THE EU FUNDED MARGIN PROJECT: TACKLE INSECURITY IN MARGINALIZED AREAS. FIRST RESULTS ON THE PERCEPTION OF INSECURITY IN FIVE EU COUNTRIES

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Abstract:*This paper presents the results achieved by the MARGIN EU funded Project (started in May 2015) to date. This transnational and multi-sector research on the perceptions of (in)security among different demographic and victims groups has been funded by the EU Horizon 2020 Programme and it involves 7 leading institutions in social researches from 5 EU countries (Spain, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Hungary). MARGIN overall objectives are: 1) to identify, validate and analyze factors influencing public and personal perception of insecurity; and 2) to analyze the relationship between socio-economic inequalities, victimization and crime, exploring the impact of insecurity among different demographic and socio-economic groups. The project compares and analyses two different sources (police and criminal justice recorded crime - PRCs - and CVS, crime and victimisation surveys data) that usually are treated separately. It also analyses the relation between socio-economic inequalities, victimization and crime and investigates the relevance of neighborhood effects on the public and personal assessment of insecurity. The aim is to provide qualitative information about how citizens assess their own security and to explore the socio-political potential of CVSs as a tool for policy-makers. Analyzing PRCs and CVSs in 5 countries, MARGIN firstly identified a series of demographic, socio-economic and socio-geographic variables influencing the perception of insecurity. On this basis, the project developed and validated a thematic module capable to assess the impact of those variables on the perception of insecurity. On July 2016, the data collection process started and the quantitative survey using the MARGIN module has been implemented on a sample of 15.400 citizens in Italy through the CATI method, including a CAMI and CAWI correction plan. In order to take into account the*

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qualitative aspects and to identify possible cross-cultural differences among the countries, direct random interviews have been held on a limited sample of population living in 5 selected EU cities (100 citizens in each city). The large-scale survey in Italy has been concluded in October 2016 and the data are now under process and analysis in order to: 1) explore the cross-cultural potential of the module; 2) provide a set of validated indicators enabling the assessment of insecurity among different demographic and socioeconomic groups. By deepening the understanding of the root causes of insecurity, the research will provide policy makers with evidence-based tools for developing and assessing strategies targeted at better facing risks and increasing the public and personal perception of security.

***Keywords**: perception of insecurity; victimization; large and small-scale surveys*

***JEL Classification:** K42, O17, Z13*

Introduction

Following a general presentation of the project design, this paper analyses the preliminary results achieved by the MARGIN project at this stage of its implementation (October 2016). Once analyzed the factors assessing public and personal insecurity, the indicators defining demographic, socio-economic and socio-geographic determinants of insecurity, a large scale survey had been developed, validated and tested in Italy in order to assess the impact of those variables on the perception of insecurity.

The MARGIN project: an overview

The MARGIN research is funded by the European Union and leaded by the University of Barcelona (Spain). The project has been approved by the European Commission in 2015 within the Horizon 2020 Programme dedicated to support the Scientific Research and the Technological Innovation. The total budget of the initiative is 1,881,399.,50 euro. The project is scheduled to last 24 months, from May 1, 2015, until April 30, 2017. MARGIN sets up an international environment for knowledge exchange involving 7 leading EU institutions in Crime and Victimisation Surveys (CVSs) from 5 EU countries: Universitat de Barcelona (project leader, Spain); EuroCrime – Research, Training and Consulting SrL (Italy); National Institute of Criminology (Hungary); Institut National des Hautes Etudes de la Sécurité et de la Justice (France); Universitàdegli Studi di Milano-Bicocca (Italy); University College London (United Kingdom); Departament d'Interior – Generalitat de Catalunya (Spain).

The general objectives of the MARGIN project are: 1) to identify, validate and analyze factors influencing public and personal perception of insecurity, and 2) to analyze the relationship between socio-economic inequalities, victimization and crime, exploring the impact of insecurity among different demographic and socio-economic groups.

The MARGIN's specific objectives are: 1) to compare and to analyse two different sources of data (police and criminal justice recorded crime events and CVS data) that usually are considered separately. 2) To analyse the relation between socio-economic inequalities, victimization and crime, to map the unequal distribution of victimization in relation to social divisions and inequalities, and to examine how victimization impacts upon and is experienced differently by a range of groups and individuals. 3) To investigate the relevance of neighbourhood effects on the public and personal assessment of insecurity. 4) to provide qualitative information about how citizens assess their own security, and to explore the cultural and social context of victimization reviewing key methodological and empirical approaches, which are important in understanding victimization in contemporary society with a main focus on marginalized urban areas. 5) To explore the socio-political potential of CVSs as tool of policy-making, and to evaluate the various political and policy responses to crime victims and victimization and assess the role of CVSs in supporting policy makers in the field of security.

