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# DOES THE WELFARE STATE PLAY A ROLE IN URBAN UNREST? LEARNING FROM PARIS, LONDON AND STOCKHOLM RIOTS

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**Percorsi di secondo welfare** is a research project started in April 2011. It is structured as a partnership - led by Dr. Franca Maino as director and Prof. Maurizio Ferrera as scientific supervisor, both academics at the University of Milan - hosted by the research centre Centro Luigi Einaudi in Turin. The venture has been funded and actively supported by several partners, among which some of the most important Italian companies, trade unions and foundations.

It is committed to enhancing the understanding of "second welfare", a mix of social protection programs not funded by the State but provided instead by a wide range of economic and social actors, linked to territories and local communities, in order to tackle the challenges posed by emerging social needs.

The website www.secondowelfare.it – with a new English Section – collects the most significant "second welfare" experiences at national and international level in the attempt to spread knowledge for purposes of evaluation and, hopefully, emulation. The research also seeks to build a strong conceptual framework for future reference.

Since 2011, the research project has been producing hundreds of online articles and research reports, and providing training and advisory services, thus becoming a landmark for social innovators.

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## Keywords

Urban unrest, welfare state, housing, youth unemployment, migration, social cohesion

Abstract

### Does the welfare state play a role in urban unrest? Learning from Paris, London and Stockholm riots

Paris, 2005. London, 2011. Stockholm, 2013. Different timing, country and social model, but the same dynamics: the police shoot and kill a man belonging to an ethnic minority. The accident triggers the explosion of riots, first in the suburbs, then spreading around the whole city and country.

The paper aims at analysing the events from a social policy perspective, focusing on three elements occurring in all of the reported episodes. First, the place, suburbs: riots are geographically very circumscribed, thus showing the persistence of a centre-periphery cleavage often widened by gentrification processes. Secondly, rioters' age: most of them are under 25, reinforcing some sociologists' opinion that riots are, first of all, "a youth underclass uprising from destitute neighbourhoods" (Roy 2005). Lastly, the high involvement of people from minorities as the result of an incomplete integration process, even in countries such as the United Kingdom and France where immigration is already a long-standing phenomenon.

The analysis of these three elements can fruitfully outline that rioters are a part of society living in a sort of "limbo": they are not in work nor in education, they are not foreign nationals nor citizens of the country where live in, or at least they often do not feel they belong there. This state of things seems to feed feelings of exclusion, injustice and detachment from society, especially in suburbs, which have frequently become worlds apart from the rest of the city and the nation. Episodes as the ones analysed suggest how the economic crisis is undermining social cohesion and widening the cleavages between the insiders and the outsiders of society, centre and periphery, different generations, migrants and residents. Such dangerous outcomes pose a threat to all of the "worlds of welfare" (Esping-Andersen 1991) from "social democratic" Sweden to "liberal" United Kingdom, as well as to "corporative" France.

# Does the welfare state play a role in urban unrest? Learning from Paris, London and Stockholm riots

#### INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, several European cities have experienced social disorders, sometimes in the form of social and political protests (more or less pacific) others in the form of riots, the latter ones often ending up in mere looting and vandalism. Researchers and public opinion have identified different causes for such urban unrest, ranging from the economic downturn to the crisis of democracy and representative institutions, from the rise of immigration to the loss of public safety. Although we are not able to identify one individual cause for riots, and even less an unequivocal cause distinguishing one riot from the other, it is crucial to understand these episodes in order to ensure social cohesion and urban rest.

The paper analyses the events from the perspective of social policy, focusing on three elements occurring in each of the reported episodes: the place, rioters' age and rioters' ethnic background. The cities, and their respective countries, have been selected because they are particularly relevant. In fact, they are very similar regarding the features of riots, but extremely different regarding their social, welfare and economic patterns, thus opening interesting questions such as why riots develop following the same dynamics even in so diverse countries and which elements are able to ensure social cohesion.

The research, based on a case study approach, is carried out through the collection of quantitative data and statistics published by several institutions (e.g. Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social affairs and others) as well as with the results of the qualitative analyses by academics, researchers and institutions that investigate people's feelings and opinions about riots. Riots coverage by media and public talk complete the research framework.

#### 1. NARRATIVE OF THE EVENTS: THE SAME PLOT

#### Stockholm, Sweden<sup>1</sup>

Stockholm, 13 May 2013. The police is called to an address in Husby on accounts that a male occupant is threateningly brandishing what looks to be a machete. The man, a 69 years old with mental disease and originally from Portugal is killed by the police. Two stories emerge as to why the man had a weapon, and on his death. According to the news coverage, police tried negotiating and then stormed in the apartment attempting to bring the man under control. When negotiating proved ineffective, one officer fired his gun killing the man, in what was described as an act of self-defence.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Facts and figures are available in several Swedish and international newspapers and websites (e.g. «The Economist», BBC, «The New York Times», Sveriges Radio).

The police filed a report claiming that the victim died at the hospital. This version was soon disputed by witnesses who said the dead man's body was collected directly from the apartment later that night. The police eventually admitted they were wrong and amended their report accordingly. On 15 May, a peaceful protest organized by the community activist group *Megafonen* takes place on demands for a public excuse from the police and for an investigation on the killing by an independent committee. Few days later, on the night of Sunday 19 May, riots break out with about 100 vehicles torched, a garage set on fire forcing the evacuation of an apartment block and a shopping centre vandalized. In the following nights riots spread to other neighbourhoods (such as Kista, Rinkeby, and Bredäng) and cities (such as Malmö, Gothenburg and Uppsala). On Tuesday 28 May, Stockholm police report that the situation in the city is "back to normal" with no disturbances, only a few torched cars, and no reported outbreaks in other Swedish towns. Riots end with about 150 vehicles set on fire, several buildings vandalized - including schools and public buildings – and total damages estimated to be at about 63 millions of Swedish Kronor.

