

Youth bands: between theories of the past and presence in modern society. The analysis of the phenomenon in official statistics

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Abstract- The research carried out to date on the subject of youth gangs have studied the phenomenon from different and sometimes radically opposite angles. The “gangs”, moreover, have taken on characteristics and reasons to be peculiar over time and space. It is thus impossible to trace the identikit of an immanent and hegemonic band model, and any attempt to do so can only prove to be partial and reductive.

Even the denomination is particularly controversial: the term gang, until now used predominantly by classical American criminology, is now more than ever imbued with a securitized and criminalizing rhetoric. The objective of this work is to develop an integrated analysis on minors reported to the Public Prosecutors at the Juvenile Courts based on the latest ISTAT data. The surveys carried out by ISTAT on the data of the judicial offices complete the system of juvenile criminal detections allowing to estimate, as far as possible, the total of the phenomenon of deviant youths included in groups. The ISTAT surveys allow an excellent description of the phenomenon of group juvenile crime and an element of comparison for the planning of active law enforcement policies. Data from Juvenile Justice Offices contradict many of the clichés about adolescents. It is not true that criminal activity has increased, it is not true that it is connected with foreign minors. On the contrary, the criminal activity is in decline both at the child and adult level, as well as the number of foreigners involved.

I. INTRODUCTION

The first organic reconstruction of the phenomenon of youth gangs was made by researchers at the Sociological School of Chicago, in the context of theories on social organization and disorganization. Social marginalization, juvenile delinquency or prostitution became the main interest of the emerging “ecological” school, which aimed to analyze the forms of behavior and socialization that arose in a new urban ecosystem. The first research in Chicago neighborhoods was aimed at gathering as much data as possible on the social composition of the city, on the interaction of groups, their life forms and their territory, using the methods of participant observation and the qualitative interview, given that in those years the gang phenomenon had assumed imposing dimensions. The study of the gangs was Thrasher's (1927) seven-year field research goal that published "The gang" giving an account of the trends and structure of over 1300

uniformly distributed street bands in every corner of the city, as Chicago, with its peculiar historical and social dimension, provided the objective conditions favorable to the birth of innumerable and varied neighborhood aggregations.

In the words of a recent reconstruction of Dal Lago (2002) the Chicago of the twenties was a “*gathering and sorting point for wandering and seasonal workers, a conglomeration in which the huge capitalist fortunes coexisted with the slums, and was considered the city which summarized the contradictions of American capitalism, and therefore the urban type par excellence*”. This was the beginning of a long period of studies on the phenomenon of gangs which up to the present day particularly involved deviant sociologists who claim that gangs, after a silent period, seem to have returned to social space, with particular reference to the youth ones, even if modern theorists identify them as street organizations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

R.E. Park (1969) proposed an important academic renewal in the studies on the city of Chicago and its neighbourhoods (Rauty, 1991); these contributions turned into a real research activity on delinquent types of association. The result, which emerged from the first surveys, showed that alongside the traditional male aggregative forms in bands, there was a small number of gangs formed by women only, some dedicated in particular to the robbery, others with recreational purposes, or passionate about baseball. However, the “mixed” bands constituted the majority; the presence of a woman in that case was characterized by her being “tomboy”. Instead, in particular in the more peripheral areas, the gender difference was not considered. So, although this was probably a good reason to be labelled as immoral (as in the case where a young woman ends up in a psychiatric clinic for this reason), it seems that men and women sometimes live together peacefully in the same organization. The Chicago neighborhoods differed in social classes and were subject to continuous “restructuring” in their respective compositions. As the various communities saw their wealth grow, they tried to move to richer areas. The latest arrivals were, naturally, staying in the worst possible conditions, the so-called “dormitory neighborhoods”. The ability to accumulate fortune allowed access

to richer and more comfortable areas, often through bloody conflicts on wages and working conditions (Renshaw, 1970).

However, as Hagedorn (2011) rightly points out, from this scenario of conflict and marginalization, at least African Americans were structurally excluded. For them the ghetto and the so called "black belt" remained the only realistically feasible horizon. This overall ferment was what the Chicago sociological school called "social disorganization". Given the complexity of the urban framework, it is certainly no coincidence that following restructuring of '29 the city became a huge laboratory of social control, that is the "true anguish of the dominant elite in American history" (Mills, 1966).

In this context, Thrasher (1927) develops a first historical definition of "gang", as an "interstitial group formed spontaneously" and "integrated through conflict", characterized by some typical behaviors such as "face-to-face relations, beatings, movement in space in a compact group, conflict and planning". But the first constituent factor was represented by the "development of tradition, of internal structure not dictated by reflection, team spirit, solidarity, morality, group conscience and rooting in a territory".

More specifically, the definition of "gang" was attributable to the structuring of an internal organization, to the use of violence characterized by a marked hegemonic masculinity, in search of a territorial and cultural dimension to be defended as a sign of identity, to the capacity of to plan activities of various kinds; but also, solidarity, the participatory and affiliative spirit, the need to fill a void and cultivate the bonds that the organizational structure of the company obviously did not guarantee. It must be recognized that, in those years, the gang exposed society's deficiencies, and not (only) the pathologies of the individuals who were part of it, was already revolutionary in itself. The slums of "The Gang" were not only repellent and infamous environments, but also full of charm and mystery, where gangsters, far from formal and conventional social control, could develop the most diverse forms of organization, autonomously creating rules and roles, choose reasons and paths of life.

The emphasis is so often placed on diversity: Thrasher (1927) does not determine a hegemonic model of organization, but identifies many different ones, claiming that "two equal gangs cannot exist". Moreover, not all gangs are necessarily criminals: most, though reproducing deviant behavior, simply have sporting or recreational purposes. A band, in the embryonic state, is constituted only by informal groups of children playing in the neighborhood: it is from there that they will gradually develop an internal structure and common traditions, sometimes clashing also with the hostility and disapproval of the surrounding adult environment.

Following the reconstruction of Thrasher, the importance of data on the ethnographic composition of the organizations stands out, which together group a number close to the 25,000 units of affiliates. The members of 35% of the registered gangs have an average age between eleven and seventeen, while, out of 1313, only 45 groups are made up of citizens of American origin. Although the birth of the gangs was largely due to a migrant context, the conflicts between them very rarely - according to Thrasher - were due to ethnic factors: even 40% were formed by individuals of different nationalities, while 60% had a monoethnic composition. The use of violence was essentially due to reasons of

territorial control and to the observation of tacit ethical codes aimed at preserving honor and respect. The natural enemy, on the other hand, was very often common: public authority. Not all the gangs, although most were, were organized in a top-down manner and led by recognizable leaders: many were characterized by their horizontality, so much so that Thrasher alludes several times to "primordial forms of democracy". This does not mean that they were capable of emancipating themselves completely from widely understood social control: several elements of the dominant society were reflected within their lives as adults and in the customs of the particular communities in which they found themselves. An obvious example is that relating to gender issues, since the prevailing attitude was decidedly masculine: the woman admitted into the gang tended to be the lover of the leader, a man chosen in relation to his marked abilities of violence and determination in 'to face every situation. Women were rarely allowed to play any role in the organization, except in cases of utilitarian sex-related employment.

