

then, the Police Headquarters has been leading and coordinating the fight against crime in Paris and in three departments of the outer suburban area (92, 93 and 94) which has 6.4 million inhabitants. This reform should make it possible to pool the units so as to offer support to the territorial units within the framework for creating intervention forces that can be quickly mobilised and deployed. Bearing in mind the mobility of crime and gangs, as well as the attraction of Paris, the act of sharing all information and operational intelligence obtained by the various intelligence services will likely help to list and monitor gang movements. At the criminal investigation level, "estate" groups have been created in Paris, in the Hauts-de-Seine and Val-de-Marne areas<sup>7</sup>, so as to better identify all of the members of a trafficking operation. Other French cities will shortly adopt an identical organisation.

Thus, the city will no longer be the place for crime, but the place of the police. From the faubourgs of yesteryear to the suburbs of today, urban balance depends on the connection between the city-centre and its periphery.

- 1 The discussions regarding Law no. 81-82 of 2 February 1981, which reinforced security and protected people's freedom, had seen the defenders of a repressive policy and those who favoured a more global approach to delinquency pitted against each other.
- 2 See Masurel (2009).
- 3 See the Court of Auditors' report, *La politique de la ville (Urban policy)*, February 2002.
- 4 See Bauer & Souleze (2009) and Bauer & Freynet (2009).
- 5 Decree no. 2007-1177 of 3 August 2007
- 6 Decree no. 2009-898 of 24 July and Order of 9 August 2009
- 7 There was already one in Seine-Saint-Denis.

## CONCLUSIONS

### PUBLIC SAFETY FROM A METROPOLITAN PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF BARCELONA

Carles González Murciano  
Marta Murrià Sangenís

#### 1. Public safety, a metropolitan problem

To speak of common spaces is to speak of safety. In recent years, everybody has assumed -to a greater or lesser degree- that entering and leaving these spaces means exposure to a wide range of risks, from rudeness to threats or robberies and even violence. We have also learned -with greater or lesser success- to protect ourselves in these situations. The response generally depends on the resources of the legal system and, above all, of the police. After all, it is the responsibility of the

police forces to establish surveillance and prevention strategies so that crime does not happen. There is a conviction that protecting public safety and exercising public freedoms are basic requirements for coexistence in a democratic society<sup>1</sup>. Although we all recognise the professionalism of our police force and their dedication, it is also increasingly clear that the population's needs with regard to public safety are more extensive. It is necessary therefore, to use more resources than those which are strictly dissuasive.

In recent years, this issue has aroused great interest and made many a pen run dry. It starts from the confirmation that insecurity depend both on real and definite exposure to different manifestations of crime (criminal rates measured by experts) and the way that people live safely together and interact in public spaces. Thus and foremost, it is important to tackle the spatial dimension of safety, because the physical design of spaces can generate insecurity. We all agree that dark and narrow alleys and deserted corners where few people pass by can make us feeling insecure. A long tradition of analysis -from situational criminology to theory on defensible spaces, etc.- has also proven that lighting, upkeep of facilities, their ability to be adapted to different uses and users, thus favouring group appropriation, and avoiding degeneration and vandalism, are all factors that decisively effect the way in which safety and security are attributed to certain spaces.

Secondly, the social dimension of safety. In an urban world like the present one, the history of the city is largely the history of society. However, if urban life is in itself the cause of many positive factors, it paradoxically also generates negative ones, including insecurity. At this point, in the terrain of misunderstandings, there is a big one that must be corrected. It consists of considering that greater quotas of urban wellbeing lead, like a magic trick or a medical cure, to more safety. Since the time cities were first founded, they saw the convergence of both the wealthy and the poor and, consequently, the problems and conflicts that this proximity cannot help but engender<sup>2</sup>. On the street or in the park, the presence of people whose behaviour disturbs or bothers us, especially if they act as if they owned these spaces and make us feel unwelcome in a public space, generates bewilderment and discomfort. They can even cause fear, particularly if these people form part of the collective imagination of danger shared by a majority of the population. Then it is the same whether they experienced a threat, an attack or not, if a criminal event occurred or not, because the feeling of insecurity and risk increases among people who live there.