#### London, United Kingdom<sup>2</sup>

London, 4 August 2011. A police officer shoots and kills a 29-year-old man, Mark Duggan, during an intelligence-led targeted vehicle stop procedure on the Ferry Lane Bridge next to Tottenham Hale Station. On Saturday 6 August, an initially peaceful protest is organized by Duggan's friends and relatives to demand justice, maintaining that the victim was not armed: about 100 people gather outside the police station in Tottenham requesting to speak with a senior police officer about the case. Tensions grow and few hours later, shortly before 9pm, the crowd begins starting fires, looting and battling with the police. Disorders end at dawn. In the following nights, riots spread to other London neighbourhoods and British cities. On Sunday 7 August there are fewer clashes with the police, with most of the disorders related to the looting of shops and retail outlets in Brixton, Oxford Circus, and Hackney. The third night of disorders sees one of the most intense 24 hours of civil unrest in recent English history: only in the city of London, disturbances affect 22 out of the 32 boroughs. The worst of the disorders takes place in Croydon, which becomes the scene of widespread arsons and the place where Trevor Ellis, 28, is shot dead. Meanwhile the riots begin to spread elsewhere in England<sup>3</sup>. The fourth night sees unprecedented numbers of police agents in the capital, with 16,000 officers deployed. London is comparatively quiet, with only minor skirmishes. However, rioting continues in other parts of England, including Gloucester, Liverpool, Nottingham and Birmingham, where three men – Haroon Jahan, 21, Shazad Ali, 30, and Abdul Musavir, 31 – are killed hit by a car while protecting local shops. A 68-year-old man, Richard Mannington Bowes, dies on 11 August after being attacked while attempting to stamp out a litterbin on fire in Ealing on the evening of 8 August. Figures by the Parliament report of 5,175 offences recorded by the police (mainly burglary and criminal damages) and almost 4,000 people arrested by early September 2011 (UK Ministry of Justice 2012). Along with the five deaths, at least 16 people are injured as a direct result of violence-related acts and a total cost of damages of about  $f_{300}$  million in London alone is registered.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Facts and figures are available in several international and British newspapers and websites (e.g. BBC, «The Guardian», «The New York Times», etc.) and UK Institutions (United Kingdom Ministry of Justice 2012; Lewis *et. al.* 2011; UK Department for Communities and Local Government 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Midlands, Birmingham, West Bromwich and Nottingham all saw serious unrest. Clashes with police also began in Liverpool, parts of the Medway in Kent, Thames Valley, Bristol, Leeds and Huddersfield.

#### Paris, France<sup>4</sup>

Paris, 27 October 2005. In Clichy-sous-Bois, an eastern suburb of Paris, a police patrol is called to a construction site to investigate a possible break-in. When seeing the patrol, a group of young people walking in the street - namely Bouna Traoré (15 years old), Zyed Benna (17), and Muhittin Altun (17) - hide in an electrical substation in order to avoid interrogation. Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna die there by electrocution, while the third one, Muhittin Altun, is seriously injured. The event triggers an escalation of conflicts between groups of young people and the police, accused of harassment and brutality. On 29 October, hundreds of people take part in a silent march through Clichy-sous-Bois, in memory of the teenagers. On 30 October, at the end of Ramadam, a tear gas grenade is launched into the mosque of the Cité des Bousquets. The Police deny responsibility but acknowledges that it is the same type of weapon used by the French riot police. As the news spread, unrest overflies from the Paris area, where it was initially circumscribed, to other areas of the Île-de-France region and to other cities around the country, affecting 243 communes in 64 departments, until on 8 November the President Jacques Chirac declares the state of emergency. On 16 November, the French Parliament approves a three-month extension of the state of emergency (which ends on 4 January 2006). Riots end 20 days later, with a total amount of about 9,000 torched vehicles, dozens of buildings vandalized - including public buildings and schools - nearly 3,000 arrests, mostly of teenagers, 126 police and fire-fighters injured, a total damage of over €200 million and two victims: Jean-Jacques Le Chenadec, knocked to death by a group of rioters, and a French-Algerian concierge, Salah Gaham, died attempting to extinguish a fire at his workplace.

#### 2. THE CENTRE-PERIPHERY CLEAVAGE: SUBURBS AS A PLACE FOR SOCIAL CONFLICT?

In each of the cases, a first fixed element can be identified: the place. Each riot is geographically and socially very circumscribed; it breaks out in the suburbs of a capital city and eventually spreads to the city centre and the rest of the country.

