

# Urban security in Rome: governance *with* government?

Maria Grazia Galantino

Sapienza - University of Rome

*The paper presents some case studies on security measures in Rome, a comparatively safe city with a growing public sense of insecurity. By looking at a selection of concrete urban safety interventions the paper argues that new governance models in this specific policy field require an active role of local government, in facilitating, connecting and regulating different public and private stakeholders. Governance with government seems to represent the most promising innovation in the urban security policy field in Italy.*

## **1. Rome: a “middle”- city with mega -fears?**

While the prominence of the city of Rome in world cultural and historical heritage is unquestionable, it may not seem immediately obvious why the city represents an interesting case for the analysis urban security issues and policies. In fact, with a population of roughly three million Rome appears to be tiny compared to the size of mega-cities developing around the world. However, Rome is an interesting case because while it continues to be a relatively safe city to live in - crime rates are smaller than in other big cities in Italy and in Europe (Transcrime, 2007) - opinion polls have shown growing public concerns about urban security and a diffuse sense of fear among its citizens (Diamanti, 2008; World Social Summit, 2008).

Undoubtedly, the deterioration of public spaces and the greater visibility of social deprivation have strongly contributed to create insecurity and fear among Roman citizens. Though on a smaller scale, Rome is grappling with the same effects of development and transformation processes than other big cities around the world:

commercial and corporate actors replacing citizens in the city centre, social deprivation and poorer living conditions in the periphery, multiplying slum-spots in the interstices of urban design. The fast growing rate of immigrants living in the city, often in deprived housing and social conditions, further contributes to a diffused insecurity climate and foments the potential for social conflicts.

Notwithstanding the fact, that urban safety concerns have been growing steadily among the citizens of Rome public security has only recently appeared on the political agenda. As late as April 2007, the centre-left major of the time, Walter Veltroni, referring to crime statistics, declared Rome the safest city in Italy and in Europe. Yet, shortly afterwards, three fatal crimes involving immigrants led to an intense public debate about the ever growing insecurity in the city. Within a very short period of time urban safety had thus moved to the centre of political attention, contributing strongly to the electoral victory of the right-wing candidate, Alemanno, in April 2008, who had placed security at the core of his political campaign.

The escalation of safety concerns in the public and political agenda in recent years is not limited to Rome but a common feature in the Italian public debate. In the recent years, legitimate citizens' concerns and concrete episodes of violence or incivilities have been widely used in politicians' discourse to support their policy strategies and their electoral objectives. Such discourses, reported and amplified by the media, reinforced public fears ultimately constructing a vicious spiral of insecurity, which is often detached from the actual reality on the ground.

Whereas urban safety has only recently been included in the national political discourse, local governments started long before to heed social demands for better and safer living conditions. Their ability to act autonomously on urban safety matters, has been facilitated by a gradual process of institutional devolution, which has handed local governments and city majors considerable leeway in designing and implementing their own urban security policies. It is to some of the measures implemented in the city Rome that we now turn our attention in order to draw some initial lessons from emerging local practices and strategies.

## 2. Security measures in Rome: three stories from the field

The first signs of a new focus on urban safety in the local political agenda emerged in 1998 when a centre-left administration created “Roma sicura”, an office specifically devoted to “promote measures for improving living conditions, for contrasting urban decay, for restoring compromised liveliness in sensitive areas”. With time the office transformed into a Municipal Department and since 2006 Rome has an elected officer for public security.

Similarly to other Italian cities, in 2007 a joint protocol (Security Pact) signed by Prefettura di Roma, Regione Lazio, Provincia di Roma and Comune di Roma, created an integrated framework for security policies which linked all levels of government. At the same time, at the municipal level, local authorities and citizens’ organisations have carried out autonomous projects in many areas of the city.

These alterations in the institutional landscape have facilitated a burgeoning diversity in the geometry of urban security policymaking. As policies and practices are increasingly variable, one can only gauge the effectiveness the real level of integration among actors by looking at concrete practices in the field. In the following pages we will look at three such cases and discuss their respective relevance for Rome’s urban safety strategy<sup>1</sup>.

