Chapter 1
Criminality: Theories, Prevention, and Life Space

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ABSTRACT

From an initial analysis relative to the spread of crime, some theories on the causes of criminal behavior are reviewed. After having underlined that many theoretical hypotheses on criminal conduct are not fully satisfactory because they do not offer data and elements useful to concretely evaluate behavior in criminology, the proposal is, especially for prevention, to refer to the theories in the field of psychology linked to the research by K. Lewin and his followers, through action-research. An attempt has been made to re-propose the approach proposed by K. Lewin, believing that this perspective can open up new horizons regarding both scientific research and practical applications, especially in relation to programming a more attentive interpretation and prevention of the crime. This proposal is based on personal experiences in the psychiatric-criminological field, applying research-action.

INTRODUCTION

Through its different manifestations, crime at a planetary level now seems to have spread and become established in urban areas. On the other hand, the control of the various forms of criminal and violent behavior which are winning over increasing spaces in cities, appears to be hindered by a large number of problems which concern the efficiency of the agencies for the control and the sense of civil responsibility. This situation is particularly evident in our societies and appears mainly in periods of growth and of recession. The various aspects of social change are reflected and will be reflected on values which determine the way people, and especially young people, think, therefore trying to observe how the change of values is imposed can also be helpful for trying to interpret the phenomena defined as deviance, criminality and violence, especially in urban areas.
With reference to the social change that is also characterized by technological innovations, it is worth recalling that there is one type of criminality that is also connected to the evolution of technology, the crimes that are committed using computers which however coexist with various sectors of traditional crime. Computer criminality and traditional crimes against property (theft and robbery) take place at the same time, for example, as crimes related to the traffic and sale of drugs. Therefore, reference can be made to conventional and non-conventional crimes which take on a different perspective concerning prevention, fear of criminality and some questions related to victimology.

It is effectively necessary to develop the analysis and study of conventional crimes, and above all, of non-conventional ones. As far as the first aspect is concerned, reference is made essentially to crimes against natural persons, property, morality and various types of harassment and other forms of offence (robbery, theft, personal injury and sexual violence). The expression ‘non-conventional crimes’ refers to offences committed under the cover of public offices, crimes against international laws and those deriving from political activities, including political violence and terrorism and crimes caused by ideological and religious fanaticism, corruption, exploitation of workers, racial discrimination, genocide, fraudulent advertising, pollution and all those crimes connected with organized criminality. In this perspective, the problem of prevention is very complex because the phenomenon of criminality and delinquency, especially in recent years, has been taking on very alarming characteristics, both for its general trend and for the appearance of specific increases of certain types of offence with the considerable persistence of the number of unknown authors of crimes. Present-day crime looks different from that of yesterday, at least in its expressive qualities, to the extent that there is increasing talk of new criminality. Examples of this are industrial espionage implemented with sophisticated technologies, the phenomenon of commercial counterfeiting with the counterfeiting of branded products, insurance frauds, adulteration of food and pharmaceuticals, the colossal levels of economic crime and the irreversible damage of the so-called ecological crime.

Conventional crimes are more frequently present in criminal statistics, whilst non-conventional crimes do not appear clearly in criminal statistics, either because they are not identified or because in some countries they are recorded in special archives. Public opinion seems to ignore non-conventional crime because it is conventional crimes that cause concern and that underlie the fear of criminality, generating insecurity and fear for the safety of people or things.

As a consequence, increasing attention has to be paid to the prevention of crime, repeating once again that in this field an adequate connection between the central state structures and peripheral institutions is absent. The difficulties in providing solutions for complex and recurring problems makes it problematic to foresee and plan the needs linked to crime prevention. In a situation such as the present one, it is likely that repression, which is closely linked to better known and more easily implementable means and procedures, is called for more than prevention. The contrast prevention ↔ repression therefore emerges: the former is a more recent notion, with blurred outlines, the practical usefulness of which does not appear immediately. The latter appears more defined concerning the aims set, even though, in a democracy, its notion can necessarily appear ambivalent: demanded by people who want order and security, it is however criticized when it can damage the freedom and rights of an individual and of the community. In this perspective, the problem of criminality becomes complex and here we aim to analyze the possibilities of extending the area of prevention through a brief review of the theories and some operative suggestions on the possibility of integrating theory and operability in the specific sector of the prevention of crime.