#### 1.1 The study of public safety in Barcelona and its metropolitan area

From the above, we can deduce that managing public safety is a complex social policy. Aware of this reality, in 1983 the mayor of Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall, established the Technical Committee on Urban Security. Its objective was to create a programme to define basic action areas and propose measures for effective action that the government team could undertake. After 14 months of work, the committee drew up conclusions and several proposals. The final document concluded that the information available in this area represented little more than an initial approach. Thus, it proposed initiating a serious research and study policy framed within global policy on public safety<sup>3</sup>.

The *Victimisation Survey and Opinion on Safety in Barcelona* was published in this setting. This study has been performed annually and continuously since 1984, giving rise to one of the most extensive analytical report series on urban security ever drawn up by a local government<sup>4</sup>. The survey was, and is, much more than a mere intellectual operation. It is an excellent tool for well-informed and decentralised political management. Its fundamental objective is to study the distribution of crime and the feeling of safety at a city-wide scope. Inequalities in its territorial shape are understood to be associated with the social differences and different uses of the neighbourhoods and districts (the different appropriation of the city by different social classes).

However, nearly 30 years have passed since the committee's work started. Throughout this period of time, cities have accrued decades of population and activity growth that have made them increasingly larger, as they have developed according to the social needs at any given time. In this process, Barcelona has become the central hub of the continuous city that we know today as the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (BMA). A space has sprung up around it formed of functional relationships, of urban concurrence, of the shared use of supplies and services. All this lets us speak of a differentiated and unique environment with special features and specific needs<sup>5</sup>.

With an area of 636 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 3,218,071 inhabitants<sup>6</sup>, the 36 municipalities make up a metropolitan area that is ranked among the most densely populated urban agglomerates in Europe with 5060 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. Life in the BMA is dense due to the concentrated population, and it is also mobile. There is a daily interchange of jobs, education, culture, commerce and leisure between the towns in this bustling mass, which make this territorial reality a dynamic, interactive and highly-heterogeneous space.

All together, this means that a large part of the urban relations that used to take place within one town, have now extended throughout the metropolitan area. Cities grow socially and economically and are experienced beyond their administrative limits. The urban sprawl, along with the new relational and mobility models, also changes criminal patterns. On the one hand, the appearance of new centralities and poles of attraction means that, during peak transit times when there are a large number of people around, the chances, opportunities and numbers of potential victims all multiply. On the other hand, each metropolitan city is the setting for criminal incidents that affect, not only the residents of the municipality, but also the inhabitants of neighbouring towns.

Thus, the city and the different territories surrounding it have started to economically and functionally merge. Now there is an urban entity, not only inter-municipal, but trans-territorial<sup>7</sup>. This statement is also valid with regard to safety, so that a proper analysis of public safety must today be framed in the context of the metropolitan reality. Sensitive to this situation, the Barcelona City Council made the wealth of knowledge it gathered over the years available to the BMA Community of Municipalities<sup>8</sup>. In 1989, it decided to expand the scope of operation of the victimisation survey to include all BMA municipalities<sup>9</sup>. The study of victimisation in metropolitan terms must enable the detection of inequalities and differences in safety that are not explained by analysing concrete cases at a municipal level.

The *Victimisation Survey in Barcelona Metropolitan Area* (EVAMB) has been carried out annually since 1990. It provides data both about the objective state of security (the exposure of citizens to the different manifestations of crime and the process of reporting these acts) and their subjective experiences (citizens' assessments about safety in their neighbourhoods and municipalities). Concretely, victimisation is studied (amount of population who have been victims of a criminal act in one of six groups of type of crimes<sup>9</sup>) and the perception of safety of BMA inhabitants by gender, age groups, educative and economic background and by territories. Twenty straight years of analysis provide a chance to empirically observe and dynamically study change processes in the state of public safety in the BMA, providing understanding about its development. It proves that the unequal impact of safety problems in the metropolitan region uphold typical patterns. They are distributed geographically, travelling along centralities and according to the logic of urbanising transformations that modify population structures (composition and size).