*a) Seicase* is a very deprived area composed of six large apartment blocks, located in a *cul-de-sac* of a fast traffic road in the northern periphery of Rome. Part of a non-finished residential project in the 1980s, it was first occupied by squatters and then used by the city authorities for temporary housing disadvantaged families. In 2005, when our research started, around 2.000 people lived there, of whom 20% were unlawful tenants. There is a high proportion of immigrants of different ethnic groups, many tenants have crime records and some are under home detention.

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<sup>1</sup> Complete reports of the case studies are in Battistelli (2008), chaps. 4-7. Names used for the city’s areas are fictitious.

The potential for conflict deriving from this social composition is further accentuated by very poor living conditions: families live in flats with an average size of 29sqm; they are not connected to the city gas grid and they are not served by municipal garbage collection or public transport. In the absence of a visible institutional presence, all formal and informal rules for common use of the public space subside to the law of informal power structures which merely reinforces the residents' sense of separateness from the city "out there" and the outsiders' prejudices against its inhabitants.

Mainly driven by a TV reportage unveiling the situation, more efforts have been devoted to face the multiple problems of *Seicase* and to reduce the feeling of insecurity among both, residents and neighbours. Together with coercive measures such as police patrolling or the forced expulsion of illegal tenants, our research studied the impact of various social initiatives in the area: a social mediation project aimed at facilitating the (re)construction of a social network through citizens' involvement and participation; a juvenile crime prevention project aimed at creating job and recreational opportunities for the youngsters; a project promoting Roma and Gypsies school attendance. Actors at different levels of governance supported these projects: the Commune of Rome, the local authority, the national Police Corps, the municipal police, civil society's associations and co-operatives.

However, the pattern of relationship among them often appeared confusing and difficult to disentangle. At municipal level, officers often did not know (at least officially) about projects funded by the city government and vice versa. The police officers, on the other hand, justified their relatively limited interactions with social workers with their distinctive duties of "control and repression, not prevention". In this context, an attempt to create an inclusive "Roundtable for security in *Seicase*" met the mutual resistance of institutional and civil society organizations, preoccupied with the preservation of their competences and financial resources. Hence, while interactions among the various actors inevitably occurred during their every day work, these were usually uncoordinated and largely happened on an informal basis.

Up to now, the most important change in *Seicase* has been the public and political awareness of its problem and the stated commitment to alleviate them. Some concrete objectives have also been achieved (in terms of street lights, garbage collection, etc.) and some efforts have been undertaken to limit the illegal housing situations. But very little steps have been made towards actual citizens' involvement. In the absence of a dense social fabric, the lack of integrated strategies and regulated cooperation among different actors has caused various redundancies and probably undermined the effectiveness of the already implemented measures.

b) *Borgatella* is a disadvantaged quarter in the south-western periphery of Rome, with a high concentration of immigrants (around 20% of the total population). Crime rates have increased in the recent years, but they do not represent a primary concern of residents. Here, as in other less sensitive quarters, security issues are usually located at the intersection between social deprivation and public spaces. The growing presence of commercial activities and shops in *Borgatella* has not been accompanied by a parallel development of social and cultural services. The parish church and an occupied squat therefore remain the main space for socialization and recreation while libraries, book and music shops are almost non-existent. The massive arrival of immigrants has deepened these social problems offering a welcome target for peoples' anger, which led to the explosion of violent anti-immigrant aggressions in 2006.

Similarly to *Seicase*, a two pronged strategy, through policing and social prevention, has been implemented in recent years: police surveillance was re-reinforced through the creation of a mobile police patrol unit (in an area without a permanent police office); a local employment office was created and a project on social mediation and crime prevention were among the initiatives undertaken.

In the eyes of the citizens we interviewed, such measures share a common methodological problem: they are decided upon the heads of local residents and the lack of communication has impeded a broader participation. The social operators are frequently perceived as outsiders with insufficient knowledge the quarter and its people. Perhaps due a nostalgic recollection of the "carabiniere" of past times, who would "stay

among people, stay with the people”, the police patrolling without interaction is also put into question.

c) *Quartiere Latino* is an inner-city quarter with a history of deprivation and poverty in the first part of the XX century and a tradition of radical-left political activism that goes back to the Seventies. It is located at the borders of the historical centre and is well served by public transport. The city’s main university campus as well as important research and cultural institutions are located here. The quarter has become a preferred living space for students, professionals and artists alike, a trend which has caused a steep increase in property values and rents, forcing many working class families to move. Today *Quartiere Latino* counts around 10.000 permanent residents and an estimated number of around 4.800 non resident students plus an unknown number of illegal immigrants. The quarter’s transformation has attracted big investments from entertainment business, and today is probably the most trendy leisure quarter in Rome.