Clichy-sous-Bois is a Municipality in Eastern Paris, in the Department of Saine-Saint Denis. Formerly a little village, during the post-World War II economic boom it has experienced a huge urban development, due to the mass migration of workers from French provinces and ex-colonies who settled in the so called grand ensemble, the huge buildings of the French suburbs. Today Clichy inhabitants are mostly first and second-generation migrants, and about half of them are under 25, a quite relevant fact (Caracciolo 2016). The inhabitants of the neighbourhood originally belong to the industrial working class that has almost disappeared since the industrial sector has been replaced by the new economy of services and e-businesses, which is not suitable for workers with low skills, poor schooling and, on top of everything, a self-fulfilling sense of exclusion. Moreover, as many other *vités*, the suburb has been marked by significant urban decay and the decline of local commerce, creating an atmosphere of depressed sterility and social exile. As a result, in 2005 unemployment rate was 25 per cent, reaching over 40 per cent among the youngsters. Therefore, many families live on a mix of welfare benefits and underground employment, while poverty gets to be an extremely compelling issue. The neighbourhood is also afflicted by severe housing deprivation: many of its buildings suffer from some combinations of water damage, insulation problems and elevators out of order, but neither the owners of the buildings nor the City possess funds to repair or replace them. Moreover, public housing shortage had increased overcrowded and squatted

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Fact and figures are published in several international and French newspapers and websites (e.g. Centre d'analyse stratégique (2007), «Le Monde», «Le Figaro»).

dwellings, especially for migrants. It was exactly in this kind of buildings that in spring and summer 2005 – few months before the riots – some fires broke out making several victims, including some children<sup>5</sup>. Hence, at the time of the riots social and living conditions in French suburbs were already concerning because characterized by: high unemployment rates; a well-developed informal economy, including a series of grey market institutions revolving around drug dealing or the fencing of stolen consumer items; density of youth gang and lack of public safety caused by cuts in police forces (Lagrange 2007). Most of the boroughs involved in riots are classified as *Zone Urbaine Sensible* (*ZUS*) and *Zone Franches Urbaine* (ZFU), thus qualifying them for receiving state and regional assistance to stave off their decline.

The Tottenham area is part of the London Borough of Haringey, in Northern London. From the geographical to the economic perspective, Haringey is a land of contrasts, up to the point that it is classified as the borough with the highest social disparity in London: of its 19 wards, four are in the richest 10 per cent (mainly in the West, such as Highgate, Muswell Hill and Crouch End) and five are in the poorest 10 per cent (mainly in the East, Tottenham included)<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, at the time of facts, Haringey had one of the worst rankings in the city for deprivation, housing and health (Aldridge et al. 2013). Unemployment rate was 10.5 per cent, highly above the London and England average, growing to 20.8 per cent for 16-24 years old (North London Citizens 2012). According to the Citizens' Inquiry commissioned by North London Citizens7, many respondents identify the cause of the riots as the aesthetics of Tottenham (i.e. "lack of bins", "horrible smells", "clusters of chicken shops and betting shops") and the "unpleasant high street shops and unpleasant living conditions" as a key cause of young people not respecting the community. Finally, Haringey was affected by severe housing deprivation: it was one of the London boroughs with the highest number of overcrowded houses (20 per cent or more) and the highest number of households living in temporary accommodation (4,600) (Aldridge et al. 2013, 44). In the last decades, London has been widely hit by the rising cost of housing, so that high accommodation costs are seen as one of the key drivers of poverty in the city (Trust for London and New Policy Institute 2013). Moreover, some boroughs like Haringey have experienced a gentrification process that forced people to move to cheaper areas, like Tottenham, making it a borough populated by a working class that rarely owns the house they live in. On the long run, this phenomenon has fostered negligence and that attitude "Them-Us" typical of riots. Finally, Tottenham is regarded as one of the most multicultural neighbourhoods in Europe. Even if there are several ethnic groups, it is usually classified as a "black area" since it hosts mainly Afro-Caribbean, the first to settle here after the Second World War, followed by Colombian, Albanese, Kurdish, Turkish, Irish and Portuguese in the 1980s.

Husby is a district in the borough of Rinkeby-Kista, North-West Stockholm. It is part of the large-scale housing project the *Million Program* (Miljonprogrammet) aimed at constructing one million dwelling units from 1965 to 1974 in order to remedy shortage of housing and improve social equality, tightly interknitted with spatial uniformity. As Sweden was, in the late 1960s, industrially strong and rapidly growing, homes were made for incoming labourers, while since the 1970s the Swedish economy slowed considerably and some areas suddenly had a housing surplus. Moreover,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Since April 2005, the lack of safe public housing has turned deadly for 48 poor immigrants who died in three separate fires in municipal housing and abandoned buildings in Paris. In April a fire in an old hotel hosting immigrants killed 24 people; on the night of 25<sup>th</sup> August, 17 people were killed in the fire of a building in the 13<sup>th</sup> arrondissement; on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 7 people from Ivory Coast were killed in the Marais.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Data available on the Haringey Council and London's Poverty Profile websites.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>North London Citizens is an alliance of 40 civic institutions, mostly faith-based and educational that work together to make change in their communities after the August 2013 events.