Many elements contained in the work of the Chicago School have been, and still are, central to the gang debate; from territoriality to violence, from sexism to hegemonic masculinity, from the ethnic issue to the objective conditions of social marginalization of the young people involved, from the "leader" hierarchy to its opposite (the so-called "primordial forms of democracy" told in "The Gang"). The scientific innovation of this contribution lies in the "ecological" research method. This term meant the paradigm through which to scientifically read the processes of evolution and transformation that took place in society: the technique of ecological study, that is to say of aggregates, allowed to transcend individual to gather, through the collection of empirical data, the characteristics of large groups of people (Williams, McShane 2002). Urban ethnography, the collection of life stories, were also "adequate tools to deeply grasp the elements and events that shape individual lives". Chicago scholars had the ambitious goal of describing the complex scenarios of urban social relations of their time. The idea was to bring the many observable elements back to a minimum common denominator, enhancing the most visible features and trying to give a sort of logical predictability to what happened in the real world. For example, he claimed Park (1969) in "Introduction to the Science of Sociology" that the majority of social groups originate from conditions that are typical for all groups of the same species, generating developmental mechanisms that are characteristic and predetermined and that in definitive can be predictable.

The recent critical remarks proposed by Hagedorn go in this direction, accusing the Chicago School of modernism, determinism and opportunism in hiding or underestimating the phenomenon of racism as an essential element to be taken into account in the birth and development of gangs in American metropolis of the 1920s (Hagedorn, 2011).

The search for common characteristics of gangs, by combining the factors relating to their genesis, arguing that the members had the unconditional possibility of emerging from social disorganization to integrate into the working or media class, demanded that the reference society, whatever it may be, should be welcoming, mobile and in economic expansion. The latter aspect supposes an idea of disorganization, determined by the abandonment of a neighborhood of entire groups that move to a

place more suited to their new economic capacities, calls for social mobility and not structural ethnic marginalization; it refers to the forecast of a constant economic and social growth and not to a context of cyclical recession and racial segregation.

But even the Chicago of that time, the protagonist of an unstoppable capitalist rise, quickly denied this prediction. Hagedorn (2011) documents in detail clashes between white gangs of Irish origin and African-American gangs at least until 1919, the year in which the clashes assumed the tenor of the “racial uprisings”, with the authorities openly lined up against the inhabitants of the black belt. Thus it becomes difficult to understand the assertion of Thrasher (1927) that argue as, in Chicago, “race divisions disappeared and ethnic divisions could be considered superficial”.

Other works, such as Zinn's (2010), tell of an uninterrupted racial conflict with repeated raids and assaults conducted by white gangs in the segregation spaces “assigned” to black men and women, at least until the last decades of the twentieth century; conflicts, according to the historian, largely concealed by intellectual and academic circles, directly fed by the most influential American corporations.

Further contributions on the study and the nature of the youth gangs are to be attributed to Albert Cohen. Within the classical sociological literature, it possible to find a line that connects youth bands and deviance according to two great traditions: on the one hand, the reflections of the Chicago school and develops later through the so-called labeling theory, on the other the Durkheimian reflection of the anomie and the fundamental function that deviance plays in the realization and maintenance of the social order (Bugli, 2010). According to this last perspective, the element that leads to the non-observance or infringement of the current rules is represented by the degree of adherence and importance that are granted, by an individual or a community, to the social norms in force.

Deviance, for Durkheim (1976), assumes within certain limits a positive function, since it strengthens the collective consciousness and marks the boundaries of what is considered socially licit. The theory of anomie also emphasizes the need for society to regulate the aims of its members by keeping them within the limits of the possible realizations, thus avoiding the development of tension and frustration mechanisms capable of determining irrecoverable fractures. Merton (1949), subsequently, exploring the relationship between the cultural and structural level of a given social context, added the idea that anomie does not necessarily develop due to the collapse of the only desirable goals, but, rather, to the fracture of the relationship between the same purposes prescribed and the legitimate ways to achieve them. It is, in this sense, that deviance could be explained as the result of a break in the organizational model at the head of the society, and in particular between the ideals of culturally dominant success and the concrete possibilities to reach them available to all. In keeping with this thesis, Cohen (1974) addresses scientific interest to the deviant consequences inherent in the vertical and inhomogeneous composition of the social structure. His work is generally included in the field of theoretical studies on anomaly and structural frustration, but in “Delinquent Boys”, there is no reference to the theories of Merton and Durkheim. At the basis of his theory of delinquent subcultures, Cohen suggests that “delinquency is not the expression or explanation of a particular type of personality: it

can be imposed on any type of individual if the circumstances favor an intimate association with delinquent models” (Cohen, 1974). The reasons behind some deviant behaviors that see young males of the working class as predominant protagonists, spring from belonging to a certain social stratum.

A subculture according to Cohen represents a cultural phenomenon since the participation of each subject in this system of social norms is influenced by his perception of the rules; subculture, moreover, because the same social norms are shared only by those who in some way believe they can benefit from them, generating a favorable climate for their reproduction. This is a benefit not of an economic nature or in any material sense: the essence of a subculture is constituted by immediate hedonism, in contrast to the search for long-term projects or activities that arouse little interest, since they require specific knowledge and skills acquired only with the study.

An important component of this form of self-esteem and well-being is the refusal to obey to any authority, excluding the pressures exercised within the group itself where relations tend to impose themselves not with violence but “with a strong solidarity” (Cohen, 1974). The triggering element that leads young males, of the working class, to disassociate themselves from the hegemonic cultural values of society to take refuge in a subcultural perspective and in mechanisms of rejection is that there is a problem of general possibilities of success; the young of the most disadvantaged groups manifest discomfort (often a total refusal) of adaptation to the values and cultural norms of the middle class, implicitly rejecting the dominant American evaluation system. Taking note of this “structural tension” that begins to manifest itself from the scholastic path, Cohen's tries to demonstrating that the birth of subcultures of criminals represents an endemic phenomenon: if the original problem is represented by a frustration of status, then “the social position of an individual is one in which he is in the eyes of someone. So this is not a property of the individual fixed once and for all, but a position that varies from the point of view of who is ever producing the judgment” (Cohen, 1974).