The MARGIN project is organized around 5 Phases:

1) *Desk-based review*. During this phase, the project Consortium generates a database for "smart aggregation", comparing two different kind of data sources: Official crime statistics, and CVSs data (including both the "dark figure" of crime and the subjective dimension of insecurity). Thanks to this tool, a desk-based review defines the state of the art including all relevant information that will inform the following activities and the policies aimed at reducing insecurity. This preliminary step allows the comparison of two aspects: real victimization, based on the official crime statistics of target countries, and perception of (in)security, distinguishing crime victims from non crime victims, thanks to CVS data.

2) *Dimension of insecurity*. This second phase aims at the conceptualization of the socio-economic and socio-geographic determinants of insecurity perception. A data analysis of factors assessing public and personal insecurity is implemented. The work takes into account four dimensions of insecurity: objective (e.g. crime); subjective (e.g. perception); socio-geographic; socio-economic.

3) *Assess the impact of insecurity*. This phase is dedicated to develop an assessment on the impact of insecurity among different demographic and socio-economic groups. A thematic survey is developed, validated and tested in order to assess the

impact of demographic, socio-economic and socio-geographic variables on the perception of insecurity.

4) *Anthropological fieldwork*. This step is aimed at investigating the anthropological dimension of insecurity and the socio-cultural determinants of its perception. This work is implemented in five EU cities: Barcelona, London, Milan, Paris and Budapest. The anthropological fieldwork foresees a preliminary training phase for the researchers. The data collection methodology adopted in each country includes: a) in-depth interviews; b) focus groups; c) participant observation. Each one of these activities will be carried out in two different research fieldworks (neighborhoods) per city.

5) *Dissemination and exploitation*. This phase accompanies all project activities accordingly to a detailed planning for diffusion and further application of the MARGIN tools and outcomes. Moreover, the project foresees to share best practices and to create a framework enabling end-users dealing with security issues to contrast objective and subjective causes of insecurity. For this reason, MARGIN includes the development of an Agenda of Best Practices targeting different sector stakeholders.

The factors assessing public and personal insecurity

Within the MARGIN project, an entire work package is dedicated to the data analysis of factors assessing public and personal insecurity. Its general objective is to analyze data on crime and victimization while considering contextual and situational differences among EU countries. The analysis is based on the data gathered during the previous phase of desk-based review of CVSs at national and international level, mainly focusing on the five partner countries and the respective national editions of the CVSs. Those data regards the Spanish region of Catalunya, England and Wales for the UK, and Italy, France and Hungary. In addition, CVS and Police Recorded Crime (PRCs) data have been provided for the cities of Barcelona and London, and PRCs data have been provided for Milan, Florence, Paris and Budapest.

Eight crimes categories had been chosen for the comparison between CVSs and PRCs incident rates, and for the comparison between the five countries and the cities considered in the MARGIN project. The objective dimension is conceptualized by examining victimization rates across the different study areas, as obtained from both PRCs and CVSs data. Then, the subjective dimension is considered by examining questions relating to different aspects of perceived insecurity. The rate of crime is well-known to vary spatially at local levels. Therefore, the indicators of victimization need to correspond to this levels in order to represent more accurately the experiences of the individuals in those neighborhoods. The analysis considers instead a series of

regression models that enabled to test a range of demographic and socio-economic variables in terms of their association with different aspects of perceived insecurity. A geographic weighted regression analysis had been used to examine consistencies between the neighborhood effects and socio-geographic indicators. Thanks to this methodology, the data analysis identified a series of key demographic, socio-economic and socio-geographic factors associated with public and personal insecurity.

Some interesting findings can be taken into consideration analyzing perceived insecurity, and most of all the demographic and socio-demographic variables associated to insecurity. If it is confirmed that the differences in collected data also among EU countries (and most of all in CVSs, e.g. regarding considered socio-demographic variables) make somehow difficult to compare data and findings, it emerged that some comparisons are definitely possible, and offer promising results. Some variables emerged as commonly influencing perception of insecurity in the different countries; and, most interesting, in some cases they are not connected to a real risk (or a relevant risk) of being victim of crime. This phenomenon has been already examined in relation to some demographic groups, as the elderly, whose perception of insecurity is usually higher than their effective risk to be victimized. The geographic dimension of the analysis allows the inclusion of multiple variables in the exam of the phenomena of objective and subjective insecurity, providing a complete framework analysis.