the simplistic shapes required by the large scale of the project and the speed of construction, together with the need for renovation of the buildings, affected the attractiveness of these areas that started being considered undesirable by Swedes and attracting for new waves of immigrants. Over time some of these areas have become suburban ghettos for newly-arrived families and individuals, isolated from the mainstream Swedish society. In many of these disadvantaged neighbourhoods riots already occurred in spring 2009, and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency classified urban unrest as "one of the five strategic challenges to the societal security of the country". The isolation of such suburbs is particularly evident in comparison to grater Stockholm and Sweden as a whole. In 2013, Husby's 7.4 per cent unemployment rate for the aged 18-64, which reached in some areas over 8 per cent, was the highest in the city compared to the 3 per cent rate of greater Stockholm. Average income was 177,000 SEK, almost half of the city average income, 351,600 SEK. While in Stockholm 60 per cent of the population hold a tertiary education level and only 9.5 per cent an elementary education level, percentages are respectively 31 per cent and 24 per cent in Husby, with a relevant impact on the quality of jobs and democratic participation - i.e. turnout in 2014 local elections was 56.7 per cent, compared to a City rate of 82.1 per cent<sup>8</sup>. Husby is a multicultural neighbourhood as well: of its 11,978 inhabitants, 10,300 (86 per cent) are foreign born, or born in Sweden but from foreign born parents, compared to 31.5 per cent of the city as a whole. The percentage of non-European origin is 86.7 per cent, the majority coming from Asia (46.7 per cent) and Africa (35.4 per cent), while in Stockholm is 61.4 per cent (Stockholms stad). Finally, Husby suffers from housing deprivation as several buildings need to be refurbished and the percentage of overcrowding dwellings is among the highest in Stockholm<sup>9</sup>.

Figures reveal how in neighbourhoods involved in riots life conditions highly differ from the rest of the city and country, showing the persistence of a centre-periphery cleavage often widened by the gentrification process.

It is a very relevant aspect, since the place where we live affects our living conditions and opportunities: for instance, for young people overcrowded apartments do not allow them to have space to do their homework and often encourage them to spend their leisure time outside (Kustermans 2014). Space also has a less direct but equally relevant impact, which is linked to culture: the experience of a space as a meaningful place is socially mediated by reputation as what other people think about a space influences in turn how other people think about it and themselves, in a constant comparison with other places (Kustermans 2014, 20). Reputation works on a social level as it creates opportunities, making activities possible, or easy, and impossible, or difficult - i.e. the poor reputation of a suburb can prevent the opening of new businesses, or it pushes owners of a chain of supermarkets to offer inferior products; living in a suburb can limit the chance of a Curriculum Vitae to be selected. When asked about what happened in Tottenham, many respondents answered "not only the poor condition and bad reputation of Tottenham was one of the contributing factors that led to the riots but now, in the aftermath of the riots, the perception of Tottenham across London and in the world has been damaged even further. This has a negative effect on our self-esteem and on the economic opportunity here in Tottenham" (North London Citizens 2013).

Reputations shape identities as well. As explained in the following section, children and young people living in suburbs often believe that there is something wrong with them and their families, or that the society and the political system are giving up on them, pushing to embracing some sort of geographical determinism. Furthermore the place of birth contributes to defining identities (Messili and Aziza 2004). As asserted by the sociologist Roy (2005), what coalesced the rioters is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Figures available on the Stockholms stad website.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

first of all a "neighbourhood identity": the neighbourhood group will join to protect the territory from intruders, whoever they are (a rival gang, police but also journalists)<sup>10</sup>. Identities sometimes take on an antagonistic form, so that suburbs have been marred by inter-cités feuds during the recent years (infightings between groups with knives, baseball bats and more rarely guns, resulting in around a half-dozen dead a year for all France), which fosters the mentality "those from the suburbs (us) against the society (them)", typical of riots.

Moreover peripheries are often *stigmatized*, considered as centre of decline, criminalisation and danger, as demonstrated by the negative connotation words – such as *banlieue*, *badland*, *forörtene* – often used to refer to them. Their negative reputation is often fuelled by media and public talk. The clearest example is the French one, where suburbs have been consistently presented as culturally, if not racially, different from mainstream France. Few months before the riots, commenting on the killing of a young boy by a rival gang in the suburbs of *La Courneuve*, the then-Interior Minister of the Chirac Government Nicolas Sarkozy claimed he would "nettoyer les cités au Karcher" (clean up the *cité* with a Karcher) and used words as "racaille" (scum) and "voyous" (thugs) referring to the inhabitants of the suburbs.

The "bad image" of suburbs is finally worsened by the little contact between the groups living in suburbs and the wealthier parts of the cities. Since communities do not communicate and know each other, they develop prejudice and do not integrate. This relative dissociation helps to develop a generalised poor image of suburbs among outsiders as well as residents; suburbs have come to be felt as places where people hang around aimlessly, apparently exploiting the rest of society while they wait for their unemployment benefits, but not wanting to, or being able to, contribute to that society (Kustermans 2014).

In conclusion, European peripheries have often become centre of marginalisation, sometimes segregation. Originally built to host migrant workers who eventually improved their social status and moved to better neighbourhoods, they have become a permanent condition for many of their inhabitants, who often feel they are missing every chance of mobility, both geographical and social. This belief is particularly common among the youngsters, as we will see in the chapter below.

#### 3. THE GENERATIONAL CLEAVAGE

The second relevant element is rioters' age: rioters are mainly young people, often minors. An explanation for such a fact can be attributed to young people's living conditions, as they are the most hit by the economic crisis and the retrenchment of the welfare state, not only in the analysed boroughs but in the whole citizenry. Commenting on the French riots, Olivier Roy (2005) pointed out that "The movement is first of all a youth underclass uprising from destitute neighbourhoods". French rioters are mainly males and aged between 12 to 25 years old (roughly half of the arrested people are under 18). At the time of facts, in Clichy-sous-Bois over 40 per cent of under 25 were jobless, an unemployment rate similar to that of most of the *banlieues*, but considerably higher than the national rate, around 25 per cent (Crumley 2012). The same happens in United Kingdom: according to the data from «The Guardian» and The London School of Economics and Political Science (2011) and the Ministry of Justice (2011), about 80 per cent of UK rioters were 10-24 years old. Evidence from several sources suggests they were generally poorer than the national average and less educated<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, many of the variables that classified Haringey as one of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Young people from suburbs are often named by the name of the estates: "Cité des 4000" at la Courneuve; "La Madeleine" at Evreux; "Val Fourré" at Mantes la Jolie; "Les Minguettes" at Vénissieux, near Lyon (Roy 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Lewis *et al.* (2011) suggest that 59 per cent of rioters came from the most deprived 20 per cent areas in UK, slightly lower than the Ministry of Justice picture of those persecuted, which found that almost two thirds of young riot came from the poorest fifth of areas.

