matthews, 1992; Hughes, 2004).

Some French influences were equally important in this first stage of USP. The French conceptualization of "new prevention" by sociologist Philippe Robert, who argued that the "new" prevention characterizing urban security local programs not only target crime but also incivilities, by means of "solutions other than imprisonment" (Robert, 1991, p. 5) also became very popular in Italy. Indeed, Robert's work was very influential thanks to a network gathering Italian and other European scholars around the journal *Deviance and Societè*, and the *Groupe de recherche européen sur les normativités* (GERN).

At the origin of USP in Italy we find therefore a combination of concepts from different sociological and criminological branches, sharing, however, the idea of USP as inclusive policies, aimed at reducing criminalization and promoting a better quality of life.

There are however several scientific weaknesses in this enterprise.

First, the lack of a strong and well-established culture of crime prevention, and particularly of social and community crime prevention, implied that the project started without the necessary foundations to properly develop. Welfare and social policies and criminal policies were, and still are, two separate fields of action in Italian public policies; crime prevention as a social project was part of the broader social policies, and rarely connected to the influence that better social conditions and improving of structural inequalities might have on crime (Selmini, 2012). If, as Reiner ((2006) claims, the social democratic criminology had to be based on Merton's theory, Italy lacked the criminological theoretical foundations on which to build a more advanced and sophisticated theory of crime. Some criminological concepts and theories, such as Relative Deprivation and "the square of crime", developed by left criminological realism, were imported in Italy and permeated the Italian criminological debate of the time (Young 1986; Lea, 1992; Young 1992) but really never developed in theoretical terms.

Second, empirical studies, in spite of the efforts of the Scientific Committee of the project "Città sicure". remained limited to the first stage of the development of

the policies and never fully developed, with the exception of some cities, that undertook interesting local studies and project on urban safety. Only in the last decade a wide range of USP studies has been carried out in Italy. A first group focused on the normative and institutional framework (Antonelli 2018; Nobili et al. 2019). Others analyzed the punitive turn and, in line with the international literature on the expansion of punitiveness (Ashworth and Zedner, 2014; Beckett and Herbert, 2010), investigated criminalization processes that USP has promoted in Italian society, particularly concerning urban marginality and migrants (Crocitti and Selmini, 2017; Ceretti and Cornelli, 2019; Curi, 2019; Ruga Riva et al., 2017; Risicato, 2019; Selmini, 2020). From a political science perspective and comparatively, others examined the relation between security and freedom (Tebaldi, 2016). Some studies have tried to move from a mostly descriptive level to answer more theoretical questions: why these policies developed and why they became more punitive (Selmini, 2020); the role played by political conflicts between national and local governments (Selmini, 2005) and the roles of fear of crime and insecurity in shaping the political agenda (Cornelli, 2008; Ceretti and Cornelli, 2013). More empirically oriented studies sought to understand the impact of institutional partnerships (Calaresu, 2013; Calaresu and Triventi, 2018) and the roles of political ideologies and other variables in making USP more or less punitive (Calaresu and Selmini, 2017).

Despite the relative increase of scientific contributions in the USP field, empirical studies of victimization and feelings of insecurity have been developed more by governmental researchers than by scholars. Works of the Emilia-Romagna regional government and of some other local observatory on urban security are examples (Cornelli, 2004a). One window of opportunity opened up with the carrying on of the first Victimization Survey, by the National Institute of Statistics (Istat), in 1996-1997. However, the results of this survey – the first of a series of five waves – rarely became a source of data for academic studies.

In sum, from the criminological point of view, the origin and the immediate development of USP in Italy suffered of several weaknesses and inconsistencies, which undermined its further development and made the "social-democratic" approach soon invisible in comparison with other, more politically attractive, criminological rationalities, based on different theories and approaches, as we discuss in the following paragraphs.

2. Crime trend and feelings of insecurity

At the origins of the Italian discourse on urban security, the measurement of citizens' fear of street crimes appeared to be one of the main contributions that scientific research could offer to policy development. First Italian surveys on insecurity were modelled on the U.S. surveys on fear of

crime. Murray Lee (2001, 2007) analysed extensively the historical moment in which the need to measure how much people are afraid and why emerged. Under the Great Society Programme promoted by President Lindon Johnson, the Science Advisory Committee invited scientific organisations to produce descriptive statistics on the behaviour of U.S. citizens useful for promoting welfare policies. In this framework, the relevance of a new concept, that of "fearing population", emerged since several public and private organisations, including the National Opinion Research Centre, began interviewing citizens about their personal experiences of victimization to obtain more accurate information about crime. In 1972 the US Department of Justice devoted a section of the National Crime Survey to the fear of crime, defining it as the fear that arises as a consequence of a criminal act.