This perspective determines in the young a problem of social collocation, or using Cohen's terms, a “problem of adaptation” to the hegemonic standards and success values. As structural, this condition of rejection and hostility will be widely shared by the subjects belonging to the same social class. The emergence of a deviant subculture can become in this sense a collective solution to the problems of social adaptation, whose “subcultural” values will be constituted precisely starting from the reversal of those of the dominant culture (Cohen, 1974). A subculture is a new way of considering and being considered, a possibility to validate the choices of those who are inside the group and to look with hostility on those who remain outside. This deviant result of the interaction, finally, is not to be attributed in particular to any of the participants, but is an emerging reality on the level of the group.

While the theory of delinquent subcultures by Cloward and Ohlin (1966) often tends to be simplified and brought back into the context of the work on anomie, it actually seems to contain a first reading that places street bands in a resistance perspective, with a vision of reality strongly oriented to the individual and his relationship with the established order.

Excluding that delinquency was a component of the criminal's genetic heritage, the "faults" of the system that would lead to forms of collective deviance could basically be traced back to two variants: on the one hand, the design of successful goals valid for all men and for all the classes (even for those who do not have much chance of reaching them); on the other, the lack of attention to emerging degradation in certain urban contexts, creating forms of segregation, abandonment and marginality.

It is with these premises that delinquent subcultures can begin form in the districts of American metropolises, in the view guidelines consisting in a set of "prescriptions, norms or rules of conduct that establish the activities required for a member of the subculture" (Cloward and Ohlin, 1966). At the center of the birth of the deviant groups, as we have seen for Cohen, there would therefore be a problem of the legitimacy of the rules: by revoking their support for certain areas of the established law, officially prohibited forms of conduct are invested with legitimacy. The members of the delinquent gangs have a clear awareness of their deviant position, and are preparing for the time when society will force them to choose which side to take; hence the need for an "internal subcultural regulation" (Cloward and Ohlin, 1966) capable of giving to the components significance in their psychological and social economy.

There is an original element within the condition of anomie in which the poor inhabitant of a highly degraded urban environment is facing. If for Durkheim that society is stable in when people are satisfied with their fate of life, aspiring to achieve only what is realistically possible for them to achieve, for Merton stability is a direct consequence of the tendency to balance between aspirations and norms, between culturally prescribed goals and socially legitimate means to achieve them (Melossi, 2003). For Cloward and Ohlin (1966) the element of rupture is, however, to be found even further upstream; it is true that there is an apology of success that seeks to forge valid meanings for all members of society, but it is doubtful that it manages to "cannibalize" opinions to such an extent. The structural restrictions faced by members of the lower socio-economic level, and in particular adolescents, provoke in them an attenuation of the pursuit of the goals of success, which belong to the ideology of equality of possibilities.

If the tendency to seek constant economic improvement is unquestionable, on the other hand there is the awareness that a large part of the goods of life remain inaccessible to them. Thus, adaptation is not actually aimed at successful imaginaries, but rather at a closer horizon (that of work and social conditions that can be concretely reached by a member of the class to which they belong). Not, therefore, a split between aims and means, but rather between different aims; that is among those defined by young people for themselves in relation to the means actually perceived as available and those prescribed by society in relation to their own structure.

Cloward and Ohlin (1966) doubt that an inhabitant of a poor neighborhood, but "rich" in social relations, may wish so intensely to abandon his environment and his relationships to jump into the unknown world of the middle class.

The anomaly generates in this sense a "problem of adaptation" that takes root even further upstream than the moment in which the subject will realize that the means at his disposal are

not proportionate to his objectives: from the beginning of his age adult he is fully aware of the limitations of his horizons.

For Cloward and Ohlin the element of awareness is a decisive piece to define the deviant trajectory; for this reason, the authors focus a lot on the problems of adaptation that the poor have with respect to an imaginary framework theoretically achievable. Thus freed from the adhesion to the complex of existing rules of success, the young males of the lower classes can choose the path of collective delinquency to seek alternative satisfactions. It is evident that the members of a nascent delinquent subculture must undergo a complex process of changing attitudes towards themselves, towards other people and towards the existing social order before such a transformation can take place (Cloward and Ohlin, 1966).

Delinquency therefore does not arise simply from a structural frustration, but from a complex process of internalization of one's basic limits, and from the contextual determination to look for other possible opportunities. In explaining the dynamics of the "development of delinquent subcultures" a simple mechanism of cause and effect is not described, but three distinct "levels" are identified from which the future delinquent must pass in order to complete his complete transformation. First of all, the "process of alienation": the most important step in revoking feelings that support the legitimacy of conventional norms consists in attributing the cause of one's failure, or predicting failure, to the social order rather than to oneself. If a person attributes his failure to the injustices of the social system, he can criticize the existing order by using his efforts to reform it or disassociate (alienate) himself from it. On the contrary, if the cause of its failure were reduced to its own incapacity, it would rather feel the duty to change oneself and not the system. Once the alienation, development and maintenance of a delinquent sub-culture has taken place, it is obviously a collective undertaking. Although mainly individualistic deviance forms may arise, the authors hypothesize that if the "failure" is attributed to the inadequacy of the existing institutional arrangements then it is easier for the reaction to become collective. This is why it is necessary to defend the (collective) "anti-system" choices from guilt, anxiety and fear. And this can happen when the rules are considered violated as morally binding and in this sense have a strong collective support. Those who are part of a delinquent subculture are exempt from feelings of guilt, since they have conceptually separated the question of the legitimacy of the rules from that of their moral validity.

The theory of subcultures ends with a detailed analysis of how these concretely operate in the real, propagating from member to member and passing from generation to generation. In this sense Cloward and Ohlin take up the theory of the differential association of Sutherland (1937), according to which the delinquency originates from the learning of a set of values, norms and attitudes in contrast with the dominant culture. Learning (of deviant behavior) occurs thanks to processes of interaction with individuals or groups that attribute positive meanings to deviant actions (Cloward and Ohlin, 1966).

However, common are the pressures to the birth of a subculture, these are distinguished from the authors substantially in three types, referable to the typology of urban zone in which they operate. A criminal subculture, referring to those who are engaged in criminal activities for economic profit, is placed in

those degraded urban areas but still somehow rich in social ties suitable for protecting this type of deviant behavior. Then there is the abstentionist subculture, populated by those who react to failure by trying to “rise” by using drugs, located in depressed and disintegrated areas, perhaps “as a result of wicked changes in the urban plan”. And finally, the conflictual subculture, steeped in violence and hegemonic masculinity, typical of those neighborhoods in the American metropolitan suburbs (Cloward and Ohlin, 1966).