the boroughs with the worst living conditions in London were affecting particularly young people: overcrowding/temporary accommodations, underage pregnancies, premature mortality, early school drop-outs and low GCSE<sup>12</sup> achievement at 19 (Aldridge *et al.* 2013). In Husby, youth unemployment was twice than in the rest of the city, even if youth unemployment was a concern for the whole country: according to the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, in 2012 Sweden had the highest ratio of youth unemployment versus unemployment in general among OECD countries. Unemployment rate for the under 24 was 24.2 per cent, four times higher than the average rate, 8 per cent<sup>13</sup>.

In each of the cases under consideration younger generations, especially those living in the poorest areas of the cities, suffer from lack of opportunities and severe deprivation rates, which feed feelings of injustice and abandonment. "Nothing for young people to do", "lack of values" or "unemployment" are just few of the reasons outlined in order to explain English riots (North London Citizens 2012), while talking about French banlieues several experts report that "a sense of belonging to an underclass excluded and ignored" is spreading among youth (Roy 2005). It is a classic phenomenon in France, but also in Western Europe. The industrial working class of their fathers has almost disappeared, replaced by the new economy of services and e-businesses that unfortunately do not suit very well the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods, who often lack skills and self-confidence – i.e. Kista, known as the Swedish Silicon Valley, is only one metro stop from Husby, but Husby's youngsters can only manage to get a job in the rental sector. Moreover, some researches report that rioters often felt that the opportunities they saw suitable to others are not available to them (Morrell, Scott, McNeish and Webster 2011). While young people are constantly being persuaded they need to acquire expensive things in order to have status, too often they are not being offered a decent chance to work and earn (Aldridge et al. 2013). As an example, a lot of them talked about looting or vandalising shops where they had earlier sought jobs (Lewis et al. 2011).

It has anyway to be said that even if poorer, these young guys often have expensive clothing, iPods and new cars. Riots do not break out just because of poverty and lack of opportunities, in fact causes are much more complex. An interesting issue to investigate has to do with the reason why dissatisfaction turns out in riots, mostly in the forms of vandalism and looting, instead of leading to political protests or strikes. The clearest example is the British one, where looting was the most common type of unlawful activity: about 2,500 shops and business are estimated to have been looted during the riots across England, 61 per cent of which were retail premises mostly selling electrical goods (pc, video games, mobile phones, etc.), clothing and sportswear (North London Citizens 2012)<sup>14</sup>.

A first explanation can be seen in the absence of a "culture of legality and law compliance". Many of the rioters have previous cautions or convictions. Since many families live on a mix of welfare and underground "business", the youngers are often the ones who bring in the money from petty traffic, entering the illegal world when they are still children. The suburbs were riots took place, especially the French ones, report high levels of juvenile delinquency, often fuelled by youth gangs, who take control of the streets and settle their feuds through a "coded" violence. Regardless of youth gangs having, or not, orchestrated riots, their attitude, aggressive manhood and rites of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup>General Certificate of Secondary Education.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup>Data available on UNRIC website.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup>When asked the reasons, rioters reported complex and varied motivations such as "simple greed to gain goods for free", "euphoria", "rewards reacting to a society full of greed", "pressure and hunger for the right brand names", "homologate to a culture of wanting stuff where if you're not wearing like no one don't want to be your friend" (Lewis *et al.* 2011).

passage based on violence and infightings with the police are likely to have provided grounds for the outburst of riots<sup>15</sup> (Mauger 2013).

Besides the absence of legality, another explanation as for why youth dissatisfaction takes the road of riots instead of that of social protest is that youth are loosing trust in institutions and in their own capability to change the world and their personal status – "Poverty, unemployment, lack of confidence in government. Young people feel let down, they have no hope" (North London Citizens 2012). As mentioned above, the youngsters have the highest inactivity rates and the fast worsening living conditions. A combination of debt, joblessness, globalisation, demographics and rising housing prices is depressing the income and prospects of millions of young people across the developed world, resulting in an unprecedented inequality between generations. *Millennials* are the first generation growing up sure that they will be poorer than their parents, increasingly cut out of the wealth generated in western societies (Barr, Malik and Oltermann 2016; Barr and Zapponi 2016). In this context, some of the youngsters became disillusioned by a backward system and institutions they think they cannot influence, and by a nation that sometimes they do not feel they belong to.

#### 4. The ethnic cleavage

A third crucial element is ethnicity. All of the victims whose death triggered the explosion of riots are immigrants, people of foreign origin or belonging to an ethnic minority: Malian and Tunisian in Paris, Black in London, Portuguese in Stockholm. Furthermore, all the suburbs where accidents occurred are highly multicultural: 76 per cent of Clichy residents under 18 have at last a foreign born parent, the highest percentage in the country (Limes 2016, 22); 54.7 per cent of Haringey population is from an ethnic minority (North London Citizens 2012); 86 per cent of Husby residents are foreign born, or born in Sweden from foreign born parents.