This way of investigating fear of crime proved inadequate in understanding the social and cultural reasons for the profound change in collective sensibility taking place in Western societies during the 1979s and in the following decades (Garland, 2001). Moreover, criticism of the political and media use of the fearing population was present from the earliest research (Harris, 1969; Cohen, 1972). Nevertheless, as soon as the issue of urban security began to occupy the front pages of the newspapers in Italy (at the beginning of the 1990s), the first surveys carried out by private organisations, such as Doxa in 1992, were inspired by the U.S. surveys and replicated the close link between the increasing fearing population and the increasing crime rate. "Urban crime is out of control and citizens are afraid" became a leitmotif of the public discourse on social needs and guided politics in seeking immediate and practical solutions. Italian opinion leaders and policy makers started to be influenced by the US just desert model, based on the deterrence theory and on tough crime policies (Tonry, 2004) and on police strategies based on the so-called broken windows theory (De Giorgi, 2000; Har-

court, 2001). Rudolph Giuliani, Mayor of New York City during the 1990s, was a model for many Italian mayors, and the slogan "Zero Tolerance" inspired Italian political imagination. The effects of this cultural climate were soon evident. Detention rates and prison overcrowding began to rise, mayors began to demand more and more regulatory powers and financial means to increase local police officers and the use of CCTV (Pavarini, 1997, 2006; Ceretti and Cornelli, 2013).

To question these trends, already evident in the mid Nineties, researchers involved in local urban security projects tried to problematize the issue of urban security.

First of all, studies on crime trends showed that crime rates were declining, a drop that, even if with a different timing compared to other countries (Aebi & Linde, 2010; Tonry, 2014), is still going on today. Over the last thirty years, Italy is no longer a "high-crime society", to use Garland's popular definition, particularly with regard to homicides, which are decreasing steadily and constantly. Even street crime, such as robberies and car thefts, have been declining, despite some fluctuations, since almost two decades (Selmini e Arcidiacono, 2015).

Secondly, some research (Maneri, 2001; Cornelli 2004b, 2005; Pavarini, 2006) began deconstructing the concept of fear of crime, showing its connection with the personal, economic and social insecurities spread in late modernity. Others enlightened non-crime factors of insecurity (Caneppele, 2010).