The most significant datum of the theory of delinquent subcultures probably lies in introducing unconditionally the element of awareness in the deviant choice. Unlike Cohen, in “delinquent boys” or those of Sykes and Matza (1957), in “Techniques of neutralization: a theory of delinquency”, the delinquent is not a person who continues to attribute legitimacy to the official norms of society, albeit in a substantially unconscious in the first case or possibly conscious in the second. He is not grappling with an ambivalent personality due to the position of challenger of certain values of the middle class of which, however, he still recognizes a certain value, nor is he in a precarious psychic condition due to the “neutralization” of the conventional norms that he has operated while continuing not to repudiate them.

The deviant is not plagued by continuous feelings of guilt, growing anxiety and it is a futile effort to continue to direct the research towards “psychological” concepts of delinquency. There is a conscious intentionality in its behavior, although these continue to be the product of a system of structural inequalities, invariably reproduced outside the sphere of its possibilities.

The contribution of Matza (1969), outlined in “How to become deviant”, does not represent a real study on gangs but, on the contrary, a process of understanding on the path of the deviant. The critical objective is aimed, first of all, at the impossibility of treating man as an object incapable of resisting the forces of the surrounding environment and irresistibly attracted to deviance regardless of his will following circumstances that are objectively determined. Using a minimum common denominator for the analysis and the study of “affinities” and “affiliations”, Matza maintains that, until then, the totality of deviant scholars had used research tools to explain the scope of inorganic objects rather than that of human beings. The concept of affinity is understood as an etiological connection between a cause, such as ethnicity, poverty or social disorganization, and an effect, deviance. Similarly, the concept of affiliation describes a relationship between an objective context, such as the presence of delinquent gangs in a degraded neighborhood, and a subject, who becomes equally delinquent because of “conversion” to a conduct that is new to the subject but already consolidated for others.

The main concern is the distance between these theories and the multiplicity of subjective experiences which represents a schematic and reductive reading of human phenomena.

The problem is that in reality people considered deviant may have their own motives, goals and moral conceptions, which are incompatible and incomprehensible if the assessment remains linked to the “dominant” culture, or if they are supposed to reduce them to what they actually “are not” for convenience analytical. Matza suggests, therefore, that when the subject of the research are activities that in some way violate widely shared standards of conduct and morality, we must first establish a relationship of profound understanding and empathy with the subject himself.

Establishing a relationship of empathy means entering in the world of the phenomenon we want to describe almost to the point of sharing it, demanding to give it a faithful and non-reductive representation, without violating its integrity.

The change in research prospects, compared to the past, took place with the contribution of the Birmingham School; the latter moves the theoretical reflection towards an analysis of the symbolic and rebellious capital inherent in the young, emancipating the study of the bands from the problem of deviance. Starting from the assumption that band does not necessarily mean deviance, the need is felt to investigate those paths that, through the construction of a common image of tastes and styles, express completely new and unpredictable subjectivities (Bugli, 2010).

The “ritual resistance” becomes the paradigm around the development of the research centre for the study of contemporary culture in Birmingham, founded by Hoggart in 1964 and directed by Hall; this research centre tries to explain some behaviors and trends that emerged strongly in the youth of the English working class.

For Hebdige (1990) the objective became to assimilate, to the concept of subculture, a study perspective that took into account the ideological, economic and cultural factors that weigh on it. If, on the one hand, it is the social class, and not the age, the explanatory element of the production of youth subcultures, on the other hand, the practices and languages contained in them cannot be explained simply by deviance, but it is necessary to analyse the changing expressions of the traditional culture of the working class, which, at that time, expressed a strong symbolic antagonism towards the culture of the middle class.

The subcultures are seen as contest rituals “played” by young people “in the theater of hegemony” undermining the myth of consensus: their emergence is linked to those historical periods in which a crisis of consensus becomes evident. As in a theatrical scene the conflict is expressed at the level of the imaginary although it reflects real contradictions (Hall and Jefferson, 1993; Macciocchi, 1974). In this way several “spectacular bands” are investigated that inhabit many of the main English cities. The British metropolises traditionally had a strong concentration of workers, and at the same time constituted European outposts in the dynamics of industrial and social restructuring (Tabboni, 1986). The response of these young people is a declaration of independence, refusal of anonymity and insubordination; it is, also, an indirect confirmation of the condition of submission. The subcultures constitute a gesture of both request for attention and rejection (Hebdige, 1991).

Almost a century after the publication of Thrasher's research the predominant definition of gang has changed radically. Much of contemporary American and European criminology has abandoned any kind of social or cultural interpretation of juvenile delinquency, preferring a perspective linked to the dogma of security in the urban peripheries. According to Brotherton (Queirolo Palmas, 2010) the studies by Klein, Kerner, Maxon, Weitekamp (2001), place particular emphasis on three elements: 1) the evaluation of how external observers see bands; 2) how the members of a group perceive and define themselves; 3) the reference to pathological implications since the bands are involved in transgressive practices that break the legal codes and raise reactions of social control by the community.

The “European paradox”, according to Klein et al. (2001), consists in the fact that in Europe the existence of youth gangs is not fully recognized, unlike the United States, where instead the presence of gangs is a known fact. This lack would be due to a presumed difference, both quantitative and qualitative, of the phenomenon between the two continents, and yet, argues Klein, it would contradict the empirical reality. Europol, for example, already indicated in 2002 the presence in Europe of 4,000 bands and 40,000 affiliates to them. It is starting from the idea that Eurogang has decided over the last two decades to structure a research plan aimed at guaranteeing a methodological and linguistic formalism useful for comparing the data collected in different European urban and cultural contexts. The objective was to create a set of tools useful for interpreting different situations and attempting to bring them back to a minimum common denominator, starting precisely from the search for a general definition of gang.

The latest version states that: *a street gang (or a troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose own identity includes involvement in illegal activity* (Weerman, 2009). This is a definition traces the existence of the phenomenon starting from the presence of some elements: the duration in time, a certain number of months sufficient to create an idea of stability; territoriality, in the sense that the group must spend part of its time outside the typical places in which they are subjected to the control of adults, such as school, home or work; age, which must be in most of the components just over twenty; finally, carrying out illegal activities as a distinctive feature of group identity.

It is above all the latter component that would indelibly characterize the gang, the accomplishment of systematic violations of the legal codes (Weerman, 2009). For Klein (2001) it is always possible to trace the existence of distinctive signs (such as a name, colours, symbols, tattoos, graffiti, etc.); to reconstruct the identity of the group and assimilate it to a youth band is involved in illegal activities as a form of subjectification of young members. The eurogang researchers have recognized that one of the main effects of the bands is precisely the increase in their delinquent and criminal behavior (Klein, Maxson, 1989). The awareness of being involved in criminal behavior that will lead them to a judicial process, causes the internalization of the need to differentiate significantly from other young people.