What about the rioters? Immigrants and people of foreign origins were the most numerous components in Swedish riots, while in the French case figures are much more complicated. Among the 1,800 people arrested, foreign residents were only 120, while others were French citizens, often of foreign origins. Moreover, the bulk of the French rioters were second generation migrants but, if we consider the names of the arrested people, it is more ethnically mixed than one could have expected (in addition to the second generation of Muslim background – mainly North Africans, plus some Turks and Africans – there are also many non-Muslim Africans as well as people with French, Spanish or Portuguese names) (Roy 2005). The British case is once again different. Even if many of the suburbs involved are highly multicultural, immigration and ethnicity appear to be less relevant as an explanation. According to The Guardian and The London School of Economics and Political Science (2011), interviewees did not consider the episodes as "race riots", and only 54 per cent considered racial tensions as an important or very important cause of the riots. As a matter of fact, where ethnicity is recorded figures varied significantly: in London 32 per cent of defendants were White, whereas in Merseyside the percentage rose to 79 per cent. By contrast, 15 per cent of defendants in Merseyside were Black, compared to Nottingham where 59 per cent were Black. At the national level, 42 per cent of the arrested rioters were White, 46 per cent Black, 7 per cent Asian, 5 per cent Other (Ministry of Justice 2011).

Although immigration is a central issue in all of the cases, there are some differences as well. First of all the countries are at a different step of the "immigration-to-integration" process. In the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>The role of gangs in riots is controversial. While many of the French rioters were already organised in gangs, regarding United Kingdom analysts asserts that even if gangs members were certainly present in many of the disturbances, there is little evidence they were orchestrating the riots (Lewis *et. al.* 2011).

United Kingdom, ethnic background is not always considered as a central explanation of riots, even if minorities often complain about police harassment (especially regarding stop and search procedures). The French case is the most complex. Despite the fact that immigration is an historical phenomenon, according to some researchers immigrants have not been successfully integrated into the French community yet (Silverstein and Tetreault 2006; Melotti 2007). Moreover, people of foreign origins are mostly descendants of immigrants from Maghreb and other French ex-colonies; therefore they are Muslim and their integration embraces the broader Islam-West conflict. French riots took place in 2005, few years after September 11, 2001 and few months after London terrorist attacks, which had made coexistence harsher all over the world and in France as well. During the months before the riots, several episodes exacerbated the tensions between Muslims' and the French community; among them, Sarkozy's and other politicians' declarations, radical Islamists' declarations, more frequent police controls, and the grenade on the mosque of Clichy.

In Sweden, immigration is a more recent but an extremely fast growing phenomenon. The number of inhabitants not born in Sweden has risen steadily in the course of the last thirty years, from 7.5 per cent in 1980 to 14 per cent in 2009 (Statistics Sweden 2009), partially due to the liberal refugee policy the Country undertook since the Balkan conflict and is now seeking to limit. This new diversity is concentrated particularly in neighbourhoods such as Husby, where residents with a non-European background mainly live. Despite the fact that Swedish immigrants are better off than in many other European countries thanks to the efficient and generous integration system, their living conditions are getting harder. Among the reasons for that: the high skills required for entering the labour market, linked to the lack of low-wage options for those without either Swedish language ability or education and vocational training; the concentration of immigrants in suburbs with higher rates of unemployment and schools with students with worse education outcomes. Given this, the real problem seems to be not only that immigrants have borne the brunt of Sweden's increasing inequality, but that as a result, they are also being excluded from meaningful membership of the Swedish nation. Issues like police brutality, racial profiling and territorial stigmatisation have made immigrants feel like outsiders in Sweden (McLaughlin 2013). Moreover, immigration is less and less supported by the Swedish, who started asking themselves whether their model can survive with so many immigrants continuing to arrive in the country, bringing with them their own notions of trust, morality, and community. A related fear is that the support for the high tax welfare state will diminish because of the view that many immigrants take more than they contribute from the system. Such feelings are fostering, in turn, xenophobic-right forces such as Sverigedemokraterna, which has grown from 2.9 per cent in 2006 to 12.9 per cent in 2014.

In conclusion, on the one hand intolerance towards immigrants is growing, while on the other the share of immigrants and their descendants – especially those who are born in Europe – is getting greater too. Still, these minorities often grow apart from the rest of the nation, with potentially dangerous consequences. Frustration can be found also in the anger towards police, seen as the Authority and the State they do not recognize: the forces of law and order were one of the main targets during the riots, and in each of the cases police harassment is reported by the residents of the neighbourhood.

#### 5. Welfare state and social conflict

As explained so far, the three cases show several similarities, even if they refer to three different social and welfare worlds: "Liberal" in United Kingdom, "Conservative-corporatist" in France and "Social-democratic" in Sweden.