A correlation with a full range of socio-demographic variables and indicators through specific surveys addressing (in)security, carried out in different EU countries with a common methodology, has not been done before on such a scale as planned by the MARGIN project. The preliminary findings had been verified during the large and small scale surveys, and integrated with further data and results.

The MARGIN survey: the development of the module and the sample design

Based on the state of the art analysis and the identified demographic, socio-economic and socio-geographic variables influencing the perception of insecurity, the project developed and validated a thematic module capable to assess the impact of those variables on the perception of insecurity.

A panel of 12 international experts on the topic of insecurity assessment has been involved in an iterative design process in order to define a number of indicators enabling the assessment of insecurity among different social groups. The Delphi method has been chosen as the most appropriate technique in order to obtain a reliable consensus among the participants included in the panel of international experts. It consists of a structured communication process using a series of questionnaires to collect data from

a panel of selected subjects. After each of them, the Delphi coordinator provides an anonymous summary of the experts' positions. The feedback process encourages the panelists to reconsider their initial positions, generates additional insights and clarifies the information developed within the previous round. Then, the results are used to inform the subsequent rounds. The Delphi method implemented in the framework of the MARGIN project has been structured into four rounds. The results obtained represented an agreed framework that informed the selection of a set of items to be included in a new thematic questionnaire called "MARGIN questionnaire on perception of insecurity". The final draft of the questionnaire consists of a module including a set of items enabling the assessment of how demographic, socio-economic and socio-geographic variables might influence public and personal perceptions of insecurity. A further module includes standardized questions on victimization and perceptions of insecurity derived from the existing CVSs.

EuroCrime SrL was in charge for testing the questionnaire on a sample of 15,400 citizens in Italy through the CATI method. Under its coordination and supervision, the data collection was subcontracted to DemetraOpinioni.net, an Italian company specialized in the implementation of surveys in the social sector. The two companies jointly planned to add to the survey carried out using the CATI method a CAMI and CAWI correction plan, and defined the sample design. The final frame population is composed by three subgroups: a first one including the Italian municipalities with a resident population between 50,000 and 199,999 inhabitants, and a second one defined by all the Italian municipalities with more than 200,000 inhabitants. The third subgroup is composed by the four major Italian municipalities (Rome, Milan, Naples and Turin), which have been allocated 1,500 interviews each. The first two subgroups have been sampled using a proportional criterion, whereas the one defined by the major Italian cities has been sampled by a purposive sample design. The sample is divided among the three subgroups in a non-proportional manner. This has been made to guarantee the estimation at the district level for all the four major cities involved. An ad-hoc database for interviewing foreign citizens has been used, to support the response rates of the foreign citizens who are usually more difficult to be reached by landline phone. The expected final target for this particular category was equal to 7%. 1,000 CAMI interviews had been implemented thanks to a database of pre-validated mobile phone numbers generated using a RDD technique. Moreover, 1,500 interviews were supposed to be collected using the CAWI methodology, and they are included in the analysis even if those interviews cannot be considered as a proper part of the sample because they have been collected by online compilation of the questionnaire and not by phone interview. The CAWI interviews regarded only people who refused the telephone interview accepting to participate in the project anyway, compiling the questionnaire on-line.

The MARGIN survey: the data collection process

On July13th 2016 and 14th a preliminary test session had been organized to detect potential troubles in the interviewing and gathering process (e. g. difficulties in understanding some questions or potentially missing answers). During the three sessions, about 70 interviews were collected. On July 15th 2016 the process officially started. By the following week, Demetra increased significantly the pace of the process with an average of 32 shifts per day (Monday to Friday; duration: 3.5 hours each), allocated in 2 work sessions: afternoon (from 1:30pm to 5:30pm) and evening (from 5:30pm to 9:00pm). During the first three weeks, a morning session with two interviewers was activated too, in order to verify the response rates of some specific segments of the population. Informed consent had been requested to all respondents, according to EU and Italian regulations.

For the foreign citizens' database, firstly the company created a table with the most common surnames of the main foreign ethnicities in Italy and then took from the telephone directory the phone numbers corresponding to those surnames. Then the database was cleaned up by eliminating false positive matches and duplicates. Using the cleaned database (15,000 surnames), Demetra collected the first 250 interviews with foreign citizens. Then, the company carried out a refusal conversion by trying to reach positively those contacts who refused to answer in the first instance. Taking into consideration all the interviews collected with the ad-hoc database and the interviews collected in the general survey, the percentage of foreign people in the dataset was 6% already in the first month, increasing in the second and third month up to the final 7%.