Violence, although it is not the only form of deviance that develops within youth gangs, remains an inevitable distinctive sign. Indeed, exercising violence makes it necessary both to preserve the identity and the “respectability” of the group, as well as in relation to the fact that the very existence of the band is constrained by the physical presence in a territory (district, street, square) of to defend against possible invaders (Klein et al, 2001). If the definition represents a common starting level, the goal of the researchers remains to provide a series of useful tools for classifying, differentiating and comparing the gangs of different cities.

Several authors identify as a comparative objective the definition of a complex structural model within which we can appreciate some essential characteristics of a youth band. Using the formality/informality parameter describes an important classification parameter for the internal organization. The different levels of participation, both in quantitative terms (time spent in

group activities), and in qualitative terms (degree of authority and experience of the individual member). Another variable is the existence of moments of collective confrontation, such as regular meetings, or the use of rules written or handed down orally. The existence of a leader is considered particularly important, according to the hypothesis of hierarchical structures of gangs. There are also levels of comparison relating to the activities carried out, in which the specialization in performing certain illegal activities (especially in relation to the drug market) is identified as a distinctive trait. Other trait involves maintaining relations outside the group, with gangs from other cities, but also with the neighborhood or other gang members currently in prison (Weerman, 2009).

The understanding of internal structures thus takes on centrality in the overall analysis of gangs. Rostami, Leinfelt, Holgersson (2012), take up the application method of Maxson and Klein which propose a “grid” composed of some types of bands divided by reason of: dimension, duration, local roots, activity carried out and age of the components.

Traditional gangs, for example, are those that have existed for at least twenty years, count hundreds of members and contain subgroups formed in relation to the age and duration of the member's affiliation. They are distinguished by the defense, even violent, of their territory. Equally “territorial” are the Neo-traditional gangs, which instead have only about fifty members, a duration close to ten years, and are divided into subgroups, although the definition of these bands is less pronounced. The Collective gang instead, would be characterized by the poorly structured coexistence of a mass of adolescents and “young adults”; although it has existed for several years, these bands do not have such obvious distinctive symbols, and tend to exercise a more bland territorial control. Finally stand out the Specialty gangs, whose existence is essentially due to purely criminal rather than social reasons; the size of the specialty gangs would be reduced and the scope of interest related only to that area in which they develop their criminal intentions.

A typical example, according to the researchers, would be the drug dealing groups or skinheads. In the last few years, a research movement proposes a return to a theoretical orientation based on resistance and which is inspired by literature not generally contemplated by traditional criminology, in a decided countertendency with respect to the dominant criminological perspective that places the “youth gangs” with a view to pathology and social reproduction. According to this perspective, social reproduction, although it may actually be useful to describe some or even the majority of gangs, cannot be able to explain them all, thus excluding several local or even transnational experiences (Brotherton, 2015).

As numerous empirical researches show, the practices of multiple street organizations contribute to generating specific situations of resistance/transformation of the social order and the dominant cultural, and are far from being explained in terms of mere dysfunction or reproduction (Cannarella, Lagomarsino, Queirolo Palmas 2007).

It is in this perspective, Barrios and Brotherton (2004) propose replacing the terms “gang” or “youth gang” with that of “street organizations”; the latter are: groups formed largely by young people and adults from marginalized classes, whose goal is to provide their members with an identity of: resistance, an

opportunity for empowerment, both individually and collectively, a possibility of voice capable of challenging the dominant culture, a refuge from the tensions and sufferings of everyday life, and finally a spiritual enclave where rituals considered sacred can be developed and practiced.

III. METHOD

Several studies and researches show that official statistics fail to capture and represent the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency or the actual trend in function of the submerged crimes (the so-called "obscure number"); it is estimated that around 90% of illegitimate behaviors would remain unknown. The concealment index measures the ratio between unregistered crimes and those committed; the most heinous crimes turn out to be those most denounced, making the indicator assume a value of 1; on the other hand, minor crimes record high levels of omission of the complaint. Crimes such as theft and assault against weak subjects fall into this category. The objective of this work is to develop an integrated analysis on minors reported to the Public Prosecutors at the Juvenile Courts based on the latest ISTAT data. The surveys carried out by ISTAT on the data of the judicial offices complete the system of juvenile criminal detections allowing to estimate, as far as possible, the total of the phenomenon of deviant youths included in groups. The ISTAT surveys allow an excellent description of the phenomenon of group juvenile crime and an element of comparison for the planning of active law enforcement policies; in fact, the survey carried out by ISTAT, based on data obtained from the judicial offices, allows for the quantification of the total number of minors for whom the crime report is recorded in the register of the Public Prosecutor's Office for minors.

The objective of the present work was to provide a theoretical framework integrated with the statistical variables in order to allow the construction of an analytical framework to combat discomfort and encourage the social integration of young people belonging to the group. In this perspective, the research stems from the growing importance that the theme of youth violence is acquiring especially in the media, following the use of technological forms of diffusion of forms of violence that are difficult to be immediately understood by adults; consider, for example, the methods of harassment and violence through web devices such as cyberbullying.

The specific analysis target is set in adolescents aged between 11 and 18; the analysis relating to this segment takes into consideration the reports referring to minors in an attributable and non-attributable age. Most of the minors are in the 14-17 age group, which constitutes more than 80% of the total, and in the last year under review was up (+ 11%) compared to the 2013-2015 three-year period.

The analysis of this kind shows that the number of children reported is mainly male. According to the "Report of the Ministry of the Interior on the state of security in Italy", juvenile crime in our country, after a period of decline in the years 2000 and 2001, is slowly but steadily increasing. The intervention models are closely related to welfare policies and the social context; in this last case the general evaluation of deviance and sanction is important, that is, how the social context considers the rule, the norm, the transgression and the offense.

The total number of minors subjected to proceedings in 2015, the latest figure available, is equal to 9339. This figure makes it possible to assess a situation in terms of minors subjected to partially positive criminal proceedings with reference to the two-year benchmark (2013-2014). On the other hand, minors who are not responsible report a growth in the last three years (Tab. 1).