Thirdly, the increase in fear of crime was also questioned, first by criticizing the adequacy of the items normally used in sample surveys (Cornelli, 2004a) and then by analyzing the time series of the most important surveys on insecurity carried on in Italy. Indeed, all the data available show that in the last thirty years fears, concerns and insecurities linked to crime didn't increased and that, on the contrary, they have been constantly decreasing in the last five years (fig. 1 and 2).
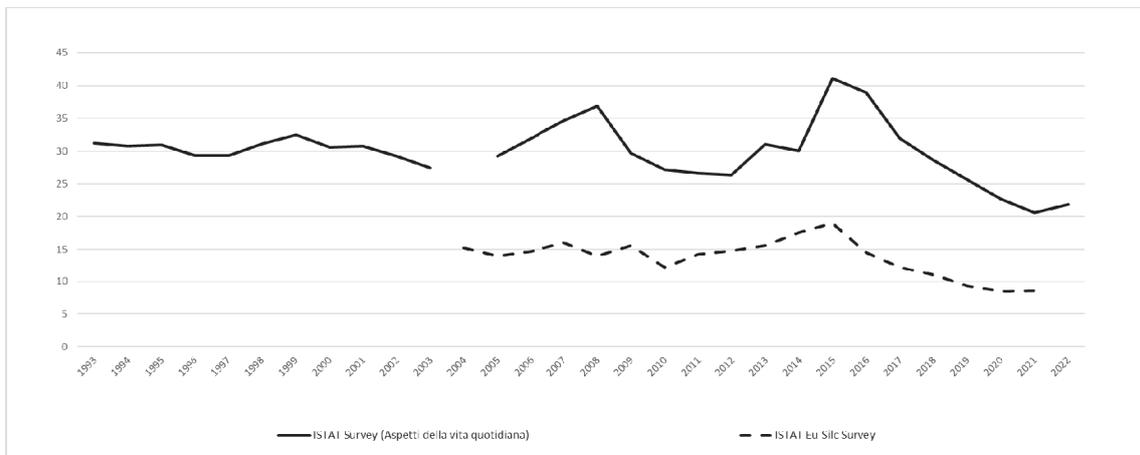
Source: elaboration of Istat data
Fig. 1 - Perception of Crime Risk in the neighbourhood in 2 Italian Surveys. Italy, 1993-2022 (Istat on "Aspetti della vita quotidiana"), 2004-2021 (Istat Eu-Silc)
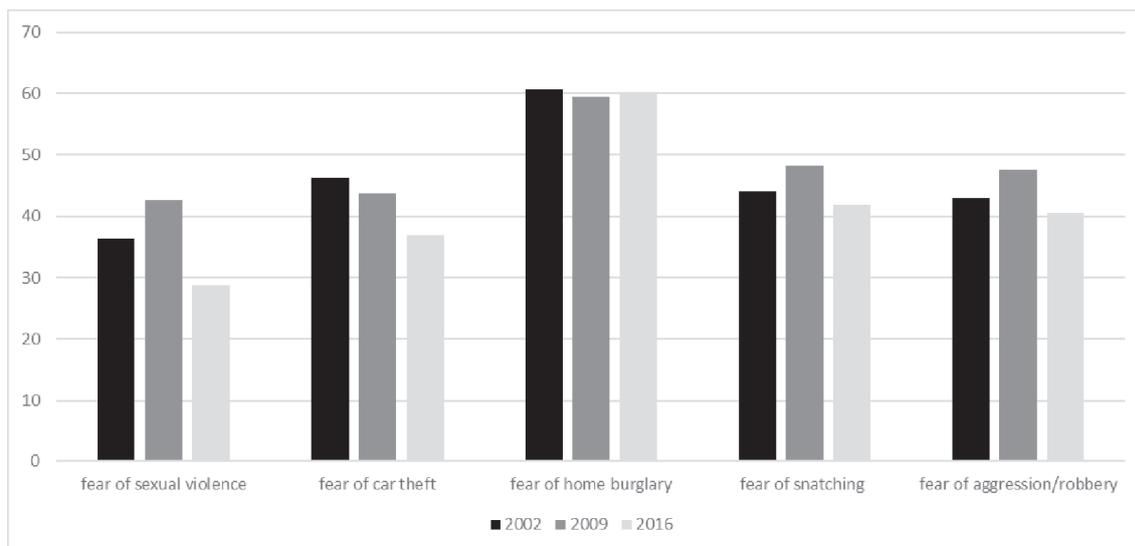
Source: elaboration of Istat data
Fig. 2 – Fear of Specific Crimes. Italy, 2002, 2007/8, 2016 (Istat on "Sicurezza dei cittadini")

In short, research shows that both crime and fear of crime are not increasing, and that fear of crime is mostly unrelated to crime trends. However, these research findings have failed to undermine the official narrative, extremely useful to strengthen repressive or coercive policies, of an increasingly violent society where fearful citizens ask for more severe punishment. As a result, the gap between the scholars initially engaged in policy-oriented studies – as those involved in the experience of "Città sicure" – and the institutions and policy-makers became even wider. Broadly, criminological research on USP and related issues in Italy proved to be unable to influence policy makers and political agendas, as the story that we describe in the next paragraphs confirms.

The gap between research and policy is remarkable in three areas. The first is the relation between security and immigration, one of the most contested fields of research and a hotly debated subject in public and political discourses. Since the very beginning researchers tried to provide useful knowledge to discuss the subject in a more rigorous and scientific way. In spite of these efforts, since the early years of the third millennium, at the political level anti-immigration policies and the emphasis on the relation between immigrants and crime prevailed (see par. 4).

Secondly, broken window theory became firmly established in the institutional language, in local and national practices and laws, as in the media narrative, legitimizing the adoption of coercive and situational prevention policies based mainly on punitive administrative local orders, and electronic surveillance. Criticisms to this approach, that we discuss in the following par. 5, have been largely ignored.

Thirdly, the shift of security policies from the local to the national level reduced mayors' willingness to engage in more creative, research-based policies tailored on the local peculiarities and on the specific security problems of their city, and more oriented to replicate at the urban level the national political strategies and operational tools. Here again, policy-oriented empirical research has been increasingly marginal (see par. 6).

3. The relation crime-migration

The controversial relation between crime and migration affects the debate and the development of urban security policies since its origin, soon becoming one of the main themes (Dal Lago, 1996, 1999; Barbagli, 1998; Melossi, 1999, 2000).