## 2. Development and status of public safety in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Two issues on public safety must be clearly differentiated: one, a real and definite exposure to different manifestations of criminal activity and two, the social construction of feeling safe, both with respect to conclusions and how they are dealt with. BMA changes in these 20 years have continued to modify and rewrite the criminal and safety landscape with which neighbours coexist.

### 2.1 Trends of crime

According to EVAMB data, victimisation in the metropolitan area since 1989 has been rising, with some stabilisation from 2004 to 2008. In 2009, the trend changed and the stability of past years was interrupted by an increase in the victimisation index (the percentage of the population that has been a victim of crime), up to 22.3%, the highest rate seen in the entire series (see figure 1).

With regard to the different crimes studied in the survey, the most victimisation occurs in the area of personal security (robberies, hold ups, assaults). Over the years, these have been replacing crimes involving vehicles as the area with the highest victimisation. Crimes against homes are less frequent and the population's exposure to crimes affecting shops and businesses, second homes and agricultural products are even lower.

The highest victimisation in the area of personal security results from non-violent acts: robbery, of handbags, purses or mobile phones, is the most frequent crime in this area. Appropriation of goods by any degree of violence affects less people. The most frequent acts involving vehicles are also the least serious: stealing objects from inside vehicles as well as theft of vehicle accessories. Bicycle and scooter thefts are more frequent than car theft.

In a context of demographic growth and the increased density of BMA municipalities, criminal activity is growing, as there are a larger number of people liable to be victimised. Thus, population variations, both increases and losses of inhabitants, must be a variable that is considered when adapting citizen protection systems.

Changes to demographic structure also influence the relationship that citizens have with safety. Thus, in the period between 2003 and 2009, increased victimisation was detected among the elderly in the BMA. Traditionally fairly untouched by crime, the larger demographic pre-eminence of the elderly sector, along with longer life expectancy

and better quality of life, all contribute to their greater vulnerability to crime. In this process, adolescents have also emerged as a group that is particularly vulnerable to new types of crime. They have even overtaken adults as the group that is most exposed to the risk of victimisation. Demographic changes have also contributed to increasing ethnic diversity. Growth in the foreign-nationality population in the BMA has gone hand-in-hand with significant increases in criminal activity. With extremely-high victimisation indexes, these increases are closely related to these groups' great vulnerability to crime.

The tertiarisation of employment and the corporate fabric in the BMA's municipalities have been accompanied by increases in criminal activity. On the one hand, labour market and gender role changes have had an influence on the increased victimisation of women, today comparable to that of men. On the other hand, the creation of new companies and the diversification of the offering of services modify the territorial patterns for the distribution of crime, because the centrality and overcrowding of the territory entail a greater number of opportunities, higher guarantee of anonymity and, above all, the possibility for criminals to obtain economies of scale. In parallel, the population's mobility patterns and the functional specialisation of the metropolitan area also exercise an unequal attraction over criminal activity. Depending on the activities carried out there, crime is concentrated particularly in commercial zones, hubs of services, businesses, etc<sup>10</sup>.

In summary, the majority of crimes that affect the metropolitan population correspond to different types of predatory crime (against personal security and vehicles) or, in other words, utilitarian, seeking to appropriate a piece of property or obtain economic benefit without violence and with the least cost possible for the offender. These are quick actions, with the majority happening on streets, generally without violence. These factors all make it extremely difficult to apprehend the offenders.

