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Social Insecurity And Perception Of Insecurity In Barcelona

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Abstract

Below is presented a study of urban marginality which purpose is the creation of a database enabling the selection of the neighbourhoods with highest degree of marginality in the city of Barcelona. The research process has been developed through a bibliographic analysis framed on the theory and the results of the investigations of Loïc Wacquant (2007; 2009; 2011), with a particular focus on the concept of "advanced marginality". The results obtained through a descriptive statistical analysis allowed the selection of three neighbourhoods whose residents are characterized by an increased presence of indicators of marginality: Besòs i Maresme (district of San Marti) Ciutat Meridiana (district of Nou Barris) and Trinitat Vella (district of Sant Andreu). On the basis of the definition of marginality, a questionnaire template was designed in order to analyse the feelings of Barcelona's citizens about insecurity. The questionnaire aims to outline similarities and differences between two demographic groups (the marginality and the citizens at large) and, at the same time, verify how aspects such as gender, age, income, etc. affect the feeling of insecurity.

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Introduction

Urban insecurity has become over the last years one of the most pressing issues affecting European citizenship. In particular, several researches show that the countries of Southern Europe and the Mediterranean are experiencing the highest rates of insecurity (Mayhew & Van Dijk, 1997; Van Kesteren *et al.*, 2000; Aromaa & Heiskanen, 2002; Nieuwbeerta, 2004; Van Dijk, 2007; Recasens, Cardoso, Castro, & Nobili, 2013). Barcelona follows the general

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trend as well. According to the Municipal Services Survey (2013) – developed annually by the Municipal Council – insecurity is perceived as the second most serious problem in the city after the problems related to unemployment and working conditions. This figure is interesting for different reasons:

- The perception of insecurity does not match with the crime rate of the city. Data show a decrease (6.5%) in proceedings for offenses brought by the District Attorney's Office between 2011 and 2012 (Ministerio de Justicia, 2013)
- According to the Municipal Services Survey (2013) there is a disparity at the territorial level regarding public perception of problems. In the district of Ciutat Vella, for example, the main task of the authority is related to the improvement of safety in the neighbourhood. On the contrary, at the municipal level, concerns related to personal safety come right after the economic problems
- In a nutshell, according to the perception of the citizens it is possible to say that the mayor problems in Barcelona are the economics ones, such as the unemployment (the most serious issue which accounts for 26.6% of the respondents), the poverty (2.1%) and the other economic-related problems (9.9%)

The concerns about the economic conditions and their relationship to the issues related to the insecurity itself suggests a reflection on two dimensions: on the one hand, the criminal insecurity (i.e. the objective increased in terms of crime and offence) and, on the other hand, the social insecurity due to the precarization of the labour market and the rose of uncertainties during the current economic crisis.

2. Objectives

The aim is to analyse the feelings of Barcelona's citizens around the issue of urban insecurity. At a second level, this paper aims to analyse similarities and differences between two demographic groups: the marginality, on the one hand, and the public at large, on the other hand. Considering that the profile analysis of interviewees is a classic reference in studies on the perception of insecurity, the idea is to verify how aspects such as gender, age, income, etc. affect the feeling of insecurity. Finally, this study privileges a focus on the neighbourhood (*barrio*) rather than the focus on the district usually employed by other instruments such as Victimization Surveys. By establishing a relationship between insecurity and a closer territorial reality it is possible to provide a more representative dimension of what citizens experiment in their everyday lives, highlighting their problems (real and/or perceived) and evaluating the impact of public policy on security on marginal spaces of the city.

3. Theoretical dimension of insecurity in Barcelona

As explained by Valera (2012), socio-psychological studies on insecurity usually operate a distinction between two dimensions: fear of crime and perception of insecurity. Others authors refer to this differentiation in terms of objective insecurity – a concept that depends on the increase of crime – and subjective insecurity – more related to an emotional dimension (Robert, 2006; Wacquant, 2011). Rader (2004) tries to overcome this opposition opting for the more inclusive concept of victimization. This term refers to three aspects: one affective (fear of crime), one cognitive (risk perception) and one behavioural (self-restraint behaviours). However, beyond the conceptual differences, researchers agree on the assumption that studies on urban insecurity could not be reduced to an analysis of official data on crime but emotional aspects related to the perception of citizens have to be taken into account (see among others: Bustinza, 2008; Valera, 2008).

At the end of the decade of the 1970s, in conjunction with the Spanish State's democratic transition, the city of Barcelona experiments a period of crisis of confidence, "*a generalized increase in the sense of insecurity and consequently, a growing demand for political and security services*", to quote Lahosa (2009, p. 23). As occurred in other urban areas of Europe, the Socialist mayor Pasqual Maragall commissioned an Urban Safety Technical Committee in order to develop a programme "*for effective measures performance in the field of public safety*" – as claimed by a mayoral decree in 1983. The conclusions made by the working groups of this Committee evidenced that insecurity as a social phenomenon was structured on two dimensions (one objective and one subjective), which involved the taking into account of a methodology that could investigate citizens' feelings beyond the official crime

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