Italy became a destination country for migration flows more recently than other European countries. Until the 1980s, the number of Italians leaving the country to seek work abroad was higher than the number of foreigners arriving in Italy (fig. 3)
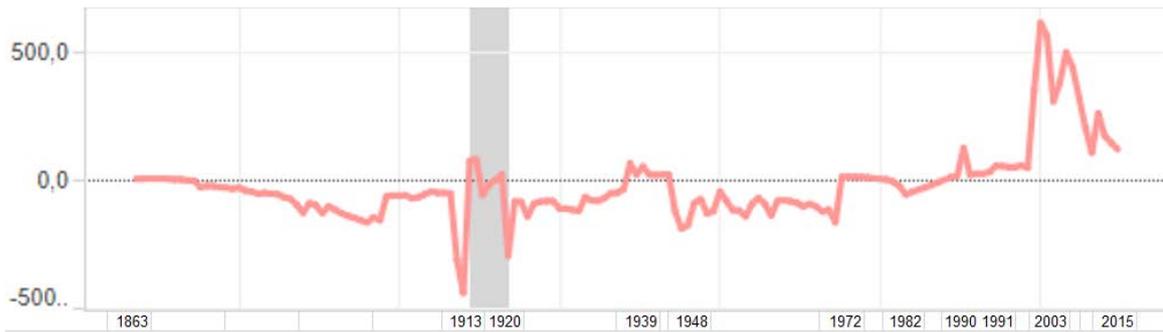
Source: Istat
Fig. 3 - Migration balance in Italy. Years 1863-2015 (in thousands)

During the 1990s, however, the number of foreigners resident in Italy doubled, rising from 649,000 in 1991 to 1,341,000 in 2000 (Pittau, 2005). At the beginning of the new millennium, the foreign population growth was estimated to exceed 5 million in 2015 and to remain stable around this number until 2022. Foreigners currently make up 8.5% of the resident population in Italy.

The fast transition from a country of emigrants to a country of immigrants was accompanied by a public discourse oscillating between the duty to welcome and the need to defend. Over the years, the latter approach prevailed, and the perception of migrants as a social threat sparked across the country, giving raise to increasingly more restrictive laws on the conditions of regular access to Italy and to criminalization processes of regular and irregular foreigners (Crocitti, 2014, 2022; Fabini, 2017, 2023; Campesi and Fabini, 2020). In the framework of the migration and asylum policy of the European Union, which from 2015 extended Frontex's mandate and transformed it into a fully-fledged European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Campesi, 2015), Italian immigration laws have been inspired by the rhetoric of defending national borders and embedded in broader legislation on urban security and public order. In this approach, the governance of immigration has become inextricably intertwined with the issue of security and constantly presented as the *trait d'union* of a variety of urban problems. From street crimes to prostitution and drugs selling, to more serious phenomena such as terrorism, immigrants are described as troublemakers and dangerous people, even more when they are "illegal migrants" who entered the country violating the increasingly narrow migration laws.

Research on the relationship between immigration and crime is nuanced and has been influenced by – and in some ways is replicating – the ambivalence of the public discourse between the – more marginal – approach in favor of inclusive policies, and the dominant anti-immigrant approach. Some studies at the local level addressed a variety of urban problems associated with the presence of foreigners (e.g. prostitution; Pavarini, 2006) trying to orient local policies towards prevention and harm reduc-

tion; some studies provided useful knowledge on the presence of foreigners in supporting policies to promote integration and civil coexistence (Gatti et al.; Di Nicola, 2010); other studies addressed the issue of governing multicultural societies (Melossi, 2014) and questioned the shaping of Italian public opinion on the basis of racial stereotypes (Cornelli, 2019). Studies based on police data or criminal justice statistics, on the other hand, showed an increasing rate of foreigners among suspects, convicted and inmates (Barbagli, 1998; Solivetti, 2019). These data permeated the public debate, reinforced the common opinion of immigrants as a social threat and fostered defensive attitudes towards immigration in the wider society. In scholarly debates, these findings have been, however, strongly criticized for three reasons.

Firstly, research shows that the increase in the number of foreigners in official crime statistics is not related to the increase in the number of foreigners in the country, including irregular ones (even if on these last there are only estimates available). This finding implies that the assessment of the weight of foreigners in official statistics was inadequately calculated or incorrect (Ascolani, 2002). Indeed, statistical studies investigating the causal impact of immigration (legal residents) on crime across Italian provinces during the 1990s. demonstrated that total criminal offences as well as most types of crime are not related to the size of immigrant population (Bianchi et al., 2008).

Secondly, some scholars (Ferraris, 2021) remarked how it was necessary to address the relationship between immigration and crime more broadly and to better understand, on the one hand the impact of migration on crime trends at a macro level and, on the other, how foreigners' victimization might affect the whole picture. On the first point, data show that crime started to increase the 1970s, when migration to Italy was almost irrelevant. Similarly, homicides started to decrease in the 1990s when migration to Italy intensified (Cornelli 2007; fig. 4). Data clearly rule out the hypothesis that immigration contributes directly to the increase in crime (Bianchi et al. 2008).