The United Kingdom has a long story of urban conflict. Since 1980, urban conflicts have crossed its cities and neighbourhoods, especially those most affected by the de-industrialization

process (Bergamaschi 2009, 38) such as Brixton (1981 and 1985), Brighton (1985), Tottenham (1981 and 1985) and Bredford (2001). The roots of such turmoil can be found in diverse factors: a markedly industrial system that has frequently caused brutal conflicts such as the Winter of Discontent in 1978-1979 and miners' strikes in 1984-1985; a widespread conservative culture where nobility and lords are still influent; interracial tensions due to an extraordinarily multicultural society; concentration of hooligans and baby gangs participating in fights, looting and vandalism; high social stratification and low levels of decommodification achieved by its model of welfare, resulting in one the highest Gini Index among Europe (Eurostat 2013). Levels of inequality are significantly higher in the English-speaking countries than in continental Europe and Scandinavia. The answer to this puzzle is not that the welfare states of the English-speaking countries are less effective than those of other countries, but that their levels of market-income inequality are greater (Castles et al. 2010). The British welfare label has been strongly debated: it has been classified as a "Liberal World" (Esping-Andersen 1990; Leibfried 1992), "English-Speaking" (Castles and Obinger 2008), "Anglo-Saxon" (Ferrera 1996), "British" (Bonoli 1997) and then as "Radical" (Castles and Mitchell 1993), "European" (Obinger & Wagschal 1998) and "Undefined" (Shalev 1996). The system is so controversial because it has the core characteristics of the Liberal Model<sup>16</sup> but, when looking more closely at the strategies of redistribution adopted in the country, there are significant differences, the most evident being the existence of the National Health System - universal and publicly funded – and the more redistributive end, that classifies it as a 'radical' example of the English-speaking worlds of welfare (Castles and Mitchell 1993).

France has a long story of conflict as well, from the strikes for labour and civil rights to the urban conflicts, from the summer 1981 in Lyon to the ones in the 1990s (Vaulx-en-Velin, Sartrouville, Paris, Mantes-la-Jolie, 1991) and the 2000s. Several reasons have been outlined: urban segregation (Perotti and Thépaut 1990); social exclusion of the young proletarian first and second-generation migrants (Jazouli 1992); the failure of the republican integration model, which does not recognize ethnicity as it seeks cultural assimilation (Touraine 1992). Focusing on the welfare state, the French welfare system is classified as "Conservative-corporatist" (Esping-Andersen 1990), "Bismarkian", or "Continental". It is a *male breadwinner* system in which social insurance is the primary delivery mechanism and where access to benefits is mainly based on work and contribution records. Also, benefits are mainly in cash and calculated as a proportion of past earnings, the biggest share of financing comes from social contributions paid by employers and employees, and the governance and management of the system are neither directly run by the state nor by private companies, but by collective compulsory social insurance funds (Palier 2010).

Despite its relative generosity, it is affected by two problems. The first one is that even if its system had become 'quasi-universal' by the 1970s<sup>17</sup>, it has remained fragmented and unequal, providing better benefits to some professions (core industrial workers, public servants) than to others (agricultural workers, for instance, or the self-employed)<sup>18</sup>. In such a system, the degree of social protection strongly depends on professional status, gender, and age of the individual. The system is thus characterized by medium levels of decommodification, since it weakens dependency to the market but it is not able to eliminate it (the amount of social benefits is related to prior employment,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Low levels of public spending on welfare and weak development of social citizenship rights; limited state intervention and a strong preference for private welfare spending.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Thanks to progressive extension of both the coverage and the generosity of the various social insurance schemes already in existence during the "Golden Age".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> In the late 1990s in France there were nineteen different health insurance schemes, over 600 basic pension schemes, and more than 6,000 complementary pension schemes (Palier 2010).

earnings and family situation), and a medium-low level of destratification that strongly reproduces inequalities among income and gender. The second problem is that after the 1970s crisis, France, just like other countries of continental Europe, wanted first of all to preserve the jobs of skilled male workers by excluding other workers (the unskilled, women, the young) from the labour market. Thus, it sought to resolve its employment problem by decreasing the supply of work, implementing a 'labour shedding' strategy, which led to what Esping-Andersen called a 'welfare without work' syndrome (Palier 2010). The strategy favoured income guarantees, early retirement, and reductions in working hours in order to maintain the salaries and job security of highly skilled, highly productive, permanent (male) workers, at the expense of less qualified or unqualified workers. This resulted in both very low levels of employment and a high degree of labour market polarization (Esping-Andersen 1996) between a well integrated segment (skilled males between 25 and 55 years of age) and a marginalized or excluded one (poorly skilled or unskilled workers, the young, women, workers over 55 years of age, and migrants), which is precisely the segment rioters often belong to. One should also add that significant structural reforms implemented during the 2000s with the aim of stabilizing social expenditure retrenchment led to a new architecture of the Bismarckian welfare system in which a secondary world of work and welfare is developing for outsiders, made up of secondary 'atypical' jobs, activation policies, and income-tested targeted benefits. As the population is no longer covered by the same guarantees, the new architecture created new forms of vertical dualism in society. Even though the system was already fragmented and unequal, it is clear that recent trends are likely to deepen the divisions and create new social cleavages: a dual labour market, a dual welfare system, and a society even more divided between insiders and outsiders than it was before. Such condition of marginalization seems to hit, above all, those already excluded neighbourhoods, their social welfare budget, and funds devoted to their neighbourhood associations, after-school programs, community policing and internships (Silverstein and Tetreault 2006).