Given its old record of political violence, today’s *Quartiere Latino* appears quite innocuous, with levels of crime lower than the average in Rome. However, intense conflicts on the use of public spaces have emerged, as longstanding residents began to oppose the “occupation” of public places by young students and night lifers. Rather than crime, noise in the street till late night, use of alcohol and other drugs in public spaces, poor hygienic conditions are the main cause of citizen complaints. “Let us sleep!” was residents’ request, written on a white bed sheet pending from balconies in the central square.

In this context, several projects have been promoted by local authorities and organized citizens’ groups to reconcile the different needs of inhabitants and visitors. The local police office (Polizia di Stato) has been especially active in this field, initiating a network comprising local authorities, shop keepers and several private and public institutions. Among others, a project directed at the prevention of crimes and drug abuse among young people was particularly successful in promoting participation of local schools and citizens in a complex programme of training, mobilization and public awareness. Such projects were part of a bigger strategic programme elaborated by the

local police and aimed at getting closer to citizens and to activate connections with potential institutional partners, through the establishment of community policemen, the so-called “poliziotto di quartiere”. Through several initiatives policemen acquired a renewed sense of their professional identity, perceiving themselves as “intermediaries” between citizens’ needs and the various institutions deemed responsible to act. They also helped to partially overcome the prejudices and diffidence towards police traditionally held by the highly politicized people living in the quarter.

### **3. When civil society’s participation does not grow on trees**

Looking at the experience of Rome, we can once again confirm that the origins of public fear are not necessarily related to actual crime rates but mainly to the rupture of shared formal and informal rules on the use of public space. For this instance, it makes not much sense to respond to untrue people’s subjective perception of insecurity with “objective” evaluation of crime risks in the city. In consequence, security policy should address the real demand of citizens which is not simply control and repression of criminal and uncivil behaviors, but also the restoration of civility.

Our three case studies also confirm the centrality of citizens’ engagement for the success of policy processes. Moreover, an issue arises on the actual practicability of participatory security policy. By now it seems clear to all policy actors that wider arenas involving all stakeholders are a way to ensure the transparency, legitimacy, participation and ultimately effectiveness of policy interventions. More inclusive policies also facilitate compliance rather than resistance in the phase of implementation. Still in practice, in Italy the concrete possibility to pursue a participatory governance of security meets a series of obstacles. The blurred borders of institutional competence in security policy are certainly a major cause of conflicts, blame shift and overlap<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, civil society’s participation necessitates an attitude of civicness which is often

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<sup>2</sup> An instance of this can be found in the co-presence of three Police Corps depending from the national (Polizia di Stato and Carabinieri) and the local government (Polizia Municipale) that often have overlapping missions and tasks in urban security.

missing in the very areas where security measures need to be put in place. In other words, civil society's participation does not grow on trees; neither can it be willed into existence by good intentions. How can it be generated in social context where people do not know their neighbours, where newcomers disrupt already fragile social nets, where mistrust towards the institutions, the police, the outsiders and the fellow citizens rules?

Unfortunately, there does not seem to be an easy answer to these questions. In the case of Rome, more effective participatory practice were developed when a) there was an identifiable institutional leadership that sustained the process and mediated among actors; b) a clear definition of reciprocal roles and a regulatory framework were in place.

While enforcement and control appear to be increasingly insufficient to attain security and liveliness in the city, an active role of local government in facilitating, connecting and regulating different public and private stakeholders remains crucial. Thus in the Italian case, where the distance between the public and politics is identified as one of the main causes for decaying trust and civic culture, governance *with* government is probably the real innovation. But that might probably be the case in all those instances where governmentality is at stake.

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