161
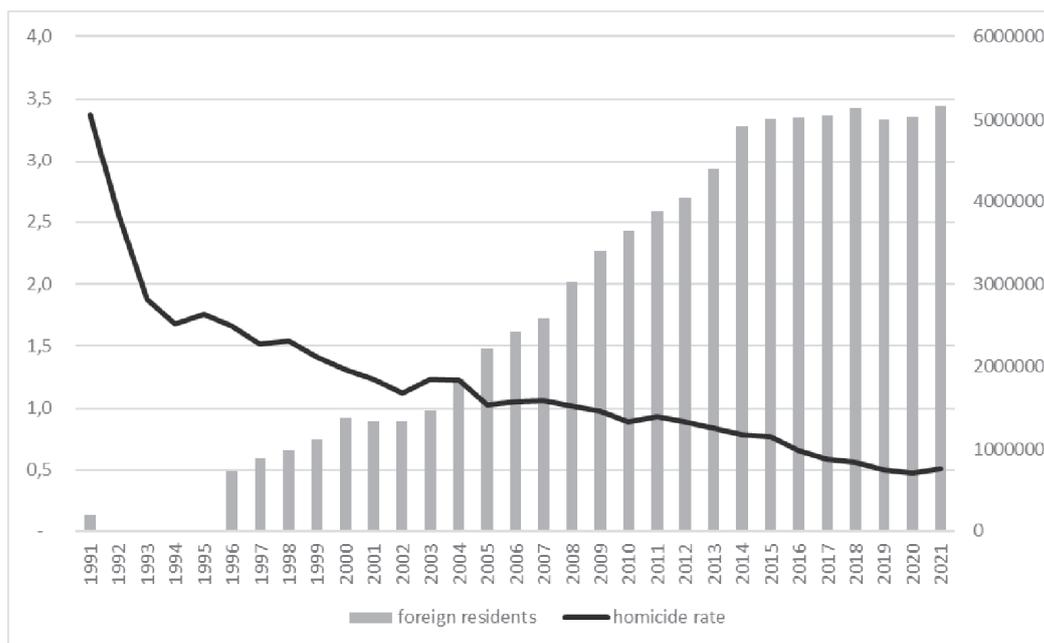
Source: elaboration of Istat data
Fig. 4 – Comparison between homicide trends (rate per 100 thousand inhabitants) and the presence of foreign residents (absolute value)
in Italy. Years 1991-2021

Furthermore, a study on homicide reported data showed a strong correlation between the nationality of the perpetrator and the nationality of the victim, and that it is more likely for a foreigner to be killed by an Italian than for an Italian to be killed by a foreigner (Colombo, 2011).

Finally, it has been highlighted how official statistics may be biased by institutional prejudices and stereotypes, and thus how important it is to take into consideration the processes of constructing statistical data (Melossi, 1999)

The contemporary debate on the relation between crime and migration is deeply affected by these divergent research findings. No surprise, then, that the subject is highly politicized, probably even more than in other contexts, where studies are more widespread and based on more reliable data.

4. From British left realism to Zero Tolerance: The evolution of USP in Italy

Poor research and lack of reliable data on fear of crime, feelings of insecurity and crime and migration contributed to the development of USP much more characterized by a law and order approach, particularly when compared to the inclusive rationality permeating the origins of USP at the local level. In Italy, as in other European contexts (Jones and Newburn, 2007; Selmini and Crawford 2017) broken windows – and the related concept of Zero Tolerance – became wide-spread concepts, widely accepted by

politicians at the local and national level, of both the right and left wing (Selmini, 2020). The adaptation of this concept implied a strong focus on disorder and incivilities, that became the most important subject of USP. The main ideas of broken windows – that incivilities attract more serious crime, and that they foster feelings of insecurity – were accepted, even if not strongly supported by empirical evidences. Indeed, there are no studies in Italy showing that incivilities attract serious crime[1], while data from the national victimization surveys demonstrate that experiencing some types of disorder in the public space has an impact on the feelings of insecurity (Barbagli, 2002; Chiesi, 2004; Nobili, 2022). Moreover, the theoretical approaches connected to broken windows, such as Routine Activity, Life-style and Rational Choice, have rarely been tested empirically[2]. Despite the lack of research, incivilities, disorder and the need to tackle them seriously became the most important aspect of USP, and they were translated into national laws, and in local practices, through municipal by-laws and administrative orders.