The survey had been accomplished on October 17th 2016 with the last CAWI interviews collected. In total 15,629 interviews were collected including, per collection methodology: 14,419 CATI interviews, 1,009 CAMI interviews and 201 CAWI questionnaires (Table 1), made up by those who refused the telephone interview but accepted to receive the link for the online compilation. The number of CAWI questionnaires collected had been lower than expected. Demetra collected 201 CAWI questionnaires instead of the 1,500 envisaged.

Table 1 – Final results on data collection modes

Mode	Absolute Frequency
CATI	14,419
CAMI	1,009
CAWI	201
Total	15,629

The average response rate had been equal to 6.14% (Table 2). It is a sufficient and predictable result considering two factors: a) some questions are sensitive and deal with issues about which the respondents usually are not available to answer (i.e. general or specific victimizations, such as rape; personal incomes). b) In Italy, call centers are often used not only for surveys but also for advertising and marketing activities, leading respondents less keen to collaborate on this kind of initiatives.

Table 2 – Phone Outcomes

Code	Outcome	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
E6	Not reachable	93,422	24.47%
NE3	Call Back Del	2,285	0.60%
E1	Busy	51	0.01%
E2	No Answer	2,181	0.57%
NE1	Fax Answer	4,726	1.24%
E3	Answer Machine	154	0.04%
NE2	Not working	108,458	28.40%
E4	Refusal	139,798	36.61%
NE4	Not Eligible	15,297	4.01%
I	Completed	15,428	4.04%
E5	Call Back	46	0.01%
	Total	238,354	100%
	Response Rate*		6.14%

**I/E1+E2+E3+E4+E5+E6*

The Italian respondents had been equal to 93% out of the total, and the 7% target of foreign citizenship respondents had been achieved (Table 3).

Table 3 – Distribution of respondents by citizenship

Citizenship	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
Italian	14,327	93%
Foreign	1,101	7%
Total	15,428	100%

In the coverage of the general sample, a slight prevalence towards women (53.1% versus 46.9% of men) is recorded. The territorial distribution of the sample is homogeneous as for the city dimension and for the territory as well. Regarding the

questionnaire, the average length of the phone interviews was 11:13 minutes, with an average of a less than 2 complete interviews per hour.

The MARGIN survey: research problems

The survey did not record any particular difficulties. The response rate remained relatively constant without decreasing relevantly during the summer period, when in Italy less people are available at home owing to the summer vacations. The only critical issues were connected to the typical aspects of this kind of survey: more difficulties in recruiting males than females, problems in reaching the younger age groups (especially if the focus is in a single city, referring to the main four cities), and the population from Southern Italy. For these reasons, less interviews had been collected in Naples and Turin to prevent a more biased sample due to out of quota interviews. Difficulties in reaching the target of foreign citizens were known since the beginning. As previously said, 1,101 foreign citizens were interviewed, corresponding to 7% of the sample. The foreign population presents critical issues both in the coverage (low landline use) and in the propensity to respond. Language comprehension has an important role in the initial contact, which is essential to obtain the interview. Some ethnicities are underestimated compared to their real presence in Italy (*e.g.* the Chinese community). All these problems cannot be resolved easily (*e.g.* using mother tongue interviewers). Finally, the initial target for the CAWI questionnaires proved to be unrealistic. The number of people that accepted to receive the email with the link for the online compilation was less than originally estimated.

Conclusions

In order to take into account the qualitative aspects and to identify possible cross-cultural differences among the countries, direct random interviews are in progress on a limited sample of population (500 citizens) living in 5 selected EU cities (100 per city: Barcelona, Milan, Paris, London and Budapest). In the following phases, the data will be processed and analyzed in order: 1) to explore the cross-cultural potential of the module; 2) to provide a set of validated indicators enabling the assessment of insecurity among different demographic and socio-economic groups. The data collected will be analyzed using the Structural Equation Model (SEM). The purpose of the statistical analysis is to assess the reliability of the proposed insecurity indicators as well as verifying the hypothesis of the research, namely that public perception of insecurity can be explained by different demographic, socio-economic and socio-geographic conditions that affect the subjective perception. By deepening the understanding of the root causes of insecurity, the research will provide policy makers with evidence-based tools for developing and assessing strategies targeted at better facing risks and increasing the public and personal perception of security.