Table 1 - Number of proceedings

Year	2013			2014			2015			
	Municipality	Capital city	Not Capital City	Total	Capital city	Not Capital City	Total	Capital city	Not Capital City	Total
Type of crime										
crimes against the person		394	674	1078	418	731	1159	464	727	1199
crimes against life		..	4	4	1	3	4	5	4	9
voluntary murder		..	4	4	..	1	1	4	1	5
consummate homicide		..	1	1	..	..	..	1	..	1
attempted voluntary murder		..	3	3	..	1	1	3	1	4
manslaughter		1	1	1	2	3
crimes against individual safety		244	393	640	240	421	662	252	392	648
beating		44	61	105	36	73	109	50	82	132
voluntary personal injury		195	310	507	202	320	523	200	293	497
negligent personal injury		11	23	34	4	27	31	9	23	32
brawl		4	20	25	11	13	24	6	10	16
crimes against honor		102	161	266	92	187	281	100	199	302
insult		83	138	222	79	167	246	84	173	260
defamation		18	26	46	14	22	38	17	34	51
crimes against moral freedom		108	180	288	121	194	315	144	217	363
threat		77	135	212	80	144	224	95	152	248
stalking		15	16	31	24	24	48	29	33	62
private violence		22	39	61	24	35	59	27	40	68
crimes against the inviolability of the home		14	34	50	14	23	39	10	10	20
violations of domicile violation		10	28	38	4	17	21	4	8	12
cyber abuse		5	5	12	10	5	17	6	1	7
unauthorized interceptions, interruptions and falsifications of electronic communications		1	..	1	..	..	..
crimes against public morality and morality		5	4	9	6	8	14	3	7	10
crimes against the feeling of animals		1	5	6	2	10	12	3	4	8
property crimes		1081	1003	2094	1041	936	1986	1024	793	1823
theft crimes		850	653	1507	789	548	1340	803	480	1285
simple and aggravated theft		707	504	1215	664	450	1116	673	385	1060
attempted simple and aggravated theft		137	62	199	129	55	185	152	59	212
robbery		52	28	80	63	38	101	57	35	92
damage to property, animals, land, etc.		113	245	359	114	242	359	101	187	288
crimes against property through fraud		76	118	199	87	121	211	73	118	195
scam crimes		2	3	5	..	4	4	..	3	3
fraud		1	1	2	..	1	1	..	2	2
misappropriation of property		6	7	13	9	9	18	5	10	15
stolen		63	100	168	76	99	177	66	94	164
money laundering offenses		4	6	10	4	9	14	2	10	12
violence, resistance, insulting a public official		49	39	88	34	37	71	47	16	63
crimes related to the protection of one's own reasons in an arbitrary manner		..	1	1	1	2	3	1	..	1
crimes against religious denominations		..	2	2	..	1	1	..	..	..
crimes against public order		2	1	3	1	..	1	2	1	4
criminal association		..	1	1	1	..	1	1	..	1
crimes against public safety		8	33	41	17	37	54	12	38	50
other violations of the rules on:	
violations of the rules on weapons and explosives		2	3	5	1	4	5	3	5	8
immigration		1	..	1	..	..	..
smuggling		1	..	1	..	..	..
narcotics and psychotropic substances		23	32	57	34	45	79	47	50	98
protection of personal data (privacy)		..	2	2	2	3	5	2	1	4
traffic violation		1	2	3	1	..	1	..	2	2

Data extract 02 dic 2019 11:42 UTC (GMT) da I.Stat

For minors, the use of detention as a response to deviance is seen as an extremely residual measure. Child services, within the criminal jurisdiction of the juvenile judicial authority, contribute to the promotion and protection of young people's rights. Their task does not end at the age of 18 but extends to "young adults", that is to those who have reached the age of majority, but were still minors at the time of the committed crime¹.

Young minors who committed crimes in 2016 (Table 2) were 32,335, down 9.4% compared to the previous year. A characteristic element is that 25.7% are foreigners, while girls are 11%.

At the end of 2017 (Table 3), 999 young people are present in the communities, a figure that is up by 16.2 percent compared to the previous year. In eight percent of the cases they belong to the age group between 14 and 15, while the others are divided almost exactly between 16-17 year olds and adults. Contrary to those in the community, those present in penal institutions for minors (PIM) in 2017 are instead decreasing (they are 425, 8.0 percent less than in 2016). Currently in penal institutions for minors there are more "young adults" (this category now includes the 18-24 year olds) than under age: in fact, at the end of 2017, 57.4 percent (64.8 percent among Italians and 48.4 percent among foreigners).

Entry into first reception centers occurs almost exclusively due to arrest in flagrante delicto (92.6 per cent of cases), while that in the community is mainly arranged by direct application of this precautionary measure (54.5 per cent), in lower proportion for the application of the probation (19.5 percent), or for the end of the worsening period in PIM or for the transformation of a more serious measure, i.e. the juvenile penal institution (a total of 20.6 percent cases). Entries in the PIM take place in 72.4 percent of cases for precautionary custody purposes and in the remaining 27.6 percent for execution of the sentence. Almost half of the entries in the PIM (47.9 percent) concern foreign citizens and 11.2% girls.

The crimes committed by minors entering residential services (CPA, Community, PIM) of juvenile justice (Table 3) are mainly against property or the person, or violations of laws on drugs. In particular, the crimes that led to a greater degree of entry into PIM (the most restrictive personal precautionary measure), are 58.5% of cases of crimes against property, 20 in 17.2% against the person and in 12% of crimes related to drugs. For foreign minors, and particularly for foreign girls, crimes against property are even more the reason for entry into PIM (66.7 and 89.8 % of cases, respectively).

Table 2 - Crimes of known authors under the age of 18 by type of definition by the judicial authority and type of crime - Year 2016

[1] YEARS	[3] Archived crimes	[4] Crimes for which criminal proceedings have begun	[5] Total	[6] Per 100.000 minor
[2] TYPES OF CRIMES				
[7] 2012	[8] 17.648	[9] 22.462	[10] 40.110	[11] 1.798,52
[12] 2013	[13] 16.434	[14] 20.160	[15] 36.594	[16] 1.622,05
[17] 2014	[18] 16.176	[19] 18.259	[20] 34.435	[21] 1.506,22
[22] 2015	[23] 15.866	[24] 19.518	[25] 35.384	[26] 1.541,15
[27] 2016 – per delicts				
[28] Voluntary homicide consumed	[29] 17	[30] 16	[31] 33	[32] 1,44
[33] Voluntary attempted murder	[34] 5	[35] 34	[36] 39	[37] 1,70
[38] Manslaughter	[39] 12	[40] 18	[41] 30	[42] 1,31
[43] Roadside murder	[44] 1	[45] 2	[46] 3	[47] 0,13
[48] Beatings	[49] 655	[50] 251	[51] 906	[52] 39,45
[53] Voluntary personal injury	[54] 1.735	[55] 2.047	[56] 3.782	[57] 164,68
[58] Neglected injuries	[59] 347	[60] 79	[61] 426	[62] 18,55
[63] Road injuries	[64] -	[65] 2	[66] 2	[67] 0,09
[68] Insult	[69] 835	[70] 148	[71] 983	[72] 42,80
[73] Threat	[74] 1.086	[75] 914	[76] 2.000	[77] 87,09
[78] Brawl	[79] 137	[80] 210	[81] 347	[82] 15,11
[83] Private Violence	[84] 127	[85] 208	[86] 335	[87] 14,59
[88] Slander	[89] 96	[90] 68	[91] 164	[92] 7,14
[93] Defamation	[94] 151	[95] 88	[96] 239	[97] 10,41
[98] Maltreatment in the family	[99] 85	[100] 150	[101] 235	[102] 10,23
[103] Stalking	[104] 190	[105] 106	[106] 296	[107] 12,89
[108] Theft	[109] 2.237	[110] 3.335	[111] 5.572	[112] 242,62

¹ Law Decree dated June 26, 2014, No. 92, converted with amendments into Law August 11, 2014, no. 117.