The adoption of this approach seems to be the result of a policy transfer process (Jones and Newburn, 2007) much more than the response to specific crime problems,

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1   In other countries, several studies showed that the connection between incivilities and crime was weak or limited to some specific crime (Matthews, 1992).
2   See Barbagli (1995) who tested the empirical validity of the decision-making process of potential offenders for the case of thefts and robberies in Italy.

considering, as we mentioned above, that crime was decreasing. Indeed, the Italian Victimization Survey (2018) showed that from 2008-2009 and 2015-2016 also citizens' perception of disorder in their neighborhood went down, except for prostitution.

In spite of these findings, suggesting some improvements in the feelings of insecurity and concern about crime, the law reforms of the period focused on incivilities, as the major urban problem. In term of the content of USP, this process implied: a restriction of social and community crime prevention, and of measures based on urban renewal, a reinforcement of the situational crime prevention and control at the local level, and the increasing tendency to deal with disorder and incivilities as if they were semi-criminal behaviors.

Urban security gradually lost its conceptual and practical autonomy as a set of local public policies and became one of the aspect al the overall public security. The new concept of "sicurezza integrata" (integrated security) now used at the national and local level, expresses this shift towards USP that are firmly entrenched in the broader field of public security (and then, as Selmini shows in this volume, also in public order).

This process of centralization occurred in the second half of 2000 and accelerated in the last few years. One important consequence is that even in the field of disorder and incivilities, the punitive rationality of the Minister of the Interior prevails, as shown by some law reforms in 2008-2009 and then, more recently, in 2017-2019, that we describe in these final paragraphs.

A turning point was the decree of the Ministry of the Interior (5 August 2008) – not a law, but an administrative regulation issued on the basis of Law no. 125/2008 – defining for the first time, at the national level, what are the problems of urban security and what measures mayors can adopt. In this document incivilities and disorder are defined at the national level as a specific area of competence of the mayor, who can adopt "provisional and urgent ordinances" to prevent or eliminate dangerous situations that "threaten public safety or urban security". In addition, mayors may intervene to «prevent» and «contrast» situations of urban decay and social isolation that favour the development of some criminal phenomena, such as drug dealing, exploitation of prostitution, alcohol abuse -related violence and aggressive begging involving minors and/or disabled people.

The decree, mainly evoking prodromic situations of crime in public spaces, contributes to move the notion of urban security into the context of security and public order, and it is consistent with the principles of broken windows theory and Zero Tolerance policing. Once again, these regulations were enforced without any clear support from research findings. The approach was then developed further by the Law no. 94/2009 «*Provisions on public safety*» clearly oriented towards a centralization of urban security policies. The central government now definitively provides guidance, priorities and establishes what is the mayors' role at the local level: they, as executors of national

policies, and not as elected by citizens and representants of the local community, are entitled to use municipal regulations (*Ordinanze sindacali*). Administrative ordinances, already common in USP, become since then the most important measure to deal with urban security problems.

The 2008-2009 reform was followed by the adoption of hundreds of municipal ordinances on urban safety, defined as attempts to enforce a sort of "municipal criminal law" (Ruga Riva 2008: 133). The instrument has been used often particularly in large Italian municipalities (with more than 250,000 inhabitants), in the center-north of the country, and in particular in Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna and Liguria (Giovannetti 2012). A research by Crocitti and Selmini (2017) showed that administrative ordinances were mostly addressed at problems of urban marginality and specifically targeted immigrants living in the public space and surviving in the informal economy of the city as beggars, prostitutes, panhandlers. Since then, mayors' administrative orders are still the most important tool to deal, at the local level, with incivilities and "soft" crimes.

The centralization process implied that a punitive attitude permeated most of the measures at the national and local level. Besides mayors administrative orders, CCTV was strongly supported by the government that, in 2009 launched a national program on urban security to fund local projects. Of 175 projects, 103 are based on CCTV, 21 fund local police equipment and headquarters, 15 support urban renewal measures, 9 road security, and only 2 social crime prevention initiatives (Selmini, 2020, p. 74). In 2008, one more government's project, defined as "Strade sicure" (Safe streets), shows that a control mentality is prevailing, since he program introduces army patrol in the city. The measure was meant to be temporary and mostly directed to protect buildings and monuments from terrorist attacks, but it then became permanent, making army patrol a routine form of control on a variety of urban problems (Battistelli 2016). Data on the impact of this militarization of public space are rare and only gathered by investigative journalists. They show that, at least in 2015, 3.5 million of Euros were diverted from funds addressed at services for asylum seekers to support the army patrol in the streets (Civillini, 2016).