### 2.2 Trends of opinion on safety

EVAMB figures, one of the only tools that lets us study how safe the general population feels, reveal that the perception of the level of safety in the territory, both with respect to the neighbourhood where they live and the city as a whole, has been gradually improving –in general terms- throughout all BMA municipalities. The highest levels of safety are currently perceived in small and medium-sized municipalities and, conversely, the lowest levels are attributed to the largest municipalities (Badalona, Barcelona, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat and Santa Coloma de Gramenet).

The successive transformations of the BMA have continued to modify coexistence patterns and the feeling of safety among the population. At the end of the 80s, safety levels were quite low, coinciding with the era in which democratic town councils started to design and implement their prevention policies. Starting at that time, the feeling of safety started to progressively increase, until it reached its maximum values from 1998 to 2001. With the start of the new century and, after years of continued improvement, the perception of safety levels in metropolitan neighbourhoods and cities started to drop slightly, in parallel with an important period of social transformations (see figure 2).

The demographic growth of cities was characterised by an increase in elderly as well as infant and juvenile populations; an increase and diversification of foreigners, with a particularly heavy influx in recent years; large-scale urban planning operations and initiatives, which transformed the metropolitan landscape; the consolidation of the metropolitan area as a city of flows more than a grouping of towns. All together, these factors have contributed to changing -at times expected and involuntarily at other times- coexistence and relational patterns between citizens and their territory and, most importantly, had important consequences for public safety.

The *2009 Report on the State of Safety in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area*<sup>11</sup> set forth some of the factors that may have contributed to some increase in the perception of insecurity in the metropolitan area and an increase in coexistence tensions. Based on the analysis of the information on the changes undergone in the midst of the metropolitan area in the last period, some metropolitan processes were deemed to have significantly influenced the feeling of safety and processes of getting along in the BMA.

An increased number of victimisations is logically a key element contributing to this feeling of danger. Thus, the perception that the safety level has worsened grows in line with victimisation indexes. The increase in crime has thus been one of the factors that have contributed to generating insecurity among residents of the BMA in the period from 2003 to 2009.

The perception of a lack of safety is similarly the result of other factors, such as the social use of spaces. Analyses show that the feeling of not being safe grows as soon as the territory starts to be viewed as a problematic space in which to live, whether this is due to deterioration in the social conditions of the residential environment (incivility) or due to forced coexistence with the *other* (from another group, causing fear). Segregated and abandoned spaces also

tend to be perceived as unsafe, or those that are difficult to territorialise as our own. Thus, as territories stop becoming hubs or stop attracting population flows, there is an analogous increase in the number of people who state that they feel unsafe there. Conversely, as territories gain in centrality, the feeling of worsening safety also decreases.

### 3. Managing public safety in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Metropolises are more than a conglomerate of people, streets and buildings. They are the system of social relationships entailed in the inhabitants' process of living there. The trends observed in the metropolitan area in its recent history verify considerable development. We are faced with a metropolitan society that is very consolidated, but which has to confront the changes experienced in many of the structures that underpin it and that have characterised it up until now. Metropolitan demographic and productive dynamics have changed and new social and cultural expectations have arisen.

People change and urban spaces change and with them, the phenomenology of public safety changes. New situations appear that turn into problems of coexistence with neighbours and their use of common areas (which are limited and have become one of the main sources of conflict among citizens and therefore one of the main sources of the perception of insecurity). Thus, coexistence emerges as one of the key factors in the feeling of wellbeing and, inseparably, also of safety. The study of the influence of these transformations, as far as our data permits, shows that the present metropolitan processes pose a series of specific challenges for managing public safety in upcoming years.

#### 3.1 Preventing crime

With the aim of reducing the crime that has been shown to be more widespread and rampant in metropolitan areas, it is advisable to prioritise a concerted and sustained action over time aimed at significantly reducing 'petty crime' (theft, robbery, assault, etc.) throughout the metropolitan area, in particular where the majority of these crimes take place. The security forces are responsible for developing the required strategies that, from proximity, knowledge and adaptation to the territory, substantially improve the efficacy and efficiency of regulatory, police and legal strategies when reducing the most pernicious effects of criminal activity in the BMA and on the transport network and communication routes that uphold it.