[113]Damage	[114]839	[115]729	[116]1.568	[117]68,28
[118]Robbery	[119]254	[120]773	[121]1.027	[122]44,72
[123]Extortion	[124]68	[125]159	[126]227	[127]9,88
[128]Fraud	[129]129	[130]147	[131]276	[132]12,02
[133]Web Fraud	[134]3	[135]7	[136]10	[137]0,44
[138]Fraud in obtaining certificates issued by the criminal record court and their improper use	[139]19	[141]82	[143]101	[145]4,40
[147]Misrepresentations or statements about your own or others' personal identity or qualities	[148]293	[150]361	[152]654	[154]28,48
[156]Violation of weapons regulations	[157]34	[158]96	[159]130	[160]5,66
[161]Violation of laws on drugs and psychotropic substances	[162]1.670	[164]1.820	[166]3.490	[168]151,97
[170]Sexual violence	[171]332	[172]204	[173]536	[174]23,34
[175]Violation of immigration rules	[176]21	[177]57	[178]78	[179]3,40
[180]Receiving	[181]559	[182]1.215	[183]1.774	[184]77,25
[185]Criminal association	[186]11	[187]12	[188]23	[189]1,00
[190]TOTAL (a)	[191]14.670	[192]17.665	[193]32.335	[194]1.407,97

(a) Source: Elaboration on ISTAT Data

Table 3 - Crimes against minors entering the residential services of juvenile justice by citizenship and sex of the authors, type of service and crime Year 2017

[1]	[2] Italian				[3] Foreign				[4] Total			
[5]	[6] T	[7] %	[8] of which	[9] T	[10] %	[11] of which	[12] T	[13] %	[14] of which			
	o		female	ot		female	ot		female			
	ta			al			al					
	I											
[15]	[16]	[17]	[18] Tot	[19] %	[20]	[21]	[22] Tot	[23] %	[24]	[25]	[26] To	[27] %
			al				al				tal	
[28]	RECEPTION CENTRES											
[30] Against the person	[31] 9	[32] 11	[33] 3	[34] 5,	[35] 8	[36] 9,6	[37] 5	[38] 2,	[39] 1	[40] 10,	[41] 8	[42] 3
	5	,5		7	2			7	7	5		,
									7			4
[43] Against the Estate	[44] 3	[45] 47	[46] 31	[47] 5	[48] 6	[49] 70,3	[50] 172	[51] 9	[52] 9	[53] 58,	[54] 20	[55] 8
	9	,0		8,	0			3,	9	9	3	5
	0			5	3			0	3			,
												3
[56] Violation of the provisions on drugs	[57] 2	[59] 31	[61] 16	[63] 3	[65] 9	[67] 11,1	[69] 2	[71] 1,	[73] 3	[75] 21,	[77] 18	[79] 7
	6	,8		0,	5			1	5	3		,
	4			2					9			6
[81] Infringement of the provisions on arms	[82] 4	[84] 4,	[86] -	[88] -	[90] 3	[92] 0,3	[94] -	[96] -	[98] 4	[100] 2,6	[102] -	[104] -
	1	9							4			
[106] Resistance, violence, outrage to a public official	[107] 2	[109] 3,	[111] 3	[113] 5,	[115] 2	[117] 3,4	[119] -	[121] -	[123] 5	[125] 3,2	[127] 3	[129] 1
	5	0		7	9				4			,
												3
[131] Other crimes	[132] 1	[133] 1,	[134] -	[135] -	[136] 4	[137] 5,4	[138] 6	[139] 3,	[140] 6	[141] 3,6	[142] 6	[143] 2
	4	7			6			2	0			,
												5
[144] Total	[145] 8	[146] 10	[147] 53	[148] 1	[149] 8	[150] 100	[151] 185	[152] 1	[153] 1,	[154] 100	[155] 23	[156] 1
	2	0		0	5			0	6		8	0
	9			0	8			0				0

										8									7		
[157]	[158]	[159]	COMMUNITY																		
[160]Against the person	[161]3	[162]20	[163]37	[164]3	[165]1	[166]15,0	[167]21	[168]1	[169]5	[170]18,	[171]58	[172]2									
	9	,5		0,	8			7,	7	4									3		
	4			8	3			1	7										,		
																			9		
[173]Against the Estate	[174]9	[175]50	[176]52	[177]4	[178]7	[179]63,8	[180]95	[181]7	[182]1.	[183]55,	[184]14	[185]6									
	6	,2		3,	7			7,	7	4	7	0									
	2			3	6			2	3												
									8										,		
																			5		
[186]Violation of the provisions on drugs	[187]3	[189]19	[191]28	[193]2	[195]9	[197]8,1	[199]4	[201]3,	[203]4	[205]14,	[207]32	[209]1									
	6	,1		3,	9			3	6	9									3		
	7			3					6										,		
																			2		
[211]Infringement of the provisions on arms	[212]7	[214]4,	[217]-	[219]-	[220]1	[222]1,0	[224]-	[226]-	[228]8	[230]2,8	[232]-	[234]-									
	7	0			2				9												
[236]Resistance, violence, outrage to a public official	[237]3	[239]2,	[241]3	[243]2,	[245]4	[247]3,3	[249]2	[251]1,	[253]7	[255]2,5	[257]5	[259]2									
	8	0		5	0			6	8										,		
																			1		
[261]Other crimes	[262]8	[263]4,	[264]-	[265]-	[266]1	[267]8,8	[268]1	[269]0,	[270]1	[271]6,0	[272]1	[273]0									
	0	2			0			8	8										,		
					7				7										4		
[274]Total	[275]1.	[276]10	[277]120	[278]1	[279]1.	[280]	[281]123	[282]1	[283]3.	[284]100	[285]24	[286]1									
	9	0		0	2	100		0	1		3	0							0		
	1			0	1			0	3			0							0		
	8				7				5												
[287]	[288]	[289]	[290]	[291]	INSTITUTIONS for DETENTION of YOUNG PEOPLE																
[292]Against the person	[293]2	[294]18	[295]8	[296]1	[297]1	[298]15,0	[299]4	[300]2,	[301]3	[302]17,	[303]12	[304]6									
	4	,8		3,	3			9	7	2									,		
	3			8	5				8										2		
[305]Against the Estate	[306]6	[307]52	[308]37	[309]6	[310]6	[311]66,7	[312]123	[313]8	[314]1.	[315]58,	[316]16	[317]8									
	8	,8		3,	0			9,	2	5	0	2									
	1			8	2			8	8										,		
									3										1		
[318]Violation of the provisions on drugs	[319]1	[321]15	[323]8	[325]1	[327]6	[329]7,4	[331]1	[333]0,	[335]2	[337]12,	[339]9	[341]4									
	9	,2		3,	7			7	6	0									,		
	6			8					3										6		
[343]Infringement of the provisions on arms	[344]6	[346]5,	[349]-	[351]-	[353]1	[355]1,1	[357]-	[359]-	[361]7	[363]3,4	[365]-	[367]-									
	5	0			0				5												
[368]Resistance, violence, outrage to a public official	[369]4	[371]3,	[374]2	[376]3,	[377]3	[379]4,1	[382]-	[384]-	[386]8	[388]3,7	[390]2	[392]1									
	5	5		4	7				2										,		
																			0		
[393]Other crimes	[394]6	[395]4,	[396]3	[397]5,	[398]5	[399]5,8	[400]9	[401]6,	[402]1	[403]5,1	[404]12	[405]6									
	0	7		2	2			6	1										,		
									2										2		