As in "Social-democratic" Sweden conflict is much less familiar, riots have sparked a critical public debate. Sweden has been considered one of the most egalitarian and inclusive countries of the world. Back when Europe was divided by the Iron Curtain, the Scandinavian Countries, and particularly Sweden, were frequently mentioned as a successful "third-way" compromise between unregulated capitalism and state socialism for their ability to produce desirable social outcomes while at the same time maintaining economic competitiveness and full employment (Kautto 2010). The success of the Nordic Model was based on a virtuous combination of universal welfare provisions, collective bargaining, labour market regulation and free market capitalism; such combination was able to achieve low income inequality and poverty rates, smaller differences in standards of living and more pronounced gender equality. Nevertheless, from the mid 1980s the system has been widely reformed in the attempt to achieve a balance between the Keynesian tradition, which had a solid backing in the labour movement, and the Monetarian ideas, that had become increasingly fashionable (Bengtsson 2013). Influenced by global competition, and following the path toward integration in the European Union, the Nordic welfare started converging with European Countries (Kautto 2010). The early-1990s Swedish crisis accelerated the transformation process, inducing governments to reduce the public sector's share of GDP and to cutback the social insurance system through the introduction of more restrictive access to supplementary welfare benefits. By 2006, the conservative government implemented major changes in the welfare system, the most important of which is the new work-incentive policy (Arbetslinjen): unemployment and sickness benefits have been reduced; work-fare measures have been introduced; all tax deductions have been designed for the employed in order to foster job take-ups and to ultimately recalibrate the once-meagre difference of income between those who are employed and those who are not. According to some research, the reform increased polarisation between insiders and outsiders, between those who have a strong position in the labour market and those who do not (Bengtsson 2013). The Swedish Model

has now significantly changed its original orientation towards the control of market structures, and even if the welfare system is still financed via taxes, it is increasingly private in its operational sphere. These reforms produced also unwelcome outcomes, such as the rise of marginalisation and poverty, especially in certain suburbs and for the most disadvantaged categories of workers (Schierup, Ålund and Kings 2014). Even if Swedish standards of living are still among the highest in Europe, Sweden is the country where income gaps have widened the most since 1985 (OECD 2011), falling from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> ranking among the most egalitarian countries. The Gini Index has risen from 0.19 in 1995 to 0.27 in 2012, while relative poverty increased from 4 per cent in 1995 to 9 per cent in 2012 (OECD)<sup>19</sup>. Finally, according to several studies, the Nordic Swedish model is facing "a special form of state individualism"<sup>20</sup> and an "outsidership" societal dichotomy that could have likely created a fertile ground for riots (Bengtsson 2013).

Despite the attempt of avoiding over simplistic explanations, it emerges is that social conflict is affecting different social and welfare models. Regardless of their characteristics in terms of generosity and universality, none of them has been able to prevent these countries from developing social conflict and the growth of inequality. Moreover, welfare retrenchment is particularly affecting suburbs, which already presented higher levels of deprivation and marginalisation.

#### 6. CONCLUSION

The paper aims at investigating the reasons why social disorders and urban unrest frequently affect our society.

Drawing from the present analysis, it can be concluded that rioters are often a section of society living in a sort of "limbo": they do not study nor work, they are not foreigners nor citizens of the Country they live in, or at least they do not feel they belong there<sup>21</sup>.

However, rioters' marginalisation is not the only explanation: riots are not triggered only by poverty and social exclusion, and cannot be considered as simple protests. As explained in Section 3, such discontent does not take the road of political protests, like for instance the ones for civil rights (i.e. there are no typical elements of organized protests such as slogans and banners, a protests-leader, a formal list of requests). Rather, it turns out in mere vandalism and looting, expression of an *exit* attitude rather than a *voice* one (Hirschman 1970).

Regardless of considering riots as protests, the analysis highlights that in contemporary society several cleavages are coming to the fore: between centre and periphery, youth and adults, richer and poorer citizens, migrants and old residents. Even if we cannot identify an only one explanation, a crucial factor is the loss of social mobility, the "elevator" that has somehow ensured cohesion in Europe for at least fifty years. The recent polarisation of our societies, and in particular the erosion of the middle class, exposes the continent to the threat of social conflict and political turmoil. Despite the fact that several factors contribute to such a result (e.g. economic crisis, globalisation, migration), the welfare state retrenchment seems to be one of the most relevant ones, due to Gov-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Data available on OECD website.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> On the relationship between the individual and the collective as outlined in Henrik Berggren's and Lars Trägårdh's book, Are Swedes people? Affinities and independence in modern Sweden, the authors assert that the Swedish welfare society has made individuals more independent from their families and civil society than individuals in other welfare models because it organises major aspects of the welfare structure in collective forms, such as student grants and social security systems. This seems to have led to a special form of state individualism (Bengtsson 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Just 51 per cent of rioters agreed with the statement "I feel I am part of British Society" compared to 92 per cent of the public (Lewis *et al.* 2011).

ernments' loss of ability to balance up the social, economic and geographical inequalities between individuals and to mitigate the impact of economic instability.

In order to bridge these distances, it is crucial to invest in programs that integrate different policy areas (i.e. urban planning, housing, employment, poverty, education) with the aim of re-sewing all the components of our society and of improving democratic inclusive institutions<sup>22</sup>. Xenophobia, the growth of populist and far-right political parties (such as Front National, UKIP and Sverigedemokraterna) and religious radicalization are among the most dangerous threats to European peace and stability.

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 $<sup>^{22}</sup>$  2/3 of people interviewed on UK riots suggested community cohesion (20 per cent), empowerment (20 per cent) or community development (23 per cent) as solutions for Tottenham to move forward (Lewis *et al.* 2011). Moreover, according to some researchers suburbs would be also potential or actual sites for political mobilization driven by democratic ideals (Dikeç 2007).

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