Municipalities, especially those with local police competence, must mutually

help each other to correct territorial imbalances and collaborate with their neighbours to protect citizens from the effects of crimes that, like the rest of daily activities, exceed administrative limits. The effective fight against crime and the reduction of public worry has to be compatible with policies centred on improving the feeling of safety by promoting coexistence and minimising the conflicts that are manifest in the use of public spaces and the urban setting.

#### 3.2 Governing insecurity

Without prejudice to policies and initiatives to fight crime, we must be aware that public safety policies must principally heed concerns about safety that emerge as a relatively recent product of social and political evolution in our societies. Up until recently people normally assumed that the measures to control crime were also the best strategy for reducing fear and insecurity. However, today many demands for safety that reach the authorities and local governments have less to do with increased thefts and robberies and more to do with an increase in requests for protection in daily conflicts that emerge in our daily lives. Noise, bad smells and fights between neighbours or the simple presence of groups of people in public spaces who bother others or act in ways that are considered 'inappropriate' are, to cite just a couple examples, situations that worry citizens.

These are social insecurities and fears that, despite encompassing the real fear of becoming the victim of a personal assault (above all via robbery or attacks against personal security), intervene directly in citizens' right to peaceful and safe coexistence. The priority task must thus consist of reformulating the problem of public safety and insecurity in terms that make it possible to confront them without unsustainable costs to freedom and justice. This requires modifying the conditions that produce the fears that arise during coexistence.

For any public policy that proposes decriminalising conflict and solving local safety problems, it is essential to put an end to reducing safety policies to simple policies to exercise control and to redefine public safety, adding the concern for safety to the set of public policies -economic, social, educational, cultural, urban planning- that drive the different governments. When defining safety policies, new social players must be incorporated and the policies must be extended to new areas of group action, as the complexity of the phenomenon requires an integral and comprehensive focus.

Safety is a challenge that involves quality of life and the BMA is prepared to confront it, in the framework of its competences, via local support policies

to promote coexistence<sup>12</sup>. Policies to increase urban security encompass initiatives that range from restoration, renovation and maintenance of public spaces to introducing elements of centrality and invigorating common-use spaces. This is not the place to make a dissertation about the value of public space to dissuade criminal behaviour. However, it is appropriate to stress the importance that defending the urban environment against assaults likely to detract its value has for safety. Faced with closure techniques –based on designing spaces around specific services so that its inhabitants go to it and watch over them, as well as the search for order via supervising flows, making people circulate to prevent undesired encounters- it is important to point out that it is possible to ‘secure’ spaces used by everyone by opening them up to social life and relations, creating new spaces and making existing ones more accessible and pleasant to everybody, favouring group appropriation<sup>14</sup>.

While the spatial handling of security is indeed important, the social dimension of public safety must also be strengthened, working to reduce criminogenic and fear-inducing effects of our common lives. Urban development through economic revitalisation of neighbourhoods and suitable regulation on land uses to promote balance between housing, living, commerce, work and leisure zones, in short, to prevent ghettoisation and the concentration of risk factors that lead to insecurity, are all key factors.

---

1 Organic Law 1/1992 of 21 February on Protecting Public Safety (Official Journal no. 46 of 22 February).

2 Donzelot (2007).

3 Barcelona City Council (1986).

4 For further information, consult Sabaté (2005).

5 Law 31/2010 of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. DOGC 5708, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2010.

6 [http://www.amb.cat/web/mmamb/estudis\\_territorials/indicadors](http://www.amb.cat/web/mmamb/estudis_territorials/indicadors)

7 Font (2005).

8 Lahosa and Molinas (2003).

9 Personal security and security of vehicles, homes, second residences, shops and businesses and agrarian economy.

10 IERMB (2009)

11 IERMB 2009.

12 See footnote 5.

13 Ponce (2010)