5. Centralization and the never ending conflict among Cities, Regions and the State

The centralization process described above implied not only a more punitive approach in dealing with urban security problems, but also redesigned the cooperation between regional and municipal governments, with the latter becoming the most important actor cooperating with the Minister of the Interior, while the former lost its pivotal role. Together with the laws mentioned above, another turning point towards centralization – and the breaking off of the alliance between municipalities and regions – occurred in 2007, when a national strategy to sign

formal agreements for the cooperation in USP (the so-called "Security Pacts") was launched by the Minister of the Interior. These pacts are, since 2007, following a national pattern, pre-determined by the Minister of the Interior – though in cooperation with the National Association of Municipalities (ANCI). As Calaresu (2013, p. 44) states, they redefine roles and power of the political actors involved in this public policy, giving the Minister of the Interior (and the Prefects at the local level) a prominent role (see also Antonelli, 2010). Other political actors are entitled to "integrate" a policy, whose core is now definitively relocated in the public security field.

Security pacts have been presented by the national governments as a new organizational and operational model, based on the philosophy of "partnership", and also as a successful way to reduce crime rates. Research findings (Calaresu, Triventi, 2019) show that security pacts had a limited impact on crime one year after the adoption, but they significantly reduced thefts and minor crime two years after. The same study found evidences of heterogeneous effects along province population size, with the strongest impact in the larger provinces, and null effects in the smaller ones. Despite this study, it remains unclear what is the role played by the dynamics characterizing the international crime drop (Aebi & Linde, 2010; Tonry, 2014) which, even if with a different timing, affected Italy as many other Western countries. Once again, the lack of empirical research, and particularly of evaluation studies, doesn't allow to understand what the impact of these agreements on the urban problems they are targeting really is.

As occurred in other European countries (Le Goff, 2004) also in Italy the rhetoric of "partnership" prevailed, but real cooperation never developed, considering the asymmetry of power among the institutional subjects involved (Selmini, 2020)

The attempt to redesign cooperation among different levels of governments was undertaken again a few years ago with the Decree 14/2017 (known as "Decreto Minniti"), characterized by two distinct sections. The first redesignes the complex infrastructure and distribution of competencies among Regions, Cities and the State, showing once again how important are institutional and administrative relation in shaping urban security policies.

More specifically, the decree introduces a vertical integrated security model, in which the State, the Regions, and the municipalities promote and implement an allegedly unitary and integrated system.

The measures to establish this integrated security system are, again, specific agreements –such as the security pacts mentioned above – to be signed between the State and the Regions and other local pacts. In the first section of the decree, there is a clear, albeit rhetoric, attempt to conceptualize urban security as an autonomous system of policies related to local governments' competence, and to emphasize the role of social and community crime prevention. Indeed, the introductory statement of the decree mentions very ambitious goals, such as the need to promote urban, social and cultural regeneration of areas char-

acterized by social and physical disorder, the removal of factors of social exclusion, the promotion of a culture of legality and of higher levels of social cohesion and civil coexistence. The law, however, neither includes specific measures oriented to these goals, nor promotes – and funds – social and community crime prevention.

Indeed, the opposite: the second part of the Decree takes a clear law and order approach, since security policies must now be based on these main types of intervention: mayors administrative orders (reinforced and limited to some specific urban areas defined by the government and detailed by municipal regulations), and then two completely new measures. The first is the "ordine di allontanamento", issued by mayors: a sort of banishment order to remove people from public space in some specific areas of the city. These orders are very short-term (48 hours) and are enforced by the municipal police. The second is the "divieto di accesso", an harsher banishment order issued by the city police chief (the "Questore", head of the national police in the biggest cities). These orders are police measures, they may last up to two years, and target those who do not comply with the mayors' provisional orders and are a problem for "urban security". Therefore, despite the premises of this decree (based on "decorative" statements about promoting social inclusion and fostering social prevention) this is a Zero Tolerance approach, mostly addressed to poor people, immigrants and homeless living in public spaces (Crocitti and Selmini, 2017; Ruga Riva et al., 2017; Ceretti and Cornelli, 2019; Curi, 2019; Risicato, 2019; Selmini, 2020).

Unlike mayors orders, these banishment measures target specific individuals and increase social and spatial segregation, creating urban areas free from "disturbing" populations, i.e the same individuals that for more than two decades have been considered the main problem for security, such as beggars, prostitutes, alcoholics, drug addicts (Nobili, 2019: 70; Selmini, 2020).