[406] Total (a)	[407] 1	[408] 10	[409] 58	[410] 1	[411] 9	[412] 100	[413] 137	[414] 1	[415] 2	[416] 100	[417] 19	[418] 1
	2	0		0	0	100	0		1		5	0
	9			0	3		0		9			0
	0								3			

(a) Source: Elaboration on ISTAT Data

Table 4 – Crimes of juvenile group divided for age (Years 2010-2015) (Source: Tribunale dei Minori)

Group Number	Age					Total
	< 14	14	15	16	17	
One person	59.5	45.5	47.2	51.6	64.4	54.5
Two person	24.6	23.8	22.5	20.6	19.6	21.8
Three person	8.2	12.8	11.5	12.2	7.7	10.3
Four person	3.9	6.9	6.1	6.4	3.2	5.2
More than five	3.8	11.0	12.6	9.3	5.0	8.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N.	613	508	720	987	962	3790

Table 5 - Crimes of juvenile group divided for birth places (Years 2010-2015) (Source: Tribunale dei Minori)

Group Number	Birth Places		Total
	Italy	Foreign	
One person	51.5	61.3	54.5
Two person	21.5	22.5	21.8
Three person	11.5	7.6	10.3
Four person	6.4	2.4	5.2
More than five	9.0	6.2	8.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N.	2643	1147	3790

From the analysis of data on Juveniles reported up to 2015, according to the type of crime, a prevalence of crimes against property is observed (especially theft). Crimes against the person follow, in order of frequency, characterized mainly by voluntary personal injury. The number of violations concerning drugs is also relevant, while the number of crimes against the family, public morality and morality, those against the State, social institutions and public order are minor.

With reference to the nationality of minors, for both Italians and foreigners the prevalence of crimes against property is confirmed, with a lower percentage incidence in the former (55% of the total crimes of Italians) than in the latter (76% of the total of crimes of foreigners) (Table 4-5). On the contrary, violations of the provisions on drugs and crimes against the person have a higher percentage incidence among Italians (respectively 31% and 7%). Still observing the data relating to the complaints, it can be noted that the percentage of minors involved in crimes against property decreases with age, in favor of other types of crimes such as those against the state and public order and violations of the law on the subject of drugs. Furthermore, it can be observed that infra-fourteen-year-old minors and those aged between fourteen and fifteen years record higher than average percentages with reference to crimes against property. For children between the ages of sixteen and seventeen, the percentage referring to crimes against security and public faith is higher than the average, while that of property crimes is lower than the average.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Data from Juvenile Justice Offices contradict many of the clichés about adolescents. It is not true that criminal activity has increased, it is not true that it is connected with foreign minors. On the contrary, the criminal activity is in decline both at the child and adult level, as well as the number of foreigners involved.

It must be acknowledged that the perception of public opinion is often influenced by the mass media which amplify certain crimes. It should also be noted that the crimes, in recent years, have been strongly concentrated against property and against the person: crimes that mainly affect ordinary people. There can be doubts about the exact representation of the phenomenon on the basis of the data provided, as many crimes, especially less serious ones, are not even reported and the number of those registered often depends on the type of tolerance or addiction to crime, on the part of the society.

Gangs have existed in Italy since the 1950's. Nowadays there are very few gangs in Italy. The increase in juvenile delinquency (theft, vandalism and assaults) that Italy is facing has led to a general social perception of violent criminal juvenile gangs. However, "it is not necessarily linked to gang activity"; in fact, "the reality of the problem is possibly not as great or as serious as the media portrays as there are actually not that many

gangs in existence throughout the country” (Brutto & Minesso, 2013). Brutto and Minesso study would be in tune with the aforementioned and that is that the gang phenomenon exists but is partly built by the media, so much so that making use of press reports allows us to perceive the extent of this media construction (Di Nicola, 2007). In this regard, referring to the research conducted by various study centers, it is a media construction of aggregation and socializing practices of young people under the homogeneous and stigmatizing label of the “gangs” engaged in criminal activities. In any case, a useful invitation to reflection is that proposed by Cerbino, who states that the phenomenon of the bands leads us to consider the need to rethink the other, even in a context marked by conflict, perceiving it not as an enemy but as an adversary, as a guarantee for the expression of a plurality of positions and for the unfolding of free play among social actors (Cerbino, 2005). The author also underlines how it is possible to articulate effective responses only if we contribute to generating spaces of speech and expression, of circulation of ideas, of reflection on the meanings of life for society and youth. In order for public policies aimed at young people to be effective, it is necessary to start from the symbolic horizons peculiar to the youth worlds. Grasping the meanings, the reasons and the representations that form the background to the birth of the bands as a specific youth world, to seek solutions referring to the structural causes (many of which are emotional) and not to the manifest and contingent problems. In fact, the institutions' actions, to become effective, must incorporate the profound meanings of the bond and cohesion, of the emotional community that the bands structure, horizons of meaning that many young people no longer find in the normal spaces of everyday life.

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