The following decrees (one in 2018 and the second in 2019) have been enacted by the right-wing government and precisely by the Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini (they are commonly defined as "Decreti Salvini") of the League Party, famous for his campaigns against migration and a strong supporter of Zero Tolerance policies. Both decrees address a variety of problems (migration, first of all, but also terrorism and organized crime) blurring the boundaries between minor crime and disorder and other social or serious criminal problems. At the local level, they reinforce the earlier measures of the Decreto Minniti, transforming the banishment orders in two-step prohibitions order (Simester and Von Hursch, 2006) since, in some cases, not complying with the order becomes a criminal offence; the areas of the city where they can be enacted is enlarged; the consequences on people's life become harder (Selmini and Crocitti, 2020); crimes that were in the past de-criminalized, are now crimes again (such us begging). These decrees definitively conceptualize urban security as a matter of "public security" (and sometimes of "public order", see Selmini, this volume).

In conclusion, research on the development of USP in Italy clearly shows that this branch of policies, originally meant to be preventive and inclusive, are now dominated by a zero-tolerance approach and by forms of preventive coercion, based on mayors administrative powers and on police measures.

6. Conclusion

In this article, we discuss the development of USP, their shift from local and more inclusive policies to law and order approaches, trying at the same time to better understand what the impact on this development of both criminological theories and of empirical research was, and we argue that complex explanations of crime, such as left realism, have been abandoned in favor of more practical and policy-oriented approaches, such us broken windows and theory of opportunities. Empirical research on USP in Italy is still limited and fragmented, and, even when data are rich and reliable, as it is the case of the Italian Victimization surveys by Istat, they are not taken into consideration by policy-makers. The lack of connection between research and policy is a common issue in many countries, and it is self-evident in the case of crime policies, at least for what concerns studies on punishment and sentencing. In Italy this disconnection seems to be even stronger, and the story we told in this article leaves many open questions and shows future lines of research.

A first open question concerns the determinants of USP. If research findings are not at the basis of policy design and implementation, and if evaluation studies are not carried out, which are the reasons why policy makers adopt more punitive policies? The answer to this question has always been that USP represent the State's response to an increase in crime rates and in feelings of insecurity and fear of crime, consistently with a bottom-up model, in which the State responds to public concerns associated with demands for security (see Bottoms, 1995; Garland, 2010). Criticisms have been expressed by several scholars, who argue that USP, and, broadly, criminal justice policies are a political construct shaped by other factors, such as political consent and conflict (Beckett, 1997; Simon, 2007; Selmini, 2020; Ceretti and Cornelli 2013; Mosconi, 2017). In the international literature the subject was never fully problematized, with the notable exception of work by Beckett (1997) who, rejecting the "democracy-at- work" thesis, showed that law and order policies result from a top-down approach, with politicians (and the media) setting the tune. The focus on the role of political factors as determinants of law and order policies and practices was addressed, in a wider picture, by Garland (2001), who analyzed dynamics of state sovereignty and re-distributions of power and the influence of public discourse about crime on collective sensibilities, and by Simon (2007), who described criminal policies as part of a broader political agenda of "governing through crime". In Europe, the issue was examined, among others, by

Downes and Morgan (2007), in terms of political conflicts; by Crawford (1997, 2002) who focused on how governance unfolds at the local level; and by Edwards and Hughes (2012) from the perspective of "regime analysis". More recently, Kübler and De Maillard (2022) showed empirically how political ideology influenced European mayors' adherence to a law and order approach, while Wenzelburger & Staff (2017) explored the divergent development of these policies in the UK and Germany in relation to political conflicts and balances of powers. This literature represent a useful starting point to develop similar lines of research in Italy as well, aimed at understanding whether a bottom -up model is at work, or, as the literature mentioned above claims, we need to look more carefully to a model "top-down", in which political needs are the determinants of USP, and, broadly, of criminal justice policies, and fear of crime and feelings of insecurity are strongly influenced and reinforced more by political campaigns and initiatives and law reforms than by crime trends or increase in disorder and incivilities. Research in this field would allow to answer to most important – and still open – questions – about USP in Italy and their determinants, filling a gap and improving studies that still remains at a very descriptive level.

There are several other knowledge gaps that need to be filled. Just to mention some of them, the analysis of the result of data from victimization surveys need to be improved as well: in spite of the good quality of the surveys carried on by Istat, the findings have rarely been taken into consideration not only by policy- makers, but also by scholars. As shown by our discussion in this paper, the studies on the relation between crime and migration should also improve, with more research on the type of crime committed by immigrants, and more attention on how to the different nationalities of immigrants influence their involvement in crime. Both the academic debate, and the public discourse on crime and security would benefit from these new lines of research, making USP more based on rigorous knowledge and less influenced by political dynamics and replication of models.

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